



Report on the Present  
and  
Future Protection of  
Thatched Structures in  
Ireland



Executive Summary

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# Report on the Present & Future Protection of Thatched Structures in Ireland

## Executive Summary:

The Heritage Council published a policy paper *Irish Thatched Roofs and The National Heritage* in 2002. Arising from this paper, a steering group, led by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, including representatives from the Environment and Heritage Service (N.I.), the Heritage Council, the Office of Public Works and Wexford County Council was established to examine the issues surrounding thatch structures on the whole island of Ireland. This group decided that a report setting out a three-year plan of action was necessary.

There has long been concern about the decline of historic thatch in Ireland and through the work of DoEHLG, EHS, The Heritage Council and other agencies, strategies and policies have been proposed and implemented. Despite these efforts, historic thatch is being lost at an accelerating rate. There are many reasons for this including the fragmented nature of the trade, a widespread lack of detailed knowledge of historic thatch materials and techniques, varying and conflicting government policies.

This Action Plan charts a way forward to address all these problems, based on a detailed study of the current status of Irish thatch and the many years experience of the authors in recording and preserving thatched structures. Volume 2 of the report contains supporting information, including a list of thatchers working in Ireland and suppliers of thatching materials, that should be useful for owners and those working on thatched structures.

The report recommends the following Action Plan:

### Action 1

All buildings where the historic thatch survives should be placed on the relevant Record of Protected Structures (each planning authority has a separate RPS) as soon as possible.

### Action 2

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Environment and

Heritage Service should commission or facilitate through the Heritage Council and Local Authorities, a systematic comprehensive survey of thatched structures in Ireland to include the collation of all existing surveys, together with an analysis of the new information to identify regional and local characteristics.

### Action 3

Environment and Heritage Service should proceed to publish the results of their detailed survey of thatched structures and review of grant statistics.

### Action 4

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Environment and Heritage Service should commission an illustrated leaflet describing the state of thatched buildings in Ireland, the protection afforded by the legislation, and indicating sources for advice and information. It should be aimed at owners and all relevant conservation and grant-aiding bodies in order to raise the levels of awareness regarding the heritage value of thatch. The leaflet should be regarded as an initial provisional measure until full protection and survey information is available.

### Action 5

A centralised database should be established as a repository for all information relating to historic Irish thatch, regularly updated with an efficient system of information dissemination. The 'Irish Thatch Advisory Group' as recommended in Action 12 would provide the 'home' for the database. The Department of Irish Folklore at UCD should be asked to record interviews with active and retired traditional thatchers.

### Action 6

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Environment and Heritage Service should liaise and collaborate with other relevant departments and agencies to support the development of the production of thatching materials. In the South this could be delegated to the Heritage Council.

### Action 7

The Heritage Council is best placed to commission the publication of *The Irish Thatch Handbook* with support from The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, OPW and Environment and Heritage Service.

**Action 8**

An education and training programme aimed at Local Authority Conservation Officers to ensure agreed standards and criteria. This programme could be run by experts in historic thatch roofs and approved thatchers with support from The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, OPW and the Environment and Heritage Service. The programme would include Workshops and Practical Training Days (cf Mourne Heritage Trust). University courses in relevant subjects could be incorporated into this programme to encourage research and study.

**Action 9**

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with support from OPW and Environment and Heritage Service should enter into discussions with FAS and CITB to establish the potential of a Thatching Apprentice scheme which would include on the job training with approved experienced thatchers. If an Irish based scheme should not prove viable, scholarships could be offered to Knuston Hall Training College in England followed by a placement with an approved thatcher, skilled in Irish traditional style.

**Action 10**

There should be a single specification for work to historic thatch that all (all island)

regulatory and grant giving bodies will use in their approval criteria. Such a specification must include regional variations. Additional criteria (e.g. Irish speaking Gaeltacht areas) can be used as long as conservation standards are upheld.

**Action 11**

A panel of Historic Thatch Conservation Advisors should be established by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Environment and Heritage Service to advise grant-aiding and regulatory authorities. The panel would undertake specific commissions on instruction from any one of the bodies. A programme of standard setting and CPD will need to be set up to maintain and develop standards.

**Action 12**

We propose the establishment of an 'Irish Thatch Advisory Group' to advise on all official policies and grant schemes relating to thatched structures and the thatching trade including growers. This Group may be facilitated by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to provide the Secretariat.