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THE
HERITAGE
COUNCIL



Irish Walled Towns Network (IWNTN) - 20 Towns/Cities
Irish Walled Towns' Day and Local Photographic Competitions
All-Island Event, 27th August 2006
(as part of National Heritage Week 2006)



Feedback from Members and a comparison with Events in 2005

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE IRISH WALLED TOWNS NETWORK (IWTN)

The Heritage Council of Ireland established the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) in April 2005 to unite and co-ordinate the strategic efforts of local authorities involved in the management, conservation and enhancement of historic walled towns in Ireland, both North and South.¹

The Irish Walled Towns Network is formally linked to the International Walled Towns Friendship Circle (IWTF),² which is the international association for the sustainable development of walled towns, walled cities and fortified historic towns.

Key Aim of Irish Walled Towns Network:

“The Irish Walled Towns Network seeks to ensure that Ireland’s unique cultural and archaeological heritage in relation to its walled and fortified towns and cities is protected and managed in a sustainable and appropriate manner in the long-term”.

The Network is committed to operating in accordance with the IWTF’s Mission Statement and International conservation ‘Best Practice’.

The Irish Network will liaise with other historic Walled and Fortified Towns in Europe on a regular basis, e.g. Chester, Dubrovnik, Alcudia, etc. Improved networks and links will ensure that quality management and effective conservation plans and systems are designed and implemented to protect and conserve the historic Walled Towns for the enjoyment and appreciation of current and future generations in Ireland and further afield.

Irish Walled Towns Network Members (20 Towns/Cities)

Athenry	Athlone	Carlingford
Carrickfergus	Cashel	Clonmel
Cork	Derry	Drogheda
Dublin	Fethard	Galway
Kilkenny	Kilmallock	Limerick
New Ross	Trim	Waterford
Wexford	Youghal	

¹ www.heritagecouncil.ie/walledtowns/index.html.

² www.walledtowns.com.

SECTION 2: FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
1. Athenry	Galway County Council	Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer	Athenry Arts & Heritage Centre, The Square, Athenry	Athenry Arts & Heritage Centre, The Square, Athenry	Bell Ringing at Athenry Arts and Heritage Centre. International Walled Towns Friendship Circle (IWTFC) Flags also flown at Arts and Heritage Centre. Local Community notified – enthusiastic response to event.	<p>Day-long family event focusing on Athenry Heritage Centre, Athenry Castle and local hotels. The OPW gave out tickets at the Castle in order to estimate numbers. OPW estimate the 1,000 people attended the event. <i>Photographs of the Athenry event along with all the other towns' events are provided at Appendix A. Event Brochure is attached at Appendix B.</i></p> <p>The event, which started at 12.30pm, included opening address by Noel Tracey, Junior Minister for Foreign Affairs, Peter Feeny, Deputy Mayor, Galway County Council, Alison Harvey, SORCHA Murray and Marie Mannion.</p> <p>The Historic Walled Towns local photographic competition was also launch during the event by Marie Mannion and Alison Harvey. 1,000 helium filled balloons with seal of Athenry in County Galway colours (pairs of balloons: one white, one maroon) were also given out to children. In addition, 100 no. Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event.</p> <p>Your Man Puppet Show (250 children attended), Childrens' Colouring Competition - 'Athenry in Colour'. Leinster Re-enactors staged show all day including a battle re-enactment, medieval crafts on display, falconry, face painting and medieval dress up and archery at Athenry Arts and Heritage Centre</p>
2. Athlone	Westmeath County Council	Bernie Guest, Heritage Officer	St. Mary's Church of Ireland, Athlone	Athlone Castle	Bell Ringing at Col Cathedral opposite Athlone Castle, flag flying on Athlone Castle. Walking Tour organised for 20 people. Very well received event.	<p>Irish Walled Towns' Day was celebrated in Athlone with the Launch of the Historic Walled Towns Local Photographic Competition by the Mayor of Athlone Cllr. John Butler along with a Guided Tour of Old Athlone with Geraóid O'Brien. Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event.</p> <p>12 people took part in the guided tour.</p>

