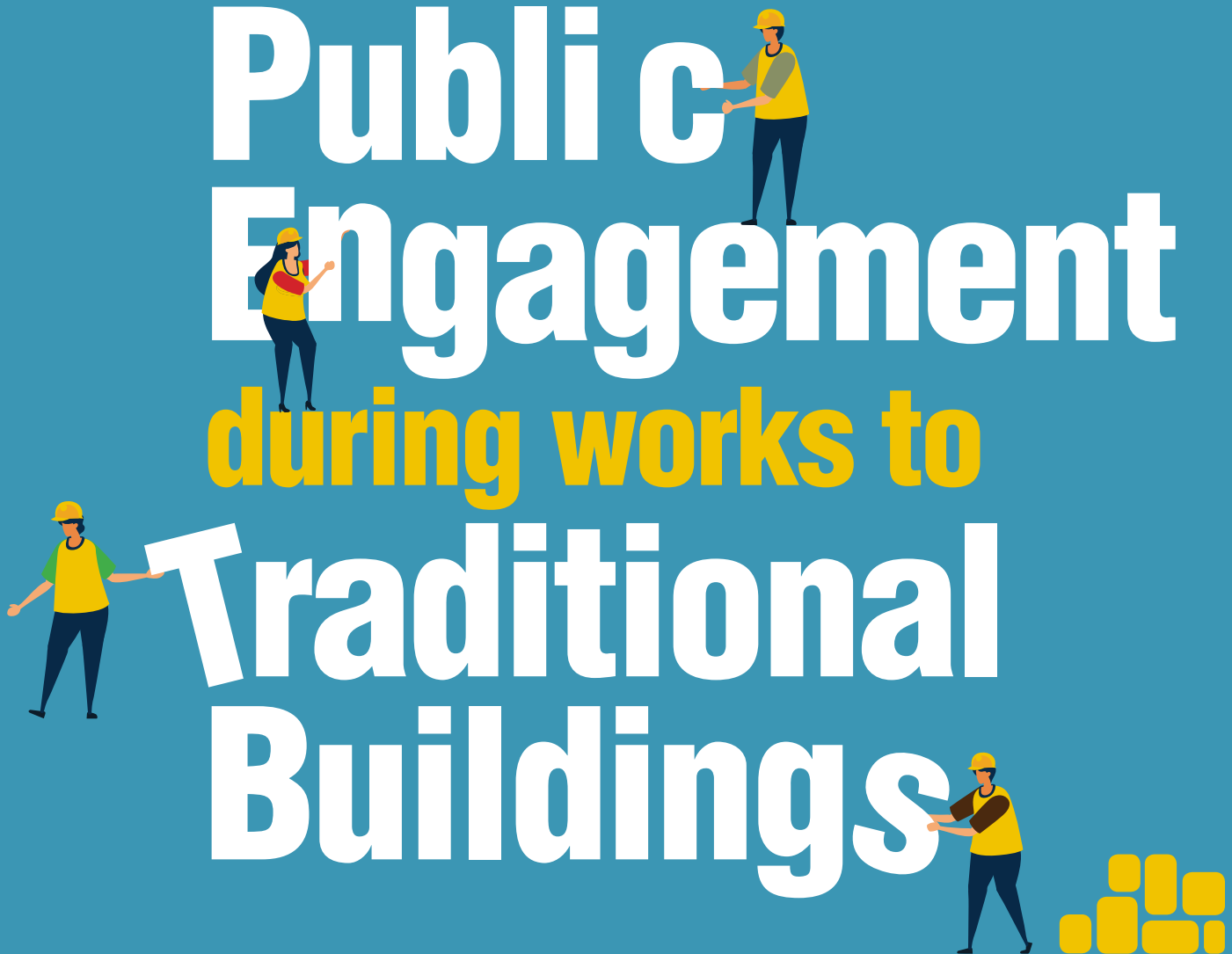


# Public Engagement

during works to

# Traditional Buildings



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



An action of the Heritage Council's  
Traditional Building Skills Programme



	page
<b>1</b> Context	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b> Creating a Public Engagement Plan	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b> Possible Actions	<b>7</b>
<b>4</b> Designing Tenders	<b>10</b>
<b>5</b> Promotion	<b>12</b>
<b>6</b> Further Reading and Support	<b>14</b>
Acknowledgments	<b>15</b>





## Context

### Who is this publication for and what does it try to do?

The purpose of this document is to help all those involved in the conservation, restoration or modification of historic buildings to train, educate or energise the public as to the importance of traditional buildings and traditional building skills. This document will be useful for building owners, contractors, tradespeople, local authorities and community groups setting out to engage the public with conservation skills.

