



# Kilkenny Craft Strategy

(2025 – 2027)

A future forged in tradition – centuries in the making

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Strategic Priorities and Key Actions .....	3
Introduction .....	5
Background .....	6
Methodology .....	8
Kilkenny's History of Craft and Making .....	9
Kilkenny Design Workshops .....	10
Landscape for Craft Development .....	12
Kilkenny Design and Craft Yard .....	15
Clusters of Craft Activity .....	17
Craft Education and Skills Development.....	18
Craft Tourism Landscape .....	19
Kilkenny: A World Crafts Council City and Region of Craft.....	22
World Crafts Council EU Cities and Regions of Craft.....	24
SWOT Analysis of the Craft Ecosystem in Kilkenny .....	31
Maximising Potential .....	34
Strategic Vision .....	37
Strategic Pillars.....	39

## Executive Summary

The Kilkenny Craft Strategy 2025–2027 establishes a bold and actionable framework to enhance County Kilkenny’s position as a premier craft destination. This three-year strategy is designed to foster a thriving, sustainable, and innovative craft sector that builds on Kilkenny’s rich heritage while embracing new opportunities for growth.

Kilkenny has long been synonymous with craftsmanship, more recently earning international recognition as a World Crafts Council City and Region of Craft. This strategy capitalises on that designation to drive sectoral development, expand economic opportunities, and solidify Kilkenny as a hub for makers, visitors, and craft enthusiasts alike.

## Strategic Priorities and Key Actions

The strategy is structured around five key pillars, each with targeted objectives to ensure a holistic approach to craft development in Kilkenny:

### Pillar 1 - Visibility of Craft in Kilkenny

- Develop and promote the Kilkenny Craft Story, from heritage to contemporary production.
- Develop a business plan for a dedicated immersive craft facility in Kilkenny City to showcase craft in the county.
- Integrate craft more deeply into Kilkenny’s cultural and creative offering.
- Expand experiential craft opportunities for visitors and locals.

### Pillar 2 - Viability and Sustainability of the Craft Sector

- Support the establishment of a dedicated craft entity to lead sectoral development.
- Secure effective resourcing to deliver on the Strategy’s ambitions and sustain a thriving craft sector.

### Pillar 3 - Tourism and Destination Development

- Position Kilkenny as a world-class destination for craft tourism, in alignment with Fáilte Ireland’s initiatives.
- Enhance craft tourism with specific focus on experiential engagement with craft and making.
- Leverage Kilkenny’s World Crafts Council designation to attract national and international visitors.
- Maximise national and international promotional opportunities to highlight Kilkenny’s craft sector.
- Assess opportunities to develop an educational tourism focus for craft in Kilkenny.

### Pillar 4 - Craft Skills Development and legacy of Kilkenny Design Workshops

- Strengthen partnerships with educational institutions and training bodies to expand craft education.
- Assess availability of possible spaces and incentives to support delivery of additional craft workshops and experiences.
- Advocate for policies that support traditional skill preservation and modern craft techniques.



### Pillar 5 - Collective Storytelling, Communications, and Marketing

- Develop the story of making in Kilkenny as a clear destination narrative.
- Resource a cohesive marketing strategy to enhance visibility of Kilkenny as a World City and Region of Craft.
- Create bespoke business supports to foster collaboration among craft businesses and tourism providers to create a seamless craft experience.

### Implementation and Collaboration

The successful execution of this strategy will require the continued coordinated efforts of local government, industry bodies, craft communities, and tourism stakeholders. By embedding craft within Kilkenny's broader economic and cultural framework, this initiative will ensure that craft remains a cornerstone of the county's identity, fostering job creation, innovation, and international recognition.

Kilkenny's craft sector has long been a symbol of excellence, and this strategy aims to solidify its status as a sustainable, thriving, and globally respected centre of making. Through strategic investment, targeted actions, and ongoing collaboration, Kilkenny will continue to inspire, engage, and lead in the world of craft.



## Introduction



As Co-Chairs of the Kilkenny Craft Working Group, we are delighted to introduce the Kilkenny Craft Strategy (2025 – 2027), the first dedicated craft strategy for the

county. This document has been developed collaboratively by the Kilkenny Craft Working Group, a multiagency and industry-led group of passionate craftspeople, individuals and organisations working to support the development of a vibrant and sustainable craft sector in Kilkenny.

Craft is deeply woven into the fabric of Kilkenny's cultural identity; it's in our DNA. This strategy sets out a clear path to enhance the visibility of our craftsmanship, of our heritage and traditions, to support its growth, and ensure its continuity and innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our shared commitment to ensuring this growth is reflected in the immense potential this strategy brings to shaping a vibrant and sustainable future for makers, craft businesses, craft experience providers, and the wider community.

The strategy offers a powerful framework for advancing the craft economy across the city and county. It aims to create valuable opportunities for both professional makers and those wishing to engage in and appreciate craft, enriching our community and attracting visitors from around the world. We are confident that through its implementation, we will foster an inclusive, resilient, and thriving craft

sector that continues to inspire, engage, and prosper in the years to come.

The Kilkenny Craft Working Group takes this opportunity to thank Kilkenny County Council's Local Enterprise Office and Fáilte Ireland, who together funded the strategic development process.

We look forward to working together with all stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of the strategy and to secure Kilkenny's future as a leading destination for craft.

### **Martin Matthews and Eimear Vize**

Co-Chairs – Kilkenny Craft Working Group

## Background

Kilkenny has long been regarded as a location where craft and making find their home. Craft is rooted in Kilkenny's heritage, reflecting the cultural identity and history of the region, while evolving through modern techniques and sustainable practices. The history of making in the county is evident in the built heritage of the city from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and has continued through the centuries to initiation of the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW) some 60 years ago, the establishment of Kilkenny City as home to the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland, the National Craft and Design Gallery, Design Week, the centre of excellence in Jewellery and Silversmithing, the Made in Kilkenny collective and the high number of craft artisans, practitioners, educators, mindful makers, craft enthusiasts and retailers living and working locally.

The preservation and continuance of craft heritage skills is supported through new and developmental educational projects and programmes in locations, and the county continues to excel in craft production and development, achieving international recognition as a World Crafts Council City and Region of Craft in 2021 (one of only five locations in Europe to hold this prestigious title). This creativity and innovation in craft presents a driving force in the economic fortune of the region for makers, citizens, and visitors alike.

Kilkenny has over time also expanded and developed as a location where creativity is at the core of enterprise and innovation, its focus providing

leadership and excellence not only in craft but also in the animation and wellbeing sectors. Kilkenny continues to draw makers from international locations to live and work in the region. It remains a location deeply connected with craftsmanship (design, manufacture, retail) but also as a region of innate creativity, where creative endeavour is supported in all forms (design, experiential, retail, skills development, exhibition, heritage preservation, wellbeing, innovation and leadership in craft and making).

The development of this strategy was supported by Kilkenny County Council and Fáilte Ireland and guided by the Kilkenny Craft Working Group<sup>1</sup>, working together to deliver a vision for the craft sector in Kilkenny. The strategy reflects the significant ongoing commitment of industry partners to supporting and developing craft and making. It seeks to capitalise on Kilkenny's designation as a World Craft Council Craft City and Region, building on the legacy of the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW) in tandem with the development of craft businesses, enhancing craft motivated tourism and Kilkenny's craft culture and heritage, alongside the preservation of craft skills.

Delivering Kilkenny's Craft Strategy is one where the voice of the maker is central, where opportunities not only for design, manufacture, production, retail and export are integral but also where new opportunities for craftsmanship and making as well as engagement with and experience of Kilkenny's craft story, together create a sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> *The Kilkenny Craft Working Group is a newly formed voluntary group for the advancement of the craft sector in Kilkenny. The group has representation from the 'Made in Kilkenny'*

*collective, craft businesses and experiences and local government and national agencies and organisations.*



ecosystem for craft and a continued appetite for innovation and development of the sector.

We have defined Craft in this strategy as - the creation of high-quality, handmade products that blend traditional skills with contemporary innovation, alongside experiential opportunities for audiences to engage with craft and making, and craft as an element of wellbeing. The sector spans a diverse range of disciplines—including textiles, ceramics, woodwork, metalwork, glass, leather and more— where makers use their expertise, creativity, and passion to produce unique, meaningful objects.

This strategy sets out an overall vision for craft in the city and county for the three-year period 2025 – 2027 and is supported by a framework for effective implementation. It positions the value of the sector

- as an economic driver (supporting the development of craft businesses and of craft motivated tourism)
- in ensuring preservation and development of Kilkenny's' craft culture heritage and skills, while promoting innovation in the sector, and
- as a means of cultural expression, fostering growth, collaboration and engagement within the community and beyond.

It ensures an embedded craft agenda, one which dovetails with existing strategic objectives for planning and development in the city and county. It presents an opportunity for Kilkenny to further support the existing ecosystem of craft and making, increase visibility of its craft heritage to new and diverse audiences, ensure continued preservation and development of craft skills, positioning collaboration and sustainability at the core, for a thriving, innovative craft sector.

