

Draft County Donegal Heritage Plan (2023-2030)

Introduction

What is Heritage?

Under the Heritage Act (1995), heritage is defined as comprising archaeological objects, architectural heritage, fauna, flora, geology, heritage gardens/parks, heritage objects, inland waterways, landscapes, monuments, seascapes, wildlife habitats and shipwrecks. This concept of heritage is based on our material heritage, a visible expression of our culture. Our heritage embraces the concept of inheritance too – the aspects of built, archaeological, cultural and natural heritage that we have inherited and of which we are custodians and which we seek to hand on to future generations. The Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (The Faro Convention) defines “cultural heritage as a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time.” The County Donegal Heritage Plan will address aspects of our built heritage (such as historic buildings, landscapes, designed parks and gardens), our archaeology (such as monuments, ancient objects and shipwrecks), our natural heritage (such as wildlife, habitats, flora, fauna and geology) and our cultural inheritance (such as skills, folklore, traditions and archives).

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth, in all its forms and interactions. It is both extremely complex and a vital feature of our planet. Biodiversity is comprised of several levels - genetic diversity, species diversity, communities of creatures and then ecosystem diversity such as woodlands or bogs where life interacts with the physical environment. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines ‘biological diversity’ as “The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.” Biodiversity is our life-support system and it provides us with ecosystem goods and services, such as clean water, carbon sequestration, healthy soil, air quality, pollination, food and medicines, timber, and fibre for material. Biodiversity provides us with everything we need to survive.

What We Do

County Donegal Heritage Office

The County Donegal Heritage Office was established in July 2003 with the appointment of County Donegal’s first Heritage Officer. The Heritage Office is part of the Culture Division of Donegal County Council that includes the County Archives, County Library, County Museum, County Arts Office and the Regional Cultural Centre. The role of the County Donegal Heritage Office is to:

- raise awareness of County Donegal’s built, archaeological, cultural and natural heritage;
- provide advice and information on heritage matters to the public and Donegal County Council;
- collect data and conduct research on aspects of County Donegal’s heritage;
- promote best conservation practice in relation to our heritage;
- develop heritage policy; and
- implement the strategic County Donegal Heritage Plan in association with the County Donegal Heritage Forum, The Heritage Council, key stakeholders and local communities.

The Heritage Officer post is a joint initiative between Donegal County Council and The Heritage Council under the Heritage Officer Programme. The first County Donegal Heritage Plan was adopted by Donegal County Council in 2007 and the second County Donegal Heritage Plan was adopted in 2014.

County Donegal Heritage Forum

The County Donegal Heritage Forum is a committee of Donegal County Council and provides advice to Donegal County Council on the preparation and implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan. It is composed of representatives from local government (elected representatives and officials), local development, state agencies, educational institutions, landowner/farming representatives, community/voluntary groups and heritage organisations and groups. The County Donegal Heritage Forum operates on the basis of real and meaningful partnership and cooperation. The County Donegal Heritage Forum prepares and submits an annual application to The Heritage Council and Donegal County Council for matching funding for the implementation of County Heritage Plan actions. There is a commitment in the new National Heritage Plan – Heritage Ireland 2030 – to “Enhance support for local authorities, County/City Heritage Forums and the Heritage Council, and others working in community heritage engagement” (Objective 1).

The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council is a statutory body established under the Heritage Act (1995). Its role is to:

- propose policies and advice for the protection and management of our national heritage;
- promote interest, education, knowledge and pride in, and facilitate the appreciation and enjoyment of this heritage; and
- co-operate with public authorities, educational bodies and other organisations and persons in the promotion of its functions.

The Heritage Council established the Heritage Officer Programme in 1999 – a strategic partnership between The Heritage Council and local authorities in Ireland. Under the Heritage Officer Programme, The Heritage Council provides part-funding for the post of Heritage Officer, organises the Heritage Training & Development Programme for Heritage Officers and provides part-funding annually for the implementation of County Heritage Plans.

