



Our Ambitions for the Future

A Strategic Framework The
Honourable The Irish Society

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Introduction

The Honourable The Irish Society has a long-standing and ongoing commitment to the Northwest and North Coast of Northern Ireland. As a dedicated funder, property and fishery owner, and steadfast supporter of education, the Society has played a pivotal role in the region's development. Our investments and initiatives have consistently aimed to foster community, growth, sustainability, and prosperity.

Communities have always been at the heart of our efforts. Their powerful role in shaping the region's future cannot be overstated. We recognise and celebrate the invaluable contributions that communities have made and will continue to make in the years to come. Their resilience, creativity, and collaboration are the cornerstones of our shared success.

However, years of political and social turmoil including the Troubles have had a profound impact on relationships across communities within the region. The legacy of violence and political strife has resulted in ongoing challenges, including poverty, low educational attainment, and significant influence from paramilitaries in areas most affected by the conflict. Housing and education remain largely divided along community lines, hindering efforts at reconciliation and fostering genuine relationships.

Looking ahead, The Honourable The Irish Society remains steadfast in its ambitions for this part of Northern Ireland. We are determined to support impactful endeavours that drive positive change and create lasting benefits for all. Our vision is one of continued partnership and progress, ensuring that communities drive positive change for future generations.



Our Achievements

The Honourable The Irish Society has worked hard for more than four centuries to support communities across Northern Ireland. Since 2018, our efforts have been marked by several key achievements that highlight our commitment to fostering positive change and supporting and empowering communities.

One of our most notable accomplishments in that time is the distribution of over £2.4 million in grants and community rents to support important work. These grants have supported a wide range of initiatives, from educational programmes and community projects to environmental conservation efforts and cultural activities. By providing this financial assistance, we have empowered local organisations to make a meaningful impact and address the unique needs of their communities. Some examples include educating children about the importance of the river environment and the life cycle of fish; extracting tonnes of plastic waste from the River Bann; providing access to play for infants; promoting and enabling access to angling for people living with a disability. It has also supported individuals in further and higher education through scholarships and through bursaries.

The Society also works in partnership with local communities to provide access to buildings. One example of this is the Society's role in Culmore. Working in partnership with the local community, the Society has ensured that historical property has been brought back into use and is a place where residents, workers and visitors can meet while accessing activities and programmes.

In addition to our grant-making efforts, we have also ensured that the Society's sporting rights are managed by angling clubs for the benefit of communities across the Northwest. These clubs play a vital role in promoting sustainable fishing practices, conserving aquatic environments, and fostering a sense of community among their members. By entrusting the management of our sporting rights to these clubs, we have supported their ongoing efforts to protect river environments and enhance the well-being of local communities.



Our Achievements (contd.)

We were proud to work in partnership with local councils and the City of London Corporation to promote City and Growth Deals for Derry City and Strabane District Council and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. These deals have the potential to be catalysts for the wider region - driving economic growth, enhancing infrastructure, regenerating communities and improving the quality of life for residents in these regions. The Society also works in close partnership with its parent body, the City of London Corporation, to promote the Northern Irish economy and introduce UK and global investment to NI's financial services and fintech sectors. As part of this work, the Society supports the annual trip to NI by the City's Lord Mayor and Policy Chair, which feeds into their international trade and investment visit programme.

In response to the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, the Society developed grants programmes specifically designed to help schools adapt to the new realities of educating through a pandemic. These grants provided essential funding for schools to implement remote learning technologies, enhance health and safety measures, and support students' mental and emotional well-being. By investing in these critical areas, we aimed to ensure that all students had access to quality education, regardless of the circumstances.

Despite significant achievements over the last number of years, the Society is aware that there remains much work to do. Significant reports from the education sphere indicate that despite positive results for many, “too many students are left behind”¹. Communities are under pressure in new and significant ways - increasing levels of need at a community level, coupled with funding challenges and inflationary costs have created challenging circumstances for community organisations. Recent issues with algal blooming at Lough Neagh are indicative of the wider challenges our river systems are facing. Challenges such as these are a key context for this strategic framework.

