



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Historic Structures Fund

Stream 2: Conservation Advice Scheme for Traditional Farmhouses 2026

Guidance Booklet for Applicants



Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage



**An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**
Department of Housing,
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NBHS

An tSeirbhís Oidhreachta
Tógtha Náisiúnta
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Background and Purpose of the Conservation Advice Scheme for Traditional Farmhouses

This guide provides applicants with information in relation to the application process and operation of the Historic Structures Fund (HSF) 2026 Conservation Advice Scheme for Traditional Farmhouses.

The National Built Heritage Service is running a scheme to provide grant support for the provision of expert conservation advice to private owners of traditional farmhouses, who are availing of or considering the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant or Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) energy retrofit grants, where the building one of the following:

1. A farmhouse which is a Protected Structure.
2. An historic farmhouse located within a rural Architectural Conservation Area.
3. A vernacular farmhouse that has no statutory protection.

The aim of the scheme is to help owners of traditionally constructed farmhouses to understand the heritage value and potential of these structures and to prompt them to consider investments which could protect and enhance that value. The scheme aims to support the repair and reuse of historic buildings.

Vernacular farmhouses comprise modest homes constructed using local materials and traditional techniques by people without formal training using locally available materials such as thatch, stone, slate, earth, wattle and unsawn timber following long established folk traditions. 'Traditionally constructed' is taken, but not exclusively understood, to mean buildings constructed of solid masonry walls of stone or clay (or a combination of these materials), using lime or earth-based mortars, often with a lime or earthen-based render finish.

The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant

The Conservation Advice Scheme is intended to complement the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, which was launched in July 2022 to help bring vacant and

derelict residential properties back into use. This scheme provides a grant of up to €50,000 for the refurbishment of vacant properties for occupation as a principal private residence and for properties which will be made available for rent, including the conversion of a property which has not been used as residential heretofore.

Where the refurbishment costs are expected to exceed the standard grant of up to €50,000, a maximum top-up grant amount of up to €20,000 is available where the property is confirmed by the applicant to be derelict or where the property is already on the local authority's Derelict Sites Register, bringing the total grant available for a derelict property up to a maximum of €70,000.

Properties must be vacant for two years or more and built up to and including 2007.

In 2026, the VPRG has introduced a new stream 'Above the Shop'

More information on the scheme can be found here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/f8f1b-vacant-property-refurbishment-grant/>

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland Grants

Homeowners can access grant supports to upgrade the energy upgrades from the SEAI, using products suitable for traditionally constructed homes. This grant allows homeowners to carry out hygrothermal risk assessments for appropriate insulation of solid walls. This will assist them to understand the technical aspects, materials and products for the solutions traditional homes need.

More information on the scheme can be found here:

<https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants>

Objective of Conservation Advice Scheme

The aim of the 'Traditional Farmhouse Conservation Advice Scheme' is to support the provision of expert advice to enhance owners' awareness and understanding of the potential of their traditional and vernacular farmhouses, and prompt enhanced long-term investment in our architectural heritage. This grant scheme has been devised under the 'Housing for All' policy document and 'A Living Tradition', the national

strategy on built vernacular heritage in particular “Action 13: Promote vernacular-friendly repair and maintenance” and “Action 14: Present models of gentle rehabilitation”.

The grant covers the provision of expert advice on the repair and energy upgrade of traditional and vernacular farmhouses. Proposals for reuse should build on the character and integrity of the original building, in particular taking into account the building layout, survival of historic features and the importance of the hearth in vernacular houses. The grant does not cover costs associated with the design and specification of new-build extensions. Note: Not all conservation professionals will have energy-modelling skills, so engagement of additional conservation expertise may form part of the report recommendations.

All applicants must be willing to complete a short questionnaire to assist with the evaluation of the scheme and provide a selection of before and after photographs.

Photographs: Please note that the Department reserves the right to use any or all images supplied by the applicant and/or their conservation professional to advertise or publicise the scheme. Photographs must be of high quality and submitted in jpeg format, clearly identified with the name of the relevant project.

What Kind of Buildings Qualify?

This scheme is open to the owners of the following traditional farmhouses:

1. A farmhouse which is a Protected Structure.
2. An historic farmhouse located within a rural Architectural Conservation Area.
3. A vernacular farmhouse that has no statutory protection.

The aim of the scheme is to help owners of traditionally constructed farmhouses to understand the heritage value and potential of these structures and to prompt them to consider investments which could protect and enhance that value. The scheme will support the repair and reuse of historic buildings.

Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas

The scheme is open to owners of farmhouses which are a Protected Structure or located with a rural Architectural Conservation Area. If the building is a protected structure the RPS Reference number can be found on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) of the relevant local authority. The list of Architectural Conservation Areas can be found in the current Local Authority Development Plan. These documents are available to search online; alternatively, the local authority Architectural Conservation Officer can provide advice.



Vernacular Farmhouses

These small, simple, single or two-storey traditionally constructed houses are a key part of our rural landscape and shared heritage. Often described as ‘cottages’, these buildings generally comprise modest homes constructed using local materials and traditional techniques by people without formal training using locally available materials such as thatch, stone, slate, earth, wattle and unsawn timber following long established folk traditions. Their form and orientation reflect local site conditions and climate to maximise comfort for occupants. This has resulted in highly regional styles found in dwellings, outbuildings and field enclosures. Particular house forms, layouts, walling and roofing techniques may be found in one region and not another, for example: lobby-entry farmhouses in the east and direct-entry ones in the west.

Not all modest buildings are Vernacular. Buildings that are the work of professional builders and designers, such as estate buildings (gate lodges, farm buildings and estate worker housing) and social housing (labourer’s cottages, land commission houses, etc.) are excluded. While in many cases, the design of these buildings was

influenced by vernacular buildings, they are not considered vernacular, as they were designed by architects, and in many cases, built by professional builders.



Ineligible Buildings

The following categories of building listed below are not eligible for funding under the present scheme. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

- Buildings in villages and towns.
- Buildings where the intended purpose is commercial only.
- Buildings in ruinous condition.
- Farm buildings.
- Buildings where works have already commenced.

Note: this scheme does not pay towards previously completed reports.

Grant

The grant is 67% (two thirds) of eligible costs, up to a maximum grant of €5,000. The building owner will cover the remainder of the cost. The grant will support the following:

- Conservation report on the traditional farmhouse (as per provided template).
- Site survey and drawn measured survey of existing building to include mapping location of existing services.
- Sketch plan outlining reuse proposal for building (to include mapping location of proposed services required). **Important:** Professional fees towards this element of the grant is capped at €615 (incl. VAT). The grant does not cover costs associated with the detailed design and specification of new-build extensions. Reuse proposals should build on the character and integrity of the original building, in particular taking into account the building layout, survival of historic features and the importance of the hearth in vernacular houses. Where future extensions are being considered they should be sympathetic to the scale, form and traditional character of the existing historic farmhouse and ancillary buildings.
- Pre-works energy analysis: **Costs associated with energy-modelling**, where wall insulation is being considered, will be required. The specification of certain complex retrofit measures should be supported and informed by the results of analysis. The type of pre-works analysis which will inform the energy retrofit approach include modelling and in situ investigation to reduce the risk of condensation damage post-installation include:
 - hygrothermal analysis in accordance with I.S. EN ISO 15026:2023 and thermal modelling in accordance with I.S. EN 10211 & BR497, Dynamic Energy Simulation Report (e.g. using BIM, IES-VE, DesignBuilder)

Note any pre-works energy analysis report should be guided by the Department's publication [Improving Energy Efficiency in Traditional Buildings](#) (2023), in particular, pages 53-54 which outline the 'Recommended Procedure for Developing a Retrofit Plan', as well as sections: 2.2 'Performance

Assessment Methods'; 2.2.1 Thermography; 2.2.7 Calculating and Measuring U-values (various I.S. EN standards referenced).

Please note that the pre-works energy analysis does not include costs associated with obtaining a Building Energy Rating (BER) certificate.

- Fire consultant: For 'Above the Shop' applications, costs associated with appropriate assessment to the traditional construction and existing historic materials.

Selection of Conservation Professional

Applicants must select an experienced conservation professional who is a registered architect, engineer or surveyor and therefore, an assigned certifier. Please note that the proven and appropriate experience of the chosen conservation professional makes up part of the assessment process. Selecting assigned certifiers without proven conservation experience will result in the application being deemed ineligible. Furthermore, any conservation professionals who are not assigned certifiers will have to team up with an assigned certifier who also must have some conservation experience.

Suitably experienced and accredited conservation professionals can be found here:

- Accredited Conservation Architects: <https://www.riai.ie/work-with-an-architect/conservation-skills>
- Accredited Conservation Surveyors: <https://scsi.ie/building-conservation-accreditation/>
- Accredited Conservation Engineers: <https://www.engineersireland.ie/Professionals/Communities-Groups/Engineering-Divisions/Structures-and-construction/Conservation-Accreditation-Register-for-Engineers>

Registered architects, surveyors and engineers are capable of acting as assigned certifiers in relation to any subsequent building works that may take place on foot of the Conservation Advice Report, to ensure continuity of professional advice and avoid duplication of effort. Assigned certifiers inspect and co-ordinate the

inspection activities of others during construction, and certify the building or works on completion.

