

Proposed National Pilot Town Centre Health Check Training Programme

2016 – 2018

An initiative led by the Heritage Council and RGDATA¹

1. To address the challenges that many town centres are facing and to aid and direct revitalisation of towns, a new initiative has been developed by RGDATA and the Heritage Council for a Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) pilot programme. The aim of the pilot is to train representatives from 10 Irish towns to carry out a Town Centre Health Check in accordance with best international practice. The TCHC information will then be used as a baseline to develop a Town Plan to direct future town centre development and revitalisation.
2. This initiative is intended to provide training via two workshops to Local Authority, town centre trader and community stakeholders on how to carry out a Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) (Workshop 1, 29 September 2016). Once the TCHC has been completed then, in early 2017, the town representatives will be invited to Workshop 2: How to Develop a Town Plan. The participants will be advised by Town Centre Management and other experts on how to develop a Town Plan to guide and direct town centre development and town centre management.
3. The Programme involves engaging the private, public and voluntary sectors in a representative selection of ten Irish Towns to raise awareness of the role and contribution of town centres and to develop an innovative town centre led retail, cultural, heritage, community and tourism baseline, which is recognised internationally as a best practice collaborative development model.
4. The Programme involves building capacity in this area for Local Authorities, town centre businesses, and local citizens with mentoring support from professional practitioners with experience of town centre design, planning, heritage architecture, urban landscape design and town centre management. Educational establishments throughout the country including UCD; DIT and QUB have also committed to including Town Centre Health Checks in their academic programmes and providing students to carry out the measuring and surveying as part of their course work.
5. The first step in the Programme is a National Pilot Town Centre Health Check Training Programme, which is being launched in Naas on 29 September. The Pilot will focus on 10 towns and will assess their health and vitality by reference to a range of different indices and checks such as vacancy rates, depopulation, public realm, dereliction, retail and social mix, presence of out of town retail developments, accessibility, parking, footfall etc.
6. The objective is to provide training to representatives from local authorities, town centre businesses and urban groups to conduct these health checks and for the results of the health checks to feed into the development of Town Centre Management Plans and strategies to address any deficiencies identified.
7. In order to ensure that the Town Centre Health Check and the Town Centre Management Plan feeds into supportive Local Authority Plans the pilot towns have been selected based a

¹ In partnership with Chambers Ireland, Retail Consultation Forum, ILI, IPI,RIAI, UCD, DIT, QUB and others

a number of criteria including: that the selected towns are all in areas that are about to undertake a review of their Local Area Plans which can then be modified to reflect the outcome of the research findings and the Town Plans; that the Local Authority has a licensed mapping system in place and that there is an active Chamber/town centre traders prepared to engage in the pilot.

8. The towns selected for the Pilot Programme are;
 - a. Ballina, Co Mayo
 - b. Cashel, Co Tipperary
 - c. Ennis Co. Clare
 - d. Dundalk Co Louth
 - e. Monaghan Town
 - f. Naas, Kildare
 - g. Rush, Co Dublin
 - h. Sligo Town
 - i. Tralee Co Kerry
 - j. Tullamore Co Offaly

9. There is huge interest in the initiative which is supported by the Irish Planning Institute, the RIAI, UCD, QUB , DIT and the Retail Consultation Forum, which meets under the auspices of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. It is a really constructive, positive and practical initiative which will play an important and constructive role in town centre revitalisation in Ireland.

10. The project will be approached in a number of distinct phases;
 - a. Phase One – TCHC Workshop - 29 September 2016
 - b. Phase Two – TCHC Mentoring Phase – October – December 2016
 - c. Phase Three – Town Plan Workshop – January 2017
 - d. Phase Four – review of Pilot Project and development of implementation plan for the roll out of Town Centre Health Checks to additional Town Centres during 2017/2018
 - e. If the project secures funding the information from the Workshops and the pilot towns will be collated and presented online on a new Irish Town Centre Management web portal.

For further information please contact;

Tara Buckley (TB) T 01-2887584 M. 087 8258008 tbuckley@rgdata.ie

Alison Harvey (AH) M. 087 419 3458 aharvey@heritagecouncil.ie