Guiding Principles

The County Donegal Heritage Plan seeks to adhere to the following guiding principles in its implementation:

- **Leadership**
The County Donegal Heritage Office, Culture Division of Donegal County Council and the County Donegal Heritage Forum will demonstrate leadership in the implementation and delivery of priorities in the County Donegal Heritage Plan.
- **Integrated Heritage Approach**
Donegal County Council and the County Donegal Heritage Forum recognises that the strategic County Donegal Heritage Plan provides an opportunity to consider the integrated nature of our built, archaeological, cultural and natural heritage and its tangible and intangible aspects. This holistic perspective and ecosystem approach is very important to safeguarding, conserving, enhancing and promoting our heritage.
- **Role of Community**
The implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan will seek to foster interest in, and build the capacity of, communities to engage with their local heritage. There is an active heritage sector in County Donegal and consideration will be given to the support required by heritage groups and community groups with a heritage remit in the county in order to deliver the best

outcomes for our heritage. Care also needs to be taken that there is not an over-reliance on community and voluntary effort in order to protect and conserve our heritage. Investment is needed in the heritage sector to develop employment opportunities for heritage professionals, heritage-related business and traditional skills.

▪ ***Working in Partnership***

In the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan, Donegal County Council and the County Donegal Heritage Forum will work with key stakeholders at local, regional and national levels to deliver the priorities identified in the County Donegal Heritage Plan.

▪ ***Heritage as a Valued Resource***

Donegal County Council recognises that our heritage resources are assets that require careful management and conservation. Heritage values include aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, spiritual, political, national, cultural, educational, recreational, economic and resource. Our tangible and intangible heritage has intrinsic value but also supports our economy, tourism and development. The conservation of our heritage in all its aspects constitutes proper planning and sustainable development in its own right and the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan will seek to prevent the over-exploitation of, and damage to, our heritage resources. Respecting the integrity and value of our heritage is important to its appropriate stewardship and to our handing of it on to future generations.

▪ ***Inclusion & Participation***

Our built, archaeological, cultural and natural heritage presents opportunities for engaging people of all ages and backgrounds. Interest in, managing and caring for our heritage can help be a unifying force in communities and can be a way of introducing newly-arrived people to the local community, landscape and place.

▪ ***Addressing the Biodiversity & Climate Change Emergencies***

In May 2019, the Dáil declared biodiversity and climate change emergencies. In order to play our role in addressing biodiversity loss and the human impact on climate, Donegal County Council and the County Donegal Heritage Forum is committed to taking a responsible approach to the delivery of the County Donegal Heritage Plan as regards these national priorities. We will work with internal and external stakeholders over the lifetime of this plan to achieve the best results for our biodiversity and climate.

The Heritage Plan in Context

The Policy Context

The new County Donegal Heritage Plan was prepared on behalf of Donegal County Council by the County Donegal Heritage Office, Culture Division and the County Donegal Heritage Forum in partnership with The Heritage Council. The County Donegal Heritage Plan (2023-2030) is a strategic action plan for the identification, conservation, management, promotion and interpretation of heritage. In the new National Heritage Plan – Heritage Ireland 2030: A Framework for Heritage – published in February 2022, there is a commitment to “Continue the preparation and implementation of County/City Heritage Plans and resource their implementation with a view to maximising their effectiveness and assistance in the delivery of Heritage Ireland 2030” (Action 148). The County Donegal Heritage Plan is an opportunity to identify heritage issues and needs in the county and to address them locally, within a regional and national framework.

The context in which the new County Donegal Heritage Plan was prepared was dynamic and there were a number of policy initiatives at national and local level that influenced the preparation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan. The Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage in partnership with The Heritage Council is committed to developing an implementation plan for the new National Heritage Plan – Heritage Ireland 2030. The Department has committed to “Work with local authorities to review the existing heritage staff complement to ensure that the service is adequately resourced at the local level, taking into consideration the findings of the 2021 review of the Heritage Officers Network” (Action 73). An Evaluation of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme commissioned by The Heritage Council in partnership with the County & City Management Association (CCMA) was launched in November 2021. The Heritage Council has committed to “Develop and support new guidance for local authority heritage plans and for local authority heritage forums.”