Maintaining the availability of a good supply of craftspeople with traditional building skills is vital for conserving Ireland's built heritage. Modern commercial and administrative arrangements present challenges to skills learning that the Heritage Council wishes to address. The Heritage Council seeks to facilitate the person-to-person transmission of these skills, for example through its grant schemes. Towards those ends, this publication provides advice to people and organisations wishing to satisfy grant conditions on 'public engagement' with these skills through their projects.

What follows is helpful information on why it is important to engage the public, how to structure an education programme, possible actions, designing tenders incorporating public engagement, promotion and some further resources.



### What are traditional buildings and traditional building skills?

Traditional buildings were built prior to the use of concrete and steel became common in buildings, that is, roughly before 1940. Traditional buildings are those buildings constructed using traditional techniques and materials (e.g. stone, lime, mud, wood, slate).

The skills used to make these buildings require a high degree of craft and in-depth knowledge of the materials. Traditional building skills include: stone masonry, working with lime, working with cob (i.e. mud walls), carpentry, working with glass, stone and ceramic flooring, leadwork, thatching and blacksmithing (please note: this list is not exhaustive). To maintain and conserve traditional buildings, it is necessary to retain traditional skills, as compatible repairs will be more harmonious and are less likely to create new problems.

## The importance of traditional buildings

There are an estimated 175,000 buildings still standing in Ireland that were constructed before 1919. Thousands more were built between Independence (1922) and 1940. For both the State and the communities in which they are located, these buildings are of immense social, environmental and economic value. With proper care and maintenance, almost all of our pre-1940 building stock will continue to endure.

### Why are historic buildings important?

- 1 An existing building is environmentally the most benign. The sensitive reuse of historic buildings is essential to the fight against climate change.
- 2 They are a vital part of our identity and the story of our society. They anchor us to place.
- 3 They are beautiful.
- 4 Their presence is a key part to the economically significant beauty premium of an area (i.e. visually attractive places tend to do better economically).
- 5 They add distinctiveness which is often appealing to businesspeople wishing to open high-quality shops, restaurants and hotels.
- 6 They are frequently used as the locations of new innovative technology businesses.
- 7 The Irish tourism sector is fundamentally linked to the presence of historic buildings.
- 8 Repairing existing buildings creates more construction jobs per euro than during the construction of new buildings.

## The importance of public engagement

As pre-1940 buildings are conserved and modified, opportunities are presented to communicate the importance of these structures and associated construction skills. Until recently, public engagement during building works has typically been seen either as a pleasant action of little consequence or, at worst, an annoying distraction for the contractor. However, such perceptions undermine the largely untapped strategic potential public engagement provides for the construction sector, heritage management and in certain cases, the property owner.

### Why is it important to engage with the public during building works?

- 1 Helps develop interest amongst younger people of the career possibilities in the construction sector. This in turn will assist in the improved future availability of skilled tradespeople.
- 2 Through removing fear and providing inspiration, public engagement encourages people to fund the sensitive conservation, restoration or modification of historic structures.
- 3 Connects locals with the building. They in turn will become greater advocates for the site and heritage in general.
- 4 Provides a social activity. This deepens connections of people with each other and the building's location.
- 5 For works on buildings that will ultimately have a commercial purpose, community engagement aids in the promotion and marketing of the site.
- 6 Acts as a temporary tourist attraction for independent travellers.



Typically, the cost of developing even an ambitious public engagement scheme is low. During conservation works to Harmondsworth Barn, Historic England took the opportunity to run a public engagement programme. The programme involved facilitating the work placement of a trainee, carrying out six hard hat tours and seven open days. The total cost was £2,360. This included safety clothing and supporting buses for visiting students. Despite this relatively low-cost example, it is always prudent to have a reasonable contingency sum and manage finances carefully. Of course, in many cases there will be little or no budget available for public engagement. Nonetheless, there still exists the possibility of running one or two small-scale events that are complemented by social media posts. If carefully planned, the net cost of all this could be near zero.

The catalyst to create a public engagement programme can come from a wide variety of sources. Public events may be a condition of a grant award or planning permission. A programme can also be an element of a public sector request for tender. Alternatively, the push to engage with the public may be instigated by a property owner or a contractor eager to educate and increase interest in the site or certain traditional skills. A company may also see it as a shop window opportunity to promote their capabilities.



