

## Grant Aid for Building Conservation - 'Quanta' Research

### Executive Summary - The Heritage Council 2011

The Heritage Council received a grant in 2010 from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to implement the Government Policy on Architecture 2009 - 2015. Council used this funding to commission consultants to carry out a research study and report related to Action 18 (*'to carry out an analysis of the operation and efficiency of existing grant-aid and tax relief programmes supporting architectural heritage protection'*). The study specifically set out to provide an analysis of the amounts of money that are offered ('quanta'), and how effective they are.

The schemes analysed were:

Scheme	Administering organisation	Source of funds	When operating
<b>1 Buildings At Risk</b>	Heritage Council	Heritage Council	1997 until 2010
<b>2 Large-Scale Properties not in State Care</b>	Heritage Council	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2010 – present (previously 'Special Conservation Grants' 2003 -2009)
<b>3 Significant Places of Public Worship</b>	Heritage Council	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2008 - present
<b>4 REPS4 Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme</b>	Heritage Council	Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food	2008 - present
<b>5 Local Authority Conservation Grant</b>	34 Local Authorities	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	1999 – present (currently 'paused')
<b>6 Civic Structures</b>	Built Heritage and Architectural Policy Section	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2006 – 2010 (previously urban and village renewal scheme 1994 – 2005)
<b>7 Thatch Roof Repair and Renewal</b>	Housing Section	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	1991 - present

Several of the seven grant schemes that are not currently, or are no longer, operating. It is timely, in these circumstances to evaluate the objectives of grant-giving, and the effectiveness of the recent arrangements, and to learn lessons from the experience of recent years. Four of the seven schemes examined were administered by the Heritage Council. The Department of the Environment, Heritage

and Local Government were involved directly in two others and indirectly, through the local authorities, in a third.

The methodology of comparison employed highlights the strengths and weaknesses of Council's and the Department's grant-giving regimes. The report highlights the economic and social value of the funding, individually and collectively, at a time when there is pressure on public-sector funding for conservation. It is intended to inform future discussion on grant-giving for the architectural heritage by establishing a relevant and up-to-date review and analysis.

The consultant's final report has been amended for presentation to Council by the addition of a foreword and a discussion of four major issues written by Council's architecture officer. The report now consists of four parts – the consultant's analysis of the seven schemes, the review of the four main issues identified, recommendations, and technical appendices containing detailed the financial analysis and characterisations of the schemes.

Grant schemes for the conservation of structures share a headline objective, but differ in both their aims and outcomes as a result of changes of emphasis in criteria and administrative arrangements. These encompass the following:

- (a) Safeguarding and weatherproofing buildings and other structures as cultural, social, economic and environmental resources (all schemes)
- (b) Fostering a market in building conservation contracting (all)
- (c) Fostering a market in the supply of traditional building materials (all)
- (d) Maintaining and enhancing the tourism resource (all, but in particular, Large-Scale Properties not in State Care, Significant Places of Public Worship Fund)
- (e) Enhancement of landscapes and streetscapes (contribution to the landscape is a specific criterion of the Traditional Farm Building grant scheme)
- (f) Providing professional advice and moral support to the owners and occupants of special buildings for their role as custodians of the architectural heritage (most notable in small-scale grants to owner-occupiers)
- (g) Encouraging owners to enhance their construction and conservation skills (encouraged in the Traditional Farm Building grant scheme)
- (h) Transmission of concepts of conservation, care and stewardship to owners and guardians of special places ( especially Local Authority Protected Structures grants)
- (i) Fostering a market in professional conservation advice
- (j) Encouraging good practice in building conservation by standard-setting through grant conditions
- (k) Encouraging the expenditure of private sector funding through matching expenditure conditions, making resource conservation a more attractive option than resource-intensive 'knock-down and rebuild' options.

- (l) Fulfilling the State's undertakings as a signatory of international conventions, especially the Granada Convention on the Conservation of the Architectural Heritage.

