



Public Participation Network **Kildare**

Kildare PPN Submission

County Kildare Heritage Plan (2025 - 2031) Pre-
Draft Consultation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Embracing Modernity in Heritage	4
Gaps and Threats in Our Heritage	4
Accessibility and Inclusion	5
A County Museum for Kildare	6
Celebrating Traditions and Encouraging Participation	6
Natural Heritage and the Peatlands	7
Planning and Oversight	8
Community Tools and Public Information	8
Conclusion	9

INTRODUCTION

Kildare Public Participation Network (Kildare PPN) was established on foot of the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government published in 2014, which recommended greater input by communities into decision making at local Government level. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the formal establishment of PPNs and they are now operational in all Local Authority areas.

Kildare Public Participation Network (PPN), representing over 800 member groups across community and voluntary, social inclusion, and environmental pillars, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the County Kildare Heritage Plan 2025-2031. The following points reflect the voices and concerns of our members, along with practical suggestions to ensure that Kildare's rich heritage is celebrated, protected, and made accessible for all.

EMBRACING MODERNITY IN HERITAGE

We believe it's essential for Kildare's heritage to adapt to modern expectations, particularly in terms of how it's communicated and experienced. Many people now engage with information through social media and online platforms, so we suggest:

- Developing short videos, reels and posts for social media that highlight local heritage stories, trails, and traditions.
- Supporting community groups to create digital archives and oral histories.
- Using digital mapping tools to provide an online, interactive map of heritage sites that includes information on accessibility, opening hours and historical context.
- Expanding the use of QR codes at heritage sites to provide on-the-spot access to self-guided tours and background information.
- Recognising the digital divide, particularly for older citizens, we propose the publication of a printed heritage newsletter at least twice a year. This could help keep all residents informed while offering basic guidance on how to access online heritage content.
- Addressing the skills gap in traditional and conservation crafts should be a core part of this effort. We encourage the sharing and expansion of existing best practice models from the OPW and other heritage bodies.

There's a growing appetite for more dynamic and inclusive ways of connecting with heritage, and local groups should be supported to play a bigger role in this.

GAPS AND THREATS IN OUR HERITAGE

Our members raised concerns about the condition and neglect of many built heritage structures, particularly in Naas. While some developments like the Potato Market are welcome, there's a sense that important sites like St David's Castle, Jigginstown Castle, and older buildings on Main Street haven't been adequately protected. The same goes for sites across the county.

We believe that:

- All built heritage, including industrial heritage (like Bord na Móna infrastructure), should be preserved where possible.
- At least one Bord na Móna building should be kept and repurposed for community heritage use.
- The grounds surrounding historic buildings (like Oakley Park and The Abbey) should be protected alongside the buildings themselves.
- Creative approaches, such as those used at Lullymore, show how making heritage visible in new ways can re-engage the public and protect what remains.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

There is a strong need to improve physical access to heritage sites across the county. According to Census 2016, over 27,000 people in Kildare have a disability, with many experiencing substantial physical limitations. With this in mind, we propose:

- A full accessibility audit of heritage sites in Kildare, covering everything from paths and signage to access to graveyards, parks, and historical buildings.
- Publishing the findings of this audit online in the form of an interactive map that's easy to use for all.
- Working with stakeholders such as Waterways Ireland to make inaccessible features more accessible, for example, eliminating kissing gates along canals and greenways.
- Making heritage sites more accessible benefits everyone, including families, older people, and visitors alike.
- Inclusion initiatives should go beyond physical access, expanding to include multilingual signage and non-text-based options.

A COUNTY MUSEUM FOR KILDARE

There is strong support among our members for the establishment of a County Museum. This could:

- Serve as a central space for the county’s archaeology, history, and cultural displays
- Provide educational opportunities for schools and community groups
- Act as a tourism draw for both local visitors and those from further afield

We recommend:

- Not tying the museum to one urban location. A dispersed model with rotating exhibitions and a mobile or “moving” museum trail would reach more people.
- Choosing locations based on public transport access and environmental sustainability.
- Recognising that many towns and villages already have heritage items of interest that could feed into a wider county network.

We suggest that Kildare County Council explore the viability of such a facility and consult with the public on how it might be developed.

CELEBRATING TRADITIONS AND ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

Kildare’s heritage is not just about buildings and landscapes, it’s also about people, stories, and culture. Our members highlighted the value of traditions such as:

- Making St Brigid’s crosses
- Storytelling and music sessions
- Local crafts and markets

- Intergenerational projects that connect older and younger residents

We would like to see more support for these kinds of activities, along with new ideas such as:

- Pop-up galleries and artisan events in towns
- A gallery space in towns to showcase local talent and culture
- Community festivals that celebrate all the traditions present in modern Kildare
- Opportunities to promote and use the Irish language in an organic way

NATURAL HERITAGE AND THE PEATLANDS

Our members emphasise the importance of conserving peatlands by protecting intact bogs and fens, and prioritising ecologically informed restoration of degraded sites.

They strongly support active community involvement in peatland projects, including the planning and rehabilitation of Bord na Móna lands and participation in the development of the National Peatlands Park.

They also advocate for the continued development of the Blueway and other outdoor amenities, alongside heritage and environmental education, to help promote sustainable tourism and support overall community well-being.

We also recommend:

- Bringing greater attention to key natural heritage areas such as the Curragh Plains, Pollardstown Fen, and waterways.
- Expanding existing efforts in peatland restoration and putting these efforts front and centre in the Plan—not just as a legacy issue, but as a vital part of our present and future.

PLANNING AND OVERSIGHT

We recommend:

- Employment of a full-time County Archaeologist to provide independent oversight of development-related heritage issues.
- Engagement with NPWS and other national bodies to ensure that natural and built heritage sites are protected and maintained.
- Modernising planning processes to protect heritage without unnecessarily impeding progress. This could include practical measures such as requiring nest boxes in new developments and protecting old hedgerows.
- Clarifying how heritage-related organisations work together and how community input is structured and recognised.
- Re-evaluating what has been undervalued or overlooked. We should continue to innovate, not just repeat what's always been done.

COMMUNITY TOOLS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Finally, we recommend expanding access to education and information resources. This could include:

- Guidelines for local groups (Tidy Towns, history societies, community councils, archaeological volunteers) on how they can contribute to the implementation of the Heritage Plan.
- Curated lists of free resources such as journals, publications, online archives, and local history materials (e.g. through the Library Service or partnerships with Kildare Local History).
- A broader approach that doesn't only spotlight areas already well-represented, but actively looks for potential in under-recognised places and communities.

CONCLUSION

Kildare's heritage is multifaceted, encompassing its built environment, landscapes, languages, traditions, and stories. The 2025-2031 Heritage Plan should reflect not only the need to conserve this heritage but also to make it living, inclusive, dynamic, and accessible to all.

Kildare PPN looks forward to continued collaboration with Kildare County Council and other stakeholders in shaping a vibrant and sustainable heritage future for all communities across the county.