

A detailed historical illustration in a woodcut style, rendered in shades of orange and yellow. It depicts a fortified town with a high wall and several towers. Inside the wall, there are numerous houses, a church with a cross on its roof, and a few trees. Outside the wall, there are more trees and a body of water. In the foreground, two large sailing ships with multiple masts and sails are visible. The text 'Irish Walled Towns Network Action Plan 2020-2023' is overlaid in the center. The background shows a landscape with hills and a distant town.

Irish Walled Towns Network Action Plan 2020-2023



Mission Statement

To ensure the protection of walled town heritage and to place it at the core of making towns great places in which to live, work and visit.

Values

The three following values provide guidance by which we will accomplish our vision and objectives.

- **Collaboration:** to work as a community of towns amongst ourselves and with others
- **Transparency:** being open in our decision-making processes
- **Adaptive:** nimble and innovative in problem solving

A detailed historical illustration in a woodcut style, rendered in a monochromatic orange-brown color. The top half shows a fortified town with a high wall and several towers. Below the wall, a dense cluster of houses is labeled 'The Base Town'. The bottom half shows a harbor with a large sailing ship docked at a quay. A gate in the wall is labeled 'Water gate' and 'Kraze'. The overall scene depicts a bustling, fortified coastal town.

Introduction

What we do

Formed by The Heritage Council in 2005, the IWTN's purpose is to unite and co-ordinate the efforts of local authorities in the management and conservation of historic walled towns across the island of Ireland. In 2014, recognising the economic circumstances under which our member towns then found themselves in, a broader interpretation of that purpose was taken. Accordingly, the central objective of the previous action plan was to help Ireland's walled towns become great places in which to live, work and visit.

The IWTN's activities are coordinated by a steering committee, made up of representatives from: three of its member towns; the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; the Northern Ireland Historic Environment Division; and the Heritage Council.

The Irish Walled Town Network constitution clearly sets out the composition of the steering group. Guidance and assistance is provided to our twenty-nine member towns in the following ways:

- Providing grants for town wall conservation.
- Providing grants for community festivals and heritage interpretation.
- Training community groups on how best to use their town's heritage for the benefit of those who live there.
- Coordinating research and publishing user friendly advisory documents.

Our approach is to work with local authorities and communities and to empower them through funding, training and guidance.

It is a methodology that in 2013 resulted in the network winning a prestigious European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Award.

Many of our member towns have won Chambers Ireland and Local Authority Members Association (LAMA) Community and Council awards for IWTN assisted projects. The following is a list of some of the achievements on the Irish Walled Town Network since its inception:

- Since 2011, more than 3,300 people have attended over 60 IWTN training events covering areas such as conservation, regeneration, event management and communication.
- Provided c.€7 million to conserve town wall heritage since 2007. Almost all of these projects have enabled or improved local access to the towns' heritage and have had a tangible tourism benefit. The conservation work also directly supports employment in the construction sector.
- Helped in the development of: Kilmallock's West Wall Walkway, Talbot's Tower Archaeology Park in Kilkenny, the Collegiate Church in Youghal, Galway Civic Museum's medieval wing and archaeology-based tourism at the Blackfriary excavation in Trim.
- Developed a new format for town regeneration plans. The 'Solving our own problems' system allows the creation of a high-quality action plan within a short time-span. The format involves mentors in retail, tourism, heritage, public realm, and traffic management working together with locals from the public, private, and community sectors. Plans have now been completed for Carrick-on-Suir, Bandon and Kells.
- In 2017, 32,000 people attended IWTN supported festivals and events. Since 2007, c.€1.1 million has been provided for community festivals around the country by the Heritage Council through its IWTN grant schemes.
- We have published guidance documents on regeneration, tourism, heritage interpretation and community festivals.
- Created the world's largest collection of videos dedicated to historic town regeneration.
- In 2013, our website irishwalledtownsnetwork.ie was shortlisted for an Eircom Spider Award.
- In 2018, we were acknowledged by the EU European Committee of the Regions as being one of two Irish examples of good practice in the use of culture to enhance local competitiveness.





Jack Pinson from Living Longbows at
Athlone Castle
Photo Credit: Athlone Arts and Tourism

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The Action Plan format makes it possible to evaluate the IWTN's impact on the management and promotion of walled settlements.

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Why have a plan?

The **2020-2023 Action Plan** is the fourth to have been compiled by the IWTN. Action Plans support the network's structure in the effective running of the organisation. They allow us to identify the key issues that threaten the vitality of historic towns and provide a framework through which the IWTN can help its member towns protect and regenerate their historic spaces and places. The Action Plan format makes it possible to evaluate the IWTN's impact on the management and promotion of walled settlements. It also permits the IWTN to influence wider agendas within Irish heritage, particularly in terms of conservation, interpretation and sustainable economic development.

