



Clár Éire Ildánach  
Creative Ireland  
Programme



Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann  
Local Government Ireland



# Culture & Creativity Strategy

**2023–2027**



**Louth**

**Cover Image Credits (L to R):**  
Top image — The Táin Tapestry hanging in An Táin Arts Centre, Louth. **Photo Credit:** Steven Larkin

Large Image underneath — Cruinniú na nÓg day at Mellifont. **Photo Credit:** Jenny Callanan

Image bottom right — Borrowed Ground Artist Studios Open Night, Artist Dee Walsh speaks to visitors to the new studio space at the launch event. **Photo Credit:** Rob Fay

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# Forewords

## Foreword of Chief Executive

The Creative Ireland Programme has been a fantastic addition to the artistic landscape of Louth over the past 5 years. Built around themes of identity, collaboration, and community, it has helped us embed culture and creativity into our daily lives during a period of unprecedented times. It has afforded us the opportunity to see first-hand what a vital resource culture and creativity can be when integrated into our society and we will continue this evolving trend by integrating it into our local policies. The extension of the Creative Ireland Programme for the years 2023–2027 is welcome news for the County of Louth and its citizens.

As we all know, Louth is home to a rich and thriving cultural sector with its heritage etched into our surroundings. It provides endless inspiration for artists young and old, and for many years Louth has been a leader in the area of artistic development and enhancement. We were one of the first counties to appoint an Arts Officer to the Local Authority and we have a breadth of cultural spaces which we continually invest in, including Highlanes Gallery, Droichead and An Táin Arts Centres, and the County Museum, Dundalk.

Louth County Council also recognises the value of the culture and creativity sector as an important element of sustainable local communities, with the well-being of its citizens of primary concern. The Louth Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 seeks to create unique and innovative ways for us to be creative in our work. We want to ensure that we have a programme that is inclusive and accessible to all.

Following the focus groups with key stakeholders and public survey, we have devised a strategy that outlines the key priorities for the Louth Culture and Creativity Strategy over the next five years. This strategy will address and meet those priorities as we work collaboratively to integrate culture and creativity into our policies, recognizing the important role it plays in all our lives. We will continue to make Louth a place that we are proud to live and work in and I look forward to experiencing and enjoying the enhanced creative output and expressions of our citizens in the years to come.

**Joan Martin**

Chief Executive Louth County Council

*Gruinniú na nÓg at Mellifont, Louth*  
**Photo Credit:** Jenny Callanan

## Cathaoirleach’s Foreword

As Cathaoirleach of County Louth I welcome this new Creative Ireland Louth Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027. This strategy forms part of the Irish Government’s Creative Ireland Programme which seeks to ensure that the creative potential of every citizen is realised. It also strengthens the partnership between central and local government.

Over the past 5 years the delivery of cultural and creative offerings from this initiative has been of immense benefit to communities here in Louth, with a range of programmes including projects in our schools, residential facilities, and with youth groups. It has not only enhanced our understanding of local culture but has proved to be a crucial support for the health and wellbeing of our citizens during and in the aftermath of Covid.

The importance of culture and creativity cannot be underestimated. This new initiative seeks to further integrate it into our way of working to ensure that we provide a sustainable environment that benefits all our citizens. It is aligned with existing policies across the local authority and will enable us to continue to deliver our strategic actions. It is our statement of strategic intent in delivering the Creative Ireland vision in our county. The strategy will be led by our Creative Ireland Co-Ordinator and the Louth Culture and Creativity Team and I look forward to seeing the outputs of their work reap dividends for all the citizens of County Louth in the coming months and years.

**Cllr. Conor Keelan**

Cathaoirleach Louth County Council





The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-government initiative committed to enhancing access to, engagement with, and enjoyment of Ireland's culture and creativity. Within the broad range of available definitions, creativity is considered as a set of innate abilities and learned skills; the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms and by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity.

The vision of the Creative Ireland Programme 2023–2027 is to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, in our personal lives and in our institutions, we can realise our full creative potential thereby promoting individual, community and national wellbeing.

The Creative Ireland Programme will deliver through collaboration and partnership, promoting understanding and appreciation of the value of creativity in all its forms — whether through the arts, culture, heritage, or technology.

**The Creative Ireland Programme will prioritise its work around five aspects for the period 2023–2027:**

1. Creative Youth
2. Creative Communities
3. Creative Industries
4. Creative Health and Wellbeing
5. Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Through the Creative Ireland Programme, *Creative Communities* supports the partnership between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Ireland's local authorities. This partnership enables citizens and communities to explore their culture and creativity at local level and, where appropriate, leverage that creativity to strengthen wellbeing, advance social cohesion and support economic development.