## Creating a public engagement plan

The best and most efficient way of deepening the public's understanding and appreciation of historic buildings and the associated skills is to create a simple yet incisive engagement plan. The document should seek to provide the greatest possible educational results within the constraints of the available financial and personnel resources. Below are a set of recommended steps and questions to be considered when devising a plan:

### 1 Defining the opportunity

Ask why you are engaging with the public? What are your motives and objectives? What about the building works will be interesting to see? What is your vision/ambition for the engagement programme? All actions should be in keeping with your vision.

### 2 Audience

Is your audience going to be secondary school children studying construction related subjects, existing workers in the construction sector, members of historical/heritage groups, the

broader public, new residents to the area? Why are you targeting them? Each audience type may need different outreach actions and considerations.

*Note:* if you are planning to engage with people under the age of 18, please follow the Heritage Council's *Child Protection Guidelines* (2018).

### 3 Identify the stakeholders

Stakeholders are all those who have an interest in what is happening. They may be able to contribute to the success of your event(s) or stop anything from occurring. Aside from attendees and participants/staff, stakeholders may also include: Local Authority heritage staff, the Gardaí, Fire Officer, local residents and businesses, etc. The requirements of each stakeholder need to be ascertained and satisfied. All stakeholders should be kept adequately informed and their expectations managed. In general, the more information, the better!

#### 4 Permissions

Ensure all relevant permissions are in place well before the planned event(s) occur (e.g. permission from the owner, if the event organiser is not the site owner). Are all relevant heritage permissions in place? All permissions should be in writing.

#### 5 Key messages

How will you showcase the traditional building skill(s) and the building(s) to the public? What will your audience(s) find interesting and relevant? People like looking at things being done with care or expertise. They also like seeing things that people in general do not have access to (i.e. a sense of exclusivity). It is worth remembering that people connect with the personal stories of other people (e.g. the tradespeople on site, the building's owners). Some examples of stories to tell include:

- the career of a skilled tradesperson (e.g. stone mason, leadworker, thatcher) and the importance of passing on skills
- the benefits of using traditional materials in traditional buildings
- how the function of the building impacted its original design
- how skilled craftspeople learn to 'listen' to the building for how best to conserve its fabric.

#### 6 Goals

What will people learn? Will they gain skills - however minor? Will they learn about what makes the site significant and the importance of various traditional building skills?

#### 7 Review of resources

What skills and teaching capabilities are available from site workers, the consultants and project sponsor? What financial resources are available? Are there enough people available to manage visitors to the site? What activities can be accomplished while causing as little disruption to the project timeline as possible?

#### 8 Health and safety audit

Event organisers and property owners have a common duty of care towards visitors. Hence, reasonable care must be taken that visitors do not suffer injury or damage. Accordingly, all proposed activities should be carried out in a safe manner. Are any additional health and safety precautions required? Walking through the location of the event(s) well before they happen is an excellent way of identifying possible issues. Is additional insurance needed? If you are in doubt about the suitability of your site as a venue, get professional advice. If no onsite events are deemed possible, there are still a number of offsite or online activities that can occur (see section three for more detail). For health and safety and insurance issues, Chapter 9 of *Guidance for community archaeology projects* (2017) offers great guidance.

#### 9 Actions

Choose the activities that best correlate to the identified capabilities, objectives, audiences, budget, site constraints and human resources (see section three for more detail). Be mindful of creating a programme that is designed to minimise its carbon footprint (e.g. recycling facilities provided, the event is accessible to walkers and cyclists, there is a place to store bicycles).

#### 10 Promotion

The promotion of the various activities is fundamental to success. How will you connect with your target audience(s)? (see section five for more detail).

#### 11 Post events programme analysis

Did you meet your educational objectives? What went well? How can things be improved upon? How many people attended your events? Were the attendees from the target audiences? It may be worthwhile to interview a sample of attendees via a quick questionnaire and informally through chats. A visitor book may also provide insights. It is important to gather feedback from the contractors and consultants involved in the programme.



