

# Historic Irish Houses

## *A Creative Reappraisal*



HISTORIC HOUSES *of* IRELAND





W.B. Yeats memorably  
called the Irish country  
house a space “*where order  
and beauty meet...*”





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## Executive Summary

- i) Historic Houses of Ireland are very heartened and grateful to have the support of the Creative Ireland team and to be working with members of Government who have a shared understanding and interest in the goals of our association.
- ii) In 2011 the economic consultants Ecorys, working in co-operation with Fitzpatrick Associates, produced a report on the economic value of Ireland's historic environment for The Heritage Council. The report identified that the majority of Ireland's heritage assets of all types are in private ownership, and that private owners are solely responsible for its care, maintenance and support. This remains the case today.
- iii) Unfortunately, the report did not address the fact that the State can only afford to look after a very small percentage of Ireland's heritage assets and it only examined those in State or institutional ownership in depth. The challenge of deriving maximum benefit, both economically and aesthetically, from the clear majority of heritage assets that are in private ownership was not considered in the report, and nor was the fact that many private owners also look after a whole portfolio of environmental assets that are often of equal or greater importance to their cultural and heritage responsibilities. This attitude was in line with then current thinking, since Heritage has always been regarded as a component of Irish tourism, which has tended to focus on big and ever-increasing numbers, largely but not solely from America, while the majority of private houses are unsuitable for large numbers.
- iv) More recently, in 2015, the then Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphries TD, launched an *Action Plan for the Sustainable Future of the Irish Historic House in Private Ownership*, which was the fruit of a collaboration between her Department and the Irish Historic Houses Association, now Historic Houses of Ireland (HHI). The Action Plan examined ways of providing a sustainable future for the Irish Historic House in private ownership which it identified as "*primarily dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and linked to the larger landed estates of the time.*"

- v) The Action Plan recognised that “these houses are a particular and significant section of Ireland’s architectural heritage” and are also “unique and irreplaceable repositories of architecture, art, history, culture, and craftsmanship, not only portraying the story of the families who created and care for them, but also of the communities that sustained and maintained them, and continue to benefit from them today”. It also stated that, “Their associated landscapes, gardens and demesnes are an essential artistic, ecological, social and economic resource.”
- vi) The aim of the Action Plan, the houses to which it relates, and the wide range and variety of heritage assets that they encompass could not have been stated with greater clarity.
- vii) The owners of country houses are often considered wealthy but, just as is the case with Ireland’s farmers, their alleged wealth can only be realised or calculated if all their assets are sold. Meanwhile, in contrast to farming where income derives from farm enterprises and subsidies, stewardship of heritage houses requires continuous, ongoing maintenance, and opening the doors is seldom a paying proposition in a country with a small population and no tradition of historic house visiting.
- viii) Until very recently, suggestions of managing numbers or booking in advance, in an effort to avoid damage to historic fabric or environment, or to provide an enhanced and more rewarding experience, were discounted. Instead, emphasis was placed on attracting large numbers or large groups, often in close proximity, and providing ready or unrestricted access and availability. Owners were encouraged to maintain unsustainably low admission charges, with the result that the business of opening to the public often incurred further losses, yet only a very small minority of owners are able to support loss-making initiatives from their own resources.
- ix) In the autumn of 2019 Creative Ireland provided generous funding which allowed HHI to survey some seventy-five historic house owners in depth, in order to establish their current levels of interaction with different sectors of the community. Perhaps more importantly, it also provided an opportunity to assess their capacity for greater levels of interaction and co-operation, and to identify spaces that could be made available for creative purposes under favourable circumstances. While the survey examined every possible form of engagement, it concentrated on Creative Ireland’s key pillar categories. Its conclusions are contained in this report, along with a series of potential projects that will help to provide a beneficial outcome, assuming that support from Creative Ireland and other bodies is forthcoming.



- x) Since the survey was concluded, COVID-19 has changed the situation dramatically and it is quite possible that these changes will be long-lasting. It is not yet clear whether Ireland's tourism authorities appreciate this but it must be assumed that the significant aspects of the current situation, such as the need to avoid crowds and close proximity, may well be here to stay. In this unforeseen scenario Ireland's historical approach to the use of heritage for tourism purposes will be overturned. Heritage assets and venues, which have always relied on ever increasing visitor numbers, will have to choose between reinventing themselves, and finding a new role and a new modus operandi, or incurring heavy, and very possibly unsustainable, annual losses.
- xi) In fact, for the clear majority of Ireland's heritage assets that are still in private ownership, COVID-19 actually presents a major opportunity, provided the situation is fully understood and handled in a sympathetic and appropriate manner. The private owners of Ireland's historic houses are in a unique position to develop, as this report shows in considerable detail, a whole spectrum of new creative and cultural heritage products, initiatives and experiences in response to today's much-altered circumstances.
- xii) While of course there will always be exceptions, the majority of private owners are perfectly prepared to play their part if they receive fair treatment and can see a sustainable future. However, progress really needs to be made now, since few historic houses will achieve their potential without a new process of joined-up thinking and many will not survive unless this happens directly.
- xiii) Initial discussions should take place between owners' representatives and the responsible Government departments, including the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Department of Education, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with its new portfolio of Land Use and Biodiversity, ideally under the auspices of Creative Ireland and as a matter of urgency.



- xiv) This report, which is based on the survey, proposes a number of Pilot Projects. Unlike normal 'heritage' activities, all can be promoted at private houses, or in their gardens or parks. They can take place in containable numbers, in line with the measures to limit the spread of the pandemic, and will produce a series of high-end, top quality heritage products and creative experiences for all ages, capable of reaching out to all members of Irish society and of genuine interest to visitors from overseas.
- xv) In summary, the principal Pilot Projects are:-
- a. **Behind the Hall Door** — a quality assured scheme for events at historic houses
  - b. **Beyond the Garden Gate** — a similar system for events in gardens and parks
  - c. **Historic Houses of Ireland Conservation Volunteers** — new programme
  - d. **Creation and Creativity** — an exhibition of Irish-made items from historic houses
  - e. **Gaisce** — developing joint programmes, ideally in association with (c) above
  - f. **Forest Schools** — learning new outdoor skills in unspoiled rural settings
  - g. **Naturally Creative** — a sensitive approach to accessing the environment
- xvi) Pilot projects will also be further enhanced by a series of Workshops. Some will be specifically designed to teach owners special skills or to impart essential, useful or interesting information to a wide variety of different sectors and interests. Others will explore new methods of interaction with local communities or new ways of releasing the untapped potential for creative activities and creativity at private houses and estates.
- xvii) Unfortunately, the survey also identified that many owners are concerned about viability. Their concerns have increased since the onset of COVID-19 since, just as is the case with many businesses and other organisations, a number of house owners and their collections may not survive. A further survey, to assess their numbers and calculate the likely overall impact of the pandemic on Ireland's historic houses, is urgently needed.
- xviii) Meanwhile, four changes that should be considered are shown below. All will help to protect Ireland's historic house heritage, will create sustainable and continued public access, and will ensure that country houses become focal points for cultural, creative and community activities throughout rural Ireland.

- xix) The offer of a payment to owners in return for a verifiable number of creative activities, events and endeavours to be held each year in accordance with a formula and a protocol for opening methods and times, all to be agreed in advance, would transform the situation completely.
- xx) Alternative methods of meeting the public access obligations of Section 482 must be explored, since the new pandemic protocols have made delivery of the accepted access forms difficult for many owners, especially for those at risk who continue to self-isolate.
- xxi) Ways must be found to reduce the red tape that surrounds all applications for funds to support cultural activities and creative events.
- xxii) It is seldom understood that those who own and care for Ireland's heritage assets are often under financial pressure and many are stretched almost to the limit. While the projects recommended by this report are excellent they can only be undertaken when they are fully supported and support can be maintained for as long as it takes for them to become properly established and self-supporting.
- xxiii) Private owners cannot be expected to participate in developments or projects that increase their borrowings, even if these developments are clearly of benefit to the wider public. All initiatives must increase, rather than reduce, the owners' income stream and thus help Ireland's privately owned heritage to survive and, more importantly, to flourish.
- xxiv) Many private owners can only participate in matched funding schemes by selling portions of adjoining land, which reduces their ability to maintain their houses, or by selling important items from their collections, which causes irreparable damage to Ireland's fragile and rapidly diminishing heritage. Unless matched-funding schemes receive external funding, from the Government, from the Lottery Fund, from business or from other sources, they will continue to damage heritage and are unsustainable.
- xxv) Finally, while the measures advocated in this report offer the potential to achieve a hugely improved situation for Ireland's heritage and creativity, Creative Ireland cannot be expected to become the sole panacea for this perennial problem.
- xxvi) Additional sources of funding for qualifying heritage and creative activities and events must be identified, and the methods of accessing them for rewarding, worthwhile projects made simple and straightforward.
- xxvii) HHI asks Creative Ireland to help bring this about.



## Part 1

# Introduction



1. 1 Major independent studies have established that private owners are responsible for maintaining, repairing and preserving the vast majority of Ireland's heritage of all types: built, cultural, historical and environmental. At a meeting in the Custom House, in the Spring of 2018, representatives of the Built Heritage Policy Section of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht stated that, in their estimation, 75% of Ireland's built heritage is in private ownership today.
1. 2 Historic Houses of Ireland (HHI) is a registered trading name of the Irish Historic Houses Association (IHHA), a Company Limited by Guarantee and a registered Irish Charity, incorporated in 2008.
1. 3 HHI (IHHA) was formed in 2008 with the active encouragement of the Government. The principal civil servant in the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht expressed concern because the department had no method of engaging with the private owners of Ireland's historic country houses. The department had no way of telling how the owners were situated, how they were affected by legislation, how they could be helped or encouraged, or whether they were at risk.
1. 4 The great Georgian buildings of Ireland and historic town houses in Dublin and other cities and towns were already well represented. The Department suggested that a group of owners should come together and form a representative body for the private owners of Ireland's historic country houses with which it could negotiate and engage in dialogue. It was made clear that the specific purpose was to represent houses that, at least in former years, were mainly linked to Ireland's landed estates but that the resulting organisation should also represent the interest of smaller historic houses in the countryside such as rectories, farmhouses, sporting lodges and good houses of all sorts provided they were protected structures in residential use.
1. 5 HHI was founded to represent private owners of Irish country houses and support them with the ongoing responsibilities and challenges that come with ownership of historic houses. In doing so, HHI has always effectively represented the interests of all such owners and houses, whether members or not. Membership of HHI currently stands at about 140 houses, largely though not exclusively located in the Irish countryside and all standing in their own grounds.
1. 6 The formation of an Irish association also received support from the European Historic Houses Association, now European Historic Houses (EHH), the representative body for all national European historic house-owners' associations based in Brussels. The then EHH President informed the 2007 Historic Houses Conference at Maynooth that a properly constituted Irish owners body was of paramount importance for Ireland's heritage; HHI joined EHH in 2008. EHH is in regular dialogue with its member associations and sustains close relationships with all EU institutions. HHI has been represented at all EHH meetings and conferences and has been an active participant in EHH activities over the years.





1. 7 In 2019 HHI received funding through the Creative Ireland programme to undertake a survey of historic Irish country houses in private ownership and use the resulting information to produce this report. Throughout the report the above description will be abbreviated to country houses or historic houses or houses, but the full wording is explicitly implied in all cases.
1. 8 Ultimately, the purpose of this present exercise is to find new ways of releasing and reinvigorating the huge legacy of creative potential inherent in Ireland's historic country houses so they become centres of creative activity and creative excellence in their localities. The aim was to explore and establish how country houses could be made available as 'creative spaces;' to examine innovative new ways of using houses, along with their outbuildings, gardens & parks in order to benefit their owners, local communities, local creative enterprises and industries, and the wider creative economy. It was decided to approach this task by establishing exactly what was happening at members' properties already, and then exploring the scope for inspiring owners to consider further methods of engagement with the wider public.

1. 9 HHI developed a questionnaire to identify what members currently do, what they might be prepared to do and what they would like to offer in the future. A substantial majority of members were keen to participate and the survey was conducted by a combination of telephone interviews and visits. With the time and resources available it was possible to survey 75 members, roughly half of whom were visited on site. The interviews involved some 65 separate questions, all specifically developed to gather the critical data that forms the basis of this report. The results have allowed HHI to draw conclusions and make recommendations, and these will facilitate further discussions and the cross-pollination of ideas and concepts. No such information has been gathered from private owners in Ireland before.
1. 10 The results were very encouraging since they showed how many owners engage with their communities, frequently on a pro bono basis, and they have helped to identify the areas which members should be encouraged to develop as a priority. HHI aims to extend this survey, both to other members and non-members, subject to the availability of time and further resources. A number of new members joined HHI during the course of this process, attracted by the prospect of participation in the survey and in the resulting projects.
1. 11 This report showcases the variety and diversity of HHI's member houses and illustrates the important part their owners play as custodians of Ireland's shared culture and heritage.
1. 12 Building on what many members are already doing and by extending new ideas and concepts, and best practice, to others will allow this valuable contribution to be considerably enhanced. HHI aims to focus the owners of country houses on the positive benefits of engaging with their communities, so unleashing their houses' hidden potential and re-imagining them as centres of culture, education and community, both within their own localities, and nationally and internationally.
1. 13 HHI would like to thank Creative Ireland and all those who have contributed in any and all ways to this project.



## Part 2

# Irish Country Houses — Architecture and Creativity

2. 1 Ireland's country houses are renowned as the fruits of great creative talent and imagination. Beautifully sited, ingeniously planned and designed, constructed from the best available materials by skilled tradesmen and artisans, they were filled with the collected works of Ireland's finest artists and creative craftsmen. In recognition of their unchallenged position as the embodiment of a country's creative crafts and skills, country houses have been accurately described elsewhere as 'collective works of art' but in fact they occupied a far more influential position in Ireland's cultural and creative mantra as important centres of creativity and creative excellence.
2. 2 Country houses were rural centres of training and craftsmanship, and of excellence. Many owners were inquisitive and experimental. They were interested in new concepts and in new ideas and inventions, and a number became highly proficient in their chosen fields of creative endeavour. They also imported new creative ideas from their travels overseas, brought creative experts to work on and in their houses, gardens and parks, and on their farms and wider estates, while their staff and employees were often trained to achieve an extraordinarily high level of creative skills and abilities, and took a real pride in their creative achievements.
2. 3 Country houses were mainly built as the principal residences on large estates. While their size varies considerably, most are larger buildings of at least two stories. HHI membership also includes the owners of a number of smaller rural buildings, such as former rectories, sporting lodges, larger farm houses and smaller houses, although only one former rectory was included in this survey. The majority were built between 1740 and 1880, although HHI membership includes buildings from mediaeval times until the early twentieth century. They are listed as protected structures in the development plans of their respective counties and a number are included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), an important online resource. For a definition of the various types of protection afforded to buildings in Ireland see Appendix F.



2. 4 Over the last three hundred years, individual house owners have made an important contribution to architecture and creative design by engaging the most important Irish architects to build their country houses. Others sought plans and designs from overseas while a number of talented and creative amateurs produced their own designs, or adapted those they had seen elsewhere. The results vary considerably. Some buildings are charmingly naive but others show real creative ingenuity and an accomplishment that rivals the best professional architects and designers.
2. 5 Over fifty architects worked on HHI Members houses and are shown in Appendix A. 60% of these were Irish or spent most of their creative careers working in Ireland. The remainder were largely English and, in several instances, the resulting houses are their only known Irish work. Almost all the leading Irish architects are represented. James Gandon is the only omission of real importance as his one remaining Irish country house, Emo Court, is now owned by the State.
2. 6 A number of houses are associated with several different architects, and one house was adapted or altered by no less than five different professionals over the centuries, which shows the important contribution country house owners made as patrons of creative architecture and design.
2. 7 Irish country houses of the Georgian period have been celebrated internationally for well over a century. The typical example is an imposing square classical block, with a tall roof, almost golden in sunshine but often turning a dull grey in the Irish rain. Apart from the principal entrance, usually approached by a tall flight of steps, houses usually relied on the number and positioning of their windows and chimney stacks for visual effect yet, despite the plain facades, they often had remarkably rich interiors. This contrast is a particularly Irish creative phenomenon.

2. 8 In fact Irish houses are far more creative and diverse than this widely accepted Georgian norm, both in style and in size. Current HHI membership includes buildings with mediaeval cores and one or two from the seventeenth century, while the Georgian period saw many variations on the Palladian theme. Some houses are almost over-square in elevation while others are longer and lower, and a number have matching wings, which are usually connected to the main block by curved quadrants.
2. 9 The early 1800s brought a return to the gothic style, with turrets and battlements and mullioned windows. Georgian '*gothick*' was delicate, ethereal and, initially, symmetrical but asymmetry soon became more prevalent and the Gothic style gradually grew more ponderous and robust as the century progressed. Some traditionalists still preferred the classical style, which in turn gradually became more *Italianate* and elaborate, while neo-Tudor, a derivation of Gothic with tall chimneys and multiple gables, became particularly popular in Victorian Ireland. The early years of the twentieth century brought further change and there are some particularly fine examples of the architecture of the Arts and Crafts movement.
2. 10 Country houses were surrounded by areas of land often referred to as 'demesnes' which may include gardens, parks, farmland and woods, along with a varied, and often extensive, range of outbuildings to serve and support the house. Parks or demesnes often contain a number of protected structures in addition to the principal house. These may include lodges, entrance gates, garden buildings, and follies and even, in a very small number of cases, National Monuments.
2. 11 Few Irish houses were built on the same grand scale as those elsewhere in Europe, and indeed many could best be described by the title of Maurice Craig's book about them, *Classic Irish Houses of the Middle Size*. While there are exceptions, and most owners are prepared to allow their main rooms be used for a variety of cultural and creative purposes, few houses are large enough to separate the main rooms on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. Consequently, this report focuses on maximising the potential of other areas by making use of other available areas, both in houses and in now-redundant stable yards and farm buildings, and by exploring new ways of using gardens, parks, demesnes and wider estates.



### Part 3

## Creativity and Craftsmanship at Irish Country Houses

3. 1 Country houses are Ireland's largest repository of Irish creative craftsmanship, and illustrate the country's pre-eminence in an extraordinarily wide range of different artistic and creative endeavours. Designed largely by Irish architects they were constructed by skilled Irish masons, carpenters, slaters, plasterers, plumbers, lead-workers and glaziers. Their completed envelopes were then fitted out by highly accomplished Irish craftsmen; joiners, carvers in stone and wood, ironsmiths, coppersmiths and stuccodores, and were decorated by specialist Irish decorators, gilders, paperhangers and painters.
3. 2 Much has been written about their wonderful collections of Old Master paintings, perhaps purchased on the Grand Tour, about French and English furniture, Oriental porcelain, European silver and numerous objets d'art. Even the most detailed descriptions usually overlook the true value and significance of Irish collections, since country houses were largely decorated and furnished with the creations of Irish artists and craftsmen, landscape artists and portraitists, miniaturists and watercolour painters, cabinet makers and upholsterers, the work of Irish silversmiths, the produce of Irish ceramicists and potters, of Irish glass manufacturers, of Irish printers and printmakers, and of Irish cartographers and bookbinders. For a more detailed list, see Appendix C below.
3. 3 Country houses were also important as creative spaces for the owners and their families, some of whom achieved real excellence at their chosen pursuits. All family collections include the creative work of ancestors and relatives, which incorporate every imaginable kind of visual and written record, from oil paintings and drawings to biological sketches, engineering drawings, photographs, records and inventories. They include pieces made by former owners and the collections they assembled, a hugely important section of Ireland's creative past that is often put away unlabelled in a series of cupboards and drawers. For a more detailed list of examples, see Appendix D below.



3. 4 Finally, the local tradesmen and small manufacturers, and the staff and employees at Irish country houses were often accomplished artisans and craftsmen in their own right and taught their creative skills to young employees from the immediate locality. They often designed and created fittings and furniture specially for the house, made tools for use in the garden and on the estate, made clothes and curtains and bed coverings and numerous other items, and repaired and altered them as necessary. Perhaps most interesting of all are the items that they reused and adapted for new purposes in a skilful, creative and often an ingenious way. Once again, many of these items, along with the tools and equipment that they used on an almost daily basis, still exist. For a fuller list of examples, see Appendix E below.
3. 5 While a number of new owners have assembled important collections of Irish paintings, furniture and other forms of creative craftsmanship, the really significant collections of more personal items, including those made, designed, collected or used by the owners and their staff and employees can only be found in houses with a history of long occupation by a single family.

## Part 4

# Gardens and Landscape

4. 1 Several architects made careers as designers of gardens and the man-made landscape forming the setting of houses. However there are few records of their involvement at HHI members' houses, perhaps less than a dozen instances in total. See Appendix B below.
4. 2 Professional architects were engaged to design a house and its surroundings as part of a complete package on only two or three occasions. Stand alone garden and park commissions were far more frequent. It is particularly interesting that several owners engaged one architect to design their houses, while another provided the designs for their gardens or parks, which demonstrates their ongoing interest in creative design and the importance of country house owners as patrons, both of professional designers and of creativity.
4. 3 The situation was the result partly of changes in fashion and partly because, having completed their house, prudent owners gave their finances time to recover before embarking on another large undertaking. When considering options for garden design, most owners followed their own instincts, perhaps with the advice of the professional gardeners whom most employed until the beginning of the twentieth century. They displayed a particular talent when laying out their parks, enhancing the natural landscape with creative planting to form and focus views, and to create visual surprises.
4. 4 By the middle of the eighteenth century the fashion for approaching country houses along straight, tree-lined avenues, and surrounding them with elaborate formal gardens and plantings, gave way to a more 'natural' landscape, with the avenue meandering through a tree-lined park. Gardens were some distance off, behind a high stone wall, where they were usually subdivided into several different compartments. The kitchen garden provided fruit and vegetables for the house, while the pleasure garden was a pleasant sheltered area for the ladies to exercise and provided cut-flowers for the house. Both areas usually had their own greenhouses; one generally produced tender fruit and vegetable seedlings, while many owners built special hot-houses in their pleasure gardens for growing exotic flowers and plants.



