



Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025

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A message from the Chairman

Limerick's attractiveness and reputation as the Mid-West's cultural powerhouse is built on decades of experience and hard work. It has developed a cultural infrastructure that actively supports artists and aspires to serve as diverse an audience as possible, reflecting the dynamic and vibrant population of our city and region. Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable has been an integral component of this success.

Our ambition at the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable is to support artists as they explore and create new work, while inspiring and compelling our audiences to attend our shows. Our success is grounded in the strength of our two venues. We have a population of more than

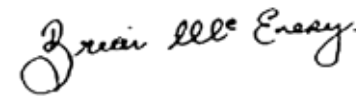
133,000 people who live within a 30-minute journey from our venues, of whom around 73,000 are aged under 24. We attract large scale shows to our 510-seat Lime Tree Theatre and have the capacity to continue to foster new work, at varying scales and across genres, at our 220-seat venue and creative complex in the Belltable space.

Our current strategy helped us navigate a path through significant structural change for the Lime Tree Theatre. We took on management of, and governance responsibility for the Belltable, and maintained and developed programmes and activities there, while we continued to position the Lime Tree Theatre as a venue of regional and national significance, presenting classical and contemporary theatre, music, comedy, traditional arts, and schools' performances.

We have succeeded in retaining and consolidating a core audience for the work that we present at each venue: BelltableConnect Artists in Residence schemes, IFI at the Belltable, Creative Ireland initiatives, and the hosting of touring productions and shows at the Lime Tree Theatre via our NASC network membership, to name a few. Our Bualadh Bos Childrens' Festival is the only festival in the mid-west region to focus on professional performances and workshops for

children. We have also ensured that Limerick artists are supported to create new work and to develop the professional skills, experience, networks, and standards that are essential in our industry.

During the great challenges of the global pandemic of 2020/2021, our staff and board worked tirelessly, supported by the Irish state through the offices of our local authority and the Arts Council, to ensure its survival in unique circumstances. We are equally committed to bringing the organisation forward in the coming years, placing it at the centre of cultural life in Limerick and the mid-west.



Brian McEnry
Chairman



A message from the Executive Director

This new strategy for Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable signals the beginning of a fresh phase of ambitious growth and consolidation for our organisation. It concludes a period of transition and transformation for both venues, following the decision taken in 2016 by Limerick City Council, An Chomhairle Ealaíon / The Arts Council, the Lime Tree Theatre and the Belltable to stabilise and secure the future of the Belltable, acknowledging its prominence as one of the city's prime cultural assets.

The Lime Tree Theatre's role in this intervention has been of strategic significance, and we have worked with stakeholders to create the support structures that have enabled Limerick City Council to invest with confidence in the regeneration of the Belltable, as a critical element of the city's cultural infrastructure. Coupled with that is our ongoing partnership with Mary Immaculate College, which offers a wide range of programmes in Education and the Liberal Arts. We welcome further collaboration with MIC at a curricular level to create opportunities for artists and arts workers across the creative industries. With board support, we will continue to work to diversify our funding model through sponsorships, membership support, and grants and foundations to enable the creation, generation and production of Limerick-sourced theatre via the Limerick Fund for Theatre (LiFT).

Notwithstanding the traumatic consequences of Covid-19 on the arts sector, and the ensuing uncertainty for our venues, we look forward to the next phase of our contribution to cultural life in Limerick and the region. We are focused on maximising the wonderful assets that we are privileged to manage for artists, audiences, and communities. We believe that we are uniquely placed to provide a platform for the next generation of Limerick writers and actors to produce and perform their work, creating more landmark theatre for venues in Ireland and abroad.

The opportunity to produce our own work will provide employment for actors, designers, directors, and technical crew. We will provide invaluable experience to the full complement of theatre practitioners, bringing skilled professionals to the city – either those who may be returning home, or those who live and work in Limerick – to earn their living through a combination of professional performance and education.

We are conscious that there are still barriers to participation in the arts in Limerick; we want to give voice to the artistic contribution that our multi-cultural communities offer and recognise the extent to which they broaden our horizons and enrich our understanding.

