

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



An Roinn Cultúir,
Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta
Department of Culture,
Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Historic Towns Initiative 2019

Information for Local Authorities

and

Call for Applications

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, the provision of community facilities, and the communication and interpretation of what makes the place interesting and unique.

The Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) is a joint undertaking by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Heritage Council which aims to promote the heritage-led regeneration of Ireland's historic towns. In 2018 six towns participated and received a total of €1 million under the Historic Towns Initiative: Youghal, Co Cork, Ballinrobe, Co Mayo, Kells, Co Meath, Carrick on Suir, Co Tipperary, Portlaoise, Co Laois, and Kilmallock, Co Limerick (see below).

Drawing on the experiences of the programme in 2018 and an earlier pilot scheme this nationwide programme will continue in 2019 administered by the Heritage Council. The Historic Towns Initiative will award **€1 million** competitively to a number of historic towns for heritage-led urban regeneration projects in 2019.

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 Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht website at the following link:

<https://www.chg.gov.ie/heritage/built-heritage/architectural-heritage-advisory-service/historic-towns-initiative/>

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 2019.

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

<https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Ballybrilliant.pdf>

Aim of the Historic Towns Initiative 2019

The Historic Towns Initiative 2019 aims to provide support to historic towns engaged in a programme of heritage-led regeneration.

Funding available

A total fund of €1,000,000 (capital funding) is available to local authorities under the HTI 2019. A 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 2019

- The HTI 2019 will be administered by the Heritage Council, as advised by the HTI National Steering Group.
- Each local authority may put forward one application for funding under the HTI 2019 for a historic town in their functional area. Applications will only be accepted from local authorities.
- The programme is intended to support a small number of towns in 2019. 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.

- 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, 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 HTI 2019 projects and evidence of such partnerships, e.g. letters of support, should be included with any application.
- Funding for each successful town will be in the region of €150-200K, 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 2019.
- Projects funded under the HTI should show strong public engagement. Social media should be used to promote events where members of the public are invited in to learn about the project, and if possible to take part. Examples how this might be done include demonstrations, 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, 17-25 August 2019. However, it should be noted that any grant awarded by the HTI can be used to fund capital works only.

Application process for HTI 2019

Each local authority is invited to apply in respect of one historic town (with an indicative minimum population level of 1,500 inhabitants) in their functional area where a programme of suitable heritage-led regeneration projects has been identified by the local authority, working with a town partnership team or local steering group.

Applications should set out:

- the significance of the town and its heritage
- any relevant policies and objectives for the town in the County Development Plan
- 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, public realm plan, etc.
- the project(s) that would be funded under the HTI and how these would promote heritage-led regeneration within the town
- 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 assessed under the following criteria:

- the significance of the town and its heritage
- 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
- the quality of the project(s) proposed
- the presence of a vibrant and engaged community who would support the implementation of the Initiative.

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.

What works are eligible?

1. Capital works to 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 and to bring vacant floor area in historic buildings back into use
 - Projects that address dereliction, the conservation of landmark buildings, improved maintenance and general improvements to streetscapes and conservation-led public realm works which encourage investment from other sources
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 Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht'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. Each local authority may apply for funding for one historic town in their functional area. Applications must be made via the Heritage Council online grants management system (www.heritagecouncil.ie). Hard copy or emailed applications will not be accepted.

What happens next?

- A workshop will be held in the Heritage Council's offices in Kilkenny on **Friday 11th January 2019** for local authority personnel interested in applying for the HTI 2019. Please contact the Heritage Council at idoyle@heritagecouncil.ie to register your interest in attending (maximum of 2 attendees per local authority).
- The deadline for receipt of online applications is **5pm on Friday 8th February 2019**. Applications received after this date will not be considered.
- The Heritage Council will notify applicants of the outcome of the assessment during week commencing **25th February 2019**.

Recoupment of Grant Funding

Grant awards must be recouped from the Heritage Council within the 2019 calendar year. 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 and countersigned at Director of Service level. This must be accompanied by proof of payment i.e. printout from Agresso or similar financial system.

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 Monday 11th November 2019.**

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.

Historic Towns Initiative projects funded in 2018

In 2018 six towns were provided with €1 million under the Historic Towns Initiative: Youghal, Ballinrobe, Kells, Carrick on Suir, Portlaoise and Kilmallock.

