



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

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



Realising our
Rural Potential
Action Plan for Rural Development

Town and Village Renewal Scheme



2017 Scheme Outline

All queries can be addressed to: townandvillage@ahg.gov.ie

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Scheme Outline

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

April 2017

Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017

1. Introduction

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is an initiative under the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, *Realising our Rural Potential*, and is part of a package of national and local support measures to rejuvenate rural towns and villages throughout Ireland¹.

Vibrant towns and villages are at the heart of our rural communities and can play an important role in revitalising rural Ireland. In 2016, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Heather Humphreys T.D., launched a new Town and Village Renewal Scheme, with funding of €10 million, to start the process of rejuvenating Ireland's rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

2. 2017 Scheme

As part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, an enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2017 will again focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages and will be run in **two phases**:

Phase 1, which is the focus of this document, is the main scheme concentrating on projects to enhance and develop towns and villages socially, economically and culturally.

Phase 2 will involve a pilot to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. This phase will be launched in the second half of 2017.

Projects under Phase 1 will be required to commence in 2017 and be completed by the middle of 2018. A total of €20 million will be approved for projects in 2017, with up to 50% of this available for draw-down in 2017 and the balance available for draw-down in 2018.

3. Categories of Towns

As with the 2016 scheme, the 2017 scheme will be targeted at two categories of Towns/Villages as follows:

Category 1: Towns and villages with a population of less than 5,000 people.

¹ Complementary initiatives which can help support the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages include the Built Heritage Investment Scheme, the Structures at Risk Fund, capital grants for local arts and cultural centres, SEAI energy efficiency grants for homes and communities, Local Authority Business Incentive Schemes, Shop Front Improvement schemes, Repair and Lease scheme, Tidy Towns competition, Purple Flag initiative, etc.

Category 2: Towns with a population of 5,001 to 10,000 people.

The primary focus of the 2017 scheme will be on villages and towns with population of less than 5,000 (Category 1). These towns/villages will receive at least 60% of funding available.

Note: As the full 2016 CSO data has not yet been released, towns may qualify for either category based on either the 2011 or 2016 CSO data. For example, Town A, Population 10,400 under the 2011 Census but 9,900 under the 2016 Census will qualify and vice versa.

4. Application Process

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme will be funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and will be administered through the Local Authorities.

Selection of projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2017 will be by means of a **competitive process**. Final project selection will be made by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, on the basis of proposals submitted by the Local Authorities. **Applications must be submitted by 30th June 2017**

Full involvement by community interests and business interests will be an essential feature of successful projects. The following stages will apply to the application process:

- Local Authorities will be required to advertise for expressions of interest from towns/villages in their area and will select up to 15 proposals for development into detailed applications to be submitted to the Department.
- Local Authorities, in consultation with town/village community and business interests will develop the selected expressions of interest into detailed applications to be submitted.
- A total of 15 project applications may be submitted by each Local Authority. Only one application can be submitted in respect of any individual town; however, the application may include several linked components to support the rejuvenation of the town/village.
- The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will assess these proposals and will approve up to 300 of the best projects for funding, depending on the quality of the projects and the level of funding sought.

5. Selection Criteria

The following is a guide to the criteria which will be applied by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in the selection process:

- Successful proposals will include activities which have clear positive economic impacts on the town, rather than just public realm-type actions. In this context, some weighting will be given to projects that demonstrate a REDZ-type component², such as stimulating economic activity between a town/village and neighbouring townlands.
- Successful proposals will demonstrate close collaboration between communities and business interests in the design and delivery of proposed projects and must have the support of the Local Authority. Successful town revival is most likely to be achieved where there is close partnership on projects between the community, public, and private sectors.
- All project proposals should outline the consultation processes followed with local community and business interests
- Weighting will be given to projects which demonstrate leveraging of, or linkages with, other schemes operated by Government Departments or agencies (e.g. in the areas of heritage, arts, culture, tidy towns, recreational facilities, re-use of vacant premises, vacant sites, energy efficiency schemes, etc.).
- Towns aiming to achieve Purple Flag³ or similar recognition will also be viewed positively.
- Proposals should also be consistent with the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), town health checks, and other local development plans.
- The Framework for Town Centre Renewal, developed by the Retail Consultation Forum under the auspices of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, may also provide a useful guidance for the development of town centre plans.
- Towns approved under the 2016 Town and Village Renewal Scheme may be considered if:
 - All 2016 funding has been fully and satisfactorily expended by end-June 2017, and

² Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZs) are functional areas that utilise synergies and interdependencies between rural towns and their townlands to generate economic activity in their local area.

³ Purple Flag is an accreditation process similar to the Blue Flag for beaches. It leads to Purple Flag status for town & city centres that meet or surpass the standards of excellence in managing the evening and night time economy.

- A clear case is made that the new project offers value for continuing investment.

6. Types of activities which can be supported

As indicated earlier, a general objective of the 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme is that projects should, where possible, utilise or leverage other national or local government initiatives to create projects of scale and maximise the impact on towns or villages. Measures which are taken under the Scheme should also have a sustainable and visible impact on the town/village.

The following are indicative lists of the types of activities that can be supported (these lists are not exhaustive).