In its new strategic plan Our Place in Time, The Heritage Council is committed to working with local authorities “to enhance partnership and secure the protection of heritage and best practice in heritage management.” It acknowledges the long tradition of collaboration between local authorities and The Heritage Council and, in particular, through the Heritage Officer Programme – a strategic partnership between The Heritage Council and local authorities. There is a commitment in the new Heritage Council Strategic Plan to engage communities more actively in heritage “through increased support for Heritage Officers and other heritage services offered by local authorities.”

The new National Biodiversity Action Plan is in preparation by the National Parks & Wildlife Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage. It recognises the “essential role that local authorities play in engaging with communities to support local biodiversity.” There is a target in the new National Biodiversity Action Plan to have increased capacity to facilitate and implement all required duties relating to biodiversity at the local level. The establishment of the Biodiversity Officer Programme by The Heritage Council working in partnership with the County & City Management Association with funding from the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage seeks to establish a dedicated Biodiversity Officer in each local authority (Action 1B4) and to produce and implement a County Biodiversity Action Plan (Action 1B6) by 2026.

In our Corporate Plan (2020-2024), Donegal County Council is committed to supporting the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (page 28). It also contains commitments to “Protect, conserve and promote our county’s natural and built heritage and identify and support biodiversity for the benefit of our policies, people and our environment” (page 29) and to

“protecting and promoting our unique indigenous culture, heritage and language whilst also embracing and valuing the diversity of all cultures and languages in Donegal” (page 24).

The Culture Division of Donegal County Council has produced its new strategic plan *Cultúr le Chéile* (2022-2026) in which we commit to the vision of “Where everyone in our society is inspired, enabled and enriched by cultural activity” including our natural, built, archaeological and cultural heritage. Donegal’s Culture & Creativity Strategy (2023-2027) aims to “respect, celebrate and share Donegal’s rich and varied natural, built and cultural heritage which represents our roots in the past and shapes our understanding of the present.”

The goals and objectives in the County Donegal Heritage Plan embrace the principle of sustainable development which is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The new County Donegal Heritage Plan will also inform the preparation of the new Donegal Local Economic & Community Plan, the new Donegal Tourism Strategy and the new Donegal County Development Plan which are in preparation.

The County Donegal Heritage Office and Heritage Forum is also engaging with cross-border heritage colleagues in Derry City & Strabane District Council and Fermanagh & Omagh District Council to ensure coordination of approach in the delivery of our heritage plans. The Culture Teams in both Donegal County Council and Derry City & Strabane District Council also meet regularly to collaborate on a variety of joint culture and heritage initiatives.

The Funding Context

A strong heritage sector in County Donegal supports social, cultural and economic development. The strength of the heritage infrastructure and the extent of investment in heritage resources is a reflection of the value placed on the heritage sector. As outlined in the policy context, several strategies and plans such as Strategic Plan for Culture Division (2022-2026), Donegal Culture & Creativity Strategy (2023-2027), Donegal County Council Corporate Plan (2020-2024), Heritage Council Strategic Plan (2023-2028) and Heritage Ireland 2030 advocates for increased investment in the heritage infrastructure, heritage staff and financial resources.

County Donegal has a proactive heritage sector. There is a growing awareness and engagement in heritage among community groups and individuals in County Donegal. There are over 250 community groups with a heritage remit in the county. Prior to the pandemic, County Donegal was consistently the county with the most Heritage Week events per head of population in Ireland. County Donegal-based heritage events and projects won two National Heritage Week Awards every year for the past four years (2019 - 2022 inclusive). County Donegal-based heritage initiatives regularly secured between 10% and 14% annually of the national funding available under The Heritage Council’s Community Heritage Grants Scheme between 2014 & 2023. Heritage groups and projects in County Donegal have been admitted to The Heritage Council’s Adopt a Monument scheme every time applications have been sought since its inception in 2016.

In addition to the annual County Heritage Plan Fund, the number of potential annual funding schemes administered by Donegal County Council has increased significantly in recent years.