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
3. Carlingford	Louth County Council	Brendan McSherry Heritage Officer	-	-	Carlingford joined the Network in Feb 2006.	<p>The WTFC flag was flown in Carlingford and the bells were rung there. The Carlingford Tour Guides gave free walks during the day. 30 no. Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event.</p> <p>Louth County Council also organised two public talks in Carlingford on the historic Walls (17 attendees).</p>
4. Carrickfergus		Nicole Mulholland, Economic Development Officer	St. Nicholas Church. Carrickfergus	Carrickfergus Borough Council Offices (CBC)	Bell ringing at St Nicholas Parish Church from 11am to 11.30am prior to the service at 11.30am. Flag flying from Carrickfergus Museum over the weekend. Article in Irish News.	<p>Over 30 people went on the Walk of the Walls (2hrs). This is the first time that this has been organised in Carrickfergus. Good press coverage in local papers.</p> <p>The Historic Walls Local Photographic Competition was also launched by CBC.</p>
5. Cashel	Cashel Town Council	Seamus Maher Town Clerk	-	-	Cashel joined the Network in February 2006	<p>Launch of Historic Walled Towns local photographic competition by Mayor of Cashel, Cllr Paddy Downey at the Gate Plaza where face painting was laid on for younger children together with music. Photographs of official launch in local weekly newspaper. 60 Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event.</p> <p>Local radio was present as well as a press photographer. Posters (see photographs at <i>Appendix A</i>) were circulated during the week to all businesses, local Library, Community office and notice in the Parish newsletter. Targeting of the schools will be followed-up during the week commencing the 4th September 2006.</p> <p>Very successful event.</p>

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
6. Clonmel	Clonmel Town Council	Billy Doyle Town Clerk	-	-	Clonmel joined the Network in February 2006	<p>Clonmel Borough Council, in conjunction with Clonmel Museum launched the Historic Walled Towns' Local Photographic Competition on Sunday 27th August 2006. The event will be promoted in local schools during early September.</p> <p>Successful launch with excellent coverage in the local paper.</p>
7. Cork	Cork City Council	Ciara Brett City Council Archaeologist	-	-	Cork joined the Network in February 2006	<p>The IWTFC flags were flown outside City Hall for the first weekend of Heritage Week. The ringing of bells took place in St. Anne's Shandon at 11AM immediately after the Sunday Service. St. Anne's Shandon was an ideal location for the ceremony as the Shandon Bells are one of the most famous Cork landmarks.</p> <p>The bell ringing was attended by the Deputy Lord Mayor Cllr. Catherine Clancy and Cllr. Donal Counihan.</p> <p>Councillor Clancy really enjoyed the visit to Shandon and was delighted to literally pull the ropes and 'ring the bells'. The Group then proceeded to climb up to the top of the tower of the church where they viewed the city.</p>

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
8. Derry	Derry City Council	Mark Lusby, Senior Economic Development Officer	The Guild Hall, Derry	The Guild Hall, Derry	<p>Bell Ringing at St. Columb's Cathedral (Col) and St. Eugene's Cathedral. Flag flying from The Guildhall, Guildhall Square adjacent to the Walls.</p> <p>The Event received excellent coverage in the local radio, BBC Radio Foyle and editorials appeared in the Derry News 'Wall to Wall Sound and Colour' and Irish News 'Walled Towns to Celebrate Heritage Week'. Very successful event.</p>	<p>IWTFC flags flown at the Apprentice Boys' Hall, the Jail Tower, and St Columb's Cathedral. Free guided tours of Walls and boat tour along Lough Foyle. Period Costume interpretation in historic city core.</p> <p>Old style parchment certificates were hand out stating "<i>I Walked Derry's Historic Walls</i>".</p> <p>The Historic Walls Local Photographic Competition was also launched.</p>
9. Drogheda	Louth County Council	Brendan Mc Sherry, Heritage Officer	St. Peter's Church of Ireland, Peter's Street Drogheda	Milmount Museum, Drogheda	<p>The flag was flown for the whole of Heritage Week from the Millmount Museum (opposite side of the River Boyne from the church). The Museum team were very pleased with the flag and intend to fly it every time they have a heritage or cultural event in the future. Bells rung at St Peter's Church of Ireland.</p>	<p>The IWTFC flag was flown from the Borough Council offices. The Bells were rung at Saint Peter's Church of Ireland Church. The Old Drogheda Society/Millmount Museum gave a guided walk along the lines of the historic town wall.</p>

