European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards (2024)
702-Education, Training and Skills 3. Education, Training & Skills

Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme

gEdoxgZL

Entry details

General information

Main country of application	Ireland
Registration number	HA2024-IE-05

In case there are other official partners involved in the project, please list the country(ies) they come from

> Ireland

Brief description of the project

> The principal objective of the traditional farm buildings scheme is to ensure that traditional farm buildings and other related structures that contribute to the character of the Irish rural landscape, and are of significant heritage value, are conserved for agricultural use. It aims to 'valorise' these traditional structures, drawing attention to their heritage and environmental value; to encourage the survival of vernacular skills so that both buildings and skills continue to endure; to ensure an integrated approach to built and natural heritage, valuing biodiversity and sustainability equally with building conservation and putting cultural heritage at the heart of climate action.

Start date of the project	2008-03-01
Website(s) of the project/nominee	https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/traditional-farm-buildings-grant-scheme
Facebook page of the project, if any	https://www.facebook.com/TheHeritageCouncil
Twitter page of the project, if any	https://twitter.com/HeritageHubIR
Instagram page of the project, if any	https://www.instagram.com/theheritagecouncil/
Any other relevant social media	https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIKz_D-MJSUkaLvBiOQTSLGPgufGlt76u

Does the site or heritage in question have national/regional/local cultural heritage designation or protection status in its country?	No
Is the site or heritage in question included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, either as a single World Heritage Site or as part of one larger site?	No
If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to the public?	Yes

If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to people with disabilities?

> Some of the buildings/structures are owned by people with disabilities and are accessible and there are also other buildings/structures in the scheme which are accessible to people with disabilities.

Contact details

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Entrant's position	Project Manager
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Organisation of the owner	The Heritage Council manage the Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme
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Other relevant participants

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Concise summary

Concise summary

The Traditional Farm Building Scheme was established in 2008 by The Heritage Council in partnership with The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine in response to the rapid changes in agricultural practice and growing concern about the loss of traditional farm buildings and the subsequent impact on the Irish rural landscape character as well as traditional skills.

This nationwide competitive scheme is co-funded by the Irish government and the EU under Ireland's Rural Development Programme, with an annual budget of €1,000,000, increased since 2019 to €1,250,000. It runs on an annual basis, with an average of 70-80 projects supported a year.

While such buildings often fall below the threshold of 'special interest' that justifies their protection under the law for architectural heritage, these simple vernacular structures are:
• fundamental to the character of the Irish rural landscape,
• of built heritage value
• repositories of traditional building and craft skills,
• stores of memories and historic artefacts
• represent significant embodied carbon, and
• are important habitats for numerous native species of plants and animals.

The principal objective of the scheme is to ensure that traditional farm buildings and other related structures that contribute to the character of the Irish rural landscape, and are of significant heritage value, are conserved for agricultural use. The buildings must be publicly visible in the landscape, or provide another form of public benefit, such as training in traditional skills.

It is open to farmers who have given a commitment to farm in harmony with the environment and is aimed at getting farmers to put a cultural value on these buildings. Participants are supported in acquiring skills to enable them to carry out repairs to return the building to functional use on the farm. Skilled crafts people are also engaged and each participant must appoint a conservation supervisor who provides guidance on conservation ethos. Each participant must demonstrate that repairs will not adversely impact on wildlife populations, which regularly use these buildings to nest or roost. This requires the input of an ecologist who works in partnership with all to ensure a holistic heritage outcome on the project.

The scheme was reviewed externally in 2022, and determined it has had extraordinary success in changing attitudes including on traditional skills.

The scheme has been recognised as innovative at European level because of its holistic conservation ethos and demonstrates that cultural heritage can help address the climate change and biodiversity crisis.

Objectives and work undertaken

Aims and objectives of the project/initiative

> The principal objective of the scheme is to ensure that traditional farm buildings and other related structures that contribute to the character of the Irish rural landscape, and are of significant heritage value, are conserved for agricultural use.
>
> The scheme aims:
> ○ to 'valorise' these traditional structures, drawing attention to their heritage and environmental value;
> ○ to encourage the survival of traditional vernacular construction skills;
> ○ to promote an integrated approach to built and natural heritage, valuing biodiversity and sustainability equally with building conservation and traditional skills.
>
> One of the aims of the scheme is to actively transmit skills in the vernacular context. Training at multiple levels has become a component, initially by the participant being challenged to declare the heritage value of the building, by on-farm skills training and skills demonstration days, and by challenging the perceived ideas of the conservation supervisors about the non-aesthetic values to be found in these buildings. Modes of communication adopted focus on one-to-one (or one-to-few) dialogues.
>
> In devising the detailed aims for the scheme, the owners of the buildings were encouraged to carry out their own repairs if they wished The application form allows the project's costings to be expressed in two ways – the conventional builder's estimate, and, as an alternative, an 'own labour and materials' estimate.
>
> A long-standing aim of the scheme is to increase awareness amongst the farming community and the wider public of the important role of this aspect of our built heritage in helping to address the biodiversity crisis.