4. 5      Elaborate formality came back into vogue in the second half of the nineteenth century but rapidly gave way to the less restrictive ‘Robinsonian’ style, named after the highly successful Irish garden designer William Robinson. He surrounded houses with areas of lawn or meadow, protected by informal belts of trees and mixed borders of shrubs and flowers. Robinson juxtaposed native plants with those ‘collected’ from abroad, often by the owners while travelling, or when working or serving overseas, but the style proved equally expensive to maintain and few owners were able to afford the cost of upkeep throughout the twentieth century. Many owners planted collections of rare exotic trees in their parks; some created important arboreta, which today have reached full maturity.
4. 6      Perhaps more importantly, parks are now widely recognized for their rich biodiversity, which has been identified as a major component of Ireland’s environmental heritage and a significant resource in many rural areas. Access to important wildlife habitat, rare or endangered fauna and flora, or specimen plants and trees requires careful management and consideration while some owners are also responsible for Special Protection Areas (for wild birds), Special Areas of Conservation, Natural Heritage Areas and Wildlife Sanctuaries. See Appendix G below.
4. 7      Ireland has lost some two-thirds of its country house heritage over the last 100 years. The loss was caused by a combination of factors including the owners’ personal circumstances, the national and world economy, land reform and high taxes, along with the removal of roofs to avoid excessive rates on ‘mansions’ and destruction during the War of Independence and the ensuing Civil War. Another substantial portion has been compromised by conversion to new purposes, which makes the remainder especially important.
4. 8      After an initial reluctance by the State to assume responsibility in the area, a small number of the more distinguished and important country houses are now managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) which funds their restoration and maintenance. Castletown House (County Kildare), Farmleigh (County Dublin), Emo Court (County Laois) and most recently Doneraile Court (County Cork) have experienced a cultural revival in recent years, with special programmes to attract visitors. However, in the absence of published figures, it is difficult to establish whether these houses operate at a profit or a loss, or estimate their annual cost to the exchequer.
4. 9      Meanwhile, Fota, Johnstown Castle and Strokestown Park are run by the Irish Heritage Foundation, which also relies on an annual contribution from the public purse. Other houses, such as Malahide Castle, are owned by local authorities.

## Part 5

# The Survey

- 5.1 Our members' country houses are at the centre of their surroundings. Many are the focal points for rural communities and the backdrop for many important cultural events or creative and recreational activities. New initiatives based on this exercise would see more houses fulfilling this role. However, when encouraging their greater use for these important purposes, we must not lose sight of the fact that they are still their owners' family homes.

## Part 6

# Overview of Member House Engagement with the Public

6.1 Seventy-five houses were surveyed between November 2019 and March 2020. All members were encouraged to participate in an effort to obtain an overall perspective. Six or more houses were surveyed in three counties (Waterford, Cork & Kildare) but the average was three per county, and it proved impractical to profile houses in Kerry or Leitrim.

6.1.1 The report has examined the following categories of participation, some of which partly overlap:-

i)	Culture and the Arts	6.2
ii)	Cultural and Creative Enterprise	6.3
iii)	Visitors and Tourism	6.4
iv)	Accommodation	6.5
v)	Local Community	6.6
vi)	Children	6.7
vii)	Education and Training	6.8
viii)	The Environment and Biodiversity	6.9

6.2 Culture and The Arts

6.2.1 Over 60% of the houses surveyed already engage with the arts and another 25% would like to become involved. The most popular activities were outdoor & indoor theatre, lectures, performances by musical ensembles and ‘foodie’ events. However, the exercise has clearly identified a number of innovative ideas that could be repeated at other houses, while the potential for collaboration, both between private houses and their owners, and between private owners and the OPW, could deliver rich rewards.



6. 2. 2 Several houses already have exhibition spaces, and at least eight artist-owners run courses in their studios, while one offers residencies for artists. However, there is very little spare studio space in outbuildings at present so, if funding can be made available, this is an area HHI is keen to explore. The exercise identified the potential to develop local studio and work or living spaces for artists, which could encourage them to leave Ireland's city centres and form creative communities in a less costly and more productive rural environment. While this plan may be ambitious, artist-led regeneration is a well-documented phenomenon.

6. 2. 3 **Case Study — Artist Residencies at Shankill Castle**

*This castle in Kilkenny is owned by a family of artists who hold exhibitions in the main rooms of the house, both during Kilkenny Arts Festival and at many other times throughout the year. The owners have an open door policy for fellow artists, which has been extended to formal residencies which can last for up to three months.*

See:- <https://shankillcastle.com/residencies>

6. 3 Cultural and Creative Enterprises

6. 3. 1 Very few of the survey participants were aware of the wide-ranging definition of this sector which includes software publishing, computer & information technology, news, PR, advertising, architecture, design, photography, translation and other professional services, engineering, publishing and research & development. Most houses were open to the idea of hosting startups in this field so that could be an area of growth with a real potential if the correct support systems are put in place, subject to the caveats below.
6. 3. 2 Sadly, broadband is an issue at a clear majority of the houses surveyed. In fairness, most have broadband of a sort and their owners have learned to live with the sort of fluctuating signal strength and service that does not allow them to update their software or open attachments on wet winter days when everyone in their locality is online. However, few visitors, whether from Dublin or overseas, take this relaxed attitude and many complain, while the owners seldom realise how much of their time is wasted by poor internet service.

6. 3. 3 Connectivity is vital if houses are to promote themselves in the digital age. The present situation can lead to major communication problems and is a real obstacle for owners who wish to develop the full potential of their houses. They are often unable to participate in Zoom conferences or use technological aids such as live-cams to connect with a wider audience. These innovations help to limit the damage caused by excessive footfall in delicate environments by permitting access to spaces that have traditionally been ‘off the tour route’. Webcams also allow public engagement in the off-season and in non-traditional ways, which helps to ‘build the brand’ while protecting the privacy of owners. In short, the absence of reliable broadband places many owners at a considerable competitive disadvantage.
6. 3. 4 Perhaps more importantly, it must be clearly stated that access to reliable broadband is an absolute essential for all the creative enterprises that Creative Ireland is eager to promote. HHI looks to Creative Ireland for assistance in resolving this unfortunate situation.
6. 3. 5 A further related issue, which was not specifically covered by the survey but is widely acknowledged, is the variable quality of mobile phone signal throughout the country, which is another impediment to all forms of activity in rural Ireland.
6. 4 Visitors and Tourism
6. 4. 1 Some 60% of the houses in this survey (and 43% of HHI membership in general) avail of the provisions of Section 482 of the 1997 Taxes Consolidation Act, usually known as Section 482. This measure provides some relief for the private owners of Ireland’s heritage, both buildings and/or gardens that are of regional or national interest, in return for agreed forms of public access. In essence, it puts owners in a similar position to a business and allows them to set the costs of maintenance against their taxable income from all sources. This provides vital support to the private owners of Ireland’s heritage and benefits the general public.  
See:- [www.chg.gov.ie/heritage/built-heritage/financial-assistance-for-architectural-heritage/s-482-tax-relief](http://www.chg.gov.ie/heritage/built-heritage/financial-assistance-for-architectural-heritage/s-482-tax-relief).
6. 4. 2 Under the scheme qualifying houses must open to visitors for at least four hours on 60 days each year (including National Heritage Week). Not less than forty of the open days must occur between the 1st of May and the 30th of September, and the opening period must include ten Saturdays or Sundays.
6. 4. 3 Alternately, owners may qualify for the incentive by providing bed & breakfast accommodation for six months every year. Again, the period of opening must include four months between the 1st of May and the 30th of September.



6. 4. 4 The administration of Section 482 is efficient and simple. Each owner is responsible for their own expenditure and makes their own simple annual claim. This encourages efficient maintenance of Ireland's heritage assets so the State receives real value for any tax that it foregoes. If Section 482 were no longer available, maintenance would be reduced until the need for restoration or repairs arose. If works were grant aided a major programme would then follow, involving three separate tenders and a great deal of negotiation. Much time would be wasted and perhaps 40% of the total cost of each project would be swallowed up in administration costs.
6. 4. 5 Section 482 can only be used by those with a taxable income, and who have incurred repair and maintenance costs, which means that a number of owners are unable to avail of it. However, as one member put it, *'in many cases it has made all the difference to keeping such houses going, as they face overheads that no commercial enterprise could ever sustain.'*
6. 4. 6 For a long time it has been evident to HHI that their member houses fit better with a bespoke, independent, knowledgeable, committed and intensely curious visitor, and with providing a high quality of experience to the individual or small group rather than being a magnet or draw for large numbers of visitors in large groups.
6. 4. 7 The latter approach has been the dominant approach in official thinking about tourism and heritage in Ireland. A few of the larger HHI members -Blarney, Birr, Killruddery - have been able to work with this or even exemplify it. The majority have struggled to come to terms with it and many have recognised that they cannot.
6. 4. 8 The relief afforded by Section 482 and its predecessor provision was introduced in support of this approach. It was devised before wide-scale usage of the internet which now makes it feasible for owners to have their own set up for advertising, offering, selling and booking timed slots for visitors, overnight guests or participants in events. Similarly it is possible for would-be visitors to book such opportunities well in advance or on the hoof as they travel using mobile technology.



6. 4. 9 Many owners have found that the costs, whether financial (provision of infrastructure such as toilets and parking, insurance, advertising, signs and hiring of staff), quasi-financial (commitment of their own time which needs to be used to earn a living and/or to do the constant work of maintaining the property and grounds), existential (loss of the privacy of their home and having to engage with the public in it, coupled with the security risks inherent in public access) can outweigh the benefits of the relief under Section 482. The imbalance is compounded by the low level of admission charges which houses are usually encouraged to set, coupled with the typically low visitor numbers experienced in most of Ireland. Opening does not usually make a meaningful financial contribution in itself and frequently leads to a loss being incurred.
6. 4. 10 However, as the survey has shown, the great majority of owners wish to engage with the public. This means that there is, and has been for some time, very great potential both for creative and community engagement and for tourism in the membership of HHI which is as yet untapped.
6. 4. 11 Several of the houses surveyed provide regular tours for the public over the entire season (April-Oct). Bantry House, Birr Castle, Killruddery, Borris House, Clonalis House, Curraghmore, Tullynally Castle and Huntington Castle offer regular advertised guided tours with local guides. Of the others, just over half are open for 60 days each year under the Section 482 scheme.
6. 4. 12 A number open for extra days, and all are happy to open for specialist groups at other times. While the remaining houses are more private, their owners are generally happy to open by appointment or for special occasions or groups, and several are considering the possibility of joining the Section 482 scheme.
6. 4. 13 However, the majority of houses do not receive many visitors in any given year, especially when they are not near large centres of population. Several owners are trying to increase their events and activities in order to draw people, and some are now working with other houses in their areas to produce a more compelling attraction.
6. 4. 14 With bold, imaginative and supportive funding of owners and of the sort of opportunities and projects considered in this report, HHI believes much could be achieved towards realising these objectives, certainly in the short term, with the help of the Creative Ireland programme.
6. 4. 15 To see historic houses achieve their fuller potential from community, creative, cultural and tourism points of view, HHI has been of the view for some time that a slight remodelling of Section 482 relief would be immensely beneficial in the short, medium and long term.

6. 4. 16 Such remodelling would consist of allowing the holding of creative, cultural, community and touristic events at a member property to count towards achieving the target for public access set by Section 482. At present they do not.
6. 4. 17 In addition it would help to encourage the holding of such events at those larger, busier houses which are affected by the cap on relief, if the cap were to be raised to the extent that such events take place in addition to the general opening required under Section 482 at present.
6. 4. 18 COVID-19 has taken away many certainties and brought in many challenges and restrictions, particularly where travel and public access are concerned. It is noted that the UK's National Trust has greatly restricted the number of properties it opens, has prioritised garden visiting over house visiting and introduced a universal advance booking system for all visits.
6. 4. 19 Houses require maintenance and repair whether anyone visits them or not as weather and time continue their remorseless work nevertheless. It would be logical and prudent to allow a proportion of Section 482 relief to be claimed even where there is no public access.
6. 4. 20 HHI seeks funding for further research and analysis on COVID-19, public access, promotion of community, creative, cultural and tourism events, establishment of a common booking system and development of a system of points for accrediting all forms of public access and engagement.
6. 4. 21 Ultimately, Section 482 benefits everybody. It helps to ensure that Ireland's heritage is preserved and is accessible. It plays a vital role in helping the owners of Ireland's built heritage to maintain and repair the buildings in their care. It helps the owners of important gardens with essential upkeep and allows them to undertake ongoing programmes of replanting and renewal. It helps to provide much needed employment in rural communities and allows houses and their owners to play an important role in education and skills training, it helps to preserve our fragile environment and biodiversity, alongside historic houses and gardens and demesnes. In these ways it helps to ensure that Ireland's rural communities are rewarding and uplifting places to visit, or in which to work and live.

## 6.5 Accommodation

- 6.5.1 Other owners have defrayed some of their expenses by letting guest rooms, either in the house or in converted outbuildings. Ten survey respondents belong to Hidden Ireland (a collection of family owned historic houses that use a limited number of guest rooms to provide overnight accommodation with dinner) while others offer short-term accommodation in estate cottages, wings and converted farmyards.
- 6.5.2 Long-term rental of these buildings is also prevalent, but this survey only examined short-term availability.
- 6.5.3 This shows that although houses may be remote, they generally have the potential to accommodate a number of people when participating in creative activities and enterprises.

## 6.6 Local Community

- 6.6.1 Engagement with local communities occurs in a number of ways. Most owners have local employees, both seasonally and all year round. Almost 70% engage with their local community in some way thorough access, opening or events. A key benefit for children which owners can and do provide is access to gardens, land, woodland and paths. Many develop special activities for their local communities, engage with local schools, arrange sporting events or open specially for local charities.
- 6.6.2 Houses and gardens provide a venue and form a backdrop for many community events. Parks and wider estates are an invaluable resource for many communities while visitors from further afield stay and support businesses and services in the immediate area. See Section 12.

## 6.7 Children

- 6.7.1 Access to gardens and countryside is perhaps the key benefit that owners provide for children. While a number provide specific amenities or activities for children, these usually take place in the garden or park, either at weekends or during the school holidays. Many events are developed for children from the local community but visitors and those staying in the area during holiday periods are always welcomed.
- 6.7.2 Indoor events are generally held in connection with school visits and other educational activities (see below) which indicates that a properly recognised programme for close co-operation with education could revolutionise this sector.



## 6. 8 Education and Training

- 6. 8. 1 Many owners arrange and encourage access by local primary schools, in an effort to generate interest in their local history and heritage, while others have a history of close co-operation with third-level institutions, usually for purposes of research.
- 6. 8. 2 The survey has identified that a highly fruitful area for further engagement, an area still largely untapped, is with Second Level students, especially those in Transition Year. There is also considerable potential for co-operation with Gaisce and the HHI Conservation Volunteers initiative. See Section 14.4 (especially 14. 4. 2 A-E) and Pilot Project P3.
- 6. 8. 3 Training schemes, adult education and upskilling are another proven method of expanding the engagement process and there are many opportunities under the HHI Conservation Volunteers Scheme (Pilot Project P3) with important implications for the Lifelong Learning process. Some 60% of the owners are already involved with education and training (both for children and for adults) while a significant number of others have indicated their interest in becoming involved.

## 6. 9 The Environment and Biodiversity

- 6. 9. 1 The Environment and Biodiversity are important elements in the process of engagement, creating various forms of interaction with local communities, providing the potential for engagement with all levels of education, training and research, and increasing contacts with a wide spectrum of special interest groups of all ages.
- 6. 9. 2 Owners need to balance the various forms of engagement and accessibility with their duty to protect a vulnerable environment. While this can pose problems, and all methods of access should be kept under review, one of the unforeseen long-term benefits of protecting our environment and biodiversity is that our country houses become more attractive and appealing for everyone. See Oases of Biodiversity, Section 10.

## 6. 10 Methods and Levels of Engagement

- 6. 10. 1 About 60% of the respondents participate in the Section 482 incentive, either by opening to visitors for sixty days or by providing overnight visitor accommodation, usually accompanied by dinner at night, for six months each year, while others are involved in various garden trails. Their websites are often relatively simple and are seldom changed or updated.
- 6. 10. 2 Roughly 25% of respondents engage with the public on an ongoing basis and in various different ways. They usually have up-to-date websites that inform the public about opening times and ways to visit, and these also promote the various activities and events that take place at houses and on their wider estates.

## 6. 11 Conservation and Stewardship

6. 11. 1 While the remaining owners may suggest that their houses and gardens are totally private this is seldom entirely true. A surprisingly high number of owners hold events for charity, open their houses and gardens for special groups, or for their local communities, but their contribution is not regarded as a form of public engagement because it does not meet the accepted sixty-day criterion.
6. 11. 2 Despite this fact, they too perform a vital role by protecting and supporting Ireland's built and cultural heritage – their houses are also important repositories of Irish craftsmanship and creative Irish endeavour, their gardens and parks also contain rare plants, specimen trees, rare flora and fauna and a rich biodiversity.
6. 11. 3 These owners provide local employment and support local businesses, and the presence of a country house with a well-maintained park and garden is considered an asset, and an oasis of beauty and tranquility in any rural community. However its owners receive no assistance for their efforts while their commitment and contribution is seldom recognised.
6. 11. 4 Most of these owners would be prepared to do a great deal more, and many would happily consider new methods of engagement in return for a little assistance and better recognition for their efforts, provided an appropriate framework for co-operation is put in place.
6. 11. 5 HHI believes that such methods of engagement would be of interest not only to its members but to a considerable number of other owners of similar properties.
6. 11. 6 Some 60% of the houses surveyed are lived in by descendants of the people who built them, in some cases as long ago as the 17th century, while the families of several owners have lived in a series of different houses on the same land since mediaeval times.
6. 11. 7 The vast majority of these houses contain original contents, including items specially made for individual rooms, which their owners wish to preserve in place for the future. This nexus of people, place, objects, tradition and memory creates a dense and complex historic and cultural experience for visitors, and it is a potentially fertile environment for those who seek a location for creative activities or events.
6. 11. 8 Perhaps 25% of the houses were acquired in the 20th century and another 15% have been purchased since the millennium. Some owners have brought collections from other family houses, while others have furnished their houses from new. Therefore, while the houses surveyed, along with their gardens, parks and collections, are a major component of Ireland's built, cultural and environmental heritage they are not a static group. The heritage and cultural benefits of long and continuous family ownership are clear and undeniable but a small number of new owners have successfully restored and revitalised country houses in an inspiring and authentic way.

## 6. 12 Viability

6. 12. 1 Even before the coronavirus pandemic a number of owners admitted that their houses were at risk and their situation will have worsened considerably over the last seven months.
6. 12. 2 66% of those surveyed were concerned about viability, a very high proportion and specifically relevant to those who are considering taking over responsibility for a member house and attempting to build a secure future for their families in the Irish countryside.
6. 12. 3 Meanwhile, several owners are facing the possibility that nobody will be prepared to take over their houses, despite a long family involvement over several centuries. While they usually have a deep awareness of their responsibilities, many younger people are understandably unhappy with the practicalities of giving up urban careers and lives, whether in Ireland or overseas, to become the unpaid and cash-strapped custodians of what are effectively museums.
6. 12. 4 Thus, the issue of viability is a very serious concern, especially when houses have a long history of continuous ownership and contain items of particular importance and relevance. Such items often have little commercial value and little individual relevance when dispersed or taken overseas as mementos, yet they are of huge heritage significance when kept together as collections; with particular relevance to the houses where they were first assembled, to local communities, to Ireland's heritage and to our history as a creative nation.





## Part 7

# Indoor Spaces and Activities

- 7.1 In his landmark 2003 study, *A Future for Irish Historic Houses*, Professor Terence Dooley, Director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates at Maynooth University, noted that the most fundamental problem facing a number of owners was that their houses are too large for use as ‘ordinary’ family homes and are often too costly to maintain on a private income. It could be argued that this is not only because of the sizes of certain rooms but because layouts and interior arrangements are inconvenient and difficult to manage in today’s world. Top floors or wings of houses contained staff quarters that are now unused. Basements, with their often dark areas for services and storage, are frequently redundant, and many families have moved their kitchens upstairs to the rooms where they live.
- 7.2 Some 87% of houses surveyed have spare capacity for events or creative activities indoors, either within the house itself or in adjacent buildings – which is an average of 2.5 spaces per house. Almost all of those spaces are capable of multiple uses – for seminars, workshops, concerts, or other purposes. Roughly half are reached through the front or back door, while the remainder either have an external entrance or are provided in separate outbuildings.
- 7.3 Formal Reception Rooms: Halls and Drawing Rooms
- 7.3.1 Today these rooms are often used for private events but they are also suitable for performances and concerts, and many HHI members already use them for this purpose. HHI has actively encouraged owners to find new ways of using these rooms, including the possibility of working with the award-winning European organisation, *Le Dimore del Quartetto* to bring classical music ensembles to tour Irish houses.