Our ambition is to serve Limerick well, to make more impact nationally, and to position Limerick more prominently in Ireland's cultural and artistic infrastructure. We believe that our theatre production model and staging productions of national stature on our stages will make the city a truly national city. Our collaborations with our artists and arts professionals, enabling them to tell their stories to each other and to the world, will provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy high-quality arts experiences.



Louise Donlon
Executive Director



Developing our Strategy: The Process

Research underpinning this strategy has been rooted in current arts policy together with an extensive consultation with the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable's key stakeholders. The Arts Council's Strategy, Making Great Art Work 2020-2025, celebrating the role of artists in society and asserting the need to provide artistic experiences for audiences shines a spotlight on our approach, identifying the opportunities and key issues and helping us to define our ambition for the next five years. Limerick City and County Council's Cultural Strategy 2016-2030 further strengthens our resolve to reach out to Limerick artists enabling them to fulfil their potential and to our local, national, and international audiences, broadening and deepening their engagement with high quality arts experiences.

The Consultation Approach

Consultation for the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable strategic planning process took place between January 2021 – March 2021. It consisted of an online survey covering a range of future-focused issues, online targeted stakeholder meetings, including board, staff and artists, and a series of 1/1 online meetings with strategically significant stakeholders, including artists and audience members so that they could be considered in the thinking and planning process.

Context-setting for informants focused on The Lime Tree | Belltable's pivotal leadership position in the arts, entertainment, and cultural sector in the mid-west, where they provide performance experiences for artists and audiences, and employment opportunities for colleagues in the industry.

In each case, participants were asked to assess how they viewed the venues' achievements. They were also asked to look to the future with a focus on both venues' place-making impact, their diversity of programming and their relevance to the artist and the audience.

More than 520 responses were received to the online survey which was live in February | March 2021. It was issued to a range of stakeholders and audiences from both venues and sought their views on how both might best support artists and audiences in Limerick and across the wider region.

What we heard

Key messages emerging from respondents to the online survey, together with findings from our stakeholder conversations, indicated a strong ambition for both venues: The 2-venue operational model is unique and is working well. The dual entity is sustainable. The

multi-use of the venues, the breadth of programming and the diversity of the offering is an asset to the city. Both venues are seen as cultural flagships for Limerick, the mid-west, and are assets to the regional arts infrastructure.

Enabling community participation through opportunities to perform or to attend either venue as an audience member enriches quality of life. Moreover, it was agreed that both venues have a significant role to play in leveraging the Limerick brand. The tricky balance between commercial pressures to maximise attendances and the creative impulse to host new work was acknowledged. Some participants noted that they would welcome a slight shift towards the presentation of more new work interwoven into both venue's schedules, particularly in the Lime Tree Theatre.

Linking to a theme from the previous strategy, engagement with younger people and harder to reach communities in the Limerick city, county and wider environs was stressed.

Our strategy for 2021-2025 reflects the following recurring themes expressed across a wide range of stakeholders throughout our consultation.

- **Ambition**
- **Artistic model and programming**
- **Artists**
- **Audience development**
- **Funding and operational model**
- **Marketing and Communications**
- **Advocacy**

These themes are described within our strategic priorities, goals, objectives and are enlivened by a set of ambitious actions.



Our Strategic Priorities

Our four strategic priorities are forward-looking and reflect the extent of our ambition.

CREATE
CONNECT
COLLABORATE
CONSOLIDATE



Vision

Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable will continue to be a vibrant, guiding cultural light, a pivotal working space for artists and a compelling destination for audiences.

Mission

As a dynamic cultural hub, we fulfil our mission by:

Creating and supporting world-class, nationally valued cultural experiences through producing, co-producing, promoting, and presenting high quality work.

Connecting with our audiences so that they engage with emerging and established artists and their work.

Collaborating with our partners to stimulate, entertain and enrich cultural life through shared creative events and experiences.