Any historical and technical research undertaken for the project/initiative

> The initial impetus for the scheme came from the results of a survey, published in 2006, that looked at the value placed by members of the public on landscape improvements achieved under REPS (Rural Environmental Protection Scheme) - Quantifying the landscape benefits arising from the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme: results from a public survey, The Rural Economy Research Centre Working Paper Series. The survey found that the public place a very high value on improvements to the visual quality of rural landscapes. Highest values were for Preserving Rivers and Lakes, Wildlife Habitats, Cultural Heritage, Mountain Land, Farmyard Tidiness, Stonewalls, Pastures and Hedgerows At the same time, there was growing concern about the loss of traditional farm buildings to changes in farming practice. Several publications and papers sought to highlight the value of these buildings, and provide guidelines for their conservation:
> ● Traditional Buildings in Ireland Homeowners Handbook featuring The Mourne Homesteads Experience, 2004
> ● Traditional Buildings on Irish Farms, 2005
> ● Caring for the Heritage of Farm Buildings, Heritage Outlook, Spring 2006
> ● Reusing Farm buildings: A Kildare Perspective 2007
> These directly fed into the joint creation of the scheme by the Department of Agriculture and the Heritage Council in 2008.

Activities carried out and stages of implementation of the project/initiative

> The scheme opens on an annual basis, generally opening in early spring of each year, shortlisting of projects by an external expert assessment panel in late Spring, approval by the Heritage Council board and decisions issuing in early summer. Wildlife surveys are carried out between May and September with projects having until the end of October for completion of repairs, unless wildlife considerations apply whereby the deadline will be mid-December. Information seminars are held on the opening of the scheme and when projects are shortlisted. Heritage Council inspections are carried out throughout the process of the project with payments made in November and December.
>
> Since 2016 the scheme has invested in the conservation repair of almost 600 buildings (2016: 72; 2017: 68; 2018:94; 2019: 112; 2020: 90; 2021: 86 and 2022:77). Projects range from small scale mortar repairs to more ambitious whole-building/several building projects.

To date, 70% of traditional farm building projects were discovered to host protected species and these have been protected throughout repairs.

Since 2018 several short films have been made on different aspects of repair and skills and guidelines to accompany short films are due for publication in December 2023.

Training and skills demonstration days have been run in partnership with TEAGASC, the Irish agriculture and food development authority, ensuring that the widest possible section of the farming community is reached, resulting in 2020 in The Reusing Farm Buildings guidance. The scheme has been included in the TEAGASC Environmental and Sustainable Farming Workbook for students undertaking Third Level courses in agriculture.

Since 2021 it is included in the Royal Institute Architects of Ireland (RIAI) Conservation Induction Module for architects seeking to achieve conservation accreditation.

Skills training days have also been run in cooperation with the Building Limes Forum of Ireland and projects featured in its annual newsletter.

Challenges or problems encountered and solutions found to overcome them

Communication on heritage is key and a continuing challenge is imparting the value of our holistic conservation ethos although by implementing an annual training seminar since 2019, and since 2021 supported by accompanying short films, guidance, training and information webinars, understanding has significantly improved.

To date 70% of buildings have served as wildlife habitats. These bring challenges as to timing and the use of particular materials. In such cases a revision to proposed works is facilitated if necessary, training provided, and deadlines extended as far as possible. As a heritage body the protection of all heritage matters. The use of a felt underlay under slate is not permitted as the breathable version is considered deathly harmful to bats, a species protected under law. As an alternative the application of lime parging is promoted and facilitates investment in traditional skills as well as protection of wildlife.

Results and impact

Summary of the main results achieved and knowledge that has been gained. List the ways that the project/initiative contributes to the preservation and/or enhancement of the historical, cultural, environmental, educational and/or social values of the heritage in question. Mention the project's impact on conservation policy and practice, if any.

