



# CREATIVE PLACES BALBRIGGAN

## STATEMENT OF STRATEGY 2026 – 2027





Comhairle Contae  
Fhine Gall  
Fingal County  
Council



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Established in 2019, Creative Places is an Arts Council programme which 'aims to connect with people, artists, and places, to allow ideas to develop into creative actions that are inspired by and enrich our island'. It is a people-powered initiative supporting places around Ireland that have not had opportunities to benefit from sustained investment in the arts and creativity. Balbriggan is one of the 19 Creative Places across Ireland being supported.

This Statement of Strategy sets out Fingal County Council Arts Office's thinking and ambition for Creative Places Balbriggan. It first defines the purpose of our unique programme and states our vision of what we want to achieve for the people and the town. It makes clear our mission, what we will do over the next few years, and how we will achieve our vision. It gives expression to the values that will guide our work.

The purpose, vision, mission and values described here are unique to Creative Places Balbriggan. At the same time, they reflect those of Fingal County Council and the Arts Office's Arts Plan 2019-2029, which is our roadmap to bring the arts to life in the county, and the county to life through the arts.

It follows that the areas we have identified as the focus of our efforts in Creative Places Balbriggan also align local and county priorities. They also build on what is already established and working well in Balbriggan, as well as creating new opportunities and adding to confidence and optimism about the future.

Over the lifetime of the programme, we will concentrate on working with and for young people, engaging creatively with climate action and building connection, capacity and career pathways in the creative industries for people locally. The decision to concentrate on these areas of priority reflects the uniquely youthful and creative population base in Balbriggan, ensures timely contribution to policy priorities and seeks to take advantage of existing and future development in terms of local cultural infrastructure and national alliances. Critically, given the nature of the programme, the choice of these areas of priorities has also been informed through conversation, consultation and engagement with people across the communities of Balbriggan, within the Council and with others, expert in creative place-making.

We look forward to the inclusive, diverse and participatory approach that distinguishes the Creative Places programme as a practice embedded within Balbriggan and by doing so, building a sense of belonging and pride of place among its citizens.

Balbriggan has a rich, varied history and heritage. Through this programme, uniting artists and its communities, Balbriggan now has the opportunity to explore and confirm its future as a creative place.

**Sarah O'Neill**  
County Arts Officer

Balbriggan is a coastal town located in north County Dublin, Ireland. Once a small fishing village, Balbriggan is now one of the fastest-growing towns in the country, with strong commuter links to Dublin city, Dublin airport and the north of Ireland.

### Population

Balbriggan’s population of nearly 25,000 people is one of the youngest and most ethnically diverse in Ireland. According to the 2022 Census, 33% of Balbriggan’s population was born outside of Ireland and 33% are under 18. With an average age of 33.6 years, Balbriggan is defined as the youngest large town in the country.

Data from the Pobal HP Deprivation Index 2022 shows Balbriggan’s disparity of affluence and deprivation. While some areas are noted to have significant wealth others, particularly urban areas, are amongst the most disadvantaged areas of Fingal.

### History and heritage

Balbriggan grew from a small fishing village to become a centre of manufacture and trade with the establishment of cotton factories in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Balbriggan stocking, a type of fine cotton hosiery, was exported across Europe at one time.

In 1920 one of the most dramatic events in the town’s history took place. Known as the Sack of Balbriggan, the town was burned to the ground in a violent reprisal by the Black and Tans during the War of Independence.

The town is home to several historic landmarks including Bremeore Castle, Balbriggan Harbour and Ardgillan Castle nearby.

### Development and future plans

Balbriggan has been identified as a key town in Fingal County Council’s Development Plan. A dedicated €57 million programme of rejuvenation is underway, under the stewardship of Our Balbriggan. The Rejuvenation Plan 2025 – 2030 seeks to advance objectives for the town under four pillars: Economic Development; Community Development; Education, Skills and Training and Sustainability, Climate Action and Biodiversity.