## Possible actions



Once steps one to eight in section two have been considered, the project sponsors, consultants and contractors can decide what to do. Remember, there are five senses. Try to stimulate as many as possible. There are a variety of methods by which your learning objectives can be accomplished. The chosen activities should match the needs and nature of the various targeted audiences. Do not fall into the trap of simply designing events effectively for yourself. This can be addressed by thinking about your likes and dislikes and focusing on the audience(s) at all times (e.g. you might find a 45 minute lecture on slate very interesting but the general public could consider this off-putting). Some considerations when selecting activities include:

- Constraints of the site. For instance, does the site have adequate parking, toilets, seating and catering facilities? If not, then a short one to two hour event may be more appropriate than an all-day event.
- Scale of the building project (e.g. is it the repair of a garden wall or a top-to-bottom renovation?).
- Timing. Events should occur when there is a fair degree of onsite activity. This is the period of highest opportunity and level of interest.
- Abilities and capacities of the project sponsor, consultants, contractor and sub-contractors.
- The heritage significance of the place.
- Relevant architectural, archaeological and ecological legislation (section six contains links of the contact details for Local Authority Heritage Officers and Architectural Conservation Officers).
- Privacy. What is currently a building site may be, or become, someone's home. Parts of it may need to be cordoned off for the event.

The various actions decided upon should be incorporated into an event management plan. Even a short plan will challenge you to make sure that the various actions have been thought through, are feasible, fulfil your objectives and can take place safely. The plan should be made freely available to all those participating in the running of the event(s). It is worth noting that Dublin City Council have an excellent publication available online called *Guidelines for event organisers* (2012).

**Top tip:** If this is your first attempt to create an engagement programme, it is best to allocate significantly more time for planning and executing the various activities than you initially estimated.

Prior to any public engagement taking place, it is important to give all those working on the site background information on the history and significance of the place as part of their induction.

During works by the National Trust to the Orangery in Tyntesfield Estate, North Somerset, it was found that as the depth of experience/quality in training increased, there was a corresponding decrease in training capacity (e.g. the cost and organisational requirements of having a full-time on-site trainee significantly exceeds that of a mere tour). Taking inspiration from the skills pyramid devised during that project, on the following pages is a list of possible activities that at each level increase in interactivity, educational impact and logistical requirements.

## Level Activities

---

### 1 Offsite, passive activities, no interaction

---

- Have relevant site reports available to read online (e.g. conservation management plan, ecology report, heritage impact assessment, archaeological assessment).
- Issue progress press releases at key stages of the project.
- Write post works articles for local newspapers and relevant trade and heritage publications.

### 2 Offsite, passive activities, some interaction

---

- Lectures given offsite by project sponsors, consultants (architect, engineer, archaeologist, ecologist, etc.) and contractors about the project. These lectures may be livestreamed or delivered solely online.
- Upload images of works and mini progress reports to social media and relevant websites. Engage with comments and questions posted on social media.
- Upload short project update videos and a video tour of the site to YouTube and connect in with social media. Engage with comments and questions posted on social media.
- Give interview updates with relevant podcasts and local radio on progress being made.

### 3 Site boundary, passive activities, no interaction

---

- Information panel(s) at the site boundary giving details on the site's significance, its conservation and the traditional building skills being used.
- Where work is obscured by hoarding, a viewing window could be provided with complementary information panel(s).

### 4 Onsite, mostly passive activities, some interaction

---

- Hard hat tours of the site. The maximum attendance should be twelve people. Allocate 1.5-2 hours for a tour. As part of the tour allow

time for questions with craftspeople about what they are doing. Consider doing a dress rehearsal. Group tours are easier to organise than tours with individuals. Ensure there is a nominated single point of contact from any schools, societies, etc.

- Site tours where visitors can also handle some tools and materials under supervision near the site entrance. For those who are less mobile, this adds to the enjoyment of the site.
- Weekday open day where people have the opportunity to talk to craftspeople about work and observe skills demonstrations.
- Sunday open day. This involves the contractor having a member of staff on hand to supervise access to designated areas of the site. An information sheet could be provided to visitors about the site and the conservation work.

### 5 Onsite, mostly passive activities, moderate interaction

---

- Tours with a clear focus on traditional building skills. The focus may be exclusively on one particular activity (e.g. lime work, roofing). Opportunity to handle tools and materials under supervision.
- Onsite seminar focusing on an aspect of traditional building skills. Mostly classroom based with site visit and opportunities to meet craftspeople and handle tools and materials.

### 6 Onsite, active, high degree of interaction

---

- Hands-on workshops focusing on an aspect of traditional building skills. Activities do not contribute directly to the final building.

### 7 Onsite, active, very high degree of interaction

---

- Student partnership. Post second level students work onsite for a period of time with experienced tradespeople gaining experience and contributing directly to the final building. Considerable level of thought required in developing an appropriate programme that provides a strong introduction to traditional skills under a high degree of supervision.