- Since 2020, the Community Monuments Fund provides 100% funding from the National Monuments Service for the conservation, maintenance, protection and presentation of archaeological monuments and historic sites by private owners, custodians, community groups or local authorities. The scheme offers an opportunity to landowners, community groups or local authorities to undertake conservation works to monuments, encourage greater access to them, improve their presentation or build resilience in monuments to enable them to withstand

the effects of climate change. The scheme is administered by the County Donegal Heritage Office and the Donegal County Museum.

- Since 2018, the Local Biodiversity Action Fund provides 85% funding from the National Parks & Wildlife Service to carry out actions in the National Biodiversity Action Plan, to mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors, to raise awareness of biodiversity in local authority areas and to undertake collaborative projects to enhance biodiversity and biodiversity awareness at the local level. The scheme is administered by the County Donegal Heritage Office.
- Since 2019, the Historic Towns Initiative provides 80% funding from The Heritage Council in partnership with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage to support the heritage-led regeneration of historic towns. Priority is given to projects that are plan-led and where strong public engagement can be demonstrated. The scheme is administered by the County Donegal Heritage Office and the Conservation Office.
- Since 2016, the Creative Ireland programme provides 100% from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media to enable creativity in every community (Pillar 2). It supports local authority-led initiatives which pioneer and support creative collaborations and local cross-sectoral projects in arts, heritage, local history, STEAM and the creative industries. The scheme is administered by the Culture Division.
- Other annual grant schemes include the Built Heritage Investment Scheme that provides up to 50% funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage for conservation works to Protected Structures, proposed Protected Structures and structures within Architectural Conservation Areas. As part of the Built Heritage Investment Scheme, a dedicated fund for the conservation of historic thatched structures was introduced in 2023 that provides up to 80% funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage. The Historic Structures Fund provides up to 80% funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage for the conservation and enhancement of historic structures and buildings for the benefit of communities and the public. Both of these schemes are administered by the Conservation Office.

The Economic Context

County Donegal was named the 'Coolest Place on the Planet' by National Geographic (2016) and awarded the title of 'Ireland's Hidden Gem' by the Irish Independent Travel Magazine (2017). The county attracts 330,000 domestic visitors and 300,000 international visitors per annum. The average stay in County Donegal for both national and international visitors is three days with an average daily spend (excluding accommodation) of €96 generating a total spend of €181,440,000 into the county's economy and supporting 29,000 jobs. In 2021, the top 30 heritage attractions recorded 480,605 visits indicating that 76% of all visitors attended one of these heritage attractions. County Donegal's natural, built and cultural heritage assets are a significant resource for the county's tourism industry. Donegal has a reputation for delivering world-class tourism services and attracting visitors from all over the island of Ireland and from many overseas destinations including Great Britain, United States of America and mainland Europe. The continued development of the tourism offering depends on our ability to manage and conserve heritage assets across the county. The growth of the tourism sector, the additional jobs, the development of the local economy are related to the health and well-being of the heritage sector. The heritage sector has a major input into the tourism sector and into the wider economic development of the county. In 2022, Donegal County Council invested 0.3% (€3.23 per person) of the total local authority budget on heritage and conservation compared to the national average of 0.42% (€4.83 per person).

Another important consideration in the economic value of heritage is that of time as a value measurement. There is a growing awareness, if not recognition, of the amount of time that people invest in protecting, conserving, recording, documenting, presenting and promoting their heritage. These efforts and investments of time contribute to the quality, character, understanding,