Consolidating our governance structures, our funding model, and our stakeholder relationships.

Values

Ambition

Our work is underpinned by high quality production values. It reflects the talent and creativity of our artists, our staff, and other arts workers.

Accessibility

We enable participation and strive to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere in our venues, broadening and deepening our engagement with both our artists and our audiences.

Collaboration

We work together with our partners to co-create experiences that enrich the lives of artists and our audiences.

Diversity

We celebrate and support diverse traditions and cultures, enabling inclusive self-expression among our communities.

Sustainability

We demonstrate integrity, accountability, and transparency in our practices, organisational systems, and structures while continuing to operate in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Strategic Priority 1: **CREATE**

Creating world-class, nationally valued cultural experiences through producing, co-producing, promoting, and presenting high quality work.



Our Goal

As a cultural leader in the mid-west region, we aim to commission, produce and co-produce, present and promote new and existing repertoire, across a variety of genres.

We will:

- Produce, co-produce and present a broad range of diverse work from across the canon of theatre repertoire.
- Be a producing house with shows that will play and tour regionally and internationally.
- Continue to be a receiving house for productions of national stature.
- Commission high quality writing which inspires new voices and illustrates fresh perspectives locally and farther afield.
- Diversify our programming approach and develop a multi-cultural programming strand.
- Create, grow, and promote a specific identity and brand for our Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable venues by animating both as social and cultural hubs for the city.

How do we know that we are successful?

We will:

- Commission at least one new play per year.
- Produce one new theatre show per year.
- Extend the run of Belltable shows to a minimum of three nights per week.
- Feature new and diverse Limerick voices on our stages.
- Develop further co-producing opportunities, including the staging of outside site-specific productions.
- Co-produce and tour, where possible, at least one production per year.
- Conduct regular workshops, illustrating new voices and fresh perspectives.

Strategic Priority 2: **CONNECT**

Connecting with our audiences so that they engage with emerging and established artists and their work.



Our Goal

Facilitate emerging and established artists locally and nationally to have the freedom to imagine and generate ambitious new work.

Animate welcoming, accessible, and inclusive spaces where audiences experience local, national, and international talent.

We will:

- Continue our programme of Artists' supports under the umbrella of BelltableConnect.
- Contribute to research and develop initiatives that will enhance the growth of artists' practice.
- Provide more opportunity across a variety of art forms for young and emerging artists to engage with us.
- Provide agile support structures to enable artists at all stages of their careers to present their work on our stages.
- Be a focal performance point for multicultural work to be presented by communities in Limerick.
- Initiate an apprenticeship model to support the development of the creative industries in Limerick and the wider region.
- Create a welcoming environment and enable a wide range of audiences to encounter creativity and new ideas.
- Continue our focus on young people and children through our Bualadh Bos festival and other initiatives.
- Harness technology to extend our reach beyond our physical location.

How do we know that we are successful?

We will:

- Conduct one series of BelltableConnect masterclasses / workshops for artists per season.
- Engage with at least one new company / performing artist per season.
- Present a number of events at a broader variety of times.
- Devise a complementary communications and marketing strategy to align with the development strategy and Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable identity.
- Reach up to 20% more audiences from the wider county and surrounding region over the duration of the strategy.
- Participate in Arts Council /Arts Audiences initiatives.
- Programme a minimum of 3 Bualadh Bos on Tour events, targeting Deis schools and new audiences each October.
- Enable young curators to programme at least three events each year.
- Conduct 3 pre or post show talks by artists from all genres to engage with audiences in each of our seasons.
- Return to pre-Covid audience numbers by 2024, with a further 10% increase by the end of the term of the plan.
- Identify a minimum of four shows or events per year in which we will actively encourage participation by new audiences.
- Stream a minimum of three events a year, aimed at audiences who cannot travel to our venues.
- Establish a mentorship programme for young people aiming to make a career in the arts industry. At least one internship per year will be delivered.

Strategic Priority 3: **COLLABORATE**

Collaborating with our partners to stimulate, entertain and enrich cultural life through shared creative events and quality experiences.