*Creative Communities* is also innovative in deploying creativity to achieve greater integration across targeted policy priorities. This has delivered new creative engagement initiatives in relation to, for example, children and young people, older persons, climate action, and local economies. Individuals and communities perception about the role and value of culture and creativity as central to our wellbeing in its broadest sense is being enhanced.

The opportunity embraced within the Louth Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is to support people's participation, inclusion and expression within communities, and further strengthen local creative economies.



A young artist decorating the Louth/  
Lú lettering at Cruinniú na nÓg.

**Photo Credit:** Jenny Callanan

## 2 Culture & Creativity in Louth

County Louth is located on the eastern seaboard midway between Ireland's two largest cities of Dublin and Belfast and has a population of 128,884 (Census 2016). While Louth is the smallest county in the state with an area of 827 km<sup>2</sup>, it is the most densely populated county in Ireland, outside of Dublin, with a population density of 156 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, compared to the national average of 70 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. It is also home to two of the three largest towns in the country, namely, Drogheda and Dundalk, with the majority of the population living in urban areas — circa 66.1% (85,224).

County Louth possesses a network of attractive and inviting towns and villages, interspersed with a diverse range of landscapes and natural environment, varied natural and built heritage, all of which contributes substantially to the county's character, identity, and sense of place.

Louth connects Ulster and Leinster in the region of Oriel, formerly the most important centre for the creation of poetry and literature on the island of Ireland. Omeath and the wider Cooley area was the last Irish speaking region in the county until the mid 20th century. The county has an internationally important and protected coastline with associated wildlife, landscapes, geology, and archaeology. A rich and productive farmland has made Louth a centre of brewing, distilling, and baking for centuries. Towns sprang up at Louth's natural harbours and these developed into important ports for export and import. Railway lines were developed to link surrounding counties to Louth's ports. Dundalk's Great Northern Works were long a national centre of railway engineering, with Ireland's most impressive railway engineering feat being the magnificent Boyne Viaduct in Drogheda.

Louth is fortunate to have a range of high-quality cultural infrastructure that includes Highlanes Gallery, Millmount Museum & Creative Quarter, Creative Spark, Droichead Arts Centre,

An Táin Arts Centre, County Museum Dundalk, Louth Library Services, Louth County Archives Service and Carlingford Heritage Centre. We have a robust Music Generation programme and are home to a range of excellent festivals.

The cultural significance of Louth's heritage is important not just from a tourism and economic point of view but equally important to connect people and place. County Louth, like the rest of the country, has had to adapt and adjust to the impact of the pandemic and the changes experienced, which present both challenges and opportunities. The impact of COVID-19 on the culture and creativity sector has been severe but while the pandemic may have impacted its ecosystem and the way people engage with it, the crisis has further revealed the important role of culture and creativity as a major resource for resilience, connection and recovery. Digital technologies have provided new ways for people to connect with culture most commonly in the home. The growing use of public space has opened up new and imaginative ways to re-imagine the future of the arts as an integral part of the economic, social and environmental recovery.

Over the past five years the Creative Ireland Initiative has allowed Louth County Council to work with organisations and practitioners to embed arts and creativity into the wider community. In our research and consultation process when devising this strategy we have looked back at the areas that have worked well and identified those which we need to continually focus on. One of the key strengths has been delivering projects through our Creative Ireland Community Grants Scheme. These grants have allowed community groups to work with professional artists to deliver projects that have had a meaningful impact for them, be it through a shared experience or learning a new skill.

It has also fostered collaborations with local artists and groups that have sustained beyond the time of the project, such as the Leanbh Festival.

The initiative has also provided projects of impact through its legacy funding such as the Táin Tapestry and SEEK Festival murals. Initiatives like these have ensured not only the celebration of our history, but the celebration of the cultural heroes from Louth that have been connected with it. The Borrowed Ground Artists in Drogheda have been supported in their endeavors to secure new artist studios and the Fighting Words project has ensured that some of the most vulnerable youths in our community have a safe space to come and be supported in their most difficult of times.

Alongside the successful work there have also been lessons learned. We need to be more innovative in our approach to project development. We need to drive cross-collaborative actions to support change and enable a shift in how the creative and cultural sector is valued.

