

Historic Towns Initiative 2027

Information for Local Authorities: Call for Applications

Opening date: Friday 27 November 2026
Closing date: 5pm Friday 19 February 2027

Information Workshop for Applicants 15 January 2027 at 10.00am
Register here

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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Introduction

Many of our city, town and village centres are historic places with their own distinct identities. Sustaining these is a complex process that in many cases involves the conservation and re-use of existing buildings, the care of public spaces and the provision of community facilities. The conservation and interpretation of this heritage makes our towns interesting, unique and attractive to residents and visitors.

In support of *Town Centre First: a policy approach for Irish towns* (2022), the Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) is a joint undertaking by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Heritage Council which aims to promote the heritage-led regeneration of Ireland's historic towns.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 sets out a roadmap for Ireland's transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by no later than the end of the year 2050. This shift to a climate neutral future means that the conservation and repurposing of existing historic building stock has become increasingly more important. Existing buildings contain embodied energy which is lost if they are demolished; while the greenhouse-gas emissions involved in the demolition and replacement of a building have been calculated to take decades to recover.

The sustainable use of the historic buildings of our towns has added benefits in increasing the quality of life for all by offering reduced commuting as these buildings are generally closer to amenities and services. More directly the impacts of climate change on our built heritage are increasingly evident and should be taken into account in any proposals under the HTI. These impacts may be both immediate and cumulative – so that damage from catastrophic events such as floods and storms are likely to increase at the same time as the slow-onset of changes in deterioration processes. The built heritage is also vulnerable to maladaptation, that is, the inadvertent loss or damage to structures and sites during adaptation works. With increased weathering and severe climate events, the repair cycle on the built heritage of our towns is likely to become shorter. Increased maintenance, repairs, and the reduction in energy usage will be key to building resilience in our historic buildings and towns to enable them to withstand the effects of a changing environment. In addition, well-maintained buildings promote heritage skills and enhance the attractiveness of our shared built environment.

The HTI has been in operation since 2018 and to date has supported heritage-led regeneration projects in the following towns: Youghal, Bantry, Midleton, Passage West and Macroom and Castletownbere, Co Cork; Kells, Navan and Duleek, Co Meath; Carrick on Suir, Nenagh and Tipperary town, Co Tipperary; Portlaoise, Co Laois; Kilmallock, Co Limerick; Ballina and Ballinrobe, Co Mayo; Roscommon town, Strokestown and Boyle, Co Roscommon; Lisdoonvarna and Kilrush, Co Clare; Callan, Co Kilkenny; Ballymote and Sligo town, Co Sligo; Letterkenny, Ramelton, Raphoe, Glenties, and Ballyshannon, Co Donegal; Clones and Monaghan town, Co Monaghan; Lismore and Tramore, Co Waterford; Listowel, Tralee and Castleisland, Co Kerry; Enniscorthy and Wexford town, Co Wexford; Birr, Co Offaly; Naas, Co Kildare; Carlow town, Co Carlow; Greystones, Co Wicklow.

Drawing on the experiences of the programme in 2018-26 this nationwide programme will continue in 2027 administered by the Heritage Council. The Historic Towns Initiative will award up to a total of **€2 million** competitively to a number of historic towns for heritage-led urban regeneration projects in 2027.

Heritage-led Regeneration

The HTI pilot developed a framework approach to regenerating a town based on the principles of heritage-led regeneration. This framework and a review of the HTI pilot programme are available on the Heritage Council website here.

The steps in the framework include an audit of the character and identity of the town, building up local support, identifying the challenges and opportunities, developing a vision for the future of the town supported by an action plan and carrying out those actions. The framework and review are a useful source of information for local authorities considering an application for funding under the HTI 2027.

The HTI relies on the strength of local communities and businesses to regenerate their historic town, supported by local and national government and other agencies committed to improving the quality of life for the town. Examples of activities in other towns can be found in the online links at the end of this document.

The Historic Towns Initiative

The Historic Towns Initiative aims to provide support to historic towns engaged in a programme of heritage-led regeneration. In 2027 we are interested in projects that address dereliction in town centres, that encourage a proactive approach to maintenance and repair, that propose the re-use of historic structures and that can act as a demonstrator for future projects. We will continue with two funding Streams for the HTI 2027.

Under **Stream 1** this year we are seeking proposals for capital works to repair and enhance the heritage of the town through heritage-led regeneration projects designed and implemented by local authorities, projects that encourage private owners and/or occupiers to invest in appropriate conservation-led works and repairs, projects that address dereliction, the conservation of landmark buildings, streetscape maintenance and conservation projects, and conservation-led public realm works which encourage investment from other sources. Projects which work within an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and which will promote this designation are also sought. Applications must show how they will build resilience in the historic built environment of the town to enable it to withstand the effects of climate change. Match funding of 20% is required from the local authority or owners under Stream 1.

