

A proposal for regenerating Ireland's historic towns and villages

Helping
towns help
themselves





USIG

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ROTHE HOUSE

ROTHE HOUSE, KILKENNY

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GALWAY CITY CENTRE

Foreword

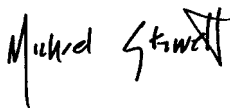
One third of Irish people live in towns. However, over many years towns have not received the level of attention and support necessary to ensure a sustainable future in the face of change. Extensive international research, including the Heritage Council's own Irish based studies, have highlighted the financial and jobs benefits that arise from the conservation and restoration of historic building stock, and the retention of historic streetscapes. The benefits not only result from strengthened tourism and retail sectors and the increased likelihood of foreign direct investment but also the general sense of well being that people derive from investment in their place.

Over the past ten years The Heritage Council has sought via the Irish Walled Towns Network, community-led village design statements, the Heritage Officer network and the pilot Historic Towns Initiative to empower the residents of Ireland's town and villages through knowledge and modest financial support. Working together, we have created a wave of projects that have made many villages and towns better places in which to live, work and visit.

Heritage and The Heritage Council can do more. However, without additional resources and capacity, our ability to help Ireland's towns and villages realise their full potential is constrained. Accordingly, within this document we have outlined a cohesive and costed proposal for a **Rural Towns and Villages Network**. All the initiative's various strands have been tested. We know they work. Consequently, if financed, we are confident the proposal will in short order help strengthen the social and economic vitality of the 40 towns and villages it is initially planned to benefit.

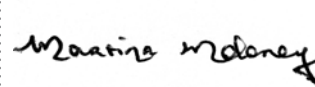
The communities of those towns and villages deserve such support. It requires political will to secure the required investment.

MICHAEL STARRETT :



Chief Executive of
The Heritage Council

MARTINA MOLONEY



Chair of the Irish Walled
Towns Network



THE ROCK OF CASHEL

The vision

Despite the national return to economic growth, unemployment in rural towns and villages remains disproportionately high. A lack of vision and inadequate support has led to a prolonged pattern of declining town centres and increasing regional gaps in quality of life. The government's response has been to promote evidence based decision making via the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) report and to improve the spread of rural tourism through the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East initiatives.

The reports have been done. What are needed now are cost effective actions. This proposal brings forward a set of solutions that will help **make Irish towns and villages better places in which to live, work, and visit.** Ultimately, this means the creation of long term sustainable jobs in viable communities that can adapt to the challenge of change.

We propose the creation of a **Rural Towns and Villages Network** that would operate on the basis of partnership and membership. Its key functions would be to assist the Heritage Council rejuvenate Ireland's town and villages and provide guidance on the effective implementation of the recommendations contained in the Heritage Council's policy proposals for Irish towns.

The solutions are based on existing literature and experience gained through the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN). Our proposals are also informed by the 2013-15 pilot of the Historic Towns Initiative which was a partnership between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Fáilte Ireland, The Heritage Council and three Irish towns.

The creation of a rural towns and villages network is an objective of the Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2012-2016.



DERRY - LONDONDERRY CITY WALLS

What we do

Formed by The Heritage Council in 2005, the IWVTN's role is to help make the walled towns of Ireland better places in which to live, work and visit. We have done this by working as a team with representatives from each member town. This makes us nimble enough to react not only to the individual situations of each place but also to the macro trends that impact upon all. Currently, we help our 28 member towns through the following ways:

- Providing grants for medieval town wall conservation
- Providing grants for community festivals and heritage interpretation
- Training community groups on how best to use their place's heritage for the benefit of those who live there
- Coordinating research with third level institutes and publishing user friendly self-help documents

Our approach is to work with local communities

and to empower them through funding, training and guidance. It is a methodology that in 2013 resulted in the network winning the most prestigious award in European Heritage, the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Award. It is also an approach that despite limited funding has ensured consistently impressive results. Some notable achievements include:

1. Growing to an active membership of 28 walled towns across Ireland.
2. Providing €6.35 million to conserve Ireland's medieval urban heritage since 2007.
3. Saving the best preserved abandoned medieval town in either Ireland or the UK. By working in partnership with the local community we have managed to save much of what remained in Rindoon, Co. Roscommon. The site now attracts over 8,000 visitors annually.
4. Developing a new format for town regeneration plans. The 'Solving our own problems' system allows

the creation of a high quality action plan within a short time span. The format involves mentors in retail, tourism, heritage, public realm, and traffic management working together with locals from the public, private, and community sectors. The first plan was done for Carrick-on-Suir.