## Methodology

This strategic planning process was designed to add value to the existing craft ecosystem in Kilkenny, aiming to maximise opportunities for future development, renewing the position of Kilkenny as a significant craft destination, a place where craft and design is at the heart of planning and development, where the voice of makers is evident in planning, where it is fully considered, resourced and supported to improve the lives, prospects and opportunities of professional makers, and the enjoyment, engagement and participation of citizens of and visitors to the city and county.

Karan Thompson Consulting Ltd (KTCL) was retained to conduct this work on behalf of the Working Group. The process was framed by an overarching focus on sustainability and accessibility, outlined for development at project outset and on the following five strategic pillars:

- **Visibility of Craft in Kilkenny**
- **Supporting the viability of the craft sector in Kilkenny**
- **Tourism and destination development**
- **Craft skills development and legacy of KDW**
- **Collective storytelling, communications, and marketing**

The document includes an overview of the existing environment and SWOT analysis of the craft sector in Kilkenny, delivering a strategy which references existing European and national craft strategies, relevant local strategies including the County Development Plan, Fáilte Ireland's Destination Experience Development Plan for Kilkenny, culture-focussed strategies (e.g. Arts, Heritage, Cultural and Creativity), and the Local Economic and Community Plan (2023-2028) and Climate Action Plan and strategies of relevant stakeholder agencies and organisations.

Methods used for data collection included:

- **Desk Research and International Comparator Analysis**
- **Industry Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement**

**Desk Research** – Included a review of relevant existing strategies and documentation referencing local, regional and national context for craft development, including the report of the Fáilte Ireland Craft Audit for Kilkenny (2024).

**International Comparator Analysis** - This element incorporated a review of the World Craft Council's 'City and Region of Craft' designated locations in Europe, to understand their craft heritage and story and the ecosystem that supports their sustainability. Learning from their development to advance Kilkenny's craft sector.

**Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement** - This element involved consultation with multiple key stakeholders, industry and agency partners, including but not limited to, Kilkenny County Council, Fáilte Ireland; Design and Craft Council of Ireland, County Kilkenny Leader Partnership, Carlow Kilkenny Education and Training Board, the Kilkenny Group, KIDCo, Kilkenny Night Time Economy, South East Technological University, and across craft makers, businesses, experiences, retailers, galleries, craft skills educators, crafts guilds, mindful crafters, and the wider craft community sectors.

It incorporated a range of bespoke methodologies including individual and joint interviews, focus groups, a stakeholder engagement workshop and prioritisation session, a vision and mission development workshop, two online surveys (one for craftspeople/makers and the other for craft businesses – those operating in and/or supporting the craft sector).



## Kilkenny's History of Craft and Making

Kilkenny is home to more than 60 professional full-time craft and design studios and workshops, small craft industries and many part-time arts and craftspeople, with the addition of multiple tourism experiences related to craft and making in locations across the county.<sup>2</sup> It holds a World Crafts Council designation as a City and Region of Craft. It has a long craft heritage and a strong tradition of making which continues to the present day.

Kilkenny participates in Ireland's national August Craft Month each year. It is home to the Kilkenny Craft Trail, to clusters of craft and making in Thomastown, Castlecomer, Bennettsbridge, and the Castle Yard craft studios in the stable yard of Kilkenny Castle, to the Design and Crafts Council Ireland - the national body for the development and sustainability of craft, and the National Craft Gallery, and the Grennan Mill Craft School in Thomastown which remains a location for craft and making.

Sessions House in Thomastown has been recently reimagined as a centre for excellence in Jewellery and Goldsmithing, offering the first BA degree programmes in craft available in Ireland. A new centre of excellence for Ceramics is due to open in Thomastown in 2025.

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<sup>2</sup> MADE in Kilkenny application to the World Crafts Council in support of a designation of Kilkenny as a City and Region of Craft (2020) and the Report of a Fáilte Ireland commissioned Craft Audit (2024).



## Kilkenny Design Workshops

Published in 1962, *Design in Ireland*, also known as the Scandinavian Report<sup>3</sup>, became a catalyst for a series of transformative state-led interventions aimed at fostering design awareness and improving Irish industry's ability to compete in both domestic and international markets.

The formal development of craft in Kilkenny traces its roots back to the establishment of the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW) in 1963. An initiative of the Irish Trade Board (CTT), KDW aimed to respond to the deficiencies noted in the Scandinavian report and introduce good design into both industrial manufacturing and craft production in Ireland.

Operating from the renovated stable yard of Kilkenny Castle, KDW became a cornerstone of Ireland's national effort to raise design standards. Over its 25-year lifespan, KDW played a crucial role in preparing Irish industry to face new competitive realities, by providing design services, prototypes, and guidance for design-led craft production while also building competencies in industrial design. It developed design prototypes and solutions to both Irish and international firms, trained young designers from Ireland and abroad, organised exhibitions, and showcased the best of Irish-designed and manufactured products.

As the first Government-sponsored design agency of its kind in the world, KDW remains one of the most significant design initiatives in Irish history, influencing the direction of Irish design and craft for decades.

Its work began in craft-based industries, with a focus on creating small production prototypes in textiles, weaving, ceramics, furniture, and silversmithing, and attracting talented designers from across Europe. Through this, Kilkenny emerged as a focal point for creative industries, driving the development of apprenticeship programmes and training schemes for aspiring designers and makers.

Throughout the 1970s, the Workshops became integral to the development of Kilkenny's reputation as a centre for design and craftsmanship. The restoration of Butler House as a residential design programme venue provided a space for young designers to live and work, creating a dynamic learning environment and attracting visitors from around the world.



<sup>3</sup> Irish Trade Board (CTT). *Design in Ireland* (Scandinavian Report). Dublin: Government of Ireland. (1962).



The challenges surrounding the subsidisation of KDW led to the eventual closure of the Workshops in 1988. The legacy of KDW, however, continued to shape craft in the city and county and the broader Irish economy.

The city of Kilkenny, as noted in the *Designing Ireland* report by the Design and Craft Council of Ireland (DCCI)<sup>4</sup>, was fundamentally transformed by the influence of KDW. Once a quiet county town, Kilkenny evolved into a bustling tourism centre with a strong reputation for craft, arts, and design. KDW was also instrumental in the city's cultural development, contributing to Kilkenny Arts Week and the preservation of heritage buildings at a time when Ireland's architectural heritage was not widely recognised or appreciated.

The workshops significantly raised the standard of design within Irish industry, helping to build a global network of design-led contacts and establishing Ireland's reputation for design competence.

In Kilkenny, KDW's influence endures through a vibrant community of craft businesses, many of which are now in second-generation ownership, originally founded by designers who stayed in the area after the Workshops closed.

These businesses continue to thrive, supported by a dynamic community of makers, educational institutions, and cultural initiatives that trace their roots back to this pioneering endeavour, perpetuating the traditions of excellence in design and craftsmanship that KDW helped to establish.





## Landscape for Craft Development

The following pages provide an overview of the agencies and organisations who together will assist the sustainable development of the craft sector in Kilkenny.



**Design & Crafts  
Council Ireland**

The Crafts Council of Ireland (CCol) was established in 1971 as an outcome of discussions which formed part of the World Craft Conference held in Dublin in 1970, and a concern by the Royal Dublin Society (who were then the primary supporting organisation for the development of the craft sector) that the burden of development of the craft sector in Ireland was not something that they could deliver on independently. It was set up as a voluntary board under the auspices of the Royal Dublin Society.

In 1976 the Council became a limited company with funding received for the Industrial Development Authority. Originally established in Dublin the administration of CCol moved to Kilkenny in 1997. In the intervening period the Council had established Showcase an opportunity to exhibit high end craft made in Ireland as part of the National Crafts Trade Fair.

CCol opened the National Craft Gallery in Kilkenny in 2000 and designated 2011 as Year of Craft, working in partnership with Craft Northern Ireland. 2013 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the KDW and CCol at the Global Irish Economic Forum advocated for a Year of Design (12015) to mark this anniversary and celebrate Irish design. In 2014 CCol changed its trading name to the Design and Crafts Council Ireland (DCCol) and launched Irish Design 2015.

(ID2015) a year-long Government backed initiative to celebrate and promote Irish Design internationally, driving job creation, export opportunities and increased competitiveness in the design and craft sector in Ireland. 2022 saw the launch of the annual August Craft Month by the organisation. DCCI continues to develop industry reports on building a policy and framework for design in Ireland, towards a national design strategy, which led to the first ministerial-led national Design Forum. The organisation advocates for the development of a National Design Centre in Ireland and works to enhance, preserve and develop heritage craft and design through its DCCI Academy (DCCIA).



**Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh**  
**Kilkenny County Council**

Kilkenny County Council (KCC) is the authority concerned with the

development of Kilkenny. Design and craft are recognised as part of the cultural fabric of the city and county. KCC has supported the development of the physical infrastructure for craft in the county including restoration of the Sessions House in Thomastown as a centre of excellence in Jewellery and Silversmithing and with support being provided for the School of Ceramics which is anticipated to commence its third level degree programme entry in September 2025. From the perspective of KCC, animating the cultural fabric of the county as it relates to craft, is made up of a number of parts including, preserving the skills and traditions of Kilkenny's craft heritage, leveraging the economic opportunity related to craft in the city and county, supporting and developing opportunities for sustainability of the sector, including support of startups and delivery of spaces for incubation and activation

of craft businesses, and delivering from a tourism perspective by increasing visibility and footfall to Kilkenny.



