



ROTHE HOUSE TRUST STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2031



Chairperson's Note

Rothe House is an extraordinary place; the story of its buildings and the people who inhabited them, are woven deeply into the life and history of Kilkenny and offer a unique perspective into larger histories of Ireland and of Europe. Like all historical structures it is a palimpsest, layers of occupancy and use overlaying each other, each one telling us something new about its own time. It is also unique in that it is still standing, complete, available to us as a route into our past, because a group of passionate local historians chose to dedicate themselves to purchasing it in order to conserve it. Their own legacy can be traced back over 175 years, to the original formation of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society (KAS) in 1849, which went on to become the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. KAS re-formed in Kilkenny in 1945, shortly before Ireland was officially declared a Republic in 1949, and the desire to collect and conserve articles of our past as a means of collective understanding must have had an enhanced intensity then. These civic custodians of our history collected objects and stories and fragments of our past over many years, to form the KAS Collection, elements of which are on display in Rothe House, and also the very fine Archive within their library in the third house. As much as Rothe House is a fascinating glimpse into medieval life, it is also a monument to these people who have collected our stories for us, who value what is often overlooked, who fill out the maps of our past with the smaller details that might otherwise slip away.

The property is, rightly, a national monument. As a board we are very conscious of our custodial responsibilities in ensuring that Rothe House survives and thrives far into the future. We are also conscious of the scale of this challenge for a voluntary board and small organisation, and we rely on the support of our stakeholders to undertake this as a collective responsibility. We are grateful to Failte Ireland and the Local Enterprise Office for their supports which enabled us to work with consultants Karan Thompspon and Denis Casey in preparing this Strategic Plan, to both sketch out our vision for Rothe House and to ground that in financial realities. Our ambition as a board is that we can do justice to the many stories that this property contains, so that they can continue to sustain, inspire and educate all those who visit here.

Ann Mulrooney

Chairperson, Rothe House Trust, March 2026

Context

Rothe House and Gardens are a significant historical site in the region, and an integral part of the tourism offering and narrative of Kilkenny. The property is home to the Kilkenny Archaeological Society and houses its library, archive and collection.

History

Rothe House is a remarkably preserved and rare example of a 16th century Irish Burgage Plot - a complete merchant's home and garden. Built by John Rothe, a wealthy merchant, in 1594, these three interconnected stone houses, with much of their original fabric intact, indicate the prosperity of the merchant class during this period. John's successful woollen trade with Bristol, his role as mayor and member of parliament, and his son Peter's involvement in the Confederation of Kilkenny highlight the family's influence. The Rothe family's fortunes changed dramatically with the arrival of Cromwell in Kilkenny in 1650 and the family's property was forfeited, along with that of many other Catholic citizens. By the late 17th century, the Rothe family's connection with the house had ceased.

The Gaelic League, later known as Conradh na Gaeilge, occupied Rothe House for over a century, from 1898 to 2018, playing a pivotal role in the resurgence of interest in Irish culture and language. Thomas MacDonagh, a signatory of the 1916 Proclamation of Independence, was among the League's members, and gave his name to the McDonagh Room in Rothe House.

In the 1960s, the Kilkenny Archaeological Society began purchasing the property, finally achieving ownership of the entire structure four decades later and embarking on a meticulous restoration project which spanned several decades. The First House was restored in the 1960s, the Second House followed in the 1980s, and the roofless Third House was finally completed and opened to the public in 1996 by President Mary Robinson.

Following a Conservation Plan commissioned in 2001 and published by the Heritage Council, the Rothe House Trust was established by Kilkenny Archaeological Society in 2004 to manage the property. In 2008, under the aegis of the Trust, the property's garden was excavated and recreated based on archaeological findings and opened to the public by President Mary McAleese.

The Trust has continued to focus on conservation, visitor experience development and financial sustainability, aiming to conserve Rothe House & Garden for future generations to learn from and enjoy. The company is a Registered Charity, 20058029, enabling it to receive charitable donations and tax efficient support.

Some Facts and Figures:



tripadvisor

Top 5 'Things to do in Kilkenny'



Over 5k followers across social media channels



13% increase in paid visitor numbers (2024 v 2025)



71% increase in event attendees (2024 v 2025)



OUR MISSION

We protect and promote Rothe House & Garden as a unique and historic cultural property that celebrates the past and secures the property for future generations. We do this by presenting the story of merchant life in 17th century Ireland, grounded in the historical narrative of the property, as well as through exhibitions, activities and events that stimulate engagement with our audiences.

OUR VISION

That Rothe House & Garden is internationally recognised as a best practice example of a conserved cultural heritage site that plays a vibrant and valuable role in contemporary life and is cherished, cared for and championed by the people of Kilkenny.

OUR VALUES

Heritage and Conservation – this unique property and the library and collection that it houses, offers important opportunities for academic and historical research. As its custodians, we strive to conserve it with integrity, sensitivity and an appreciation of its historical significance.

Community and Collaboration – Rothe House & Garden exists today due to the collaborative efforts of multiple individuals and stakeholders over many generations. As a charitable trust of limited means, it is only through collaboration and partnerships with our many stakeholders and communities of interest that we can maintain this cultural treasure for the benefit of our community and beyond.

