

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHULTÚR, OIHDREACT AGUS GAELTACHT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, HERITAGE AND THE GAELTACHT

Dé Céadaoin, 14 Samhain 2018

Wednesday, 14 November 2018

The Joint Committee met at 1.30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Michael Collins,	Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell,
Deputy Danny Healy-Rae,	Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin,
Deputy Martin Heydon,	Senator Fintan Warfield.

DEPUTY AENGUS Ó SNODAIGH IN THE CHAIR.

Heritage Council Strategy 2018-2022: Discussion

Chairman: Tá ceithre chomhalta i láthair mar is gnáth, Teachtaí Dála agus Seanadóirí san áireamh, mar sin, is féidir linn tús a chur leis an gcruinniú. We are in public session. Táimid i seisiún poiblí. Comhairlím ar chomhaltaí a ngutháin phóca a mhúchadh ionas nach gcuireann siad isteach ar an gcóras fuaime agus craolacháin ag an gcruinniú. Can everybody please switch off their mobile phones so that they do not interfere with the sound system and the broadcasting of the meeting.

Inniu, déanfaimid plé ar Straitéis na Comhairle Oidhreachta 2018-2022, today we will discuss with the officials from the Heritage Council and from the local authority heritage officer network the Heritage Council Strategy 2018-2022.

We will suspend now to allow the witnesses to come in to the meeting.

Sitting suspended at 1.44 p. m. and resumed at 1.45 p.m.

Chairman: Dia daoibh agus cuirim fáilte roimh na haíonna go léir atá os ár gcomhair inniu. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Uasal Michael Starrett, chief executive agus Ms Marie Bourke, board member and Dr. Helene O’Keefe, iad go léir ón gComhairle Oidhreachta agus Ms Shirley Clerkin agus an Dr. Joseph Gallagher from the Local Authority Heritage Officers Network.

Sula dtosóimid meabhraím do na daoine atá os ár gcomhair an rud seo faoi phribhléid agus caithfidh mé é a léamh amach nuair a thagann aon duine os comhair coiste chun a bheith cinnte go dtuigeann siad rialacha an choiste. Before I ask the witnesses to address the meeting I wish to draw to their attention to the fact that by virtue by virtue of section 17(2)(I) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I wish to also advise witnesses that the opening statement or any other documents submitted to the committee may be published on the committee website after this meeting. Members are reminded of long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that members should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses, or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

To commence our discussions iarraim anois ar an Uasal Starrett an méid atá le rá aige a chur inár láthair.

Mr. Michael Starrett: My thanks to the Chairman and to the members for this invitation to make this presentation. It is always a privilege to come back and speak on behalf of the Heritage Council. Dr. Marie Bourke, who is a Heritage Council member since 2016, is a member of the council’s strategy group which developed the strategy document that we will be discussing with members, joins me as does Dr. Helene O’Keefe, the Heritage Council’s head of education and communication.

The timing of the presentation on the council’s new strategy is very appropriate. It comes almost exactly 12 months after the chairman of the Heritage Council, Michael Parsons, ap-

peared before this committee prior to his confirmation as chairman. On that occasion the chairman outlined his vision for the future of the organisation and this strategy is now the logical progression of that. His vision was seen through his own community-based experiences, particularly his commitment to education at a national level as an active member of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, NAPD.

It is also very pertinent at this point to be very clear with members that the choice of moniker or name of our new strategy: Heritage at the Heart, is very significant. The chairman of the council in his opening remarks to the strategy emphasises the Heritage Council's strategic vision is to see heritage at the heart of Irish society and I will come to the definition of heritage so that the committee will understand where the council is coming from in that.

It is important that the committee is aware that in working to secure its vision the chairman of the council also acknowledges the role of the many partners with which the council works, partners particularly but not exclusively within the heritage community. As the committee is aware, the council is but one small agency within that community; therefore, such a partnership approach is not only desirable but also essential if it is to carry out its responsibilities under the Heritage Act 1995, as amended in the Heritage Act 2018.

In the context of partnership, I am absolutely delighted that the committee will also hear today from the chairperson of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Network. Local authorities have always been identified as key partners of the council as a small agency reaching out to communities. The partnership between the Heritage Council and the local authorities that has led to 28 local authorities employing heritage officers can be considered to be a jewel in the crown of everything the council has achieved in the 20 short years since it was established. Other initiatives such as Museum Standards Programme Ireland and the National Biodiversity Data Centre are built on policy proposals developed by the council. It has to be said - I hope members fully appreciate this - that they have become essential parts of national heritage infrastructure. This serves the people of Ireland and assures quality and excellence in Oireachtas decision-making, our policy proposals and the use of that information as an educational tool.