In this next five year term Louth County Council will position culture, creativity, and heritage centrally within its corporate policies, recognising the role they have in all aspects of the county's life: from the economy to education, from community to tourism, and from quality of life to public engagement. We will further engage more sectors within the local authority such as Economic Development, Public Realm, and Climate Change in an effort to embed culture and creativity into our policies. We will identify areas where we can encourage more engagement and participation from the public through our work in the local authority. It is important that we address the social and economic issues that we currently face and use creativity and culture to benefit the services we deliver. The local government sector provides a wide range of services ranging from infrastructure; planning; housing; economic and community development; and environment, emergency, recreation, and amenity services. We have an extensive track record of community engagement through *inter alia* the arts, culture, heritage, and library services which are fundamental to developing a wider creative

economy and society. The *Creative Communities* initiative therefore seeks to harness this potential, through partnership between the Creative Ireland Programme in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and Ireland's local authorities, to deploy creativity as a strategy for wellbeing, social cohesion and economic success.

Our Culture and Creativity Team will therefore continue to include existing members such as Museum, Libraries, Heritage, Archives and Communities. But it will now also widen membership to Public Realm, Economic Development, and Climate Action personnel working in these areas. We will strive to incorporate culture and creativity into all aspects of our work, foster collaborations with creatives, and the public, and find new ways to continue the important conversations around climate change, restore our biodiversity and support the economic development of our Creative Industries and Creative Economies. We will seek to enhance our civic spaces and celebrate all that Louth has to offer from a culture and creativity perspective.



### 3 The Creative Ireland Vision for Louth

Creative Ireland Louth will build on the momentum created by the last five year strategy and look to the future with positivity.

Our vision is to shape a creative and vibrant county which is attractive, inclusive and accessible for all. We will strengthen the local authority team, ensuring a more strategic approach across all sections of our service and work collaboratively to deliver on our actions, integrating culture and creativity into our policies.

We will align with various other local authority policies including the Local Economic and Community Plan, Climate Action Plan, Biodiversity Action Plan and County Development Plan. As the priorities for Local Authorities have pivoted in recent times, our vision is to also evolve and look to this strategy to embed culture and creativity into all that we do.

Culture and creativity helps us to see things in a different light. It brings a new level of understanding and with that in mind we look with ambition on this new phase, seeing it as a catalyst to drive local and regional growth, health and wellbeing, and place making.

This is an opportunity to further public engagement and participation allowing us to deliver projects providing the necessary supports and tools to our citizens to create a sustainable, vibrant, and healthy environment in which we can live. We will thereby raise the profile of the Creative Ireland Initiative further in Louth and foster collaborations internally within the local authority.

In a growing, diverse community our vision needs to be a strategy that is all encompassing and inclusive. We will ensure that culture and creativity create equal and fair opportunities for all and will build pride into our community and deliver a sense of empowerment. Throughout this process we will be guided by the national initiative and continue to build and strengthen our partnership with the department which will ultimately enable us to deliver a programme that benefits all of our citizens.



*Pride of Place Project with artist Rozzi Kennedy and residents of Moorehall Lodge, Louth.*  
**Photo Credit:** Arts Office Staff

Ablevision group ahead of their production, "Can You Hear Me", Louth.  
**Photo Credit:** Jenny Callanan





*The Táin Tapestry*, a 5 county tapestry project produced by An Táin Arts Centre, Louth.  
Photo Credit: Steven Larkin

## 4

### How The Creative Ireland Programme Works

#### Principles and Values of Creative Communities

Creative Communities will continue to support local authorities as a wellbeing strategy through:

- **Policy** — Working in partnership across government supporting local authorities to deliver relevant local, regional, and national policies and priorities;
- **Practice** — Flexible, cross-cutting Culture and Creativity Teams providing an agile and adaptable approach central to the delivery of *Creative Communities* as it addresses locally-relevant priorities;
- **Participation** — Providing more opportunities for people to engage with and enjoy culture and creativity at local level in ways that underpin equality of access; and
- **Partnership** — Between central and local government and between Louth County Council and our local cultural and creative sectors.

This approach is based on addressing a shared, strategic agenda while delivering on the challenges and opportunities unique to each local authority area.

