



An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta,
Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta

Department of Arts, Heritage,
Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Town and Village Renewal

Scheme Outline

Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

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Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Introduction

Ireland's towns and villages are the focus of the social, commercial and civic life of their wider communities. Research conducted by the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) has however shown that rural towns have felt the impact of the economic challenges of recent years more acutely than cities and larger urban centres. The significant deterioration of many small towns and villages throughout the country is clearly visible in the form of empty shops, abandoned buildings, vacant lands and a generally poor environment to live in or visit. Targeted action is needed to arrest this decline and harness the regeneration potential of our towns and villages to support economic recovery. This new scheme to support town and village regeneration is part of a concerted effort by Government to support rural development.

Objectives and Focus

The central aim of the scheme is to support the revitalisation of towns and villages in order to improve the living and working environment of their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future. The type of projects to be funded under this initiative is primarily a matter for the Local Authorities (LAs) to identify in partnership with local business and communities. However, the overall intention of the funding is to:

- increase the attractiveness of the town or village as a local commercial and social centre, and as a result increase its sustainability as a place in which to live and work;
- enhance the towns/village environment and amenities in the interests of residents, businesses, and visitors;
- promote the town/village's potential for tourism and as a centre for culture and local heritage, thus enhancing the sense of identity - physically and socially.

Types of activities which can be supported

Measures which are taken under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme should have a sustainable and visible impact on the town/village. The following is an indicative list of the types of activities that can be supported (this list is not exhaustive):

- Public consultation/engagement costs (e.g. room hire)
- Conducting/commissioning of Town/Village health check
- Streetscape and environmental enhancement

- Enhancement of heritage and other community assets
- Shop front enhancement
- Development of quality marks, such as Purple Flag, Heritage Town, etc.
- Provision/enhancement of leisure facilities (e.g. playgrounds, walking trails)
- Car parking improvements
- Town safety and accessibility enhancements
- Training initiatives in support of Town Strategy (e.g. marketing for retailers)
- Branding and marketing of the town/village.
- Targeted action to tackle minor infrastructural deficiencies in access, services, site development works and other infrastructure that may be needed to support housing and commercial development.

Funding will be provided from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs' capital budget. On-going current costs (e.g. salary costs) are not eligible for grant funding. However, current expenditure items which form part of the match funding to be provided by the Local Authority/project will be considered eligible for the duration of the project.

Focus of the scheme for 2016

The scheme will be strategically focused on the rural towns and villages that require assistance to stimulate new development and regeneration locally. The 2016 scheme will have two categories of eligible towns/villages:

Category 1: Towns/villages with population of <5,000.¹

Category 2: Towns with population of 5,000 – 10,000.

For the purposes of this scheme and to distinguish it from the REDZ initiative, town and village proposals should focus on individual towns/villages and the support that can be provided to those towns in order to facilitate their sustainable development. The Town and Village Renewal scheme will focus on initiatives that propose enhancements to the public spaces in a town, improvements that make that town/village a more attractive place to live and work, and facilitate an improved quality of life for the town/village's inhabitants as well as visitors.

¹ Categories are based on town and village populations outlined in the 2011 census a full list of which can be found at www.cso.ie

To achieve a more coherent approach to the development of towns and villages going forward, and for the purpose of ensuring that projects are evidence-based and contribute to sustainable rural development, proposals must be consistent with the broader development plans for the area and the county. In addition to this, Local Authorities are encouraged to consult with their Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) to ensure their consistency with the community elements of the Local Economic Development Plan and the LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS).

As part of the implementation process projects, will be required to establish a Town/Village Renewal Committee with full involvement of both business and community interests (it is acknowledged that in some areas, such committees may already exist and would meet this requirement). In addition to this, any projects approved for funding should be based on a town/village “Health Check” as outlined in the planning guidelines for retail². Appendix 1 to this Scheme Outline contains an extract from these guidelines which sets out ways to assess the vitality and viability of town centres. While the guidelines are set in a retail context, they nonetheless offer suggestions on how the viability and vitality of a town can be assessed from a broader perspective. A comprehensive “Health Check” of a town or village will allow project proposers to position their project to support the best possible outcomes for the town and its people.