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
10. Dublin	Dublin City Council	Sarah O’Gorman	Christ Church Cathedral Dublin	Dublin City Offices, Woodquay	The Bells were rung in Christ Church Cathedral and the flag was flown at Dublin City Council Civic offices at Woodquay.	<p>Dublin City Council’s Heritage Office organised a conference on the Dublin City Walls and Defences Conference.</p> <p>The Conference was opened by the Minister Dick Roche. Approximately 100 people attended the conference followed by a book launch. Attendees included Members of the Network. Event Brochure is attached at <i>Appendix C</i>.</p> <p>The IWTFC flag was flown at Dublin City Council Civic offices at Woodquay.</p> <p>Very successful programme of events.</p>
11. Fethard	South Tipperary County Council	Joe Kenny Chairperson of Community Council Dorin Saurus Chair of Historical Soc & Terry Cunningham	Holy Trinity Catholic Church and the Augustinian Abbey	Town Wall Battlements	A substantial number of people turned out for the bell ringing at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church and the Augustinian Abbey. Got press coverage on Nationalist Newspaper and on Fethard Website www.fethard.com	<p>As part of the National Heritage week events, Colm McGrath gave a guided tour of the Walls of Fethard on Sunday morning at 11.30am. Those who attended were given complimentary Heritage Council t-shirts and hats. Amongst the group were people from Australia and England.</p> <p>Very successful event.</p>

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
12. Galway	Galway City Council	Jim Higgins, Heritage Officer	2 locations: Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas and St Nicholas' Collegiate Church	City Hall	Flag ceremoniously raised at City Hall – all Council Staff photographed at flag raising event. Bells rung at two locations: Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas and St Nicholas' Collegiate Church. Excellent coverage by Galway Bay Radio Station – interview with Jim, etc. Flag now displayed full time in the reception area of the City Council Offices. Very successful event.	Galway City Council organised the Historic Walls local Photographic Competition. Advertisements were placed in the Heritage Newsletter.
13. Kilkenny	Kilkenny County Council	Dearbhala Ledwidge, Heritage Officer	The Black Abbey, Dean Street, Kilkenny	Kilkenny Castle	The flag was flown at Kilkenny Castle from Sept 4 th to 11 th and the bells were rung at The Black Abbey on Sunday 4 th at 12 noon.	Two walking tours of the city walls were organised. 120 people took part and the feedback was very positive. A full-page feature was placed in the Kilkenny People newspaper on the city walls walking tour. IWTFC Flags flying for the duration of heritage week at Kilkenny Castle and City Hall. Also, Bell ringing at 3pm at St. Canice's Cathedral. Very successful event.

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
14. Kilmallock	Limerick County Council	Sarah McCutcheon Executive Archaeologist James O'Callaghan Senior Executive Engineer	St Peter's and Paul's Church	Blossom Gate (Kilmallock Walls)	Bells were rung at St Peter and Paul's Church. Flag flown on Blossom Gate (Kilmallock Walls). The Event was well received in the area.	<p>Limerick County Council organised a Walled Town Conference on 24/25th August which was opened by Minister of State for the Department of the Environment Mr. Batt O'Keeffe. The conference attracted a wide range of people (over 60 people attended) and the papers were extremely well received. Walking tours of the town walls and conservation projects were given on 24th and tours of the Collegiate Church and the Dominican Priory were conducted by John Bradley on 25th.</p> <p>A weekend festival organised by Kilmallock Partnership began on Friday 25th with a concert by the Celtic Tenors, on Saturday 26th a street market was held under the shadow of Blossom Gate and a concert charting the evolution of music was held in the Dominican Priory. On Sunday 27th a medieval family fun day was held beside the town walls, which included battle re-enactments using local volunteers, fencing, archery and medieval crafts demonstrations, face-painting and story-telling.</p> <p>A total of 1,570 people attended the various events. The event brochure is provided at <i>Appendix D</i>.</p> <p>Bells rung at St Peter & Paul's Catholic Church. Location of International Walled Town Friendship Circle Flags: Blossom Gate and King's Castle.</p> <p>The Historic Walls Towns Local Photographic Competition was also launched.</p> <p>Excellent programme of events over a four day period</p>