5. This year, 48,000 people attended IWTN funded festivals and events. Since 2007, €737,000 has been provided for community festivals around the country.
6. Youghal Walled Towns Day is Ireland's largest free medieval festival. Each year it attracts 8,000 people into the town. In 2008, a KPMG report estimated that the economic benefit to the town from this one day was €480,000. If it wasn't for the IWTN allocation this festival would not be possible.
7. Since 2011, almost 900 people have attended 33 IWTN training events. The education programme focuses on conservation, planning/

town centre economy, heritage tourism and community group development. Its aim is to help people make better decisions about their towns.

8. In the past four years we have published guidance documents on heritage interpretation, community festivals, town regeneration and town wall conservation. All are free to download on **www.heritagecouncil.ie**
9. In 2013, our tourist website **www.irishwalledtownsnetwork.ie** was shortlisted for an Eircom Spider Award.

For further information on the network visit **www.heritagecouncil.ie/irish-walled-towns/welcome/**. You can also contact the IWTN Project Manager Liam Mannix at lmannix@heritagecouncil.ie or 056 777 0777.



Our 28 member towns:

Athenry | Athlone | Athy
Bandon | Buttevant | Carlingford
Carrickfergus | Carrick-on-Suir
Cashel | Castledermot | Clonmel
Cork | Derry-Londonderry
Drogheda | Dublin | Fethard
Galway | Kildare | Kilkenny
Kilmallock | Limerick | Loughrea
New Ross | Rindoon | Trim
Waterford | Wexford | Youghal



CASHEL

Our proposal to do more

With an existing annual budget of €260,000 and one employee, the IWTN has reached capacity. We have the experience, knowledge and structures to achieve more. However, without additional monetary support the network simply cannot do anything additional.

Towns and large villages need four things: advice and training to make better decisions; a coherent regeneration plan; a dedicated town team to coordinate actions; and financial support to help make these happen. Over the past five years the IWTN has been doing its best to provide support in all four areas. Nonetheless, despite some success, the network is unable to provide the level of service Irish towns and villages badly need. We now request the resources to rectify this (table 1). To reach its potential, this proposal for Ireland's historic towns requires a staffing compliment of five to be employed by The Heritage Council on a phased basis.

In order to encourage better decision making we propose an enlarged training and research programme. The decision makers in Ireland's towns and villages are to be further supported by a small number of advisory mentors. The mentors will also help build each town team and project manage the creation of the respective regeneration plans (i.e. *Solving our own problems* process). The improvement of the retail and tourism attractiveness of town centres is to be enhanced through funding for events and a programme of building maintenance and heritage interpretation actions. The development of the tourism infrastructure is to be additionally improved by a series of conservation and access enhancement works to historic monuments and buildings.

Each of the actions supports and builds upon the other. None is an outlier. Cumulatively, they will improve not only the liveability of the member towns but also their attractiveness as retail, tourism, and investment destinations.

In addition to expanding the scope of activities undertaken by the IWTN, it is proposed that the number involved in the new initiative be increased to at least 40 towns and villages. Should this happen, any historic town or village above a population of 1,500 could apply for membership.

All the proposed programmes are tried and tested. We know they work. Similarly, the ability of The Heritage Council to coordinate activities in a high number of towns has been proven over and over again. Consequently, if provided the requested annual amount of €1.9 million high profile results in a series of towns and villages are possible within a short time span. We know what we're doing. What is required

is the funding to bring the various programmes to a scale where truly significant positive change can happen.

Some key benefits:

- Combined construction sector stimulus of **€1,500,000** into local economies.
- Creation/support of at least **97** construction sector jobs.
- Immediate economic benefit to towns and villages from events funding of at least **€4,500,000**.
- Job creation/retention in retail and tourism.
- Preservation of our national heritage.
- Objectives of CEDRA Report, Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East supported.
- Better decision making in member towns and steady improvement in their liveability.

