

Clár Éire Ildánach Creative Ireland Programme



Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann Local Government Ireland









# Meath

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## Foreword

#### **Cathaoirleach Foreword**

The development of County Meath's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027 is very welcome. This strategy forms part of the Government's Creative Ireland Programme, which seeks to encourage everyone in our society to realise their full creative potential and aims to put culture at the heart of all government policies. Meath County Council is proud to be at the forefront of support for the arts, heritage and literature in Meath, support for which ensures meaningful cultural engagement and participation for the county's citizens. The Cultural Sector in Meath is a vibrant one, encompassing a broad range of people, places, and activities. Artists and creatives of many disciplines live and work in Meath and, together with professional arts organisations and amateur and community groups engaged in cultural activity, there is a considerable pool of creative talent and enterprise in the county.

Meath County Council Culture and Creativity team works closely with artists, creatives, individuals, and communities to increase access to, awareness of and participation in cultural activities across all disciplines and sectors of society in the county. It achieves this through the provision of an annual series of cultural events which include heritage, music, dance, theatre, visual art, literature, and participatory arts projects. It provides a wide variety of funding opportunities for individuals and groups, both amateur and professional, and a comprehensive information and advice service. It also acts as a facilitator for cultural organisations and plays a major role in the development of good practice for the county.

Meath's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027 sets out our vision for enabling every person in Meath to realise fully his or her creative potential. It establishes our values of collaboration, inclusivity, and empowerment to facilitate participation in and access to culture for every citizen. It is our statement of strategic intent for delivering the Creative Ireland vision in our county and demonstrates how our thematic and programmatic priorities will be formulated and implemented over the five-year period commencing in 2023.

I would like to thank the Creative Ireland team at national level, the staff at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media, and the staff of Meath County Council, in particular the Culture and Creativity team, for their work on this important strategy. I look forward to building on the successes of the previous strategy and seeing the outputs of this new strategy reap dividends for all citizens in County Meath in the coming months and years.

#### Cllr. Nick Killian

Cathaoirleach, Meath County Council

#### **Chief Executive Foreword**

The Creative Ireland Programme is built around themes of identity, culture and citizenship with the core operating principles of collaboration, communication, community, participation, inclusivity and empowerment. Meath County Council has a crucial role in the local delivery of the Creative Ireland Programme and is mandated, through our Culture and Creativity Team, to deliver Pillar 2 of the programme – *Creative Communities*. Our commitment to creating meaningful experiences for our citizens paves the way to promoting participation in and access to arts, heritage, and culture now and for the future.

In implementing key aims and objectives of the Meath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018 – 2022 the Culture and Creativity Team had to adapt and respond to the circumstances presented by the global pandemic of COVID-19. In doing so it adopted a proactive approach in reimagining elements of the programme and engaged with creative partners, artists, groups, organisations, and the greater creative community. This approach ensured artists and creatives continued to be supported in a meaningful way whilst providing access for the wider community to quality creative and cultural experiences. With the collaborative support of partners Age Friendly Meath and Healthy Ireland it also provided vital connectivity and support to some of the most vulnerable members of our community through the very successful Tea Chats & Tunes projects. The publication of Cocooner: A Lockdown Diary gave a voice to the most vulnerable and chronicled the pandemic for future generations.

Building on the success of programmes such as Kells Creative Placemaking, Solstice Diversity Programme, Writer-in-Residence Programme, Clayton's Woollen Mills, *Cruinniú na nÓg*, new awards such as the *Máire Mhac an tSaoí Gradam Fhílíocht na Gaeilge* and the Community Heritage Programmes, we now look forward to developing even more exciting projects in partnership with communities and stakeholders in the years ahead.

Meath County Council's Culture and Creativity Team has drawn upon the findings of an extensive process of engagement, consultation and analysis with key stakeholders and the ongoing voices of the wider community to arrive at the strategic priorities for cultural development outlined here.

Through our expanding Culture and Creativity team, and with added expertise from across the organisation, we look forward to leading and engaging with our Culture and Creativity Strategy over the next five years. In particular, we look forward to working with the Creative Ireland Programme in animating our new cultural infrastructure e.g., Bettystown Library and Community Facility, Trim Library and Cultural Centre, Meath County Archive, Kells Printing Works, and the Courthouse Cultural Hub. Through the implementation of a series of annual delivery plans we will assist emerging and established cultural projects and infrastructure and, with the support of Creative Ireland, make a longer-term commitment to continue to enrich the cultural lives of the county.