Our Goal

Work in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders to inspire creativity, and to provoke responses to an eclectic range of quality arts and cultural experiences.

We will:

- Leverage our NASC¹ and Strollers² venue networks membership to create new commission and performance opportunities
- Use a focused outreach approach to broaden and deepen community engagement in partnership with key partners.
- Explore collaboration opportunities with educational institutions.
- Invite participation from the wider community enabling access to creative self-expression.
- Facilitate opportunities for creative encounters for families, children and young people.

¹ The NASC venue network comprises the following venues:

An Grianán, Letterkenny; Backstage Theatre, Longford; Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise; glór, Ennis; Lime Tree Theatre, Limerick; Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire; Siamsa Tíre, Tralee; Town Hall Theatre, Galway.

How do we know that we are successful?

We will:

- Enable the Bualadh Bos festival to fulfil its potential as a regional festival; becoming an independent entity, continuing to use our venues, while having its own curation, marketing, and production staff.
- Make the Artists in Residence scheme an annual process.
- Initiate a partnership with the Local Authority to provide an outreach/liaison officer.
- Support and engage with artists working within their own communities.
- Engage and partner with LCETB, Doras Luimní and with communities from direct provision centres to deliver creative youth programmes.
- Develop partnerships with local festivals such as the Limerick Literary Festival, Limerick Jazz Festival, the Polish Arts Festival and others to provide space and opportunities for audience and artist development.
- Increase our cinema audience through our partnership with the Irish Film Institute, through our IFI@Belltable programme, with more frequent screenings to suit a wider and more diverse audience.
- Develop closer partnerships with the BA in Contemporary Applied Theatre Studies programme in MIC.

² The Strollers venue network comprises the following venues:

Belltable, Limerick; Draíocht, Dublin; Hawk's Well, Sligo; Linenhall, Mayo; Riverbank, Kildare; Siamsa Tíre, Tralee; Solstice, Navan; The Source, Thurles; VISUAL, Carlow; Watergate Theatre, Kilkenny.

Strategic Priority 4: **CONSOLIDATE**

Consolidate our governance and funding models, our infrastructure, technical capability, and our stakeholder relationships.



Our Goal

Ensure that the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable achieves its objectives with integrity and that it is managed in an effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent way.

We will:

- Continue to comply with best practice in governance, including the governance code, and all regulatory and statutory requirements.
- Work to diversify our funding models through a strategic focus on development and philanthropy.
- Strengthen our linkages with key stakeholders to ensure our future sustainability.
- Ensure that a targeted board succession and skills development strategy is put in place.
- Explore leadership succession for executive and board.
- Implement a policy of inclusion and diversity throughout the organisation.
- Maximise the potential of all available spaces and facilities at the Lime Tree Theatre | Belltable.

How do we know that we are successful?

We will:

- Ensure that our board oversees a strong regulatory framework and fosters a positive and enabling culture throughout the organisation.
- Secure capital funding to develop a studio space solely for the making of creative work at the Lime Tree Theatre campus.
- Undertake a capital investment programme to improve Belltable's infrastructure and technical capabilities.
- Strengthen our funding model to include Arts Council, local authority, and philanthropic support on a multi-annual basis.
- Expand our human resources function to support the work set out in this plan.
- Ensure that the staff and board of the organisation reflect the make-up of our local population.
- Consolidate our partnership with other arts organisations and networks, nationally and internationally.



Acknowledgements

Our strategy was developed over a number of months in 2020/2021 and we wish to acknowledge the work of board members whose term completed during this time. Our chairman from 2016 – 2021, Colm O'Brien and board members Deirdre Kennelly, Dr. Michael Finneran, Ciara Ní Shúilbhealláin and Bill Whelan.

Board Members

Brian McEnry (Chairman)
Graham Burns
Muriel Collins
David Downes
Michael Keane
Orla Ní Eidhin
Mamobo Ogoro
Dee Ryan
Caroline Senior



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