

# Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template – Accessible Version

## SECTION 1 – Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

### 1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department for Communities

### 1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

DfC is launching and administering a funding scheme which provides funding to owners to repair the roofs, windows and masonry walls of their listed buildings; the latter also applies to scheduled monuments. It is also launching and administering a scheme open to charities and councils to carry out research into the historic environment and to increase public awareness.

### 1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

- Developing a  Policy  Strategy  Plan
- Adopting a  Policy  Strategy  Plan
- Implementing a  Policy  Strategy  Plan
- Revising a  Policy  Strategy  Plan
- Designing a Public Service
- Delivering a Public Service

### 1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

The answer to 1C is Revising a Policy.

The Historic Environment Fund 2026-27

**1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.**

To encourage action by third parties to bring heritage assets up to a reasonable / good state of repair and thereafter, maintain them in a good state of repair through preventative maintenance.

To encourage and support action to repair and find a sustainable use for heritage assets which are at risk of loss.

To support action to repair the roofs of thatched buildings and maintain this vulnerable resource.

To support the action to repair monuments most at risk; and to initiate progress at targeted sites with relevant stakeholders.

**1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

- Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).
- Other definition (Provide details and the rationale below).
- A definition of 'rural is not applicable'

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

The answer to 1F is 'Other definition'

Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (2005), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

This was used for recent survey work commissioned by Historic Environment Division on the condition of listed buildings in NI, which informs the policy

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

## SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

**2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?**

Yes  No

If the response is **NO GO TO Section 2E.**

**2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.**

The answer to 2A is YES

The Historic Environment Fund aims to stimulate action by third parties to 'help communities to enjoy and realise the value of the historic environment', which is the Division's mission. There are 4 streams:

The Repair Stream is open to owners across the whole of Northern Ireland as it encourages the repair of roofs, windows and masonry of our historic buildings, in addition to masonry repairs at monuments, regardless of location (urban or rural) but with a particular objective to prioritise thatched buildings which are more commonly rural.

The Regeneration Stream invests in key partners to deliver projects: Heritage at Risk (UAH); Harnessing Heritage, which supports communities to unlock potential of vacant historic buildings (AHF); and National Churches Trust, which supports capacity building amongst those who care for churches.

The Revival Stream is a fund to promote the social value and increase public awareness of heritage, ranging from community archaeology to Council projects and training programmes.

The Research Stream is a fund to undertake and publish research that furthers the preservation, conservation and regeneration of heritage.

The funding is targeted at heritage assets, however, these are occupied by the people who live and work in them. Together with the rural landscape, they also provide the background to their lives.

**2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.**

For the Repair Stream there is a possibility that the objective to repair thatch buildings and making thatch repairs a priority category within scoring of applications, will provide benefit to rural areas to a greater degree than urban areas, but this is

not explicit in the objectives and will depend on applications received. The same applies for Scheduled Monuments, as these are more common in rural areas.

There is no likely different impact perceived for the Regeneration, Research and Revival Streams.

**2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.**

- Rural Businesses
- Rural Tourism
- Rural Housing
- Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas
- Education or Training in Rural Areas
- Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas
- Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas
- Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas
- Poverty in Rural Areas
- Deprivation in Rural Areas
- Rural Crime or Community Safety
- Rural Development
- Agri-Environment
- Other (Please state)

Cross cutting issues - Owners of listed buildings and scheduled monuments, or those employed to work on them

**If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.**

**2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.**

N/A

## SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

**3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Yes  No

If the response is **NO GO TO Section 3E.**

**3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

- Consultation with Rural Stakeholders
- Consultation with Other Organisations
- Surveys or Questionnaires
- Published Statistics
- Research Papers
- Other Publications
- Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).

**3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.**

The answer to 3A is YES

As part of the survey on the Condition of Listed Buildings in NI carried out in 2023-24 Survey [Survey on the Condition of Listed Buildings (2023/24)], a sample of 1504 listed buildings were selected across NI to assess their condition and risk level. This included ownership type; grade; settlement band; and NUTS 3 level.

For settlement types, this was based on the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (2005), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, for which Bands F (Intermediate Settlement), G (Village) and H (Small village, hamlet and open countryside) were

considered as Rural. The majority of buildings (56%) were rural.

There was a statistically significant difference between the proportion of buildings in Rural settlements being considered at 'Critical' Risk compared to buildings in Urban or Provincial settlements, which highlights the fragile nature of this environmental resource. There were also small but statistically significant differences between the proportion of listed buildings that were rated 'Very good/Good' in Urban (Belfast and L'derry 25.9%), and Provincial (large, medium and small towns 27.1%) settlements compared to Rural (intermediate settlements villages, hamlets and countryside 22.7%).

This survey impacts the social and economic needs of rural people as, well maintained, listed buildings attract business and investment; maintain a sense of belonging, identity and pride; and attract tourism, therefore contributing to the local economy (In 2022, five of the top ten most visited paid attractions in NI were in rural areas). Conversely, poorly maintained listed buildings diminish the opportunity for these social and economic benefits for rural people.

**3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?**

As 3C & Key Rural Issues, NI 2024 [Key Rural Issues 2024\_v2.pdf]

**If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.**

**3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?**

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## **SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

**4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

As the HEF focuses on the condition of listed buildings, the social and economic needs of people who occupy, work on or in, or experience these buildings was the main consideration.

The funding scheme may have a positive impact on people in rural areas by improving the quality of their housing; creating construction jobs in rural areas, some of which may involve training; and improving tourism by reducing dereliction in rural areas, therefore making them more attractive.

## SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

**5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?**

Yes  No

If the response is **NO GO TO Section 5C.**

**5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

The answer to 5A is yes

The HEF Repair Stream has 3 priority groups:

- Thatched buildings;
- Buildings on the Heritage at Risk register; and
- Applicants on eligible qualifying benefits.

There are more listed buildings categorized as 'Critical' on NI's Heritage at Risk register in rural than in urban or provincial settlements and thatched roofed buildings are more often found in rural areas. Buildings on the NI's Heritage at Risk register and those with thatched roofs are two of the three priority groups for the HEF. The third priority is applicants on eligible qualifying benefits. NI's latest Key Rural Issues report (2024) states that 'Similar proportions of urban and rural households are in relative poverty (19% urban, 16% rural) or absolute poverty (16% urban, 11% rural)' - this suggests that applicants from urban areas are more likely to be prioritised but when the other two priority groups are also taken into account, it seems that rural needs are fairly considered.

The Regeneration, Research and Revival Streams do not specifically target rural settlements but as two of the 3 key partners, Ulster Architectural Heritage and the Architectural Heritage Fund, focus on Heritage at Risk, there may be more benefit for rural communities, depending on where applicants are located.

If the response to Section 5A was **YES GO TO Section 6A.**

**5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

Click or tap here to enter text.



## SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

**6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.**

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

**Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:**

Nicola Golden

**Position/Grade:**

Senior Conservation Architect / SPTO

**Division/Branch:**

Historic Environment Division / Heritage Advice and Regulation Branch

**Signature:**

Nicola Golden

**Date:**

28th Jan 2026

**Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:**

Natalie O'Rourke

**Position/Grade:**

Principal Conservation Architect, G7

**Division/Branch:**

Historic Environment Division / Heritage Advice and Regulation Branch

**Signature:**

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Date:**

7th May 2026