Historic Towns Initiative:
Harnessing the potential of Ireland’s town centres

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Project Ireland 2040

• National Development Plan 2018-2027 has ten Strategic Outcomes

• National Strategic Outcome No. 7: Enhanced Amenity and Heritage

• Cultural investment component was launched on 10 April this
Project Ireland 2040

Ten-year plan for capital investment of almost €1.2 billion in Ireland’s culture, language and heritage €85 million of which will be for investment in the historic environment including initiatives to revitalise the historic cores of urban centres.
Caring for our Historic Environment

‘This plan will include significant investment to revitalise the historic cores of our cities, towns and villages and bring historic buildings back into use

‘Capital funding for towns will included support for the national roll-out of the Historic Towns Initiative… The supports for historic towns under this plan will complement and support other rural and urban regeneration initiatives under the NDP’
Historic Towns Initiative pilot 2013-14

The HTI was set up in June 2012 to undertake a pilot heritage-led regeneration programme

Joint undertaking of the Department, Fáilte Ireland and the Heritage Council

The steering committee, including representatives of the three towns, drew up a Framework for the pilot which was launched in February 2013 by Minister Jimmy Deenihan, TD
Heritage-led regeneration

- Heritage-led regeneration is a recognised policy across Europe
- Projects have shown that heritage is key to successful urban regeneration
- Private sector investment is encouraged by public sector investment in restoring landmark historic buildings and enhancing public space
- Repair of historic buildings creates a need for specialist skills
- Restored historic buildings make ideal locations for creative businesses and attract skilled workers, tourists and other visitors
Heritage-led regeneration

- The cultural heritage of a town provides a sense of specialness and distinctiveness.
- Putting heritage at the forefront of regeneration strategies ensures that local distinctiveness, community spirit, values and traditions are retained and enhanced while allowing new interventions to take place.
- The townspeople are an essential component of what makes a place special and their participation is critical to success.
Heritage-led regeneration

• The character and distinctiveness of the historic built environment are central to the future success of Ireland’s towns.
• Planning for the regeneration of a historic town needs an integrated approach balancing the protection of the built heritage and the sustainable development of the historic urban area with the needs of modern living.
• A common vision for the town needs to be developed supported by a coordinated and integrated series of objectives and a programme of realistic and achievable actions.
Historic Towns Initiative Framework

This outlined a recommended 6-step process for undertaking a heritage-led regeneration strategy in a town.

The steps were:
1. Understanding the town and its heritage
2. Assembling support
3. Assessing the issues facing the town
4. Defining a vision and setting goals
5. Implementation
6. Monitoring and reviewing
Historic Towns Initiative pilot

- The pilot ran from February 2013 to June 2014
- The Department provided funding for programmes of capital works with further investment by the local authorities and private property owners
- Fáilte Ireland provided funding for non-capital tourism-related projects including surveys of the attitudes of residents, visitors and businesses in the towns
- In total, almost €1 million was invested in the three towns during the course of the pilot
Lessons learned from the pilot

- The surveys of visitors, residents and businesses found a high overall appreciation of heritage in the towns and the benefits it could bring.
- Towns which had a clear vision for the town supported by a well-considered action plan used the funding to best advantage.
- Local authorities need to take a strong leadership role in driving heritage-led regeneration.
- The participation of townspeople is critical to success.
HTI Pilot: Youghal, County Cork

• Public realm works around ‘Tulip Area’
• Historic core painting scheme
• Advertising of Youghal app
• St Mary’s Collegiate Church trail
• Branding and launching of Raleigh Quarter
• Maritime History trail
• Exhibition of archaeological findings at St Mary’s Collegiate Church
• Filming of works at St Mary’s
HTI Pilot: Youghal, County Cork

• Nealons Quay public realm works and completion of sea wall
• New footpaths around courthouse
• Repair works to courthouse
• Public realm works at O’Rahilly St, Emmet Place and Barry’s Lane
• Access improvements at College Green
HTI Pilot: Youghal, County Cork

Public realm works, branding and trail signage
HTI Pilot: Westport, County Mayo

- Wyatt windows project
- Emergency structural report on Bridge House
- Façade painting scheme
- Public realm works to provide setting for new sculpture
- Restoration of gates to walled garden of Westport House
- Westport House study day
- Animation/interactive interpretation; costumes and training
HTI Pilot: Westport, County Mayo

- Creation of a linear orchard
- Conservation works to the Clew Bay Heritage Museum
- Shopfront conservation scheme
- Structural assessment of a locomotive shed
- Conservation assessment of murals in Holy Trinity Church
- Conservation of Chinese wallpaper in Westport House
HTI Pilot: Westport, County Mayo

Peter Street public realm works associated with ‘The Sentinel’ art work commission
HTI Pilot: Listowel, County Kerry

- Façade painting scheme
- Reinstatement of architectural features
- Building repair works
- Vacant shops project
- Signage for Listowel Castle and Lartigue Monorail
- Training of guides for Writers’ Week and Heritage Week
- Upgrading and promotion of the town heritage trail
HTI Pilot: Listowel, County Kerry

- St Michael’s Church tower conservation works
- Display units and signage at the Seanchaí Centre
- Storyboard at Lios Tuathail ringfort
- Archaeological programme
- Conservation of McAuliffe stuccowork
- Commencement of conservation plan for town (published in 2017)
HTI Pilot: Listowel, County Kerry

Façade painting and repair scheme
Conservation of the Celtic Revival stuccowork of Pat McAuliffe
Historic Towns Initiative 2018

• There is a dedicated HTI grants programme for 2018
• An allocation of €1 million (capital funding) has been made under the programme for historic towns engaged in heritage-led regeneration
• HTI is administered by the Heritage Council
• A workshop was held in Kilkenny in January 2018 to inform local authorities of the roll-out of the programme
• A call for applications issued in February
• Applications were assessed by the HTI National Steering Group who then made recommendations to the Board of the Heritage Council for funding under the programme
Historic Towns Initiative 2018

• Historic towns include those of medieval and pre-medieval foundation, plantation towns, planned estate towns and those established around local industries

• A town seeking to benefit from the HTI should possess significant cultural and heritage assets and have a distinctive sense of place

• Each local authority was invited to apply in respect of one historic town with an indicative minimum population of 1,500 inhabitants
Historic Towns Initiative 2018

Priority was given to projects that were ‘plan-led’ and likely to make a meaningful contribution to the heritage-led regeneration of the town, including:

• HTI Management Plan based on the HTI Framework
• A Conservation Plan
• A Public Realm Plan
• A Town Centre Health Check Plan
• or any plan equivalent to the above
Applications were assessed under the following criteria:

- Significance of the town and its heritage
- Town’s track record to date in heritage-led regeneration
- Extent to which the application fulfilled the aims of the HTI and was likely to make a significant contribution to the regeneration of the town
- Quality of the project(s) proposed
- Presence of a vibrant and engaged community who would support the implementation of the Initiative
Historic Towns Initiative 2018

- Local authorities were expected to show evidence of support from partnerships in delivering projects.
- Projects had to be achievable within the funding timeframe (i.e. within the 2018 financial year).
- Projects had to show strong public engagement and give examples of how they proposed to engage and inform the public with the project.
- As part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, successful towns will be expected to hold an event about their project during Heritage Week 18-26 August.
Historic Towns Initiative 2018

HTI projects are now underway in seven towns:

- Youghal, Co. Cork
- Portlaoise, Co. Laois
- Kilmallock, Co. Limerick
- Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo
- Kells, Co. Meath
- Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary