

Draft

# County Meath Heritage Strategy 2023-2030

A strategy prepared by the County Meath Heritage  
Forum

September 2023



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## Introduction

Meath has an exceptionally rich heritage resource of nationally and internationally significant heritage sites. Including the largest and most important expression of prehistoric megalithic art in Europe and the finest example of Neolithic passage tombs at Brú na Bóinne, deemed by the United Nations to have Outstanding Universal Value meaning *'cultural and/or natural significance so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity'*<sup>1</sup> (inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993); the ancient capital and seat of the High Kings of Ireland at Tara (part of the *Royal Sites of Ireland* included on World Heritage Tentative List for Ireland in 2022); the passage tombs of Loughcrew; the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland at Trim; the historic towns and streetscapes of Navan, Trim and Kells; great examples of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century country houses and demesne landscapes; a significant industrial heritage of canals and mills and a diverse natural heritage of scenic river valleys, rolling farmland, a network of mature hedgerows and coastal habitats. Meath has a captivating landscape which engages us, teaches us, inspires us, sustains us, grounds us and connects us.

Heritage gives each town, village and rural area in the county a character and local distinctiveness which contributes to a strong sense of place and is an immense source of pride for its people and communities. A positive approach to heritage management enhances quality of life and environmental sustainability and will ensure that our cultural and natural heritage is a resource that helps the county to compete as a cultural tourism destination and as a location of choice for inward investment.

Meath County Council first appointed a Heritage Officer in 2003, as a strategic partnership with the Heritage Council under the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme. Meath County Council aims to promote interest, education, knowledge and pride in the heritage of County Meath by:

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (2021)

- Facilitating the County Heritage Forum and working in partnership with the Forum to prepare and implement County Meath Heritage Strategy in collaboration with stakeholders and the local communities
- Raising awareness of Meath's heritage
- Providing information and advice on best practice in heritage conservation and management to Meath County Council and the public
- Working in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders to actively engage with and care for heritage
- Collating and collating heritage data and undertaking heritage research
- Integrating heritage within Local Authority policies, plans and projects

The County Heritage Forum, facilitated by Meath County Council Heritage Team, has prepared this draft strategy following an extensive pre-draft public consultation process. The County Heritage Forum is a non-statutory group established by Meath County Council in 2006, to assist the formulation and implementation of the County Meath Heritage Strategy. Membership includes elected representatives, representatives from the community and voluntary sector and a wide range of organisations and state agencies with an active interest in or responsibility for Meath's heritage. A review of membership of the Heritage Forum was undertaken and current membership is shown in Appendix I.

### ***The Heritage Strategy in context***

The (Draft) *County Meath Heritage Strategy 2023-2030* is non statutory and sets out the work of Meath County Council working in collaboration and partnership with state agencies, community and voluntary sector and the wider public to deliver a heritage work programme in Meath and is strategic in nature.

The County Heritage Strategy aims to identify priorities for action, establish a framework for the management of heritage at local level and increase awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of the built, natural and cultural heritage of Meath for all.

The government published Ireland's new national heritage plan ***Heritage Ireland 2030: A Framework for Heritage*** in 2022 which committed to enhanced support for local authorities, County/City Heritage Forums and Heritage Council, and others working in community heritage engagement. It is an action to *'Continue the preparation and implementation of County/City Heritage Plans and resource their implementation with a view to maximising their effectiveness and assistance in the delivery of Heritage Ireland 2030 (Action 148)'*. The strategic themes set out in this strategy broadly reflect the strategic themes of the ***Heritage Ireland 2030***: Communities and Heritage; Leadership and Heritage and Heritage Partnerships.

In 2023, the Heritage Council published its new strategic plan ***Our Place in Time*** setting out how they will lead, develop and expand the heritage sector in the five years up to 2028. The draft Heritage Strategy aligns with their strategic pillars and goals.

**Ireland's 4<sup>th</sup> National Biodiversity Draft Action Plan** published in November 2022 sets out the transformative changes required to protect and value nature in Ireland over the period 2023-2027 and highlights the key role local authorities play in protecting biodiversity and engaging with communities to support local biodiversity projects and initiatives.

Meath County Council has recognised the importance of heritage in their **Corporate Plan** (2019-2024) which has a supporting strategy to *"manage and protect our heritage and promote the understating and enjoyment of it"*

The **County Meath Development Plan, 2021-2027** is the statutory framework which sets out the overall land use strategy, policies and objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county, and other objectives of the local authority, in accordance with relevant legislation. It contains a number of policies and objectives for the protection, conservation and enhancement of Meath's natural and cultural heritage. The preparation and implementation of the County Meath Strategy fulfils an objective of the County Meath Development Plan 2021-2027 *'to implement, in partnership with the County Meath Heritage Forum, relevant stakeholders, and the community, the County Meath Heritage Plan and any revisions thereof'*.