Table 1 **Enhanced IWTN**

Project	Current situation	Proposed	Projected Cost
Advisory service	1 project manager	5 staff	300,000
Town regeneration plans: solving our own problems	1 town a year	5 towns a year	40,000
Tourism actions	Limited fund of €15,000	Broader fund	200,000
Festivals and events	Limited fund of €85,000	Broader fund	300,000
Conservation and care of historic monuments and buildings	Limited fund of €150,000	Expanded scale and scope	1,000,000
Training	6 events a year	8 events a year	20,000
Research	Minimal, some in-house and collaboration	Research questions answered	40,000

€1,900,000

Helping towns help themselves

The proposal in detail

Membership

The benefits of membership are many (training, advice, funding). However, any organisation is only as strong as the members that are in it. Engaged, active members will ensure the best rate of return on funding, just as uninterested towns and villages will undermine it. Accordingly, membership should be by merit and not taken for-granted.

Initial enlargement of the network should be capped at 40. This will allow the new body to gain further experience and reduce the risk of failure. In order that the organisation rolls out as much of its programmes as possible all 28 existing member towns of the IWTN are to become members of the new network. These towns have gained considerable experience in working together and with the IWTN staff on heritage and urban regeneration issues. The remaining places are to be filled through a competitive process.

All member towns and villages are to adhere to the following criteria:

- Create a town team made up of a cross section of representatives from the public, private, and community sectors. The group is to meet a minimum of four times a year.
- Two points of contact are to be nominated from the town team. One is to be from the local authority. The other should be from the local private or community sector.
- An annual membership fee of €2,000 per annum is to be paid by each member town and village.
- Members are to send representatives to at least two training days a year.
- Members are to send a representative to the AGM.

By adhering to a minimal set of qualifying criteria and a competitive entry process only the places most interested in heritage led urban regeneration will end up as members. It is these towns and villages that will best use the network's grants, research, and advice.

The model of the enhanced IWTN is easily amenable to additional expansion beyond the initial 40 towns and villages. For every ten members another mentor and a further €475,000 should be added to the organisation. This will ensure quality of service to all members and maintain the strong, positive impacts from the grant programmes.

Benefits:

- Motivated, engaged members mean that value for money and impressive results are assured.
- Initial retention of IWTN towns means that multiple quick wins are possible.



NEWTOWN JERPOINT, KILKENNY

Administration

The IWTN is not a top down organisation. Rather, it exists to help its members. The network's activities are controlled by a steering committee. The committee is made up of representatives from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Northern Ireland Department of Environment, The Heritage Council and several member towns. Oversight and governance is provided by The Heritage Council which also administers all finances. It is proposed that in the expanded network additional members will be sought from Fáilte Ireland, a third level planning department, and private sector groups such as Chambers Ireland or Retail Excellence Ireland. This will broaden the expertise available and more accurately represent the scope of the enhanced organisation. We will continue our existing practice of holding an AGM at the beginning of each year.

Putting into practice what the committee decides will be five energetic and knowledgeable members of staff. The staff will work from The Heritage Council's offices in Kilkenny. This will reduce operational costs and allow the network to connect into people with additional expertise.

Benefits:

- Good governance and transparency assured.
- Cost effective operations.
- Development of a heritage innovation hub.



DOMINICAN PRIORY, KILMALLOCK

Advisory service

At present, there is only one project manager running all the IWTN's grant, training, and research programmes. This has made it almost impossible for that member of staff to provide anything but intermittent short-term help to towns trying to overcome difficulties. As a result, the model employed by the network has been one of self help. Unfortunately, due to complex socio-economic reasons and low levels of relevant staff in local authorities, many places find it difficult to create and follow through on incisive solutions. These places need support and mentoring. Consequently, we propose creating an advisory service that all member towns and villages can rely on to provide expert advice on planning, retail, tourism, and heritage issues.

We are seeking four professionals with differing but complementary skills. Each mentor will be the point of contact for ten towns. A fifth member of staff will be required to carry out administration work,

manage the various grants schemes, and be the webmaster of the organisation's website.

Cost: €300,000

Please note that the above amount also includes necessary support costs.

Benefits:

- Cost effective panel of experts that each member town and village can draw upon for help.
- Better retail, planning, tourism, and heritage decisions.
- Better grant applications for bespoke projects from members.
- Steady improvement in the liveability of towns and villages and their ability to act as tourism and retail destinations.



