THE CONTRIBUTION OF RURAL BUILDINGS

Traditional farm buildings can make a significant positive contribution to the Irish landscape. Many of the older buildings were laid out using local tried and tested materials, built to patterns and arrangements that made optimum use of resources. They survived and were maintained using simple materials and ingenious repairs, all of which add up to a culture of resourceful care and pride.

Traditional farm buildings are under great pressure for change. This pressure originates in the mechanisation of farm processes in the 19th century, accelerated by the intensification and restructuring of farming and further changes in traditional patterns of farm management, the merger of farm holdings, rising animal welfare standards, shifting patterns of tenure and, latterly, the decline in farm profitability. The result is the redundancy and disrepair of many historic structures and large numbers of conversions to new uses, which can be insensitive to the architectural and historic interest of buildings and their landscape setting.
BUILDINGS IN THE LANDSCAPE

Many farm buildings are situated beside the public road, or a field or two back from it, perhaps with a backdrop of mature trees. In upland areas, traditional farm buildings can give scale and local distinctiveness to a scenic area and can be seen across large distances.
WHAT BUILDINGS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

A traditional farm building is a building or part of a building constructed before 1960 for a use associated with agriculture, and built using traditional methods and materials such as timber, brick, stone, tile, slate and thatch. There are surviving 1950s hen houses and pig sties that testify to the drive for self-sufficiency in food production. Corrugated iron haybarns, built throughout the twentieth century, have now come to be viewed as a part of this heritage, but are not sufficiently rare to be eligible for this grant scheme.

The late twentieth century, and especially after accession to the EEC, brought a new wave of large-scale farm buildings in the form of slatted sheds for winter housing, milking parlours, silage pits, into this picture, but these have not yet acquired a heritage significance.

WHAT VALUE ARE THEY?

While changes in farming have rendered many old farm buildings underused they are often valued features in the landscape and make a major contribution to local character. Like the landscapes in which they sit, traditional farm buildings provide a wide range of benefits to modern society:

1. They hand down messages from our past - to this and to succeeding generations - telling us how our ancestors farmed and lived, thought and built

2. They are an essential, if often undervalued, contributor to local distinctiveness in the countryside and to the sense-of-place enjoyed by rural communities and visitors alike

3. They are central to our understanding of settlement patterns and the evolution of today’s countryside
4. They provide an important economic asset for farm businesses through their potential for re-use where they have become redundant.

5. Through re-use, they can alleviate pressure to build on green-field land and reduce the demand for new buildings, which may otherwise compromise the character of the countryside.

6. They are irreplaceable store-houses of local crafts, skills and techniques, in harmony with their surroundings and using traditional materials sometimes not available or too expensive for new building projects. They represent an historical investment in materials and energy that can be sustained through conservation and careful re-use.

7. They may provide important wildlife habitats that are not easily replicated if the old buildings are destroyed. Bats and owls are often found in farmyard buildings.
THE GRANT SCHEME

Many traditional farm buildings are being lost through neglect. The timely repair (or, as a minimum, weatherproofing) of traditional farm buildings prevents dilapidation and the onset of serious structural problems, which may lead to expensive restoration in the future. Therefore, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Heritage Council administer a grant scheme to REPS 4 participants on the conservation and repair of Traditional Farm Buildings.

Grants are available to carry out approved conservation works to the exterior of farm outbuildings (roof, outside surface of walls, windows and doors) and associated structures (historic yard surfaces, landscape features around the farmyard e.g. walls, gate pillars, gates). The grant will not be for more than 75% of the cost of the works. The minimum amount offered will be €4,000 and the maximum, between €18,000 and €20,000. The smallest project that could be funded would cost €5,700. The balance of funding may not be from any other State source. The cost of VAT is eligible only in circumstances where such VAT is not recoverable by the grantee by any means. The traditional farm buildings must have architectural or vernacular heritage character, make a contribution to their setting and not be overwhelmed by large-scale modern buildings. It will be an objective of the scheme that a reasonable geographical spread of grantees across Ireland is achieved.
ELIGIBLE BUILDINGS:

• Traditional farm buildings which were built for a purpose associated with agriculture (such as housing machinery or animals, or storing or processing crops and food), and which are still used for an agricultural purpose. It does not matter if the current use is not the original one (for example, a barn built to house animals which is now being used for storage of feedstuffs or equipment). Buildings which once met the above conditions, but which are currently unused or empty, are also eligible.

• The buildings must be in fair condition, that is, they must have surviving materials that contribute to their character and which are repairable.
• Reinstatement of previously existing features now removed (such as a building which has lost its roof) will only be considered where the Heritage Council deems exceptional circumstances apply and if there is strong evidence (e.g. old photographs) of their former appearance and they complete an otherwise intact environment.

**INELIGIBLE BUILDINGS:**

• Farmhouses, residential or domestic buildings

• Buildings already converted to a non-agricultural use, for example, to a residential or non-agricultural business use

• Former residential buildings now used as farm buildings

• Traditional farm buildings which you intend to convert to a non-agricultural use during the life of your REPS 4 agreement

• Traditional farm buildings that will not be in your ownership or control for the life of your agreement

• Corrugated iron haybarns

• Post 1960 farm buildings such as slatted sheds, milking parlours.
Conservation works are those that maintain the character and integrity of the building by the use of compatible repair or construction techniques. The works should not be designed to ‘modernise’ the appearance of the buildings, as, in many cases, the wear and tear of the years contributes to their character. Instead the works should be the minimum necessary to ensure that the building is weathertight (to the appropriate degree for its function), and carried out in traditional building techniques and materials (such as corrugated iron, natural slate or lime render and whitewash). Careful appraisal of all the potential cultural values the buildings might possess (architectural, vernacular, archaeological, historical, social, scientific, technical, cultural or artistic), and care not to distort the historical evidence, must be a starting point. Following this principle
will lead to an emphasis on the skilled repair of an element - for example, woodwork, where the convention might be to replace it. For a full discussion of the issues that might impinge on traditional buildings, the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities and Advice Series on best conservation practice available from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, could be consulted. Kildare County Council have also published guidelines on the repair and re-use of farm buildings. Teagasc and the Heritage Council have also published *Traditional Buildings on Irish Farms*, a booklet on the built heritage to be found on ‘ordinary’ farms.