Through the work of the Culture and Creativity Team within Meath County Council it is a strategic priority of the **Meath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027** *'to creatively engage with communities to record and communicate our natural, built and cultural heritage'*.

The **Meath County Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2029** has as a goal that Meath *'celebrates and promotes its rich culture and heritage its attractive to residents and visitors'*.

In 2019 Meath County Council became a partner to the **All-Ireland Pollinator Plan** and agreed to support its ethos in our plans and policies and carry out a number of evidence-based actions to help bees, other pollinating insects and our wider biodiversity.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 requires each local Authority to prepare a local authority climate action plan and **Local Authority Climate Action Plan Guidelines** have been produced by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. Sectoral adaptation plans for biodiversity and built and archaeology; heritage have been in place since 2019 under the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework.

The draft Meath Heritage Strategy has also been informed by Project Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan; Programme for Government Our Shared Future (2020); the National Landscape Strategy 2015 – 2025; Places for People – Government Policy on Architecture; Framework and Principles for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage; A Living Tradition: A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of our Built Vernacular Heritage, Town Centre First Policy (2022) and the Creative Ireland Programme.

### ***Scope of the County Meath Heritage Strategy 2023-2030***

The *County Meath Heritage Strategy* will replace the current Heritage Plan for County Meath and covers the period 2023 to 2030. The Strategy presents an opportunity to build on, and consolidate, the progress and achievements made through the implementation of the first and second County Heritage Plans. It commits to continuing to work together with the community and stakeholders to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation of Meath's

natural and cultural heritage assets. It represents a vision for the sustainable management of Meath's heritage up to 2030 and is an opportunity to identify heritage issues and needs at a county level, and to address them locally, within a regional and national framework. It also seeks to build on and support the work currently being undertaken in the county by the many different agencies, organisations, communities, groups and individuals.

In defining the scope of heritage to be included in the plan, the Forum has been guided by the Heritage Act (1995) which states that the national heritage includes the following: monuments, landscapes, archaeological objects, seascapes, heritage objects, wrecks, architectural heritage, geology, flora, fauna, heritage gardens and parks, inland waterways and wildlife habitats.

The Forum agreed to expand on the above definition to include industrial heritage, vernacular heritage, social heritage, folklore and folklife, genealogy, place names, local history and intangible cultural heritage.

In December 2015, Ireland ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The intangible cultural heritage *'refers to means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity'*.

Intangible cultural heritage includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, social practices, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. Ireland's obligations under the 2003 Convention include

establishing a National Inventory for Intangible Cultural Heritage to protect, promote and celebrate Irish living cultural heritage practices, customs, crafts and traditions.

The preparation of the Strategy was guided by *A Methodology for Local Authority Heritage Officers on the Preparation of County/City Heritage Plans* produced by the Heritage Council.

In line with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Meath County Council is committed to promoting equality, preventing discrimination, and protecting the human rights of employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans.

### ***Guiding principles***

A number of key principles underpin the development of the County Heritage Strategy and will be respected in its implementation.

- We will be guided by core values which underpin all our activities as set out in the *Meath County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024*, including: *Strong customer, citizen and community focus; High standards of conduct, probity and impartiality; Accountability, Accessible and Responsive; Innovative and Sustainability and Integrity and Respect for all*
- We understand that a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach is required in the management and conservation of heritage assets and in understanding the integrated nature of our built, natural and cultural heritage
- We are committed to supporting the vital role of that communities play in safeguarding and promoting their local heritage and recognise that role the heritage can play in embracing diversity and social inclusion
- We embrace the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- We will work in partnership with key stakeholders at local, regional, national and international level to deliver on the priorities of the Heritage Strategy.



- We will consider the related and cross cutting themes of climate change and biodiversity loss in the implementation of this strategy

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### ***Preparing the Draft Meath Heritage Strategy 2023-2030***

Following agreement of approach, the process of preparing the strategy began in January 2023 with a workshop of the County Heritage Forum to discuss the key issues and challenges facing heritage in Meath and proposing what key themes/areas the new strategy should focus on. Based on the outcomes of the workshop a pre-draft public consultation survey was devised which asked, among other questions, the public to rank what they considered to be the five most important strategic areas/themes that the new Strategy should prioritise from a draft list of thirteen and to suggest other areas/themes not included for consideration.