accessibility, appreciation and awareness of our heritage. Much of the day-to-day responsibility for our heritage assets is vested in the hands of people in their communities. They are the early warning system, identifying changes and loss, and working to protect and conserve the built, natural and cultural heritage of the county. These people are more than volunteers or enthusiasts or amateurs. They are the wardens of our heritage, monitoring it, recording its changes and protecting and preserving what they can. Based on the County Heritage Plan consultation process, we can extrapolate that the members of the 250 community groups with a heritage remit in County Donegal contribute approximately 3,250,000 hours of unpaid voluntary work per year to the protection and preservation of our heritage. If we calculated their investment of time based on a living wage, the members of these groups are investing time to the value of almost €42 million per year. This figure is just the value of the time calculated at a living wage and does not account for the skill, expertise and tools that these people bring to the task, nor does it account for the value of that which is protected, preserved and conserved as a result of their actions. This investment dwarfs any other single investment into the heritage sector in County Donegal. To put it another way, the 29,000 tourism jobs and the €181,440,000 spend in tourism is built on an investment of more than €42,000,000 per year in time, effort and skill by volunteers across the county. These figures are estimates and are likely to be underestimated. As part of the delivery of the County Donegal Heritage Plan, we will conduct a detailed time-use survey to capture the full extent of the investment by the people of County Donegal in the protection, preservation and conservation of our heritage and the implications of that investment for wider policy concerns and budgetary decisions. Given the size and value of the voluntary contribution and the fundamental importance of the heritage assets to the tourist economy and the wider local economy, it is evident that the heritage sector is a sleeping giant. If we take a focused, collaborative, realistic and innovative approach to resourcing and investment in heritage, then the returns will be considerable.

Selected Achievements of the County Donegal Heritage Plan

Thatch Repair Grant Scheme (2019-present)

County Donegal is home to one of the largest surviving concentrations of thatch structures in Ireland. Our thatched buildings are one of the most iconic and enduring images of County Donegal. They lend character to our cultural landscapes; they are indicative of our sense of place, our traditional skills and our resourcefulness; they can be sensitively adapted to meet modern family demands; they invoke our diaspora and support our tourism industry. Despite their importance and potential, the loss of our thatched buildings, especially in recent years, has been considerable. Donegal County Council recognises the contribution that thatched dwellings and outbuildings make to our built heritage, cultural landscape, employment, economy and tourism. The County Donegal Heritage Office, Culture Division and the Conservation Office co-designed and has implemented our Thatch Repair Grant Scheme since 2019. The aims of the Thatch Repair Grant Scheme are to provide specialist advice to owners on the conservation of their thatched structures and to allocate funding for small-scale thatch repairs. The Thatch Repair Grant Scheme won the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Award in the Heritage & Built Environment category in November 2020. The award recognises the best local authority initiatives to promote public interest in, and knowledge, appreciation and protection of local heritage.

Donegal's Traditional Shop Fronts & Signage (2019)

Shopfronts, both individually and collectively, have a major impact on the overall character, quality and attractiveness of place. In 2017, the County Donegal Heritage Office commissioned architect and broadcaster Orla Murphy to undertake the research and production of guidelines for the conservation of traditional shopfronts and vernacular signage. This was followed up with a Traditional Shopfronts & Vernacular Signage seminar in 2018. In 2019, the County Donegal Heritage

Office produced the Donegal's Traditional Shop Fronts & Signage booklet that draws upon best practice and encourages appropriate, sensitive and informed interventions in relation to our traditional shopfronts, vernacular signage and historical streetscapes. The booklet provides advice and guidance on best conservation practice to business owners, community groups and planners.

'Illuminating Colmcille / Léargas ar Cholm Cille' Colouring Book (2021)

The County Donegal Heritage Office with support from The Heritage Council produced a free, 36-page colouring book entitled 'Illuminating Colmcille / Léargas ar Cholm Cille' as part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan. The free colouring book was launched on the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of St. Colmcille on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. The colouring book highlights some of the heritage sites, places, objects and archives associated with aspects of St. Colmcille's life and legacy. Some of the heritage sites and places featured in the colouring book are Gartan, Lacknacoo, Temple Douglas, Kilmacrennan, Doon Well, Gleann Cholm Cille, Disert, Toraigh Island, Ray Church and St. Eunan's Cathedral in Raphoe. Many of the heritage sites associated with Colmcille are archaeological monuments protected under the National Monuments Acts (1930-2004).