The Local Enterprise Office Kilkenny works with businesses and individuals to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups, develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job

creation, and provide accessible high-quality supports for new business ideas in the city and county. It does this through a range of different supports including financial supports, enterprise development supports, student enterprise supports, training, networking, and mentoring. Over the years the LEO has collaborated with other agencies and organisations to ensure that their supports reflect the needs of those doing business in the city and county. In relation to the craft sector, it provides opportunities for mentoring and individual business support, training to enhance competencies in managing creative businesses and in developing and effecting viable marketing and communications strategies to support business growth.

In past years it has supported a Craft and Design Bursary for craftspeople making a living from their practice, in 2021 offered a Get Set programme for Craft Design Businesses – for those operating in the creative industries sector and has also hosted such initiatives as the Craft and Design Showcase to develop international opportunities for craft makers in Kilkenny. In 2012 it developed and offered the “CREATE Kilkenny” development programme, for makers who wished to develop new products or enhance existing products whilst developing their management capability to target new customers and new markets.

In 2023 it facilitated a study visit to Farnham, UK, also designated by the World Crafts Council as a World Craft Town, to visit best practice case studies and exchange learnings. Assistance from the LEO is a crucial element of the craft ecosystem providing a business focus for makers and ensuring sustainability and commercialisation are considered in business development and planning in the sector. The LEO seeks to increase the numbers of people operating in the sector and to continue to support opportunities for collaboration to enhance development of the sector.



Kilkenny LEADER Partnership (KLP) is a community-led, non-profit organisation with over 30 years of experience in supporting rural enterprise and community

development. Since its founding in 1991, KLP has played a key role in driving local development and social inclusion in Kilkenny through initiatives such as the LEADER programme and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

Guided by a voluntary board of directors representing community and voluntary groups, social partners, local government, and state bodies, KLP is dedicated to fostering a sustainable and inclusive future for Kilkenny. The organisation focuses on strengthening the local economy, promoting sustainable development, and supporting economic activity through training, employment services, grant aid, and advisory supports. Generating employment and evaluating the impact of investment in funded projects are key factors in the delivery and planning of the LEADER programme specifically.

KLP has been instrumental in fostering craft development and tourism, supporting initiatives such as trail development and the growth of craft heritage sites. Key projects include the Thomastown Jewellery & Ceramic Centres of Excellence, Castlecomer Design Yard, and Jerpoint Glass. Leveraging Kilkenny's designation as a World Craft Council "Craft City & Region," KLP remains committed to unlocking the enterprise and tourism potential of the region's indigenous craft and creative sectors."



Kilkenny Industrial Development Company (KIDCo) is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1999. It

fosters economic development, job creation and innovation in the region with its mission 'to engage in and support projects and activities that enhance the development and betterment of Kilkenny including commerce, financial services, education, environmental sustainability, arts, culture, heritage and agricultural and food sciences.' Its purpose and objectives are:

- The advancement of education
- Involvement in projects of benefit to the community
- Advancement of community welfare including the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, or disability; and
- Advancement of community development, including rural or urban regeneration

As a body, KIDCo can provide support and educational services for the local community contributing to the economic development of the location, through community-based projects and incorporating new skills development to create employment and help combat disadvantage. Support for the craft sector may be offered in the context of such skills

development; however, any such supports need to be both commercially viable and sustainable.



MADE in Kilkenny (MADE) is a voluntary membership organisation with a mission to promote Kilkenny as the premier destination in Ireland

for authentic handmade Irish craft of exceptional quality. Formed in 2009, originally an outcome of a marketing programme for craftspeople supported by the then County Enterprise Board in conjunction with the CCol. The group comprises a range of multidisciplinary craftspeople (approximately 27). It brings together the wealth of craft talent found across Kilkenny, fostering excellence in craftsmanship and the promotion of Kilkenny craft to a wider audience, and enhancing the craft economy and tourism in the county.

In 2009 the MADE collective, working with Kilkenny Leader Partnership, developed 'Trail Kilkenny' an initiative designed to connect the craft product available across the county by publication of a map and website of the studio / retail locations of makers. In the intervening years, the Craft Trail has become a popular activity with locals and tourists and MADE has presented a solid identity and strong brand representing the best of craft of the county. In 2021, MADE developed a successful application to the World's Crafts Council for the designation of Kilkenny as a City and Region of Craft. The group continues to promote excellence in making within the region, to maximise the opportunity provided by the designation of Kilkenny as City and Region of Craft, and to advocate for continued support and sustainability of the craft sector locally.



## Kilkenny Design and Craft Yard

Kilkenny Civic Trust was established to manage the buildings associated with KDW. The Kilkenny Civic Trust (KCT) protects, enhances and promotes the living heritage of Kilkenny. It owns and maintains Butler House and Gardens and the common spaces of the Kilkenny Castle Yard where a range of craft businesses and studios are located. Revenue is garnered from relevant activities related to the use of the House and Gardens.

There are practical and pragmatic considerations in terms of maximising the opportunity presented by the Kilkenny Civic Trust spaces as locations for craft exposure and development as part of a continuum of Kilkenny's craft story. Indeed, rooms in Butler House remain furnished in the style of the KDW to this day. An opportunity exists to deepen the connection between, and story of, Butler House and Gardens, the Castle Yard and Kilkenny Castle itself. Developing the story of connectivity between the Castle Yard and the Castle demesne which presents the historical context and significance of craft and making that existed in the Castle Yard in the past, to service and supply the Castle and wider estate. In recent times the KCT developed an immersive and experiential initiative for workshops in craft as part of the Kilkenny Night Time Economy (NTE) pilot project. These workshops were supported through Kilkenny City Council, Kilkenny Civic Trust and Butler House, but without ongoing funding continuity of the initiative would be difficult to sustain. However, enhancing the experiential element of craft available within the Castle Yard craft cluster continues to be considered a latent opportunity for the craft sector.

The Kilkenny store is the flagship of the Kilkenny Group, located in the Coach House of Kilkenny Castle directly opposite the main castle gate on the Parade. Its craft story dates from when the coach house and castle were originally built; where farriers, coopers, leather-workers etcetera would have worked in the Castle Yard to service the Castle and estate. More recently it has been connected with the origin of the KDW, the workshops and studios being located in the Castle Yard.

The group continues to be associated with craft development in Kilkenny through its management of contracts for existing craft businesses and studios located in the Castle Yard. It sees the potential for increasing visibility and developing additionality for experiential craft in Kilkenny. For its part it works with each of the craft stakeholders / studios, who have a contractual obligation to provide an experiential element for visitors to the Castle Yard, to assist delivery of such elements..

Kilkenny Group understands that there are times where there is little activity for the local or visitor economy to engage with craft and making in the Castle Yard. It recognises that something more tangible is required to reduce this fragmented offer for both the local and tourism market. They have worked actively with Shenanigans Tours and Fáilte Ireland to develop a tour of the Castle Yard for visitors and see opportunities for development of a more robust and regular experiential offer in the Castle Yard, one which would deliver additional footfall for participating businesses and an 'always-on' location for craft in the city.