The *Creative Communities* partnership will be delivered in line with the following principles and values:

- i. Broaden access to, and participation in, cultural and creative activities locally.
- ii. Use culture and creativity as a catalyst for collaboration and innovation in achieving greater wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.
- iii. Strengthen the capacity of local authorities to integrate culture and creativity across place-making, regeneration, renewal, and the development of more vibrant, creative, and sustainable places.
- iv. Investing in culture and creativity to support environmental, social, and economic returns that help deliver local authority agendas — from local and regional, to national and international.
- v. Build on the agility and integrated approach of Culture and Creativity Teams to sustain further delivery of targeted collaborative programmes.



## 5 The Strategic Priorities for Louth

### 1. Supporting the Economic Development of our Creative Industries, Creative Economies and Creative Practice

Ensuring Louth is a vibrant and economically viable county is a key function of the Local Authority. As the implementer of the Creative Ireland Louth Programme it is important that we ensure we support our Creative Industries, Creative Economies, and Creative Practice. Through these actions we aim to support and enhance local economic development and cultural tourism by embedding creativity into local policies and the work that we do.

- Promote a suite of tailored training and mentoring supports to the cultural and creativity sector in County Louth and ensure continued capacity building opportunities are made available. This will be done through collaborations with our Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and other partners.
- Promote a range of supports for the culture and creative sector and look at opportunities for residencies, commissions, and awards.
- Support and enhance the Louth local creative network by bringing together the wide range of people who are involved with culture and creativity, the Louth Culture and Creativity Team and Creative Ireland once a year. These sessions will allow us to foster collaborations between organisations, creatives and artists and provide information on the range of supports available and to give guidance in relation to those supports.
- Explore ways to enhance urban environments through embedding creativity into the civic spaces and streets and working with public realm on identifying needs.

- Offer practical support to groups and organisations to enable sustainability beyond their funding.
- Work with Economic Development to enhance local festivals and identify projects that will enhance the tourism landscape around Louth.

### 2. Enhancing Health and Well Being through Participation

Under the *Creative Communities* Pillar we will ensure that Health and Wellbeing is addressed by encouraging participation in creativity through all our resources at our libraries, arts centers, galleries and museum. To ensure a socially cohesive environment it is also important that creativity is brought out into communities outside of the natural venues so we will create opportunities for projects to be facilitated in community settings that are accessible to all. We will achieve this through the following actions:

- Encourage participation of older people in creative programmes by working with organisations who advocate for the older generation and support initiatives that improve their health and wellbeing.
- Work in partnership with our Community Section, Age Friendly Co-Ordinator, and Healthy Ireland Co-Ordinator to contribute creative and artistic solutions to programme and project development within Louth.
- Provide a Creative Louth Community Grant fund that will ensure projects are promoted to community groups and that collaborative partnerships can be fostered with local artists and arts organisations.



Borrowed Ground Artist Studios Open Night in Drogheda. Artist Dee Walsh speaks to visitors to the new studio space at the launch event.  
**Photo Credit:** Rob Fay



- Work with libraries, museums, galleries, and arts centres to provide tailored programming that supports health and wellbeing and encourages participation.
- Deliver a programme that includes marginalised groups and those experiencing social exclusion.
- Deliver supports and tools that build resilience and create projects that are welcoming and beneficial to the communities involved.

### 3. Supporting Climate Change, Natural Heritage, and our Environment

Our focus groups and survey showed that people see Climate Action as one of our top three priorities for this next phase of the Creative Ireland Initiative. With the national declaration of the ‘Climate and Biodiversity Emergency’ by Government in 2021 it is also a key focus for Louth County Council as we strive to achieve our targets under the National Climate Adaptation Framework. Climate Change and the erosion of our natural habitats will therefore play a key part in this Culture and Creative Strategy. We will look at ways to celebrate and enhance our local areas and get our community involved in the Climate Change conversation through a range of projects that encourage learning and participation. We will achieve this through the following actions:

- Support the Louth Climate Action Co-Ordinator through providing creative input to environmental initiatives.
- Work with the Energy office and Climate Action Section in Louth County Council on identifying areas of interest for large scale funding opportunities to engage the public in the Climate Action programme and deliver targeted projects that have defined goals and outputs to monitor.

- Support the awareness of and showcase the richness of Louth’s natural environment and ecosystem through encouraging creative public participation on projects to enhance the local area.
- Generate opportunities for creative and artistic inspiration in Louth’s biodiversity taking guidance from our Louth Biodiversity Action Plan and the new National Biodiversity Action Plan that is currently under consultation.
- Create opportunities for creative inspiration in our local wildlife and engage specialist artists to work with groups on projects that highlight and celebrate our local wildlife.
- Create opportunities for creative engagement in the area of restoring biodiversity and our natural habitats.
- Enhance local parks and playgrounds by bringing creativity into the local areas through the Creative Louth Programme and delivering projects with local schools and community groups.