If such a Health Check is already available and was conducted as part of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), a LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS), or other process, a further Health Check is not required. If, however, the specific town or village identified for the project has not already conducted a Health Check, the cost of carrying out such a check is eligible for inclusion in the funding proposal.

Outline Scheme Detail

Local communities and their Local Authority are best placed to identify particular projects and initiatives which are important to the regeneration of their own town or village. They can utilise local knowledge, organise community support and employ technical know-how in a structured way to pro-actively realise the environmental improvements or other initiatives that will attract the residents, businesses and visitors our towns need to succeed and prosper. Physical improvement and investment can transform prominent vacant sites, backland development areas, valuable heritage buildings in dereliction and other town assets that have the capability to regenerate the

² A set of guidelines for the retail sector published by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2012 full document can be accessed here <file:///C:/Users/kellyde/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/XSUA8PZ/FileDownload,30026,en.pdf>

local economy and community. Other initiatives can support new businesses that attract increased footfall to the town/village or create a vibrant social hub.

Up to 85% of the total project cost will be provided in grant aid for approved project proposals. The minimum grant payable is €20,000. The maximum grant is €100,000. At least 15% match funding must be provided by the Local Authority and/or local community (which may include business interests). Up to 10% of the total cost may be provided in the form of “in-kind” contributions (e.g. land lease or voluntary labour³); a minimum cash contribution of 5% will also be required.

All projects should include five essential steps:

- Step 1:** Identify the town/village to benefit from the scheme, explaining the rationale for the choice, particularly in the context of the potential of the town/village and its identified needs.

- Step 2:** Establish a Town/Village Project Renewal Committee with involvement of the Local Authority, local business interests, residents and the wider community.

- Step 3:** Conduct a Health-Check on the Town/Village (if not already done) to identify existing assets, amenities, accessibility, environmental aspect, retail mix, etc., and any deficits that need to be addressed or opportunities that can be built on.

- Step 4:** Prepare a Town/Village Renewal Plan on the basis of the Health-Check, setting out in detail the measures to be taken to support the renewal and revitalisation of the town/village.

- Step 5:** Implement the specific project to be funded under the scheme as part of the Town/Village Renewal Plan.

Applications for funding will need to provide a broad outline of how Steps 1-4 will be implemented, by whom, and the estimated cost of each step. Recognising that a more detailed implementation plan will arise from the completion of Steps 1-4, funding approvals will be made on the condition that detailed plans for Step 5 are submitted to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs before any expenditure related to Step 5 commences.

³ Contributions-in-kind can be provided in the form of voluntary labour (i.e. unpaid work) which must be based on the verified time spent and the rate of remuneration for equivalent work. The LA must ensure that the rate applied is properly justified in the application.

Summary of key elements of the Scheme:

Eligible Towns: Category 1: Towns/villages with population of <5,000
Category 2: Towns with population of 5,000 – 10,000

Levels of Co Funding required: The scheme will be co-financed by Government at a maximum rate of 85%. 15% of the project cost will be provided by the Local Authority/other partners with a minimum 5% cash contribution required.

Grant Amounts Available: Minimum Grant - €20,000
Maximum Grant - €100,000

Local Authorities will identify proposed projects in each county. This can be done using a competitive process, or based on other criteria such as County Development Plans or Local Economic and Community Plans.

Each Local Authority is invited to apply to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for a maximum of 8 grants for 8 separate town/village projects.

Applications should be submitted by the end of September 2016.

At least 50% of the project proposals and 50% of the value of the funding sought from each Local Authority should be in respect of Category 1 towns with populations of 5,000 or less. A maximum of two Category 2 projects (towns with populations of between 5,000 and 10,000) will be funded in any county.