A significant ambition of any scheme such as this one is to achieve some level of attitudinal change amongst participants as well as beyond the participant pool. The 2022 evaluation of the scheme undertook a very successful survey, to which just under 70% of all participants since 2016 responded providing invaluable information:
Over 97% said they now saw the value in restoring old farm buildings instead of building new ones;
98% said they knew more about restoring and maintaining old farm buildings now;
87% said they had more confidence in carrying out repairs themselves now;
96% were more inclined to use traditional craftsmen;
and 95% knew more about the wildlife on their farm.
100% - every single responder considered their farm looked better and they were prouder of it.

This has all been achieved by dint of participation in the Scheme.

The scheme has actively prevented the decline and even destruction of some of these traditional buildings. If not successful in securing assistance 37% of respondents said the project simply would not have been done, allowing the building to slip into further disrepair, while 7% admitted they would have demolished it.

The impact is not confined to direct scheme participants: 98% of participants said that other people had commented on how well the completed repairs looked while 96% confirmed that it had encouraged others to think about doing similar conservation work themselves.

> The very existence of the scheme has been used by a local authority to refuse planning permission for demolition of a traditional building. The scheme has also been pivotal in helping to establish the All-Ireland Heritage Skills Programme. Since the scheme was established the government has brought in guidance and grant schemes for vernacular houses.

Aspects of the project that can be considered innovative within its area or field.

> It represents an innovative, successful co-operative arrangement between two State agencies, This arrangement has allowed a heritage body to reach a new audience, the farming community. The ethos of encouraging own-labour projects and prioritisation of process and learning outcomes over technical results is considered unique in built heritage schemes. The scheme has permitted a group of people who do not normally have the opportunity to engage with the ethics of conservation to do so.
>
> In both Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe (2015) and ILUCIDARE Innovation Handbook (2021), the scheme has been recognised for its innovative recognition of these “ordinary” farm buildings as being worthy of support in the environmental protection context and the scheme's understanding of the conservation of these buildings as contributing to the conservation of the character of the Irish rural landscape and to European and national wildlife legislation, particularly the protection of bats and birds.

Measures to ensure the sustainability/future viability of the project (in terms of future plans and funding).

> The 2022 evaluation of the scheme has determined how effective it has been in realising the full breadth of its ambition. Its recommendations on how to build on its strengths are being implemented and will help determine the scheme's future direction.
>
> A particularly satisfying impact for traditional skills is the increased awareness amongst farmers of their value and their readiness to use them in the future. The evaluation established that 96% of participating farmers surveyed agreed that they are more inclined now to use traditional craftworkers if they needed special works done. This is an impact for the traditional skills sector with real longevity. The evaluation also established that 47% of farmers have already carried out additional conservation works themselves since participating in the scheme. As these buildings were often built by farmers themselves, using traditional skills and local materials, it was critical that this relationship be re-established.

Environmental sustainability of the project and contribution to climate action (in terms of results, techniques, materials employed, methodologies etc.), if relevant.

> The scheme is sustainable by design. Environmental sustainability is built into the assessment criteria. Aspects considered include the embodied carbon in existing structures, the building's use, the reuse of materials and the skills necessary for this, locally-sourced labour and materials, the preservation of existing wildlife habitats and works to enhance biodiversity.
>
> Actively involving and upskilling local builders or the farmers who own and use these buildings, means that long after the project is complete, the person who has always carried out the repairs is encouraged to do so, thereby ‘future-proofing’ these buildings.
>
> Traditional farm buildings and other vernacular features are important habitats for several bird, bat, insect and other animal species (70% of buildings to date). They may also provide habitats for numerous plant species, wall flora in particular. Their conservation, sensitively managed on the scheme, contributes to the preservation of these habitats and to the reversal of biodiversity loss.

Dissemination of the project’s results and knowledge gained and any outreach or educational activities.

> The evaluation of the scheme has been disseminated widely and is available on the Heritage Council website as well as Government of Ireland website (https://www.gov.ie/en/).
>
> Close to completion are the representation of completed projects on the heritage maps viewer (www.heritagemaps.ie) which focuses on heritage around Ireland, much of which have never been publicly accessible before. New archaeological

discoveries are reported to National Monuments Service and biodiversity data submitted to the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

The scheme was chosen to be included in the very first ICCROM course on Promoting People-Centred Approaches: Engaging Communities in the Conservation of Nature and Culture in 2015.

The scheme has been the subject of papers and presentations at numerous national and international conferences and workshops, at home and abroad.

