



Local Authority Heritage Plan Guidelines

2024



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



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1 Introduction

The Heritage Act 1995 states that the national heritage includes Monuments, Landscapes, Archaeological objects, Seascapes, Heritage objects, Wrecks, Architectural heritage, Geology, Flora, Fauna, Heritage gardens and parks, Inland waterways and Wildlife habitats ([see Appendix A](#)). This list is not exhaustive and the Heritage Forum guiding the preparation of a City or County Heritage Plan may decide to widen the scope of heritage to be included in the Heritage Plan.

These guidelines are designed to assist Local Authority Heritage Officers and Local Heritage Fora, in the preparation of a Heritage Plan for their city or county. The document sets out a number of principles and steps which can be used as a guide in preparing a Heritage Plan. The issues and priorities concerning heritage conservation are likely to vary across the country, but the process followed in identifying and addressing them in a collaborative way will be similar, and this guide presents the process to be used at local level.

1.1 The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council is a statutory body established under the Heritage Act 1995 with a mission to engage, educate and advocate to develop a wider understanding of the vital contribution that heritage makes to social, environmental and economic well-being.

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 guides engagement with local authorities, communities, and other stakeholders. Supporting the development of city and county Heritage Plans is a crucial component of this work, as it sets out a strategic framework for the conservation, management, and promotion of heritage at the local level.

Heritage professionals within the local authority, including Heritage Officers employed in partnership with the Heritage Council under the auspices of the Heritage Officer Programme, manage the heritage function within a city/county in a coordinated manner, adopting an integrated approach to heritage that encompasses all aspects of heritage within the overall heritage service. A Heritage Plan aims to guide the development of this work in a strategic way, linking national and regional policy with implementation on the ground.

1.2 The Local Authority Heritage Plan

A Heritage Plan is a city or county-wide strategy for the identification, protection, conservation, management, enhancement and interpretation of the built, natural and cultural heritage led by the local authority. Preparation of a plan offers the opportunity to identify heritage issues and needs at city or county-wide level, and to address them locally, within a regional and national framework. A summary of the Heritage Plan creation process is at [Figure 1](#).

Heritage Plan - Process and Timeline



Figure 1: Summary of the Heritage Plan preparation process.

A City or County Heritage Plan is a local authority document but should address the concerns and needs of the community and relevant agencies and groups with the city or county, underpinned by the principle of shared stewardship of heritage. A Heritage Plan provides a platform to reach consensus on how best local heritage can be conserved and managed on a partnership basis, and a way to focus a range of collective energies and initiatives.

The plan should be delivered by a number of groups working in partnership (The Heritage Forum – [see section 3](#)). The plan should identify a vision for the heritage of the city or county and priorities for action, over a specified period, and should include a mechanism for monitoring impacts, review and evaluation.

1.3 Aim of a Heritage Plan

While the specific aim of each heritage plan will be decided locally, a City or County Heritage Plan aims to record, conserve and promote local built, natural and cultural heritage, and to increase awareness, appreciation, and enjoyment of it among the people of the area. The plan can also be used to gain the support of the key players and to forge new partnerships in protecting and raising awareness of heritage. It enables a range of players to engage in discourse on the importance of heritage in terms of its global, cultural, educational, academic, economic, recreational, aesthetic, and personal values, in addition to its own intrinsic value. The delivery of the Heritage Plan supports opportunities for capacity building, regeneration, and service delivery, helping to generate community cohesion and local employment.

1.4 Structure of the City or County Heritage Plan

The Heritage Plan considers the heritage of an area in a holistic way, encapsulating all aspects of the built, natural and cultural heritage in the county and how they interlink and connect. It provides the context for the local authority to work with and support local communities and owners to develop projects suitable to their local heritage within a regional and national context. Such a concept of heritage aligns with the aims of the Heritage Act 1995, Our Place in Time, the Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028 and also with the principles of sustainable development goals. This allows for the development of a greater understanding of the local heritage, the interactions between the different aspects of the heritage, and greater public participation in the debate about what is important, what should be protected, and how, inviting a wider set of values to inform this debate.

A Heritage Plan sets out a vision and strategic objectives for the promotion, conservation, best practice, and access to local built, natural and cultural heritage. Informed by national and local policy as well as public and community engagement, the plan contains objectives for the city or county. Depending on decisions to be made at local level, the Heritage Plan may be a high level strategic document, or it may contain a list of actions which will be undertaken over the lifetime of the plan ([see Figure 2](#)).

A Hierarchy of Plans

The development and expansion of heritage services at local level will require clarity on the hierarchy of plans. To ensure that the holistic nature of heritage - as intended in the Heritage Act and as perceived by the Heritage Council Strategic Plan - is embraced at local level, a hierarchy of plans may be used. This is at the discretion of local management, and ideally would be agreed among all heritage professionals within the local authority. This structure entails a City/County Heritage Strategy at the high level, providing objectives for the translation of national heritage policy to the county level. The next level in the hierarchy will involve Local Action Plans for elements of heritage including biodiversity and other heritage disciplines as may arise.

TIER ONE: COUNTY HERITAGE PLAN

The City or County Heritage Plan (or Strategy) is a strategic document that sets out the overall vision and goals for the management and protection of heritage in the county. It should be informed by the Heritage Act 1995, the Heritage Council strategy, other local and national policy and the views of the local community. This strategic approach to heritage management involves considering heritage as a whole and developing a single management framework that encompasses all types of heritage and all heritage professionals within the local authority. This will allow for a more coordinated and efficient approach to heritage management, and will assist in ensuring that all aspects of heritage and all professionals in the local authority are considered in decision-making.

