

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020

### **Heritage Council celebrates 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

Heritage is at the heart of Irish communities and shapes our identity, not just as a nation, but also as a society. That's according to chief executive of the Heritage Council, Virginia Teehan, speaking as the Heritage Council marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Established in 1995 as a result of the Heritage Bill that was introduced by then Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Michael D Higgins, it promotes interest, education, knowledge, and pride in our heritage. It reaches into communities across the country by working with groups such as public authorities, educational bodies, youth groups, and many other organisations. In doing this, it promotes a knowledge and appreciation of built, natural and cultural heritage, such as monuments, archaeological objects, architectural heritage, flora and fauna, heritage gardens, wildlife habitats, seascapes, wrecks, geology, traditional skills and past times, to name but a few areas.

The Heritage Council also provides policy advice for Government on heritage issues such as sustainability, landscape management, high nature value farming, forestry, and climate change.

Paying tribute to President Michael D Higgins for his role in establishing the Heritage Council, Ms Teehan said: "He had the vision of bringing our heritage into our homes, our hearts and our communities."

She added: "Our heritage is precious. It is invaluable to the country's economic wellbeing, but also to the wellbeing of every Irish resident. Heritage plays a huge part in our tourism sector, and in turn in our economy. While we have always appreciated how important it is to our individual, physical, mental, and social wellbeing, this has never been more obvious than during the current pandemic, when the restrictions brought a new focus on the hidden heritage in our local areas.

"The Heritage Council has achieved so much over the past 25 years in highlighting the value of our heritage. We continually build new relationships with communities across the country, through voluntary groups, schools, local and national government, and the national cultural institutions to develop a wide understanding across society of the value of our heritage and building capacity for organisations and communities to continue their heritage work. Standout initiatives include:

- The heritage officer programme, which has resulted in a heritage officer role in most local authorities across the country.
- The Heritage in Schools programme is marking its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. For primary school children, it aims to generate greater awareness, respect, interest in and appreciation of our heritage among 4-12-year-olds by encouraging teachers and pupils to engage with their local heritage in a hands-on, interactive and meaningful way through place-based learning and learning in the outdoor classroom.
- The Museum Standards Programme for Ireland was established in 2007 and benchmarks and promotes professional standards of care in collections in the Irish museum sector.
- Also established in 2007, the National Biodiversity Data Centre collects and manages data on Ireland's biodiversity to document our wildlife resource and to track how it is changing over time.
- In 2008, the Strategic Archaeological Research [INSTAR] Programme was launched. This research and funding programme supports Irish archaeology projects, promotes collaboration and partnerships, and features an online archaeology resource.
- In 2009, we partnered with the National Monuments Service to publish the Brú na Bóinne Research Framework project, which assesses knowledge of and research into the UNESCO World Heritage Site and proposes a strategy for future research with a view to sustainable management.
- National Heritage Week is the jewel in the crown. This year, despite the COVID-19 restrictions, more than 770 heritage groups and enthusiasts took part in National Heritage Week, when we innovated to create an online project-based initiative.
- We have also provided heritage grants over the years, including buildings; thatch; biodiversity; museums and archives publications, and communities."

Ms Teehan added: "Protection and promotion of our heritage is vitally important. It allows us to better understand who we are and how we got here. Critically, it helps us to make informed decisions on where we are going. To this end, the Heritage Council's role in advising the Government on heritage issues such as sustainability, landscape management, high nature value farming, forestry, and climate change is proving to be increasingly important."

This year has been a difficult one for the heritage sector, with COVID-19 restrictions having a deep impact as a result of closures, job losses, delays and increased home working. A Heritage Council survey conducted in April 2020 found that two-thirds of heritage sector workers suffered loss or postponement of work due to COVID-19; more than half (51%) experienced postponement or cancellation of events, and 52% had experienced temporary closure. Some 46% had experienced a lack of revenue streams.

Commenting, Ms Teehan said: "We are very appreciative of the significant increase in the Council's budget for next year. This commitment by Government will allow us to reinstate the community grants scheme and to develop a new 'inclusive heritage' programme, which aims to encourage diversity and inclusivity in heritage practice. With the support and engagement

of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, we are also identifying additional budgets that can be frontloaded into supports for heritage NGOs that have sustained significant losses due to COVID-19. This funding recognises the role that heritage plays in supporting local economies and recognises the work of communities.”

Chairman of the Heritage Council, Michael Parsons said: “When the Heritage Council was established in 1995, the concept of heritage was still generally broken up into disciplines such as archaeology and wildlife. Roles such as the local authority heritage officer did not exist. These are now funded by the Heritage Council and play a central role in promoting heritage locally. A quarter of a century later, the Heritage Council has established a wide-ranging network of collaborators - both individuals and organisations - which has made our understanding and appreciation of our heritage all the richer. I am very proud of what the Heritage Council has achieved over the past 25 years and I look forward to welcoming our new board members over the coming weeks to set the foundations for the coming years.”

## **ENDS**

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**About the Heritage Council:** The Heritage Council was established under the Heritage Act 1995 with responsibility to propose policies and priorities for the national heritage. It works in co-operation with a range of agencies, communities, and individuals to promote education, enjoyment and understanding of our national heritage. For further information, visit: [www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie).

## **Heritage Council timeline of key events**

<b>1995</b>	<b>Heritage Council established.</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>Grants Programme</b> launched.
<b>1999</b>	<b>Heritage Officer Programme</b> launched.
<b>2000</b>	<b>Heritage in Schools Programme</b> launched.
<b>2005</b>	Heritage Council assumes role of co-ordinator of <b>National Heritage Week</b> from the Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Establishment of the <b>Irish Walled Town Network</b> .
<b>2006</b>	<b>Conservation Internship Programme</b> launched.
<b>2007</b>	<b>Museum Standards Programme for Ireland</b> launched. Establishment of the <b>National Biodiversity Data Centre</b> .
<b>2008</b>	Heritage Council moves into <b>permanent headquarters</b> at the former Bishop’s Palace, Kilkenny. <b>Irish National Strategic Archaeological Research (INSTAR) Programme</b> launched.
<b>2009</b>	<b>Brú na Bóinne Research Framework project</b> published.
<b>2010</b>	<b>Heritage Maps</b> discovery tool launched.
<b>2012</b>	<b>Historic Towns Initiative</b> launched.
<b>2015</b>	<b>Adopt a Monument</b> launched.

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- 2016**      **National Town Centre Health Check Training Programme** pilot programme launched.
- 2018**      Heritage Council co-ordinates Ireland's activity as part of **European Year of Cultural Heritage**.
- 2020**      **Know your 5k** initiative launched, in conjunction with the National Museum of Ireland.
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