ATHENRY MEDIEVAL FESTIVAL

Town regeneration plans: solving our own problems

Without a coherent strategy either little will be done, or alternatively, what is completed will lack a unity of purpose. Last year, the IWTN successfully trialled a new approach in developing a town centre plan. The method required people in the public, private, and community sectors of one town – Carrick-on-Suir – to work shoulder to shoulder. Aided by mentors in heritage tourism, planning/architecture, public realm, roads/parking, and retail, residents came together over a weekend to analyse the town’s problems and come up with practical solutions.

The workshops and resulting plan did not focus on outside agencies. Rather, it concentrated on what the town could do to help itself. Prior to the event the five mentors had reviewed the local development plan and other relevant documents. Their job was not to come up with the answers. Instead, their role was to inspire, guide, and encourage bespoke

actions that came from the people of Carrick-on-Suir themselves. A great advantage of this technique is that the individuals who will have to implement the plan have a sense of ownership over it. This increases the likelihood of implementation. Another benefit of getting the people of the town to work together is that misunderstandings between the public, private and community sectors can be reduced. As a result, trust was increased and expectations moderated. This in turn led to more reasonable solutions and a fostering of teamwork.

The resulting plan is now being used by various public and private groups in Carrick-on-Suir when deciding their own actions and as a tool in funding applications. From the workshop to the final report took just three months.

The IWTN now proposes to roll out the *Solving our own problems* approach across all towns and villages in the planned rural towns and villages network. The reports will be primarily implemented by the respective town teams.

Cost: €40,000 per annum

Benefits:

- Better decision making.
- The development of empathy and working relationships between a member's public, private, and community sectors.
- The ability to track progress.



MURAL, MUTTON LANE, CORK

Tourism actions

Today's cultural tourists want authentic experiences. They want to feel as if they are discovering something not many other tourists see. Ireland's towns and villages already have that. As part of the *Solving our own problems* process each member's historic and cultural attributes will be catalogued. Following this, ways of protecting, developing, bundling, and promoting the most interesting of the sights and activities will be identified. This approach is in accordance with the methodology set out in the Historic Towns Initiative framework documents.

Grants of up to €10,000 will be made available to provide access to significant places and conduct heritage interpretation actions. Eligible actions will include: signage, murals, inlay paving, audio guides, health and safety compliance for historic buildings, gates, stiles and seating. The IWTN publication *Bored of boards: ideas for interpreting heritage sites* provides advice on how best to tell the stories of our towns' heritage.

Cost: €200,000 per annum

Benefits:

- Increasing the number of accessible tourist attractions.
- Visitor experience enhanced.
- Increasing the length of stay in the town or village.
- Increased tourism attractiveness of towns and villages.
- As more tourists are attracted, jobs are created.
- Objectives of the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East supported.
- Improved knowledge of member's heritage by locals.



Festivals and events

A programme of events and festivals is one of the best ways of encouraging tourists and locals to visit historic town centres. This year, 48,000 attend IWTN funded events throughout the country. Considering that all the network can provide is €85,000 and that the events are either run or heavily dependent on unpaid volunteers, this is an outstanding figure. Combined with the fact that several funded festivals have gone on to win National Heritage Week Awards, this is all the more impressive. These results are possible because the network has encouraged - through reflection, mentoring and training - the development of a set of events best suited to the towns and the abilities of the organisers.

The economic benefit is remarkable. In 2008, a KPMG report estimated that the economic benefit to Youghal from its medieval festival was €480,000. A recent survey from two IWTN funded events showed the average personal spend from attendees was €25 a head. Consequently, even without

incorporating an economic multiplier effect, the immediate economic benefit to the towns from the €85,000 invested was €1.2 million.

Without additional funding many of the annual events cannot progress. Despite most obtaining some private sector sponsorship they still need additional help. Remember, the people involved are usually volunteers. We now propose to fulfil the potential of the events by providing additional financial support. The added funding will also be used for new events throughout the enlarged network. In order for the new events to be suitable to the towns and villages, the mentors will enter into discussions with the relevant town teams. Training will also be provided.

Cost: €300,000 per annum

Benefits:

- Immediate economic return of at least **€4,500,000.**
- Increasing the level of visitor expenditure.
- Increasing the length of stay in the town or village.
- Improving destination awareness.
- Increasing civic pride.
- Job creation.