Methodology

In keeping with the IWTN's ethos of communal involvement, an open approach was taken to this document's creation. Invitations for submissions to the **2020-2023 Action Plan** were issued to the membership in December 2018. The submissions were then discussed at a January 2019 meeting of the IWTN steering committee.

Following on from this a consultation day took place with IWTN town representatives in February. This consultation day focused on both the emerging national heritage plan and this Action Plan. The deliberations from the consultation day formed the basis of a draft which was reviewed in April by the IWTN steering committee.

After changes, a second consultation was held with IWTN town representatives at the June 1st IWTN AGM. Subsequent amendments were made which were discussed at IWTN steering committee meetings in July and September. A final draft was brought for approval to the board of the Heritage Council on October 17th.

Aerial View of Youghal Town

Photo Credit:
Cork County Council





Context

The only thing constant for all walled towns in Ireland is change. Shifting demographics and lifestyles, the increase in commuting for work, online shopping, greater automation of traditional sources of employment, climate change and biodiversity loss all present challenges that require insightful responses.

Through the sensitive reuse of heritage, this Action Plan has been designed to assist the IWTN's member towns in becoming more socially and economically robust to the challenge of change.

The diverse yet complementary set of actions within this plan will allow the IWTN to be nimble as it responds to each member town's particular set of circumstances. This Action Plan has also been designed to fit within and support wider government responses to the issues identified above:

1. Heritage at the heart: Heritage Council strategy 2018-2022
2. Heritage Ireland 2030
3. Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan 2018-2027
4. Realising our rural potential: action plan for rural development

Heritage at the heart: Heritage Council Strategy 2018-2022

The IWTN fully supports the Heritage Council's vision for 2018-2022 that heritage will be at the heart of Irish society and decision-making and that Ireland will be internationally recognised as a centre of excellence in heritage management, conservation and community engagement.

This Action Plan follows on from the Heritage Council's Strategic Plan and seeks to energetically work within its strategic objectives.

The strategic plan's three objectives are:

1. Advance national heritage priorities
2. Nurture belonging
3. Ensure a vibrant heritage sector

The IWTN's Action Plan comprehensively addresses all these strategic objectives. Indeed, of the 30 sub-objectives within the three strategic objectives, the IWTN's Action Plan helps accomplish 21. Overall, the various actions within this document contribute to the fulfilling of the Heritage Council's statutory responsibilities set out under the Heritage Act, 1995.

Heritage Ireland 2030

The new national heritage plan Heritage Ireland 2030 is due to be published by the end of 2019. Although a full draft was not available for study, the IWTN Action Plan has been devised to be in keeping with the proposed vision, namely that 'Ireland's heritage is valued, protected and enjoyed for future generations' (Heritage Ireland 2030 public consultation, 2018, p.6).

This Action Plan was also designed to support the three proposed themes: national leadership and heritage, heritage partnerships and communities and heritage.



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Carrickfergus Walls
Photo Credit:
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan 2018-2027

Project Ireland 2040 is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of the country. Within this, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 sets out the investment priorities.

One of the mechanisms by which national development was to be realised was through heritage. An important part of the plan's heritage section focuses on investment in Ireland's historic urban cores:



Launch of interpretive signs at
James' Street, Kilkenny
(Photo, Vicky Comerford)

Significant investment will also be undertaken in relation to Ireland's historic environment including to: revitalise the vital historic cores of our cities, towns & villages, bringing historic buildings back into use and contributing to urban and rural revitalisation; work with owners and custodians to maintain and protect heritage assets that are precious to local communities and important contributors to well-being and social cohesion, (p.72)



Buttevant Walled Towns Festival
Photo credit: Buttevant Heritage

Urban regeneration is a central component of this Action Plan. One quarter of all proposed IWTN initiatives focus on renewing the historic town cores.

Realising our rural potential: action plan for rural development

In the government's action plan for rural Ireland (Realising our rural potential: action plan for rural development, 2016) action 199 is dedicated to the IWTN:

Support the Irish Walled Towns Network to ensure that these heritage assets are appropriately managed and conserved as a tourism asset to their areas. (p.46)

Through the Heritage Council, the IWTN has continued to report on how it contributes to the implementation of this action.