## 7.4 Libraries, Conservatories and other Rooms

- 7.4.1 At least 8% of houses currently use their Libraries for events, despite the fact that some are of modest size, while another 5% are potentially amenable to the idea. These events have included story hours for children, indoor theatre, summer language courses etc. Very few houses have conservatories that are suitable for events but, where they exist, they have been used for launches, lunches, fashion and video shoots. The most widely used and largest conservatory, the Orangery at Killruddery with its collection of statues from the Grand Tour, is in great demand and is used for major events such as concerts in the Great Houses of Ireland programme.

## 7.5 Gallery and Exhibition Spaces

- 7.5.1 Few houses traditionally contained galleries, created to display pictures and objects from the family's collections but a small number of owners have created new galleries or exhibition spaces, either by reusing redundant rooms within the house or converting adjoining outbuildings.
- 7.5.2 Galleries can be a significant drain on an owner's resources and few houses have the footfall to justify projects on the scale of the Lismore Castle Art Gallery ([www.lismorecastlearts.ie](http://www.lismorecastlearts.ie)) which has been developed in one of the courtyards of the castle. However, the community arts education concepts that Lismore Castle Arts has helped to develop could be replicated by other owners who would like to work in that field, either with children or with their local communities.

## 7.6 Case Study — Borris House Craft Shop

*A craft shop in the gate lodge at Borris House promotes the work of artists and craftsmen who work within a 15 km radius. The model could be repeated at other houses, and it would be a particularly appropriate development at houses that have created studio spaces, since it could enable their owners to achieve higher rents. The gate lodge is occupied by a feltmaker and a printmaker, who work on their own projects while issuing entrance tickets to Borris House. They also run a craft shop selling high-quality products by local craftspeople to those who visit the house. This symbiotic arrangement works very well.*

## 7.7 Displays From Collections

- 7.7.1 A number of houses display items from their family collections and others would welcome an opportunity to do this too. HHI wishes to encourage and develop this concept through a scheme that was provisionally entitled 'Living Museums,' but has since been renamed "Behind the Hall Door," and to use it to promote Historic Houses to a wide range of visitors, both international, national and local, in authentic and stimulating ways. A digital aspect to this initiative is crucial.

7. 7. 2 The project is covered by Action 5 in *the Action Plan for the Sustainable Future of the Irish Country House in Private Hands* produced by the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht in co-operation with HHI in 2015. However, the concept cannot be developed unless members are encouraged to participate and are rewarded in some way for their efforts.
7. 7. 3 A number of owners wish to participate in this project.
7. 8 Archives and Museums
7. 8. 1 A number of members also display items from their archives, and this is especially appropriate when houses have been owned continuously by a single family. Clonalis, in County Roscommon, ancestral home of The O'Connor Don, has a small museum of important Irish manuscripts and other interesting documents while four volunteer archivists are working on family papers from as early as the 12th century at Barmeath Castle in County Louth.
7. 9 **Case Study — Grange Archives**  
*Monksgrange in County Wexford, an 18th century house still lived in by the family who built it, has an extensive private archive. Over the last ten years the material has been arranged and cataloged, and the family recently held a seminar to celebrate 250 years in the house, with Professor Roy Foster among other high-profile speakers. They also commissioned a book about the collection; they issue a quarterly newsletter with articles on items from their collection and correspondence, and arrange several illustrated talks during the year.*
7. 10 These examples could be repeated at other houses since many hold extensive and important archives. Consideration should be given to arranging concurrent exhibitions at a number of participating houses on a particular topic, such as 'Early Estate Maps', 'Amateur Botanical Watercolours' or '19th century Letters & Diaries'. These could perhaps take place in collaboration with bodies such as the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates (CSHIHE) at Maynooth University.
7. 11 Some members have arranged rooms in their houses as museums about the lives of prominent family members. A room at Altidore Castle in County Wicklow displays a number of artefacts associated with the patriot Robert Emmet while the studio where Edith O'Enone Somerville wrote and painted is maintained as a museum in her memory at Drishane in County Cork.





## 7. 12 Service Areas Generally

7. 12. 1 All areas and aspects of life in country houses were supported by staff. This was also the case at much smaller establishments and in urban households. However large country houses, because of their size, relative isolation and distance from the specialist tradesmen who could be found in large towns, employed staff and workers with a high level of knowledge and a great variety of skills. Their aim was to ensure that houses were impeccably run, and that both houses and grounds always looked their very best.
7. 12. 2 Many were highly skilled artisans and craftsmen, who took huge pride in every aspect of their work and often achieved pre-eminence in their chosen field. These skills could be used to find positions at other houses, or to establish independent businesses. Equally many positions became effectively hereditary, and were handed down from father to son and grandson, showing a high level of mutual trust and respect between employers and employees.
7. 12. 3 In addition to maintaining houses and grounds, the staff actually made many of the contents, or adapted existing items to a new use. These were often skillfully designed and beautifully constructed, and many still exist in country houses today.
7. 12. 4 The service areas and the specialist installations they contain can be a very great draw to people with particular interest in such things and of considerable interest to visitors with more general interests. The domestic arrangements connect with curiosity both about technical and socio-historical matters. Such connections can be very direct and strong where visitors have specialist knowledge or are descended from people who had skilled employment working with the services and equipment which, in their day, were cutting edge or top of the range.

7. 12. 5 These parts of houses and outbuildings were the working environment for highly skilled practitioners of many specialist trades and crafts who, in the case of larger establishments, hugely outnumbered the frequently relatively unskilled people the establishment existed to serve.

7. 12. 6 Specialised activities at a house, generally provided with dedicated premises and equipment, might at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries have included:-

Chef, cook, kitchen and scullery maids in kitchen, scullery, larders and store cupboard

Butler and footmen in pantry, cellar, hall and dining room

Housemaids in the housemaids' pantry

Housekeeper with the linen in the housekeeper's room

Lady's maid and valet looking after their respective wardrobes

Nanny and nursery maid in the night and day nurseries

Governess teaching in the schoolroom

Stoker in the furnace room

Coachman and grooms in the stables and coach-house

Blacksmith in the forge

Chauffeur cum mechanic in the garage

Engineer in the generator house

Carpenter in the carpentry shop

Mason, Slater and Plumber in the workshop

Dairy maids in the dairy

Forester and timber workers in the woods and sawmill

Head gardener and gardeners in the walled garden, orchard, pleasure gardens, greenhouses, potting shed, garden shed apple store

Stewards or farm manager and workers in the yards, cow byre, livestock buildings, cart house, traction engine shed, pumphouse and fields

Gamekeeper in the woods

Bog watchers in bogs (mainly in the West of Ireland)

Water bailiff and ghillie on the river

Kennelman in the kennels

Agent in the estate office

7. 12. 7 Many of these people would live on the estate with their families, whose migrations, marriages and memories have created a web of connections around it. The roles they played have changed and coalesced or gone but the space they occupied has largely remained and is often redundant and potentially available for new activities including those the Creative Ireland initiative seeks to promote.

7. 12. 8 It is in such skilled people and the traces they have left that much of the interest and attraction of such places lies rather than with the grand rooms, prestige objects and pedigrees of the 'front of house,' which is what the visitor to such a place is generally shown.



- 7. 12. 9 Time can move at a different pace in such places, so that visitors from abroad may find that it is there that they find the readiest connection to the past that they came seeking but could not find in the surrounding area which has moved on at a faster speed.
- 7. 12. 10 Visitors now tend to find a tranquility which would have been much harder to find in the relative bustle of the place when it was the workplace and home of so many more people.
- 7. 12. 11 These strands, hard to describe or pin down, can come together to provide a space or background which is inspiring. In addition, HHI would be keen to promote collation and sharing of memories of and connections with houses and estates from among descendants of all those who once lived and worked there.
- 7. 12. 12 Establishing such connections would generally promote local community engagement and bring a more disparate, connected group from both of which proposals for creative activities would be likely to emerge and /or be brought into being.
- 7. 12. 13 A number of owners have indicated their interest in showing these spaces to visitors. It is anticipated that this would be done using a website or dedicated section of existing websites. It would be helpful for owners to have a template and source of advice for how to set this up and run it, and for this to be explained and promoted by way of seminars if resources could be made available.

7. 12. 14 **Case Study — Kitchens & Laundry at Tullynally Castle**

*These room have been carefully interpreted to explain their purpose and show how they were used in times gone by. A small exhibition describes the lives of the staff who lived at Tullynally and worked in these service areas, and there are plans to hold workshops in the kitchens.*

## 7.13 Outbuildings

- 7.13.1 The condition of outbuildings varies but it is rare to find them all in really good condition. In most instances there is a combination of those that have been converted to a new purpose, unused outbuildings that are still in good condition, and those that have become dilapidated or are semi-ruinous.
- 7.13.2 Unless the owners still use their stables for horses, traditional outbuildings are usually inappropriate for modern farm use so they are mainly used for storage today. Two owners are keen to display old machinery in their farmyards, perhaps under the Behind the Hall Door scheme. Several rent spaces for business use while a number have converted their yard buildings for self-catering rental. More recently a number of members have established breweries or distilleries in their redundant outbuildings, creating a 'product' that allows them to develop their brand.
- 7.13.3 Many have larger spaces that are ripe for development but they are cautious of borrowing money for investment and nervous of becoming liable for commercial rates. Very few are rented for creative arts & crafts use (some owners are keen to do this) or are used by local communities (for example as Men's Sheds) and just two are currently used for creative enterprises or industries, both of which have been established by the owners themselves. One example is Lisnavagh, in County Carlow, where the Bunbury family make Bunbury Boards (chopping boards) from trees felled on the estate.
- 7.13.4 Several houses have already developed large spaces in their outbuildings for multi-purpose use. A recording studio in the stables at Tyrrellstown House, in Fingal, is used for band rehearsals, shooting videos and for hosting wellness workshops at other times. Killedmond (Blackstairs Eco Trails) runs corporate days with team-building, foraging hen parties and primary school workshops, all from the same space, which could become a model for efficient usage at other houses.
- 7.13.5 **Case Study — North Mayo Heritage Centre at Enniscoe**  
*The yards at Enniscoe have been developed in collaboration with the North Mayo Heritage Centre, which houses a Family History Research Unit, one of a network of linked genealogical research centres throughout the country. There is a museum, with domestic and agricultural artefacts of regional interest, a conference centre and a number of indoor and outdoor workshops are organised each year. The combination of activities helps to make a café and bookshop viable, and encourages additional visitors.*
- 7.13.6 In summary, 87% of houses have redundant spaces or additional capacity at present. Unfortunately, most owners are unable to commit funds to make these spaces suitable for new uses, and they are understandably reluctant to increase their borrowings. Unless a combination of funding bodies and schemes can come together with local authorities, local interests and potential users in a joined-up, innovative way, it will not be possible to bring these spaces into productive use, which would be a waste of an important heritage resource.



## Part 8

# Events and Activities in Houses and Outbuildings

### 8. 1 Micro-Festivals, Boutique Events and Learning Festivals

8. 1. 1 A small number of houses host some really important festivals. *The West Cork Chamber Music Festival* [www.westcorkmusic.ie/chamber-music-festival](http://www.westcorkmusic.ie/chamber-music-festival), based at Bantry House, has been established for 25 years. This led more recently to the establishment of the Masters of Tradition festival of Irish traditional music, <https://www.westcorkmusic.ie/masters-of-tradition>. Meanwhile, *The Borris Festival of Writing and Ideas* in County Carlow, is relatively new but is already reckoned to be among the top five literary festivals, see <https://festivalofwritingandideas.com> while the annual Percy French Festival at Castlecoote House in County Roscommon is well supported and has a loyal following. See <https://percyfrench.ie>
8. 1. 2 Unlike pop or rock concerts and festivals, which are large commercial undertakings, most micro festivals focus on particular themes, interests or topics (as is shown above). Unfortunately, because these events are not designed to make as much money as possible, they are not yet regarded as serious propositions although they have the capacity to play a really significant role by encouraging creativity in many rural communities.
8. 1. 3 There is also scope for boutique events where fewer participants receive a really worthwhile experience but pay a proportionately higher price for admission. Multi-night residential 'learning' festivals or events are a more recent phenomenon, where local authorities or other bodies send their managers to acquire or disseminate expert knowledge on a wide range of topics, such as re-wilding, human rights or cybercrime from a small panel of international speakers. One example is *The Do Lectures* [www.thedolectures.com](http://www.thedolectures.com) which are presently held in the UK and have the potential to expand into Ireland.
8. 1. 4 Consultations have shown there is scope for specialist festivals to study dance, history, wellness and personal development and for environmental 'schools'. Two London-based festivals which could transfer well to an Irish venue are the Live Well festival [www.livewelllondon.com](http://www.livewelllondon.com) and the Life Lessons Festival at the Barbican [www.lifelessonsfestival.com](http://www.lifelessonsfestival.com). Live Well holds a series of lectures, talks and demonstrations on wellness-related topics along with fitness programmes, Yoga and Pilates in its premises in London's Billingsgate. Meanwhile a wide variety of high-profile speakers, including renowned authors and panelists address a series of wellness issues in Life Lessons Festival at the Barbican.

8. 1. 5 A combination of garden, food, wellness & environmental issues with music, literature and art could well prove attractive, since the increased digitization of daily life has shown that more and more of us would like to meet like-minded people face to face. As yet very few houses engage in events of this kind.

## 8. 2 Performances

8. 2. 1 Many owners have organised chamber music concerts and one has held 'Live from the Met' opera performances. Few houses have rooms large enough to accommodate a stage for full theatrical performances and sufficient room for seating, although a surprising number of owners have held such events because of their interest in music, opera or theatre.
8. 2. 2 One two-man play has toured the country and attracted surprisingly large audiences, especially when the performances were combined with an opportunity to meet the artists at supper in the house. The survey has shown the potential for more low volume events, especially in winter months. Owners who have held events in the past are keen to repeat the experience while others would like to try it for the first time.
8. 2. 3 Sponsorship of and assistance with encouraging small scale, and if possible indigenous, touring theatrical performances and recitals would be very welcome.

### 8. 2. 4 Case Study — Festivals at West Waterford houses

*West Waterford has a concentration of country houses along the valley of the River Blackwater. Their owners already co-operate with the "Blackwater Valley Opera Festival" <https://blackwatervalleyoperafestival.com> and many are also involved with the "Lismore Travel Writers Festival". There is an important regional gallery in the converted outbuildings at Lismore Castle, with significant community outreach and an emphasis on education. A recent initiative set up a craft trail, resulting in seasonal gallery spaces at a number of houses in the area. The gardens at Lismore Castle attract 30,000 visitors per annum with most of them also visiting the gallery, where the potential for developing a 'Sculpture Workshop & Exhibition Showcase' is currently under consideration. This will be based in the as yet undeveloped upper yard and will spill over into the gardens. The area around the neighbouring towns of Cappoquin and Lismore is home to many artists, writers and other creative individuals and there is considerable potential to build on the present high levels of goodwill and co-operation. Cork, with the nearest airport, and Waterford are within an hour's drive but this successful initiative is hampered by a shortage of accommodation in the immediate vicinity. The West Waterford example could be used to inspire similar off-season festivals or trails in other areas, such as Kilkenny or West Cork for example. The availability of resources to develop, promote and sponsor such initiatives would be key.*

### 8.3 Fairs

- 8.3.1 Several houses have experimented with Christmas fairs, but in general the verdict has been inconclusive as most owners believe that rural Ireland has neither the population base nor the spending power to support major events. Killruddery is an exception with a very popular Christmas Market, while Enniscoe House runs a quietly successful market in a remote rural location and a Festival of Medieval Arts at Fancroft Mill was reasonably successful. Although several owners have had disappointing experiences, most were keen to continue with events of this kind, in order to bring communities together and promote local products and producers.
- 8.3.2 In general, the survey shows that these events work better if they are largely based on food, which means that they are easier to arrange if there are high quality artisan producers in the locality. While fairs and trails on any theme generate opportunities for creative enterprise and engagement, they cannot take place without commitment or resources, along with access to supports and funding.

### 8.4 Leisure and Wellness

- 8.4.1 Leisure and wellness activities are another area of potential growth and work particularly well in the off-season for those who can provide accommodation. About 20% of the houses surveyed are currently involved in wellness and ‘personal development’ activities and another 25% would like to become involved. The participants are mainly individuals, rather than couples, which tends to reduce overnight capacity and makes it difficult for owners to offer attractive deals on accommodation rates. One very obvious form of wellness activity is Yoga which requires little more than a warm and pleasant space with a wooden floor. Life-Coaching in all of its aspects is another growing area, and ‘Zen Hens’ (alcohol free activity-focused hen parties) are much in vogue.
- 8.4.2 Almost a quarter of houses hold small-scale ‘Leisure’ events, and another quarter would like to do this, especially those with accommodation to fill. Some owners have taken this concept upmarket and have flown in well-known designers and florists; others are running successful Murder Mysteries weekends. Meanwhile, the increased interest in leisure activities, particularly among those who have retired, has created the potential to develop special events for Book Clubs, Bridge Clubs, Cook Clubs, Crafts Groups, Golf Groups, Music Groups, Running Groups, Walking Groups and Writers Groups. Many of these activities might be organised to rotate between houses around the country. Maximising the potential of Leisure and Wellness weekends requires focused and dedicated devising, organisation and marketing; perhaps this could be centralised and given resources to support it.

**8. 4. 3            Case Study — Lens & Larder Weekend at Glin Castle**

*In recent years Glin Castle in County Limerick has hosted a variety of themed weekends. A food photography event [www.lensandlarder.com](http://www.lensandlarder.com) was led by an Irish photographer and journalist with a worldwide Instagram following and it attracted a completely new clientele. Glin Castle will tailor an event to suit any interest and there is a range of specialists who can be booked to 'appear' at house parties.*

**8. 5            Food Events**

8. 5. 1        Pop-up dining and cookery demonstrations are a popular activity particularly in established foodie destinations. A quarter of respondents have held foodie events, with another quarter keen to become involved. Burtown House, in County Kildare, hosts Slow Food events with a chef from River Cottage where people pay to spend the day helping to select and prepare produce from the garden.
8. 5. 2        The publicity generated by the Lords & Ladles TV series (featured on Netflix in the US) should make it relatively easy for the participating houses to run foraging & cooking workshops.
8. 5. 3        Several member houses participate in:
- i)        The West Waterford Festival of Food [www.westwaterfordfestivaloffood.com](http://www.westwaterfordfestivaloffood.com)
  - ii)       The Taste of West Cork <https://www.atasteofwestcork.com>, and
  - iii)       The Boyne Valley Food Series <https://boynevalleyflavours.ie>.
8. 5. 4        Others have farm shops, or have run pop-up events with small local producers, often arranged by event organisers such as [www.rootsproject.ie](http://www.rootsproject.ie). Ballyvolane House has held successful *Fawlty Towers* dinners and Bertha Music Sessions, combining casual dining with music on winter evenings.



## 8. 6 Courses, Lectures and Seminars

8. 6. 1 Several houses, such as Dromana in County Waterford and Castlecoote in County Roscommon, hold a regular series of lectures each year and many others are interested in hosting courses, lectures or seminars. Well known writers on Irish country houses and on various related topics speak at both OPW and private houses, and there is considerable potential for cross-pollination and centralisation in this area. Houses with accommodation are particularly keen to host weekend courses. Subjects which have recently been covered include botanical art, flower-arranging and nature residencies. Not all courses are conventional; one house noted for its ghosts frequently has groups of spiritualists for the weekend and there is potential for male-centric workshops for wellness and personal development.

8. 6. 2 Once again this is an area where targeted resources could help to establish a series of events or courses which could be repeated in different parts of the country and could provide training for house owners and help them to make useful contacts.

## 8. 7 Re-Enactments

8. 7. 1 Devotees or admirers of Jane Austen could become an interesting proposition. A successful Jane Austen Day was recently held at Salterbridge House where the participants dressed in authentic costume, lunched on authentic dishes, learned period dances and posed for photos on the grand staircase. At another, a whole Jane Austen week was held, with participants living the life in period costume throughout their stay.

8. 7. 2 By extension this concept could be expanded to include literature or history, perhaps themed to be appropriate to the particular house, its period, its human connections, contents or locality. Given the nature and history of HHI member houses the potential range is very great. Again, this is an area which would benefit from co-ordination, training and resourcing.