YOUGHAL TOWN WALLS

Conservation & enhancement of historic monuments & buildings

Without their historic buildings and monuments Ireland's towns and villages become anywhere places. Medieval town walls, Georgian terraces, and tower houses add distinctiveness that no non-descript retail park can match. They are also part of each place's tourism infrastructure. Accordingly, we propose not only carrying out significant conservation work to prominent monuments and buildings but also conducting smaller maintenance actions to structures on historic streets.

Since 2007, the IWTN has spent €6.35 million on preserving our town wall heritage. We estimate that the cost of saving the remaining unsafe sections is €4 million. In places like York, Dubrovnik, and Derry, walking the walls is a core part of the city experience. Consequently, over the next five years we intend to resolve the remaining dangerous town wall sections and judiciously install wall walks in towns such as Youghal and Athenry. The programme of large scale

conservation works will also be open to other structure types including: Victorian public buildings, Georgian terraces, medieval churches and urban tower houses.

An aesthetically pleasant town centre is important not only to its desirability as a shopping destination but also to its attractiveness for tourists. Traditionally, attention has been split between large scale public realm works and simple actions involving cleaning and planting. Lost in between has been a focus on maintaining of the historic structures that makes our townscapes such enjoyable places to be in. In order to remedy this, towns will be supplied with up to €25,000 to conduct non structural maintenance actions. The amount is to be matched by the relevant County Council. Eligible works will include: historic window repairs; gutter clearing and repair; painting facades with appropriate colours, and repairs to door joinery, roofs and chimneys. The replacement of inappropriate windows with historically appropriate examples will

also be fundable. Eligible buildings must be located in the town centre and be one of the following: listed as a protected structure; located within an architectural conservation area, or listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. The result of this action will be improved streetscapes and conserved buildings. The maintenance approach also ensures that future repair costs are considerably mitigated against.

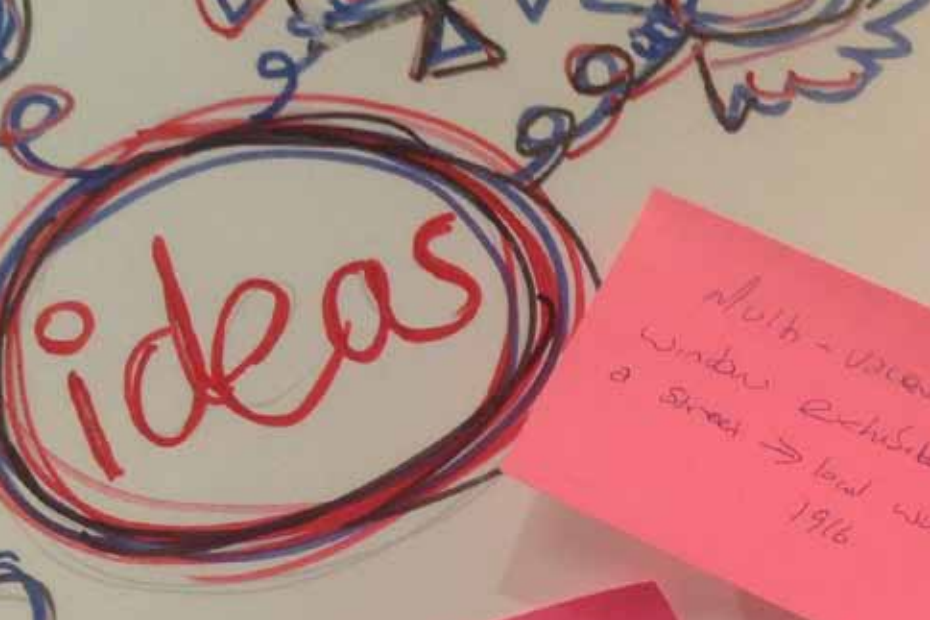
Beyond the long term improvement to the retail and tourism quality of members, there are immediate benefits to be gained from investing in our heritage. It is worth noting that even with the IWTN's significantly reduced programme of works, 31 construction sector jobs were supported in 2014. Furthermore, due to its labour intensive nature and use of local materials, conservation projects provide the best value from State construction sector funding. Indeed, according to the 2014 Bacon report, public expenditure on

conservation creates over three times the estimated employment than that spent on infrastructure.