As part of the Rejuvenation Plan, Fingal County Council has approved plans for the redevelopment of 2-4 Dublin Street to become a creative hub. The vision for this listed building and site includes the development of artist studios with adjoining creative learning spaces, a courtyard and exhibition gallery.

*33% of Balbriggan’s population was born outside of Ireland and **33% are under 18**. With an average age of 33.6 years, **Balbriggan is the youngest large town in the country.***



This Statement of Strategy for Creative Places Balbriggan has been informed by distinct local and national policies. These frameworks provide a strong foundation for the programme, ensuring alignment with wider cultural, social and economic priorities while responding to the specific needs and vision for Balbriggan.

These policies are listed in the Appendix.

## PURPOSE | VISION | MISSION | VALUES

### PURPOSE

Creative Places Balbriggan exists to encourage and enable our ambitions for Balbriggan as an open and progressive town where people and creativity thrive.

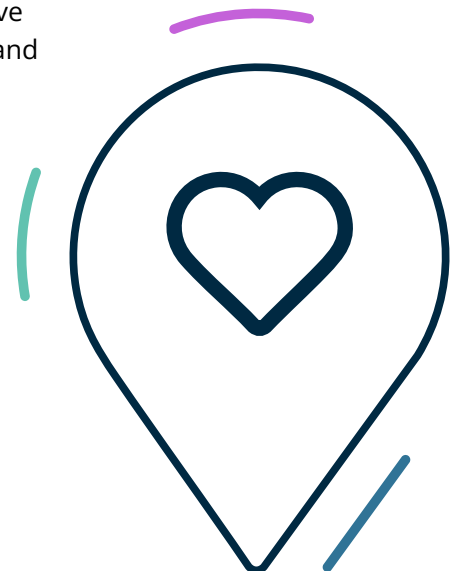
### VISION

Our vision is for Balbriggan to be known and enjoyed as a thriving, creative place:

- Where people love living, working and visiting
- Where our artists are supported to make exceptional work
- Where our growing arts and creative sector is contributing to the prosperity of the town
- Where our young people feel they belong, and our older people feel valued
- Where our diversity distinguishes us

### MISSION

Our mission is to create opportunities for the people of Balbriggan to connect with each other in new and creative ways. With the support of artists we aim to explore and make real a confident, creative future for the town that reflects its unique identity, diversity and energy and to have a positive impact on all those who live and work here.



In thinking about our values, we take the lead from those of the Arts Office: integrity, confidence, curiosity and inclusivity. While upholding these values in all that we do, Creative Places Balbriggan has defined its own unique set of values. These will guide how we think, behave and make decisions for the good of the programme and the people we serve.

## Creating OPPORTUNITY

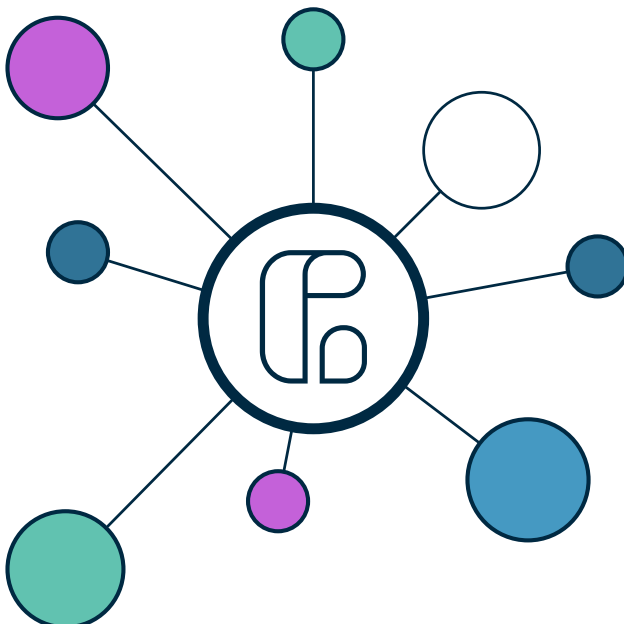
We believe everyone is creative. We will create opportunities for the public and for artists to reveal, explore or extend their creativity as we make the arts visible, accessible and vibrantly part of daily life in Balbriggan.