## Part 9

# Outdoors: Spaces on the Estate

9. 1 Many owners are faced with the responsibility of caring for a varied range of important environmental assets alongside a historic house and collection, which is a complex burden of commitments that calls for a variety of skills and resources to deal with them. These cannot be supported from farming alone and they are not usually devoted entirely to farming as they include many different types of land and land uses, which are discussed below. These landholdings are already diverse, and most owners are open to the possibility of further diversification.
9. 2 Gardens
9. 2. 1 It is sometimes hard to define the difference between gardens and parks, especially when gardens are informal, while many houses are set in landscaped parks that come right up to the door. Killruddery is unique in having a very large formal garden, with a landscaped park beyond. Most respondents have traditional gardens beside or near their houses, often with informal elements such as shrubberies and borders.
9. 2. 2 A high proportion of Ireland's most interesting private gardens are now open to the public and, where gardens exist, they are seen as an additional attraction when visiting a house. Some gardens are only open by appointment; others are open regularly under the Section 482 scheme and, in a small number of instances, gardens, rather than houses, are the key attractions. Perhaps 75% of the houses that avail of Section 482 scheme also open their gardens while only the gardens are open at a small number of important houses, usually for reasons of personal circumstances.
9. 2. 3 About half the gardens surveyed have formal elements such as parterres, terraces and balustrades, and several have fine examples of topiary. Some, such as Bantry House, Glin Castle, Lismore Castle, Coolcarrigan, Lodge Park, Burtown House & Cappoquin House are visited by specialist garden groups, who come specifically to see rare plants and specimen shrubs and trees. Most gardens are maintained by their owners, usually with some unskilled assistance, as few houses employ professional gardeners today. Some offer tours for specialist groups led by the owner, or by the gardener where a trained horticulturist is employed.

- 9. 2. 4 Many gardens are informal, with naturalistic plantings, shrubberies, borders and trees as features, in the style made popular by William Robinson, Gertrude Jekyll's Irish predecessor, inspiration and collaborator. Few have specific beds for cut flowers and, while most follow organic principles and have stopped using Glyphosate, few have received organic certification.
- 9. 2. 5 Owners participate in the Boyne Valley Garden Trail (4), the Carlow Garden Trail (4), the Donegal Garden Trail (2), the Lough Derg Garden Trail (1), the West Cork Garden Trail (2), the Waterford Garden Trail (6) and the Wexford Garden Trail (1).
- 9. 2. 6 The Carlow Garden Festival [www.carlowgardentrail.com/carlow-garden-festival-2020](http://www.carlowgardentrail.com/carlow-garden-festival-2020) is particularly successful and holds an increasingly popular niche event in high summer that attracts major speakers from Ireland and the UK. The success of this event, and of the Bloom Festival in the Phoenix Park, means that almost every county now has a 'Garden Festival' with a mixture of plants, guest speakers, music & food.

### 9. 3 Walled Gardens

- 9. 3. 1 Many of the estates surveyed have walled gardens, almost all with their walls still extant, but today almost half of them are neglected and are no longer used to grow fruit and vegetables. While high costs mean that small-scale vegetable production may not be viable, the perceived health benefits of organic & freshly picked food has become increasingly valued in recent years and the Grow It Yourself (GIY) movement is developing exponentially.
- 9. 3. 2 In general, the likelihood of walled gardens remaining in use decreases in proportion to their distance from the house. This trend may be reversed if the house is open for overnight guests with dinner, while the possibility of supplying a restaurant or café nearby can be an added incentive.
- 9. 3. 4 Allotments can work well in favourable circumstances but they work best in an established walled garden with available space and a vibrant local community with good, keen gardeners who can provide a lead. They do not always develop as intended and can take several years to become successful. A number of initiatives have failed and in other cases a workable system was only established after several unsuccessful attempts. However, the option is worth pursuing if all the indicators are positive.

## 9. 3. 5

**Case Study — Garden Volunteers at Killruddery**

*The French-inspired formal gardens at Killruddery, created at the end of the 17th century, with their famous double canals, allees, statuary and bosques are unique in Ireland. Alongside is a large walled garden where a volunteer scheme has been run for a number of years. Participants, who are mostly retired, receive free annual membership. They extend their gardening knowledge by working with master gardeners, take produce home and benefit from social interaction. Unfortunately, this all takes time to organise and owners spend time defining boundaries, managing expectations, ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations and minimising risks to security, which can discourage others from working with volunteers.*

## 9.4 Parks and Arboreta

## 9. 4. 1

The survey has revealed that almost half the landscaped parks that surround many country houses have never been ploughed and can be classified as Ancient Meadow. See Appendix H below. This term recognises their importance as centres of biodiversity and seed archaeology. It is also widely and increasingly accepted that parkland trees are healthier than farmland equivalents because their roots have never been disturbed by ploughing or compaction.

## 9. 4. 2

Many parks contain fine specimen and champion trees so HHI is encouraging owners to use identification labels and create tree trails (as at Tullyally Castle). At present labels are more widely used in recently planted arboreta.

## 9. 4. 3

Historically, privately-owned parks and estates were renowned for a wide range and diversity of trees, with many rare and exotic specimens now fully mature. Surveys by the Irish Tree Society, among others, confirm this situation, as do the various books on Ireland's trees and on champion trees (a term for one that reaches a record for its species in terms of height or circumference of trunk) in particular. The study of historic demesnes is an inspiration for modern tree-planting programmes and parks can be an ideal location for new plantings, as they are sheltered by older trees and protected by park walls.



## 9.5 Protected Structures

- 9.5.1 More than 50% of owners have other protected structures in addition to the main house, and several owners have more than a dozen individual protected structures on their land, some of which may predate the other buildings on the site. Examples include:-

- i) Follies and other unusual garden buildings
- ii) Stable blocks and farmyards
- iii) Tower houses and remnants of castles and fortifications
- iv) Early industrial buildings such as mills, some still capable of operation
- v) Gate lodges, cottages and second or dower houses
- vi) Churches, chapels and mausolea
- vii) Megalithic remains
- viii) Medieval remains or other early garden layouts including fishponds
- ix) Parks may even include National Monuments

- 9.5.2 The presence of additional protected structures (several HHI members have more than thirty protected structures on their estates) is both a practical and a financial burden, and takes up a great deal of time. Protected structures may not be changed or altered without a lengthy planning process, so it is not always possible to convert them for new uses today. In general such buildings may only be repaired with traditional materials and methods, and to conservation standards, which usually entails additional costs while their owners have a responsibility to keep them in repair. Although the example below is unusual, in that the site also includes a National Monument, it illustrates the situation in which many owners are placed.

9.5.3 **Case Study — Moone Abbey High Cross & Tower House**

*The house at Moone Abbey dates from the mid-18th century and was built at the heart of a 6th century monastic site, which includes structures and remnants from many different dates, some of great importance. The High Cross is a National Monument, and is maintained by the OPW, but the remaining structures on the site, including the 15th century 'Ten Pound' tower house are largely reliant on the owners for their care and maintenance with no access to funding or support.*

## 9.6 Horses and Equestrian Facilities

- 9.6.1 Very few of those surveyed still keep horses, ponies or donkeys and just a handful have bloodstock, a situation which would have been unthinkable a generation ago. Three estates have built cross-country courses, another three have training gallops for racehorses and four owners have thoroughbred studs - which again is likely to restrict public access. However, the key finding is that most stable-yards are now redundant, and therefore potentially available for a variety of uses.

## Part 10

# Oases of Biodiversity

10. 1      The life of a community is enriched by a healthy Environment and a vibrant Biodiversity. Both increase creativity by making communities more pleasant and rewarding places to live and work, and are a vital element of LifeLong Learning. Biodiversity plays a pivotal role in raising awareness of our interdependence on Nature and helps us to understand the need to combat Climate Change. It has an important part to play with children and education at one end of our lifecycle, perhaps through Creative Schools and Local Creative Youth Partnerships, while providing a rewarding extra dimension to Age and Opportunity at the other.
10. 2      Parks, Woodland and Hedgerows
10. 2. 1    The man-made parks and demesnes surrounding member houses are an immensely valuable part of our environmental heritage.
10. 2. 2    Despite the fact that trees have matured and fallen, and may or may not have been replaced, most parks are still maintained as they were designed, and this has helped to protect their invaluable biodiversity. Several have won Royal Dublin Society medals for biodiversity and others have been earmarked as European Wildlife Estates, a label for exemplary management established by the European Landowners Association. It is especially important that access to parks and demesnes is always appropriate, and is monitored and managed where necessary.
10. 2. 3    Almost every estate has areas of ancient or native woodland with little commercial value other than as firewood, and no financial incentive to ensure it is well maintained, while many owners have planted areas of modern commercial forestry. Woods can be wonderful amenities and many owners are happy to provide access to them for their local communities, provided their commitment and the woods themselves are respected. Most estates have rivers, streams or lakes, which often form part of Special Areas of Conservation (See Appendix G) while 33% have important areas of moorland, raised bog or wetlands, which also require protection.

10. 2. 4 A handful of the respondents still have banks and ditches as field boundaries on their land which are now recognised as perfect ‘eco corridors’ for wildlife. Several have fine examples of ancient hedges which are highly valuable and could be used as examples for workshops on hedge-planting or cutting-and-laying. However, these activities are not always practical when there is livestock on the land.

## 10. 3 Nature Conservation

### 10. 3. 1 **Rivers, Streams, Lakes, Wetlands, Bogs And Moorland**

Some 80% of estates have rivers, streams or lakes, while a 33% have important areas of moorland, raised bog or wetlands, which are also subject to protection. A number of members have recently created ponds, which again greatly assists biodiversity given that some 40% of all plants and animals breed in water.

## 10. 4 Rare Flora and Fauna

10. 4. 1 Almost half the parks identified contain rare flora, from the once ubiquitous but now threatened cowslip to a number of different native orchids. Frequently reported fauna includes pine martens (once almost extinct in Ireland), red squirrels and buzzards, which have been repopulating southward through the country. The owners of Millbrook House in County Kildare have recently recorded 56 species of birds while those at Kilrush House, in County Kilkenny, have recorded 30 species of butterflies.
10. 4. 2 Some 85% of respondents confirm that, at various times of the year, the land around their house is a roost for migratory birds and bats (and indeed several owners could identify all the different bat species present). In certain instances the presence of particular species has been measured or monitored by local conservation officers, local field clubs or BirdWatch Ireland, who have also organised a number of successful Dawn Chorus events. Monitoring is important for those who, like some HHI Members, wish to become part of the European Wildlife Estates. One HHI member invited the local Naturalist Field Club to record the flora and fauna in their park, and the results were then presented at a community event. This concept could be repeated elsewhere.
10. 4. 3 Ancient Meadows have been noted previously support unique ecosystems but several owners are experimenting with new wildflower meadows, which can be used to attract visitors, and the owners of Killyon Manor (in County Meath) are in the process of ‘rewilding’ 60 acres. Meanwhile Killedmond (in County Carlow) has an arboretum with a Celtic Tree trail, where visitors can engage in ‘forest bathing’ (an immersive nature-therapy that originated in Japan) and visit a field with 80 different varieties of grass.

## 10.5 Bees

- 10.5.1 Over 60% of members surveyed keep native Irish honey-bees and the remaining quarter would like local beekeepers to install hives on their land. Green Sod <http://dev-site.greensodireland.ie/education> is a programme which helps to educate children about the National Pollinator Plan and HHI will distribute information about beekeeping workshops, which one member plans to hold.
- 10.5.2 Beekeeping has a long history on Irish estates. At Monksgrange, for example, an apiary club was functioning around 1900 and during World War II there were 80 hives on the estate, an effort to combat the lack of sugar.

## 10.6 Environmental Protection

- 10.6.1 Some 36% of participants confirmed that their land forms part, and in some cases the major part, of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These are designated areas of national and international environmental importance, and are protected under Natura 2000. Others own land that forms part of Special Protection Areas for wild birds and many report the presence of protected species, both flora and fauna, on their land. For more information on environmental protection methods, see Appendix G.
- 10.6.2 Our diverse environmental heritage is extraordinarily fragile, and can easily be damaged by untrammelled access, which demonstrates that there is an opportunity to achieve real progress by developing an all-embracing framework for enhanced future engagement. The framework should identify how individuals and small groups can best experience the unique natural heritage that exists at privately owned parks and estates. However, the process must also establish how owners are to be incentivised in return, both for their stewardship and management, and to ensure that they will support all the resulting initiatives and will wish to become fully involved.
- 10.6.3 The process of producing a framework will require detailed consultation and co-operation between private owners and the two government departments principally concerned, before involving all the various specialist NGOs and other groups and bodies.



## Part 11

# Outdoors: Providing Access to Landscape

- 11. 1. 1 In 1895, Octavia Hill, the social reformer and co-founder of the UK's National Trust, wrote that parks were becoming "more and more valuable every year - valuable in the deepest sense of the word; health-giving, joy-inspiring, peacebringing". Parkland trees are predominantly deciduous and in Ireland there are few opportunities to walk in landscapes where conifers are not the dominant tree. There is increasing evidence about the benefits of walking through beautiful pastoral landscape on our mental health and general well-being.
- 11. 1. 2 Most respondents provide access to their estates at some level, even if this is just an informal arrangement with some members of the local community whom they know well. However, most owners expressed concerns about public liability, about the potential risk of rights of way being created, and about disturbance to rare plants, wildlife or important areas of biodiversity. Thus, it is clear that access must be properly controlled and managed.
- 11. 2 Looped Walks
  - 11. 2. 1 The Looped Walks scheme (a Government initiative implemented by local authorities) is an effective way of providing public access along identified, signposted routes.
  - 11. 2. 2 All Local Authorities have Walks Officers, who are responsible for the Looped Walks scheme throughout the county. In some instances the scheme may have become part of the Heritage or Tourism Officer's remit, while certain local authorities are more likely to encourage Looped Walks than others.

- 11. 2. 3 Owners who participate in the official scheme are indemnified, and cannot be made responsible for accidents, while walkers must adhere to the route and Rights of Way cannot be established inadvertently. After one-way systems had been introduced, looped walks became a life-line for many country towns and villages during the COVID-19 lockdown, and this has strengthened the bond between owners and communities. However, as the scheme does not generate an income, owners could not afford to take measures to control access (especially access to parking) or to ensure social distancing when demand and usage increased dramatically.
- 11. 2. 4 The Looped Walk scheme does not address the issue of unacceptable disturbance to wildlife or areas of sensitive biodiversity, so the possibility of additional funding from Government for the Parks and Wildlife Service, or for reputable local environmental groups, to hold regular, focused low-key events for small groups on private estates throughout the year could be highly beneficial. Events could be held in conjunction with groups from local schools, with third level students, with community or retired groups, or simply with those who are interested in participating, and a scale of charges should be introduced for each different level.
- 11. 3 NeighbourWood
  - 11. 3. 1 Owners can achieve much by working alongside their local authorities and communities, and by using the NeighbourWood scheme to augment their Looped Walks. NeighbourWood is an attractive option for many private owners, as it covers the sort of essential woodland maintenance that few can afford to undertake today, but it is only available when projects are carried out in partnership with local communities. See [www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/grantandpremiumschemes/2015/NeighbourWoodScheme240717.pdf](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/grantandpremiumschemes/2015/NeighbourWoodScheme240717.pdf)
- 11. 4 Regular Access Through Membership Schemes
  - 11. 4. 1 Annual 'Membership' schemes, which make gardens and parks free to members, can be an attractive method of providing regular and repeated access. However, unless parks or gardens are near large population centres, or are in great demand, income from members does not cover the cost of staff to supervise admissions or control access to sensitive parts of the site. It is vitally important that this situation is addressed.

## 11. 5 Operation Transformation, Suil Eile and Other Possibilities

11. 5. 1 Several estates engage with *Operation Transformation*, a fitness programme launched by an RTÉ series, which facilitates supervised speed walks and is ideal for community access. Walking clubs could be another option. The national organisation *Suil Eile* encourages local communities ‘to live quality healthy lives, to socialise together and to combat rural isolation’ by walking together. There are other annual events such as walking festivals to promote lesser-known walks in various counties and regions around Ireland. Once again, it is important to remember that wildlife disturbance is maximised, while pressure on fields and paths may be excessive when large numbers or groups congregate in the same place at the same time, so events of this type should take place in less sensitive areas.

## 11. 6 Conducted Walks

11. 6. 1 Roughly 33% of respondents organise conducted farm walks (usually in conjunction with Teagasc or farming organisations and groups) or woodland walks with dendrological groups such as the Irish Tree Society, forestry groups or timber-growers’ associations. Several estates have been involved with Bird Watch Ireland’s Dawn Chorus events and others have held foraging days or weekends.
11. 6. 2 A few estates have invited the local rambling group or have held walking festivals on their land, and others would be happy to do this in the future. One owner, who recently planted 20 acres in a relatively suburban environment, leads tree walks for local schoolchildren with the Education Officer from Crann, a Membership based organisation that raises awareness of the environmental importance of trees, hedgerows and woodland.

## 11. 7 In Return

11. 7. 1 Due consideration must be given to incentivising the owners of land with high environmental or amenity value. The land has these characteristics not merely by chance but because the owners and their predecessors did not follow advice to farm and run the land holding on purely commercial lines. Many owners struggle to maintain a portfolio of protected structures under very difficult circumstances so they need adequate remuneration, as would be appropriate for their role as the custodians of Ireland’s environmental heritage. All have experienced problems with littering and vandalism, and many have had difficulties with disturbance to livestock, which shows that the hidden costs of access are a considerable extra burden.

## 11. 8 Traditional Country Sports and Fairs

- 11. 8. 1 Where estates still have significant land holdings perhaps 33% are used for traditional country sports such as shooting or hunting. Workshops and displays of falconry are held at Killruddery. 30% have their own salmon or trout fishing in lakes or rivers, while a further 15% have access to pike or other coarse fishing. Several hold lessons to teach fishing and casting, and they provide lessons for children.
- 11. 8. 2 Several owners have experimented with country fairs, with varying levels of success. Some have found that crowds (and large vehicles) can damage paths and parkland unless the weather is fine.
- 11. 8. 3 A small number arrange displays or workshops of traditional country crafts and skills, and others would like to explore this possibility.

## 11. 9 Music and Other Festivals

- 11. 9. 1 Three of the country's major music festivals take place at HHI members' estates. *The Electric Picnic* and *All Together Now* are very large events held over several days and involve the creation of large serviced campsites. *Another Love Story* is much smaller but was voted the 'best music festival in Ireland' last year. Others have experimented with the idea but, either they were defeated by the weather, or they were unable to attract enough people because of their remote locations.
- 11. 9. 2 *The Electric Picnic* is held at Stradbally, in rural County Laois, but it has the advantage of a central location, beside the main Dublin-Cork motorway near the junctions for the south east and south west. In contrast, *All Together Now* is held at Curraghmore in County Waterford, perhaps a less central location although it is close to the motorway from Dublin to Waterford and within easy reach of Cork.
- 11. 9. 3 Smaller festivals such as *Another Love Story*, held at Killyon Manor in County Meath, are an interesting option and can be less of a risk for owners. Woodbrook House, in County Wexford, held a successful Green Festival for several years, an idea that may then have been ahead of its time, but is very relevant now.

## 11.10 Glamping

- 11. 10. 1 Only a small number of estates provide 'glamping' (upmarket camping in pre-erected structures) at present but the concept has been developed successfully at other locations throughout the country. Ireland's high and frequent rainfall has been a consideration but this attitude is likely to change significantly, due to the recent interest in staycations. Glamping in the sort of attractive and secluded rural settings that HHI members can provide has proved particularly popular. In future years glamping will become an option for those who wish to diversify.

## 11. 11 Outdoor Theatre and Opera

11. 11. 1 Two UK companies, Chapterhouse [www.chapterhouse.org](http://www.chapterhouse.org) and Open Air Theatre <https://openairtheatre.com>, tour Ireland in summer and perform plays in the open air. A number of HHI members have held events and others have expressed an interest in doing so too. The performance at Hilton Park, in County Monaghan, secured the largest audience, assisted by a 50% grant from their local authority which helped to cover the costs. This shows that others should consider applying and that there are opportunities for Irish theatre companies to cater for similar events. Once again, the vagaries of the Irish climate are a consideration.
11. 11. 2 In the past houses in the Carlow-Wexford region collaborated to produce the *Blackstairs Opera Festival*, which operated with some success for a number of years. The *Blackwater Valley Opera Festival* has been more successful, probably because it is closer to major population centres at Cork and Waterford, and within reach of the Dublin-Cork motorway.
11. 11. 3 At Lismore Castle operas were held under a temporary roof in the stable yard. Use of similar spaces for performance might be replicated elsewhere if an initiative was undertaken to survey possible candidates and provide access to infrastructure, expertise, performers and events.

## 11. 12 Classic Cars

11. 12. 1 Classic car rallies and gatherings (some international, others national or regional) were popular and have been held at a number of the houses surveyed, while one house regularly shows historic motoring films to groups of motoring enthusiasts.

## 11. 13 Garden Events and Training Schemes

11. 13. 1 The survey revealed that the *Rare & Special Plant Fair*, which has been held in several HHI members' gardens, has dramatically increased in popularity in recent years. While the event attracts major crowds it still works well in smaller settings, especially when held at gardens that are specially interesting for visitors. The fair was held at Birr Castle in 2017, Burtown House in 2018 and at Glin Castle in 2019. The fair had been due to take place at Tyrrelstown House in North County Dublin in 2020. Both it and plans to hold a food and plant fair at Glin Castle have been deferred as a result of COVID-19.



11. 13. 2 Training Schemes are arranged at several gardens and young gardeners are also employed under the National Programme for Further Education & Training (Solas). Other budding gardeners come for short seasonal sojourns from abroad, and there would be benefits if these could all be brought under the umbrella of the HHI Conservation Volunteer Scheme.