I would like to thank everyone associated with the Strategy and wish it every success.

#### Jackie Maguire,

Chief Executive, Meath County Council

# 1

# **Creative Ireland** 2023–2027

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-ofgovernment 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:

- Creative Youth
- Creative Communities
- Creative Industries
- Creative Health and Wellbeing
- 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 Meath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is to support people's participation, inclusion and expression within communities, and further strengthen local creative economies.



Máire Mhac an tSaoi Poetry Award

Kells Print Works, Kells, County Meath. Photo by Carol Lee



### Culture and Creativity in Meath County Council

"Creativity and Culture are as rich as the soil in County Meath seeding a beautifully diverse ecology of singers, poets, printmakers, dramatists, painters, photographers, novelists, musicians, jokers and dreamers.

"I have always found the landscape inspirational. From the lush fields, gentle hills and mythical rivers to the royal antiquities of Tara, Newgrange, and Loughcrew but the scattered villages and liquid voices also add to the sense of ancient community. Art grows out of the ether here, challenging me as a playwright to question, provoke, excavate, and celebrate the world around me.

Plays such as In the Middle of The Fields, Melody, BOGBOY, Spinning, Wild Sky, Outrage, *Me* & *Molly* & *Moo* are directly inspired by Meath stories, Meath characters or an element of the Meath landscape. They spring right up out of the ditches and find their way to theatres all over Ireland and the world. That to my mind is the beauty of art. It is both epic and local. Most songs, sculptures, plays kick off in a kitchen, a lane or a backstreet. Art forms in the raindrops, in a moment or in a scrap of scattered conversation. It slips in from the fields and beds down in the imagination. ardent and restless, until given form by pen, thumb, paintbrush or string. Art is insistent and it is thriving in County Meath.

Festivals, events and venues in the county have introduced me to a great swathe of incredibly vibrant practitioners, past and present, who have dreamed their dreams under Meath skies. Older voices echo down on the wind while present ponderers of every discipline mix their imaginative impulse with mine. Together we are compelled to question because for me Art is always a question, always an attempt at an understanding. I came to live in Meath in 1998 and wrote my first play in '99 so I have no doubt that the heaving, verdant, mucky might of it has cut a path into my voice, into my soul. That is the power of culture and creativity in every community".

#### Deirdre Kinahan, Playwright

This Culture and Creativity Strategy sets out an ambitious programme for the next five years and builds on the progress and success of the previous strategy. It is another step on the path towards a community for whom culture and creativity are relevant and enriching and aims to strengthen the links between cultural stakeholders and their communities throughout Meath in the years to come. It provides a comprehensive framework for the Council's continued development of quality service provision for culture and creativity over the next five years and sets out measures to further formalise support structures and create opportunities for culture both within the Local Authority and the county.

Meath is a large county, with an area of 2,342 sq km and population of 220,296. The population density is quite low and scattered across many small urban centres throughout the county. Navan is by far the biggest urban centre, with almost three times the population of the next biggest town, Ashbourne. The only Gaeltacht area on the East coast of the country is in County Meath at Ráth Cairn and Gibbstown.

Pivotal to the vibrant cultural sector in Meath are the many artists and creatives of all disciplines, who live and work in the county. They are complemented by the broad range of people who drive professional arts organisations, events, festivals, amateur arts groups, and community groups who engage with the arts. This amounts to an enviable resource of creative, cultural and artistic talent, know-how, commitment, and experience within the county. "The creative community in Meath needs to be connected - artists need to be invited out of the shadows through an open door - to bring their creativity into a space and fail and fail again and fail better and one day make a piece of art or music or film or script that allows them to say 'This is my art. This is what I meant to say. This is my voice' ".

#### **Oisin Leech - The Lost Brothers**

The excellent work of individuals, festivals and arts organisations throughout the county is an essential element of arts activity, provision and development. These key players provide access to high quality, lively and diverse arts programming across the county. Solstice Arts Centre provides connection between artists and public through its performing, visual art and engagement programmes. The establishment of festivals such as Hinterland Festival of Arts & Literature, Kells Type Trail and Guth Gafa International Documentary Film Festival as key components of the Meath cultural calendar has led to wider recognition of the important role the arts play in local development. These provide a key service for their locality, the wider hinterland, and provide important opportunities for artists in which to practice, exhibit, network and create.

During the research, consultation and planning stage for formulating this Strategy a large number of arts practitioners, organisations, programme participants, groups and members of the public were consulted. We would like to thank all of those involved for their participation and contributions which have guided the strategy and provided an invaluable insight into the needs and issues facing the arts in the county.