Reginald's Tower, Waterford
Photo Credit:
Simon Hill / Waterford City and County Council



Objectives

1. **Building connections:** enhance the ability of the IWTN to facilitate our member towns in connecting on heritage, urban regeneration and tourism issues with each other and outside bodies.
2. **Conservation:** ensure the protection of town walls and their sensitive reuse by the community.
3. **Regeneration:** work to promote heritage led regeneration that fully acknowledges both climate change and biodiversity loss and sensitively reuses built, natural and intangible heritage.
4. **Sense of place:** promote town wall heritage amongst town residents and enhance their pride in place.



Athlone Castle (above)
Photo credit: Athlone Arts and Tourism

Bandon Walled Towns Festival (below)
Photo credit: Conor Nelligan, Heritage Officer, Cork County Council

Actions

In all our actions we will aim to minimise the carbon footprint. All the actions below are ascribed the relevant Heritage Council strategic sub-objective.

Action 1 Funding:

- Work to enhance the level of IWTN funding for use by member towns. (HC Objectives 1iv, 2i, 3ii)
 - Disseminate information to member towns on outside funding opportunities that complement our objectives. (HC Objectives 2i, 3ii)
 - Provide assistance to member towns on developing grant applications involving heritage for projects that best suit them. We will encourage projects that are designed so that they either reduce the town's carbon footprint, help to enhance biodiversity and/or make the town more economically robust to climate change. (HC Objectives 2i, 3ii)
 - Provide assistance to towns on sourcing match funding for projects and improving the long-term support from the local community and private sector. (HC Objectives 2i, 3ii)
- The IWTN will encourage tourism projects that follow strong green principles. (HC Objectives 2i, 2iv, 3viii)
 - Introduce a tasteful branding style guide for all walled towns including an Irish Walled Towns Network flag. (HC Objectives 2iv)
 - Enhance our profile through networking, publishing advisory documents and pursuing suitable awards. (HC Objectives 1ii, 2viii, 3iv, 3vi)
 - Enhance the provision of online educational and visitor resources. (HC Objectives 1ii, 2viii, 3iii, 3v, 3viii)
 - Enhance our administrative capacity and internal communications. (HC Priority 3vi)
 - In partnership with Local Authorities, support, through training, the development of town teams and enhance their ability to help manage the town's heritage assets to encourage best practice in governance. (HC Objectives 3i, 3ii)
 - Subject to an increase in financial and human resources, the IWTN is open to the development of a broader historic towns network that brings with it the best of the IWTN but allows us to better support both our existing member towns and other towns. Duplication of roles is to be avoided. (HC Objectives 2i, 3ii).

Action 2 Building connections:

- Review the constitution of the IWTN. (HC Objective 3vi)
- Link with Local Government Management Agency to create recognition of the work of the IWTN and to have the role of liaison with the IWTN and project manager of IWTN projects recognised as a core function for an appropriate professional within each Local Authority (HC Objectives 3i, 3vi)
- Continue to encourage and support the networking of IWTN members and explore themes which will further connect the network. (HC Objective 3vi)
- Pursue connections with national and international organisations that have complementary objectives to our own. (HC Objectives 1ix, 3vi)
- Raise public awareness of the walled towns of Ireland. Work with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and local authority tourism officers on developing their tourism offering and marketing.

Action 3 Conservation:

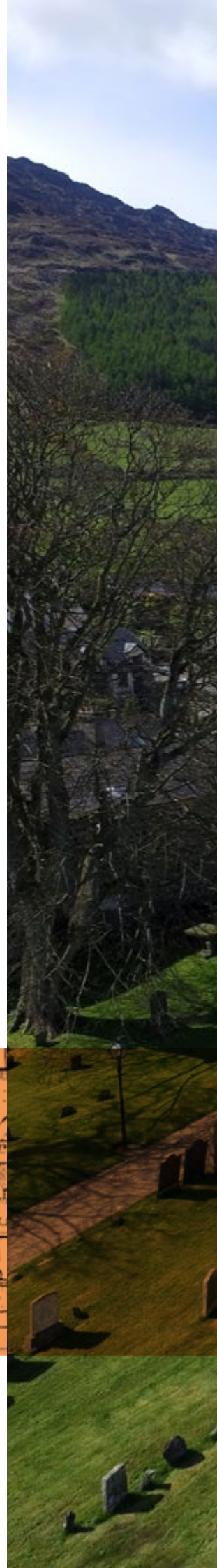
- Continue to directly support the conservation of town walls. (HC Objectives 1iv, 2i)
- Issue guidance on biodiversity and the conservation and maintenance of town walls and associated structures. (HC Objectives 1ii, 1iv, 2viii, 3iv)
- Promote the conservation and sensitive reuse of built, natural and intangible heritage. (HC Objectives 1ii, 2viii, 3iv)
- Provide training on built heritage conservation including biodiversity and natural heritage as it relates to town walls and associated structures. (HC Objectives 1ii, 3iv)
- Through research, events and other interpretation actions enhance knowledge and appreciation of town wall heritage amongst residents. (HC Objectives 2iv, 3ii, 3vii)

