

Kilkenny County Heritage Strategy, 2026–2030

Submission by The Kilkenny PPN Social Inclusion Working Group

The Kilkenny Public Participation Network (PPN) Social Inclusion Working Group welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Kilkenny County Heritage Strategy 2026-2030.

As a collective of local groups working with marginalised, underrepresented, and diverse communities across Kilkenny, the Social Inclusion Working Group is dedicated to promoting inclusion, equality, and representation in all aspects of community life. Our submission is rooted in the Kilkenny PPN's [Vision for Community Wellbeing](#), with a particular focus on values for equity, social justice, cultural recognition, and community empowerment.

We believe that recognising and preserving the full breadth of Kilkenny's heritage - social, environmental, cultural and economic - must include the voices of all communities, especially those historically excluded. Embedding diversity and inclusion at the heart of heritage efforts is essential to honour our shared past and to foster a stronger, more cohesive future.

Our recommendations reflect the lived experiences and aspirations of diverse communities across the county. We hope this submission will support the development of a Heritage Strategy that is truly inclusive, participative, and forward-looking.

Our Submission

The Kilkenny PPN Social Inclusion Working Group strongly recommends that social groups - including, but not limited to, migrants, immigrants, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, Traveller community, and persons with disabilities - are included in the new Heritage Strategy.

We believe that the legacy and history of diverse communities, must be recognised, celebrated, and preserved, including the intangible heritage (art and culture) that they embody in Ireland.

Key Recommendations

1. Inclusion and Consultation

- Holistic inclusionary action should be embedded as part of the Heritage Strategy development process, ensuring that members of diverse communities are meaningfully included and consulted—not solely through intermediary organisations.

- Where possible, members of the community should be fairly compensated for their time to remove barriers to participation.
- Particular attention should be paid to language, documentation, facilitators, interpreters, and technology used throughout the process to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.
- While we are pleased to see that the draft includes references to the Kilkenny County Council Disability Inclusion Strategy (2023) and the Kilkenny Migrant Integration Action Plan (2020), direct consultation with underrepresented groups is essential. Liaising and engaging only with organisational leaders is not sufficient.

2. Strategic Actions and Annual Implementation Plans

- Specific strategic actions and annual implementation plans should explicitly include actions related to inclusion and intangible heritage.
- Plans should include EDI training for culture, heritage, and KCC staff to ensure inclusive implementation and reduced bias. Strategic Goal 1 or 2: Add specific EDI training to ensure investment with reduced bias.
- Plans should integrate Inclusion of underrepresented groups as part of the plan.
- The draft includes a SWOT analysis identifying Access/minority representation as a weakness. We recommend direct references in the strategy and annual implementation plan that would address this.

3. Intangible Heritage

- The draft references the UN Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, which in turn references the Declaration of Human Rights, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Cultural Diversity documents. We recommend these principles be represented directly in the actions and annual implementation plans.
- We recommend that intangible heritage be specifically actioned in the strategy and annual plans, and that funding reflect investment in adding to intangible heritage (including, for example, an archive such as Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage).
- We recommend that the strategy protect the stories of everyday people—those without plaques or buildings—such as people with disabilities or changemakers for inclusion.
- We appreciate the strategy's reference to, "Historic buildings, repurposed as community hubs, embody this inclusivity by mixing cultural preservation with contemporary social needs, creating spaces that reflect both tradition and progress. Essentially, Heritage drives inclusivity, offering spaces and projects that celebrate diversity and ensure accessibility (DRAFT County Kilkenny Heritage Strategy, 2026-30_0, p 11)." However, we emphasize that not only physical heritage buildings or sites drive inclusivity; intangible heritage is integral to Irish culture.

4. Funding and Resources

- Future heritage funding should explicitly support intangible heritage and diverse cultural expressions.

- Targeted funding must include protections for underrepresented histories and stories.
- Data on past heritage funding related to access and inclusion should be collected and transparent. Strategic Goal 4: Public data/research should include social inclusion and intangible heritage; grant assessment criteria should reflect EDIA considerations.
- As referenced in the strategy, NGOs are an integral part of Kilkenny's Heritage stakeholders. However, NGOs are already stretched thin. We recommend additional cultural staffing or a Social Inclusion Action Group to support this priority (similar to the Biodiversity Action Group).
- Resources are needed to reduce pressure on existing non profit groups and to encourage diverse engagement.

5. Broader Context

- The draft references Kilkenny's economic context. We would like to see the strategy include the diverse demographic context and cultural heritage beyond tourism.

Closing

We emphasise that genuine engagement means consulting directly with community members themselves, not solely through intermediary groups or organisations. We encourage the Heritage Officer to continue working closely with Kilkenny PPN and other local groups to engage diverse voices meaningfully throughout development and implementation.

The Kilkenny PPN Social Inclusion Working Group looks forward to a new, inclusive Heritage Strategy and encourages Kilkenny County Council Heritage and Access Officers to consult with us regularly throughout the process.

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