"Engagement with our heritage deepens our sense of solidarity with our fellow Europeans. The European Commission holds that 'heritage is made up of local stories that together make the history of Europe'. Cultivation of our own heritage enhances our broader identity as Europeans. Heritage thus promotes cultural diversity while promoting intercultural exchange. Heritage tourism is a powerful generator of economic activity, which can become the basis for renewed cultural and creative industries. A coordinated Meath initiative, underpinned by a secure philosophy, would release the inspirational and creative resources of heritage".

#### Séamus Mac Gabhann,

Chair County Meath Heritage Forum.

This strategy takes cognisance of local and national arts, heritage and library policies and strategies including the Creative Ireland Programme 2023 -2027, the Arts Council 'Making Great Art Work 2016 - 2025', the City and County Managers Association (CCMA) 'Framework for Collaboration', and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Affairs 'Culture 2025' framework policy. In preparing this strategy, the Culture and Creativity Team is also informed by, and responsive to, the Solstice Strategy 'A New Light 2020 - 2025', the Council's Corporate Plan 2019 - 2024, the Local Economic and Community Plan 2019 - 2022, the Boyne Valley Tourism Development Plan 2017-2023 and adheres to the policy positions set out in the County Development Plan 2021 - 2027.

" 'All art', wrote Synge, 'is a collaboration'. Now that the arts are flourishing in County Meath it remains our collective responsibility to enhance the conditions and climate for their practitioners to do their best work. This can happen through direct and indirect ways. Through exposure and education, and this is where Creative Ireland might best keep its promise, we need to expand an audience and to ensure an awareness that everyone might participate in art for the rewards it can offer, that is to refine our capacities to think and feel. We may, in short, learn how to think better and feel better. We may improve our chances of fulfilling ourselves individually and collectively as a broad, human, kind society".

#### Peter Fallon - Gallery Press

Our new Creative Ireland Culture and Creativity Strategy for Meath must respond proactively to the international crises of climate change, global population growth and the arrival of new migrants to the county arising from conflict migration. The 2015 establishment of 17 Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations outlines a pathway for prosperity, equality, and peace. Meath's new strategy must reflect this urgency in both practical and creative ways, creating awareness of climate change issues, and supporting diversity, gender equality and accessibility activities.



Knowth West Orthostats. Photograph: Ken Williams

### **The Creative Ireland Vision for Meath County Council**

The vision of Creative Ireland is that every person living in Ireland will have the opportunity to fully realise his or her potential. The vision is pursued through the Creative Ireland Programme:

- Creative Youth
- Creative Communities
- **Creative Industries**
- Creative Health and Wellbeing
- Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Participation and access are central to the vision. Connecting artists and other creators to communities is also regarded as essential to realising this vision.

Meath's vision is to:

...foster an environment where culture and creativity flourish and are valued and embedded as an integral part of everyday life....'

We will realise our vision by working closely with individuals and communities to provide collaborative, participatory and inclusive opportunities to increase access to, awareness of, and participation in the arts, heritage and culture across all disciplines and sectors of society.

Our vision is supported and underpinned by the objectives and actions contained within the key strategic plans for the county. Meath County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024 commits to providing an excellent Arts Service and to promoting and developing access, awareness, and participation in the arts. It also undertakes to manage and protect our heritage, promote understanding and enjoyment of it and be the key provider of life-long learning, delivering literary, social, and cultural services for the community through the Library Service. Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, Meath Local Economic and Community Plan and County Arts, Heritage, Biodiversity and Library Plans all underpin these commitments.

The Culture and Creativity Team will continue to work collaboratively and forge county, national and international strategic partnerships with the Arts Council, Heritage Council, Creative Ireland, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and the Department of Rural and Community Development to advance the delivery of cultural services for the county.



**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 Meath County Council and our local culture 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:

- 1. Broaden access to, and participation in, cultural and creative activities locally.
- 2. Use culture and creativity as a catalyst for collaboration and innovation in achieving greater wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.
- 3. 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.
- 4. 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.
- 5. Build on the agility and integrated approach of Culture and Creativity Teams to sustain further delivery of targeted collaborative programmes.

### The Strategic Priorities for Meath County Council

5.1. Strategic Priority: To conserve and promote our cultural and literary inheritance and to nurture and support new and emerging writers.

- A. To protect and enhance our literary legacy to ensure that great writers like Mary Lavin, Francis Ledwidge and Lord Dunsany are forever identified with County Meath. To prioritise conservation and promotion of our literary inheritance building on the very substantial and solid groundwork achieved by cultural service providers like Meath County Council, Solstice Arts Centre and the Gallery Press. To work in collaboration with independent and community providers like The Francis Ledwidge Museum and the Mary Lavin Estate. This work will be developed through support to other cultural organisations such as Hinterland which deliver high-level and high-visibility programming. To deliver programmes which generate and support literary and cultural tourism and thereby support economic activity.
- B. To offer long-term support to Gaeltacht communities in their role as custodians of the modern Irish language tradition and to support cultural organisations in the county as they seek to preserve Meath's own native language which is rooted in the Gaelic poets of North Meath and inspired by Gaelic League founder, Fr Eoghan O'Growney.
- C. To explore creative ways to enable writers at all stages of development in their practice to connect with community and place.

5.2. Strategic Priority: To mainstream culture within the local authority and seek to deliver integrated cultural services as envisaged by the Creative Ireland model.

- A. To align our local structures and resources to meet the requirements to deliver on the overarching ambition of the Creative Ireland concept, we welcome the establishment of a full-time Creative Engagement Officer to support the delivery of the Creative Ireland Meath Programme.
- B. To advocate for the establishment of a Meath Culture and Creativity Fund to support and complement the implementation of the Meath Culture and Creativity Strategy and to support the programming of major new community and cultural infrastructure delivered through the County Development Plan and Economic Plan.

The Creative Ireland Programme maintains the ambition to embed creativity in public policy, locally and nationally, particularly in areas of wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development. Aligning to this the Meath County Council Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024, highlights creativity and culture in supporting goals of integration and economic inclusion, health and wellbeing of citizens and driving economic development. Culture and Creativity is also integrated across Meath County Council's LECP, and is important to building quality of place and growing community engagement as well as 'drivers of growth and innovation' in the local economy.



Make a kite, *Cruinniú na nÓg* 2020. Photo by Meath Arts Office

# **5.3. Strategic Priority: To nurture & support creatives, artists, and creators**

Support of culture and creatives and the provision of an environment where culture and creativity can thrive are central to the Creative Ireland Meath Programme. In recognising that artists and creatives are a fundamental element of a vibrant and sustainable community, and that development in this area is an integral part of its vitality, broader social and economic development, Meath County Council commits to nurturing a vibrant working life for creative professionals and

to develop innovative ways to support local creative economies, creative practice, and the creative industries.

Meath is a large county with a population of 220,296 the density of which is quite low and scattered across many small urban centres and rural communities with a growing diversity. This provides challenges to artists and creatives in terms of infrastructure for creating, displaying and performing their work. It can also lead to a sense of isolation. Aligning with the County Arts Development Plan 2019 – 2024, Solstice Strategy 'A New Light' 2020 – 2025, and other local authority strategies, this strategy seeks to support addressing these issues and explore and support the cultural diversity that is an emerging feature of local communities.

Creatives are at the heart of articulating a county's distinctive expression of itself, its concerns, and its people. The Creative Ireland Meath Programme supports and enables creatives to provide, through their work, points of assimilation and reflection, understanding, and inspiration to individuals, groups, and the community.

# 5.4. Strategic Priority: To enhance our local cultural and creative infrastructure

1. To address local challenges or barriers as they apply to artists, creatives and communities in accessing appropriate infrastructure for the creation, display, and performance of work and to provide artists and creators with affordable space to devise and create work. To assist communities with the development of creative, cultural, and economic stimulus to support an attractive public realm and community identity. To implement the Kells Creative Placemaking Programme and develop as a model of best practice.

- 2. To provide and sustain an environment where the creative industries and local creative economies are nurtured and can flourish. Initiate a series of discussions that adopt 'bottomup' collaborative approach, involving Local Enterprise Office, Meath County Council, higher and further education bodies and businesses to bring a focus and collaborative effort to address specific regional ecosystem gaps.
- 3. To provide a focus for local, professional, amateur, and community cultural initiatives and for the creative and economic benefits generated as a result.
- 4. To provide a stable base for high quality artistic endeavour and space for dialogue. Create 'Hubs' to support the implementation of the Creative Ireland Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027 and align with the operating principles of collaboration and communication, community empowerment and internationalisation.