Local

## Supporting Agencies & Organisations

Kilkenny County Council

Visit Kilkenny

Kilkenny LEADER  
Partnership

Kilkenny Group

Kilkenny Civic Trust

MADE in Kilkenny

Kilkenny Industrial  
Development  
Company

Kilkenny & Carlow  
Education & Training  
Board

## Kilkenny Craft Sector

Craftspeople  
Designers / Makers

Fáilte Ireland

Design & Crafts  
Council Ireland

Tourism Ireland

Enterprise  
Ireland

DCCI Academy

National Craft  
Gallery

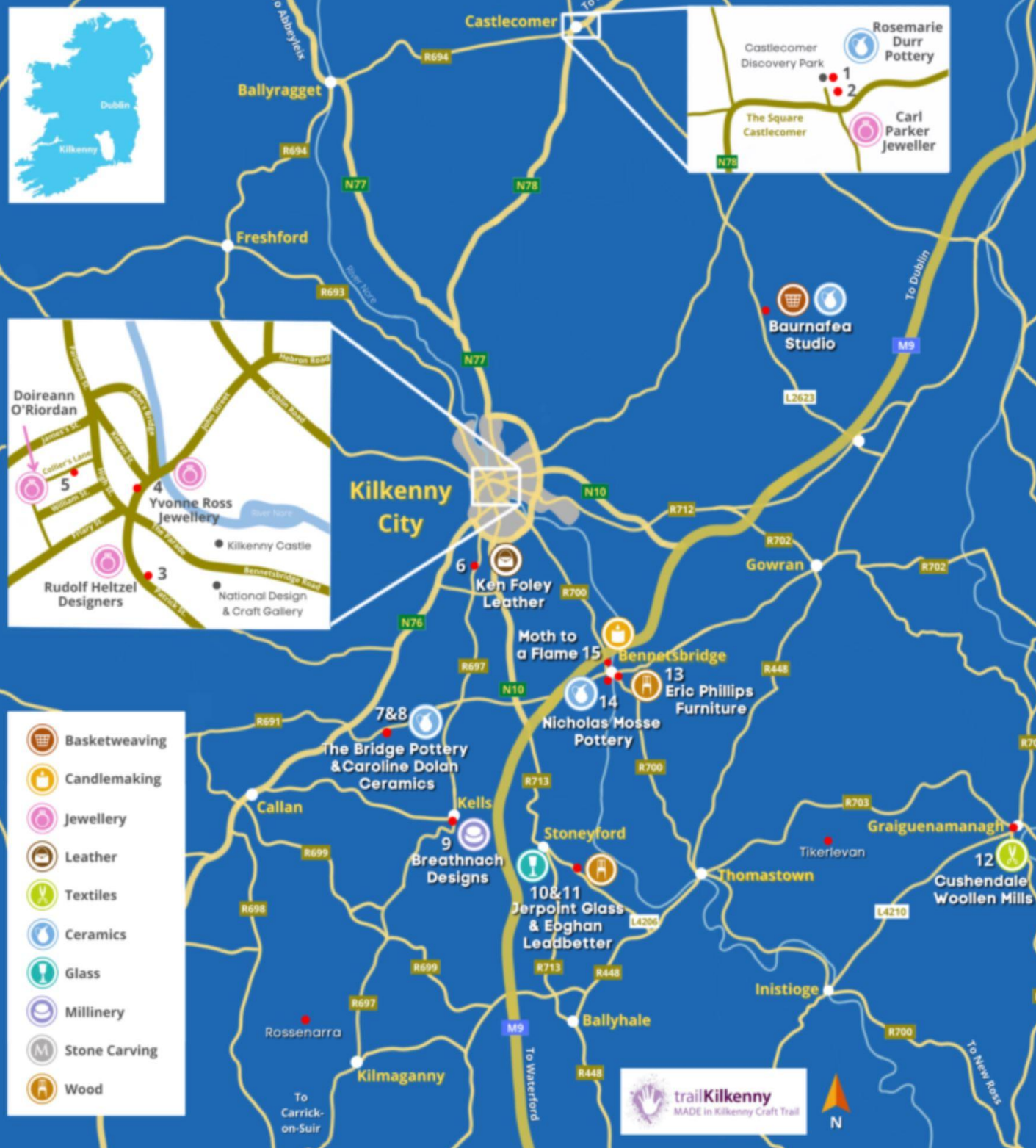
Heritage Council

World Crafts  
Council

Office of Public  
Works

WCC Cities &  
Regions of Craft

National / International



## Clusters of Craft Activity

For many years clusters of craft activity in the county have been evident in various locations across the county. The current Kilkenny Craft Trail highlighting area across the county where craft is synonymous with the location.

The list below provides an overview of the primary craft practices in each location:

**Castle Yard, Kilkenny City** – Leatherwork, Jewellery, Candle-making, Silversmithing, Pottery and Knifemaking

### Thomastown

Sessions House – Centre of Excellence in Jewellery and Goldsmithing  
Centre of Excellence in Ceramics (Opening 2025)  
Grennan Mill Craft School

### Castlecomer Craft Yard

Jewellery, Ceramics, Visual Art

### Bennettsbridge

Ceramics and Candle-making (Nicholas Mosse Pottery, Moth to a Flame, Eric Phillips Furniture)

### Graiguenamanagh

Textiles (Cushendale Woollen Mills)  
Glass (Jerpoint Glass)



## Craft Education and Skills Development

Following the demise of the Kilkenny Design Workshops, the educational element of the workshops was transferred to the Crafts Council of Ireland (CCI), formed in 1971 following a World Crafts Council conference in Dublin. This transition marked the continuation of Kilkenny's role as a key centre for craft education, with the establishment of its Pottery Skills course in 1991 and the Jewellery Skills course in 1993.

The development and preservation of skills and excellence in the craft sector in Kilkenny is supported by three agency partners, the Design and Crafts Council's newly formed DCCIA Academy, the Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board, and the Kilkenny Local Enterprise Office

Fáilte Ireland also provides supports for the sector delivering bespoke training and insights for craft businesses to increase their visibility and develop bookable experiences for tourism audiences for craft.



DCCIA provides education, training and apprenticeships for the craft and design community in Ireland and internationally. entrepreneurship at their core.

Working with higher educational institutions and accreditation bodies

including the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and Tangent, Trinity College, it has developed two degree level courses of excellence, a Bachelor of Arts in Jewellery and Goldsmithing (commenced 2024), and a Bachelor of Arts in Ceramics (to commence 2025).

The DCCIA Jewellery and Goldsmithing School is a purpose-built facility at Sessions House, Thomastown, and the planned BA in Ceramics will be housed in the former Bank of Ireland building, also in Thomastown.



Grennan Mill Craft School was founded in 1981 by the County Kilkenny Vocational Educational Committee (now Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board). Developed for the

study of craft and attracting students from across Ireland and beyond Grennan Mill offers a two-year full-time programme in Arts, Craft and Design. This programme was created to give students an insight into design and making of craft works, under the guidance of specialised teachers, equipping them with the skills to enable them to create potential future careers in craft.

It provides an opportunity for participants to progress to art college, to apprenticeships in specific crafts, or to a future craft-based career. The programme is complemented by a series of visiting lecturers, who bring their knowledge and expertise on a broad range of craft-related subjects to the region, not unlike the KDW model in former years. It also incorporates visits to exhibitions and field trips to enhance learning for those participating on the programme.

Certification for the modules provided are based on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Grennan Mill provides programmes with Certification in Art, Craft and Design in year one (Level 5) and Advanced Certification in Art, Craft and Design (Level 6) in year two.

## Craft Tourism Landscape



Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development authority, plays a pivotal role in supporting the growth of craft and the broader tourism industry in Kilkenny through

strategic initiatives outlined in its Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP) for the city and its supports for industry.

Kilkenny is renowned for its rich heritage in crafts, medieval history, and its vibrant arts scene, and is a focal point of Fáilte Ireland's tourism development efforts. The agency recognises the importance of craft in Kilkenny as both a key cultural asset and as a driver of tourism. The region's long-standing association with high-quality craftsmanship, particularly in fields including pottery, textiles, metalwork, glasswork and the renowned Kilkenny Design Centre, offers significant potential for the region's tourism offering.

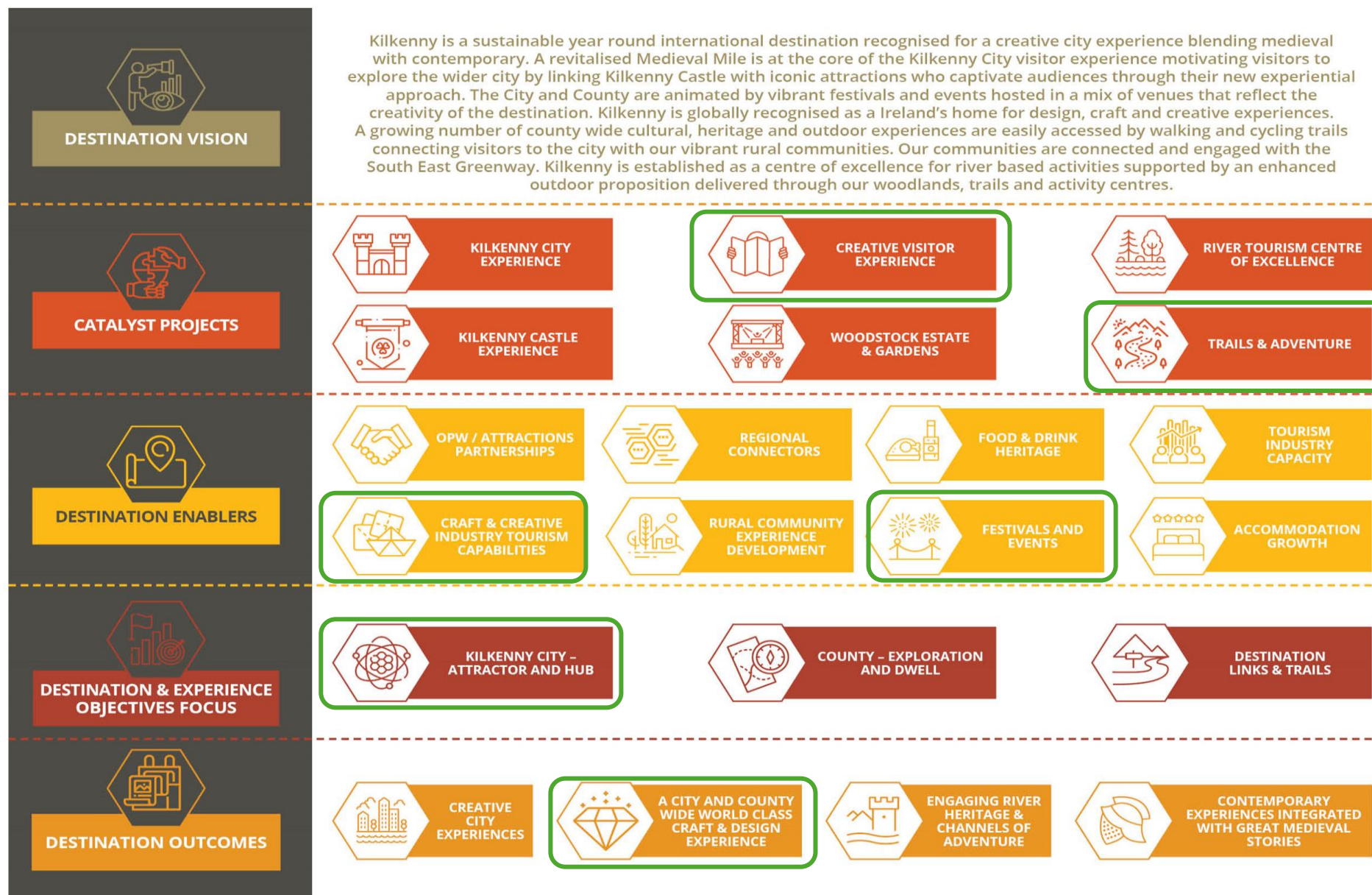
In its DEDP for Kilkenny, Fáilte Ireland notes 'Kilkenny's global recognition as Ireland's home for craft and design experiences.' It emphasises the need to position Kilkenny as a destination that not only showcases its medieval heritage but also celebrates its thriving creative industries. It has embedded craft and craft experiences across all elements of the DEDP from the destination vision, through catalyst projects, destination enablers, and experiential objectives. By positioning craft as an integral part of Kilkenny's identity, it aims to strengthen the city's appeal to tourists seeking creativity, craftsmanship, and a powerful sense of place.

