

# New Study Shows increased Public Concern for Heritage Protection

A new study on the value people in Ireland place on heritage shows that the public are becoming increasingly concerned about the need to safeguard our heritage. The vast majority of those surveyed agree that new measures and increased funding should be put in place as they are becoming increasingly concerned about the effect of development on our national heritage.

Commenting at the launch of the study Michael Starrett, Chief Executive of the Heritage Council said,

*“this research shows a huge growth in public support and awareness for safeguarding and protecting our heritage. It also shows that people are willing to pay to safeguard heritage and that protecting heritage ranked 5th in line for public spending after health and ahead of roads or the arts ”.*

The in-depth study is the largest of its kind to take place in Ireland and was carried out for the Heritage Council by Lansdowne Market Research in conjunction with Keith Simpson Associates and Optimize. The study builds on previous surveys on public opinion carried out for the Heritage Council from 1999 to 2004. It shows a strong growth in people’s attitudes and concern about safeguarding and protecting our heritage with over 92% of those surveyed agreeing that it is important to protect our heritage while 92% think that people should be penalised for damaging heritage (up from 51% in 1999). Ninety per cent are proud of our heritage (up from 83% in 1999) and 85% agree that the Government should offer more incentives to protect heritage (up from 76% in 1999).

Personal health is a key motivation for people’s desire to enhance the protection of heritage and the environment. However, this motivation is combined with a social awareness of significant threats to the environment and a concern for future generations. The top reasons people have as to why heritage should be protected include:

- **Personal health – 68%** of people agree that protecting our natural heritage for walks, enjoyment and recreation is vital for health protection
- **Threats to the environment – 65%** agree that safeguarding water quality and biodiversity is vital for our environment
- **Concern for future generations – 52%**
- **General interest in Ireland’s history and culture – 47%**
- **General interest in Ireland’s wildlife – 40%**

The study was carried out over the past year on representative samples of 1000 adults aged from 15-65 years. It includes an internationally tested process to examine if growth in public support and awareness can be translated into a public willingness to pay for heritage protection. This part of the study found a general acceptance that heritage protection is everyone’s responsibility and that public

taxation should be a key source of funding its protection. Additional public spending on heritage protection was supported by 68% of respondents to the survey. People's willingness to pay for this additional protection averages an extra €47 per taxpayer per annum, a figure that amounts to a total of €90 million in additional funding. Familiarity with heritage, obtained through recreation, site visits or general awareness, are growing and significant factors in people's support for heritage expenditure.

By encouraging interviewees to trade-off alternative priorities for additional heritage expenditure, the study revealed areas for which additional spending was most thought to be needed. Five main priorities were identified as:

- **29% Inland waterways – restoration of rivers, canals, lakes and associated facilities for amenity**
- **22% Improving coastal landscapes and associated amenity**
- **12.3% Protecting and improving habitats for wildlife**
- **10% Improved heritage education programmes in schools**
- **9% Rural Landscapes**

As part of the study in-depth analysis was carried out on the value of protecting heritage. Concern about the impact of property development on heritage and the environment has increased significantly. The nature of development in rural communities was a great concern with many respondents feeling that villages are losing their original character. While 58% agree that protection should not interfere with necessary infrastructure (up from 53% in 2004), many agree that as a nation we have not always been very good at protecting our heritage. While heritage preservation may have been perceived as a low priority in the past, in today's affluent, confident Ireland, heritage protection engenders national and local pride.

It was agreed by almost all participants in the study that progress and some change is inevitable and that heritage protection should not significantly impede the nation's progress - but that the pursuit of progress must respect the nation's heritage. A key conclusion of the study was that there is a need to encourage a more comprehensive relationship between citizens and heritage that will allow the overall value placed on heritage to be realised in terms of benefits to health and well-being as well as to the economy and employment.

### ***1. How is Heritage (2) Defined by the Public?***

The definition of heritage varies according to the level of individual contact and age. Younger people (primary school and teenage cohorts) tend to associate heritage with anything "old" or historical. All respondents except the primary school pupils understood heritage to include the natural environment. Indeed historic places and surprisingly, sports were often included in the definition of heritage. The young to middle-aged (25-45) cohort most closely identified heritage with local and national identity. For those aged 50+, heritage is associated with cultural and social changes, and particularly the loss of "the way things were".

(2)“Heritage” is defined in the Glossary of Terms in Appendix C. Please note that throughout the quantitative study, ‘heritage’ is frequently referenced as ‘natural environment and heritage’.

**Heritage** This term includes the built and natural assets of Ireland (both tangible and intangible), including its national heritage, monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens and parks and inland waterways (as defined in the Heritage Act, 1995)

## **VALUING HERITAGE IN IRELAND**

*A report by Keith Simpson and Associates, Lansdowne Market Research, Optimize Consultants, and the Heritage Council.*

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### **Date**

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**[http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/news/heritage\\_protection.html](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/news/heritage_protection.html)**