**TYPES OF WORKS ENVISAGED:**

- Repair of a slate, thatch or small-scale corrugated iron roof including their structure
- Re-pointing of stone walls in earth or lime mortar
- Re-plastering of stone walls in lime plaster
- Repair of earthen walls, or parts of walls
- Repair or re-instatement of timber doors or windows to stables, byres etc.
- Structural repairs to prevent walls leaning over

The following may be included as part of a package of works from the above list:

- Repair of dry stone or lime mortared stone boundary walls around the farmyard
- Repair of wrought or cast iron gates
- Repair of stone-paved or cobbled yard or trackway surface
- Repair of gate pillars.
If the works involve protected structures, or buildings in an Architectural Conservation Area, the planning authority should be consulted prior to making a grant application. In such cases, a copy of the application or approval of the planning authority (through planning permission, ‘declaration’; or other letter of acknowledgement of the works) should be forwarded as part of the application.

If the structure was built before 1700, it is likely to be protected under the National Monument Acts 1930–2004. If the farmyard is identified on the Record of Monuments and Places a copy of the relevant consent or application for consent from National Monuments Service, must be submitted with your application.
Many farm buildings provide roosting sites for bats and nesting sites for birds, that are protected by law. If bats or nesting birds are present in the building, a license from the National Parks and Wildlife Service may have to be obtained before works can commence.

All works grant aided must meet all statutory requirements as noted above and including the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, and employment law.

**APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

Application packs are available from the Heritage Council, Áras na hOidhreachta, Church Lane, Kilkenny and online at www.heritagecouncil.ie. The application must include a description of the buildings, a set of photographs, including one that shows how the building appears from a public place, along with a cost breakdown of the proposed works and, if available, a plan of the proposed grant-aided building. Completed applications must be returned directly to the Heritage Council, who will select the most appropriate projects each year. A formal letter of offer will issue to successful applicants, who will be required to sign and return an acceptance sheet.
For this funding you must:

- Carry out maintenance and repair works on a ‘like for like’ basis using traditional materials and methods, in order to conserve the character of the building in its local setting. The works may be carried out by a building contractor or by the farmer, but must be devised, specified and overseen by an appropriately qualified conservation professional.

- Continue to protect and maintain in weatherproof condition the specified traditional farm buildings, including fixtures and fittings and adjacent associated features such as mounting blocks or stack/stook bases, for at least the lifetime of the REPS 4 agreement.

- Where a non-traditional material has previously been used to repair or re-clad the building (such as corrugated iron sheeting...
to cover roofs), we will encourage applicants to retain and maintain them appropriately

- Obtain current photographs of all elevations of the building as evidence of its condition when you joined the scheme. This should include photographs of any areas where non-traditional materials have previously been used to repair or re-clad the building
- Keep a record of work done, and carry out and record a brief visual inspection at least once a year
- Retain the building in your ownership or control for the life of your REPS agreement
- Ensure that the building is not converted to a non-agricultural use during the life of your REPS agreement.

**CONDITIONS ATTACHED TO THE GRANT**

It will be a condition of grant aid that an appropriately qualified conservation professional inspect the buildings(s) before works commence and as they progress, advise the applicant regarding the specification and methods of work and sign off on the project when works are finished, and 75% of the cost of this, may be allowed in the grant allocation. It will also be a condition of grant aid that the finished appearance of the building will be maintained for at least five years, subject to claw-back of the grant amount if the building is poorly maintained, is developed or sold.

It also may be conditioned that a bat/bird survey be carried out to identify which species are using the building and how to carry out the works without affecting them (for example altering the
timing of the repair work or the material used) and 75% of the cost of this, may be allowed in the grant allocation.

A report on the completed works, including photographs, receipts for costs and tax clearance certificates, shall be forwarded to the Heritage Council for approval. Such approval will be notified to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to activate payment.
WEBSITES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

- **Traditional Buildings on Irish Farms**, a joint publication of Teagasc and The Heritage Council, can be downloaded at [http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/) It describes the value of the built heritage to be found on ‘ordinary’ farms.


- To order **Reusing Farm Buildings – A Kildare Perspective**, see the Heritage section of Kildare County Council’s website [http://kildare.ie/countycouncil/Heritage/BuiltHeritage/KildareProjects](http://kildare.ie/countycouncil/Heritage/BuiltHeritage/KildareProjects)

- **Bat Mitigation Guidelines for Ireland**, can be downloaded from the National Parks and Wildlife Service at [http://www.npws.ie/publications/](http://www.npws.ie/publications/)

- Information on the National Monuments Service, including guidelines, publications, license application forms and the searchable Sites and Monuments Database, can be found on [http://www.archaeology.ie/](http://www.archaeology.ie/)
The REPS 4 Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme is managed by the Heritage Council on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.