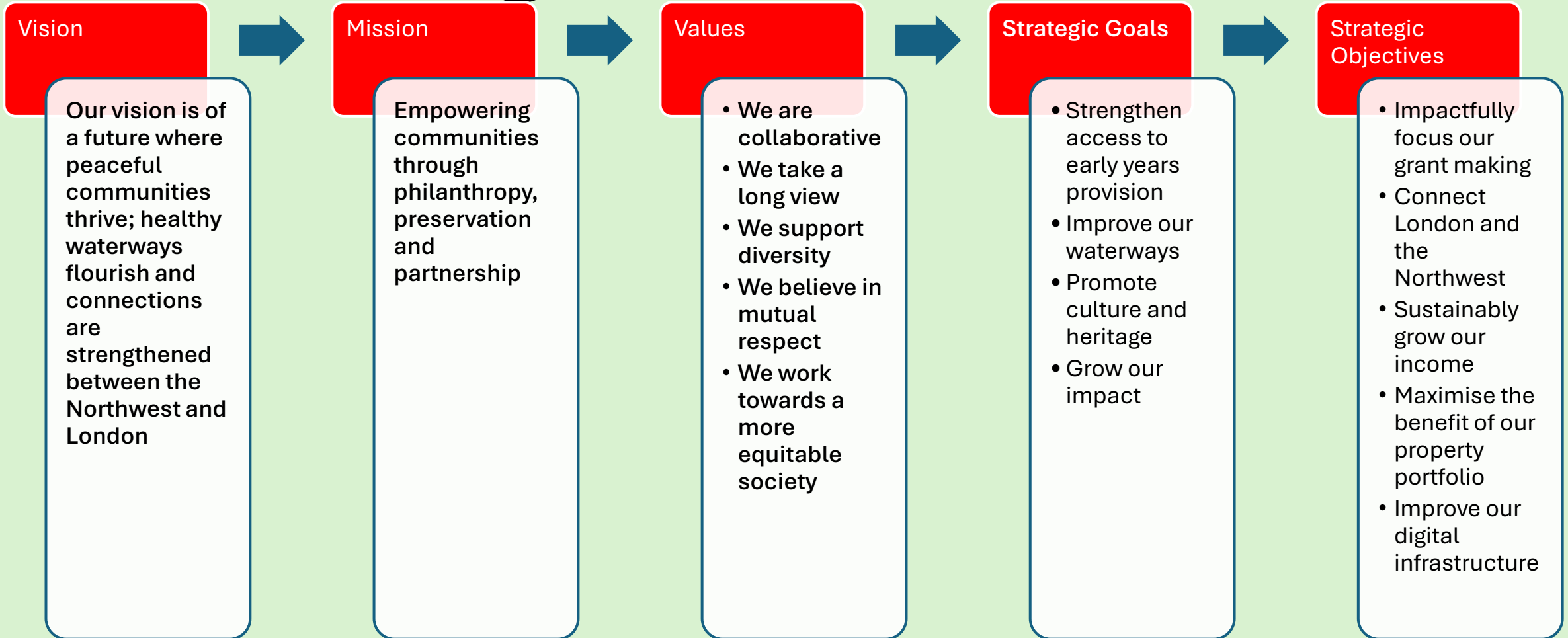


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Plan on a Page



Our Vision and Mission

The Society's vision is of *a future where peaceful communities thrive, healthy waterways flourish and connections are strengthened across the Northwest and between the Northwest and London*. We believe that strong, resilient communities are an essential building block for societal progress.

Our mission is to *empower communities through philanthropy, preservation and partnership*. We will make grants to support impactful projects that drive positive change and foster community development. By providing financial assistance, we empower local organisations to deliver projects that address pressing needs and create lasting benefits. In addition to financial support, we will bring stakeholders together, fostering collaboration and collective action.

Reconciliation is also a key theme within our vision and mission. Reconciliation in Northern Ireland is a complex and multifaceted issue, driven by historical, political, and social factors. The Society recognises that our own involvement in the plantation of the northwest is a controversial and contested episode in the island's history. Part of our ambition, however, is to see the quality of relationships across all of our diverse communities in Northern Ireland grow and develop. In considering this, the Society is mindful of work undertaken to define reconciliation¹ in the Northern Irish context which roots the concept in five interwoven strands requiring attention: namely developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society; acknowledging and dealing with the past; building positive relationships; significant cultural and attitudinal change; and substantial social, economic and political change.