11.13. 3 **Case Study — Horticultural Training at Bantry House**

*Every summer students from the French National Institute of Horticulture & Landscape in Angers come to the well-known gardens at Bantry house in County Cork. They stay for an eight-week programme, living in former staff bedrooms with their own little kitchen, and are made to feel part of the family. Each day they work with Bantry's master gardener, learning practical skills and about plants and design, and gain scholastic accreditation on returning to their studies in France. These arrangements benefit everybody and similar schemes and programmes should be developed for the HHI Conservation Volunteers scheme.*

11. 14 **Sporting Events and Activities**

11. 14. 1 While several owners organise fun runs and mud runs, Lough Cutra Castle held a major triathlon last year as part of the Castle Triathlon event series. See <https://www.castletriathlonseries.co.uk/>. One section of the course involved swimming across Lough Cutra, the largest privately owned lake in Ireland, and the event included live music, dancing, children's entertainment, retailers, food and camping.
11. 14. 2 Other owners arrange fun events like the High Summer Fling at Killruddery, a light-hearted garden party and sports day. An indoor/outdoor gym could work very well if an estate had large redundant outbuildings to accommodate it, as has been done at [www.thestables.ie](http://www.thestables.ie).

11. 15 **Outdoor Workshops**

11. 15. 1 Currently less than 20% of members have held outdoor workshops or seminars, and another third have expressed interest in hosting them. Events have been held in co-operation with the Irish Stone Wall Building Association and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), in addition to soil and vegetable growing workshops. Foraging (previously mentioned under food) is another area of real potential as it combines exercise with education, visits to interesting places followed by a feast to end the day.

**11. 15. 2 Case Study — Vegetable Growing Workshops at Burtown House**

*The renowned vegetable grower Dermot Carey discusses different plant varieties and explains how to sow seeds, care for plants, grow them to maturity and when and how to harvest. He gives expert practical, hands-on advice in the walled kitchen garden where he has increased production fivefold. The day includes a seasonal plant-based lunch at the Green Barn restaurant, which overlooks the garden. The workshop is suitable for home gardeners, experienced growers, chefs, food enthusiasts and those who work in the hospitality sector.*

**11. 16 Tree and Hedge Planting**

11. 16.1 There are numerous tree-planting projects that engage with children and communities. The *Self Help Africa* project plants five trees in Africa for every one planted in Ireland, and works with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation to show primary school children how they can be part of the solution to some of the global problems they learn about in class. See <https://selfhelpafrica.org/onemilliontrees> *Self Help Africa* is supported by the Glenisk Yogurt Company, who have their own project to restore the felled Glenisk Forest in Co Offaly.

11. 16. 2 Meanwhile Crann has formed a partnership with the *Easy Treesie* project encouraging school children to plant a million trees on the island of Ireland by December 2023. See [www.easytreesie.com](http://www.easytreesie.com). The project also aims to help children develop as community leaders by demonstrating how they can affect the world around them.

11. 16. 3 Tree-planting requires expert supervision. Many HHI members are well-placed to hold demonstrations and provide training facilities for tree-planting initiatives.

**11. 16. 4 Case Study — The Giant's Grove & Carbon Offsetting at Birr Castle**

*The gardens at Birr Castle are justly famous for an important tree collection and, in more recent years, for a number of forward-thinking tree related projects that have been launched on the estate. The Giant's Grove [www.giantsgrove.ie](http://www.giantsgrove.ie) is the largest group of giant redwoods outside California, planted in 2017 as a memorial to the Irish diaspora. Individuals sponsor a tree, planted in the name of a family member as a commemorative act and subsequent generations will be able visit their relatives' trees. Another area has been set aside so that corporations and businesses who have signed up to good governance practices can plant trees to offset their carbon footprint. Birr is understood to be the only estate in Ireland where this option is available.*

## Part 12

# Engagement with the Community

- 12. 1. 1 Almost 75% of the owners surveyed engage with their local communities.
- 12. 1. 2 Most owners provide free entry, or entry to the house or garden at a substantial reduction for local charities, churches, schools or sporting clubs. Several have become involved in joint projects, initiatives, or partnerships with local community or interest groups, and a small number have provided land for GAA pitches.
- 12. 1. 3 Others run special community-focused events (such as *Tractor Run* with up to 70 tractors). The owners of Enniscoe House hold an annual *Heritage Field Day* which displays working vintage vehicles and traditional crafts, while the long established *Steam Rally* is still held at Stradbally Hall.
- 12. 1. 4 It should be noted that the majority of owners surveyed would happily hold more events for and in conjunction with their local communities if the funding and support were made available, if there was a recognised scheme for recruiting and training volunteer stewards, and if public liability insurance was readily available at reasonable rates.
- 12. 1. 5 For example, the *Mud Run*, which attracts up to 3,000 people annually on one estate near Dublin, could be repeated at other venues with sufficient land free of livestock. Other events have included an annual *ICA tea party*, *'High Nelly Bicycle'* vintage cycle rides, *Teddy Bears' Picnics*, in addition to the *Dawn Chorus* and *Night Sky* events that mainly attract local or community participation.
- 12. 1. 6 Another mutually important aspect of engagement with the local community is the provision of work and employment which, whether all year round or seasonal, appears to involve at least 320 people.

### 12. 1. 7 **Case Study — Borris Lace Workshops**

*Lace making was introduced at Borris in the 1850s to generate income in a local economy that had been decimated by The Great Famine. The practice was revived by an interested amateur in the late 20th century, who catalogued the original collections in Borris House, published a book on the subject and subsequently began to hold lace making workshops in the house and village. Creative Ireland recently funded a project to hold workshops in the local primary school, in order to extend this local heritage skill to the next generation, a combination of all the key Creative Ireland strands – Community, Partnerships, Workshops, Education and Arts & Crafts.*

## Part 13

# Engagement with Children

13. 1      The survey examined children's activities, both after school during term time and in the holidays and some owners have developed permanent amenities for children. An unusual playground, with a giant castle, has been created at Birr Castle, County Offaly, an ingenious climbing game, *Squirrel's Scramble*, has been built at Killruddery and the gardens of Kilmokea, in County Wexford, also have various features designed specifically for children.
13. 2      Almost 40% of houses hold children's events such as Easter Egg Hunts or Nature Trails, usually aimed at the local community although they are also available to visitors. The majority of owners would be happy to do much more but this can only happen if funding and supports are put in place, while health & safety and public liability are also an issue.
13. 3      Shankill Castle in Kilkenny ran a Fairytale Festival, which attracted 2,000 people and generated a great deal of attention through a media partnership with a radio station. Several owners have allowed access to their land for scout and for pony club activities, team sports or summer camps (two of which are language based and so also qualify as education) and Halloween has become an increasingly active time at a number of houses.
13. 4      **Case Study — workshops and science camps at Birr Science Centre**  
*In 1999 Birr Castle opened its revolutionary Science Centre, with exhibitions of the pioneering developments in the fields of photography, engineering and astronomy, made by various members of the Parsons family. STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) for children is a key focus with two education rooms where schools, clubs and groups can work on a large range of programmes. Day camps are tailor-made for groups like the Scouts and Girl Guides, and there is a variety of other science-based trails and activities.*

## Part 14

# Forest Schools

14. 1      There is increasing evidence that time spent outside greatly benefits mental health and that an appreciation of our natural heritage helps children to understand the importance of preserving Ireland's natural environment and appreciate the problems caused by climate change while providing them with a sense of place and of connection. A number of respondents have become involved with the new concept of Forest Schools and Ireland now has more than 300 facilitators who lead workshops on bushcraft, survival skills, traditional scouting skills and various woodland games.
14. 2      Forest Schools provide an opportunity for the same group of learners and leaders to spend a sustained period outdoors in a wooded environment once a week and ideally all year round. They are popular with children of all ages who visit the same local woods and parkland on a regular basis to enjoy themselves. While there they learn about the natural environment, discover how to handle risks, learn how to use their own initiative, to solve problems and to co-operate with others.
14. 3      Several operators and facilitators are keen to work with HHI in an effort to open access to members' estates which have a far more diverse range of trees than Coillte forests. The Irish Forest School Association has already run successful schools on several HHI members' estates and is keen to encourage more members to engage with the process. Its schools '*encourage, motivate, engage and inspire children through positive outdoor experiences*' and the IFSA has established a long-term and sustained approach to outdoor learning. IFSA events have included after-school programmes, family days, camps in the school holidays and birthday parties. See <https://irishforestschoollassociation.ie>
14. 4      Forest Kindergartens are a new innovation. In essence they are preschools with secure and specially developed adventure playgrounds for very young children. The concept developed from an increasing realisation that children need exposure to a certain level of risk, which is actually an essential element in the developmental process.





14. 5 Forest Kindergartens have become increasingly popular on parks and estates in Europe and a pioneer Irish project has opened at the Glen Outdoor Pre-school in County Donegal. See <https://irishforestschoolassociation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/the-glen-outdoor-school-poster-presentation-by-trisha-mc-loughlin.pdf>. Killruddery has created a ‘nature’ kindergarten, which helps children to build their stamina and flexibility, and develop motor skills. It is intended that a similar project, currently in the final stages of preparation at Castle Blunden, will be extended to other estates.
14. 6 The activities of all Forest Schools are covered by the school’s own insurance. Meanwhile, most Kindergartens only operate in the mornings which helps to reduce the possibility of conflicting with other activities at the house or on the estate. These projects qualify for support under the State’s Early Childhood Care and Education Programme.
14. 7 **Case Study — Castle Blunden Garden School**  
*This is a pre-school project which has been developed within the frameworks of the “Aistear” and “Siolta” guidelines and uses the “HighScope” early years curriculum approach to implement the national framework for early childhood education. “HighScope” is based on the premise that children learn by doing and by working with materials, people and ideas. The school will only operate in the mornings on the Castle Blunden estate as, although it is nature-orientated, it will still require an indoor base on wet days - along with toilets and changing facilities.*
14. 8 The Alive Outside summer camps [www.aliveoutside.ie](http://www.aliveoutside.ie) are another variation on Forest Schools and the camps that are run at Killruddery, which again teach survival skills & bushcraft, benefit from proximity to the very large Dublin catchment area. The promoters have attempted to recreate this model at an estate in the West of Ireland, but were unable to obtain sufficient numbers to make the project viable. However, they would still be willing to explore the possibility at other venues and have run successful Touch Rugby events at various locations.

## Part 15

# Gaisce

15. 1      The Gaisce programme [www.gaisce.ie](http://www.gaisce.ie) is an obvious partner for HHI and for HHI’s proposed Conservation Volunteers in particular. Gaisce (or ‘Achievement’) aims to help young people to find their passion, become more active and make a difference within their communities. The three objectives of Gaisce are:
- i)        **Community Involvement** — teaching young people how their contribution can make their community a better place.
  - ii)       **Personal Skills** — giving young people the chance to develop new skills and interests, boosting self-esteem, helping to develop other practical and social skills, and helping them to learn how to set and respond to a challenge.
  - iii)      **Physical Recreation** — increased physical activity makes young people feel healthier, think and respond more clearly and decisively, and live longer.
15. 2      Each Gaisce participant has to play a role in planning, preparing and undertaking a group Adventure Journey over a number of days and nights.
15. 3      HHI could become a Gaisce Challenge Partner providing opportunities for Gaisce participants. HHI could also provide facilities and environments in which other Gaisce Challenge Partners could organise their Gaisce activities. Given appropriate resources, suitable templates for programmes of activity for Gaisce volunteers could be developed under the Community Involvement and the Physical Recreation headings above.
15. 4      These could be explained to HHI members and Presidents Award Leaders (“PALS”) through seminars and online sessions, and promoted through schools local to participating HHI member houses. A similar approach could be taken to developing programs for schools and for Transition Year in particular (see below).

## Part 16

# Education

16. 1 Ireland's historic country houses can make an unrivalled contribution to Irish education but there is no overall template for co-operation, which is a lost opportunity for all concerned. A small number of owners already interact with specific sectors of education but HHI would like to develop close links with the Department of Education to ensure that the benefits of visiting historic country houses are fully recognised in the national curriculum, and that appropriate systems and frameworks for visiting and co-operation are put in place.

## 16. 2 Primary and Pre-Primary Levels

16. 2. 1 Forest Kindergartens, (see Forest Schools, above) are a recent niche development but a number of owners engage with local primary schools and arrange school visits, even when their houses are not regularly open to the public. While most children are transfixed by their first experience of a large country house, gardens and parks can often make a greater contribution at primary level, since they are ideal venues for children to learn their first lessons about nature, biodiversity and the environment.

### 16. 2. 1 **Case Study — Kilmokea Gardens Education Programme**

*The site has historical evidence of human presence for more than 1,200 years and Kilmokea has branded itself as an educational resource for Primary Schools. It has also developed programmes suitable for the Junior Certificate History curriculum and for other subjects. Scavenger hunts, tailor-made for each class, take children from the Viking period to the Norman motte on the site. For younger children the emphasis is on live storytelling and culminates at a purpose-built Fairy Fort in the woodland. Other add-on options include 3D Archery Ireland, Forest School days and an opportunity to paint wooden birdhouses in an Education Room. The children can also lunch undercover.*

### 16.3 Secondary Level

- 16.3.1 The obvious potential for synergies and greater interaction at secondary level should be explored in depth. At present, engagement with secondary schools is infrequent but several owners have been able to work successfully with them at local level.
- 16.3.2 Structured school visits to historic houses and gardens can be an illuminating, immersive and instructive day-long experience but unfortunately this is seldom recognised or exploited. The example shown below can be attributed to the activities of individual teachers, who followed their academic interests and displayed considerable drive and initiative.
- 16.3.3 There is also an opportunity for owners to become involved in classroom-based assessment projects, both for the Junior Certificate and also during Transition Year, while the anticipated co-operation with Gaisce and Transition Year (See Pilot Project) offers scope for far greater engagement in future.

### 16.4 Heritage in Schools

- 16.4.1 Despite the fact that many respondents indicated an interest in arranging and receiving school visits and working with the Heritage Council's advisors, Tullynally Castle, in County Westmeath and Killedmond, in County Carlow, are the only HHI Members that currently participate in the council's 'Heritage in Schools' programme. The Heritage Council's website [www.heritageinschools.ie/places-to-visit](http://www.heritageinschools.ie/places-to-visit) shows the potential for developing a series of projects or seminars for house owners who would like to become involved in this form of education.

#### 16.4.2 **Case Study — Working with a Second-Level School**

*An entire class of thirty children from one West of Ireland secondary school visits a historic house each year. They are greeted, told about the history of the house and estate, and of its long interaction with the local community, and then separate into small groups. During the day each group is taught about the architecture and decoration of the house, when its operation and the arrangement and function of the rooms is explained and discussed. They visit the ornamental and the organic food producing gardens, are shown around a small museum, and undertake various biological studies in the park and woods. The owner provides a simple lunch (or the whole party may bring packed lunches) and the visit continues throughout the day. There is a small charge, which just about allows the owners to cover their costs, but they do not make a profit.*

## 16.5 Third Level

- 16.5.1 HHI's record of close co-operation with third level students and institutions is long-established and impressive, and has been mutually beneficial, but the resources to develop new ways of extending and deepening this relationship would reap a rich reward.
- 16.5.2 The potential for co-operation with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) should also be explored, ideally to provide further training and practical experience under the HHI Conservation Volunteers Scheme but also to explore the possibility that (QQI) may find that country houses are attractive and convenient locations for FETAC courses, either for HHI Members or for other groups.
- 16.5.3 QQI offers a pathway into many universities, third level colleges and institutes for students who have obtained FETAC or QQI level 5 or 6 so co-operation with those who provide QQI will strengthen links between country houses and higher education generally.

## 16.6 Teacher Training

- 16.6.1 Further Teacher Training (EPV) courses are only likely to become really significant partners for HHI members when houses and their surrounding parks and estates are tied into the curriculum and given a clearly defined role. Meanwhile, members might consider making their houses available for further training workshops for teachers. If teachers are given a really interesting and illuminating experience they will return to country houses with their students.

## 16.7 Further Education and Training Programmes

- 16.7.1 While many respondents expressed a great interest in training schemes and workshops, to date few have engaged with initiatives sponsored by Solas (formerly Fás) the National Programme for Further Education and Training, or with County Education or Training Boards.
- 16.7.2 Solas manages a range of Further Education and Training programmes including apprenticeships and traineeships, which enable learners to succeed in the labour market and thrive in society.
- 16.7.3 The Education Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory authorities with responsibility for education and training (in which role they have succeeded the former VECs). They manage and operate second-level schools and further education colleges that deliver a range of education and training programmes.



16. 7. 4     The survey has demonstrated considerable scope for engagement with the providers of training schemes and further education but few members have actually engaged with training programmes to date. The potential for engagement could be established and realised by further research.

## 16. 8     Formal Education Overview

16. 8. 1     Country houses, along with their gardens and largely undisturbed parks, are uniquely able to offer such a variety of all embracing, engaging and instructive experiences in one location. Furthermore, the whole visit takes place in an environment totally dedicated to the particular party for the day, without the pressure and distraction of other groups and visitors.

## 16. 9     Cruinniú na nÓg

16. 9. 1     Roughly half of respondents would like to explore the possibility of working with a more recent Creative Ireland initiative, the Creative Schools scheme. Few knew about the scheme's annual Cruinniú na nÓg children's festival, held annually in June and a third are now ready to hold outdoor events for this in future.



## Part 17

# Senior Citizens and Active Retirement Groups

- 17. 1      ‘Education for the Third Age’ has become particularly appropriate as people are living longer and healthier lives, and seek rewarding and enriching experiences to keep them active and alert.
- 17. 2      The majority of houses and gardens that open to the public encourage visits by Active Retirement Groups. All owners report that many of those who attend their cultural events are clearly older than 65, which demonstrates the potential to develop Third Age Education, Lifelong Learning, volunteering (with the HHI Conservation Volunteers) and other important community initiatives in a recognised and structured way.
- 17. 3      In addition to learning new skills, and passing on the benefits of their own lifelong skills and knowledge to a younger generation, participants get out and about and become more active, often in the open air, which brings them a new sense of fulfilment and worth, and helps to combat loneliness and social isolation.
- 17. 4      As yet, few respondents arrange specific visits or activities for senior citizens but three HHI Members have already come together to meet this opportunity by rolling out a new and attractive concept. See the case study at paragraph 21.4 below.

## Part 18

# Lifelong Learning

18. 1      While Lifelong Learning is effectively a key element in many of the workshops, seminars and lectures that take place at HHI Members' houses, it is vitally important that owners and all others involved do not forget that they must attract and interact with a younger demographic in a positive way, so that historic houses are not solely identified with school children or the elderly.
18. 2      Historic houses are ideal venues for small courses of all kinds and all forms of upskilling for career and professional development should be examined. Opportunities include the multi-night residential learning or training events for local authorities, professional groups or companies, as described under Micro Festivals, QQI courses, vocational upskilling courses and further training for teachers under the EPV scheme.
18. 3.      There is also potential to replicate successful courses at other houses in different regions.

## Part 19

# Accessibility and Visibility

19. 1      Access For Visits, Events and Activities
19. 2      All visits depend on simple logistics that must be kept in mind. Most houses are not served by public transport and groups tend to arrive by coach. Just a third of all avenues or, more specifically, entrance gates are suitable for 52-seater coaches while the overhanging branches of important trees can also cause problems. Most owners prefer groups to arrive in smaller coaches or other vehicles.
19. 3      All respondents have hard surface parking for individual cars. A few can cope with between 50 and 100 at once, rather more can accommodate between 30 and 50. The remainder have parking for 30 cars, while visitors to the small number of houses in or beside country towns or villages can use public car parks.
19. 4      Only 4 or 5 houses, once again those in or beside country towns or villages, are accessible by public transport, with connections by bus or train (or a combination of the two) within 150 metres of the entrance. While services are regular, it should be noted that, in the majority of cases, they are infrequent.

## Part 20

# Films and Filming

20. 1      Historically, Irish houses have often replaced English country houses in period films and television series. This can happen because they tend to be less overrestored and are therefore more authentic, or because they are less recognisable. One example is Mount Ievers in County Clare, which was used for the 1997 film “The Serpent’s Kiss”. On the other hand “The Last September” (largely filmed at Dowth Hall) uses an Irish house as a setting for an Irish story.
20. 2      Killruddery, outside Bray in County Wicklow, is probably the best-known example of a frequently filmed Irish house. It has the advantage of close proximity to Ireland’s principal film studio and has separate entrances for lorries and buses, while its extensive yards provide hard-standing for vehicles and plant. There is clear evidence that houses see a surge of visitor interest after a feature film or mini-series, or after they have appeared on national TV.
20. 3      While many HHI members would like their houses to become film locations or be used for visual productions in order to create additional income stream, others would simply like to make their houses more visible and better known. The connection between commercial films and the Creative Ireland initiative may not be obvious, but both help to promote interest in and appreciation of these houses and what they have to offer.
20. 4      20% percent of respondents have experience of feature films being shot at their house or on the wider estate. Some were international productions but a third were Irish and almost all were approached by a locations manager rather than securing the film through their own efforts. The experience was generally positive and beneficial, and all would like to repeat the experience.
20. 5      Country houses and estates have the great advantage for filmmakers, and perhaps particularly for those undertaking smaller scale productions, of being private, with a variety of readymade sets – rooms, gardens, woods, rivers and derelict buildings – all in one location.