## Creating CONNECTION

We look forward to creating connection within and across Balbriggan's diverse communities, sectors, generations and cultures. We will find and foster the relationships that create opportunity now and for the future.

## Creating OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

We will help people think ahead with confidence and optimism about the future. We will support our shared ambitions for Balbriggan as a safe and creative place to grow up and to grow old. In particular, we will seek to progress positive career pathways for local artists and young people.





The ambition is that by 2027, Balbriggan will be widely recognised and celebrated as a creative place. The people of Balbriggan will have a new-found sense of pride in and belonging to the town. They will think about Balbriggan and about each other differently, with openness, ambition and optimism for the future.

In particular we look forward to the young people of Balbriggan having greater agency and feeling valued, with their energy propelling positive change for themselves and for the town.

The arts and creativity will be more visible, more accessible and embedded in the everyday life of the town, from its schools to its streets. As a result, more people will know that the arts are for them and will be confidently enjoying the benefits of participation.

It is anticipated that 2 – 4 Dublin Street, a new landmark cultural space within the town, will be open by 2027. Creative Places Balbriggan will have worked towards that, building understanding of and readiness to embrace the opportunities it will afford to professional artists, young people and the wider community.

At the same time, through our work we look forward to enhancing connection to the other local arts and cultural spaces including The Lark Concert Hall, The Irish Institute of Music and Song, Balbriggan Library and Ardgillan Demesne which shape a cultural quarter within the town and immediate hinterland.

We will also have engaged more broadly with the creative industry sector and with third level institutions serving that sector. By 2027, we wish to have identified and built partnerships and alliances that support local people, organisations and businesses to advance their artistic and creative ambitions and contribute to the rejuvenation of the town.

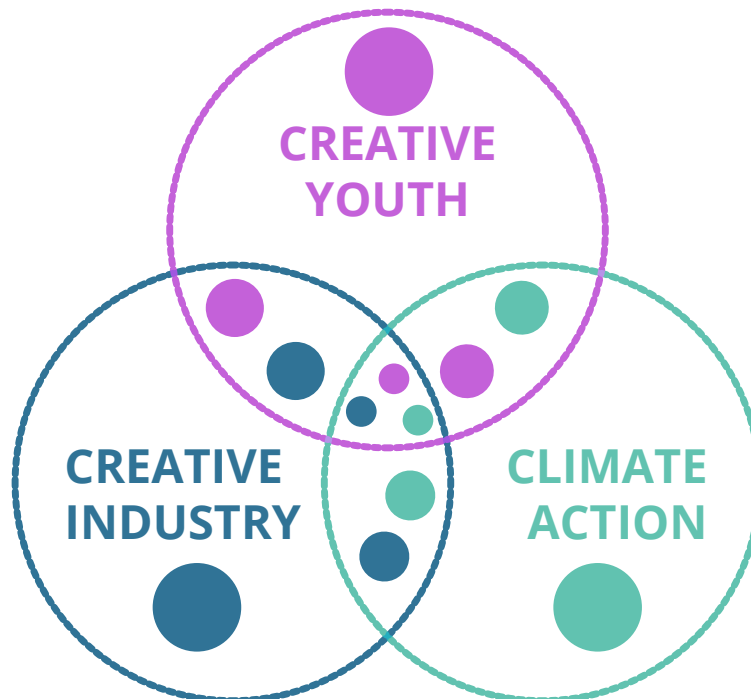
As a coastal town, there is a distinct awareness of our environmental responsibility and vulnerability. The creative processes at the heart of this programme will have enabled us to develop imaginative and authentic responses to the climate crisis as it effects our communities and take meaningful action for change.

With its rich history and heritage; its youthful and highly diverse demographic; its established artistic and creative communities and committed programme of investment, there is so much to be ambitious about for Balbriggan and its people. The Creative Places Balbriggan programme will play its part in furthering that ambition, establishing the arts and creativity as a core pillar of Balbriggan's sustainable rejuvenation and community wellbeing.