Cost: €1,000,000 per annum

Benefits:

- Economic stimulus of **€1,500,000** into local economies.
- Creation/retention of at least **97** construction sector jobs.
- Job creation/retention in retail and tourism.
- Historic sites accessible to visitors.
- Tourism attractiveness of members increased.
- Enhanced retail experience for shoppers.
- Use of historic structures encouraged.
- Long term cost savings of maintenance over expensive repairs.
- Higher scores in the Tidy Towns competition.
- Health and safety issues addressed.
- Preservation of our national heritage.



ideas

... tips or let a people ...
thank you.
AOLIFE website is good for
for which events guidelines

Multi-vacant space
Window exhibition along
a street → local news??
1916

An IRISH
POPUP

Any chance of getting copies
of Presentations (PP)?
OR Video/DVD?

Public museum
as a method of bridging
the gap between unpublished
archaeological reports and the
public.

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Oral interviews crucial
as generation of a certain
era in Ireland passing on +
it important to capture their
experiences + memories before
it is too late.

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can use this as an advert
for progress to a ...
Might ...
a put on a good show.

Training

The best way of ensuring Ireland's towns and villages are great places to live, work and visit is by empowering the locals and council staff with the knowledge they need to make decisions. To make this happen, an education plan will be devised in conjunction with key stakeholders. The plan will not focus on one single issue. Instead, a holistic approach will be taken with five strands running in parallel: conservation; planning; town centre economy; heritage tourism; and community group development. The concept is that the various themes will be mutually supportive and attract a broader base of people into taking part than would otherwise do so. Our objective is to run up to eight workshops, seminars and conferences a year. One of these will be a high profile investing in historic towns and villages conference where success stories will be communicated.

The network has great experience in running training events. Over the past five years almost 900 people have attended 33 IWTN conferences and workshops. In 2013, the existing training programme won the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/ Europa Nostra Award.

Cost: €20,000 per annum

Benefits:

- Better educated decision makers.
- Higher quality festivals and events.
- Improved retailer skills and development of effective shop local schemes.
- Better maintenance of historic fabric.
- Steady improvement in the liveability of towns and villages and their ability to act as tourism and retail destinations.



BALLYBEG PRIORY, BUTTEVANT

Research

The ability of key decision makers to make incisive place specific policies and actions that will make Irish towns and villages better places in which to live, work and visit is being undermined by a knowledge deficiency. Firstly, many management decisions in towns and villages are either based upon foreign research or conclusions drawn from studies on cities. Secondly, the research that is being conducted in Irish third level institutes rarely makes it to the people who need it most. And finally, there are significant information gaps that need to be filled. Combined, all three are damaging our ability to plan for the future. In order to address this, the following actions are proposed:

1. Create a research framework with strategic partners to identify key areas of concern. Following this, funding will be supplied to conduct the research. Likely topics include:
 - Retail development in historic town centres:

- analysis and best practice case studies
 - Incorporating archaeology and heritage into new developments: advisory document
 - Tourism management in historic towns and large villages: advisory document
 - Bundling your place's attractions and creating a viable tourist product: advisory document
 - Effective community engagement: advisory document
 - Best practice for business improvement districts: analysis and best practice case studies
2. Provide up to €1,500 for classes from third level institutes to conduct research in Irish towns and villages. This action encourages real world research and connects town decision makers to both interesting work and relevant academics. The IWTN has already been carrying out a slightly lower cost programme that has proved beneficial to participating towns and students.

3. Develop the Historic Towns Research Awards. For the past two years the IWTN has run an awards scheme acknowledging the best in student research. The resulting conference is a great opportunity for town decision makers to meet academics. It also promotes research in the area.
4. All published material is to be made available online.

The creation of a research framework is also a key recommendation of the Heritage Council's policy proposal's for Ireland's towns.

Cost: €40,000 per annum

Benefits:

- Easier evidence based decision making.
- Enables Ireland to lead on best practice.
- Students gain real world experience.
- Research on towns encouraged.
- Several research jobs are supported/created.



BLACK FRIARY, TRIM

Helping towns help themselves



www.heritagecouncil.ie/irish-walled-towns/welcome/

www.irishwalledtownsnetwork.ie

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