Together, our vision and mission are aimed at recognising the powerful and impactful work which is ongoing at community level right across Northern Ireland and focusing the Society's resources to support that community activity in ways which build positive relationships and deliver improved outcomes for people and communities.



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The Importance of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is an important and challenging debate in Northern Ireland. A more reconciled society in Northern Ireland offers numerous benefits. Reconciliation can transform former enemies into partners, fostering civic equality, the rule of law, and even trust and friendship¹. It can significantly reduce violent political and sectarian conflict, create the basis for a sustained and inclusive political settlement, and support reconciliation between people from different communities³. Grassroots interventions play a crucial role in this process, helping to address the legacies of past violence and promote shared existence¹. By prioritising reconciliation, Northern Ireland can move towards a more peaceful and prosperous future.

The reconciliation challenges being experienced at community level have significant impacts on Northern Ireland's society. Areas that experienced the worst of the Troubles continue to face poverty, low educational attainment, and significant influence from paramilitaries². Housing and education remain largely divided along community lines, hindering cross-community efforts at reconciliation². This persistent deprivation and segregation creates barriers to building genuine relationships and fostering trust between communities. Without addressing these underlying issues, cross-community initiatives are likely to fall short, perpetuating a cycle of division and mistrust²

To achieve the benefits, further work at the community level is essential. This involves addressing the root causes of deprivation and division within communities, promoting internal development, and building lasting good relations with others². It is also important to consider communities beyond the traditional Catholic and Protestant binary, including minority ethnic and migrant communities, to ensure that reconciliation efforts are inclusive and comprehensive⁴.

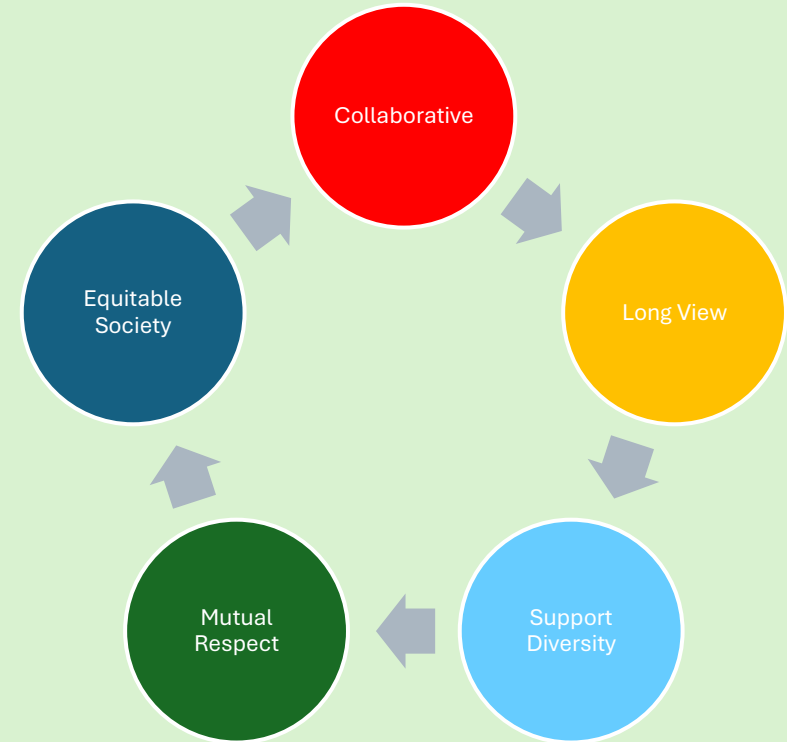


References

- [1] [From enemies to partners? Reconciliation in Northern Ireland](#)
- [2] [Deprivation and segregation are persistent barriers to reconciliation...](#)
- [3] [The Future for Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland](#)
- [4] [Shifting demographics stirs debate on Northern Ireland's future](#)