As legislators, I do not have to remind committee members that all of our work derives from the Heritage Act 1995 which established the Heritage Council as a body corporate. The council has 11 members who are represented today by Dr. Marie Bourke. A key function of the council under the Act is proposing policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage. Members of the committee are asked to note that the Heritage Council, therefore, enjoys responsibilities for both natural and cultural heritage. All of its work seeks to integrate the relationships between people and place and between nature and culture. As amended by the 2018 Act which I note took a long time to deliver, the council has a particular responsibility which I wish to emphasise to the committee. It is to co-operate with, engage with, advise and support public authorities, local communities and persons on the functions of the council.

I ask members to note the reference to local communities. The reference to local communities was one of the key and substantive amendments made to the Heritage Act 1995 in 2018. No such specific reference to our work with communities was included in the 1995 Act and the change reflects the fact that carrying out our tasks would not be possible without the support of the communities Oireachtas Members are elected to serve.

Members of the committee are also asked to note the council's function of co-ordinating all activities related to its functions. This has allowed the council to collaborate and influence key

land use interests such as agriculture and forestry, on which I can expand, as appropriate. More particularly in recent years, it has included educational and other interests such as community and rural development.

From a legislative point of view, the Heritage Council also has specific responsibilities under the Planning and Development Acts, the Heritage Fund Act 2001 as a member of the Council of National Cultural Institutions and section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in respect of the donation of heritage objects to the State. In meeting our statutory obligations and translating them into effective actions through implementation of our strategic plan I pay particular attention to why heritage matters, not to the Heritage Council or necessarily Members of the Oireachtas but to people, that is, to all of us. Heritage is the foundation of our culture and has been described as the steady pulse of contemporary Ireland. I emphasise the word “contemporary”. It does not just encompass buildings, monuments and museum pieces. As highlighted in the Act, it includes our distinctive landscapes and native wildlife. About 12 months ago we made a presentation on natural heritage. Heritage takes in woodlands, literature, folklore and crafts, all of which have been passed on to us from previous generations. It defines who we are in the present and our efforts to understand our heritage, protect it and interpret it will be our legacy to future generations and - I dare to be so presumptive as to say - the legacy of Members of the Oireachtas.

Whether tangible or intangible, personal or collective, heritage is at the heart of Irish society. Its relevance is palpable at local level. We can expand on this point in answer to questions from members. Heritage drives economies. I refer to the tourism and agriculture sectors, sectors the quality of which is determined by the quality of our heritage. It stimulates innovation. An example is the art at the entrance to the committee rooms. Heritage inspires artists in their interpretation of landscapes. Our craft workers and designers at a local level all seek inspiration from the places in which they live. Heritage also acts as a focal point for festivals and commemorations. This is something about which we can talk in much more detail with reference to Heritage Week and, in regard to culture, European Year of Cultural Heritage, as members choose. Heritage is, undoubtedly, a touchstone of identity. It fosters a sense of belonging and supports social cohesion at local and national level. Simultaneously, it crosses borders and transcends differences, connecting people through shared values, history and traditions. Our plan identifies three specific objectives: to advance national heritage priorities, to nurture belonging and to ensure a vibrant heritage sector.

I refer, first, to our aim to advance national heritage priorities. It is important to note that international policymakers, particularly within the European Union, are becoming increasingly aware of the potential of heritage to contribute to economic growth and social cohesion, as well as to national pride and well-being. All of our actions in the implementation of the plan will emphasise this.

On nurturing belonging, I note that in a world of increasing globalisation, multiculturalism and mobility we tend to lose sight of what is local. Heritage inspires a sense of belonging to both geographic and thematic communities. Heritage lies at the root of our individual and collective identities. Importantly, it is also the seed from which new connections can grow. The Heritage Council sees its strategy as a blueprint for increasing inclusivity. It addresses the inextricable links between heritage, identity, people and place and the absolute imperative to engage with both the diaspora and community-based custodians of heritage.

Our third objective is to ensure a vibrant heritage sector. The Heritage Council has always taken an innovative approach to enabling communities to care for and enjoy their local heritage.