Youghal, Co Cork

Youghal was awarded €170,000 to carry out public realm paving works adjacent to the historic Clock Tower at Barry's Lane. This public area has now been transformed into a multi-purpose plaza in the centre of the medieval town. The space can be used by many groups for activities such as open air concerts and recitals, historical talks, exhibitions, markets and festivals. This continues the process of heritage-led urban regeneration pioneered by Youghal since 2005.

Ballinrobe, Co Mayo

Funding of €180,000 for conservation works to Ballinrobe Market House has ensured that the roof has been conserved thereby providing protection to the interior and allowing the adaptive re-use of the building. Supporting projects funded under HTI 2018 enabled repairs to a prominent historic facade with existing sash windows and a historic shopfront at Walsh's Shop, Abbey Street. The theme of repair to historic sliding sash windows was continued in significant works at Robe Villa adjacent to the Bowers Walk. Significant architectural built fabric has been conserved under this scheme with traditional local skills being employed to advance the works, bringing employment to local specialist contractors including those working with lime and lead, as well as for traditional sliding sash window repair specialists and traditional roofing contractors.

Kells, Co Meath

This project involved a conservation led approach to the streetscape of Kells by collaborating with community/building owners and local craftspeople in the presentation of their buildings. The streetscape works included repairs and replacement of historic joinery, building façade painting, and the replacement of modern guttering with traditional cast iron rain water goods. The impact of works to seven privately owned properties has resulted in an improvement to the appearance of the historic streetscape. Conservation works also commenced on the historic former court house to allow the re-use of the first floor as an artist's studio and performance space. €180,000 was awarded to Meath County Council to enable these works.

Carrick on Suir, Co Tipperary

The Historic Towns Initiative 2018 for Carrick on Suir focused on properties on a section of the Main Street running to the West Gate. The project carried out works to enhance and preserve the architectural character of the streetscape. A detailed survey of each building and the associated costs were compiled by a conservation architect. This was provided to each property owner and following a one to one meeting with the architect their agreement was sought along with a commitment to make a contribution to the costs associated with their buildings. The works varied with each building but included paint schemes, gutter and downpipe maintenance and repair, vegetation

removal and repairs to chimneys. The project focusing on Main Street links in to works proposed by the Council for Sean Kelly Square and potential public realm works being considered for the Castle Street Area. In recent years investments in the medieval town walls by the Irish Walled Towns Network and by the Office of Public Works in Ormond Castle, as well as REDZ funding for the redevelopment of the Heritage Centre just off the Main Street, are all contributing to a substantial investment on the public realm and architectural heritage of the town. The works on the Main Street will also have a strong visual impact on the streetscape. €110,000 was awarded to Tipperary County Council to enable these works.

Portlaoise, Co Laois

The fabric of the sixteenth century Fort Protector, which is central to the foundation story of Portlaoise has been conserved and its setting improved as part of this HTI project. The scheme creates a green amenity in the town centre and a location for public events, such as the popular Old Fort Quarter Festival. These works improve the setting of the Fort and present it to the public as central to the foundation of the town. The significance of Portlaoise as Ireland's first Plantation town is not yet widely appreciated, at local or national level. The proper appreciation of the Fort can give the town a new identity and a national standing as an important part of the story of Ireland's Ancient East. €185,000 was awarded to Laois County Council to enable these works.

Kilmallock, Co Limerick

This project by Limerick City and County Council consolidates the western section of the medieval defences of the walled town of Kilmallock. The enables the public to walk alongside the now conserved medieval town defences from a newly created pathway. The west wall walkway has opened up 516.5m of the line of the medieval town's western defences of which 474.5m is standing wall with an average height of over 4m. Since 2008 it has been the plan to completely consolidate the western town wall and to install a public pathway to enable the people living in and visiting Kilmallock to experience the town defences. Most of the structurally at risk or fallen sections have been dealt with through Irish Walled Towns Network grants and in 2016 through the Rural Economic Development Zone Scheme. Two hundred and forty-three metres of wall, however, remained to be secured and this has now been accomplished under HTI 2018. €175,000 was awarded to Limerick City and County Council to enable these works.