The pre-draft public consultation process was held from January 31<sup>st</sup> to March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 (inclusive). A pre-draft consultation survey was available online via [consult.meath.ie](http://consult.meath.ie) and the public were also invited to attend six drop-in information sessions held in each Municipal District during February 2023. The process was advertised in *The Meath Chronicle*, on [www.meath.ie](http://www.meath.ie) and Meath County Council social media platforms. In addition, submissions were invited from an extensive list of stakeholders including elected representatives, government and state agencies, Public Participation Network, Meath Heritage Office Mailing List, Meath Library Services Mailing List, Meath Archaeological and Historical Society Membership, Meath Comhairle na nÓg, and Transition year Co-ordinators in Secondary Schools in Navan.

306 pre-draft submissions were received, and 63 people attended the drop-in information sessions. Pre-draft submissions were considered by the County Heritage Forum at workshops held on March 30<sup>th</sup>, April 28<sup>th</sup> and May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and are were central in informing and prioritising the strategic themes and objectives on the draft Strategy.

The strategic themes and objectives proposed for inclusion in the draft strategy were presented to the Planning, Economic Development, Enterprise and European Affairs Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and the SPC members made a recommendation to the Corporate Policy Group that the Draft Strategy go on public display in September.

The strategy is subject to Appropriate Assessment screening, under the EU Habitats Directive.

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## Strategic Themes and Objectives

### Strategic Theme 1

***Support the Conservation, Protection Management and Interpretation of heritage sites (i.e. Monuments/Historic Graveyards/ Architectural Conservation Areas/Protected Structures) in partnership with stakeholders***

- Provide advice on best conservation practice and support to owners/occupiers of Protected Structures and those within Architectural Conservation Areas and administer the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Historic Structures Fund in association with the Built Heritage Policy Unit
- Collate a list of heritage assets in the ownership of/vested in Meath County Council and support the conservation and protection of these assets by targeting the commencement of two conservation initiatives/projects per year
- Provide heritage and conservation guidance and advice, across departments within Meath County Council, in support of the delivery of projects to revitalise and enhance historic town and village centres which will provide for the conservation, restoration, adaptive reuse and redevelopment of historic buildings and streetscapes, including upgrading of shop frontages and the public realm (e.g. Part 8, RRDF, URDF, Historic Towns Initiative, Town and Village Renewal, ORIS, CLÁR, Town Regeneration and Town Centre First Projects)
- Liaise with relevant stakeholders to encourage and support improved access and interpretation to heritage sites (where required)
- Commission and resource the implementation of Conservation Management Plans for heritage sites (as appropriate), and develop and resource maintenance programme for sites where conservation works have taken place

- Highlight and promote the value of vernacular heritage of Meath e.g. thatch buildings and vernacular structures (urban and rural) and support the delivery of A Living Tradition A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage (2021)
- Work with landowners/occupiers and the community to support the conservation, maintenance, protection, and promotion of monuments and historic sites and administer the Community Monument Fund in association with the National Monuments Service

## Strategic Theme 2

### *Work with and support communities*

- Organise and deliver an engaging and inclusive **annual heritage awareness programme** (*target of ten events per year*)<sup>2</sup> to celebrate Meath’s heritage and align with key national and international heritage dates including:
  - **An annual heritage event** to act as a focal point for networking and capacity-building for heritage groups/local communities, disseminating information on heritage projects, grants and publications
  - Co-ordinating and supporting the delivery of **Heritage Week** in County Meath
  - Update the **heritage section of [www.meath.ie](http://www.meath.ie) website** as a key resource to disseminate heritage information and communicate the work of the County Heritage Forum and delivery of the plan
- Develop an innovative, engaging and inclusive **heritage communications plan**, in collaboration with the Communications Unit (MCC), to increase the reach of, participation in and engage with new audiences to broaden awareness of, interest in and appreciation of our heritage
- Increase support for Meath County Council’s **Community Heritage Grant Scheme** to

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<sup>2</sup> Based on 2023 staffing resources in the Heritage Section

support local community groups and organisations and encourage collaboration between group to undertake local heritage projects

- **Encourage, continue to support and create more opportunities for citizen science and local heritage/recording projects** – e.g. oral history, holy wells, field names, industrial heritage, vernacular heritage, recording of headstones, biodiversity data collection, gathering a local knowledge base for the impact of climate change, intergenerational and intercultural heritage projects etc.
- Work with Irish language organisations and **Gaeltacht areas in the County** in the development and implementation of heritage programmes through the Irish language.
- Engage with and support communities in their participation in the **National Tidy Towns Competition, Pride of Place, Entente Florale and other relevant schemes, projects or initiatives** (built, natural and cultural heritage)
- **Engage with practitioners, communities and stakeholders to support the safeguarding, development and promotion of our intangible cultural heritage**