We have identified three strategic priorities which we will work towards over the next three years. They correspond and contribute to those of the Arts Plan, which sets out to make space for art, connect people and ideas, enable excellence and ensure delivery capacity. Consultation undertaken in Q4 2025 aligned with these strategic priorities and will inform programming in 2026 and 2027.

The Creative Places programme will focus on three intersecting areas of work: Creative Youth, Creative Industry and Climate Action. These areas of focus respond to the local context, both in terms of its population base and of local and county policy priorities.



For every area of priority, led by our values, we will be seeking to create opportunity, broker connection and build for the future, to ensure a meaningful legacy for the programme.

### Commitments

In its realisation of the Creative Places programme, Fingal County Council commits to the following principles and practices:

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Working in **partnership** with others

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**Equality, diversity and inclusion**

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**Effective voice** (with particular regard to enabling and amplifying the voice of young people and those whose voice is often unheard)

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**Socially engaged practice** and professional developmental supports for artists

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## Goal

More young people in Balbriggan are participating in the arts, feeling valued and contributing confidently to their future and the future of Balbriggan.

## Why this priority?

33% of the near 25,000 population in Balbriggan are under the age of 18, making Balbriggan the youngest town in Ireland. With this continued growth, it is important that the arts are available to the emerging youth population as a viable option for recreation, expression, economic opportunity and inclusion in their community.

## Objectives

- Empower young people to actively participate in and have a say in the development of arts and cultural life in Balbriggan by embedding their voice in planning and decision-making.
- Prioritise young people's agency and informal creativity to lead, shape and define their own creative engagements.
- Define and demonstrate creativity as a vital means of connection for young people to their community
- Commission innovative and collaborative projects that are responsive to the lives lived by young people in Balbriggan.
- Create environments where young people are safe to create, work, collaborate and express themselves in and through the arts.
- Work in collaboration with local youth, education and community services to improve access, inclusion and participation in quality arts services.
- Identify ambitious creative partnerships at local and national level that champion youth-led and youth health initiatives.
- Provide training for young people to develop cross-disciplinary creative and technology skills. Through the exploration of projects that connect young people with mentors, industry pathways and third-level arts academic institutions.
- Develop intergenerational programming opportunities.
- Strengthen the Council's existing relationships with local communities, organisations and the work of Fingal's Youth & Education Programme in Balbriggan, to embed meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes.
- Enhance creative connections and visibility at national events such as Cruinniú na nÓg and Culture Night.



## Goal

Balbriggan is a progressive community which actively supports and develops opportunities for artists, creative professionals and those interested in creative careers.

## Why this priority?

In recent years, Balbriggan has regenerated itself as a vibrant Arts community with a diverse range of artists of different disciplines, residing and working in the town. Many artists currently work in studio spaces in Ardgillan Castle, however with the addition of the new Lark Concert Hall into the community as a multidisciplinary arts venue and the development of 2-4 Dublin Street as an arts hub, with artist studios, exhibition gallery and creative learning space, Creative Places has the opportunity to meet the evolving needs, by supporting existing and emerging arts practitioners and industries, enhancing quality of life, strengthening the local economy and therefore ensuring continued growth.

## Objectives

- Strengthen pathways for local artists through the delivery of capacity-building workshops, which may include training and mentoring in planning for quality socially engaged methodologies, best practice models, funding pathways and links to national and international practice.
- Commission new projects with a focus on socially engaged arts practice that supports the artist and community to make innovative work together.
- Create opportunities for artists to visit and learn from examples of best and innovative practice in other Creative Places Initiatives, supporting peer learning and national connection.
- Promote access to lifelong learning in the arts, ensuring opportunities for people of all ages to develop artistic skills.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration with third-level institutions and industry experts to support learning and development.
- Support the development of 2-4 Dublin Street as a key asset for creative and digital innovation.
- Maximize the use of existing spaces to support creative careers and industries.
- Promote the economic potential of the arts and culture sector as a viable option for employment and enterprise.

## Goal

Balbriggan is actively creating awareness and collaboration around Climate Action through creative community engagement and artistic development projects.