Projects should be submitted on the Application Form provided. A separate Application Form should be completed for each town/village for which funding is sought. Funding will be released to Local Authorities once applications are approved by the Department.

Funding Allocations

An allocation of €380,000 will be made to each county. Only projects that have achieved a high standard using the criteria set out below will be approved for funding and the number of projects approved will be limited by the funding available.

Selection Process

All applications will be considered by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on receipt. Each project will be required to be specifically focused on a particular village or town and on its regeneration in social, economic and environmental terms, with strong integration with local and national initiatives.

The selection of individual town and village projects will be based on an assessment against the following criteria:

- a) Population size of the town(s) or village (i.e. Category 1 or Category 2).
- b) Quality of the project in terms of its contribution to the environmental, economic and community regeneration of the village or town.
- c) Coherence with the existing development strategy for the respective town/village as set out in the relevant Town Plan/Local Area Plan, including the contribution to achieving the regeneration and development objectives contained therein.
- d) Linkages between the Health-Check and project proposal.
- e) Integration with other funding programmes supporting rural and community development or town centre development, including those for economic and enterprise initiatives (e.g. grants for occupation of vacant business premises).
- f) Synergies with other Government initiatives, where appropriate (e.g. leveraging the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East, Food Wise 2015).
- g) Delivery arrangements, including project management, timescale, required planning/approval status, targets, deadlines and outcomes.
- h) Value for money of the proposed project actions to be supported, and the leverage effect on additional public and/or private funding including any additional funding over and above the minimum matching contribution required.
- i) Inclusiveness of the consultation process in the development of the project, including with local businesses, community and the LCDC.
- j) Evidence that the relevant intervention is required for regeneration purposes and would not otherwise occur through normal market-led investment.

Funding Rules

All expenditure registered through this scheme will be subject to the terms of the Public Spending Code which can be found at <http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/>.

In this context and in addition to this, the following specific rules will apply to all funding approved through the Town and Village Scheme. The need for adherence to all of the following rules will be reflected in the contractual arrangement between the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Local Authorities approved for funding under the scheme.

1. The full amount of approved funding will be paid as soon as possible after the funding approval is confirmed.
2. All appropriate financial and Government procurement and accounting rules and regulations will be complied with in relation to the expenditure and each Local Authority will fully account for the sum advanced in a timely manner.
3. Every effort should be made (and documented) to expend the full grant awarded by the end of December 2016.
4. All project proposals should outline the consultation processes followed with local stakeholders, including any consideration of the proposal by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).
5. Full and accurate documentation to support all expenditure should be maintained and accessible by Department officials for audit purposes at all times and for a period of three years from the date of completion of the project.
6. Local Authorities will acknowledge the support of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in all public announcements and advertising relating to the project, and the Department may seek to use the project in the broader promotion of its policies.
7. Local Authorities will provide any reports and information relating to the project as may reasonably be requested by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs from time to time.
8. On-going monitoring and evaluation should take place of the project outputs and outcomes in the context of assessing the impact of the intervention and as part of the learning process associated with such interventions. Local Authorities will be expected to collect appropriate

data, facilitate this learning on an on-going basis and make this data available to the Department.

9. Each Local Authority will provide contact point/points to the Department to facilitate timely interaction in the context of payments and information requests.
10. A final report detailing all elements of expenditure relating to the grant aid will be required upon project completion.

Non-Compliance with the rules as outlined or any additional stipulations agreed during contract negotiations may result in the requirement to refund part or all of the grant aid awarded.

Queries

Any queries in relation to this Scheme Outline should be submitted by e-mail to: townandvillage@ahg.gov.ie.



Annex 2

Assessing the Vitality and Viability of Town Centres

A 2.1 Introduction

This appendix outlines some information that may be of use in assessing the viability and vitality of city and town centres in preparing retail strategies, in planning for the retail sector, and in assessing development applications.