County Heritage Forum

The County Heritage Forum is a consultative body that brings together representatives from a range of stakeholders, including heritage organisations, local agencies, and the community. It provides a forum for discussion and debate on heritage issues, and it advises the local authority on the creation and implementation of the County Heritage Plan.

TIER TWO: LOCAL ACTION PLANS

Local Action Plans set out specific objectives and actions for managing and protecting heritage in a particular area, such as biodiversity, archives, archaeology, heritage engagement, education etc, within the context of the City or County Heritage Strategic Plan. Each Local Action Plan is developed by a Working Group that includes representatives from relevant stakeholders and is led by heritage professionals within the local authority.

This hierarchy of plans ensures that the Heritage Act 1995 and national and regional heritage policy are translated to local action in a coordinated and effective way. The City or County Heritage Plan provides the overall framework for managing and protecting heritage in the county, while the Local Action Plans and Working Groups focus on specific areas of heritage, themes in heritage conservation and implementation.

Figure 2: Proposed structure for a hierarchy of plans relating to heritage at local authority level.

2 Context of a City or County Heritage Plan

Each Local Authority Heritage Plan reflects local heritage needs and priorities. However, all are guided by supporting principles, such as

- ▶ **Holistic and integrated heritage approach**
- ▶ **Creative collaboration**
- ▶ **Sustainable development**
- ▶ **Equality and inclusion**
- ▶ **Informed best practice**
- ▶ **Climate action**

2.1 Strategic Context

As a partner of the Heritage Council, the local authority Heritage Plan should reflect relevant objectives and actions of the Heritage Council Strategy 2023-2028 "Our Place in Time"¹.

The development of a Heritage Plan is also informed by and developed in the context of national policies and plans such as Project Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan, and policies in relation to heritage including Heritage Ireland 2030, The National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030, the National Peatlands Strategy 2015, the National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025, Government Policy on Architecture, Climate Action Plan, Culture 2025, 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 – 2030, National Planning Framework and the National Strategy for Vernacular Heritage. Other policies and plans may be relevant for the development of heritage plans in particular areas.

Heritage Council Strategic Plan

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan "Our Place in Time 2023-2028," sets out a comprehensive vision for heritage conservation and management in Ireland. This plan is structured around six strategic pillars: Leadership and Stewardship, Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss, Research, Partnership, Communities, and Education and Engagement. It outlines a series of actions and initiatives aimed at recording, conserving and enhancing Ireland's natural, built, and cultural heritage. The plan emphasises collaboration, community involvement, and sustainable practices, reflecting a commitment to heritage as a vital component of national identity and societal well-being.

¹ The Heritage Council, 2023 www.heritagecouncil.ie/news/news-features/strategic-plan-2023-2028



Local Authority Heritage Officers are crucial in translating the Heritage Council's strategic vision into tangible action at the local level. Their role involves leading, building capacity, and facilitating heritage initiatives within local authorities and local communities. By aligning their efforts with the strategic pillars of the Heritage Council's plan, heritage officers can ensure a cohesive and effective approach to heritage conservation. This alignment is essential for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities present in different localities, while also contributing to broader national heritage objectives.

Local Authority Heritage Plans can deliver on specific pillars and actions of the Heritage Council Strategic Plan as follows:

1. Leadership and Stewardship

- ▶ Develop and maintain partnerships with local community groups and organisations to enhance heritage conservation efforts in an area.
- ▶ Advocate for the inclusion of heritage considerations in local planning and development processes.
- ▶ Organise regular training and professional development workshops for staff and volunteers involved in heritage-related activities.

2. Partnership

- ▶ Establish collaborative projects with local schools, museums, and cultural institutions to promote heritage awareness and education.
- ▶ Work closely with local businesses and tourism operators to integrate heritage into local economic development strategies.

3. Communities

- ▶ Facilitate community engagement in heritage projects through public engagement, workshops, and volunteer programmes.

- ▶ Implement initiatives to increase accessibility and inclusivity in heritage sites and programmes, ensuring they cater to diverse audiences.

4. Education and Engagement

- ▶ Publish educational resources and guidance for local schools and community groups on heritage conservation and management.
- ▶ Organise events and activities during National Heritage Week to engage the wider community.

5. Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss

- ▶ Incorporate sustainable practices in the management of heritage sites, focusing on energy efficiency and minimal environmental impact.
- ▶ Develop and lead local community biodiversity projects, such as habitat restoration or species monitoring, to highlight the link between climate and nature conservation.

6. Research

- ▶ Conduct local heritage surveys and research projects to gather data on the condition and significance of heritage assets in the area.
- ▶ Share findings and best practices with other Local Authority Heritage Officers and the Heritage Council to contribute to the broader heritage knowledge base.

By focusing on the strategic pillars of the Heritage Council strategy, Local Authority Heritage Officers can effectively contribute to the Heritage Council's vision. Their work in fostering collaboration, providing support, and engaging communities is key to preserving Ireland's heritage for future generations. Alignment of local heritage plans with the Heritage Council's strategic objectives will ensure a unified and impactful approach to heritage conservation across the country.

Heritage Ireland 2030

The publication of Heritage Ireland 2030² provides a strategy for the protection, promotion and management of Ireland's heritage for the next decade and beyond. The objectives of Heritage Ireland 2030 are set out under three themes: Communities and Heritage, Leadership and Heritage and Heritage Partnerships, reflecting the importance of ongoing collaboration between government and communities, stakeholders, citizens and local authorities in delivering upon the objectives of this strategy. Heritage Ireland 2030 recognises that local authorities have a critical role in all aspects of the protection and promotion of heritage, as enablers of community action, managers of land, providers of infrastructure, owners of land and monuments and as regulatory authorities in relation to planning and economic development.