Biodiversity in Your Back Garden (2021)

As part of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan and for Culture Night, the County Donegal Heritage Office in partnership with the Arts Office, Donegal County Council produced a series of five, five-minute videos entitled 'Biodiversity in Your Back Garden' which draws upon the local expertise and experience of natural heritage specialists and enthusiasts in County Donegal to share their advice on making our gardens, green spaces or towns more wildlife friendly, planting native trees and flowers, fostering habitats for our fauna and supporting our bees in the important work that they do in terms of pollination. Contributors included:

Joanne Butler, OURganic Gardens, Gort a' Choircé:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kySASSs_ybk

Aengus Kennedy, Nature North West, Ramelton:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9YdVxysFug

George McDermott, Bunrana Town Gardener, Donegal County Council:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1YrqmIU0

Liz & Ralph Sheppard, Carnowen House, Raphoe:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsw0QSQtdU

Elizabeth Temple, Salthill Gardens, Mountcharles:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUsX31v69as

Wetlands Survey of County Donegal (2021-present)

The Wetlands Survey of County Donegal aims to determine the extent, distribution and types of wetland in County Donegal in order to provide biodiversity information to inform decision-making. Wetlands include rivers, lakes, ponds, bogs, fens, wet woodlands, wet grassland and a range of other wet habitat types. Donegal County Council recognises that our wetlands are an important aspect of our natural heritage, as they are home to many significant native plant and animal species. Wetlands contribute to biodiversity conservation and the provision of ecosystem services. In recent years, some agricultural practices, land drainage and developments have resulted in increased rates of wetland loss. A database of wetland sites based on a review of the literature was established, 898 potential wetland sites were mapped and a selected field survey was undertaken. A detailed site description highlighting the wetland habitat types, threats to wetland conservation and future protection, restoration potential and management priorities and a conservation evaluation was conducted for each site selected for field survey.

Preparation of County Donegal Heritage Plan

The County Donegal Heritage Plan was prepared in accordance with the 'Methodology for Local Authority Heritage Officers on the preparation of County/City Heritage Plans' produced by The Heritage Council (2003) and based on the experience of the preparation of County Heritage Plans in other local authorities. The preparation of the new County Donegal Heritage Plan began in June 2022 with an in-house review of the implementation of the previous County Donegal Heritage Plan in order to inform the new strategic plan. It showed that over €1,061,000 was spent on the implementation of County Heritage Plan actions between 2014 and 2022 inclusive. 63% of this funding was secured from external sources of funding (in particular The Heritage Council) and a further 27% was leveraged from other sources of funding within Donegal County Council beyond the funding allocated for County Heritage Plan implementation in annual budgets. Of the 68 actions in the previous County Donegal Heritage Plan, it is estimated that three-quarters (75%) of the actions were delivered. These figures do not include the investment of €1,072,700 in funding from The Heritage Council and €275,000 from Donegal County Council for the implementation of our award-winning Historic Towns Initiatives in Letterkenny (2019), Ramelton (2020) and Ballyshannon (2021 & 2022).

An initial workshop with County Donegal Heritage Forum members took place in October 2022. An information breakfast and workshop with heritage groups, historical societies, museums, heritage centres, non-governmental organisations, heritage professionals, environmental groups, Tidy Towns groups and community groups with a heritage remit in County Donegal was held in November 2022. Submissions to the new County Donegal Heritage Plan were sought between November 2022 and January 2023. Three on-line questionnaires were devised and resulted in 99 submissions from members of the public, 32 responses from internal stakeholders in Donegal County Council and 14 submissions from County Donegal Heritage Forum members. A further 16 written submissions were received. The public consultation process received coverage on the Nuacht on TG4 on Thursday, January 26, 2023. Two workshops were held with the Donegal Youth Council in February and March 2023. In total, it is estimated that 236 people provided input into the County Donegal Heritage Plan. Issues highlighted by people included the need for increased awareness and communication of heritage, support for community groups, recognising the intrinsic value of heritage, greater networking and partnership opportunities, and stronger organisational support for the heritage sector.

The County Donegal Heritage Forum considered all the submissions made and devised the aim of the new County Donegal Heritage Plan and five strategic goals. Under each of the strategic goals, a number of objectives were identified which will direct the actions to be undertaken in the delivery of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (2023-2030).

