

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



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

Historic Towns Initiative 2021

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.

In keeping with the Town Centres First policy set out in the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future* (2020), 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 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 and repair will be key to building resilience in our historic buildings and towns to enable them to withstand the effects of a changing environment.

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). In 2019 €1 million was awarded to Ballina, Co Mayo, Navan, Co Meath, Letterkenny, Co Donegal, Boyle, Co Roscommon, Nenagh, Co Tipperary and Kilrush, Co Clare for a range of building and streetscape conservation projects. In 2020 a total of €1.3 million was awarded to Ballina, Co Mayo, Callan, Co Kilkenny, Sligo, Co Sligo, Tralee, Co Kerry, Ramelton, Co Donegal, Clones, Co Monaghan and Roscommon, Co Roscommon.

Drawing on the experiences of the programme in 2018-20 this nationwide programme will continue in 2021 administered by the Heritage Council. The Historic Towns Initiative will award **€1.5 million** competitively to a number of historic towns for heritage-led urban regeneration projects in 2021.

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 at the following link:

<https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/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 2021.

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.

Aim of the Historic Towns Initiative 2021

The Historic Towns Initiative 2021 aims to provide support to historic towns engaged in a programme of heritage-led regeneration. In 2021 we are particularly interested in projects that address vacancy in town centres, that propose the re-use of historic structures and that can act as a demonstrator for future projects.

Funding available

A total fund of €1.5 million (capital funding) is available to local authorities under the HTI 2021. 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 2021

- The HTI 2021 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 2021 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 2021. 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 2021 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 2021.
- 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, 14 - 22 August 2021. However, it should be noted that any grant awarded by the HTI can be used to fund capital works only.

Application process for HTI 2021

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 and 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
- how the project would build resilience in the historic built environment of the town to enable it to withstand the effects of climate change
- 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 and vacancy, 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
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. 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?

- An online workshop will be held by the Heritage Council on **14th January 2021** for local authority personnel interested in applying for the HTI 2021.
- The deadline for receipt of online applications is **5pm on Friday 5th February 2021**. Applications received after this date will not be considered.
- The Heritage Council will notify applicants of the outcome of the assessment during **February 2021**.

Recoupment of Grant Funding

Grant awards must be recouped from the Heritage Council within the 2021 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 or a signed letter from the Director of Finance stating that monies claimed have been expended.

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 15th November 2021.**

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.

Project details and awards under the Historic Towns Initiative 2020

- **Tralee, Co Kerry:** This funding supported the plan-led regeneration of Tralee's historic buildings, underpin urban revitalisation, promote conservation-led improvements to historic fabric to ensure occupancy in the Denny Street and Day Place area of the town. Specifically, railings and joinery were the focus of conservation works. €307,000.
- **Roscommon, Co Roscommon:** The works carried out were in the older parts of the town which have suffered decline. Conservation works were carried out to the street frontage of a number of historic buildings. €157,000.
- **Clones, Co Monaghan:** This project restores the setting and enhances the visitor experience to the round tower, sarcophagus and 'Wee Abbey' by removing intrusive infrastructure, improving access and conserving key attributes. €103,000.
- **Sligo, Co Sligo:** This project has involved private owners working with Sligo County Council to undertake the heritage-led regeneration of O'Connell Street (Architectural Conservation Area) in Sligo town through streetscape conservation and enhancements. €220,000.
- **Ramelton, Co Donegal:** This project worked with local property owners to conserve the historic built environment, facilitate sustainable heritage-led regeneration, reinforce civic pride, enhance attractiveness and promote the tourism potential of Ramelton's historic core. €290,000.
- **Ballina, Co Mayo:** This project continued works started in 2019 with HTI funding to enable essential structural repairs and conservation works to eight properties in the Pearse Street Architectural Conservation Area in order to address dereliction, allow for occupancy and promote sustainable adaptive re-use. €140,000.
- **Callan, Co Kilkenny:** This project carried out conservation work on the historic iron railing and stone elements of Saint Mary's Church on Green Street and Mill Street, as well as conservation works to the Kings River foot bridge. €80,000.

Useful resources

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>

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* and in the publication *Old House, New Home*

https://www.riai.ie/images/uploads/RIAI_TownandVillageToolkit.pdf

<https://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2020/05/old-house-new-home.pdf>

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*

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/bringing_back_homes_final.pdf