Leanbh Festival 2019. Produced by Droichead Arts Centre and funded by the Arts Council of Ireland, Creative Ireland, Create Louth, Meath County Council Arts Office, and Louth County Council.  
**Photo Credit:** Jenny Callanan



#### 4. Enhancing the Creative Abilities of our Children & Young People

Under the *Creative Communities* Pillar, it is important that we provide a sustainable future for our children and young people. It is equally important that we nurture them during this time to ensure they have the necessary tools to cope in the ever changing environment and are resilient and positive about their future. The actions below will provide all children and young people in our county access to creative activity that is important and meaningful to them.

- Develop an environment for children and young people that offers opportunities to explore science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM).
- Support the roll out of initiatives that offer children and young people the opportunity to engage with and become creatively involved in new and emerging technologies such as gaming and coding.
- Assess the potential of building partnerships with the creative industry to pursue new creative areas such as animation, 3d Printing and Design and Digital Fabrication with DKIT, Creative Spark FabLab and Louth Library Services.
- Support organisations that specialise in children and young people's creative programmes of work, to creatively engage with children, in particular for children with disabilities.
- Continue to implement a programme for *Cruinniú na nÓg*, the National Creativity Day for Children and Young People.
- Devise an outreach programme to reach socially and economically disadvantaged young people throughout the county, ensuring we are inclusive and diverse in our audience reach.
- Work with local schools on expanding young people's experience of and exposure to creativity by working with our galleries and arts centres on delivering projects.

#### 5. Promoting a sense of place and identity

Louth has a rich sense of heritage; a productive land that was at the heart of brewing, distilling and baking for centuries. Railway and ports provided extensive trading opportunities throughout our history and it is vital we continue to nurture and document our cultural identity. It is equally important that we embrace the cultural identity of others who now choose to live and work in County Louth. We will achieve this through the following actions:

- Promote the development and documentation of our cultural heritage by encouraging our communities to participate in its conservation and management.
- Encourage the learning and sustaining of our Irish language through working with local Gaelscoileanna and education facilities on projects around our language and heritage.
- Work with PPN (Public Participation Network) to reach out and celebrate the wide range of diverse cultural and ethnic groups in Louth with a view to tapping into their unique cultural and creative offerings and provide opportunities for them to contribute to the creative, cultural and artistic make up of Louth.
- Commission and produce works linked with key periods in our history, such as the 1500th anniversary year of St. Brigid in 2023.



"Butterflies in your Stomach" mural by artist Alice Lambert, part of the 2022 SEEK Festival, a collaboration between Dundalk BIDS and Creative Spark. **Photo Credit:** Martin McElligot



## 6

Louth has a Culture and Creativity Team in place to guide and oversee implementation of this Strategy.

The Culture and Creativity Teams are the cornerstone of *Creative Communities* across all 31 local authorities in Ireland. These teams bring together a significant range and level of expertise and, in many cases, include professionals from architecture, archives, the arts, climate action, community, enterprise and environmental development, heritage, information and communication technologies, Irish language, libraries, spatial planning, tourism, and more. This depth of technical expertise affords each local authority a level of insight, resources, and delivery experience which few other public or private sector organisations can match.

The role of this team is to:

- Provide a collective forum for the ambition of culture and creativity within the local authority;
- Focus on diversity and inclusivity and enable harder to reach communities to participate in cultural and creative activities;
- Build on existing in-house expertise and strategies across areas of wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development to leverage culture and creativity to deliver on targeted local authority agendas;

- Enable a shift in how the cultural and creative sector is valued within and across local authorities and ensure that culture and creativity is embedded across local authority plans, policies and project teams;
- Drive cross-collaborative actions that support change and positive outcomes locally, and potentially between local authorities at regional level; and
- Be innovative and take risks — try new projects and new ways of working.

The delivery of the Strategy is led by the Director of Services for Housing and Social Development and the members of the Culture and Creativity Team for Louth include the Arts Officer, Heritage Officer, County Librarian, Museum Curator, Archivist and members of the community, climate action and public realm sections.