Draft County Donegal Heritage Plan (2023-2030)

The following table outlines some of the key milestones in the preparation of the new County Donegal Heritage Plan:

June 15, 2022	Process of preparation of new County Donegal Heritage Plan presented to Community, Social & Cultural Strategic Policy Committee
October 6, 2022	Workshop with County Donegal Heritage Forum members
November 21, 2022	Information breakfast and workshop with heritage groups
November 2022 - January 2023	Public consultation period
February 17 & March 11, 2023	Workshops with Donegal Youth Council
March 28, 2023	Workshop with County Donegal Heritage Forum
May 15 - June 5, 2023	Draft County Donegal Heritage Plan placed on public review
May 2023	Five public meetings (one meeting in each Municipal District)
June 2023	Final draft of County Donegal Heritage Plan to be adopted by County Donegal Heritage Forum
June 14, 2023	New County Donegal Heritage Plan to be presented to Community, Social & Cultural Strategic Policy Committee.
July 24, 2023	New County Donegal Heritage Plan to be presented to Donegal County Council for adoption
July - August 2023	New County Donegal Heritage Plan to be designed and published
September - October 2023	Launch of County Donegal Heritage Plan (2023-2030)

Strategic Goals & Objectives

Aim

Work together to manage, conserve, promote and celebrate our heritage responsibly, foster appreciation and communicate the values of our rich heritage to present and future generations.

#1

Improve resources for heritage services through an integrated approach to delivery

In order to address current and future demands for heritage services, increasing heritage staff resources and investing in heritage services are required urgently. Supporting existing and developing new partnerships will also enhance a more integrated approach to the management of heritage. The facilitation of training for heritage stakeholders also improves our capacity to better manage our heritage. A strong heritage sector supports social, cultural and economic development.

1. To continue to explore developing capacity through collaboration and partnership and improving lines of communication.
2. To improve capacity in local communities to address heritage management by providing selected training.
3. To secure additional heritage specialists in Donegal County Council to meet demands for local authority heritage services (such as an Assistant Heritage Officer, a County Archaeologist, a Community Archaeologist, a Biodiversity Officer, a County Ecologist, a Geographical Information Systems specialist and a Heritage Communications Officer).
4. To secure funding for support officers to work with voluntary groups to make funding applications and deliver community heritage projects.
5. To develop partnership with third-level institutions to drive vital research projects.
6. To explore education, outreach, training and apprentice opportunities in heritage in County Donegal.
7. To advocate for employment opportunities and career progression in the heritage sector in County Donegal.
8. To facilitate in-house training on heritage issues for Donegal County Council staff.
9. To collaborate with relevant partners to ensure heritage is appropriately addressed in local authority policies, plans and programmes and in the design and delivery of tourism, regeneration and economic development projects.
10. To work with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage and The Heritage Council to assist in the implementation of the National Heritage Plan (Heritage Ireland 2030), the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the Heritage Council Strategic Plan (Our Place in Time).

#2

Engage and support communities in the [re]discovery and management of our heritage

Engaging local communities with our heritage will be central to the success of the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan. Collaboration between key heritage stakeholders and local communities presents opportunities for cooperation, partnership, engagement and additional resources.

1. To foster networking and collaborations between heritage groups and with heritage organisations, key heritage stakeholders and the local authority.
2. To communicate and simplify the ways in which heritage groups and local communities can participate in heritage initiatives.
3. To continue to promote and expand funding opportunities for local heritage groups, communities and individuals.
4. To support the work of the network of local museums and heritage centres in County Donegal.
5. To develop non-formal educational projects in partnership with the Donegal Youth Services.
6. To inform and engage the Donegal diaspora with the heritage of County Donegal.
7. To initiate a citizen science approach to selected heritage projects.
8. To support local heritage awareness days.

#3

Raise awareness and knowledge by communicating a better understanding of heritage

Raising awareness and appreciation of heritage is a consistent challenge. Essential to this endeavour is communicating the importance and value of our heritage to present and future generations.