A central element of the DEDP for Kilkenny is the development of "experiential tourism" creating opportunities for visitors to engage directly with craftspeople and with the design and making process. Through partnerships with local makers, workshops and craft tours, tourists can actively participate in crafting activities, fostering a deeper appreciation for the local craft scene. It encourages the development of unique craft experiences, highlighting Kilkenny's artisan makers and their products by offering authentic, immersive experiences.

The DEDP underscores the importance of creating a seamless visitor experience, including the enhancement of infrastructure that supports the craft tourism sector. This includes better signage, improved access to craft-related venues and the development of dedicated craft trails, ensuring their integration into broader visitor itineraries, so that visitors have a clear understanding of what is available for them to do, see, buy and experience in relation to Kilkenny's craft heritage and businesses.

Fáilte Ireland also provides opportunities for training and development for craft service providers in Kilkenny, ensuring that they can effectively share their knowledge about the local craft industry and provide high-quality experiences for visitors.

The diagram on the following page outlines the core elements of the DEDP with highlights relating to craft development and positioning for tourism audiences.





Fáilte Ireland has supported the establishment of craft studios and events including the Kilkenny Arts Festival, where visitors can observe or participate in live craft demonstrations. These activities not only enhance the visitor experience but also providing sustainable income opportunities for local craftspeople and contributing to the economic vitality of the city.

Earlier in 2024, the agency conducted an industry audit of those operating businesses in the craft sector in Kilkenny. It identified over 60 existing craft businesses and individuals making a living from their craft practice. It continues to work with the LEO to amplify the impact of craft tourism, ensuring that craft experiences are integrated into Kilkenny's broader tourism offerings and to cohere the craft story for the visitor audiences both domestic and international.

The outcome of the Craft Audit provided valuable insights into existing craft businesses and identified those currently delivering or aspiring to offer craft experiences in Kilkenny. The audit has established a baseline for further development of the craft element of the DEDP and of fostering cluster development within the county, contributing to Kilkenny's broader Creative City Experience and its rich design heritage.

Opportunities for continued connectivity and development of the craft sector for the visitor audience would include collaboration between local craft businesses, tourism operators, and community groups to create a unified approach to further promoting Kilkenny as a craft destination, incorporating joint marketing campaigns, cross-promotion between craft producers and hospitality services, and the creation of thematic festivals or events that showcase Kilkenny's craft tradition.

Expanding and amplifying the craft theme will enhance Kilkenny's tourism portfolio, increasing both domestic and international visibility. When craft

tourism experiences are successful, they inspire and engage visitors, encouraging them to purchase items that have a deep connection to both people and place.

Sustainability is a key principle in Fáilte Ireland's approach to tourism development, and this is particularly relevant in the context of Kilkenny's craft sector. The DEDP encourages the promotion of sustainable craft practices, such as using locally sourced materials and environmentally conscious production methods, which resonate with today's environmentally aware tourists.



Kilkenny Tourism ([www.visitkilkenny.ie](http://www.visitkilkenny.ie)) is a collective membership organisation, a voluntary group of sectoral representatives governed by a board of directors, working together to maximise tourism audiences, enhance the tourist experience and increase the economic impact of investment in Kilkenny's tourism sector. It is primary vehicle for marketing and communication strategies relating to Kilkenny's tourism offer.

It works in partnership with Kilkenny Leader Partnership (KLP), OPW, Coillte, Waterways Ireland, Kilkenny Civic Trust, Fáilte Ireland, Kilkenny County Council and Tourism Ireland to refine, market and communicate the tourism offering in Kilkenny through a number of major marketing and branding campaigns, consistent with Kilkenny's history and heritage.

## Kilkenny: A World Crafts Council City and Region of Craft

Kilkenny was designated as a World Crafts Council (WCC) City and Region of Craft in 2021, one of only five regions in Europe to achieve this prestigious recognition. The title not only acknowledges Kilkenny's rich craft heritage but also presents a unique opportunity to enhance Kilkenny's reputation as a globally recognised hub for excellence in craftsmanship. By maximising the opportunity, Kilkenny can further unlock its tourism development potential, attracting a diverse range of international visitors eager to engage with authentic craft experiences, educational opportunities, and cultural exchanges, further establishing the city as a premier craft tourism destination.

Kilkenny's recognition as a WCC region places it alongside other European cities with the same designation. Working with other European WCC Cities, Kilkenny can further enhance its position within the global craft movement, ensuring that it remains a leading destination for craft tourism, education and fostering opportunities for collaboration with peers who share a commitment to promoting craft and making, that can draw visitors from across Europe and beyond.

Kilkenny's legacy of craft innovation was significantly shaped by the Kilkenny Design Workshops, which served as a transformative force providing a foundation for Kilkenny's ongoing prominence in the craft world. This legacy continues to resonate today, with the city's current craft offer building on the pioneering spirit of the KDW. Emphasising this historical connection within the designation, Kilkenny can further distinguish itself as a centre of craft innovation and education.

In solidifying its appeal as a place to visit, learn, and engage with world-class craftsmanship, Kilkenny has the potential to become a leading destination for international knowledge exchange and collaboration in craft, a centre of learning for both aspiring and established craftspeople, a place where the past and present intersect to create a dynamic environment for craft experience, engagement and education.

In addition to its rich heritage of making, the designation offers a powerful platform for hosting global craft events, symposiums, and cross-cultural projects. Kilkenny can facilitate the sharing of expertise between local and international makers, such exchanges benefitting Kilkenny's craft community and simultaneously enhancing the city's reputation as a hub of international craft innovation.

Events such as Design Week, which focus on celebrating contemporary design and craftsmanship, can play a vital role in this process. Further enhancement of Design Week (through a wide array of masterclasses, workshops, and immersive educational experiences) presents an opportunity for global craft professionals to showcase their work, to collaborate and share best practice. It offers visitors the chance to gain hands-on knowledge from local artisans and immerse themselves in the region's rich craft traditions.







## World Crafts Council EU Cities and Regions of Craft



The World Crafts Council is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation recognised by UNESCO. It is a

transnational network representing nearly 40 craft organisations from over 20 European countries. Its statutory mission is the promotion and value add of crafts, delivered through a spectrum of events, projects and programmes, fostering networking and knowledge exchange among stakeholders in the field of craft and craft promotion. The organisation seeks to increase the awareness and appreciation of craft as an integral part of the cultural social and economic wellbeing of societies.

The World Crafts Council's Craft Cities constitute a network of creative regions worldwide, developed in response to the growing awareness of the contribution of local authorities, craftspeople, and communities to cultural economic and social development. The network complements the UNESCO Creative Cities Programme, fostering interaction between crafts and other creative industries. It has the ambition of highlighting globally the reputation and assets of a Creative City and Region whether in a specific craft discipline or material, or a variety of crafts. Its intent is also

- to encourage government to commit to the development of craft in their city or region
- to strengthen the local potential for innovation and the development of creative tourism
- to promote the knowledge and exchange of experiences best practice in diverse craft fields nationally, regionally, and internationally, and

- to create new opportunities for cooperation and partnership between the designated craft cities

### Learning for Kilkenny

There are only five locations in Europe which hold a World Crafts Council designation as a World Crafts 'City and Region of Craft.' The locations are Bornholm, Denmark; Farnham, United Kingdom; Harris Tweed, Scotland; La Bisbal d'Empordà, Spain (Catalonia); and Kilkenny, Ireland. Being part of this network of craft destinations in Europe presents an opportunity for cross-national connectivity and thematic development, for shared learning and the development and cross-promotion of bookable experiences for craft in each of the designated regions, and the wider promotion of Kilkenny's craft story to international, craft-motivated audiences.