Sustainability and Inclusivity – We strive to embed sustainability and inclusivity in every layer of the organisation, to minimise our environmental impact, ensure the long-term viability of the property and provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for all, regardless of background or ability.

Excellence and Integrity – we strive to uphold high standards of excellence in all our work, operating with professionalism, transparency, and a strong sense of responsibility in our governance, management, programming, collection care and conservation of Rothe House & Garden.





Strategic Goals and Objectives

Three key areas have been identified as the drivers of our strategic development over the next five years. They are:

- Development of our audience offering and engagement
- Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation and the property through good governance, management and conservation
- Increasing the social, cultural and economic value that we generate through our activities, programmes and partnerships

These three areas form our Strategic Objectives for 2026 - 2031 and are broken down into individual goals in the following ways:

- through a focus on people, recognising that our many audiences, communities and stakeholders are of central importance to what we do, and that the expertise of our team and Board is essential for successful delivery.
- through a focus on the property as a significant and important heritage building and a key cultural element of Kilkenny's Medieval experience with a unique opportunity to tell the story of 16th century merchant life.
- through a focus on the quality of the visitor offering and its impact on developing engagement and understanding.



Objective 1 - Develop Our Audiences

Rothe House is a rare and unique property, the only remaining and complete burgage plot in Ireland; the stories of this property and the histories that have unfolded within, are compelling. It is our objective to ensure that the way in which we tell these stories and the quality of the overall visitor experience are significantly improved, in order to create an immersive and enthralling visitor attraction that realises the property's full potential.

This is an ambitious goal which will require us to develop partnerships and funding opportunities. In parallel to our development plans in this area, we are working to

further improve how we engage with audiences, both through our marketing activities and through our goal to secure additional resources to develop projects and activities for schools, groups and communities.

1.1 Create a compelling visitor experience for Rothe House

Actions

1.1a Seek funding to identify, develop and install a high quality and historically grounded tour experience based around the core elements of the Rothe House story and key secondary stories

1.1b Enhance and update the street frontage, access and visitor facilities in a manner appropriate to the conservation requirements of the property

1.2 Develop and communicate our offering to diverse audiences

Actions

1.2a Resource and deliver a comprehensive marketing and sales strategy around our visitor propositions

1.2b Develop Education and Outreach policies and programmes to grow education audiences, off-peak tours, community engagement and partnership opportunities



Objective 2 - Enhance Our Sustainability

Through the creation and care of our gardens, we already enhance biodiversity and green space in the city, which is a strong core of sustainability. We aim to extend this core to encompass our entire approach to how we manage the property, ensuring that the organisation and the financial operation is also strongly rooted and sustainable for the longer term.

This is particularly important in relation to the physical structure of Rothe House, which requires a long-term conservation and maintenance approach in order to ensure that it survives and thrives for future generations to learn from and enjoy.

2.1 Ensure good governance, management and financial planning to deliver a sustainable future for Rothe House.

Actions

2.1a Achieve full compliance with the Charities Regulator's Governance Code

2.1b Maintain and develop leadership and expertise in Board and team

2.1c Produce a business development plan in support of our objectives with annual action plans containing smart targets to measure achievements

2.1d Strengthen the organisational capacity through expanding the organisational structure and investing in staff development

2.1e Ensure that sustainability and inclusivity are embedded within the organisation at every level and offer a best-practice example for the sector

2.2 Ensure the preservation of the property and collections for future generations to enjoy

Actions

2.2a Review the 2002 Conservation Plan and create a Conservation Management Strategy for the property

2.2b Engage key stakeholders and funders in identification and delivery of an annual Maintenance Schedule and a long-term plan for the safeguarding of the property

2.2c Develop standards in line with the Museum Standards Programme of Ireland (MSPI) including professional curation and achieve accreditation for the property and collection



Objective 3 - Increase Our Value

Through its operation as a heritage space and its multiple historical, cultural and community events, Rothe House contributes significant social, cultural and economic value to Kilkenny city. It generates over 80% of its income through tourism activities, events, genealogy services and retail sales. Our ambition is to continue to grow these income streams as much as possible in order to better resource the organisation to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan.

We will ensure that we do so in alignment with larger cultural and tourism development plans in the region, to maximise the value that we can return to our city.

3.1 Work in partnership to achieve our objectives

Actions

3.1a Deepen strategic relationships with agency partners, cultural venues and collaborators to create opportunities in tourism, hospitality and cultural projects that align with our objectives and connect Rothe House as a key element of Kilkenny's cultural and heritage offering

3.1 b Ensure connectivity with appropriate key cultural and tourism development plans for the region, including the Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP) and Night Time Economy Diversification plans

3.2 Develop our financial potential

Actions

3.2 a Maximise the potential of the current retail and genealogy offerings to increase revenue

3.2 b Identify, cost, and seek funding to feasibly develop the property's potential as a rental venue for suitable events

3.1 c Seek out suitable funding streams to support delivery of our strategic objectives