### **Strategic Theme 3**

#### ***Heritage and Climate Change***

- Work with the Climate Action Team to integrate and implement heritage actions within the **Local Authority Climate Action Plan**
- Undertake a **review of the key Heritage and Cultural Assets in the ownership of Meath County Council** to assess their condition and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and provide an evidence base to undertake priority conservation works to develop climate resilience

- Support the implementation of Local Authority/relevant actions of the ***Built and Archaeology Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan (2019)*** and ***Biodiversity Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan (2019)***
- Build resilience within communities to adapt to the impact of climate change on heritage assets as it relates to heritage by:
  - i) recording and cataloguing impacts on heritage and interlinkages between natural and cultural heritage,
  - ii) combining local knowledge with national and international research and best practice, and ensuring knowledge exchange/transfer between these levels
  - iii) fostering learning, upskilling and leveraging technology to maximise information flows and action

#### **Strategic Theme 4**

##### ***Biodiversity and Natural Heritage***

- Appoint Biodiversity Officer as part of the Local Biodiversity Officer Programme in partnership with the Heritage Council and NPWS/DHLGH
- Review the **County Meath Biodiversity Action Plan** and implement actions to protect, conserve and enhance local biodiversity
- Implement the **All Ireland Pollinator Plan** as part of our partnership agreement with the National Biodiversity Data Centre
- Promote best practice in management and control of **Invasive Species**
- **Audit of Council owned lands** to identify sites which may have biodiversity opportunities
- Support the preparation and implementation of **Community Biodiversity Actions Plans**

## Strategic Theme 5

### ***Partnership and Collaboration***

- Work with the Heritage Council to support implementation of ***Our Place in Time Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028***
- Work in partnership with stakeholders to support the implementation of the *Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site Research Framework* and ***Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site Management Plan*** to promote, understand, conserve and manage the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne
- Work as part of Meath County Council Culture Team to implement ***Meath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027*** in partnership with **Creative Ireland** and engage collaboratively with artists and creatives to animate and tell the story of Meath's rich heritage resource
- Support the implementation of the ***Tara Conservation Management Plan*** and continue to work with all relevant partners and stakeholders to progress the **Royal Sites of Ireland**, (Navan Fort in Armagh, Rathcroghan in Roscommon, Hill of Tara in Meath, Dún Ailinne in Kildare, the Rock of Cashel in Tipperary and the Hill of Uisneach in Westmeath) towards nomination for inclusion on UNESCO's World Heritage List
- Establish liaison and work in partnership with other local authorities on mutual heritage issues
- Work with project stakeholders and the local community to implement the **Kells Creative Placemaking Programme**
- Work in partnership with key stakeholders to promote and develop County Meath as a centre for heritage education and a **destination for cultural tourism**
- Support the implementation of national heritage plans and initiatives – e.g. ***Heritage Ireland 2030*** and National Biodiversity Plan



## Strategic Theme 6

### *Research, Data Collection, Training and Education Programmes*

- Promote **best practice guidance and training** in the conservation and management of Meath's heritage asset within the local authority and the community e.g. encourage and promote knowledge and skills in traditional building (e.g. stone masonry, working with lime, thatching, blacksmithing, implementation of All Ireland Pollinator Plan etc.)
- Support **Meath County Archive** in the care and conservation of collections
- **Disseminate existing heritage data and information** to a wide audience and undertake surveys/projects where information gaps exist
- Collate and **digitise available heritage records**, databases and reports on **Council GIS System/Website**
- Work in partnership with third-level institutes, the Discovery Programme, community groups and other stakeholders to develop and advance opportunities for **innovative research, education/outreach heritage projects/initiatives, community engaged research and publications**
- Work in partnership with Navan Education Centre to develop heritage education through locally based projects and initiatives linked to key priority areas in primary and post-primary education

## Strategic Theme 7

### *Resourcing Heritage*

- Provide **annual heritage budget** for implementing the Heritage Strategy and **explore national and/or EU funding opportunities**, possibly in collaboration with other partners, on a regional or transboundary basis

- Seek the appointment of additional full-time heritage professionals and support administration staff within Meath County Council required to address current and future demands for heritage services. to implement this strategic plan, key legislation and national policy (Subject to (a) Central government sanction for the filling of staffing positions, and (b) the availability of sufficient budgetary resources to meet the salaries of any approved staffing positions):