## Bornholm, Denmark

In 2017 the Danish island of Bornholm was inaugurated as the first World Crafts Council European Craft City.

Situated in the Baltic Sea and known as Maker's Island, Bornholm has a strong tradition of craft and making primarily in glass blowing, pottery and ceramics. It represents the highest number of craft makers per square metre and is also renowned for its artists, hosting one of the three recognised artists colonies in Denmark. Bornholm's designation was received as a result of:

- the quality authenticity and standard of the sector
- the rich tradition which provides a foundation for craft and making in the region, now a broad and embedded ecosystem of craft studios and museums
- the education facilities on the island, and
- the standard of craftsmanship across the disciplines, being on par with the best available models internationally

Bornholm has a vibrant arts and crafts association named Arts and Crafts Association Bornholm (ACAB). To maintain quality in the sector an External Assessment Committee approves craftspeople before they are admitted to the Association. Prior to the WCC designation ACAB's membership consisted of 71 craft professionals. This number increased significantly on receipt of the acclaimed designation for the region.

Makers Island, as it is known, incorporates both agencies and organisations who have craft within their portfolio, thus connecting craft as an embed message across all related industry sectors. It includes:

- Bornholm Kunstmuseum
- Destination Bornholm
- Hjorths Fabrics
- Business Centre Bornholm
- Arts and Crafts Association Bornholm
- Bornholm Regionskommune
- Det Kongelige Akademie, (Architecture, Design and Conservation)
- Bornholm's Centre for Kunsthåndværk
- Sparekassen Bornholm Food
- European Leader programme
- EU Commission

There are three the centres for craft on the island the Ceramic Factory and Museum of Bornholm, the Bornholm Art Museum and the Bornholm Centre for Arts and Crafts each providing exhibitions and biennials looking at the history contemporary crafts and craftsmanship. The glassblowing



tradition is evolving and innovating where glass artists have created applied art associated with the School of Design Bornholm.

The island has its own distinct communications style, aimed at multiple markets, from makers to the visitor economy and those who wish to be educated in craft. They also provide a focus on communications for those operating in press and publicity.

Bornholm hosts an Annual Craft Week offering 10 days of experiences, workshops, exhibitions, tourism, and special events. The week opens with two major exhibitions featuring masters in ceramics or glass, depending on the year. Craft Week includes experiential offers of workshops for adults, young people, children, exhibitions, tours, pop up galleries, visiting craftspeople, artist talks, woodturning, championship glass blowing, research projects and walking tours. The visitor offer comprises experiences, made for both families and individuals including meeting the makers in their own workshops and studios, glassblowing workshops under the skilled guidance of the professional glassblower, creative workshops in ceramics (throwing and decorating).

The craft message is inherently connected with the location and with the food offer on the island, with partnerships flourishing between artists / makers, the Bornholm Farm Shop, and the Yarn Shop for textiles, enhancing the experience for the visitor.

The Royal Academy of Bornholm is one of Europe's leading educational environments for glass and ceramics. It offers internationally oriented programmes that focus on high-quality teaching and artistic development and a Bachelor of Crafts in Glass and Ceramics degree programme. Within the programme students learn about the regional national and international craft traditions focusing on social significance in

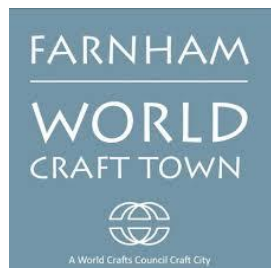
contemporary development, insights into new production methodologies, modern technology, and sustainability. Internships from an integral part of the programme and are open to citizens from Europe and the Nordic countries.

### Learning for Kilkenny

There are evident similarities between the craft offer and ecosystem in Bornholm and that of Kilkenny. Opportunities exist to better understand how the ACAB developed its membership following the WCCC designation and also in looking at the way in which the Bornholm Biennials creates a destination focus for the region annual - (with either Ceramics or Glass taking centre stage every second year, appealing to differing yet connected audiences). Kilkenny could also learn from the experiential offers developed during the festival (Craft Week) period, which incorporates opportunities for motivated visitors, intergenerational audiences, and craftspeople alike.







## Farnham, United Kingdom

Farnham, designated as England's first World Craft Town, has a rich history of craftsmanship dating back to prehistoric times. It wasn't until the 21st century that its role in the craft movement gained wider recognition. The area is home to a large community of makers, ranging

from internationally renowned professionals to those just beginning their craft careers. It also hosts craft organisations, creative micro-businesses, and independent industries, with makers working in dedicated studios, workshops, their own homes, and in retail spaces.

As a World Craft Town, Farnham supports its makers in becoming more resilient and enterprising, advocating for affordable studio spaces, incubator units, and retaining local craft graduates through apprenticeships. The town blends its craft heritage with a vibrant contemporary craft scene, hosting festivals, pop-up events and craft retail, attracting both local and international makers. This creative atmosphere drives the local economy and fosters a keen sense of place. Farnham's celebration of craft is inclusive, benefiting both professional makers and those engaging with craft for health, well-being, and community-building purposes.

Branded as "Farnham Craft Town" with the tagline "*Craft brings the community together*," the town's identity reflects its deep-rooted cultural heritage, with craft embedded into life in the town over centuries. Pottery has been central since Roman times, and Farnham's tradition of making continued through the wool and cloth industries of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Key landmarks, like the Museum of Farnham (est. 1961), The Maltings (a former tannery and brewery turned Arts Centre in 1969), and the Crafts Study Centre (est. 1976), highlight the town's ongoing connection to its craft heritage, brought to life through art trails and industrial heritage displays. The range of operators and groups working in the craft and creative sector in Farnham includes such organisations as

- Hampshire Cultural Trust
- Magpie Contemporary Art
- Museum of Farnham
- Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Farnham Crafts Study Centre
- Rural Life Centre - Living Museum
- Surrey Guild of Craftsman University of the Creative Arts
- The Surrey Adult Learning Centre
- Watts Gallery
- West Street Potters318 Ceramics
- Ashgate Gallery
- Creative Response - Arts for Wellbeing
- Farnham Arts Society
- Farnham Creatives' Network
- Farnham Library
- Farnham Maltings
- Farnham Pottery
- Farnham Sculpture Park
- Farnham Sculpture – Wood/Stone
- Farnham Town Council

Farnham Craft Town has a dedicated website at [www.farnhamcrafttown.com](http://www.farnhamcrafttown.com), offering information on the town, its

makers, creative groups, events, and activities. It also details the town's rich craft traditions and its annual artist-in-residence program, which is managed through a competitive application process.

This residency supports artists and makers, with each participant creating a Farnham-inspired piece that remains in the local craft collection after their residency.

### Learning for Kilkenny

Farnham has cleverly developed its craft brand, positioning it as a central message for visitors and locals alike. The connectedness of businesses, organisations and entities across the town with the craft message is evident and ensures that craft is embedded as a central feature of the town. It tells the story of its craft tradition through the ages and has built an ecosystem which continues to support skills development, new craft businesses and innovation, alongside preservation of that heritage into the future. Understanding the way that Farnham has built on its history and traditions can help Kilkenny amplify its long history of making and craftsmanship.





### Harris Tweed – Scotland

Harris Tweed, based in Scotland's Outer Hebrides, became the World Craft Council of Europe's second Craft City in 2018. Known for its handwoven traditions using pure virgin wool, Harris Tweed emphasises quality and provenance. Established over 100 years ago, the craft of weaving has been passed down through generations and is now a key player in fashion and design.