It is an objective of Heritage Ireland 2030 to enhance support for local authorities in their active role of heritage management, heritage conservation, and community heritage engagement and to "Continue the preparation and implementation of City or County Heritage plans and resource their implementation with a view to maximising their effectiveness and assistance in the delivery of Heritage Ireland 2030" (Action 148).

Relationship to other local plans and strategies

There will be a number of other plans and strategies within the local authority which the Heritage Plan may complement. In addition to the City or County Development Plan and other local spatial plans, objectives for heritage may be included in the local

authority Corporate Plan, the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and the Local Authority Climate Action Plan.

A Development Plan contains policies and objectives for the protection, conservation, and enhancement of the heritage, as well as inventories of structures, sites and places, considered to be of heritage value which are worthy of protection and conservation. For example, it contains the Record of Protected Structures, reference to the Record of Monuments and Places, Architectural Conservation Areas, and the list of areas designated for nature conservation (Natural Heritage Areas, Special Protection Areas and Special Areas for Conservation).

The Heritage Plan is not a statutory plan and does not contain land-use policies. Nor does it attempt to compensate, or act as a substitute, for deficiencies relating to heritage conservation in the Development Plan. However, identified gaps in policy or data which impact spatial plans may be addressed, through for example data collection through the Heritage Plan. This data could then inform future Development Plan policies.

² Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022 see www.gov.ie/en/press-release/02a15-heritage-ireland-2030-sets-out-strategy-for-the-protection-of-irish-heritage-with-joined-up-approach-across-government-stakeholders-and-communities/

3 City or County Heritage Forum

A Heritage Forum is a non-statutory advisory group established by the Local Authority to provide advice to the authority on the preparation and implementation of a Heritage Plan. The Heritage Forum should be comprised of representatives of bodies and groups involved with heritage in some way within the city or county. These can be state agencies and bodies which have a heritage remit within the city or county, the local authority, NGOs and representatives of community groups.

The membership of the Heritage Forum should be drawn from the following sectors:

- ▶ heritage professionals and other relevant sections within the local authority
- ▶ local elected representatives
- ▶ local development agencies
- ▶ relevant state and semi state agencies
- ▶ landowner representatives
- ▶ representatives of the education, community and voluntary sector
- ▶ local heritage organisations.

A broad range of perspectives should be encouraged in establishing the Forum.

Guidelines on the effective establishment and operation of a City or County Heritage Forum are available separately.

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4 Heritage Plan Preparation Process

The preparation of a Heritage Plan is informed by the principles of subsidiarity and participation, which encourages involvement of local communities in local action and decision-making and assists them in working towards the sustainable development goals. Having agreed the preparation of a Heritage Plan with the local authority management team, and established a Heritage Forum, the process to be undertaken should be advertised, and submissions invited from interested bodies and individuals. These submissions can be collected through both public meetings and written submissions.

The purpose of inviting submissions from the public and from all interested parties is to acquire an understanding of current needs and issues in the city or county relating to heritage. The collection of this information is undertaken by the Heritage Officer and assisted by the Heritage Forum. Once this information has been collated and analysed, it will be possible to begin formulating the broad aims and objectives of the plan. Detailed objectives and specific actions will emerge from a number of sources: public meetings, written submissions from the full range of interested parties in response to public advertisements, consultation with statutory bodies, and the Heritage Forum itself.

Throughout this process, the Heritage Officer (in collaboration with other heritage professionals) will act as a facilitator continually including public and political participation. The preparation of Heritage Plan is likely to take approximately twelve months, depending upon the preparation process followed by the Heritage Forum, as well as the timing of relevant approval by Strategic Policy Committee meetings and City or County Council meetings.

The process of preparing the plan is important in securing as wide an ownership base for the plan as possible. The key steps in preparing a Heritage Plan are detailed in the following sections.

4.1 Key Steps

Step 1. Preparation

The initial step is to secure the agreement of the local authority management team for the preparation of a Heritage Plan and the establishment of a Heritage Forum. This is mandated in the Service Level Agreement between the Heritage Council and local authorities, but time should be taken to ensure genuine understanding and buy-in to the process at senior level.

The collection and collation of data on heritage in the county is an essential stage in the process. This will be used to identify gaps, prioritise research and conservation effort, and familiarise the heritage officer with the city or county and the people and groups active in the area.

Heritage Forum representatives are selected according to criteria agreed with local authority management, guided by Heritage Council policy. Forum members are asked to serve on the Forum for the period of the Heritage Plan (generally 5 years).

Step 2. Plan Goals

The first task of the Heritage Forum is to agree the broad aims of the Heritage Plan. To assist the work of preparing a plan, working groups can be established either along thematic (eg built, natural heritage etc) or project-based

lines. These can feed back to the Heritage Forum with specific recommendations for objectives and actions for the Heritage Plan, which are then compiled and analysed by the Forum. The establishment of working groups is at the discretion of the Forum. It has been the experience in a number of the city councils in particular, given the population density, that it is more efficient to prepare the plan exclusively through working groups, which may then join together in recommending the final plan to the city or county council.