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
15. Limerick	Limerick City Council	Brian Hodkinson Archaeologist and Curator of the Limerick City Museum	-	-	Limerick joined the Network in September 2006	<p>IWTFC Flags flown from King John's Castle, bells rung from St Marys and Walls walked! The guided walk went exceedingly well. There was a minimum of 75 people, which was more than expected (30-40 expected). After the Walk, the organiser Brian Hodkinson was met by two people who are associated with King John's Castle, who were not on the walk, who congratulated him on his efforts. They were amazed at the number of people who turned out. The guided walk was a nice mix of young and old, and of the 75 people, only about 10-12 were familiar faces from other historical groups. 30 Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event.</p> <p>On the walk Brian highlighted that Limerick has a surviving city gate. Previously it had been marked down as part of the so-called Citadel built in the 17th century, but now there is evidence that the gate is part of the medieval circuit of Walls.</p>
16. New Ross	New Ross Town Council	Ger Mackey, Town Clerk and Cllr John Dwyer, Cathaoirleach	-	-	New Ross joined the Network in August 2006	<p>IWTFC Flag flown on Irish Walled Towns' Day 27th August 2006 at The Tholsel, New Ross, Co. Wexford. Public interaction in Heritage Week encouraged through the distribution of Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats in New Ross throughout the week.</p> <p>Excellent first-time event.</p>
17. Trim	Meath County Council	Jill Chadwick Conservation Officer	-	-	Trim joined the Network in February 2006	No event organised.

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
18. Waterford	Waterford County Council	Eamonn McEneaney, Director of Waterford Treasures Museum	Christ Church Cathedral	The Bishop's Palace (now the Engineering Dept of Waterford City Council)	Bells were rung at Christ Church Cathedral. Over 30 people attended the tour of Reginald's Tower and then walked the circuit. Flag flown at the Bishop's Palace. Very successful event.	Approximately 60 people took part in a walking tour of the Walls of Waterford – this was the biggest group ever on a walking tour of the historic walls. The tour lasted two and a half hours and all the participants really enjoyed the event. The Historic Walls Local Photography Competition was also launched in the city. 100 Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event. Very successful event.
19. Wexford	Wexford Borough Council	Pat Collins, Town Clerk	Rowe St. Church, Wexford	Wexford Borough Council	Bells were rung at midday at Rowe Street Church, Wexford. There was a good attendance at the bell-ringing event. Flag flown at Municipal Buildings.	Wexford rang the bells for the Walled Towns Day and flew the flag, as in 2005. Posters have gone into the local papers and onto the Council website advertising the Irish Walled Towns' Local Photographic Competition. Wexford Borough Council launched the Historic Walls Towns Local Photographic Competition on 27 th August by placing details etc on the local authority website on that day, and also by advertising in two local newspapers on the following Wednesday. Five local secondary schools and the Wexford Camera Club have also been involved and the competition will be advertised on South East Radio. 30 Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event. Great feedback so far.

Walled Town	Member Council	Key Contact	Location of Bells 2005	Location of IWTFC Flag(s) 2005	Feedback from Members 2005	Feedback from Members 2006
20. <i>Youghal</i>	Youghal Town Council/ Cork County Council	Liam Ryan, Town Clerk	St. Mary's Collegiate Church and Clock Gate, Youghal	Collegiate Church, Clock Gate and Youghal Town Hall	<p>The Bell ringing took place at midday in St. Mary's Collegiate Church & in the Clock Gate on Main Street. It was announced the week before on the local radio and in the local paper. Col service was going on at the time as well as midday mass. For this reason there aren't specific numbers but the fact that services were on was found to be effective. The flags were flying from the Clock Gate, the Town Hall and Collegiate Church. Very successful event.</p> <p>The flags will remain in place for the Youghal <i>'Through the Ages Festival'</i> in late September 2005 and throughout the year. The flags will be placed on the Town Hall, Clock Gate and Town Wall Turret between the Collegiate Church and Convent.</p>	<p>Bell Ringing took place at midday in St. Mary's Collegiate Church & n the Clock Gate on Main Street. The IWTFC flags were flown from the Clock Gate, The Mall House (Town Hall), St. Mary's College, Tynte's Castle and on two locations on the Town Walls. Youghal Town Council fly the flags from these locations all year round and find that they attract great interest and awareness in Youghal's local heritage from both locals and tourists alike.</p> <p>The Heritage Society organised a walk around the historic core of the town. 50 Heritage Council T-shirts and baseball hats were distributed to children during the event. Flags are replaced on an ongoing basis throughout the year to ensure a quality visual impact.</p> <p>Very successful event.</p>