Our Values

- **We are Collaborative** – we will work collaboratively with partners and welcome collaborative efforts from others that support our vision and mission.
- **We Take a Long View** – with over 400 years of history behind us, we recognise that positive change can take some time. We seek to support work that results in lasting change.
- **We Support Diversity & Inclusion** – we believe that diversity is a real asset within communities and want to support endeavours that make the most of that asset.
- **We Believe in Mutual Respect** - mutual respect underpins all of our relationships and is about valuing each other's worth, regardless of backgrounds or beliefs. We believe it's the cornerstone of healthy relationships and effective collaboration.
- **We Work Towards a More Equitable Society** – we recognise that not all communities and people are at the same starting point, and in undertaking our work we seek to bridge those gaps.



Strengthen Access to Early Years Provision

Early years provision is a critical component of any comprehensive educational strategy. The foundation laid during the early years of a child's life significantly influences long-term academic, social, and emotional development. Research consistently highlights the profound impact of high-quality early childhood education on a child's future success, making it an essential focus for educational policymakers and practitioners.

Cognitive and Academic Benefits

Early years provision fosters cognitive development and prepares children for the formal education system. During these formative years, children develop essential skills such as language, numeracy, and problem-solving. High-quality early childhood education programmes provide a structured environment where children can explore, experiment, and engage in activities that stimulate their intellectual growth. Studies have shown that children who attend quality early years programmes are more likely to perform better academically in later years, demonstrating higher literacy and numeracy skills. For instance, children who participate in high-quality early education programmes are 25% more likely to graduate from high school¹.

Social and Emotional Development

Beyond academic readiness, early years provision plays a crucial role in social and emotional development. Children learn to interact with peers, develop empathy, and build relationships in a supportive setting. These social skills are foundational for future interactions and collaborations, both in school and in life. Early childhood education also helps children develop emotional resilience, self-regulation, and a positive self-concept, which are vital for their overall well-being and success. Research indicates that children who attend preschool are 20% less likely to require special education services later in life².



Strengthen Access to Early Years Provision

Long-Term Societal Impact

Investing in early years provision yields significant long-term benefits for society. Children who receive quality early education are more likely to complete post primary education, pursue higher education, and secure stable employment. Furthermore, early intervention can help identify and address developmental delays or learning difficulties, providing children with the support they need to thrive. A study by MIT found that children who attended preschool were 18% more likely to enrol in college on time³.

Equity and Inclusion

Early years provision is also a powerful tool for promoting equity and inclusion. By ensuring that all children, have access to high-quality early education, we can help bridge the achievement gap and provide equal opportunities for all. Inclusive early childhood programmes that cater to diverse needs and backgrounds foster a sense of belonging and respect for differences from a young age. Statistics show that children from low-income families who attend high-quality early education programmes are 30% more likely to achieve higher academic outcomes compared to their peers who do not¹. Furthermore, evidence from Northern Ireland demonstrates the impact of Early Years programmes in terms of learning about diversity and developing respect for others⁴.

Conclusion

In conclusion, early years provision is a cornerstone of a robust educational framework. Its impact on cognitive, social, and emotional development, coupled with its long-term societal benefits, underscores the importance of prioritising and investing in early childhood education. By doing so, we lay the groundwork for a brighter, more equitable future for all children.



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[1] [Children's Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early ...](#)

[2] [New MIT Study Reveals Long-Term Benefits of High-Quality Early ...](#)

[3] [International experts highlight the importance of a child's early years ...](#)

[4] Eder, J, Fitzpatrick, S., Ziv, M. (Eds). (2023) Foundations for a Peaceful World: The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Development in building Peace and Social Cohesion. The International Networking Group on Peace Building with Young Children.

Improving our Waterways

Northern Ireland's river environments face numerous challenges that threaten their ecological health and biodiversity. While there are multiple drivers behind these challenges, one of the primary issues is pollution, particularly from agricultural runoff and sewage, which introduce excess nutrients into the water. This nutrient pollution leads to eutrophication, causing harmful algal blooms that deplete oxygen levels and harm aquatic life¹. According to a report by the Office for Environmental Protection, 100% of river stretches in Northern Ireland fail to meet 'good' overall status, with 12% classified as poor or bad².