The Heritage Officer will be expected to provide professional advice to the Heritage Forum on matters which arise during the preparation of the Heritage Plan, although s/he is not expected to be an 'expert' on all aspects of heritage. The Heritage Officer will also oversee and manage the implementation of the Heritage Plan. It will also be the Officer's responsibility to make sure that everybody involved knows what their role and tasks are, and how they fit into the overall process. This is important as it establishes clear lines of communication and can help to avoid misunderstandings later on in the process. Roles should be realistic and informed by what is achievable given the available human resources.

Step 3. Public Engagement

An important objective is to build public awareness and, ultimately, public support. A sense of common ownership of the plan by all those who contribute to it, and by the wider public, should be a fundamental objective of the process.

The identification of local issues and needs can be achieved through a public participation exercise. This can identify the issues facing the key community and should identify what the various stakeholders want to see achieved for the heritage over the period of the plan.


Public participation in the plan making process can commence with the production of a discussion paper which introduces the public to the concept of a Heritage Plan, and summarises the outcomes of previous plans, if relevant. The paper will help set the context for public involvement in the development of the new plan. For areas where a previous Heritage Plan has been implemented, the discussion paper can include a summary of the achievements of the previous plan, the results of an evaluation of the plan, and a summary of the key changes in policy context since the publication of the previous plan. For areas where the first plan is being created, the discussion paper may include some background on the heritage of the county, some findings from the data gathering stage, and perhaps pose some questions for those considering participation to consider.

In addition to a discussion paper, public participation in the process can be facilitated through meetings (online or in person), presentations to interested groups, discussions with elected members at Municipal District level, direct invitation to participate and advertisement in local media to invite submissions from interested parties. Many local authorities now use online consultation portals and these are a convenient way to reach many people, but should not be used to the exclusion of those who may not have access to relevant technology or internet. The consultation process should be advertised in local media and social media. A model advertisement is shown at [Figure 3](#). Please note also any Irish language requirements in relation to advertising in both national languages.

The following is an indicative list of the types of bodies and organisations that should be invited to make submissions to the Heritage Plan. It would be appropriate to contact these directly in addition to the public advertisements:

- ▶ Local authority (elected members, management team, other heritage professionals, relevant sections eg Planning, Environment, Climate, Roads etc)
- ▶ public authorities as defined in section 2 of the Heritage Act, 1995
- ▶ relevant state and semi-state agencies eg Coillte, Teagasc, Bord na Mona, Inland Waterways, Inland Fisheries Ireland, The Arts Council, etc
- ▶ National Cultural Institutions, eg, National Museum of Ireland, The National Archives, National Library of Ireland, National Gallery of Ireland, Abbey Theatre etc.
- ▶ The Heritage Council
- ▶ Local non-governmental organisations
- ▶ Community representatives including the Public Participation Network for the City or County
- ▶ landowner representative groups (e.g. IFA, ICMSA, Macra na Feirme, etc.)
- ▶ Local development bodies, e.g. LEADER, area development partnerships, etc.
- ▶ groups representing socially excluded and disabled people
- ▶ local interest-groups (heritage, environmental, and historical societies, etc.)
- ▶ schools and educational institutions
- ▶ business representative groups (Chambers of Commerce, etc.)
- ▶ owners of heritage properties

Local authority logo



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Name of Local Authority

[Name of Local Authority] has established a Heritage Forum to advise it on the preparation and implementation of a Local Authority Heritage Plan.

The aim of the Heritage Plan is to [insert aim agreed by the Forum]

The Heritage Forum is seeking your assistance with the preparation of the Heritage Plan.

The Heritage Act 1995 includes: monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens and parks, and inland waterways.

You are invited to participate in the consultation process and avail of the opportunity to identify heritage issues and needs at local level and to discuss mechanisms to address them locally. All interested individuals and organisations are welcome to attend.

The consultations will be held in the following venues:

[one meeting should be held in each Municipal District]

Written submissions are also invited and should be received by the Heritage Forum by **[date should be at least six weeks from the date of the ad]**

For further information please contact: [contact details of Heritage Officer] [website for online consultation]

Figure 3: Suggested Heritage Plan public advertisement

Step 4. Plan Development

The results of the public consultations and submissions should be compiled by the Heritage Officer and presented to the Heritage Forum to allow the Heritage Forum to identify and discuss the full range of issues which may be considered in the Heritage Plan, the relative priority of each of these issues, the short and long-term implications of dealing with each one, and possible alternative strategies for action. It will not be possible to deal with all the issues identified, so decisions will have to be made and priorities identified for the period of the plan. It is a good idea to ensure that the Heritage Plan seeks to address a combination of long and short-term issues over the period of the plan, as some long-term issues may extend beyond the period of the plan.

Questions that the Heritage Forum should ask at this stage could include:

- ▶ What are the current heritage problems facing the city or county?
- ▶ In general terms, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that exist within the local authority area in relation to heritage, and what can be done to address them?
- ▶ What are the data gaps in the local authority area?
- ▶ What has changed in terms of policy, legislation, funding, and resources etc, since the last plan? (Or what is the policy context, if this is the first plan)
- ▶ What were the lessons learned from the consultation process?

Strategic objectives will define what should be done to achieve the aim of the Heritage Plan. The framework of the plan should include:

Aim: This is the overall aim or vision of the Heritage Plan which will have been agreed by the Heritage Forum at the outset to the plan preparation process.

Strategic Objectives: The object or end result of a group of actions. It is a short statement of intent. The Heritage Plan may be divided thematically (e.g. raising awareness, collecting and disseminating information on heritage, demonstrating best conservation practice, etc.) or by heritage subject (e.g. archaeology, archives, architecture, wildlife, waterways, geology, heritage objects, etc).