Note: To act as an Assigned Certifier in relation to Building Control the building professional must be registered as follows:

- (1) Architects on register pursuant to Part 3 (Registration of Architects) of the Building Control Act 2007
- (2) Building Surveyors on register pursuant to Part 5 (Registration of Quantity Surveyors) of the Building Control Act 2007
- (3) Chartered Engineers on register pursuant to Section 7 of the Institution of Civil Engineers of Ireland (Charter Amendment) Act 1969.

Conservation Professionals should also provide evidence of any recent Continued Professional Development (CPD) they have undertaken in historic buildings, vernacular buildings and energy upgrading of traditional buildings, approved by the relevant body: Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland and/or Engineers Ireland.

Where the selected building professional does not have conservation accreditation, they must clearly outline their relevant conservation qualifications and demonstrated conservation experience. It should be clear that the building professional has **demonstrable competence** in building conservation. Therefore, a Curriculum Vitae outlining details of educational and professional qualifications should be provided along with the following:

- Any recent approved conservation CPD (in particular historic buildings, vernacular buildings and energy upgrading of traditional buildings). Include details of any relevant approving body (Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland and/or Engineers Ireland).
- Details of conservation experience and working with historic buildings.
- Experience in conservation report writing.
- Sample report which includes condition survey, recommendations and conservation specification of works.
- Details of experience on how to sensitively retrofit traditionally constructed buildings using suitable materials.

How to Apply

To apply for the grant, owners of eligible buildings should:

- Fully complete the application form
- Submit the application, along with required information by the closing date. To consider your application, we must receive your fully completed application form, along with required supporting documents, by **5pm on the 8th May 2026**. **Applications and/or required supporting documents cannot be submitted after this time.**
- While applicants do not have to be currently resident in Ireland, they must have a Republic of Ireland bank account.
- As in the case of the Vacant Property Refurbishment Scheme, the scheme is not available to registered companies or developers. Applications can only be made by named individuals.

Applicants must submit the attached application form and supporting documents to conservationadvicegrants@housing.gov.ie using the subject line **Stream 2: Conservation Advice Grant Scheme for Traditional Farmhouses**.

Alternatively, applicants may submit their application form by post to **Stream 2: Conservation Advice Grant Scheme for Traditional Farmhouses**, National Built Heritage Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Room 59, Custom House, D01 W6X0. Applications must be received by the deadline above.

The following documents **MUST** be uploaded/provided in support of an application by the stated closing deadline:

1. Proof of ownership
2. Evidence of vacancy
3. Site-location map
4. Clear and current photograph(s) of the building. It is important that good-quality digital photographs (minimum of 8) are included which illustrate the

building/buildings in question as this will inform the assessment of the application. Photographs should be clearly labelled with a short description of the content. Photographs should include a general view of the exterior (front & rear); related outbuildings; general view of site/context to provide an understanding of the wider setting etc.; interior: at least one general image of original kitchen to include hearth area; other details, such as wall cupboards, windows, doors, stairs, flagged floor and exposed roof structure, where visible. It is essential that these photographs are clear and of sufficient quality to allow an informed assessment of the building. Please note that the Department reserves the right to use any or all images to advertise or publicise the scheme.

5. A quotation to include a cost breakdown from your conservation professional. This may include the following: conservation report, as per provided template; pre-works energy analysis, site and building survey and reuse proposal sketch plan.
6. Tax reference details for the applicant and your conservation professional.
7. Selected accredited Conservation Professional to provide evidence of any recent approved CPD in historic buildings, vernacular buildings and energy upgrading of traditional buildings.
8. Where selected professional has no conservation accreditation, a CV should be provided to include relevant conservation qualifications and demonstrated conservation experience (working with historic buildings and conservation report writing), along with any recent approved conservation CPD (in particular historic buildings, vernacular buildings and energy upgrading of traditional buildings). Include sample report which contains condition survey, recommendations and conservation specification of works; evidence/knowledge of how to sensitively retrofit traditionally constructed buildings using suitable materials.

Assessment Process

Initial Screening: All applications are screened first to ensure eligibility and completeness as follows:

- Is the building eligible?
- Is the application fully complete?
- Is the relevant supporting documentation attached to the application?