Complex and ambitious proposals (e.g., streetscape wide projects involving multiple buildings/owners) which encourage private owners and/or occupiers to invest in appropriate conservation-led works and repairs may be phased over two years, i.e., 2027 and 2028, subject to a maximum award of **€350,000** in total per town.

Successful applicants should check their Letter of Offer for details of how funding is to be spent over the two years, where applicable. This letter will include contractual, procurement and governance conditions.

Under **Stream 2**, we will support applications to deliver a heritage-led regeneration plan (please see above for details of the HTI framework) which will examine the existing heritage of a town and determine what conservation focused interventions are required. The resulting plan should ultimately inform future grant applications. Under Stream 2 we will award up to €50,000 per town for heritage-led regeneration plans. Match funding of 20% is required from the local authority under Stream 2. Local authorities may apply for more than one Stream 1 and Stream 2 projects.

Funding Available

A total fund of €2 million (capital funding) is available to local authorities under the HTI 2027. A 20% minimum matching contribution will be required (please see below). The extent of matching resources will be taken into account in the assessment of applications.

Operation of the HTI 2027

- The HTI will be administered by the Heritage Council, as advised by the HTI National Steering Group.
- Each local authority may apply for Stream 1 and Stream 2 projects for funding under the HTI for historic towns in their functional area. Applications will only be accepted from local authorities. There is no limit on the number of applications per local authority area.
- The programme is intended to support a small number of towns in 2027. Funding will be allocated on a competitive basis, in accordance with the assessment criteria set out below. It will not be possible to support all applications in this round.
- Applications will be assessed by the HTI National Steering Group which will make recommendations to the Board of the Heritage Council for funding under the programme.
- In the case of Stream 1, priority will be given to applications that are 'plan-led', i.e. in line with a HTI Management Plan based on the HTI framework, or a Conservation Plan, or a Public Realm Plan, conservation actions identified in a Town Centre First Plan, or eligible actions from a Town Centre Health Check Plan, or equivalent.
- It is expected that local authorities will work with a range of partners in delivering Stream 1 or 2 HTI 2027 projects and evidence of such partnerships, e.g., letters of support and/or expressions of interest, should be included with any application.
- We are encouraging local authorities to partner with owners of historic buildings and not for profit groups in possession of historic buildings in need of conservation
- Funding for each successful town in Stream 1 will be in the region of €150,000 -€350,000, depending on the projects proposed. Applications should reflect the scale of the likely funding available and the identified actions should be achievable within the allocated funding timeframe, i.e., in 2027. Applications under Stream 1 which are complex and ambitious (e.g., streetscape wide projects involving multiple buildings/owners) may project spending over 2027-2028, and such applications should clearly set this out.
- Projects funded under the HTI should show strong public engagement. Examples how this might be done include demonstrations, traditional skills training, community or NGO-management, or encouraging under-represented groups to take part or to share their heritage. It is expected that successful towns will hold an event about their projects during Heritage Week 2027.

Application Process for HTI

Each local authority is invited to apply in respect of historic towns in their functional area where a programme of suitable heritage-led regeneration projects (Stream 1) or the need for a heritage-led regeneration plan (Stream 2) has been identified by the local authority, working with a town partnership team or local steering group.

Applications should succinctly set out:

- the significance of the town and its heritage
- any relevant policies and objectives for the town in the County Development Plan, Local Area Plan etc
- the town's track record to-date in heritage-led regeneration, such as the involvement of an Architectural Conservation Officer and/or Heritage Officer in the local authority area in which the town is located
- the vision for the town as set out in any relevant management plan, conservation plan, Town Centre First Plan, public realm plan, etc.
- the project(s) that would be funded under the HTI and how these would promote heritage-led regeneration within an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and/or the wider the town
- details of the project in question, e.g., a specification, costing etc. **It will be advantageous for applications to include a specification for works compiled by a conservation professional**
- partnerships for the delivery of the HTI project(s) including any letters of support, etc.
- the extent of matching funding and contribution-in-kind proposed
- leadership, i.e., a named coordinator within the local authority responsible for successful delivery of the programme.

Assessment Criteria

A demonstrable track record in caring for the historic environment of the town will be a distinct advantage. Works should support the creation of vibrant and attractive places where people will want to live, work, visit and invest. Conservation works in the historic urban core should encourage private sector and community confidence. Applications will be scored under the following criteria:

- The extent to which private owners and/or occupiers or community groups will address dereliction and promote appropriate maintenance **(30%)**
- The town's track record to date in heritage-led regeneration, the extent to which the application fulfils the aims of the HTI, and is likely to make a **significant contribution** to the heritage-led regeneration of the town **(20%)**
- The quality of the project(s) proposed **(20%)**
- How the project would build resilience in the historic built environment of the town to enable it to withstand the effects of climate change **(15%)**
- The presence of a vibrant and engaged community who would support the implementation of the Initiative **(15%)**

What Towns Are Eligible?