20. 6 **Case Study — Filming at Harristown House**

*In recent years owners of this relatively low-profile house have refocused their website to attract films and it now illustrates the great variety of locations available and demonstrates their preparedness. In the 1990s some interiors were used for the mini-series “Aristocrats,” which was set in Ireland, and they have been used more frequently in recent years. The basement is connected to the stable yard by an underground tunnel, and its large vaulted spaces have been used as a publishing house, a hospital and a prison, while the 18th century farmyard has been used as a French village and as the setting for a barracks during the Great Irish Famine.*

20. 7 While a small number of houses have been used for mini-series, surprisingly few have been used as locations for commercials or documentaries. As has been mentioned previously, 12 members’ houses were used for dinner parties in RTE’s *Lords & Ladles* series over 3 successive seasons. The programmes are now shown on Netflix in the US, and could be used to promote foodie events such as cookery demonstrations and pop-up dinners.

20. 8 Community filmmaking workshops, as were used to produce and film *A Nightingale Falling*, made in County Offaly in 2014, are another interesting concept. For three weeks experts ran classes in filmmaking, filming and set design in the town hall at Daingean. They held a number of public meetings to select a core crew of some 40 volunteers, who became crucial to the project. Local volunteers worked on everything from set design to carpentry and costume making, or acted as extras.

## Part 21

# Partnerships — Between Houses and with Other Bodies

21. 1      Some 40% of the houses surveyed have formed links with other owners in their counties, which has usually grown out of their participation in garden trails. Several garden trails cross county boundaries and several respondents have gone out of their way to develop links with owners in other counties. Initiatives like this report, along with the HHI website and more regular newsletters, help to raise awareness of innovative new activities and developments. It is anticipated that this will encourage a greater degree of co-operation between HHI members and could eventually develop into an internal mentoring scheme.
21. 2      One example is the recent alliance between three houses on the borders of Counties Limerick and Tipperary, which have come together to promote daylong visits to their region for active retirement groups. This concept could be developed with advantage by small groups of houses in other areas since very few houses are sufficiently engaging to fill an entire day.
21. 3      Historic Houses in the UK has a similar scheme called ‘Invitation to View’. Interesting and lesser known houses of medium size are perfectly suited to visits of this kind, even when they are not open to the public in other ways. Greater support for low-key initiatives of this kind would allow many more owners to engage with the public in interesting and mutually beneficial ways.
21. 4      **Case Study — Castlegarde, Grenane and Lismacue: three visits, one day**  
*While all three houses participate in Section 482, they receive few visitors in the normal course of events, largely because of their relatively remote locations. In an effort to promote an attractive product, their owners now collaborate by encouraging coach parties and active retirement groups to visit all three houses on a single day tour, providing meals and refreshments, with talks on architecture, history and on items from family collections. The concept has created a special, bespoke form of access and provides direct contact with the owners and their families. It has proved particularly appealing to visitors and the result is a win-win for everybody.*

21.5 Another successful partnership arrangement is described below. On this occasion the initiative was developed, encouraged, organised and promoted by a local authority.

21.6 **Case Study — Carlow Tourism & the Big Houses Festival**

*Some 20 years ago Carlow County Council decided to promote and market country houses and gardens in the county, both privately owned and in State hands, in a coordinated way. They started a floral festival, which evolved into a niche Garden Festival, and now brings prestigious speakers from the UK and elsewhere. The county council also held an off-season Big House Festival in October 2019, with multiple speakers and a programme of events over four successive weekends. The initial festival was very well-received and this kind of joined-up thinking is a major step forward.*

21.7 Almost 25% of participants work with active retirement groups <https://activeirl.ie> and another 10% intend to do so. Coverage by RTE's programme "Nationwide" has proved invaluable here, and has dramatically increased visitor numbers in the following season. Some 31% of respondents have forged links with musical or other cultural groups. Others intended to do this in the near future while almost half have created links to other special interest groups. For the most part these are garden associations or architectural societies, such as the Irish Georgian Society. Others have links with brewing and distilling aficionados, wider families or clans, steam enthusiasts or other special interest groups and bodies.

21.8 More than 33% of those surveyed speak to their local Heritage Officers (and to other local authority representatives) frequently, and the survey indicates a definite correlation between regular contact and the submission of grant aid and funding applications. HHI strongly encourages house owners to forge links with their conservation and heritage officers, and will take steps to improve communications on a county-by-county basis. It should be noted though that a small number of counties do not have conservation or heritage officers at present. If members have spare spaces with potential for creative usage, they are also encouraged to form links with their local Arts Officers, since they usually represent Creative Ireland in their counties. Several heritage officers regularly produce newsletters to promote events in their counties and circulate useful information about new grants.

21.9 33% of respondents have built up beneficial relationships with local businesses or professional firms, while rather more engage with local tourism initiatives and the feedback was almost universally positive. The 'Historic Houses of Roscommon passport' admits visitors to each participating venue, whether state-run or private, at a discounted rate. The project was launched in 2013 after a series of meetings with their owners or managers.

## Part 22

# Local Enterprise Offices

22. 1      Local Enterprise Offices (known as LEOs) have the potential to play an important role but to date few respondents have approached them for funding and advice since the full extent of their remit is not always clear. LEOs are usually prepared to support Creative Industries, and could benefit anyone with spare space available for creative purposes, so all HHI members are encouraged to make contact with their local LEO.
22. 2      Examples of recent LEO projects which could suitably be repeated in historic house settings are:-
- i)        The Galway regional LEO has collaborated with Creative Ireland and the IDA to initiate a project called DesignWorks. Creators, designers and manufacturers are paired with leading Galway companies and the designers benefit from the company's design processes to create unique pieces. See: [www.localenterprise.ie/Galway/News/Press-Releases/Innovative%20project%20celebrates%20business,%20design%20and%20art.html](http://www.localenterprise.ie/Galway/News/Press-Releases/Innovative%20project%20celebrates%20business,%20design%20and%20art.html)
  - ii)       The Dun-Laoghaire LEO runs online courses for creative business owners in their region, creating a community-driven, network-based learning environment which supports businesses and helps them to sell their products online. The initiative includes workshops on product photography. See [www.localenterprise.ie/DLR/Training-Events/DLR-Creatives](http://www.localenterprise.ie/DLR/Training-Events/DLR-Creatives)
  - iii)      The Carlow LEO has committed to a sustainable creative sector by running a 'Build Your Biz' programme for Creative Start-Ups in craft, design, fashion, film, performing arts, R&D, software, toys & games, TV & radio, and video games in partnership with the Entrepreneurs Academy. The aim is to grow businesses and help them reach an international market, and to create new jobs in the region. See:- [www.localenterprise.ie/Carlow/News/Creative-Start-UP-s-with-new-inCarlow-Development-Programme.html](http://www.localenterprise.ie/Carlow/News/Creative-Start-UP-s-with-new-inCarlow-Development-Programme.html)

**Part 23**

## Grants and Funding

- 23.1 Respondents were asked if they had succeeded in attracting local or government funding, and the response was variable. While 50% have applied for support to restore buildings (with an 40% success rate), only 16% have applied for funding to convert buildings for new purposes (with a 40% success rate). One respondent commented that unless the available levels of funding for the conservation and maintenance of historic buildings is significantly increased, then planning and conservation officers will need to take a more flexible and practical approach by, for example, allowing more affordable solutions for the roofs of outbuildings.
23. 2 A further comment was made about the impact of the lack of grading or any form of differentiation in the listing of structures when combined with a lack of flexibility in administering planning control over significant repairs. The result can too often be that relatively modest and simple buildings which, from a practical point of view could be restored economically, are allowed to deteriorate as the investment required to restore them authentically cannot be recouped from potential rental income. Such buildings might perhaps be made suitable for creative enterprises with targeted grant aid.
23. 3 Very few houses have received grant aid for holding cultural events on site. One good example was the Monaghan County Council grant for the outdoor theatre programme at Hilton Park, which is currently being further developed as a result. Meanwhile, the owners of Enniscoe House in County Mayo, have been successful in obtaining grants for community development, and for educational and training projects along with looped walks and a number of woodland schemes.

## Part 24

# Key Conclusions

24. 1 In 2012, the consultants Ecorys and Fitzpatrick Associates produced a comprehensive report for the Heritage Council, entitled *The Economic Value of Ireland's Historic Environment*. The report stated that *"the majority of historic environment assets in Ireland are privately owned and receive no public assistance for their management and maintenance."* The report also concluded that *"The ability of private owners to invest sufficiently in the maintenance of historic buildings, sites and places is likely to be crucial to the longterm management of the historic environment"*. Unfortunately, these words do not appear to have had the anticipated result, as successive governments have failed to grasp the opportunity of close co-operation with the private owners of Ireland's precious heritage assets. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that historic houses and estates are a unique resource and have the capacity to become a lifeline for many rural communities. We ask the various arms of Government, using the good offices of the Creative Ireland Programme, and co-operating with local authorities and local communities, to create the climate, and introduce the necessary supports, to take these precious resources forward in a way that is mutually beneficial for their owners, for local communities and for the public at large.
24. 2 The survey has shown that a number of these spaces are seldom essential for everyday family use. The most available spaces for public access and creative usage, and therefore the most likely to be available, are former staff quarters, estate cottages, stable blocks and walled gardens. By coincidence these areas may have a connection or resonance with some members of the local and wider community, whose family members and ancestors worked and lived there.
24. 3 Inside the house, the formal rooms have the greatest potential, always provided they are sufficiently large and the planned events are appropriate.
24. 4 Initiatives that encourage owners to engage with the public are welcome, as they increase the new appreciation of Ireland's historic houses that has been growing over the last two decades. The public wants greater access to heritage and to experience it in a greater variety of forms. There is no doubt that people are fascinated by houses that are still family homes, especially when they are still lived in by the descendants of the families who built them. Research undertaken by European Historic Houses has established that such houses are the single greatest attraction for tourists and travellers in the categories which are of greatest interest to tourism organisation.



24. 5 Owners cannot be expected to lose money by providing public access. They are happy to work with others but they need more flexible arrangements and a more comprehensive and effective system of supports. If this circle is squared, the present situation can readily be transformed. But the stakes are very high as the survival of a large part of Ireland's heritage in the 21st century is in the balance.
24. 6 A key part of any strategy involves assessing the different options, identifying and selecting pilot projects with real potential and a broad support base, supervising their development and overseeing their implementation.
24. 7 While many events and activities take place in the outdoors, they will always require an indoor base and the survey has demonstrated that a large multipurpose indoor space can be a useful investment. The need for space can provide an opportunity to restore and revitalise redundant stable-yards (often designed by important architects and very beautiful) and other estate buildings, giving them new purpose. While vibrant creative communities of artists and craft-workers seem the most appropriate use, creative enterprises may pay a more realistic rent.
24. 8 Unfortunately, difficulties with development control and funding remain an issue. Approval for conversion is seldom easy: one quite generous restoration scheme was based upon not converting stone outbuildings but returning them to agricultural use, despite the fact that some had not been fit for purpose since the 19th century. Ultimately, hard-pressed owners cannot be expected to increase their borrowings in order to rescue redundant buildings unless the planning process becomes less arduous, grants are increased, and they can expect a rental that will more than cover their repayment costs.
24. 9 The rapid rollout of rural broadband is essential for all future development and this cannot be over-emphasised. Without reliable broadband, proposed projects will be significantly hampered and the future of Ireland's heritage of historic houses and estates will be in jeopardy. Right across Europe, culturally active country houses act as hubs in their localities, encouraging people to live in the area and enhancing their quality of life, helping to regenerate the countryside and reversing the rural-to-urban trend. Ireland cannot benefit from this welcome development without reliable broadband.
24. 10 In addition, these key points – indeed the whole report – must be considered in the light, or shadow, of COVID-19.

**Part 25**

## The COVID-19 Pandemic

25. 1      Within this current year to date – and since the Survey that underpins this report was completed – all countries, governments, international and national organisations, institutions, corporations and individuals have had to come to terms with and try to find a way to cope with COVID-19 and its implications in every aspect of our collective and personal lives. HHI members are no exception, particularly where it comes to providing public access to what is by definition a private home, a particularly difficult conundrum.
25. 2      The Government, through the Revenue, has humanely and pragmatically recognised that it may not be possible to resolve that conundrum within the strictures of Section 482, at least for the current year.
25. 3      It is beyond the scope of this report or the capacity of HHI to predict what the COVID-19 situation next year will be like or really to plan for it in detail. No one could predict with certainty or universal acceptance what will happen next year with regard to the virus. However HHI is of the view it can clearly be said that more flexibility in the Section 482 requirements on the lines indicated above would enable and encourage more activity to take place at member properties even if COVID-19 is still so influential, and it would harness the ingenuity and goodwill of HHI members to make this happen.
25. 4      If and as restrictions and constraints drag on and economic downturn and its concomitant horrors take hold, access to and experiences of the sort of spaces our members hold are likely to be even more valuable to the wider community.
25. 5      Throughout Europe the new COVID-19 normality has obliged historic house owners to reappraise their situations. They must adjust to fewer numbers at any one time. Events will be smaller, and visits can only be booked in advance, but this creates the opportunity to develop a whole range of new products and provide a more intense and interesting experience. Thus, while there are many drawbacks to the current situation, there will be advantages and opportunities too.

25. 6 Most private owners now have an opportunity to make what is probably their greatest potential contribution out of doors. In the garden, where a garden still exists, but especially in their parks and demesnes, and in their woods and fields and meadows.
25. 7 The historic numbers-based approach to tourism can no longer apply. While no doubt some visitors will come from overseas, in future years at least, the real target audience will be the local and regional community, along with fellow Irish citizens on 'staycation' in the area. The challenge will be to find meaningful and manageable forms of access throughout the year, forms that respect the natural environment and biodiversity, farming practices, livestock and the owners' personal privacy, while providing an uplifting and invigorating experience.
25. 8 A number of possibilities and options have already been identified in this report, and many more will arise in the coming months and years. This new situation will require a new vision, a new infrastructure and a new level of oversight. Visitor programmes and experiences need to be carefully developed to meet changing social distancing and other protocols, and numbers will need to be controlled and managed carefully.
25. 9 If the all-year-round potential is to be fully developed, visitors will require a changing area, to don and remove their wet weather gear within easy reach of their cars. They will require efficient, new, easily maintained toilets, showers and other facilities with plenty of hot water and, ideally, somewhere to eat their sandwiches if food is not provided for sale. These facilities might be developed in redundant outbuildings, or low-cost new buildings – in the most attractive, convenient, efficient and manageable way – and this all comes at a cost.
25. 10 While many of the anticipated activities will generate revenue, this will not be sufficient to operate parks and demesnes at a profit, never mind meeting repayments on the cost of development. Thus, it is clear that the potential benefits cannot be realised without radical new thinking about how such projects are financed.
25. 11 Since local communities are the prime beneficiaries, ways must be found to access community funding schemes for:-
- i) Research and Development of projects
  - ii) Conversion of buildings
  - iii) Provision of facilities
  - iv) Essential staff
  - v) Ongoing Research & Development into new opportunities and practices

- 25. 12 Other potential sources of funding should also be sought and made available.
- 25. 13 All schemes should involve the use of volunteers, through the HHI Conservation Volunteer scheme.
- 25. 14 Joined up thinking must involve local and national heritage groups and bodies, Local Heritage Officers, Local Wildlife Officers and local school teachers. Involvement should be through their national representatives quickly filtering down to local level.
- 25. 15 Not all owners will wish to become involved, and this must be accepted. However, those that chose to become involved should receive a realistic level of payment in return for their participation.
- 25. 16 The important issues of liability and the potential to create rights of entry or access will need to be addressed.
- 25. 17 Communities must accept that community involvement does not mean community ownership. Access will take place under licence. Forms of access may change throughout the year, and will be curtailed completely at times, to facilitate farming activities, in severe weather conditions or for a variety of other reasons including public health concerns.
- 25. 18 How can we best seek CI's help to progress the above? HHI would like funding to be made available for the purpose of investigating and reporting on an appropriate way, from all points of view, of setting up and monitoring and controlling such a regime and on the types of activity at member properties and perhaps others such as those run by OPW which would be more robust in the face of an ongoing pandemic.











## Part 26

# Projects Overview

- 26. 1      Although HHI had a number of concepts in mind when submitting the initial proposal for this research initiative, the projects and workshops below were selected after a careful analysis of the results and in view of the evolving COVID-19 situation. The selection shows a balance between indoor & outdoor projects with a consistent theme of Lifelong Learning, creativity and wellness, all specially selected to involve older and younger people in a variety of active, interesting & innovative ways.
  
- 26. 2      When arranging training initiatives to implement these projects HHI proposes to adopt a coaching approach, developing a series of seminars and lectures that will lead to the creation of self-sustaining creative enterprises and activities with wide public and community support.
  
- 26. 3      Many of the chosen projects will be high-tech and online, and all will be based on current international best-practice and subjected to SWOT analyses. The security and health & safety aspects will be paramount, and will be considered in consultation with owners and their local communities, as too will the ‘end product’ to ensure the long-term goal of sustainability and viability.

## Project 1

# Behind the Hall Door

- P. 1.1 HHI has worked on this project for several years under its previous title, *Living Museums*. Action 5 (ii) of *An Action Plan for the Sustainable Future of the Irish Historic House in Private Ownership* commits to the development of “a *Living Museum* category to promote historic houses to a wide range of visitors, both local and international, in a variety of authentic and stimulating ways”.
- P. 1.2 HHI Members and other private owners will be encouraged to join the scheme, which will promote an innovative range of authentic heritage activities and events at participating houses under the *Behind the Hall Door* banner. When joining, participating owners will commit to holding and arranging a minimum number of qualifying events each year. These may take place indoors, in owners’ houses or in connected or associated buildings, outdoors in their gardens or parks, or elsewhere on their wider estates.
- P. 1.3 *Behind the Hall Door* events and activities will all fall under the broadest possible interpretation of ‘heritage’ ranging from cultural, historical and artistic events to those based on Ireland’s unique and fragile environmental heritage and biodiversity. They will focus on different age groups and varying interests, will meet exacting standards of authenticity and will further Creative Ireland’s aim of promoting the Lifelong Learning process.
- P. 1.4 Instead of attempting to boost visitor numbers, *Behind the Hall Door* will provide a greatly enhanced visitor experience and will encourage repeat visits. Events will allow the public, usually in small or medium sized groups, to engage with Ireland’s built, cultural and environmental heritage in a variety of different ways. Eligible events will include talks and lectures, often focusing on particular aspects of houses, contents and estates, or on historical subjects and topical events. They will include plays and literary events, operas, classical music concerts and recitals, small, topical, highly focused exhibitions and special courses for educational purposes or to teach specific creative skills.

- P. 1.5 Objects from the owners' collections, photographs, drawings and paintings by former owners or of the house and locality, drawings, interesting artefacts, books, documents, architectural plans – the list is endless – can be used to bring events alive. Many exhibitions will be accompanied by interpretive talks or lectures and two or more owners may hold joint exhibitions of complementary items from their collections. These can travel to houses in different regions, while musicians and actors will be encouraged to hold repeat performances at private houses in different regions on subsequent nights or over a very short period.
- P. 1.6 Eight or ten houses, all protected structures of at least regional interest, will initiate the *Behind the Hall Door* project and others will join the scheme over time. Many have good gardens and interesting family collections while their parks are all a haven for flora and fauna, and important centres of biodiversity.
- P. 1.7 Participating house owners will receive practical ongoing help and advice on running events, on the conservation of heritage items, on methods of display, on video projectors, screens, microphones and speaker systems. Perhaps more importantly, they will receive help with funding from the scheme's own resources and advice about obtaining funding from local authorities or initiatives, from local businesses and on other potential forms of support. Funding will become more accessible and available when *Behind the Hall Door* events are presented as part of a recognised, authentic, high-quality initiative, fully endorsed by the government and not arranged as private endeavours by individual house owners.
- P. 1.8 All events held under the *Behind the Hall Door* banner and brand will be promoted equally and widely, either on a dedicated sub-section of the HHI website, or on a new website. *Behind the Hall Door* will quickly develop as a recognised brand, thus inspiring visitor confidence and providing a high level of quality assurance. Irish citizens will choose to attend forthcoming *Behind the Hall Door* events in their localities, and can arrange to visit other regions for events that attract their interest, while overseas visitors can plan their Irish holidays around these events and activities.
- P. 1.9 Finally, it would be more appropriate to promote and display outdoor events under a variation of the *Behind the Hall Door* banner – *Beyond the Garden Gate*. The two schemes can work in tandem.
- P. 1.10 **Potential Partners**  
When implementing *Behind the Hall Door* project, HHI is particularly eager to work with the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates (CSHIHE) at Maynooth University, the National Museum of Ireland, the National Gallery of Ireland, the National Library of Ireland and the Office of Public Works.