Important: Applications that do not meet the above requirements will be rejected on these grounds and will not be assessed further. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

The Assessment Process: Applications that pass the Screening Stage will be assessed by the National Built Heritage Service. Please note that as this is a competitive application process, **only the highest scoring projects** will be chosen in line with the available funding budget. Unsuccessful applications will not be carried through to any subsequent approved grant scheme. All applications will be assessed under the following criteria:

- ***Heritage interest of the building (12)***
- ***Vernacular interest (13):*** Please note that only Vernacular buildings will score under this category.
- ***Reuse potential/appropriate energy upgrade of the building (25)***
- ***Demonstrated experience of chosen Conservation Professional - in particular in relation to historic buildings, vernacular buildings and energy upgrading (25)***
- ***Best value for money of costings provided (25)***

Approval & Notification

Successful applicants will be selected and shall be notified using the contact details provided in the application form. Once approved, a letter shall be issued by email to you and your conservation professional, outlining the level of funding approved, as well as the timeline for completion of the report and the terms and conditions of the award. Consistent with other grant schemes, a list of projects awarded funding under this scheme will be published on the Department's website – the list will provide the building address, but not the name or any other details of the grant recipient or building professional.

Once approved, the report shall be compiled by your Conservation Professional using the **Conservation Advice Report Template** supplied. The National Built Heritage Service will use the reports only for the purpose of approving the grant payment, in line with the Data Privacy Statement (see attached). The completed report must be submitted for approval by the **28th August 2026**.

Important:

- No works to be undertaken following submission of application and until after the report is completed and the report content has been approved by the NBHS.
- If you are proposing to change Conservation Professional after you have been approved, this **must be agreed in writing** in advance with the NBHS - otherwise the grant offer is considered void and will be considered withdrawn.

Payment Procedures

Prior to any payment being made by the building owner to the Conservation Professional, the completed conservation report must be sent for approval to the National Built Heritage Service (NBHS). Changes to the report may be required by the NBHS to reflect best conservation practice. Once approval has been issued by the NBHS, **payment** by the building owner to the approved Conservation Professional can be made.

In order to recoup the grant funding from the NBHS the applicant must fill out an EFT form, containing their own bank details and not those of the conservation professional. A **recoupment** form will then be supplied to the building owner once the Conservation Report has been approved. The building owner can then recoup the grant amount from the NBHS.

The recoupment will only be made on proof of payment (receipt of payment & evidence of bank transfer) and where a tax clearance certificate has been provided for the building owner and appointed Conservation Professional. Relevant tax clearance procedures in respect of public sector grant payments, as set down by the Revenue Commissioners must be adhered to. Please refer to www.revenue.ie for further details, in line with Section 4(1) of Department of Finance Circular 44/2006: Tax Clearance Procedures: Grants, Subsidies and Similar Type Payments.

Owners who have received a determination under Section 482 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (as amended) (formerly Section 19 of the Finance Act 1982) and/or where the owner/occupier has received tax relief under the Home Renovation Incentive or the Living City Initiative, should inform the Revenue Commissioners of any funding received through this scheme.

Wildlife in Buildings

Traditional buildings may provide wildlife habitats. Please note that if, for example, bats, pine marten, red squirrels, swallows, swifts and/or nesting birds are present, owners should consult with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) as a licence from NPWS may have to be obtained before survey and works can commence. It is the responsibility of the building owner/applicant to establish whether permission or a derogation licence is needed under the Wildlife Acts 1976, and related legislation. Further more detailed can be found here: <https://www.npws.ie/licencesandconsents> or from wildlifelicence@npws.gov.ie

If a bat/bird survey is required, see link below for details of the wildlife panel. The survey report produced should identify which species are present and how to carry out the works without affecting them - for example, altering the timing of the repair

work or the material used. https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/images/HC-Wildlife-Panel_2023-05-25-091437_ngpj.pdf

For more information, please refer to the following documents:

Information on derogation licences can be found here:

<https://www.npws.ie/licensesandconsents/disturbance/application-for-derogation-licence>

National Parks and Wildlife Service *Bat Mitigation Guidelines for Ireland v2* (2022):

<https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/IWM134.pdf>

Additional guidance on how best to manage and protect bats in historic buildings has been published by Eurobats:

https://www.eurobats.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/publication_series/EUROBATS_PubISer_No4_English_3rd_edition.pdf

In addition, guidance is available from Bat Conservation Ireland:

https://www.batconservationireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BatsHeritageStructures_Final.pdf

Aughney, T., Copland, A. & Duggan U. (2009) *Bats, birds, buildings and you!* The Heritage Council.

https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/bats_birds_buildings_you_2009_3mb.pdf

Sullivan, Irene & Lusby, John (2021) *Wildlife in Buildings: Linking our Built and Natural Heritage*. Bird Watch Ireland.

<https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/images/HC-Wildlife-Panel.pdf>

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