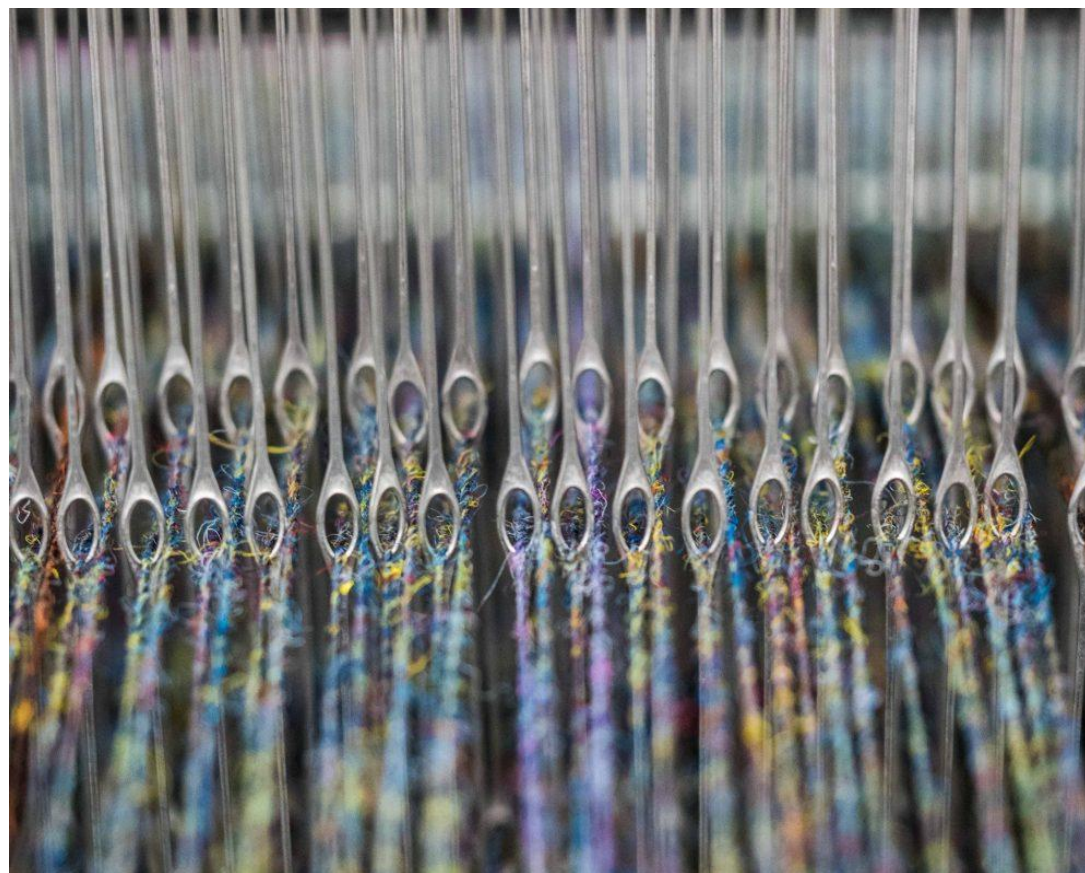
Harris Tweed celebrates skilled artisans at every stage of the weaving process, from designers and dyers to spinners, darners, finishers, and weavers. The craft is overseen by the Harris Tweed Authority, established by an Act of Parliament in 1993, which replaced the Harris Tweed Association. According to the Act, Harris Tweed must be handwoven by islanders at their homes in the Outer Hebrides, finished in the region, and made from virgin wool dyed and spun locally. The Harris Tweed orb symbol certifies adherence to these standards, ensuring the quality and reputation of the craft. The Authority is managed by volunteers who protect the industry as a vital part of the local economy.

Harris Tweed brings its story to life through the Story Room in Stornoway, open seasonally to educate visitors on the production process. Donations and booking fees help support the Story Room and the Harris Tweed Authority's Educational Trust.

A Trail Map of the islands guides visitors to purchase tweed, learn about its history and find local artisans. Mill tours, exhibitions, and opportunities to buy accessories, furnishings, and clothing are available

at various locations, though visits to artisans must be arranged in advance.

The website, [www.harristweed.org](http://www.harristweed.org), serves as a hub for industry information, and archival materials can be accessed through the Hebridean Archives at Lews Castle in Stornoway.





**LA BISBAL D'EMPORDÀ**

A World Crafts Council Craft City

**La Bisbal d'Empordà**

La Bisbal d'Empordà became the first World Craft City in continental Europe in 2021, following a request by the City Council. This designation highlights the

town's rich ceramic tradition and its broader craft ecosystem, which plays a vital role in local life. La Bisbal is a leading ceramics hub, home to over 40 craft companies, including those from neighbouring municipalities, and features a commercial district with 20 specialised stores.

Key institutions supporting ceramics in La Bisbal include:

- The Terracotta Museum
- The Association of Ceramicists
- La Bisbal School of Ceramics
- The Federation of Commerce (protected at the European level)
- Ceràmica de La Bisbal

Recognised by the Generalitat of Catalonia as a unique ceramics trading zone, La Bisbal saw regulatory changes in 2020 to support small and medium-sized enterprises producing under 10 tonnes per day. These reforms simplified administrative processes, encouraging new artisans to establish workshops in the region. The City Council is dedicated to developing artisan workshops alongside retail spaces, offering visitors an immersive experience when purchasing ceramics. The World Craft City initiative is supported by various organisations, including:

- Ajuntament de La Bisbal d'Empordà
- Empordà Costa Brava Costa Brava Pirineu de Girona
- Visit Catalunya
- Calidad Turística

- Grand Tour de Catalunya
- Visit Empordanet
- Tourism a Baix Empordà
- Accessit Innovació 2023



## SWOT Analysis of the Craft Ecosystem in Kilkenny

### Strengths

- Designation as a World Crafts Council City and Region of Craft
- Strong history and heritage of craft and making in the county
- Home to Design and Crafts Council Ireland
- High quality craft education programmes (QQI Level V to Level 8)
- Home to the MADE in Kilkenny craft collective
- Reputation and excellence of makers living in the county
- Clusters of craft production and excellence across the county
- Kilkenny Craft Trail, August Craft Month, Design Week
- Centre of Excellence in Jewellery and Silversmithing in Thomastown
- Current development of a Centre of Excellence in Ceramics in Thomastown
- Engagement and interest in craft development by agency partners
- Embedding of craft into Kilkenny Arts Week
- Creative industries businesses operating in the city

### Weaknesses

- Lack of vision for craft in Kilkenny
- No coordinated ownership / leadership for craft development in the county
- Fragmented craft offer for tourist audiences
- Lack of a dedicated space in the city for Kilkenny-made craft and the story of craft
- Little visibility / understanding of Kilkenny's designation as a World Crafts Council City and Region of Craft
- Under-utilisation of the Kilkenny Castle Yard facility and connectivity to the history of making in Kilkenny
- Few experiential opportunities for engagement with craft for both locals and visitors
- No dedicated Craft Festival
- Lack of visibility of the legacy of KDW workshops and their impact on the location
- Few workshop and studio spaces for makers in Kilkenny city
- Difficulties getting around the county to avail of craft experiences outside the city

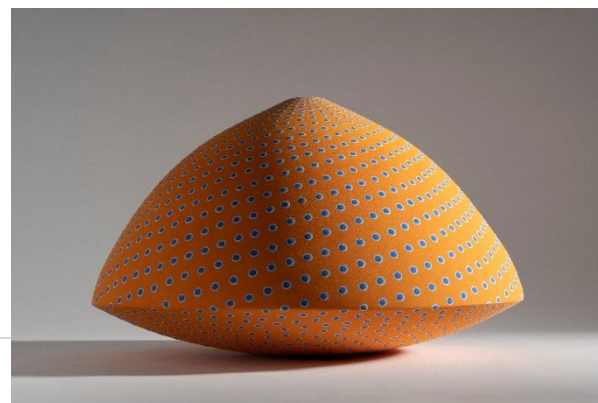
## Opportunities

- Development of the story and history of craft in Kilkenny
- A coordinated approach to embedding craft into Kilkenny's development agenda
- Maximising the opportunity from Fáilte Ireland's DEDP and the WCC designation
- Enhancing the visibility of craft
- Defining legacy from the Kilkenny Design Workshops
- Identifying a location in the city to showcase Kilkenny's craft credentials (exhibitions, retail, makers studios, workshops etc.)
- Increasing economic opportunities presented through connectivity with craft tourism
- Enhancing makers' skills to develop experiential and immersive craft offers
- Celebrating the community, social and wellbeing aspects of craft / making
- Establishing a dedicated Craft Festival in Kilkenny
- Further connecting craft message with other programmes and activities – Kilkenny Night-Time Economy, Kilkenny cultural offer

## Threats

- Need a clear vision for craft in Kilkenny
- No clear ownership / management of the craft development agenda
- Establishing clarity of funding to support the craft sector development
- Developing a singular message / story for craft in Kilkenny
- Failing to effectively tell the story of craft in Kilkenny to consumers, buyers, tourists
- Creating a robust framework / entity to avail of potential funding and development opportunities
- Resourcing the strategic development agenda so that implementation of the strategy can be fully realised
- Ensuring clarity of understanding across the sector on the roles of agencies/organisations
- Addressing the lack of resources (physical, financial and personnel) to advance the craft development ambition
- Ensuring continued engagement by the craft community, to advance development
- Failing to effectively tell the story of craft in Kilkenny to consumers, buyers, tourists





## Maximising Potential

Kilkenny's potential to become Ireland's premier destination for craft is especially significant given its World Crafts Council designation, it being home to the Design & Crafts Council Ireland and the National Craft Gallery and its well-established design heritage, including its historical Kilkenny Design Workshops. Together, these assets provide a solid foundation for a sustainable and vibrant craft tourism sector. Whilst other locations in Ireland present a craft offer for the visitor, none have the depth of tradition and heritage of craft that exists in Kilkenny.

The potential rewards for Kilkenny in embracing and expanding its craft sector are substantial. Craft tourism is a growing trend, with travellers increasingly seeking out authentic, hands-on experiences. By positioning itself as Ireland's premier craft destination Kilkenny could significantly boost visitor numbers attracting both domestic and international tourists and opening up new markets in such areas as educational tourism in craft. The economic benefits of focusing on craft tourism are also considerable for craftspeople, as local artisans gain direct access to a growing market, leading to increased sales, bookings, and increased visibility of their business/practice.