The plan can be drafted by the Heritage Officer and presented to the Heritage Forum for discussion, revision and agreement. Alternatively, if resources are available for facilitated workshops, it is possible to write the plan as a group, over a series of workshop days. This is a good way to ensure buy-in by all Forum members, but the quality of facilitation is key to a positive experience and outcome.

Appropriate Assessment screening of the draft plan should take place at this stage, and sufficient time should be allowed to procure specialists as required, carry out the screening, and make the screening determination available for public review at the time of publication of the draft plan.

Step 5. Plan Review

The draft Heritage Plan should be presented for approval by the Management Team after agreement by the Heritage Forum, and once signed off by management, it should be presented as a draft to the relevant Strategic Policy Committee(s). Timing of these meetings are set in advance, so the date of the likely meeting should be sought in good time, to ensure that the draft is ready in time for circulation to members in advance of the meeting.

Step 6. Public Review

Once the draft has been agreed by the Strategic Policy Committee, it should be made available for the public to comment. To reach the wider community, the Heritage Officer should consider giving a series of presentations to community and interest groups. The public should be encouraged to participate in this phase of public consultation by attendance at meetings or through written submissions. The draft plan can be made available online through an online consultation portal or the council website. Hard copies should also be made available through the City or County Library Service, and submissions should be accepted electronically or in hard copy.

Consideration can be given to a formal launch of the Plan which will help to raise the profile of the Heritage Plan and the Heritage Office locally, particularly if this is the first plan for the area.

Step 7. Plan Approval

Submissions and comments received on the draft Heritage Plan should be compiled and assessed by the Heritage Officer and presented with recommendations to the Heritage Forum for its consideration. The Heritage Forum make the necessary amendments to the draft plan, following which it should be submitted to the Strategic Policy Committee for final approval. Once approved by the SPC, the plan can go before the full Council for approval.

The timing of these meetings should be carefully planned, particularly as the SPCs may only meet quarterly.

Step 8. Publication

Following approval by the elected members in the full Council, the Heritage Plan should be published and distributed to all those who contributed to the process as well as to the wider public. Copies should be made available in local libraries and other suitable local venues (eg museums, community centres) and the document should be made available online.



5 Irish Language and the Heritage Plan

In the preparation of Local Authority Heritage Plans, it is imperative to recognise the Irish language as a fundamental and valued component of Ireland's cultural heritage. The richness and complexity of the Irish language are not merely a matter of legal compliance but are integral to the very fabric of Ireland's heritage. This document aims to provide guidelines that ensure the Irish language is woven throughout every aspect of local authority heritage services, reflecting its significance in preserving and celebrating Ireland's unique cultural identity.

5.1 Beyond Compliance

The following paragraphs detail the legal requirements for the translation of Heritage Plans into Irish, as mandated by the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021. These Acts underscore the commitment to promoting the use of Irish in official capacities and outline the obligations of public bodies concerning the State's official languages. While the legal framework provides a foundation for the inclusion of the Irish language, local authorities are encouraged to go beyond mere compliance. The expectation is that the Irish language will be embraced in its entirety, ensuring its presence and vitality in all heritage-related activities and communications.

The Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021, along with subsequent advice and guidelines, serve as a roadmap for local authorities to integrate the Irish language into their Heritage Plans. This integration is not only a legal requirement but also a reflection of the value placed on the Irish language as a living, breathing part of Ireland's heritage. By adhering to these guidelines, local authorities will not only fulfil their legal obligations but also

contribute to the conservation and promotion of a vital element of Ireland's cultural heritage – the Irish language

5.2 Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021

The Official Languages Act 2003 and the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 are intended to promote the use of Irish for official purposes and set out the duties of public bodies in relation to the official languages of the State (Irish and English). The Acts place a number of significant requirements on public bodies regarding the use of the Irish language. For full details of all requirements, Heritage and Biodiversity Officers should consult with the Irish Language Officer of their local authority, or with An Coimisiúneir Teanga. The Act establishes the duty to publish certain core documents simultaneously in Irish and English, including any document setting out public policy proposals (Section 10).

5.3 Public Consultation

Under Section 10A of the Official Languages Act 2003, any policy document issued by or on behalf of a public body, in draft form for public consultation must be issued in both official languages, simultaneously.

5.4 Irish Language Scheme

Irish Language Schemes are specific to local authorities and therefore are not all uniform in terms of their commitments. Irish Language Schemes will be discontinued when Standards (section 19A) are applied to each public body – local authorities among them. These

Standards are not yet available, and Irish Language Scheme requirements will continue until Standards are applied. If a local authority has committed – in its Irish Language Schemes – to making documents like the Heritage Plans available in both official languages, then they must continue to do so.

5.5 Translation

Local Authorities should allow for the cost and time associated with professional translation of both draft and final Heritage Plans in preparing these plans. The advice of an Coimisinéir Teanga is that public bodies should use the panel of accredited translators established by Foras na Gaeilge. Contact details for accredited translators is available at www.forasnagaeilge.ie/support/translators-and-editors.

While adherence to the legal requirements outlined in the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021 is essential, the overarching aim for local authorities in the preparation of City and County Heritage Plans should be to transcend compliance. The integration of the Irish language into these plans is an opportunity to deeply embed this rich and complex language into the heart of local heritage services. By doing so, local authorities will not only honour the legal framework but also actively contribute to the conservation and celebration of the Irish language as a cherished and vibrant part of Ireland's cultural heritage. This commitment to the Irish language should be evident in every aspect of the Heritage Plan, ensuring that it remains a living, dynamic, and integral component of Ireland's heritage narrative.