The scheme has informed government and NGO policy including A Living Tradition Strategy, Wildlife in Buildings: Linking our Built and Natural Heritage, Reusing Farm Buildings.

Participation in the initiative (number of participants/audience/users per year and/or, in the case of websites and digital platforms, information regarding visitor numbers and online interaction).

From 2016 to 2022, 450 participants/applicants (farmers) have been involved in the conservation repair of just under 600 traditional buildings, (far exceeding the target of 350 buildings set out in the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020). Each of the 450 participants undertook to promote the holistic conservation ethos of the scheme, through open days, local and national radio interviews, newspaper articles, tv interviews, presentations to farming organisations and other groups, social media posts including in 2021 a first ever Tik Tok story and in 2023, a first ever podcast. As well as farmers, each project also involved the participation of a conservation supervisor and many also an ecologist and builder. The Scheme has generated at least 4,000 weeks employment in the pursuit of holistic conservation repair since 2016. From 2009 to 2015 conservation repairs were carried out to just under 400 buildings to return them to active use for the farm.

Involvement of youth, community and/or non-traditional audiences.

The scheme is designed to involve a non-traditional audience - the farming community and administered via an agricultural environmental protection initiative. As such, it is non-traditional in its entire operational model, including in its encouragement of own-labour projects.

On an informal level, the scheme facilitates the transmission of skills from generation to generation - with the whole family often getting involved in conservation works (more than 50% of projects have involved some family/own labour aspect). It has been interesting to observe that it is often the younger generation who feel most strongly about the traditional buildings on the family farm being conserved.

In 2021 the scheme featured in the RIAI (Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland) Conservation Induction Module for the first time. As architects have not always emerged as the best conservation supervisors on this scheme this is a noteworthy inclusion for these ‘ordinary’ buildings.

Contribution to intercultural dialogue and to the protection of cultural diversity.

An influx of inward migration to Ireland after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union has led to the establishment of what are now settled communities from several countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Skilled tradespeople were in high demand at the time and building-related tradespeople from these new communities quickly integrated into the Irish construction sector. Those tradespeople brought their own traditional skills and expertise, from their own vernacular traditions - and this has led to a lively intercultural exchange on individual building projects.

Additionally, the scheme contributes to the protection of cultural diversity by preserving a dynamic vernacular tradition that is threatened - across Europe - by changing agricultural practices. The preservation of the vernacular tradition here in Ireland allows for dialogue with the traditions of other European countries, and their protectors, in a way that would not be possible were these ‘ordinary’ aspects of our cultural identities to be lost.

Transferability of the initiative to other contexts and its scalability potential.

In the 2022 evaluation of the scheme it was found that in the research for similar interventions overseas, there was nothing to compare with the Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme in terms of scale, vision or ambition and it is considered unique. The fact that it is co funded under a European mechanism - the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)) means that this scheme should be easily transferable to other European countries.

The holistic conservation ethos demonstrated on the scheme resulting in positive outcomes for built heritage, traditional skills and biodiversity could be transferred, with perhaps some slight modifications, to other built heritage initiatives in Ireland and further afield.

The scale of the scheme is one applied at national level with what might be considered a regional budget. The scheme has been heavily oversubscribed since it first originated and has huge potential for increasing in both scale and ambition.

Any related work that still needs to be completed, if applicable.

The scheme is funded under the Rural Development programmes 2014 - 2020 N+3 rule whereby it is expected to be in place in its current form up to 2025. The 2022 valuation of the scheme has made 35 recommendations across policy, finance, operation, research and communication and while several recommendations have already been implemented, there are others which have yet to commence.

The process of collating all data captured since the scheme began in 2008 and sharing it publicly is a body of work that needs to be completed. Several illustrated 'how to' own labour guides are due to be published by December 2023 to complement the short films already produced on various aspects of the scheme and further films and guides on other aspects of repair are required.

The addition of a question on traditional farm buildings to the National Farm Structure Survey and Census is a long term prospect.

European and international dimension

European significance of the project/initiative/nominee.

The scheme is significant in a European context for its recognition of these 'ordinary' farm buildings as being worthy of support in an environmental protection context. European cultural identity rests on the twin Faro Convention principles of the right of all citizens to have their cultural heritage respected, and the responsibility on all citizens to respect the cultural heritage of others.

Extended to a European scale, this scheme embodies just such an approach. It valorises the ordinary heritage tradition that is particular to a given region, culture or state, while allowing for dialogue with the related ordinary heritage traditions of other regions, cultures or states.