SECTION 3: SUMMARY

- 18 Walled Towns/Cities organised events on Irish Walled Towns' Day 2006. Events included family fun-days, concerts, guided walks, etc.;
- Heritage Officers, Heritage Groups, local communities and businesses, Government Ministers, Local Authority Councillors and Officers were all involved in the organisation and launching of the all-island events;
- The Network's events were given excellent media coverage from national and local press, local radio, etc; (see Appendix E);
- The Heritage Council distributed over 300 Council T-shirts and baseball hats throughout Ireland on Irish Walled Towns' Day;
- Two Walled Towns Conferences were organised in Kilmallock and Dublin;
- Photographic competitions were launched in 10 Walled Towns (north and south);
- The event has grown significantly since the first ever all-island event of 2005;
- Approximately 4,000 people took part in the IWTN's celebratory Irish Walled Towns' Day in 2006;
- Irish Walled Towns' Day is particularly important to historic walled towns located outside the Greater Dublin Area (GDA);
- The local photographic competition period for entrants will close on the 29th September 2006 and the national winners will be announced at the inaugural Irish Walled Towns Network Gala Dinner on the 9th November 2006 in the D Hotel, Drogheda

For further information on the all-island Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) please visit the Heritage Council's website at http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/walled_towns/index.html or contact Alison Harvey (Planning and Development Officer) or Anne Barcoe. (Administrator).

APPENDIX A

Photographs of Irish Walled Towns' Day, Photographic Competition Posters and Conferences

Athenry



Carrickfergus



Cashel

**Cashel Walled Town
Photographic Competition**

Launch: Saturday August 26th at 11am
by Mayor, Councillor Patrick Downey
at Lowergate Plaza (City Wall)

**Theme: Historic defensive walls
have left a unique and visible
impression on our Irish towns & cities**

Entry groups
Adults over 18: Prize €500
Children under 18: Prize €250

Entry forms & rules can be obtained from & returned to
Cashel Heritage Centre, Main St., Cashel. 062 62511

Closing date Friday 29th September 2006

Entry forms also at
www.cashel.ie

Cork



Fethard



Kilmallock



APPENDIX B

Brochure for Athenry's Irish Walled Towns' Day (27th August 2006)



APPENDIX C

Brochure for Dublin City Walls and Defences Implementation Conference
(Dublin Castle, 1st September 2006)



APPENDIX D

Brochure for Kilmallock Medieval Festival including Walled Towns Conference and Walled Towns' Day (24th / 27th August 2006)



Kilmallock Medieval Festival 24th to 27th August 2006

Thursday 24th • Friday 25th
Kilmallock Walled Town Conference
 • (1 Day €30 • 2 Days €50) • Friars' Gate Theatre •

Friday 25th • 'The Celtic Tenors'
 • Church of Saints Peter & Paul • 8.30pm • € 25 •
 • Tickets on sale at Friars' Gate Theatre •

Saturday 26th • Medieval Market
 • Emmet Street • 10am – 3pm •

• **Open Air Concert** •

• **Medieval, Choral, Gospel & Jazz • Fireworks** •
 • Dominican Priory • 8pm • € 15 • Tickets on sale at Friars' Gate Theatre •

Sunday 27th • Medieval Fun Day
 • Coláiste Ioseef Kilmallock • 2pm – 6pm •
 • Medieval Fun Day Family Ticket €20 •

• **Archery • Fencing • Falconry • Storytelling** •
 • **Battle Re-enactment • Balloon modelling** •
 • **Juggling • Competitions • Facepainting** •
 • **Music • Barbecue • Puppet Show** •

Competition details available from Friars Gate Theatre from Monday August 21st

PLEASE BOOK EARLY
 Registration Form: Please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS and return with your payment to:

Kilmallock Walled Town Conference
 c/o Helen O'Neill
 Limerick County Council
 The Court House,
 Kilmallock, Co. Limerick
 Tel: (063) 98019

Accommodation in the Kilmallock Area includes:

Ash Hill Towers	(063) 98035
Auburn House	(063) 98761
Deebert House	(063) 98106
Flemingstown House	(063) 98093
Fitzgeralds Guest House	(063) 98139
Hillgate House	(061) 382275

for further information go to
www.ballyhouracounty.com

Thursday 24th & Friday 25th August 2006

sponsored by
 The Irish Walled Towns Network

Publication: Irish Times
 Date: Friday, August 18, 2006
 Page: 15
 Extract: 1 of 2
 Circulation: 117,543
 Author: Frank Mc Donald
 Headline: Towns plan wall-to-wall action for Heritage



Towns plan wall-to-wall action for Heritage

Ireland's walled cities and towns are coming together to celebrate their unique history, writes **Frank McDonald**, Environment Editor



Who would have guessed that the Irish Walled Towns Network has no fewer than 19 members? Of course, Derry is known for its impressively intact set of walls, but many of the others have fortified gates, towers and other bits and pieces that testify to more troubled times.