## Project 2

# Gardens and Beyond the Garden Gate

- P. 2. 1 Although there is a great deal of potential, there may not be sufficient numbers in any of the above categories or groups to develop a whole walled garden initiative. However, when a small number of garden owners come together with a worthwhile concept, such as a series of open days or lectures, or an individual garden owner wishes to promote a worthwhile event, this can be initiated and promoted under *Beyond the Garden Gate* which will operate in tandem with the *Behind the Hall Door* initiative, as described above.
- P. 2. 2 A small number of historic house owners have well-tended walled gardens and several employ professional gardeners. Another small group of owners have entered into arrangements with commercial organic growers or community groups that use their walled gardens under license to produce fruit and vegetables for sale. In a small number of instances these gardens also provide instruction and training (for young children, school leavers, retirees and senior citizens, or for those with disabilities) while others provide allotments for their local communities. The survey shows that while there is a reasonable amount of garden activity, there is very little consistency and overall standards can be uneven.
- P. 2. 3 The majority of owners have redundant walled gardens which they would like put to creative use, and in some cases these same owners would like to do more with young people. The Vandeleur Walled Garden, at Kilrush in County Clare, is an example of a well-organised and supported community garden scheme but it was an expensive project and is costly to maintain. Meanwhile, a rather more instructive and educational community garden can be seen at the Walled Garden Project in rural Shropshire.  
See <http://www.vandeleurwalledgarden.ie/> and <http://www.walledgardenproject.org.uk/aboutus.html>
- P. 2. 4 Unfortunately, restoring walled gardens is a major challenge as the cost of annual maintenance is likely to exceed 25% of the initial restoration costs, and this can seldom be met by profits on the sale of produce. Ultimately, this means that walled garden restoration should only be contemplated by really well- funded and involved community development schemes, strongly supported by their local authorities, or by owners with very deep pockets.

- P. 2. 5 If Creative Ireland is minded to devote very substantial sums to initiatives of this type, HHI would be very willing to help identify potential gardens and give advice and support.
- P. 2. 6 There is potential for working with schools. Ideally children should learn the basics of vegetable growing during their primary school years but today most primary schools have developed their own gardens, where children can work on a daily basis during term time without the need to arrange special transport, although there may be a possibility of working with some of the progressive Educate Together schools. In most instances the most practical method of engagement with primary schoolchildren may be a day visit to a historic house and garden, where one module of the visit could include a talk on some practical aspects of gardening, specially developed for a young audience.
- P. 2. 7 There is greater scope for involvement in secondary level during transition year. Students could work alongside professional gardeners under the HHI Conservation Volunteer Scheme (see below) where their efforts could make a positive contribution towards their final school assessment or could become a recognised qualification for Gaisce. (Again, see below.)
- P. 2. 8 Third level students of gardening and related subjects could be offered temporary positions, which could count as a module towards their degrees or qualifications in a similar way.
- P. 2. 9 More active senior citizens can work in gardens as conservation volunteers, as already happens at Killruddery. While initiatives of this kind have been shown to reduce rural isolation and encourage community development, they also create significant extra work for, and place extra duties and responsibilities on, the owners and their staff. This can create a significant extra cost.
- P. 2. 10 The Walled Garden Company, <https://www.thewalledgardencompany.com/#> is an interesting initiative that converts redundant walled gardens at great houses into gardens of remembrance for family members. Today almost 25% of the Irish population is cremated, and numbers are increasing rapidly. In Ireland this scheme would only be viable at or near a large population centre.
- P. 2. 11 Some owners are very good gardeners, usually with a particular expertise, and a small number of others employ experienced professionals. While the number of such experts is not large, and they are unevenly spread throughout the country, they are in a position to give talks and lectures, both to fellow gardeners and to amateurs.



**P. 2. 12 Partners**

Festina Lente is a registered charity, based in the stable yard of the former Plunkett estate at Enniskerry in County Wicklow. It has restored the garden, which is now the largest working Victorian walled garden in Ireland, with 74 allotments and regular classes in horticulture and *Grow It Yourself*. One of Festina Lente's key aims is to combine activities for children and older people, thus spreading knowledge and combating isolation. Festina Lente's work has attracted funding from multiple sources. It is willing to assist HHI and perhaps even to take the lead on potential projects and initiatives.

**P. 2. 13 Funding**

The Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund 2017 Environmental Protection & Awareness promotes sustainable development by assisting small scale, non-profit environmental projects at local level. It supports community gardens and allotments, funds educational initiatives and is another potential source of funding that could be particularly suitable for community projects. It is hoped that this would attract support from the Creative Ireland programme.



### Project 3

## HHI Conservation Volunteers

- P. 3. 1 Our country houses, gardens and estates are unique and fragile elements of Ireland's heritage. Unless they are fully appreciated, and the challenges of their care and preservation are fully understood, they will not survive as a resource for future generations. In an effort to promote greater understanding between owners and the wider world, and to assist owners with conservation and presentation, Historic Houses of Ireland will introduce a new concept – The HHI Conservation Volunteer Programme – which will involve volunteers in all the elements of caring for a historic house, garden and estate.
- P. 3. 2 The HHI Conservation Volunteer Programme is particularly appropriate for:
- i) Small groups of schoolchildren
  - ii) Transition Year students
  - iii) Third-level and postgraduate students
  - iv) Active retirees
  - v) Individual members of local communities
- P. 3. 3 The project will facilitate new forms of involvement and interaction with:
- i) The wider Irish community
  - ii) Irish initiatives such as Gaisce
  - iii) Local communities and local schools
  - iv) The international community
- P. 3. 4 In return:
- i) Younger schoolchildren will learn about their immediate surroundings
  - ii) Students will receive accreditation while learning new techniques and skills
  - iii) Active retirees will learn new skills and benefit from a feeling of involvement
  - iv) Responsible adults will receive training as stewards and guides
- P. 3. 5 Volunteers from outside the region, or outside the country, require a reasonable standard of accommodation which not every house owner will be able to provide. In addition to meals they will require instruction, supervision and attention, in order to derive the greatest benefit from their experience. Their working conditions and terms of involvement must be established in advance and fully understood by all and this concept may not be suitable at all historic houses.

## Project 4

# Irish Creativity and Craftsmanship Exhibition

- P. 4. 1 As is shown above, historic country houses have been identified as Ireland's largest repository of Irish creative craftsmanship, and as centres of creative excellence in rural Ireland. In order to celebrate their importance, and to inspire present and future generations, it is proposed to hold an exhibition of items exclusively from HHI members' houses under the title *Creativity and Craftsmanship in Historic Irish Country Houses*.
- P. 4. 2 The exhibition will be subdivided into six separate strands:-
- i) items made by Irish artists, craftsmen or artisans
  - ii) items made by house owners and their families
  - iii) items made or adapted by employees, staff and local craftsmen, along with tools, uniforms and equipment used during their working lives
  - iv) personal possessions of important former owners; portraits or items relating to their work, their expertise, or to their careers
  - v) examples from craft industries and initiatives developed by house owners to generate employment for their local communities in former years
  - vi) Creativity and Craftsmanship, a contemporary view
- P. 4. 3 While a number of the items displayed will be of high value, this will certainly not apply across the board as the real aim is that every exhibit should be interesting, topical, personal and Irish. Only strand iv) may include items made overseas but the strand should prioritise Irish-made items wherever possible.
- P. 4. 4 Initially, the exhibition will be shown at a Dublin city centre venue and will then be moved to various regional venues in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, and perhaps also to Belfast. However, the real potential of this project is that it can also be moved to London, Brussels and to America if there is sufficient interest and the necessary supports are forthcoming.

## Project 5

### Gaisce

- P. 5. 1 HHI has held initial discussions with Gaisce to devise an Adventure Journey for Bronze and Silver Award participants. The initial proposal was similar to Gaisce's partnership with the Defence Forces ([www.gaisce.ie/gaisce-defence-forces-challenge-2020](http://www.gaisce.ie/gaisce-defence-forces-challenge-2020)) and would create a contrasting Adventure Journey for teenagers who are more attracted to heritage and prefer a less pressured approach.
- P. 5. 2 A potential pilot project was identified in Sligo where a cluster of neighbouring historic houses could work together. Gaisce would like to explore the potential for similar projects at other historic houses who are happy to involve responsible teenagers.
- P. 5. 3 Meanwhile, HHI is eager to explore the possibility of a partnership between Gaisce and the HHI Conservation Volunteer scheme. Gaisce has a 86% saturation rate in secondary schools across Ireland, with 25,000 school children participating in its programmes every year.
- P. 5. 4 **Partnership & Funding**  
Agreed schemes would be funded by Gaisce and promoted through its President's Award Leader (PAL) network, on social media and through PR.

## Project 6

# Forest and Garden Schools and Kindergartens

- P. 6. 1 Forest and Garden schools and kindergartens are an exciting new phenomenon with considerable scope for expansion and development.
- P. 6. 2 In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, private owners now have an opportunity to make what is probably their greatest potential contribution out of doors, especially in their gardens, parks and demesnes, and in their woods, fields and meadows, as this Report has identified in Section 25 and elsewhere.
- P. 6. 3 However it is unclear whether the commercial potential of Forest Schools has been affected by the pandemic. Will schools have to cater for fewer participants in order to ensure social distancing in future, and if so, will they still be able to operate as profitable enterprises? Will schools now have to open for more days in any given year in an effort to remain viable? Have the on-site infrastructural requirements, or the rules of thumb for distances from major centres of population, changed, and if so, in what way? Will public transport and social distancing issues mean that previously profitable venues and sites are no longer a paying proposition? These questions need to be answered and quantified.
- P. 6. 4 Perhaps more importantly, will the current operators be able to operate at a profit in future, or will they need support? And, if they do need support, how much support will they require, will it be forthcoming, reliably and in sufficient quantities, and, if so, from whom?
- P. 6. 5 HHI will not be in a position to recommend that house owners establish Forest Schools, or enter into arrangements with current operators or facilitators, until it has undertaken an extensive scoping exercise into the whole industry and has considered the results. The scoping exercise should also include an overview of international innovation and best practice in this sector, both in Ireland and overseas, to ensure that Irish Forest Schools are class leaders in their field.
- P. 6. 6 Once this project has been completed, and has provided clear and credible conclusions, HHI can disseminate the resulting information to its members in a series of Zoom mini-conferences, always assuming that the results and the answers are favourable.



## Project 7

# Naturally Creative

- P. 7.1 The survey by scoping the environmental potential of member estates has revealed that Ireland's historic country houses are surrounded by an extensive and diverse range of environmental assets. Owners have to balance their responsibilities towards flora, fauna and biodiversity, with their responsibilities to other elements of Ireland's heritage, while trying to remain financially solvent.
- P. 7.2 The purpose of this project is to examine parks and wider estates that surround historic country houses in greater depth, in order to identify both their "assets" and ways of realising the potential of them in a sensitive, responsible and sustainable way.
- P. 7.3 The project will examine a number (probably up to 10) of examples as pilot projects. They will be identified in different areas of the country, and will have willing owners and a wide range of different habitat types and environmental biodiversity.
- P. 7.4 The success of this project will depend on the establishment of a mechanism and a framework for co-operation between owners, National Parks and Wildlife, local Wildlife Officers and Local Authority Heritage Officers. (At present, contacts are arranged on an individual and ad hoc basis and are usually dependent on the presence and goodwill of interested individuals on the ground, who may have varying levels of knowledge and competence, and differing agendas.) Community groups and local schools should also be involved, alongside other recognised groups and bodies, where appropriate.
- P. 7.5 The project will begin by clearly identifying what environmental assets are present in the surroundings of member houses and which areas of them might sustainably be used for:-
- i) education, study and the protection of biodiversity & endangered species
  - ii) public and community access for relaxation and wellbeing, for walking, for other forms of informal light exercise by individuals and families, and as a visual amenity
  - iii) organised outdoor activities and events such as fairs, festivals, forest schools, fun events, outdoor work-shops, festivals, fairs and various sporting activities

- P. 7. 6 The project will then consider whether a combination of uses can exist side by side, simultaneously, at individual locations. Where multiple uses are contemplated, the project should consider when or whether it is appropriate to separate areas of environmental importance from areas of activity, and recommend how this may be done effectively, without creating fences or barriers, or erecting visually obtrusive signs. Effective and enforceable methods of restricting or controlling access - when appropriate - should also be considered.
- P. 7. 7 Then, with specific regard to P. 7. 5 i) above, the project will establish the different categories and levels of vulnerability of environmental heritage and biodiversity that:-
- i) can be seen and experienced with minimal restriction
  - ii) can only be seen and studied with supervision or
  - iii) that is so fragile and endangered that it must receive minimal disturbance and can only be studied by experts, or viewed under carefully controlled and monitored conditions.
- P. 7. 8 The project will to develop templates to:-
- i) help owners recognise and understand the different categories
  - ii) identify their importance regionally and nationally
  - iii) show how they can best be made available, used, studied or protected
- Point iii) above is especially important when a number of different habitats and potential options coexist in different areas of the park or estate.
- P. 7. 9 The project will make recommendations about how owners should be supported in return for their involvement and participation, and how their private lives, and those of their families, will continue to be respected and maintained.
- P. 7. 10 Finally, the project will be expanded to include many of the aims set out in paragraphs 25. 6 and 25. 18 above in the section of the report that deals with COVID-19. In particular it will make recommendations about the levels of infrastructure required in each instance, where this should be located, and how this can be established, funded and supported.
- P. 7. 11 The proposed project will create a methodology and framework for appropriate access and events that protect the fragile environment and biodiversity.

## Project 8

# Education

- P. 8. 1     The report concluded that historic country houses, along with their gardens and largely undisturbed parks, are uniquely able to offer a wide variety of all embracing, engaging and instructive educational experiences at a single location. Unfortunately, few owners have been able to develop ongoing, symbiotic relationships with local schools.
- P. 8. 2     In the small number of instances where ongoing relationships exist they are largely confined to primary or third levels, at opposite ends of the spectrum, despite the fact that this report has identified that the greatest potential for positive engagement occurs at secondary level, and particularly during transition year. For the most part, ongoing relationships with secondary level schools occur because of the particular interests or expertise of individual teachers, who are to be commended for thinking outside the box.
- P. 8. 3     The current situation, which is the waste of a precious resource and a lost opportunity for all, will not change until historic country houses are included and given appropriate weighting within the national curriculum. HHI seeks Creative Ireland's assistance in creating the opportunity to engage in direct negotiations with the Department of Education in this regard.
- P. 8. 4     Meanwhile, HHI seeks Creative Ireland's assistance with:-
- i)        clearly establishing the potential benefits for all parties by way of further, specific research
  - ii)       developing templates for educative experiences at historic houses
  - iii)      promoting the concept to schools
  - iv)       assisting historic houses to work with specific schools to develop specific experiences

**Project 9**

## Film and Photography

- P. 9. 1 Owners can derive immense benefit from images that show their houses and gardens in a new and positive light. Images play an important role in boosting their internet and social media presence, which means that the potential for a photographic project should be reviewed and considered in depth.
- P. 9. 2 A successful recent programme connected young people with a specific building and collection, and allowed them to present the past from their own particular viewpoint without damaging it or changing it in any way.
- P. 9. 3 It does not seem possible to expand this initiative to multiple houses in a manageable format, so it is proposed to engage the services of a competent and qualified expert, who will review the situation and produce a report, along with a concrete proposal for a new project.
- P. 9. 4 The potential for film and video will also be considered in the report. They are possibly an even greater challenge since buildings and interiors are notoriously difficult to film, especially by amateurs.
- P. 9. 5 Finally, the report will also consider the potential for using historic houses for film training, possibly in co-operation with certain local authorities that are encouraging the development of film training and skills.

## Part 27

# Workshops Overview

- 27. 1      It is anticipated that workshops are likely to take place by Zoom, for the foreseeable future at any rate, and should be repeated to meet demand or to provide appropriate information for a specific audience.
  
- 27. 2      Workshops will take varying times to arrange. Several will require a number of contributors to lead on the day, and these will be more complex to arrange and therefore more expensive, both initially and when repeated. Workshops on key topics should be repeated on a regional basis.



## Workshop 1

# Micro Festivals – Workshop

- W. 1. 1     There has been a great deal of interest in boutique ‘micro festivals’ in recent years and these have brought people in significant numbers to areas of Ireland that they might not otherwise have visited. In the normal course of events a ‘matchmaking’ workshop that introduced interested owners to expert professional festival organisers would be a high priority. Micro-festivals could generally be difficult to run in accordance with social distancing requirements but it should still be possible for small, socially distanced, events to take place under the *Behind the Hall Door* banner.
- W. 1. 2     A report should be commissioned on
- i)        The anticipated format of micro festivals in 2021, 2022 and beyond
  - ii)       The anticipated level of demand for micro festivals in those years
  - iii)      Essential requirements for houses and skills for owners
  - iv)       Whether micro festivals will still be viable for house owners
  - v)        Other key information
- W. 1 . 3     Assuming that the report is favourable, a Zoom conference or workshop should be prepared which would be capable of repetition if required to meet demand.

## Workshop 2

# Creative Hubs – Workshop

- W. 2. 1 Creative hubs have the capacity to play a really important role in rural regeneration by restoring small towns and villages as desirable residential and working clusters for artists and craftsmen, and thus countering the rural-urban trend. Artists' hubs are an excellent idea. It is a well-recognised phenomenon that when a number of talented artists work together in a close-knit environment (usually a working environment in a small country town or seaside fishing village) their productivity, and the quality of their work, increases exponentially. The Newlyn school in Cornwall is one well-known example. In the 1960s the State-sponsored Kilkenny Design Workshops encouraged designers and craftsmen to work in the disused stables of Kilkenny Castle and over the years their workshops spread into the outlying county. Not all survived and several craftsmen moved away to find success but today many of the remainder have established flourishing businesses with international reputations and Kilkenny is an important centre for craftsmanship and creative endeavour.
- W. 2. 2 The development of studio and co-working spaces at adjoining country houses could be actively and easily encouraged, provided the proper finances and supports are put in place. It should be remembered that the initial funding is only half the story, as projects of this kind require expert guidance and direction. They also require ongoing additional investment, until they become fully viable, which can take a surprisingly long time.
- W. 2. 3 Understandably, few owners are prepared to take the risk of supporting an artists' colony, and fewer still are in a financial position to do so. However, the survey has identified a small number of potential sites where hubs of this type are likely to flourish, provided there are sufficient state supports to take the project off the ground and maintain it at a very high standard for perhaps ten years.

W. 2. 4 Some potential hubs are:

- i) Bunclody and the village of Clonegal on the borders of Counties Carlow and Wexford
- ii) the towns of Baltimore, Castletownshend and Skibbereen and their neighbourhood in West Cork
- iii) the town of Stradbally in County Laois
- iv) the town of Birr in County Offaly
- v) the neighbouring towns of Cappoquin and Lismore in County Waterford

W. 2. 5 This important initiative will depend on the availability of a wide range of support options and opportunities for its success. The stakes are extremely high but the potential rewards and benefits are far higher, and the success of the Kilkenny Design Workshops should be borne in mind. That project cost a great deal of money over a long number of years but it delivered outstanding results.

W. 2. 6 The starting point would be a report from an appropriate expert or experts to form a basis and set the agenda for a workshop for potential candidate hub hosts, partners and interested parties.

W. 2. 7 **Potential Partners**

Creative Ireland, Local Authorities, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), The Arts Council, The Crafts Council, The European Commission, The Ireland Fund and Big Business.

### Workshop 3

## Funding and Supports – Workshop

- W. 3. 1 It is seldom understood that those who own and care for Ireland’s heritage assets are often under financial pressure and many are stretched almost to the limit. While the projects recommended by this report are excellent they can only be undertaken when they are fully supported and can be maintained for as long as it takes for them to become properly established and self-sustaining.
- W. 3. 2 Many valuable creative enterprises and initiatives fail to reach fruition because private owners are unable to avail of grants, supports and other funding opportunities. In consequence, private owners are placed at a disadvantage, Ireland’s heritage is put at an increased risk and the public is denied a number of worthwhile and interesting opportunities.
- W. 3. 3 In an effort to redress this imbalance, workshops are proposed to help owners understand how to place themselves in a position where they can avail of grants, support schemes, funding initiatives and advice. The workshops will cover how to work with other houses, either in the locality or in other regions, with local community groups and bodies, with the local authority and local enterprise bodies, and with other groups and bodies, and will explain how to encourage the development of local community groups where these do not exist.

## Workshop 4

# New Uses for Redundant Buildings – Workshop

- W. 4. 1     The survey has shown that many houses have redundant spaces, some in reasonable condition, others dilapidated or even ruinous. The list includes gate lodges, cottages, stable-yards, redundant farm and garden buildings, and follies, all of which have potential for creative use and many of which are protected structures.
- W. 4. 2     The present system of grants is not always a suitable method for bringing these redundant buildings into creative use, or indeed into any viable form of use that could help their owners achieve sustainability. Some grant schemes require that restored buildings be returned to their former purposes, even though those purposes may not have existed for the past fifty years, while others require owners to lay out capital that they simply do not have at their disposal.
- W. 4. 3     Creative Ireland could play an important role in rectifying this anomaly by meeting with the HHI, with the grant-giving organisations and the representatives of local authorities and local interests, and by helping to resolve this difficult situation.
- W. 4. 4     A successful conclusion should be followed up by a series of workshops that consider the issues and explain how owners should proceed.



## Workshop 5

### Zoom – Workshop

- W. 5. 1     During the current pandemic we have all been forced to rely on Zoom, yet few house owners have the necessary skills to derive the best results from this exciting new communications medium. A Zoom workshop would be of huge assistance in teaching new skills, and in improving and honing the skills of those who already use Zoom so that they receive a far higher level of proficiency, improve their communications and showcase their houses to best advantage.

## Workshop 6

### Photography – Workshop

- W. 6. 1     Owners and their families are on hand throughout the year and are in the best position to take photographs at the correct time or occasions yet few have sufficient training or skills to achieve the optimum result. While it will not be possible to bring all house owners up to professional standards it is still possible to demonstrate a number of basic rules, techniques and skills that will improve their results exponentially.
- W. 6. 2     The possibility of Workshops on the use of Webcams should also be explored at a later date.

