

Ardgillan Castle Ltd.

Activity Report for the period April 2023 to April 2024

Ardgillan Castle Ltd. is a company with a single shareholder, Fingal County Council. It was established in 2009. The directors are volunteer members from the local community and two *ex-officio* members of FCC staff. The company staff consists of a manager, an assistant manager and three Community Employment Scheme part-time staff along with a part-time gallery curator. The staff and directors are listed below.

The company manages the activities within the castle building itself, which is located in the demesne of Ardgillan Castle & Gardens, the parkland being owned by Fingal County Council and managed by its Operations' Department.

The castle provides the following services to visitors: Tearooms, operated under contract by Brambles Café; Castle tours (which are mainly self-guided, although a guided tour may be organised for groups of more than ten), a craft shop and an art gallery.

In 2021, eleven artist studios were established in the castle and were allocated following advertisement seeking expressions of interest from artists and crafters. The artists' studios are mostly open to visitors and their work can also be purchased in the castle's craft shop.

Among the significant activities during 2023 and early 2024 were:

- The development of a proposal to substantially improve the visitor heritage experience of Ardgillan Castle for visitors of both domestic and international origin, based on a phased delivery of the Interpretive Strategy and Vision document commissioned from the consultants, Tandem Design.
- The refurbishment of the magnificent chandelier in the main room in the castle, along with other light fittings throughout the tour area.
- During the calendar year 2023, despite the major upheaval of the ten-month construction works, the castle still managed to welcome 2,600 visitors who took the tour.
- The Taylor-made craft shop significantly extended the number of local artists and crafters who now sell their work in the former main entrance hall to the castle.
- The Ardgillan Art Gallery opened in March 2023 and during the year eight exhibitions were held, including notable artists such as Marie Le Men, Dave West and Thomas Brezing.
- Other events to take place during the year were - Heritage Week 2023, National Drawing Day 2023, Artist Talks and Workshops, Culture Night and the extremely popular annual Christmas Craft Fair.
- The initiative 'An Afternoon with...' took place in the Autumn of 2023 and all three proved to be complete sell-out events, with household names, Paul Kimmage, Anne

Cassin, and Susan McKay kindly participating. Shane Hegarty and Gerry McDermott were the interviewers. All participants kindly waived any fee and the board donated the proceeds of these events to local charities: the Balbriggan Alzheimer's Society in Balbriggan and the Forget-Me-Not Café in Skerries

- The clearance of the laundry and dairy spaces in the west wing as an initial stage of animating these characterful rooms for daily use.
- Ardgillan also provided the backdrop film location for two major movies: *Lies We Tell*, which received four IFTAs and *The Glitch and the Ghost*, both of which were filmed entirely on location in Ardgillan, as well as a number of other TV productions.
- The implementation of the Fáilte Ireland *Digital that Delivers* programme, an initiative that will better enable potential visitors to discover and book castle activities through the channels that are most convenient for them and that offer the best value, along with the launch of a new website (May 2024).
- Also, during this period, artists to depart from their studio spaces were Glenn Matthews and the McCaul Brothers while others to take up residencies were writer Shane Hegarty, artists, Clemence Prosen, Alessandra Pollicini and Thomas Brezing. The latter being the recipient of an FCC-subsidised studio.

Fingal County Council also carried out very significant work in the same period. In particular:

- The completion of major structural conservation works by FCC that included an entirely new roof on the castle coupled with extensive window preservation works throughout the entire building.
- The completion of a Conservation Management Plan which was commissioned by FCC and which sets out the history and evolution of Ardgillan Castle and Demesne. It describes the physical attributes of the estate, and outlines the significance of the site, and provides a policy framework for the Council to implement protection measures, to appropriately manage and develop the estate now and in the future.
- The introduction of wheelchair-friendly access to the Tea Room terrace, along with the introduction of wheelchair-friendly access to the art gallery, which is located in the basement.

The Board and management are very appreciative of the ongoing support and encouragement provided by Fingal County Council and looks to the future with renewed enthusiasm to ensure we play our part in ensuring that the entire Ardgillan demesne fulfils its potential as a multifaceted facility for the greatly expanded population of North County Dublin, as well as a major attraction for visitors from further afield.

The members of the Board of Ardgillan Castle Ltd are:

Ciaran O'Keeffe (Chair)

Sinéad Lucey Brennan

Sally O'Shea

Cllr. Gráinne Maguire

Tom Noonan

Pat Furlong

Cllr. Brendan Ryan

Paul Delemere

Declan Power (FCC)

Kevin Halpenny (FCC)

Two Board members, Austin Hickey and Martin Daly resigned their positions due to other work pressures, and they are warmly thanked for their contributions.

The staff of Ardgillan Castle are:

Tom Reilly - Manager

Ingrid Madsen - Assistant Manager

Caitlin Kearns – Marketing Manager

Aoibheann Brennan - Part-time administration

Sarah Johnstone – Part-time Administration

Jasmina Bouhebbal – Part-time administration

Dana Eparu – Part-time cleaning