This has been pursued through its grant schemes which have been much curtailed as funding has decreased. It is evident in dynamic heritage networks such as the heritage officer network, the Irish Walled Towns Network and the Museum Standards Programme Ireland network, as well as new networks such as the Irish uplands partnerships. We look to provide impetus and small levels of support for community engagement and the development of heritage awareness and participation. The plan includes a strong commitment to educational and research programmes to stimulate curiosity and promote the highest levels of understanding and appreciation of our national heritage.

The plan does not touch on the fourth and probably most significant element. One could say it is a strategic decision; I will leave it to members to decide. The fourth element requires emphasis. In this changing world of compliance and governance, we need to ensure the Heritage Council is effective in its administration and financial management and has the governance capacity to allow it to operate effectively and develop the Irish heritage. The chairman of the council addresses this imperative in the plan by stating the Heritage Council is aware of the constraints of its current capacity and will continue to be imaginative and innovative in the way it both secures and directs its resources.

It is pleasing to note the prominence accorded to heritage in many Government and political manifestoes and recent Government policies and initiatives such as Culture 2025, Creative Ireland, the national landscape strategy, the biodiversity plan, the national development plan, Project Ireland 2040 and the Action Plan for Rural Development. The commitment given by the Minister, Deputy Madigan, to publish a new national heritage plan in the next 12 months will add further impetus to our work.

Critical to achieving the Heritage Council's vision for the period 2018 to 2022 is the continued support and development of the dynamic and diverse heritage sector. Heritage can play a key role in helping to resolve complex and changing socioeconomic issues such as the housing crisis and motivating the heritage-led regeneration of the centres of some of Ireland's cities, towns and villages and the plan seeks to address these contemporary issues. Working with others to facilitate the reuse of existing buildings can help to alleviate aspects of the crisis. Great strides have been made by such things as the rural development plan and village programmes, although more needs to be done.

In a similar way, new initiatives that focus on native woodlands, acknowledging the value of high nature farming and the development of a series of uplands partnerships, can help in alleviating the contemporary issues surrounding climate change and rural decline. To be effective, the Heritage Council needs to enhance its capacity, both its overall staff numbers and the capital and revenue funding required to serve the public. Discussions are ongoing with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with a view to securing the enhanced capacity in an incremental manner over the lifetime of the plan.

The Heritage Council very much welcomes the recent launch by the Minister of the public consultation process for Heritage Ireland 2030. The Heritage Council has always received cross-party support and setting a vision for 2030 will transcend Governments. This is a commitment to a revitalised and refreshed national heritage plan which I know local authority heritage officers and chief executives welcome as a framework within which they can allocate funding.

In her foreword the Minister states Heritage 2030 will bring together a tapestry of other relevant heritage initiatives, providing an overarching space for engagement and action in the next

decade. I particularly like the word “action” in that context. It will integrate essential national heritage policy principles into the future strategy of the entire Government and be supported by investment under Project Ireland 2040, setting out a real vision which we can all work to fulfil. The Heritage Council looks forward to contributing fully and constructively to this process. In the consultation exercise we will ensure commitments are given and that the most effective frameworks are put in place, as well as fully resourced, to allow all objectives to be met within the lifetime of the plan. I encourage all members to engage with their local community in the consultation process. The challenges are immense, but the opportunity presented needs to be grasped.

Ms Shirley Clerkin: I thank the Chairman and members of the joint committee for inviting the Local Authority Heritage Officer Network to make this presentation. I am heritage officer with Monaghan County Council and chairperson of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Network. I am joined by my heritage officer colleague from Donegal County Council, Dr. Joseph Gallagher.

Heritage is part and parcel of our identity. It is the thatched cottages in County Donegal and the special way the thatch is held down with ropes to stop it from lifting on a windy day. It is the Irish damselfly which is distinctively apple green on its thorax and only found on a small number of lakes and wetlands on this island. It is our legacy of townland names such as An Currach or Béal Átha an Chatha which are so rich in language and meaning, hiding within them old histories and land use. It is the dawn chorus; one will not hear the same birds in any other country. It is our cultural landscape which is dotted with monuments from past societies such as Dún Aengus or Loughcrew and large earthworks such as the Black Pig’s Dyke. There are historical buildings such as Muckcross House and Dublin’s Henrietta Street, as well as courthouses and market houses dotted throughout towns. In their very construction, design and ornamentation they highlight the work of skilled craftspeople and play a vital role in towns and villages. It is our farming traditions, including the Burren winterage and upland farming practices which are in synch with their habitats and create high nature value. It is our music, language, instruments, songs, sports, stories and folklore which are so evocative of place and time.