**Part 28**

## Events and Activities Encouraged by HHI

Members are encouraged to participate in the following events:-

**28. 1      National Drawing Day**

This is a very straightforward annual event initiated by the National Gallery. Lismore Castle and Killruddery already participate by opening their gardens and estates for drawing workshops.

**28. 2      Heritage In Schools**

This project is excellent. It is largely devoted to biodiversity and the environment, and includes programmes at Tullynally Castle and Killedmond. However the obvious potential for co-operation between the owners of historic houses and schools will never become fully effective until the Department of Education recognises that historic houses and demesnes are an untapped educational resource, and gives them a place and a status in the national curriculum. See [www.heritageinschools.ie/](http://www.heritageinschools.ie/)

**28. 3      Cruinniú na nÓg**

Ireland was the first country to establish a free national day of creativity for children. <https://cruinniu.creativeireland.gov.ie> This annual event for everyone under the age of 18 was inaugurated two years ago by Creative Ireland and is increasing in popularity each year. HHI intends to encourage wide participation in 2021.

## Part 29

## Statistics from the Survey

FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT	ACTUAL/ PRESENT	INTERESTED/ ATTRACTED	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
Visitors or Tourism	86%	4%	90%
Accommodation	62%	14%	76%
Local Community	73%	16%	89%
Children	47%	16%	63%
Education and Training	62%	14%	76%
Culture and the Arts	63%	27%	90%
Creative Enterprises	5%	56%	61%
Concerts and Performances	43%	16%	59%
Courses, Lectures Seminars	50%	23%	73%
Micro Festivals	16%	29%	45%
Fairs	10%	12%	22%
Food Events	24%	30%	54%
Leisure Activities	23%	26%	49%
Wellness Activities	24%	32%	56%
Conducted Farm Walks	39%	10%	49%
Walks and Looped Walks			59%
Outdoor Music Festivals	14%	5%	19%
Outdoor Theatre	18%	21%	39%
Outdoor Workshops	18%	45%	63%
Glamping	7%	11%	18%

SEASONAL OPEN DATES	ACTUAL/ PRESENT	INTERESTED/ ATTRACTED	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
Section 482 Dates	59%	12%	71%
Additional Times by Appointment	17%		17%
Open All Year Round	23%		23%

SPARE INDOOR CAPACITY	AT PRESENT	POTENTIALLY AVAILABLE	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
Formal Reception Rooms	53%	7%	60%
Lesser Rooms	19%	19%	38%
Studio Spaces	12%	27%	39%
Galleries	12%	5%	17%
Exhibition Spaces	27%	12%	39%
Rooms For Performances	58%	14%	72%
Rooms Suitable For Seminars	51%	22%	73%
Displays From Collections	20%	13%	33%
Archives and Museums	20%	13%	33%
Kitchens, Basement & Offices	11%	20%	31%
Barns And Outbuildings	27%	35%	62%

SPARE OUTDOOR CAPACITY	AT PRESENT	MAINTAINED	POTENTIAL
Gardens	87%	77%	87%
Walled Gardens	86%	50%	86%
Parks	92%		92%

OTHER ATTRACTIONS	
Additional Protected Structures	64%
Lakes or Rivers	78%
Raised Bog or Wetlands	31%
Rare or Specimen Trees	77%
Rare Flora	50%
Migratory Birds	85%
Special Areas of Conservation	36%
Traditional Country Sports	40%
Game Fishing	30%
Coarse Fishing	16%

ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN	AT PRESENT	POTENTIALLY INTERESTED	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
Scouts	14%	12%	26%
Pony Club	9%		9%
Team Activities	16%	4%	20%
Summer Camps	16%	1%	17%
Cruinniú na nÓg	0%	53%	53%

ENGAGE WITH EDUCATION	AT PRESENT	POTENTIALLY INTERESTED	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
Primary Schools	51%	15%	66%
Secondary Schools	16%	11%	27%
Transition Year and Gaisce	14%	33%	47%
Third Level	20%	15%	35%
Heritage in Schools	3%	59%	62%
Creative Schools	0%	53%	53%

ENGAGE WITH SENIOR CITIZENS	AT PRESENT	POTENTIALLY INTERESTED	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
Activities in House	32%	11%	43%
Activities in Garden	34%	3%	37%

IMPORTANT STATISTICS	
Reliable Broadband	44%
Concerns About Viability	67%
Engage in Farming	67%
Engage in Forestry	55%

CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS	INTEREST	INFORMATION NEEDED	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
	61%	39%	100%



CO-OPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	IN CONTACT	INTEND TO CONTACT	POTENTIAL
House Owners in Same County	42%	23%	65%
House Owners in Other Counties	23%	19%	42%
Retirement Groups	23%	9%	32%
Cultural and Musical Groups	34%	12%	46%
Special Interest Groups	54%	15%	69%

CONTACTS OR CO-OPERATION WITH	IN CONTACT	INTEND TO CONTACT	TOTAL/ POTENTIAL
Local Heritage Officers	53%	15%	60%
Local Tourism Initiatives	46%	9%	55%
Local Enterprise Offices	26%	24%	50%
Solas or Equivalent	14%	14%	28%
Local Business Groups	34%	7%	61%

GRANTS & FUNDING	APPLIED	SUCCESS RATE
Restoration Grants	56%	76%
Grants for Change of Use	21%	37%
Arts And Activities	8%	66%

COACH ACCESS	52 SEAT COACH	32 SEAT COACH	NONE
	46%	86%	14%

CAR PARKING - HARD STANDING	100 cars	50 cars	30 cars
	8%	32%	96%

FILM LOCATIONS	OPERATIONAL	POTENTIAL	UNAVAILABLE
	47%	44%	9%

**Part 30**

## Appendices

**Appendix A****Architects who worked at HHI Members' Houses - a representative selection**

1. John Aheron - Stradbally Hall
2. George Ashlin - Lough Cutra Castle
3. William Atkinson - Lismore Castle
4. R.S.Balfour - Hollybrook
5. Francis Bindon - Castle Blunden, Coopershill (both attributed)
6. Francis William Caldbeck - Moyglare House
7. Richard Castle - Ledwithstown, Whitewood
8. Nathaniel Clements - attributed - Hamwood, Lodge Park
9. Frederick Pepys Cockerell - Clonalis House
10. Thomas Cooley - Rokeby Hall
11. John Curle - Beaulieu
12. Frederick Darley - Killedmond
13. Whitmore Davis - Charleville, Harristown
14. Abraham Denny - Tourin
15. Sir Thomas Drew - Coolcarrigan
16. Davis Ducart - Kilshannig
17. William Farrell - Ballykilcavan, Coravahan
18. James Franklin Fuller - Annaghmore, Harristown
19. William Hague - Hilton Park
20. Abraham Hargreaves - Cappoquin (attributed)
21. Francis Johnson - Tullynally Castle, Rokeby Hall
22. James Jones - Hilton Park
23. Sir Thomas Lanyon - Blarney House, Stradbally Hall
24. Lanyon, Lynn and Lanyon - Stradbally Hall
25. James Lewis - Lough Cutra

26. Sir Edwin Lutyens - Lambay Castle
27. John McCurdy - Harristown
28. Alexander McLeish, Lisnabin (house and garden)
29. Christopher Meyers - Blarney Castle
30. Sir Richard Morrison - Borris House, Tullynally Castle, Tullanisk
31. William Vitruvius Morrison - Borris House, Killruddery
32. John Nash - Lough Cutra Castle
33. James and George Richard Pain - Castlegarde, Fortwilliam, Loughton
34. Joseph Paxton - Lismore Castle
35. Sir Edward Lovett Pearce - Altidore - attributed
36. Richard Orpen - Cappoquin
37. Samuel Wilson Reside - Beaulieu
38. John Roberts - Curraghmore, Enniscoe
39. Samuel Ussher Roberts - Curraghmore
40. Daniel Robertson - Ballinkeelee, Lisnavagh
41. Manning Durdin-Robertson - Huntington Castle
42. William Robertson - Kilrush, Lismacue
43. John Rothery - Mount Ievers
44. Isaac Rothery - Mount Ievers
45. James Sheils - Tullynally Castle
46. Thomas Smith - Barmeath Castle
47. Sandham Symes - Glenville Park
48. William Tinsley - Curraghmore, Lakefield
49. Welland and Gillespie - Lorum Rectory
50. Thomas Wright of Durham - Barmeath
51. James Wyatt - Curraghmore

## **Appendix B**

### **Professional Garden Designers and Gardeners**

A representative selection of those who worked at HHI Members' houses

1. 'Mr. Armour of Dublin' - Stradbally Hall
2. William Burn - Killruddery
3. James Frazer - Loughton, Curraghmore
4. James Howe - Castle Leslie, Temple House
5. Sir Edwin Luytens - Lambay
6. Ninian Niven - Hilton Park
7. Daniel Robertson - Killruddery
8. William Robinson - Ballykilcavan

## Appendix C

### Examples of items by Irish Artists and Craftsmen:

#### Images of all types:

- Landscapes, genre paintings, portraits, still lives -  
in oil, in crayon or gouache
- Miniatures and silhouettes
- Watercolours of all types
- Drawings and sketches
- Architectural drawings and maps

Manuscripts and documents of Irish interest

Book-bindings

Furniture by Irish cabinetmakers and craftsmen

Silver by Irish silversmiths

Irish delft, pottery and ceramics

Irish glass

#### Irish textiles:

- Linen
- Silk and poplin
- Lace
- Tweed and woollen items
- Costume and couture

Musical instruments

Sporting Equipment

## Appendix D

### Examples of Items created by owners:

Paintings and drawings – of all sorts

Sketchbooks

Photographs, photograph albums and photographic paraphernalia

Published books or manuscripts

Pottery and ceramics

Hand-painted china

Samples of carpentry

Carved wooden items

Textiles:

Items of clothing

Bedding and bedspreads

Tablecloths and napkins

Lace

Knitted or crocheted items

Embroidery, petit point etc.,

Natural specimens:

Birds eggs

Stuffed birds

Sporting trophies

Butterflies and moths

Taxidermy

Geological specimens and fossils



## Appendix E

### Examples of Items made, repaired or adapted by staff or employees:

#### Furniture:

- Tables - of all possible kinds
- Benches, chairs and seats
- Wardrobes and cupboards
- Bookcases and shelves
- Boxes for logs and turf
- Chests and Ottomans
- Stands and easels

#### Objects of treen:

- Bowls
- Lampstands
- Trays and stands
- Wooden spoons
- Small boxes

#### Garden equipment:

- Rakes
- Barrows and carts
- Garden seats
- Racks for storing fruit

Materials and textiles:

Clothes

Night clothes

Baby's and children's clothes

Mourning clothes

Aprons and overalls

Bedspread

Items worn by staff or employees:

Uniforms

Livery buttons

Items used by staff or employees at work:

Kitchen items and equipment

Private house receipt books - with own recipes and patent medicines

Sewing equipment

Laundry equipment

Garden equipment

Early farm equipment

## Appendix F -

### Provisions relevant to Historic Buildings

- F. 1 Generally speaking the most important Irish monuments and buildings dating from before 1700 have long enjoyed official protection (see National Monuments and Monuments and Places, below). Important buildings of more recent date are given protection under the Planning and Development Act 2000. Part IV of the Act introduced the concept of protected structures, along with measures for their protection.
- F. 2 **Protected Structures**
- F. 2. 1 A protected structure is a building of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical viewpoint and is protected under the Act. The houses of HHI members are protected structures.
- F. 2. 2 There are between 40 and 50,000 protected structures in the country. The majority are in private ownership but others are institutional buildings, schools, commercial and industrial premises and hotels. Each local authority maintains a list of the protected structures in its area. Every building on the list has been surveyed by the local authority, or by an agent acting on its behalf, who made a photographic record and completed a written assessment about its quality or importance.
- F. 2. 3 The level of detail in these assessments varies greatly. In the case of terraces in towns, where a high proportion of protected structures have been in multiple occupancy, or are in commercial use, there may be little of significance remaining in their interiors. While this is a common state of affairs in an urban context it is relatively unusual in HHI members houses, where the interiors still tend to include many more elements of historic or architectural interest which are likely to be subject to protection.
- F. 3 **Obtaining a Declaration**
- F. 3.1 In some cases an owner and a local authority may have agreed a Declaration, identifying areas of a building to which work may be done without specific planning approval.

#### F. 4 **Determinations under Section 482**

- F. 4. 1 Houses that have received a Determination under Section 482 of the 1997 Taxes Consolidation act have been examined by an OPW historic buildings expert who has decided that they are buildings of at least regional, and in many cases of national importance. The houses of many HHI members have been granted Determinations though approximately 40% of those who could participate in the incentive do not do so for a variety of reasons.

#### F. 5 **National Monuments**

- F. 5. 1 The State is responsible for the conservation of almost 1,000 National Monuments. These buildings are considered the most important examples of Ireland's built heritage and, with a small number of exceptions, were built before 1700.
- F. 5. 2 The majority of National Monuments are in state ownership but some are protected and maintained under an arrangement known as 'guardianship'. All are accessible to the public, although a majority can only be reached by passing over private land.
- F. 5. 3 There can be anomalies in the system. For instance, the late 18th century Casino at Marino, a highly accomplished architectural folly in the grounds of a long-demolished 18th century house, has been a National Monument for more than fifty years.
- F. 5. 4 Meanwhile, Castletown House, dating from the first quarter of the 18th century and perhaps the most important and architecturally influential house in the country, is a protected structure while the associated Conolly Folly, which dates from about 1740, is a National Monument.

#### F. 6 **Monuments and Places**

- F. 6. 1 Each local authority also keeps a very extensive Record of Monuments and Places, with a combined and increasing total of several hundred thousand lesser buildings, structures and places throughout the country. Many of these, perhaps the majority, date from the period between the Neolithic and Iron Ages and in some cases their remains are fragmentary and difficult to recognise or interpret. Others are partial remains of early monastic sites or mediaeval settlements while another group are early churches, castles, tower houses and seventeenth century strong-houses, many of which are structurally unsafe. These buildings stand on private land and the public has no right of access, although in certain instances permission to visit may be obtained upon request.
- F. 6. 2 Structures listed in the Record of Monuments and Places cannot be removed or altered without the permission and agreement of the National Monuments Service, which operates under the National Monuments Act.

## Appendix G

### Environmental Protection

- G. 1 The laws that protect Ireland's natural environment were introduced as part of Natura 2000, an integrated system of nature protection areas that have been established throughout the European Union. The measure covers some 18% of the EU's land area and more than 8% of its marine territory, and is the world's largest coordinated and interconnected network of environmentally important or sensitive areas and sites.
- G. 2 Natura 2000 is a network of core breeding and roosting sites for rare and threatened species, which are listed under the Birds Directive, along with a number of rare and protected natural habitat types which are regulated by the Habitats Directive. It aims to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.
- G. 3 Although Natura 2000 includes some strictly protected nature reserves, human activities are not excluded and most of the land involved is privately owned. The approach is one of conservation and sustainable use, and focusses on the concept of people working with nature rather than against it, but Member States are responsible for ensuring that sites are managed in a sustainable manner, both ecologically and economically.
- G. 4 Each Member State identifies its own sites but the selection procedure varies depending on whether a site is created under the Birds Directive or the Habitats Directive.
- G. 5 **Special Protection Areas**
- G. 5. 1 Ireland selects Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive according to specific criteria. Once the European Commission has determined that the chosen sites are sufficient to form a coherent network for the protection of vulnerable or migratory species, they become an integral part of the Natura 2000 network.
- G. 5. 2 For example, land owned by a number of HHI members along the River Blackwater in County Waterford forms part of a Special Protection Area and is recognised as a 'wetland of international importance for migratory wildfowl'.

**G. 6      Special Areas of Conservation**

- G. 6. 1      The selection of sites under the Habitats Directive is rather more complex. Initially each Member State undertakes a comprehensive audit and assessment of the habitat types and species that are present in their territory. It then submits a list of proposed Sites of Community Importance (pSCIs) to the European Commission, which subjects the proposals to extensive scrutiny and analysis.
- G. 6. 2      Once examination of the list of proposed sites has concluded, and qualifying sites have been adopted as Sites of Community Importance, the Member State must designate them as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within six years. SCI lists are updated by the Commission annually, to ensure that proposed new sites are given legal status.
- G. 6. 3      The survey has shown that 37% of HHI members own land that forms part (and in certain cases a major part) of an SAC. Owners of an Irish SAC can receive some payment by operating under the REPs scheme, or by participating in a management scheme organised by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

**G. 7      General Wildlife Protection**

- G. 7. 1      Animals such as bats and pine martens, and certain wild birds and raptors have a more general protection that is unrelated to specific areas or sites. It is illegal to kill protected species, or to disturb their roosts or habitat in any way.
- G. 7. 2      Other species, such as deer, game and certain other wild birds, may be culled or shot during specific and carefully regulated open seasons.



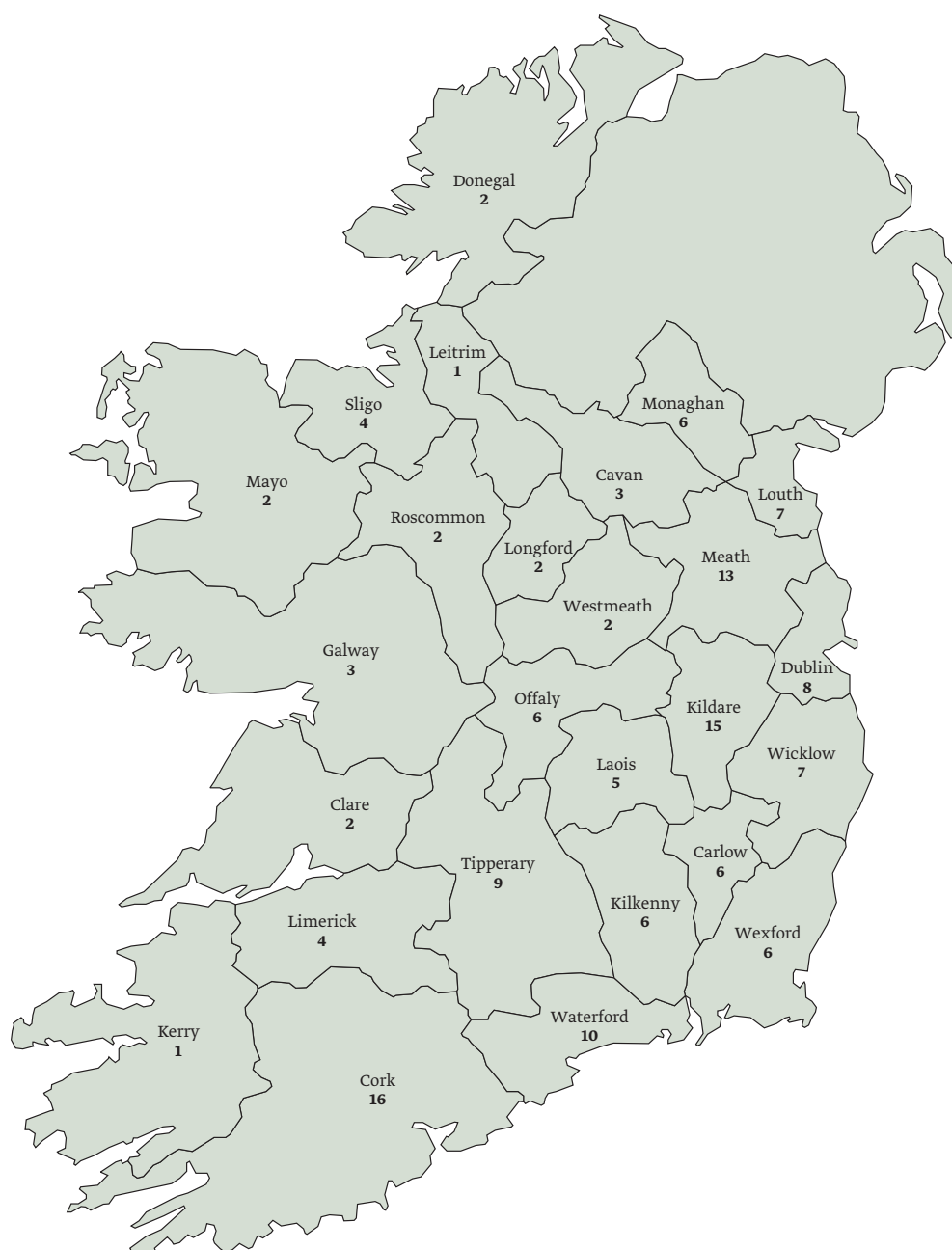
## Appendix H

### Ancient Meadows

- H. 1      Many of the parks and demesnes that surround Ireland's country houses have never been ploughed or tilled, and today they can be described as ancient meadows. Over the centuries these areas were grazed in spring and autumn, and cut for hay or, more recently, silage, in summer. The use of chemicals or fertilisers has been minimal (and in some cases completely absent) while soil disturbance or compaction were rare, which means that today they support a rich and vibrant biodiversity that other grasslands lack.
- H. 2      Ancient meadows are home to a wide variety of flowers, herbs and grasses, including many rare native species, which in turn support an equally wide diversity of animals, birds and insect life. They are the perfect environment for children to learn about nature and the urgent need to ensure its protection.

## Appendix I

### Distribution of HHI Member Houses by County



Information on many member houses including contact details can be found on the HHI website [www.ihh.ie](http://www.ihh.ie). Other member houses may be contacted via the HHI administrator (see website).



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