#### **Assistant Heritage Officer**

- Work with the Heritage Officer to raise awareness, provide advice, develop/implement policy, collect data, conduct research and promote best practice to value and safeguard heritage
- Support the delivery of *Meath Heritage Strategy 2023-2030*
- Assist in delivering heritage education and training initiatives and help to facilitate public participation in heritage events, projects and initiatives

#### **Assistant Conservation Officer**

- Work with Conservation Officer to protect the architectural heritage of the county and to implement the provisions of the Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) -
- Support implementation of conservation grant schemes
- Provide advice to the general public in relation to built heritage queries, produce guidance notes and help to facilitate public participation in architectural heritage events, projects and initiatives

#### **Community Archaeologist<sup>3</sup> (in partnership with Heritage Council)**

- Liaise with monument owners and occupiers, local authority and other agencies to advise on the condition of archaeological monuments and promote appropriate management measures

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<sup>3</sup> Possible funding stream available from the Heritage Council to support Community Archaeologist

- Devise community awareness and educational initiatives
- Work with primary and post-primary schools to develop educational projects

### **Ecologist**

- Carry out Appropriate Assessment for the development management process and provide ecological support and advice to Planning Department.
- Appraise Ecological Impact Assessments and relevant sections of Environmental Impact Assessments
- Advise on Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment for land use plans and policies
- Liaise and provide ecological support and advise to other Departments within the council

### **Landscape Architect**

- Support the planning, designing and management of public parks, outdoor spaces, public realm, designed landscapes and urban regeneration
- Contribute to the development of nature-based solutions and natural resource management as part of climate action including arboricultural management
- Contribute to assessing and reporting on planning applications and developing land use policy
- Liaise and provide landscape advice to other Departments within the council

### **Communications Graduate**

- Assist in managing social media, websites and other communications
- Event management

- Develop outreach activities and campaigns to promote projects and initiatives
- Examine ways to promote heritage in creating and enhancing **social capital**<sup>4</sup>

### **Implementation – how will it be delivered**

The draft strategy has seven strategic themes and associated strategic objectives to be implemented over the period from 2023 to 2030. The County Heritage Forum was greatly encouraged by the number of pre-draft submissions from the public (n=306) which indicated their strong desire and willingness to participate in the implementation of heritage projects. Opportunities to work in co-operation with partners within and outside the county and to collaborate with local communities and the vibrant community and voluntary sector to deliver actions that address strategic objectives in the strategy will be taken wherever possible.

In their deliberations the County Heritage Forum highlighted that increased resources (human and financial) would be necessary for the implementation of the strategy and proposed the appointment of additional full-time heritage professionals and support administration staff within the council to address current and future demands for heritage services (subject to government sanction for posts and availability of sufficient budgetary resources). The Forum acknowledge that the provision of additional staff is an operational matter for Meath County Council. However, in that context in early 2023 Meath County Council were approved funding from the Heritage Council to participate in Phase 2 of the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme. The Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme is an initiative of the Heritage Council in partnership with the County and City Managers Association (CCMA), with funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Meath County Council have appointed a Biodiversity Officer who will take up the post shortly. This is a very positive and significant development and will greatly build capacity to increase awareness, understanding and conservation of biodiversity within Meath.

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<sup>4</sup> Social capital sees relationships and networks as resources that enable groups to collaborate and work together effectively

Meath County Council Heritage Team working in partnership with the Meath Heritage Forum will oversee and guide the implementation of the Meath Heritage Strategy 2023-2030. Meath County Council and the Heritage Council will provide core funding for the implementation of the strategy. Annual Service Delivery Plans in accordance with Meath County Council Corporate Plan will be prepared which will include actions to deliver on objectives within the strategy in line with current priorities. This annual heritage work plan will be used to apply for funding for various initiatives/projects from the Heritage Council and other partners as opportunities arise including National Monuments Service/National Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage); Creative Ireland; Department of Rural and Community Development (RRDF, URDF, ORIS, CLÁR, Town and Village Renewal, LEADER). National and/or EU funding opportunities, possibly in collaboration with other partners, on a regional or transboundary basis will be explored.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Meath County Council is committed, in partnership with the County Heritage Forum, to the delivery of the strategy. The County Meath Heritage Team will co-ordinate and manage the day-to-day implementation of the County Meath Heritage Strategy. The Heritage Forum will monitor progress of the delivery of the strategy at its quarterly meetings.