Establishing a physical "Beacon for Craft" in the city could further solidify Kilkenny's destination promise. Such a centre for craft, would not only attract craft enthusiasts but also become a cultural landmark, symbolising Kilkenny's craft story, its creative aspirations, and its leadership in the craft sector. The facility could showcase the best of local craftsmanship, serve as a hub for workshops, exhibitions, and international collaborations, offer visitors the chance to engage with craft on multiple levels: purchasing artisan products, observing makers at

work, participating in workshops, and learning about the rich history of craft and design in Kilkenny. It would deepen the city's connection with the wider craft community, its relationship with other WCC Cities and Regions of Craft and amplify its global reputation.

Further development of Kilkenny's Craft Trail, enhanced by additional experiential opportunities for visitors around the county, has appeal for both domestic and international markets. By offering immersive, hands-on experiences that connect visitors directly with local artisans, Kilkenny could offer tourists the opportunity to actively participate in its living craft traditions. Such workshops provide an authentic experience that goes beyond traditional sightseeing, leaving visitors with meaningful memories from their time in the region and encouraging longer visitor stays in the county, thus boosting local businesses in accommodation, dining, and retail sectors.

A focus on product development and capacity building will provide additionality in the craft offer for visitors. Experiential trails and locations in the county allowing visitors take a journey through key artisan studios, workshops, and galleries, offering them a chance to meet local makers, learn about their work, and even create their own bespoke pieces.

Deepening partnerships and initiatives with craft-related educational institutions, could further strengthen Kilkenny's international profile as a destination for creative learning. There are many examples of destinations (Bornholm, Pilchuck) offering specialised courses, residencies, and retreats which attract students, designers, and craft practitioners from around the world. Enhancing and cohering such an offer in Kilkenny will embed it at the heart of the global craft community.



The county's rich history and vibrant arts scene is uniquely poised to enhance its tourism appeal by integrating craft tourism into Kilkenny's existing cultural offerings specifically its festivals and events. This would add depth and value to the visitor experience.

While the city's medieval heritage, with landmarks like Kilkenny Castle and the Medieval Mile, already draws in a considerable number of tourists, a thriving craft scene could complement these attractions, creating a comprehensive cultural journey. By celebrating not only Kilkenny's historical landmarks but also its contemporary craft community, visitors experience a rich blend of past and present, of built and living traditions.

The growth potential for Kilkenny's craft sector provides opportunities for innovation and expansion. A robust digital strategy including online storytelling, virtual tours, and interactive craft workshops will help to promote Kilkenny's offerings to a global audience, while partnerships with tour operators could incorporate craft experiences into bespoke travel packages. Integrating craft with other local sectors creates holistic visitor experiences and providing tourists with a full spectrum of creative and cultural immersion.







## Strategic Vision

**KILKENNY - Globally recognised for excellence in craftsmanship. A leading destination where heritage, making, education and innovation converge, and professional craftspeople, enthusiasts and visitors participate in a thriving, sustainable craft culture.**

## Mission Statement

Building on Kilkenny's designation as a World Crafts Council City and Region of Craft, we will enhance our vibrant craft heritage by fostering a sustainable and innovative sector. Through collaboration between makers, agencies, providers, industry partners, and the community, we will ensure the continuity of traditional skills while embracing new opportunities for growth.

## Our Values

The following values underpin the future development of craft and making in Kilkenny.



1. **Heritage and Innovation** - We respect Kilkenny's rich craft tradition and the legacy of the Kilkenny Design Workshops, which pioneered design excellence and creativity. By blending time-honoured skills with modern techniques, we will ensure the craft sector remains vibrant and adaptable for future generations.
2. **Sustainability and Resilience** - We are committed to promoting environmentally responsible practices. By encouraging the use of sustainable materials and processes we will help secure the long-term sustainability and resilience of Kilkenny's craft sector, paving the way for a greener and enduring future.
3. **Collaboration and Community** - We will continue to foster strong partnerships between makers, agencies, industry, and the wider craft community, building on the collaborative spirit fostered by the KDW. Together, creating a supportive and interconnected craft ecosystem that promotes shared growth, innovation, and opportunity.
4. **Excellence and Cultural Identity** - Craft is part of our cultural identity, enhancing local pride while strengthening Kilkenny's international reputation as a hub of creativity and design. We will maintain the highest standards of quality in craftsmanship, continuing the KDW tradition of excellence.
5. **Inclusion and Engagement** - We are committed to ensuring that craft is accessible to all. We encourage participation in Kilkenny's craft culture for both local citizens and visitors alike, and support opportunities for engagement in craft and making.
6. **Skills Development** - We prioritise the advancement of craft education, building on Kilkenny's existing craft skills programmes and the legacy of the KDW. We will advocate for continuous programme development to equip makers with the knowledge and tools needed to sustain and grow the craft sector, ensuring its vitality for future generations.





## Strategic Pillars

Our strategy is built on priority areas for development over the three-year period of the plan. Objectives and actions will be delivered under each of these pillars through our supporting Strategic Implementation Plan.

It is appreciated that this strategy provides but the starting point for cohesive sectoral development and that much groundwork has to be done for a sustainable ecosystem to be delivered.

We look forward to the continued support and commitment of our agency and organisational partners, local craftspeople, and wider crafts community, together, working in partnership, to deliver on the ambition of the strategy.

**Pillar 1** Visibility of craft in Kilkenny

**Pillar 2** Viability and sustainability of the craft sector

**Pillar 3** Tourism and destination development

**Pillar 4** Craft skills development and legacy of KDW

**Pillar 5** Collective storytelling, communications, and marketing



## Pillar 1

### Visibility of Craft in Kilkenny

**Goal 1** Significantly enhance the visibility of Kilkenny's craft offering by positioning the city and region as a leading destination for craftsmanship. By 2027, we aim to increase awareness and engagement with Kilkenny's vibrant craft sector, attracting more visitors, raising the profile of local makers, and strengthening Kilkenny's reputation on a national and international level.

#### Objectives

- 1.1 *Define the Kilkenny Craft Story from heritage and tradition to contemporary craft production, engagement and experience.*
- 1.2 *Build a Development Plan and Business Case for a dedicated and immersive facility in Kilkenny City to showcase the proposition of craft and making in the county.*
- 1.3 *Integrate Kilkenny Craft as an embedded element of Kilkenny's wider cultural and creative offer.*
- 1.4 *Enhance the craft offer for visitors and locals across the county, with specific focus on experiential engagement with craft and making.*





## Pillar 2

### Viability and sustainability of the craft sector

**Goal 2** Design a framework for collaboration, connectivity and the commitment of key agency partners to drive delivery of the ambition for craft in Kilkenny and ensure the necessary resources and infrastructure are in place to sustain a thriving, multi-faceted craft sector, and secure its future growth and success.

#### Objectives

- 2.1 *Support the establishment of a dedicated entity to influence and advocate for the development of craft in Kilkenny and take overall responsibility for implementation of this strategic plan.*
- 2.2 *Ensure effective resourcing to deliver on the ambition of the strategic plan and to sustain a multi-faceted, thriving craft community.*







## Pillar 3

### Tourism and destination development

**Goal 3** Position Kilkenny as a world-class destination for craft tourism, aligning with Fáilte Ireland's Destination Experience Development Plan, enhancing the visitor experience by integrating craft into strategic tourism propositions that increase dwell time in the region.

#### Objectives

- 3.1 *Cohere the story of Kilkenny as a world class City and Region of Craft.*
- 3.2 *Support craft-related and industry tourism capabilities to deliver for tourism markets, with specific focus on experiential engagement with craft and making.*
- 3.3 *Maximise the opportunity presented by the WCC designation of Kilkenny as a City and Region of Craft*
- 3.4 *Use national and international tourism trade and promotional opportunities to create exposure for Kilkenny as a world class destination for craft and making.*
- 3.5 *Assess opportunities to develop an educational tourism focus for craft in Kilkenny.*

## Pillar 4

### Craft skills development and legacy of KDW

**Goal 4** Advocate for targeted skills and business development initiatives to equip current and future makers with the expertise needed to sustain and grow the craft sector in Kilkenny, building on the legacy of the Kilkenny Design Workshops, maximise its influence on contemporary craft to ensure continuity of excellence in craftsmanship.

#### Objectives

- 4.1 *Work with DCCIA to maximise potential of the centres of excellence in Jewellery and Goldsmithing, and Ceramics*
- 4.2 *Advocate the ETB to continue to drive development of craft and making programmes to support careers in design, making and the preservation of traditional skills.*
- 4.3 *Assess availability of possible spaces and incentives to support delivery of additional craft workshops and experiences.*





## Pillar 5

### Collective storytelling, communications, and marketing

**Goal 5** Establish Kilkenny as an internationally recognised craft destination by developing a clear narrative and marketing strategy that enhances its visibility, connects the craft community through networking and business opportunities, and promotes its unique craft brand to local, domestic, and international audiences.

#### Objectives

- 5.1 *Resource the development of a marketing and communications plan to enhance visibility of Kilkenny as a World City and Region of Craft.*
- 5.2 *Develop the story of making in Kilkenny as a clear destination narrative. Layer the craft story on the history and built heritage of the city and county.*
- 5.3 *Create bespoke business supports to connect craft businesses and craft tourism providers and enhance marketing and promotional skills in the sector.*
- 5.4 *Work with relevant agency partners to promote Kilkenny's craft message across local, national and international audiences.*