The recent inscription of the uilleann pipes on the international list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity underlines the uniqueness of Ireland’s culture and heritage as an enriching element of all humanity. All tangible and intangible elements weave together to form our heritage and connect people with it. Heritage is a public good which belongs to us all and is crucial for identity, as a cultural anchor and for social stability, especially in times of change. It is for well-being as it contributes to the maintenance of a healthy environment, cultural jobs, cultural tourism jobs, creativity and farming. The best people to conserve and protect our heritage are local communities which have been doing a stellar job with limited resources. Enabling and facilitating them to achieve this is the main role of the heritage officer programme which has been in existence for almost 20 years. The recently published European Cultural Heritage Strategy Century recognises that there is an urgent need to reposition cultural heritage policies to place them at the heart of an integrated approach which focuses on the conservation, protection and promotion of heritage by society as a whole - by both the national authorities and communities.

Established in 1999, the local authority heritage officer programme is one of the Heritage Council co-operative initiatives and allows the council to effectively reach local government and communities all over the country. Both parties contribute to the success of the programme. The Heritage Council funds the heritage officer programme at a rate of 25%. Out of the 31 local authorities, there are 25 heritage officers in place, with a number in the process of be-

ing recruited. The heritage officer role is a strategic one and must be a core service within a changing local government system which has oriented increasingly towards the community. The Heritage Council provides technical support for the heritage officer programme which is important, as heritage officers are, by and large, stand-alone heritage professionals in their organisations. Like arts officers, they are under a different Department from the local authority. We share similar goals and align local heritage plans with the Heritage Council's strategic plan. We bring innovative participatory practices into the heritage sphere, involving communities to de-bureaucratise heritage and, once again, engage people with it. We are living and working in communities. We help to create conditions where experts can meet communities to share with each other tangible and intangible knowledge of heritage. Advocacy, capacity building and such underpinning are essential to support the Government in achieving its departmental goals, including the national heritage plan and the national biodiversity plan, as well as implementation of other heritage protections and policies.

It can be challenging to deliver a heritage agenda when the importance of the heritage mandate is overlooked, as it sometimes can be. It can manifest itself in poor planning decisions and a failure to recognise and capitalise on heritage related economic activities and potential. Project Ireland 2040 recognises the importance of heritage and historical town cores and aims to bring historical buildings back into use. This has been supported by the new historical towns initiative such as one in Portlaoise and the town centre health checks throughout the country, including in Monaghan, organised by the Heritage Council and supported by the heritage officers.

Successful local heritage management requires a wide definition of heritage, capacity for heritage management, a planned strategic approach, commitment and support, leadership and heritage data. The development and implementation of local heritage plans, with heritage forums, contribute to this process. We link with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht through its services, particularly the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Monuments Service and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. These relationships are crucial. We provide data through local survey work to those bodies, as well as to the National Biodiversity Data Centre. We also work with Creative Ireland through the local culture teams to embed culture and creativity at the heart of public policy. We welcome the recent announcement of the consultation for the new national heritage plan, Heritage Ireland 2030. The absence of recent Government policy in this area had created an unhelpful policy vacuum and gap in heritage leadership, which we hope can now be remedied. We have 20 years' experience building community and local involvement in heritage and are keen to share and work in partnership with the Department on the type of actions which could contribute to its objectives.

The heritage sector has grown through the heritage officer networks and includes communities and individuals throughout the country who are full of enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment. They represent a huge resource if supported to be involved and to contribute their ideas and vision for heritage. We are ready to assist the Department in this process to develop the new national heritage plan and to encourage communities to engage with the consultation process.

The Council of Europe has found that budgetary and human resources, both at the European level and at the level of some member states, are increasingly inadequate to ensure the conservation and the restoration of European heritage, and thus to ensure that it can be transmitted as a legacy to future generations. Despite the increase in the remit, reach and demand for heritage services from the public since the establishment of the heritage officer programme in 1999, heritage officers for the most part still operate as one-person heritage sections. The number of heri-

tage officers has not materially changed since 2008. We believe there is potential to expand the local heritage services to meet current demands and future ambitions. We recently suggested to the Heritage Council board that an assistant heritage officer programme be established using a similar model as the original heritage officer programme. Heritage practice is more complex than ever before for heritage managers but a strategic framework of the attributes of a good local heritage service has not been developed in Ireland. An Australasian framework provides a potential model that may prove useful as the basis for such an examination, including a review of the existing barriers to such a service. Funding for heritage plan implementation is important for local authorities and there is a need for continued and increased investment in this area especially as the new national heritage plan will seek activity and implementation at a local level.