## 8 Onsite, active, very high degree of interaction over a long period

- Full time trainee/apprentice working onsite for a prolonged period, contributing directly to the final building. Considerable level of thought required in developing a programme that provides high quality training under appropriate supervision.

**Top tip:** For site visits by the public, it is useful to employ an online booking system (e.g. Eventbrite). Please note: for free events the amount of no shows can be high. Nonetheless, using an online booking system reduces time spent on administration and helps control numbers.

Many historic buildings have complex archaeological, ecological and social history backgrounds. Frequently, both archaeologists and ecologists are part of building conservation teams. As part of the programme of public engagement activities, the opportunity should be taken to create events focused on these areas. Possible activities include ecology walks, a viewing window for archaeology digs and a lunchtime show and tell of archaeological artefacts at the site entrance or viewing window.

Finally, build in flexibility into your plan and programme of events. Sometimes certain events may be more popular than expected. Alternatively, despite strong promotion, attendances may be disappointing. Consequently, don't be afraid to adapt your programme of events as required.





## Designing tenders

For both public and private sector client sponsors a key way of integrating public engagement into a conservation project is to have it as a scorable component of the issued tender documentation. Depending on the project, there may be two main formal tendering stages. The first would likely deal with procuring consultants. The second would involve engaging contractors. In other projects, especially those led by the private sector, the client may hire consultants (e.g. architect, engineer) directly through recommendation or previous interactions. Regardless of the manner of procurement, in the cases of both consultants and contractors there is the opportunity to incorporate public engagement into their core involvement on the project.

The project sponsor can either provide a clear brief to allow for accurate pricing or leave it largely to the creativity of the tenderer. If a clear brief is part of the tender, the following could be included:

- **The kind of activities to be held.**
- **Number of activities.**
- **Target audiences and expected attendance.**
- **Who will deliver the activities and when?**
- **Cost and resources.**
- **How will events be promoted?**

Public engagement should then be built into the relevant contracts once the main consultant and contractor are selected. Due to unforeseen circumstances or surprising variable demand, make sure to incorporate a provision for a flexible approach to be taken with the events programme. Subject to the overall size of both the design and build contracts, a percentage sum could be allocated for public engagement.





# 5

## Promotion

Without implementing an adequate promotion strategy, it is unlikely that many people will attend your public engagement activities. Relying solely on word of mouth is not sufficient. Below is some guidance intended to provide focus and structure on how best to connect with your target audience(s).

Remember! Different audience groups may require different events and media to reach them.

For all written material use simple, active language that will encourage people to attend.

### 1 Websites

Unless you are planning a prolonged period of repairs and associated public engagement, it is probably best that you do not create a bespoke website. Instead, advertise on existing websites, frequently visited by your target audience(s). The following websites may be particularly relevant: Heritage Council, Community, Heritage Week (if event(s) held during Heritage Week), Discover Ireland, Ireland.com, Local Tourist Group, irelandsancienteast.com, wildatlanticway.com, www.discoverireland.ie/ Irelands-hidden-heartlands, Local Authority. If you do decide to create a website, it should be designed to render best on mobile devices.

### 2 Social media

Social media is a fantastic, low-cost way of getting out your message. Connect with your audiences on social media with language, themes and stories that are meaningful to them. Using high quality images and short videos will significantly boost engagement.

Facebook is still the most effective social media platform for heritage events. Create an 'Event(s)' through your Facebook account and consider setting up a dedicated event/programme page. Post on community

social media pages and tailor your message accordingly.

Connect in with relevant Instagram accounts. Heritage, as a subject, lends itself to visual communication.

On Twitter use hashtags and tag relevant social media influencers in your posts. Do not forget to create a hashtag for your own event/programme.

LinkedIn is a business and work-related social network with a strong following in Ireland. If you are looking to engage with those in the construction sector make sure to post on LinkedIn news of your events and the progress being made on site.

### 3 Press releases

Depending on the scale of the engagement programme, consider connecting with the following print outlets: national newspapers, regional newspapers, local press, local notes, free local newspapers, community newspapers (e.g. church newsletters).

Press releases should be clear, concise and no more than two pages. Choose a simple yet engaging headline that states what the story is about. The first two paragraphs should address "who, what, where and when". Additional details and quotes can be added in the third and fourth paragraphs. If you are using an online booking system (e.g. Eventbrite), don't forget to include the link. Make sure to include a contact number at the end of the press release. When issuing by email, paste the press release into the body of the email and include a subject line that summarises your story. Issue the press release two or three days before the deadline for local newspapers and before lunchtime the day



before for national newspapers. A press release template for Heritage Week events is available at [www.heritageweek.ie](http://www.heritageweek.ie). Write separately to newspapers to be included in the Local Notes section.