Issues with Algal Blooming

Algal blooms, particularly harmful algal blooms (HABs), are a significant concern for river environments. These blooms occur when algae grow excessively due to high nutrient levels, often from agricultural runoff containing nitrogen and phosphorus³. HABs can produce toxins that are harmful to humans, animals, and aquatic ecosystems. They reduce oxygen levels in the water, leading to dead zones where aquatic life cannot survive⁴. In Northern Ireland, the prevalence of algal blooms has been linked to nutrient pollution from farming and sewage¹.

Decreases in Fish Stocks Globally and Locally

Globally, fish stocks are declining at an alarming rate due to overfishing, habitat destruction, and climate change. An investigation revealed that many fish populations are in far worse condition than previously reported, with some fisheries already collapsed⁵. Locally, Northern Ireland's rivers are also experiencing declines in fish stocks, exacerbated by pollution, habitat loss, and the impacts of climate change. Sustainable fishing practices and effective management are crucial to reversing these trends and ensuring the long-term viability of fish populations⁶.



Improving our Waterways

The Importance of Angling Clubs as Community Resources

Angling clubs play a vital role in both human and environmental terms. These clubs foster a sense of community, providing social and recreational opportunities for their members. They also serve as custodians of the river, promoting conservation and sustainable fishing practices. Angling clubs often lead initiatives to clean up rivers, monitor fish populations, and advocate for policies that protect aquatic environments⁷. By engaging in these activities, angling clubs help maintain healthy river ecosystems and ensure that future generations can enjoy the benefits of fishing.

In addition to their environmental stewardship, angling clubs contribute to the well-being of their communities. They offer a space for individuals to connect, share knowledge, and develop skills. Participation in angling has been shown to improve mental health and well-being, providing a sense of purpose and relaxation⁸. The social bonds formed within these clubs strengthen community ties and foster a collective responsibility for the local environment.

Conclusion

Addressing the challenges facing Northern Ireland's river environments requires a multifaceted approach that includes reducing pollution, managing fish stocks sustainably, and supporting the efforts of local angling clubs. By tackling these issues, we can protect and preserve our rivers for the benefit of both the environment and the communities that depend on them.



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- [1] [OEP report on the drivers and pressures affecting nature in Northern ...](#)
- [2] [The Rivers Trust launch new report revealing ... - NI Environment Link](#)
- [3] [Algal Blooms: The Causes, Dangers and Some Solutions](#)
- [4] [Harmful Algal Blooms: Contributing Factors and Impacts](#)
- [5] [Investigation Reveals Global Fisheries Are Worse Off — and Many Have ...](#)
- [6] [Fish and Overfishing - Our World in Data](#)
- [7] [Fostering Ties and Tales: How Local Fishing Clubs Enhance An](#)
- [8] [The Social and Community Benefits of Angling: Fishing for Answers](#)

Promoting Culture and Heritage

Culture and heritage play a pivotal role in shaping the identity of communities and fostering a sense of belonging among their members. In Northern Ireland, promoting cultural and heritage activities is not only about preserving the past but also about building a cohesive and inclusive society in the present. These activities have the power to unite communities, bridge divides, and celebrate diversity.

The Role of Cultural and Heritage Activities

Cultural and heritage activities serve as vital lifelines for fostering community spirit and educating younger generations about their heritage. Local festivals, cultural events, and heritage projects create opportunities for people to come together, share experiences, and celebrate. These activities help to strengthen social bonds, promote mutual understanding, and enhance community cohesion.

Statistics on Culture and Heritage in Northern Ireland

Engagement with culture and heritage is significant in Northern Ireland. According to the Department for Communities, 87% of adults engaged in some form of cultural activity in 2022/23¹. This includes attending arts events, visiting heritage sites, and participating in cultural festivals. Additionally, 72% of young people reported engaging in cultural activities, highlighting the importance of these activities in fostering a sense of identity and belonging among the younger generation¹.