In light of the multiple social benefits outlined above, grant-giving for architectural heritage conservation can be seen to achieve value for money

The report's terms of reference lists 22 questions, relating to grant-giving for building conservation in Ireland. A section of the report, a policy discussion, focussed on four of these key questions:

- ~ Whether or not the amount of grant offered was crucial to the decision to carry out the conservation works project
- ~ Whether the project works can be characterised as preventative maintenance or the remedy of neglect, and whether grant scheme 'Schemes of Priority' (required of local authorities by Circular PD 5/99) or other criteria provide a clear and rational basis for decision making in this regard
- ~ Whether or not the works grant-aided ensured that the structure remains socially useful
- ~ Proportion of matching funding from other State sources, and non-State sources

A further two key questions deserve to be addressed –

- ~ Whether stipulations regarding public procurement procedures have an impact on outcomes (as, for example, when end-of-year grant deadlines also apply)
- ~ Cost of administration

It is recognised that the information needed to analyse the cost of administration of the grant schemes is difficult to access.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The significant recommendations emerging from the report are as follows:

- (a) The State should support a coherent overall strategy for grant giving for the conservation of the architectural heritage that includes a framework of 'quanta' of grant aid which recognises that different amounts of funding can achieve different objectives, and that the State aspires to meet these different requirements through the schemes that it fosters. A future framework of grant-giving should permit the delivery of a range of grant amounts from €500 to €5,000,000. It should allow for the monitoring and co-ordination of grant-giving on an on-going basis. The 'Action 18 Review' should take into account the broad economic value, value for money and effectiveness of grant-giving, and the policy lessons to be learnt from past experience of supporting the built heritage sector.
- (b) The national grant-giving policy framework should ensure the conservation of (a) structures of national significance that require large-scale funding, (b) structures that are not yet

recognised as being of sufficient heritage value to be included in Records of Protected Structures, but which may do so in the future, and (c) particular types of structures that, because of their nature, are vulnerable, e.g. thatched buildings, or places of worship.

- (c) The local authority protected structures grant function should be continued due to the local familiarity of conservation officers with the structures, and strong educational, and expert advice service provision, element in this scheme, and in support of the regulatory role of the local authority in protecting the architectural heritage
- (d) Criteria for all grant schemes should be re-shaped to prioritise, or at least not exclude, preventative maintenance, including the preparation of programmes of on-going repairs, condition reports and quinquennial inspection regimes.
- (e) Grant schemes should recognise voluntary effort by non-owners as a valid economic contribution to projects.
- (f) In all grant-giving for architectural heritage, there should be cross-compliance with other heritage conservation aims.
- (g) As certain types of building conservation projects are more worthwhile to invest in than others, the Heritage Council should amend its grant scheme criteria for building conservation works to give consideration (but not overriding priority) to the following;
  - 1. Small scale works of preventative maintenance; studies that help to organise and prioritise the process of repair and maintenance, such as quinquennial inspections
  - 2. Works that permit the custodian of a structure of significant interest to make use of it, or to continue to make use of it, because of its public value
  - 3. Projects that exemplify good conservation practice, and that, in so doing, provide training or educative opportunity for the construction trades people involved.
  - 4. Buildings that are of sufficient national special interest as to merit being protected even if they do not currently have a function in society.
  - 5. Buildings that contribute to our sense of place by the role that they play in landscape or streetscape, and thereby form our identity
- (h) Criteria should be re-focussed to support the utilisation of and achievement of conservation standards in, specialist skills, e.g., thatching, joinery repair, high-quality lead- and slate-work.
- (i) It is recommended that there should be a single thatching grant scheme which would rationalise the various current funding sources and build on existing expertise and experience. A working group be established to set up the new scheme based upon collaboration between existing agencies.
- (j) It is recommended that other forms of financial relief should be explored, that could supplement or run in parallel to capital grants. This could include lower VAT on conservation work and services.