Almost all Irish towns are historic in origin. A town seeking to benefit from the HTI should possess **significant** cultural and heritage assets and have a distinctive sense of place. Historic towns include those of medieval and pre-medieval foundation, plantation towns, planned estate towns and those established around local industries.

Urban centres designated as Special Regeneration Areas under the Living City Initiative **are not eligible to apply**. This includes areas within Dublin, Galway, Cork, Kilkenny, Waterford, Limerick and the recent addition of Athlone, Sligo, Drogheda, Dundalk and Letterkenny. However, we will consider projects involving publicly owned buildings in these areas, i.e., buildings/projects that are not eligible for the Living Cities Initiative tax relief.

What Works Are Eligible?

1. Capital works to maintain, repair and enhance the heritage of the town in line with a programme assessed by the HTI National Steering Group and approved by the Heritage Council. This may include:
    - Heritage-led regeneration projects meeting the criteria set out above which are designed and implemented by local authorities
    - Projects that encourage private owners and/or occupiers to invest in appropriate conservation-led works and repairs in historic buildings
    - Projects that address the conservation of landmark buildings, improved maintenance and general improvements to streetscapes and conservation-led public realm works which encourage investment from other sources
    - Projects that would build resilience in the historic built environment of the town to enable it to withstand the effects of climate change
    - Projects to retain and enhance character in an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and which will promote the value of an ACA designation
2. All grant-aided work under the HTI must respect the character and special interest of individual buildings and the heritage of the town in general.
3. Works must be in accordance with best practice principles contained within the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2011) and relevant volumes in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's Advice Series.
4. All statutory requirements for the protection of heritage must be met – including natural, archaeological and architectural heritage.
5. Where grant funding is sought for conservation and re-use of vacant buildings, information shall be provided on a sustainable proposed future use.

How To Apply

Applications will only be accepted from local authorities. Applications must be made via the Heritage Council online grants management system here. Hard copy or emailed applications will not be accepted.

What Happens Next?

- A webinar will be held by the Heritage Council on **15 January from 10.00am to 12.00pm** for local authority personnel interested in applying for the HTI 2027.
- The deadline for receipt of online applications is **5pm on Friday 19 February 2027**. Applications received after this date will not be considered.
- The Heritage Council will notify applicants of the outcome of the assessment following Board approval in **early March 2027**.

Recoupment Of Grant Funding

Grant awards must be recouped from the Heritage Council within the 2027 calendar year (Except for the projects that are approved to run over 2 years). Funds not claimed at the end of the year will be forfeit.

Works must be completed and verified by the local authority before grant funding can be recouped. A report detailing the works carried out must be signed by the Architectural Conservation Officer or Heritage Officer or a member of the local authority's professional staff with oversight of the project. This must be accompanied by proof of payment i.e., a signed letter from the Director of Finance and relevant Director of Service stating that monies claimed have been expended.

Value Added Tax (VAT) is allowable under this scheme only for that portion of capital works being funded and only in circumstances where such VAT is not recoverable under this scheme by any other means.

Recoupment is via the online payments process on the Heritage Council's online grants management system. **The date for submission of final claims and reporting to the Heritage Council is 10 November 2027.**

Matching Funding Requirement

Matching funding of **at least 20% of total project expenditure** is required for each project funded.

Where a building is in local authority ownership the requirement for 20% matching funding can be met from local authority financial resources. In-kind contributions (e.g., the salaried time of publicly funded personnel) from the local authority can be cited as a contribution but this should only be in addition to matching funding (i.e., in-kind local authority contributions cannot make up the minimum of 20% matching funding). Confirmation of matching funding approval is required from the local authority at Director of Service level at application stage.

Where a HTI project is also funded under other grant schemes financed by the Exchequer or the EU, the cumulative total of such funding must not exceed 80% of the total project cost. Any HTI grant funding provided to a local authority that is subsequently recovered from the owner/occupier under the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts must be refunded to the Heritage Council.

There will be a requirement for interim progress reports. Where sufficient progress is not evident in these reports, the Heritage Council, on the advice of the HTI National Steering Group, reserves the right to reallocate funding to other approved HTI projects.

Useful Resources

Heritage Council publication *Ballybrilliant: heritage-led regeneration in 5 Irish towns* (2018) available on the Heritage Council website **here**.

Information on case studies can be found in the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland publication *Creating Vibrant Places: the RIAI town and village toolkit* **here** and in the publication *Old House, New Home* **here**.

Our urban centres contain a large amount of underused building stock. The sensitive reuse of such floor space at ground level and on upper floors should be encouraged. In relation to this, attention is drawn to the publication *Bringing Back Homes: Manual for the reuse of existing buildings* **here**.

Town Centre First: a policy approach for Irish towns (2022) **here**.

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