## Why this priority?

Balbriggan is a coastal community with a heritage of industry including fishing and linen production. Therefore, it is in a unique position to become a beacon of progression by embracing this history and developing the community to be more climate aware. With the largest youth population per head nationally, Creative Places can address Climate Anxiety in young people and encourage expression of these concerns through positive artistic outputs. Art and creativity can also raise awareness to a wide audience about the threat of climate change and support professional artists to develop sustainable practices to change perceptions of art creation and consumption.

## Objectives

- Encourage environmentally responsible approaches to art-making through project production, programming and events.
- Prioritise local and circular economies through the reuse and repurpose of materials in arts practices.
- Foster cross-sectoral partnerships to provide innovative training, resources, and opportunities for climate change education and engagement.
- Invest in arts programmes that raise awareness and promote positive behavioral change regarding bio-diversity and climate justice.
- Demonstrate art as an educational tool for climate action, which effectively communicates climate change issues, inspires engagement and fosters action in the community through new artistic work.
- Support cooperation between artists and community groups who share common climate action goals.
- Support projects that connect everyday creative activities (e.g. cooking, making, walking) to environmental awareness.
- Frame climate action as a collective and community-based creative process rather than individual responsibility.
- Draw inspiration from Balbriggan as a Fingal Decarbonising Zone with goals of net zero by 2050.
- Support and empower young people to explore and express climate change issues and concerns.



The consultation undertaken as part of Creative Places Balbriggan revealed a rich, complex, and at times contradictory picture of how creativity is understood, valued, and experienced across the town. Engaging with community groups, young people, artists, and older people highlighted both shared priorities and distinct needs, underscoring the importance of a flexible, inclusive, and long-term approach to creative development in Balbriggan. The methodology used was both qualitative and quantitative in its approach with 4 workshops delivered.

Across all consultation groups, creativity was understood in expansive terms that extended well beyond formal arts participation. While traditional creative activities such as visual art, music, drama, dance, and design were consistently cited, participants also identified cooking, walking, sport, knitting, engineering, conversation, and collective movement as creative acts. This suggests that creativity in Balbriggan is often experienced as embodied, social, and embedded in everyday life, rather than solely as a professional or institutional pursuit.

Young people, in particular, articulated creativity as a felt experience—often described through concepts such as flow, freedom, peace, expression, and mindset. Notably, many associated this sense of creativity with sport and physical activity, indicating that creative expression is closely tied to movement and emotional regulation. Older people similarly connected creativity to dance and walking, linking these activities to memory, identity, connection, and wellbeing.

These insights challenge narrow definitions of creativity and point to an opportunity for Creative Places Balbriggan to champion a broader, more inclusive understanding of creative life, one that values process, participation, and lived experience as much as artistic output.

*Young people, in particular, articulated creativity as a felt experience—often described through concepts such as flow, freedom, peace, expression, and mindset.*





The programme will be supported by a formal process of review and evaluation, undertaken by an external independent expert. The evaluation is intended as a **learning-focused, developmental process**, rather than a solely summative or metrics-driven assessment. Discrete processes of review to monitor efficacy and impact will be an integral part of each project. Fingal County Council Arts Office will also monitor Creative Places Balbriggan as part of its overall annual review of its programme of work.

## Funding and Legacy Planning

Legacy funding plans will be explored for core Creative Places Balbriggan programming beyond 2027. This early planning for sustainability will support continuity and long-term impact.

Potential approaches will include:

- Matched funding models
- Signposting artists and community groups to relevant grant aid
- Exploring philanthropic support

A diversified funding approach will strengthen resilience and support programme longevity.



### **The Arts Council's strategy Making Great Art Work (2016 – 2025)**

and relevant policies including Place, Space and People, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Children and Young People's art.

### **Fingal County Council Arts Plan 2019 – 2029**

The Arts Plan seeks to enable all in Fingal to access a wide range of arts and cultural experiences, to foster diversity of arts practice and to support artists from a range of backgrounds.