A 2.2 What Viability and Vitality Means

The concept of vitality and viability is central to maintaining and enhancing town centres. It will depend on many factors, including the range and quality of activities in a centre, its mix of uses, its accessibility to people living and working in the area, and its general amenity, appearance and safety. A healthy town centre which is vital and viable balances a number of qualities:

- **Attractions** these underpin a town and comprise the range and diversity of shopping and other activities which draw in customers and visitors.
- **Accessibility** successful centres need both to be accessible to the surrounding catchment area via a good road network and public transport facilities, and to encompass good local linkages between car parks, public transport stops and the various attractions within the centre.
- **Amenity** a healthy town centre should be a pleasant place to be in. It should be attractive in terms of environmental quality and urban design, it should be safe, and it should have a distinct identity or image.
- **Action** to function effectively as a viable commercial centre, actions need to follow: Development and improvement projects should be implemented efficiently; there should be regular and effective cleaning and maintenance and there should be co-ordinated town centre management initiatives to promote the continued improvement of the centre.

Although no single indicator on its own can measure the performance of a town in relation to these four elements of all round “health”, it is possible to gain a good appreciation by undertaking a vitality and viability health check assessment using a variety of indicators. This provides a consistent framework for assessing vitality and viability. In this way the strengths and weaknesses of town centres can be analysed systematically and planning authorities will be able to ascertain how well centres are performing in terms of their attraction, accessibility, amenity, and action programmes. Such health checks should both inform and be undertaken within the framework provided by the development plan or undertaken in the form of a city/town/urban centre strategy (detailed below) which is supplementary to, but which informs the



development plan's key retail policies and objectives. Local authorities, in keeping their area under review, should collect information on key town centre uses, and key sites which may be suitable and may become available for retail and other non-retail uses, with or without rehabilitation or redevelopment

A 2.3 Vitality and Viability Health Check Indicators

Some particularly appropriate health check indicators are summarised below:

- IV. Diversity of uses: how much space is in use for different functions – such as offices, shopping, other commercial, leisure, cultural and entertainment activities, pubs, cafes and restaurants, hotels, educational uses, housing – and how has that balance been changing?

A detailed land use survey will generally be required which should clearly distinguish between retail uses, commercial activities (such as hotel, leisure, cafes) offices uses, residential uses, and vacant uses, etc. Specifically the footprint of retail uses is very helpful in identifying the core retail areas of a city or town, the primary and secondary shopping streets, and useful in distinguishing between city/town centre and edge-of-centre. .

Consideration could be given to an upper floor survey of uses to inform possible future re-development opportunities, e.g. Living Over The Shops schemes (LOTS schemes).

- V. Competitiveness: is the current mix of retail stores offering choice to consumers? Is there a need for more innovative retail offerings and services for the benefit of consumers?
- VI. Retailer representation and intentions to change representations: it may be helpful to look at the existence and changes in representation, including street markets, over the past few years, and at the demand from retailers wanting to come into the centre, or to contract or close their representation.
- VII. Shopping rents: monitoring the pattern of movement in retail rents within primary shopping areas is useful and available from commercial property information sources.
- VIII. Proportion of vacant street level property: vacancies can arise even in the strongest town centres, and this indicator must be used with care. Vacancies in secondary frontages and changes to other uses will also be useful indicators. Details on vacant property can be captured through the land use survey.
- IX. Accessibility: the ease and convenience of access by a choice of means of travel, including the quality, quantity and type of car parking, the frequency and quality of public transport services, the range of customer origins served and the quality of provision for pedestrians and cyclists. In certain circumstances car parking surveys should be considered as the circulation and car parking management strategy of a city/town/urban area can play a pro-active role in contributing to the vitality of a centre.