Projects which display the following will be considered High Priority by the Department for assessment purposes:

- Projects that support entrepreneurship (e.g. development of Enterprise Hubs, Hot Desk Facilities, Digital Hubs, Creative Hubs, training facilities)
- Integrated approaches to developing individual sectors within the town and/or its environs (e.g. artisan food hubs, craft hubs)
- Projects which demonstrate collaboration between town centre businesses and the surrounding area to produce economic benefit
- Tourism initiatives
- Enhancement of heritage and/or other community assets
- Town safety and accessibility enhancements
- Provision/enhancement of leisure facilities (e.g. Town Parks, walking trails)
- Conducting/commissioning of Town/Village health check
- Development of quality marks, such as Purple Flag, Heritage Town, etc.

The following types of activity are eligible for support, but will be considered a lower priority for towns with a population of over 1,000 people unless they can be shown to be an integral part of a higher priority project:

- Enhancement of streetscape and town environment
- Shop front enhancement

- Branding and promotion of the town/village to attract new customers and/or business investment
- Car parking improvements
- Targeted actions to tackle minor infrastructural deficiencies in access, services, site development works and other infrastructure that may be needed to support housing and commercial development

Funding will be provided from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs' capital budget. **On-going current costs (e.g. salary/wages cost of staff directly employed on the project) are not eligible for grant funding.** However, current costs which form part of the match funding will be considered eligible for the duration of the project.

7. Grant level

Up to 80% of the total cost of a project under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme will be provided for any individual project. The minimum grant which is available is €20,000 and the maximum is €100,000.

Up to 10% of the total cost may be provided in the form of "in-kind" contributions (e.g. land lease or voluntary labour⁴); a minimum cash contribution of 10% will also be required.

A higher maximum of €200,000 will be considered for a limited number of projects where a robust case can be made demonstrating exceptionally strong economic benefit to a town.

8. Payment Schedule

Subject to the grant levels outlined above, the payment schedule will be as follows:

- 50% of the total allocation in 2017, provided a minimum of 20% of the total project cost has been expended, and
- 50% payment on completion, based on expenditure actually incurred.

⁴ Contributions-in-kind can be provided in the form of voluntary labour (i.e. unpaid work) which must be based on the verified time spent and the rate of remuneration for equivalent work. The Local Authority must ensure that the rate applied is properly justified in the application.

9. Optional funding for public art works

In addition, Local Authorities may seek further optional funding of up to €20,000 (in total) for art works to enhance public spaces, as part of one or more project proposals submitted in respect of their area. Local Authorities opting to apply for this funding are required to complete a separate Art Works application form for each project, this should include a brief outline of their proposals as part of their applications. It will be a matter for each Local Authority to commission and choose the works to be funded, ideally with an emphasis on participation by local artists. Funding for art works will only be paid on full completion of the works in question.

10. Scheme Requirements

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

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

Projects will be required to commence in 2017 and will be expected to incur a reasonable proportion of expenditure by mid-November (minimum 20% of total project costs, inclusive of match funding). The capacity to deliver this level of activity should be taken into account by applicant towns/villages and by Local Authorities in selecting their projects for submission to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. All projects must be completed by mid-2018.

1. All appropriate financial and Government procurement and accounting rules and regulations will be complied with in relation to the expenditure and each Local Authority will fully account for the sum advanced in a timely manner.
2. Every effort should be made to expend the full grant awarded by mid-2018.
3. Full and accurate documentation to support all expenditure should be maintained and accessible by Department officials for audit purposes at all times and for a period of six years from the date of completion of the project.
4. Local Authorities will acknowledge the support of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in all public announcements and advertising relating to the project, and the Department may seek to use the project in the broader promotion of its policies.

5. Local Authorities will provide any reports and information relating to the project as may reasonably be requested by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs from time to time.
6. On-going monitoring and evaluation of the project outputs and outcomes should take place in the context of assessing the impact of the intervention and as part of the learning process associated with such interventions. Local Authorities will be expected to collect appropriate data to facilitate this learning on an on-going basis and make this data available to the Department.
7. Each Local Authority will provide contact point/points to the Department to facilitate timely interaction in the context of payments and information requests.
8. A final report detailing all elements of expenditure relating to the grant aid will be required upon project completion.

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

All applications must be submitted by 30th June 2017

Scoring Framework

The scoring framework below will be applied to all applications In order to ensure that successful projects are of a high quality. A minimum threshold of 65% will be required for each criterion and the mark required to meet this is also outlined below.

Selection Criteria	Detailed Outline	Max Score	Quality Threshold
Economic Development Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project include activities that have clear positive economic impacts? • Does the project complement or leverage other Government programmes and objectives? • Does the proposal add value to current initiatives? • For projects exceeding €100,000 does the project demonstrate a strong economic case? 	30	19.5
Strategic nature of the proposal and coherence with local area plans/healthcheck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence is there that the project proposal is in line with the aims and objectives of local area plans? • Did the application seek input from local community or business interests? 	20	13
Demonstration of need and potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the proposal include a clear statement of identified needs? • Does the proposed plan of action address the needs identified? • Does the proposal show engagement with the local community or business interests in the formulation of the project proposal? 	20	13
Realistic nature of the proposal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are a clear set of defined outputs and outcomes included in the proposal? • Has a delivery mechanism been identified? • Is there a process in place to measure outcomes and impact of the proposal over time? 	15	9.75
Value for Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which projects are clear and include targets, realistic costing and timescales. • Clear rationale for costs requested. • The cost effectiveness of the proposal with regard to the level, range and quality of outputs and outcomes to be delivered. 	15	9.75
Total		100	65