As part of National Heritage Week 2006, the Ireland's walled towns (North and South) will celebrate their unique history and heritage with "a day-full of fun-packed events for all the family", according to the statutory Heritage Council, which helped to set up the network in April 2005.

The main celebrations will take place in Athenry, Co Galway, on Sunday, August 27th. There will also be a walled town conference in Kilmallock, Co Limerick, on the previous Thursday and Friday, while another conference on Dublin City Walls and Defences is scheduled for September 1st.

As the Heritage Council says, walled towns and cities in Ireland are "an important, yet currently neglected, national heritage asset". So the aim of the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) is to co-ordinate the efforts of local authorities involved in their management, conservation and enhancement.

The IWTN is formally linked to the International Walled Towns Friendship Circle, which promotes the sustainable development of walled towns, walled cities and fortified historic towns. It includes such notable examples as Carcassonne (France), Chester (England) and Dubrovnik (Croatia).

"Improved networks and links will ensure that quality management and effective conservation plans and systems are designed and implemented to protect and conserve the historic walled towns for the enjoyment and appreciation of current and future generations in Ireland and further afield," says the council.

The Heritage Council is committed to

the preparation of conservation plans for all of Ireland's historic walled towns, with the focus on improving visitor experience and the surroundings.

So far, it has provided funding for plans to conserve what remains of Dublin's city walls as well as Athlone's and Kilkenny's.

The Dublin plan, drafted by the Integrated Conservation Group led by archaeological consultant Margaret Gowen, arose from a number of concerns about the above-ground and below-ground remains of the city wall, "one of the most important, but poorly preserved and presented, historic civic monuments".

The Dublin City Walls and Defences Conservation Plan has provided the city council and other interested parties with information and impetus to "move forward to preserve what remains of the city's most important monument, and also to present it to the citizens of Dublin in a more coherent and accessible way".

The IWTN has also drawn up a three-year action plan, and one of its aims is to encourage the Department of the Environment to formulate national guidelines for the management, conservation and enhancement of walled towns. In the meantime, it has set up a website, www.heritagecouncil.ie/walled_towns.

On September 4th last, in the first all-island event to promote public awareness of the cause, flags were flown and bells tolled at noon in most of the 19 member towns. There were also walled town walks, organised in conjunction with local museums and historical societies, to coincide with Heritage Week.

Co-ordinated by Alison Harvey, the Heritage Council's planning and development officer, this year's more extensive range of activities are intended as a precursor to an annual "Walled Towns Festival".

It is also planned to devise visitor signage and set up a photo gallery and digital image bank. Presumably this will include a telling shot of the 12th-century walls of Trim Castle with the new four-storey hotel directly opposite, which was built in the face of strong criticisms from Dúchas, the former State Heritage Service, abolished by Martin Cullen; it was he, as minister for the environment, who

gave his imprimatur to the hotel.

The Heritage Council remained mute on the Trim case, but it did make a submission on a controversial mixed-use development of housing, offices, retail and parking planned for a site within the walls of Athenry, Co Galway.

Having twice deferred its decision on appeals, An Bord Pleanála is due to rule on the scheme today.

In other sensitive places, such as Kilkenny and Waterford, the setting of medieval walls has been severely compromised by inappropriately-scaled development, such as multi-storey car parks or new housing schemes built too close for comfort.

Once-open views of ancient walls are lost, as the urge to make money triumphs over heritage.

With so many other towns in Ireland under pressure from development - including those with surviving medieval walls - the Heritage Council's conservation initiative could not come at a more opportune time.

◆ Further information on the walled towns programme may be obtained by e-mail from Alison@heritagecouncil.com

◆ For details of the Heritage Week programme, see www.heritageweek.ie