1. To communicate the value, importance and relevance of heritage in our everyday lives.
2. To continue to produce education and information materials and deliver seminars on aspects of our heritage.
3. To embrace new technology in the interpretation and promotion of heritage sites and assets.
4. To advocate for improved access to, and appropriate interpretation at, heritage sites.
5. To coordinate and support National Heritage Week in County Donegal.
6. To support heritage initiatives in the formal and non-formal education sectors.
7. To communicate our senses of place and identities through heritage resources.
8. To publicise the work of our Heritage Forum and the achievements of County Donegal Heritage Plan implementation.
9. To develop an effective communication plan for the County Donegal Heritage Office and the County Donegal Heritage Forum.

#4

Provide advice and promote best practice

Key to the conservation, management and care of our heritage is the provision of good quality advice and the adoption of best conservation practices.

1. To identify, support and share examples of best conservation practice in heritage management in public and private guardianship.
2. To investigate an awards scheme to recognise ‘the best in heritage’ and the contribution made by guardians of our heritage.
3. To work with statutory authorities to communicate and promote the protection afforded built, archaeological, cultural and natural heritage resources to help ensure their protection.
4. To support the work of public and private guardians of our heritage through the management of funding schemes such as the Community Monuments Fund, Historic Towns Initiative, Built Heritage Investment Scheme, Historic Structures Fund and Local Biodiversity Action Fund.
5. To address heritage priorities as they relate to climate change and biodiversity loss.
6. To continue to conserve and promote our vernacular built heritage and associated traditional building skills.
7. To continue the conservation of landmark historic buildings, streetscapes and landscapes.
8. To work in partnership with key stakeholders to establish a best practice conservation and management scheme for historic graveyards in County Donegal.
9. To encourage and facilitate the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan in County Donegal.
10. To work with key stakeholders to support projects that conserve and promote locally-significant flora, fauna, birdlife and their habitats especially those that are endangered.
11. To undertake a joint heritage and tourism sector project based on the development of best practice guidance in heritage tourism.

#5

Commission research and gather heritage data

Our sense of place is informed by an understanding of our heritage. Responsible policy development and decision-making requires a strong evidence base. Commissioning research and gathering heritage data will contribute to our knowledge base and a better understanding of our heritage assets.

1. To develop databases on heritage resources in the county to provide evidence and to inform decision-making.
2. To commission surveys and studies of overlooked or hidden aspects of our county's heritage and landscape.
3. To commission a time-use survey to map the range and value of the voluntary investment in heritage.
4. To develop in-house Geographical Information Systems capacity to make heritage information collected accessible to decision-makers and to the public.
5. To commission an audit of archaeological, built and natural heritage assets at risk in coastal environments and to assess their vulnerability from the impacts of climate change.
6. To pilot initiatives between heritage and folklore, culture, language, oral history and intangible heritage.
7. To investigate the establishment of literary and music heritage trails to highlight the material heritage associated with these traditions.

Implementation & Monitoring

The County Donegal Heritage Office, Culture Division, Donegal County Council in partnership with the County Donegal Heritage Forum will oversee the implementation of the new County Donegal Heritage Plan. An annual implementation plan will be drawn up and agreed by the County Donegal Heritage Forum and an annual funding application will be made for part-funding to The Heritage Council for County Heritage Plan implementation. Donegal County Council and The Heritage Council will provide core funding for the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan. The County Donegal Heritage Forum will work with its constituent member organisations and sectors as well as external stakeholders to deliver an annual programme of actions that address the strategic objectives and goals in the County Donegal Heritage Plan. The County Donegal Heritage Office will coordinate and manage the day-to-day implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan. The County Donegal Heritage Forum will monitor progress as regards the delivery of the County Donegal Heritage Plan at its quarterly meetings. Progress reports will be provided to the Senior Management Team and Elected Members of Donegal County Council and to The Heritage Council. Information on the implementation of the County Donegal Heritage Plan will be made available at launches, outreach events, on-line on the County Donegal Heritage Office webpages and via Donegal County Council social media channels. At the end of the plan period, an evaluation of implementation of the strategic goals and objectives will be undertaken.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Membership of the County Donegal Heritage Forum (2023)
- Appendix 2: Achievements of the County Donegal Heritage Plan (2014-2022)
- Appendix 3: County Donegal Heritage Plan Expenditure (2014-2022)