**Our Balbriggan Rejuvenation Plan 2025 – 2030** and relevant documents such as Social Spaces and Youth Services for Young People in Balbriggan and Public Realm Strategy.

**Fingal's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027** and relevant policies including Creative Youth, Creative Communities, Creative Industries (Digital Creative Industries Roadmap), Creative Health & Wellbeing, and Creativity & Climate Change.

### **National Planning Framework**

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the long-term, 20-year strategy for strategic planning and sustainable development of our urban and rural areas to 2040, with the core objectives of securing balanced regional development and a sustainable 'compact growth' approach to the form and pattern of future development.

### **Fingal County Council Development Plan 2023 – 2029**

The Development Plan sets out the framework to guide future development within Fingal. It is a strategic document which envisages Fingal as an integrated network of vibrant socially and economically successful urban settlements and rural communities, supporting and maintaining a vibrant artistic community, promoting the cultural life of the County and increasing accessibility to arts and cultural facilities for all members of the community.

### **Fingal's Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2023 – 2028**

The LECP sets out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic and community development of Fingal. The LECP is built around six core themes: Sustainability & Climate Action; Prosperous Economy; Skills for Life & Work; Healthy, Inclusive, Connected Communities; Rich Arts, Culture & Heritage; and Safe, Accessible, Vibrant Places. Under each theme, a series of high-level goals have been derived including promoting and protecting Fingal's arts and heritage and embracing cultural diversity in the county.



## **Fingal's County Council Corporate Plan 2025 – 2029**

A strategic framework for action, the plan sets out the strategic priorities and objectives for achieving the Council's vision for Fingal to be 'a great place to live, work, visit and do business'. It is based around 6 strategic themes of Delivering Strategic Infrastructure, Enabling Economic Growth, Connecting with our Communities, Embracing Technology and Innovation, Driving Climate Action and Providing a High Quality Service.

### **Future Fingal: An Economic Development Strategy (2024)**

Fingal's Economic Development Strategy, published in 2024, outlines a 15-year vision for the local economy. It identifies opportunities, objectives, and actions to achieve the vision for Fingal's economy to be "dynamic, sustainable and inclusive, enabled by strong infrastructure, collaboration and skills".

### **Future Fingal: Fingal Skills Strategy 2024 – 2029**

The Fingal Skills Strategy was developed as an objective under the Fingal Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2016 – 2020 and is the first cross sector skills strategy developed at a local level in Ireland. The purpose of the strategy is to implement a range of recommendations and actions to grow the skills of the workforce in Fingal, benefiting both citizens and employers.

### **Fingal County Council - Fingal Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030**

The Fingal Biodiversity Action Plan sets out a hundred actions to achieve halting the loss of biodiversity by 2030 in Fingal. The delivery of the Biodiversity Plan and the associated Ecological Network are ambitious targets that require significant resources to be fully implemented.

### **Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 | Fingal County Council**

The Climate Action Plan sets out a range of actions across the six theme areas of Energy & Buildings, Transport, Flood Resilience, Nature Based Solutions, Circular Economy & Resource Management and Community Engagement.

### **Arts in Education Charter**

### **National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services 2024 – 2028**

### **Young Ireland National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023 – 2028**

### **National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making**

### **Comhairle Na nÓg Five Year Development Plan**

### **Census 2022**

### **2022 Pobal HP Deprivation Index**



## Creative Ireland's Digital Creative Industries Roadmap has the following definition of **Cultural and Creative Industries:**

"Cultural and Creative Industries' encompasses sectors from advertising and design, software and digital games, to the audiovisual and immersive sectors, publishing, architecture through to music, the wider arts, libraries and cultural heritage. Creative Industries grow from a thriving cultural sector – providing content and value creation, inspiring new business models and new growth opportunities"

## Western Development Commission definition of **Creative Sector:**

"The creative sector is broadly defined as 'Occupations and industries centred on creativity, for the production and distribution of original goods and services. It includes businesses such as architecture, designers, publishers and software developers. In total, 12 sub-segments make up the creative sector. In our region we see its composition in broadly three areas: Craft, Culture and Creative".







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