Promoting Culture and Heritage

Economic and Social Benefits

Promoting culture and heritage also brings substantial economic and social benefits. Cultural tourism, driven by festivals, heritage sites, and cultural events, contributes significantly to the local economy. In 2022, cultural tourism generated approximately £1.2 billion for Northern Ireland's economy². Moreover, these activities create job opportunities, support local businesses, and attract visitors, boosting the overall economic vitality of the region.

Community Building and Social Inclusion

Cultural and heritage activities are powerful tools for community building and social inclusion. They provide platforms for diverse groups to come together, share their stories, and celebrate their unique traditions. By promoting inclusivity and respect for different cultures, these activities help to break down barriers and foster a sense of unity. For example, the annual Belfast Mela, one of Northern Ireland's largest multicultural festivals, attracts over 30,000 visitors each year and showcases the rich cultural diversity of the region³. Annual Pride festivals in cities and towns across Northern Ireland also create positive opportunities to educate communities and challenge negative stereotypes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, promoting culture and heritage as community activities is essential for building a cohesive and inclusive society. These activities not only preserve the rich cultural legacy of Northern Ireland but also bring people together, fostering a sense of belonging and unity. By investing in cultural and heritage initiatives, we can create vibrant, resilient communities that celebrate diversity and work together towards a shared future.



References

- [1] [Culture and heritage statistics | Department for Communities](#)
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- [3] [Experience of culture, arts and heritage by adults in Northern Ireland ...](#)

Growing Our Impact

The Society is dedicated to modernising its structures and systems to ensure long-term sustainability and growth. This strategic framework sets out the key pillars of our strategy and the areas we want to positively impact on. To deliver this ambitious programme will require the Society to continually develop.

A key aspect of this commitment is the sustainable growth of our income. By implementing strategic initiatives and fostering partnerships, we aim to increase our financial resources, enabling us to support more impactful projects and initiatives. This approach not only ensures the Society's financial stability but also enhances our ability to drive positive change and foster community development.

The Society holds a significant property portfolio, and maximising the benefit of that portfolio for our charitable purposes is a key focus of our plans for the years ahead, including by investing in the regeneration of Castleroe through the development of land which the Society holds.

In addition to financial growth, we are focused on becoming increasingly digitally enabled. Enhancing our digital infrastructure is crucial for improving operational efficiency and better serving our stakeholders. By implementing comprehensive digital communication strategies, we aim to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged. This digital transformation will allow us to leverage technology to streamline our operations, enhance our outreach efforts, and provide more effective support to the communities we serve.

Growing our supporter base is another critical component of our modernisation efforts. We are dedicated to reaching out to communities that have engaged less with the Society, ensuring that our impact is felt widely and inclusively. By establishing networks of supporters, such as the 'Friends of the Society' in London, we aim to build strong connections that can drive our mission forward. These efforts will help us create a more robust and engaged community of supporters, amplifying the impact of our initiatives and fostering a sense of shared purpose.



Making It Happen

Delivering the ambition contained in this strategy requires a clear focus on the part of the Society, targeting our resources on those activities and areas that support the pillars identified in this document. Key among those actions is continuing to manage the Society's commercial activities to support our charitable impact and specifically managing and growing the organisation's property portfolio to deliver not only social impact but also financial impact. It is that financial impact which will support our charitable ambition. Those ambitions will be guided by an outcomes framework which we will develop to support this framework.

We will make grants to support impactful projects that drive positive change and foster community development on the pillars outlined in this strategy. By providing financial assistance, we empower local organisations to implement initiatives that address pressing needs and create lasting benefits.

In addition to financial support, we will bring stakeholders together, fostering collaboration and collective action. By convening diverse groups, we facilitate the exchange of ideas, resources, and expertise, ensuring that community efforts are well-coordinated and effective.

Our influence and engagement in the City of London is a powerful tool that we will leverage to promote the great work happening in the Northwest. By highlighting the successes and innovations of our communities, we aim to attract further support and investment, amplifying the impact of local initiatives.

We will partner with various organisations, adding weight to efforts aimed at improving community conditions. Through partnership working, we enhance the reach and effectiveness of our collective endeavours, ensuring that our communities thrive.

Finally, we will advocate for the needs and interests of our communities. By championing their causes and raising awareness of their challenges and achievements, we strive to create a more supportive and enabling environment for community development.