Action 4 Regeneration:

- Explore the creation of a walled towns award category as part of the Tidy Towns Awards or similar. (HC Objectives 2iv)
- Ascertain and fill key gaps that exist in the development of an evidence-based approach to heritage led regeneration. Support the creation of collaborative town centre health checks for member towns. (HC Objectives 1ii, 2i, 2viii, 3iv)
- Promote the sensitive reuse of heritage within the public realm, the tourism sector and new development. (HC Objectives 1ii, 2i, 2viii, 3iv)
- Support the creation of a high-quality public realm that will encourage people to visit, linger and live in town centres. The public realm should sensitively incorporate the built, natural and intangible heritage of the town and be designed so as to enhance biodiversity. (HC Objectives 1ii, 2i, 2viii, 3iv)
- Support communities as they lower carbon emissions, promote biodiversity and make their historic towns more socially and economically robust to the challenge of climate change and biodiversity loss. (HC Objectives 1ii, 2i, 2viii, 3ii, 3iv)
- Develop and encourage inclusive events that celebrate and explore walled town heritage, including oral heritage, customs, and traditions. (HC Objectives 2iii, 2iv, 2v, 2ix)
- Support collaboration between heritage and the arts to increase the diversity of interaction with and towards heritage to widen the potential audience and to promote inclusivity.

Partnerships are to be developed with the Creative Ireland Programme. (HC Objectives 1vii, 2iii, 2iv, 2v, 2ix).

- Support member towns to create an archive of conservation works undertaken (HC Objectives 1iv, 2i)





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Evaluation and Reporting

This Action Plan is to form the basis of the work programme for the IWTN Project Manager(s). The work programme is to be decided by the Management Committee of the IWTN and the Heritage Council.

Progress of this Action Plan and resulting action plans will be monitored at each of the Management Committee meetings.

The project manager's report, presented at the IWTN's AGM, will be a key qualitative measure of implementation. Details of implementation will be made available to the representatives of each member town and to the Heritage Council.

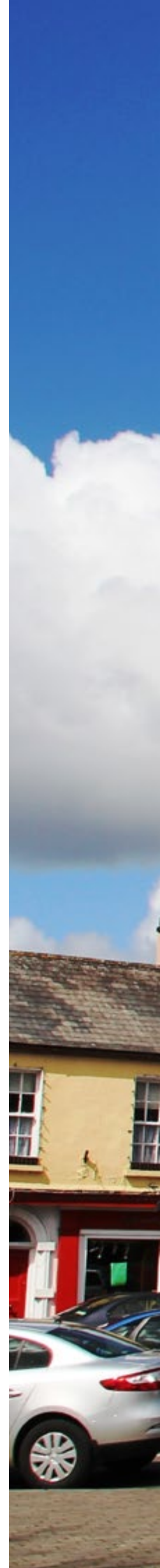
The core objective of this Action Plan is to ensure the protection of walled town heritage and to make towns great places in which to live, work and visit. Plainly, there are a great number of factors outside the control and budget of the IWTN.

Nonetheless, as a commitment to effective plan implementation, feedback on the impact of the document will be sought from town representatives and other stakeholders at the mid-point. At the end of the plan's term a final evaluation will be undertaken.

Climate change and the operation of the IWTN

In conjunction with providing support to our member towns on the use and protection of heritage as they develop low carbon economies and enhance biodiversity, the IWTN will change how it operates on a day to day basis:

1. The vast majority of IWTN training events and steering committee meetings are to take place in towns with good public transport connections. The venues are to be located within walking distance of public transport, preferably within the urban centre. Attendees are to be strongly encouraged to use public transport. Carpooling is to also be encouraged.
2. The IWTN project manager is to use public transport where reasonable. Video phone calls should be used for repeat meetings with town representatives.
3. Flying on behalf of the IWTN is to be kept to a minimum. We will look to offset any flights that do occur.
4. There is to be a strong preference for locally sourced food for catering at IWTN run events.
5. Printing of IWTN publications will be kept to a minimum. Where printing of publications does occur, only recycled paper or paper sourced from responsibly managed forests will be used.
6. We will encourage projects that are designed so that they either reduce a town's carbon footprint, help to enhance biodiversity and/or make a town more economically robust to climate change.
7. By 2021, all IWTN funded festivals and training events must enact a robust set of green principles. Appropriate training and support will be provided.





Kildare town
Photo Credit: Tom McCutcheon