6 Appropriate Assessment

The requirement for "Appropriate Assessment" is set out in Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The Habitats Directive is transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended. European Sites are defined in Regulation 2(1) of the Habitats Regulations and comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), at all stages of designation commencing with the Minister's notice of intention to designate.

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) is an assessment of the potential adverse effects of a plan or project (in combination with other plans or projects) on Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. Detailed guidance for Appropriate Assessment is available from the NPWS³.

The AA guidance states: "Plans include all statutory and non-statutory land use, framework and sectoral plans and strategies to the extent that they have the potential to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site. This incorporates 'plans and programmes' covered by the SEA Directive¹¹, and **other plans and strategies, including those that are designed or intended to benefit the environment or heritage, such as Heritage and Biodiversity plans**, recreation/amenity plans or strategies, and River Basin Management Plans."

6.1 Stage 1 Screening for AA

Screening determines whether appropriate assessment is necessary by examining:

- 1) whether a plan or project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site, and
- 2) the potential effects of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, on a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives, and considering whether these effects will be significant.

6.2 Competent Authorities

The AA Guidelines State: "The competent authorities in Ireland are the national, regional or local authorities that are charged with or responsible for consenting, authorising, adopting or deciding to proceed with a plan or project. From a planning and land use perspective, the competent authorities are considered to be the regional authorities, the planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála. It is the competent authority's responsibility to obtain the information to enable it to screen a plan or project for AA and, if required, obtain from the proponent of the plan or project the NIS. Obviously if a plan or project is being proposed by a competent authority itself, the competent authority will be responsible for the production of the NIS. The competent authority is then responsible for carrying out AA and for maintaining a complete audit trail of the AA process."

³ Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities. Available at www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS_2009_AA_Guidance.pdf

6.3 Expertise

Work on the NIS can be carried out by an in-house team preparing the plan, if they have the requisite ecological and other expertise at their disposal. Alternatively external specialists may be engaged for the purpose, or a combined approach involving in-house and external expertise may be adopted. If it is carried out in-house, the team will be best placed to quickly feed the results of the process back into the plan preparation process but it is essential that the team has at its disposal the necessary competencies to deal with the planning, ecological and other technical issues involved. Consultants, on the other hand, may bring a degree of objectivity to the process, and may be required for their ecological or other expertise.

A combination of the two approaches may well offer the best solution, with specialists engaged to assist the team as required at different stages in the process.

In planning the preparation of Heritage and Biodiversity Plans, sufficient time and budget should be allowed to incorporate AA screening to the process. If screening demonstrates that significant effects are certain, likely or uncertain, the plan must either proceed to Stage 2 (AA), or be rejected.



7 Implementation and review

Heritage planning should be an iterative process. The Heritage Plan is continually evaluated, and modifications made based on experience. Over a five-year cycle, the plan is prepared, implemented, evaluated, followed by another cycle of planning and implementation based on the outcome of consultation and ongoing evaluation.

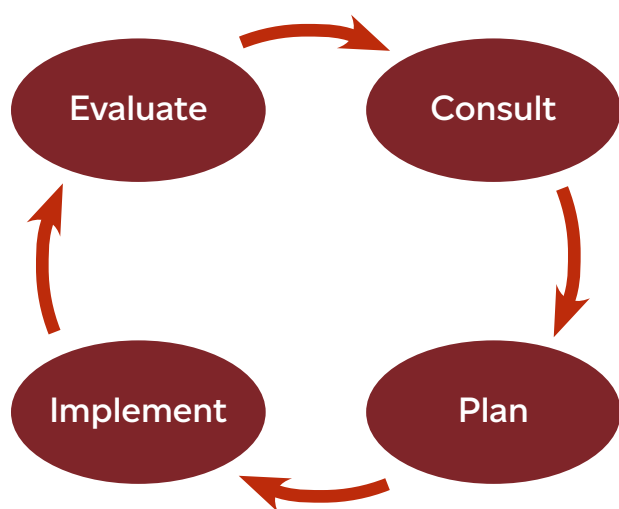


Figure 4: Heritage Plan cycle of implementation and review

The Heritage Plan should be accompanied each year by an Annual Action Plan which indicates how the strategic plan will be actioned, and details who is responsible for each action, the budget, funding source, target outcomes and delivery date. Action plans for the lifetime of the plan should not be prepared all at once as action plans for subsequent years may be determined by the implementation and evaluation of the preceding year. Projected costings should only be included in the annual work programmes rather than in the plan itself. The plan may contain an indicative figure for the implementation of the entire plan.

It is important to set a pace of implementation that can be maintained throughout the entire

plan. This should attempt to take account of the inevitable issues that will arise throughout the implementation of the plan, and which will divert the attention of the Heritage Officer.

7.1 Resourcing implementation

The Local Authority should establish a Heritage Plan Implementation budget within the Local Authority annual budget. In 2022 the Heritage Council awarded €971,845 to local authorities for implementation of County and City Heritage Plans. This fund represents the Heritage Council's commitment to empowering Local Authorities to secure benefits for heritage at a local level. The Heritage Plan fund is available only to Local Authorities who have engaged a Heritage Officer through the Heritage Council's Heritage Officer Programme. Any funding received by a Local Authority under this scheme must be managed by the Heritage Officer.