#### 4 Spreading the word

Create an email database of people or organisations that may be interested in your event(s). It is essential that you have permission to email everyone on your mailing list (be respectful of Personal Data Protection priorities). If you are creating events targeted specifically at secondary school pupils, directly email the relevant teachers in the nearby schools. It is important to email teachers as early as possible.

Remember the value of word of mouth. Tell local groups who will spread the word for you (e.g. youth groups, Chamber of Commerce, heritage groups, Men's Sheds, ICA, Scouts, etc.).

#### 5 Local radio

Identify a spokesperson for your event/programme who will speak with authority and enthusiasm if interviewed. When emailing your press releases include the local radio stations. Don't forget to include the event(s) for mention in local community listings.

#### 6 Posters

Event/programme posters should be colourful and include the event name, date(s) and location, a list of activities and a website address. Make sure to also include booking details or notification if places are on a first come, first served basis. Remember to distribute posters to neighbouring towns and villages. Locations for posters might include: DIY shops, building materials providers, tourist offices, heritage attractions, libraries, shop fronts and bars, supermarkets, doctor/dentist offices, day centres, schools, sports clubs, train/bus stations. Finally, put the posters up yourself.

#### 7 Event day

Ensure that the signage on the day(s) of the event(s) clearly indicates the location of entrance and parking facilities. Send post-event day press releases to local press, free local newspapers, regional and national press and to the local community newsletter. Include two to three high quality images of the event (get the written consent of a legal guardian if you propose to include the faces of children). Post live coverage of the event on social media.

## Further reading and support



On the Heritage Council's YouTube Channel there is a specific playlist dedicated to public engagement [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIKz\\_DMJSUm\\_SOpelfEwQM1U3GFOs0-x](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIKz_DMJSUm_SOpelfEwQM1U3GFOs0-x)

Almost every local authority has either a Heritage Officer or Architectural Conservation Officer, many have both. They can provide you with very helpful advice on engaging with the public during works to traditional buildings. They can also provide advice on any legal heritage designations your site may have.

To find your local Architectural Conservation Officer visit: [www.buildingsofireland.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/Architectural-Conservation-Officers-01.07.2020.pdf](http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/Architectural-Conservation-Officers-01.07.2020.pdf)

To find your local Heritage Officer visit: [www.heritagecouncil.ie/our-work-with-others/county-heritage-officers](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/our-work-with-others/county-heritage-officers)

For information on organising heritage events, make sure to visit [www.heritageweek.ie](http://www.heritageweek.ie). Dublin City Council also have an excellent publication called *Guidelines for event organisers*. Dublin City Council Events Unit (2012) *Guidelines for event organisers*, Dublin City Council, Dublin [www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-07/DCCEventOrganiserGuidanceBooklet.pdf](http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-07/DCCEventOrganiserGuidanceBooklet.pdf)

**Top tip!** Taking part in Heritage Week is a great way of benefiting from the marketing and public interest generated during one of Ireland's biggest annual festivals.

For health and safety and insurance issues, Chapter 9 of *Guidance for community archaeology projects* offers excellent advice. It also has a sample risk assessment form.

Burke, R, Jackman, N. & Ryan, C. (2017) *Guidance for community archaeology projects*, The Heritage Council, Kilkenny [www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Guidance\\_for\\_community\\_archaeology\\_projects.pdf](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Guidance_for_community_archaeology_projects.pdf)

If you are dealing with people under the age of 18, please adhere to the Heritage Council's *Child Protection Policy*.

The Heritage Council (2018) *Child Protection Policy*, The Heritage Council, Kilkenny [www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/child\\_protection\\_policy.pdf](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/child_protection_policy.pdf)

For more information on greening your event(s), the Local Authority Prevention Network has published a short document providing helpful guidance.

Local Authority Prevention Network (2012) *Event manager's resource pack: four steps for a cleaner, greener event*, Local Authority Prevention Network <https://greenyourfestival.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/guide.pdf>



## Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Liam Mannix, Director, Research and Dig. It was reviewed by Colm Murray, Architecture Officer, The Heritage Council. Sincere thank you to SPAB Ireland for providing the images used.

© The Heritage Council, 2021