#### 5.5. Strategic Priority: To creatively engage with communities to record and communicate our natural, built, and cultural heritage

Heritage and culture are about the connection and interaction between people and place. When we look at the landscape of Meath we see the remnants and footprints of successive generations embedded all around us, the survival of ancient monuments, holy wells, settlements patterns over thousands of years, mosaic of habitats and networks of hedgerows, stone walls, forged gates, farmed land, place names, literature, history, myth and folklore which all tell a story central of our identity and sense of place. The towns, villages or rural places where we grew up, and where we live, are imprinted on our minds as are the values we attach to them. Our emotional responses to our 'home place' are based on our experiences, memories and perceptions passed down from generation to generation. To know and understand our place is to know ourselves.

- A. To continue to support communities to connect with, care for, and communicate the value of their local natural, built and cultural heritage, and to collaborate with creatives in undertaking initiatives inspired by the legacies of past generations and celebrating the Meath landscape. An effective placemaking process creates quality public spaces drawing on local assets, contributes to people's quality of life, wellbeing and sense of place and provides a high-quality environment for all.
- B. To work creatively and collaboratively to engage communities to respond to the key challenge of the climate and biodiversity emergency.
  Deepening our understanding of Meath's natural environment and supporting educational and training activities to promote best practice for its sustainable management will be essential in meeting our obligations for climate action.

#### 5.6. Strategic Priority: To increase access to, awareness of and participation in culture and creativity

Central to the Meath Culture and Creativity Strategy are the principles of equality and social inclusion, and as such to increase access to, awareness of and participation by the wider community in culture and creativity in the broadest sense. By contributing to and engaging with key local, regional, and national policies including areas such as Climate Action, Healthy Ireland, Age Friendly, urban and rural development organisations, youth groups and community health and wellbeing organisations, we aim to provide essential support to programme development in these areas. As facilitator, the wider Culture and Creativity team will provide a framework and enable meaningful engagement. Our programmes

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will reflect the important contribution that culture and creativity make to the quality of life in the county, bringing communities together, exploring shared heritage and experiences and, more recently, exploring the cultural diversity that is an emerging feature of local communities. In doing so we will also support creatives from diverse communities regardless of gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race, membership of the Traveller community or socio-economic background in their creative practice.



Members of Dunboyne Flower & Garden Club collaborating with Alan Phelan on his award-winning Joly Screen Photography project. Dunboyne, County Meath. Photo by Barry Cronin

## Implementation by the Meath Culture and Creativity Team

Meath County Council 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:

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- 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.

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- 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, Community & Library, Arts & Culture and the members of the Culture and Creativity Team for Meath County Council include the County Librarian, County Arts Officer, County Heritage Officer, County Archivist, Director of Solstice Arts Centre, Conservation Officer, Senior Executive Librarian, Local Studies Librarian, and Irish Language Officer.

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

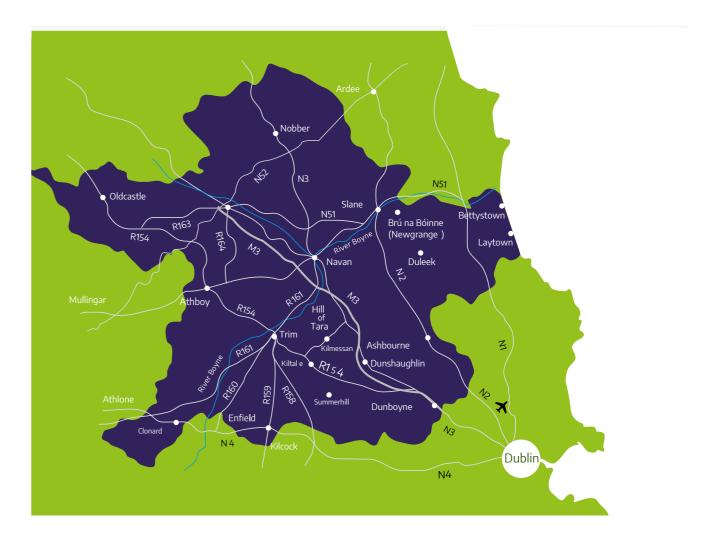


Author Tracey Ní Mhaonaigh pictured with Cllr. David Gilroy , Chairperson, Meath Council and members of the Meath Culture and Creativity team at the launch of 'The Life and Legacy of Eoghan Ó Gramhnaigh' in Athboy, County Meath. Photo by Meath County Council

> Author Paddy Smith, Trim, reading from his book 'Cocooner: A Lockdown Diary' at a Covid-19 Ceremony of Reflection and Remembrance, Navan 2022. Photo by Meath County Council



## Map of Meath and Municipal Districts



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