The Heritage Council offers funding to Local Authorities for the implementation of County/ City Heritage Plans on a matching basis. A minimum of match funding of 25% must be provided by the Local Authority for projects funded by the Heritage Council.

There will be a number of funding sources available to the Heritage Office to complement the Local Authority Heritage Plan Implementation budget in implementing the Heritage Plan which will vary over time. Attendance at the Training and Development sessions organised quarterly by the Heritage Council will assist in informing the Heritage Officer on additional funding opportunities.

Draft plans which have been agreed only by the Heritage Forum and not the full County / City Council will not be eligible to apply for this

funding. The plan process must, therefore, be at least at step six of the eight steps outlined in [Section 4](#).

7.2 Keeping stakeholders informed

The elected members will be a crucial part of the process, as they represent the people of the city or county and will be the ones who will endorse the Heritage Plan on their behalf. In keeping elected members informed, keep in mind that heritage conservation is just one of a number of issues that they are expected to deal with. The information they receive should, therefore, be concise, timely, relevant and accessible. They should receive regular updates on the progress of the Heritage Plan preparation and implementation of the Heritage Plan in line with a predetermined information programme. Such information should be succinct and focussed.

Other stakeholders should be kept informed on the progress of the plan. Suitable communications formats can be agreed at local level but will include regular press releases, annual reports on work carried out, information on the local authority website and social media, annual seminar and National Heritage Week events.



8 Monitoring and evaluation

Evaluating the plan will involve assessing whether the plan actually achieved what it set out to, how well it did that, and whether or not it could achieve the same objectives more effectively and efficiently through some other means. Both the Heritage Officer and the Heritage Forum have central roles in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan. This can be done by the Heritage Officer on an ongoing basis, as actions and projects are completed, and on a formal basis by the Heritage Forum at regular scheduled meetings.

To be undertaken properly, it must be based upon clearly defined performance indicators which are related to the objectives of the plan, in order to provide the Heritage Forum with information for improving the decisions

regarding the original design, implementation or modification of the plan. These indicators should be developed once the plan has been endorsed. The primary indicator, however, will be the completion of the actions which are set out in the plan, and the extent to which they contribute to the achievement of the objectives. The evaluation of the plan will, therefore, be expressed in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Suggested performance indicators that might be considered are included in [Appendix B Sample Key Performance Indicators](#).

The process used to evaluate the Heritage Plan should open, transparent and clearly documented.

9 Conclusion

The aim should be to produce a plan that is ambitious yet realistic and attainable and make full use of the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to adjust and improve the plan during the implementation stage. The plan can contain some objectives which may appear unattainable at the time of preparing the plan, but may become more attainable as outside factors change. Remember that it is an iterative and cyclical process and the objectives and priorities must, therefore, be continually informed by the results of implementation.

It is advisable to have some flexibility in strategic objectives where possible as this allows for change during the lifetime of the plan.

A record should be kept of the full process of preparing the plan, and any adaptation of guidelines to suit local circumstances. A summary of this can be included in the plan. This record will be of great use to other Heritage Officers, as well as learning how the process (and these guidelines) can be improved and updated in the future.

Appendix A Definitions of elements of heritage included in the Heritage Act, 1995⁴

Archaeological object

Any chattel whether in a manufactured or partly manufactured or an unmanufactured state which by reason of the archaeological interest attaching thereto or of its association with any Irish historical event or person has a value substantially greater than its intrinsic (including artistic) value, and the said expression includes ancient human, animal or plant remains.

Architectural heritage

Includes all structures, buildings, traditional and designed, and groups of buildings including streetscapes and urban vistas, which are of historical, archaeological, artistic, engineering, scientific, social or technical interest, together with their setting, attendant grounds, fixtures, fittings and contents, and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, includes railways and related buildings and structures and any place comprising the remains or traces of any such railway, building or structure.

Fauna

All wild birds and all wild animals (both aquatic and terrestrial) and includes in particular fish, wild mammals, reptiles, non-aquatic invertebrate animals and amphibians, and all such wild animals' eggs, larvae, pupae or other immature stage and young, but in relation to fish or aquatic invertebrate animals (or their eggs or spawn or other immature stage or brood or young) only includes fish and such aquatic invertebrate animals of a species specified in regulations under section 23 of the Wildlife Act, 1976, which are for the time being in force.

Flora

All plants, (both aquatic and terrestrial) which occur in the wild (whether within or outside the State) other than trees, shrubs or plants being grown in the course of agriculture, forestry or horticulture and includes in particular lichens, mosses, liverworts, fungi, algae and vascular plants, namely flowering plants, ferns and fern-allied plants and any community of such plants.

Geology

The study of the planet Earth as a whole or in part, the materials of which it is made, the processes that act and have acted upon these materials and the products and structures formed by such action, the physical and biological history of the planet since its origin including the history of life preserved as fossils in rocks and deposits at the surface or in layers beneath the surface of the earth, stratigraphic succession, caves, fossil content of any other items of scientific interest, and include geomorphology, lithology and mineralogy.

Heritage gardens and parks

Includes areas of natural heritage, and gardens and parks whose plant collections, design, design features, buildings, setting, style or association are of significant, botanical, aesthetic or historical interest or which illustrate some aspect of the development of gardening or of gardens or parks.

Heritage objects

Objects over 25 years old which are works of art or of industry (including books, documents and other records, including genealogical records) of cultural importance.

⁴ www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1995/act/4/enacted/en/html

Inland Waterways

Canals, canalised sections of rivers and lakes, navigation channels in rivers and lakes, and their associated navigational features.