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- X. Environmental quality: this indicator should assess the physical condition of a town (clutter, litter and graffiti) and the environmental attributes (quality of shopfronts, landscaping and open spaces).
- XI. Public realm: the public realm must be an integrated element in the design of the overall development of a street/area, using quality hard and soft landscaping, street furniture, public signage etc. Concerns of maintenance costs and risk management need not preclude varied and interesting design if the issues are considered and adequate measures put in place at planning stage.
- XII. Customer views and behaviour: regular surveys of customer views will help authorities in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of town centre improvement and in setting further priorities. Interviews in the town centre and at home should be used to establish views of both users and non-users of the centre. This could establish the degree of linked trips.
- XIII. Perception of safety and occurrence of crime: this should include views and information on safety and security.
- XIV. Commercial yields on non-domestic property (i.e. the capital value in relation to the expected market rental): this demonstrates the confidence of investors in the long term profitability of the centre for retail, office and other commercial developments. This indicator will normally only be available for the larger town centres and should be used with care as investor confidence can be influenced by a number of extraneous factors unrelated to a particular centre and for many smaller centres there are in any event only a limited number of investment attractions from which conclusions can be drawn.
- XV. Pedestrian flows: the numbers and movement of people on the streets, in different parts of the centre at different times of the day and evening, who are available for businesses to attract into shops, restaurants, or other facilities. To be effective this indicator should be monitored regularly as it is the relative values (rather than absolutes) which are important together with clear evidence of changes over time. This can be done as a comprehensive survey during a typical shopping day or it can be carried out as a sample survey of people on the streets, in different parts of the city/town/urban area. The counts measure footfall, which can contribute to the identification of the street hierarchy.

These indicators should be collected and monitored regularly for the main centres in the retail hierarchy in order to provide baseline and time-series information on the health of centres and allow comparison between centres. The private sector should co-operate with the planning authorities in collecting data. The indicators will also provide the necessary context for considering the implications of retail impact assessments. In many instances it may be difficult to obtain all the vitality and viability health check indicators, especially for local authorities with limited staff resources. Where priorities on data collection have to be established, emphasis should be given to indicators (i)-(viii), especially in the smaller town centres.

The analysis of these health check indicators can also be used directly or to inform the preparation of a city or town centre strategy.



A 2.4 City/Town Centre Strategies

A city or town strategy provides a detailed framework which enables the co-ordination of ongoing programmes, projects, and initiatives within the central area. Positive action to promote change may include the identification of development opportunities, site assembly, better access for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians, and environmental improvements, including improving the attractiveness of townscape and public realm. Such strategies will often incorporate the outcome of the health check appraisal of the relevant areas, indicating both areas of weakness and opportunity.

The following matters should form part of a strategy:

- availing of development opportunities and the need to promote land and site assembly. Renewal opportunities may also arise where underused property and land might be brought back into more productive use through joint action, using Section 212 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended or through other initiatives. Improved town centre management could also help in the co-ordination and implementation of a range of activities in support of the strategy;
- encouraging a diversity of uses in the town centre throughout the day and evening;
- ensuring accessibility by a range of transport types, including reviewing the car parking strategy;
- creating an attractive and safe town centre for pedestrians; and
- undertaking effective management and promotion of the town centre.

Such a strategy will generally contain:

- a profile of the city or town centre, which will identify the essential qualities of the centre and seek to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the community it serves by consolidating and building on its existing strengths;
- a 'visioning' statement, where a shared vision is drawn up and a strategy and action plan for the centre are then prepared to implement the statement;
- implementation proposals, which can range from the strategic to the specific, indicating responsibilities and delivery timetables; and
- provisions for monitoring and review, to ensure that the appropriate actions are being progressed and that changing circumstances are considered.

The city/town centre strategy will generally be prepared by the planning authority in liaison with stakeholders such as retailers, customers, chambers of commerce, and community groups. This liaison should continue through the various stages of the implementation of the centre strategy.

While the strategy can be done at any time it is probably best done either in parallel with the development plan process or just before the process begins so that it can inform the policies and objectives of the development plan, if resources permit.