The scheme aligns with several existing European initiatives - such as CHARTER, the European cultural heritage skills alliance - and with the principles of the European Green Deal and New European Bauhaus. Its significance lies in the fact it could be easily transferable across Europe.

Costs of the project/initiative

Costs of the project (in euro), financial and management arrangements, funding partners and/or the type of funding.

The Scheme is co-funded by the National Exchequer (through the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The Heritage Council manage this scheme in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The Department make all grant payments on this scheme following certification by the Heritage Council. The grant is available for the conservation of traditional farm buildings and is also

available for other related farm structures. Standards and conditions are stiplulated. Skills training, capital works and professional fees are all grant eligible.

A total of €6 million was allocated to the Traditional Farm Building Scheme under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Grants do not exceed 75% of the cost of the works, with a maximum grant available of €25,000 and a minimum grant of €4,000. Since 2020 the maximum grant has been increased to €30,000. A minumim input of 25% from participants (farmers) private resources is required.

An annual fund of €1 million was available to the first iteration of the scheme over the lifetime of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme. The funding mechanism and grants were similar to current although the minimum grant available was €5,000.

Funding provided by the European Union or the EEA/Norway Grants (including programme, year and amount of the Grant), if any.

Since it was established, the Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme has been funded in the relevant Rural Development Programmes and is co-funded (55:45) by the National Exchequer (though the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The scheme is funded in its current form under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 until 2025 (N+3 rule).

Additional information

How would winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award benefit you, your project and/or your organisation?

It would help to ensure the continued endurance of this scheme because of the recognition bestowed on its holistic conservation ethos, ensuring recognition of these historic buildings as an active contributor to preserving biodiversity, the sustainable use of resources and the mitigation of climate change as well as their inherent cultural heritage value. It would further benefit us in our work with others to put cultural heritage at the heart of climate and biodiversity action.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, what will the monetary award be used for?

To carry out a 'Look-back' exercise in co-operation with a Third Level partner for on-going use by farmer of the traditional skills acquired, building use and wildlife impact; and to also develop a CPD programme for the heritage sector on balancing the conservation needs of flora, fauna and built heritage.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, who will be the recipient of the monetary award?

The Heritage Council

How did you find out about the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Europa Nostra newsletter
Is this the first time that this entry has been submitted to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	No
If it is a resubmission, write the registration number and title of the previous submission here:	HA2022-IE-02

On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with this online submission form?	✓ 8

Do you have any comments on the application form or suggestions that you would like to share with us?

> Its very helpful to save and keep work and return to an application. A spell check function would be helpful.

By submitting your data, photographs and other material to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards you agree to the processing and sharing of your data in accordance with Europa Nostra's Privacy Policy. Please check the box to indicate you agree with the Privacy Policy.	✓

Log in to european-heritage.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



1 The setting of t... 1.7 MiB



2 Building propo... 4.8 MiB



3 Building refuse... 4.9 MiB



4 Participant bes... 179 KiB



5 A Father and s... 838 KiB



6 Communicatio... 855 KiB



7 A family own la... 5.1 MiB



8 The family own... 5.0 MiB



9 A landmark bui... 2.3 MiB



10 A previously ... 716 KiB



11 Inhabitant aw... 123 KiB



12 Awaiting for s... 7.0 MiB



13 An IGS&UAHS... 592 KiB



14 Cobbled yard ... 205 KiB



15 Completed re... 3.7 MiB



16 Essential repa... 2.8 MiB



17 Detail of an e... 1.1 MiB



18 Blacksmith Ke... 649 KiB



19 Skills people a... 4.9 MiB



20 A family own l... 3.9 MiB



21 Buildings as w... 1.4 MiB



22 Mud bricks h... 2.5 MiB



23 Participant di... 325 KiB



27 The survival o... 856 KiB



28 Stone flag roo... 968 KiB



29 The setting of... 2.3 MiB



30 The first parti... 1.6 MiB



24 A building in ... 4.4 MiB



25 A cache of 19... 150 KiB



26 The building ... 8.3 MiB

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Traditional Farm... 15 KiB

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Traditional Farm... 7.4 MiB

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Using old farm b... 572 KiB

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Traditional Buildi... 2.1 MiB

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SPAB IRELAND 2... 64 KiB

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RTE Radio1 2020 ... 54 KiB

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HA2024 Entrant ... 114 KiB

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