Landscape

Includes areas, sites, vistas and features of significant scenic, archaeological, geological, historical, ecological or other scientific interest.

Monument

Includes the following, whether above or below the surface of the ground or the water and whether affixed or not affixed to the ground:

- (a) any artificial or partly artificial building, structure or erection or group of such buildings, structures or erections,
- (b) any cave, stone, or other natural product, whether or not forming part of the ground, that has been artificially carved, sculpted or worked upon or which (where it does not form part of the place where it is) appears to have been purposely put or arranged in position,
- (c) any, or any part of any, prehistoric or ancient –
 - (i) tomb, grave or burial deposit, or
 - (ii) ritual, industrial or habitation site,
- (d) any place comprising the remains or traces of any such building, structure or erection, any such cave, stone or natural product or any such tomb, grave, burial deposit or ritual, industrial or habitation site, situated on land or in the territorial waters of the State, but does not include any building, or part of any building, which is habitually used for ecclesiastical purposes.

Seascape

Areas and sites of coastal water including estuaries, bays and lagoons of significant scenic, geological, ecological or other scientific interest.

Wildlife habitat

The ecological environment in which particular organisms and communities thereof thrive.

Wreck

A vessel, or part of a vessel, lying wrecked on, in or under the seabed or, on or in land covered by water, and any objects contained in or on the vessel, and any objects that were formally contained in or on a vessel and are lying on, in or under the seabed or on or in land covered by water.

Appendix B Sample Key Performance Indicators

The following is a list of sample Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by which a Local Authority Heritage Officer can monitor and measure the success of their Heritage Plan. These are intended to act as a starting point for Heritage Officers in the process of drafting a Heritage Plan and are therefore general in nature. As each local authority has unique requirements and resources, so too will the

KPIs for each Heritage Plan be unique to that local authority. Figures have been left blank so that each Heritage Officer can set a goal that is achievable and realistic for their Heritage Plan.

Sample Key Performance Indicators	Measure
Signed Service Level Agreement	In place (Y/N)
Current Heritage Plan	Plan in place (Y/N)
Heritage Forum in place and operating	Number of forum meetings/ year, Record of attendance at meetings
Participation in Heritage Council Heritage Officer training & development programme	Number of training events attended per year
Number of heritage events/projects throughout a 12-month period (% which facilitate a youth element)	Number of events, % increase over past year
Increase in spend per capita on heritage by local authority of the life of the Heritage Plan	% increase
Amount drawn down from accessible national funds by Heritage Office	Total direct heritage spend by the LA
Number of events for National Heritage Week, World Wetlands Day, National Biodiversity Week, Archives Awareness Week, International Museum Day and similar national campaigns (per thousand population of LA area)	Number of events/Number per thousand population
Improved access and interpretation to physical heritage sites in local authority ownership over the life of the Heritage Plan	Some qualitative or quantitative measure of accessibility would be required
Up to date accessible information available on local authority Heritage Office and related websites	Heritage section on LA website

Sample Key Performance Indicators	Measure
Increase in data collected and submitted for inclusion to Heritage Maps and NBDC database	Number of datasets on heritage maps for the city or county
Submission made by Heritage Officers at National, Regional, and local level in respect of relevant strategies and plans	Number of submissions
Representation of Heritage Officers and other LA Heritage Professionals on national/regional working groups	Number of working groups included
Number of successful applications to grant schemes (locally or nationally) by community heritage groups	€ drawn down in the city/county from Heritage Council
Internal training session on heritage needs held within the local authority during the lifetime of the Heritage Plan	Total staff trained
Heritage skills training sessions held in a 12-month period	Number of participants
Best-practice/guidelines materials promoted per annum	Number of publications
Joint projects delivered cross-county/cross-border, and all-island	Number of collaborative projects
Projects acknowledging and celebrating the importance of the Irish language	% of publications in Irish, number of projects with Irish language at their core



Image information

Front Cover: Top left: Conservation works at Tirellan Castle, Galway. Photo: Galway City Council; Bottom left: Blacksmithing at Cappamore Campus, Limerick. Photo: The Heritage Council/Pedro Souza; Top right: Filming about wetlands in County Monaghan. Photo: Shirley Clerkin; Mid right: Taghmon group consulting a map for Westmeath Field Names Recording Project. Photo: Melanie McQuade; Bottom right: Wetland vegetation at the edge of Lough Namucka, Co Mayo. Photo: Peter Foss.

Inside front cover: Fethard Castle, Co Wexford during conservation works. Photo: Catherine McLoughlin.

Opposite page 1: A farmer with his grandson looking over one of his fields, Rathcroghan, Co Roscommon. Photo: Farming Rathcroghan EIP.

Page 6: Birr Castle, Co Offaly. Photo: The Heritage Council/Pedro Souza.

Page 10: Mapping the placenames and old roads of the Cooley Peninsula, at the start of the “Cadger’s Pad” path from Ravensdale, Co Louth. Photo: Ken Finegan.

Page 16: Holy Wells Story-Sharing Event during National Heritage Week 2023 at Johnswell, Co. Kilkenny. Photo: Róisín Ó Sullivan.

Page 21: Traditional Dresser in Hastings Farmhouse, Tullyvarraga, Shannon, Co Clare. Photo: Clare County Council.

Page 24: Family woodland fun in John O’Sullivan Park, Ennis, Co. Clare. Photo: The Heritage Council/Pedro Souza.

This page: Boardwalk at the Ridge of Capard, Slieve Bloom Mountains, Co Laois. Photo: Alf Harvey.



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