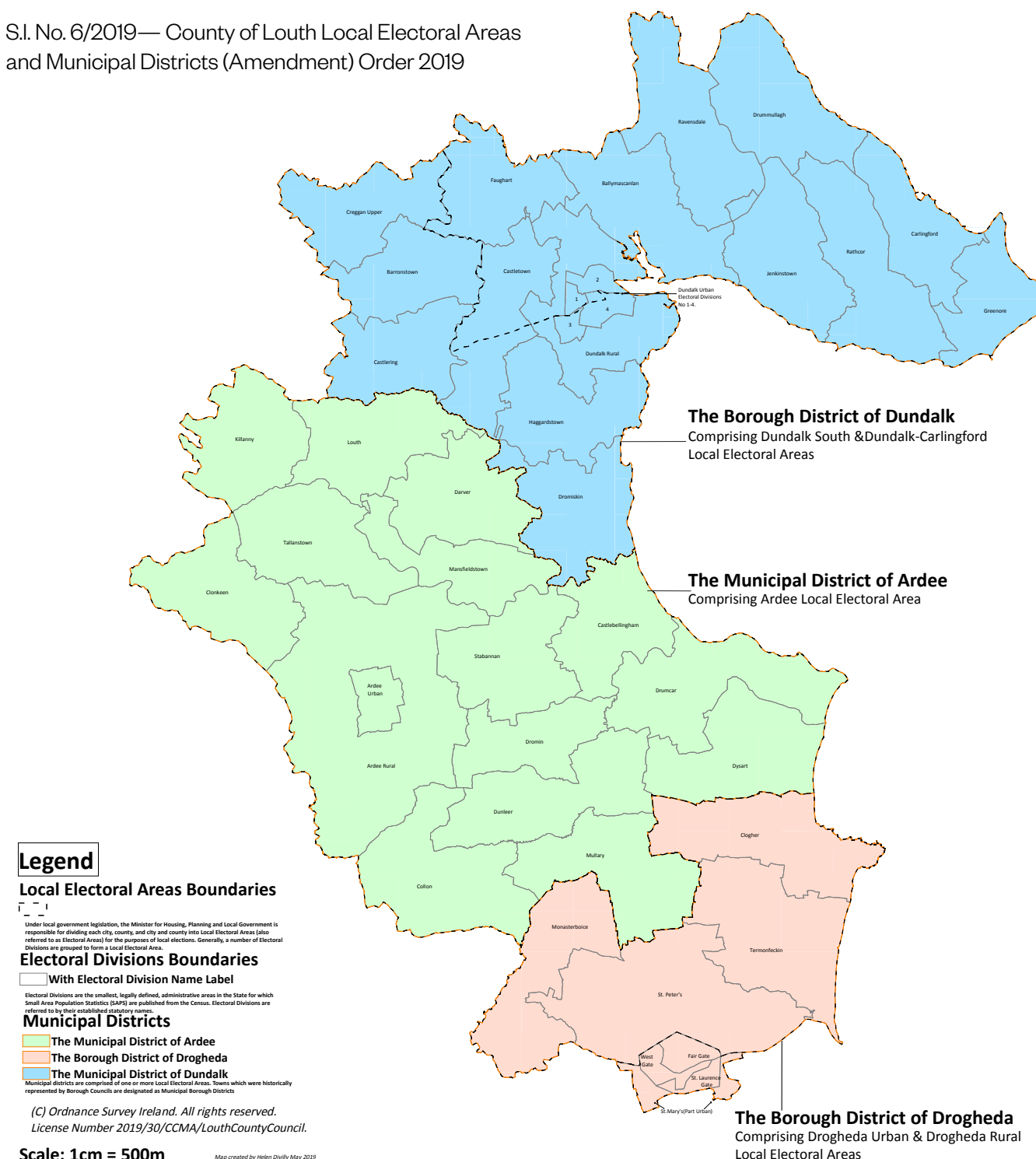
These structures and processes are a critical success factor that will enable *Creative Communities* to deliver on strategic priorities for Louth.

The implementation of this strategy will not only strengthen the work of the local authority, it will enhance its' partnership with Creative Ireland and the department. As we move into this next phase we look forward to continuing our work and delivering a creative society for all our citizens in Louth. We will work collectively with the department to ensure that our goals and aims work effectively and in line with national and local policy and we will continue to keep the wellbeing of our citizens at the forefront of all that we do.

## Map of Louth and Municipal Districts

S.I. No. 626/2018 — County of Louth Local Electoral  
Areas and Municipal Districts Order 2018

S.I. No. 6/2019— County of Louth Local Electoral Areas  
and Municipal Districts (Amendment) Order 2019





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