In tandem with this funding, there is a need to increase community heritage grants through the Heritage Council to allow local communities as heritage custodians to engage and invest in their heritage in order that they can continue to create better places for people to live. I thank the Chairman and members of the committee for inviting the heritage officers to present our work to them. I wish to extend an invitation to the committee on behalf of our network to visit heritage initiatives that have been supported by the heritage officer programme to see first-hand the contribution heritage is making to our communities and society.

Chairman: Go raibh maith ag an aoi as an gcuireadh a tugadh ag an deireadh dúinn féachaint mórthimpeall na tíre ar ghnéithe difriúla den obair atá rompu. I thank the witnesses for their contributions. Ms Clerkin's definition of heritage captures for me much of what heritage means. The old saying was it is part of what we are but in fact it is what we are, whether we like it or not, and sometimes people confuse it or put it on a higher plane than everyday issues.

I will ask the members to ask questions and make comments and then I will put a few questions.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Go raibh maith ag na haíonna as a bheith anseo agus cheap mé gur cur i láthair an-suimiúil go deo a bhí ann. In the political sense there is often a lazy analysis that culture and heritage are the same thing but they are very different. Heritage is what came before us and culture is what exists now. The first presentation was interesting on how we can connect heritage with contemporaneous issues and Mr. Starrett mentioned housing. How do we fight for heritage as a political priority? Whenever we go abroad and put the face of Ireland to the world, heritage icons and arts and culture are to the fore but when we take budgetary measures at home they are way down at the bottom of the list.

I was very taken by Ms Clerkin's comment about the heritage officer being a one-person heritage section in each local authority. That was a strong comment. I know the witnesses might be constrained about how they answer my question but I would be interested to hear their response.

I taught for a long time in the inner city in Dublin. The heritage there is very different to that in the text books the children are handed. Their heritage is housing schemes, flat complexes, the docks, tuberculosis. It is a different way of life. When I was in school I could have recited every Land Act from 1870 but I was not necessarily as well versed in the housing schemes that came out of World War One or with what happened in tenement Dublin. How do we connect heritage with every type of community in Ireland? Ireland is not homogenous, there are different elements to the Irish nation that have a heritage that people need to connect with fully to make it theirs. That involves reaching out to disconnection, disenfranchisement and disadvantage, making Irelands of everybody, if one likes, that it belongs to them.

I am tickled that Mr. Starrett mentioned housing. When we try to rejuvenate a listed building – I am thinking of a flat complex in Ballybough - we cannot redevelop it because it is a listed building. How do we strike the balance between something that is worth saving and treasuring without it being an aloof aspiration which is not solving the needs of the day? How can the witnesses help us help them? How do we make heritage real to every community, particularly those which are disenfranchised, disconnected and disadvantaged and to new communities? How do we help heritage solve issues?

Mr. Michael Starrett: I will not answer all the questions. I will choose the easy one. I will answer the question about making people connect. The Chairman got it right in many ways when he said heritage is part of what we are. Whether someone is in Ballybough or Inishowen, that is the place where they live, that is their environment and surroundings. That is their contemporary heritage. We have many inner city initiatives, working with people through educational services, to improve the quality of those places. Heritage is not always the answer but education and the connection with people is where we make that connection. It is all very well to have a huge capital investment in big projects but what we really need to invest in is people who can go out, communicate, encourage and support. Governments will have to wrestle with that issue.

Dr. Marie Bourke is a great fighter. I should refer the question on how do we fight for heritage to her because she has been fighting for heritage in Ireland much longer than I have.

Dr. Marie Bourke: It is a privilege to be here to speak to members. Probably, if one were to fight for Irish heritage, one would be fighting for one's key national asset. If Irish heritage is one's key national asset, what could be a greater thing to be fighting for than everything that we are and everything that this nation is in terms of its landscape, natural heritage, rivers, culture and monuments? The main argument is that heritage is critical to the tourism industry. I use the analogy quite often of the museums standards programme, which is one of the great unsung success stories of the heritage programme. The Heritage Council have been up and running for ten years and it has single-handedly raised the standards of Irish museums around the country. The people who visit this country in the autumn, winter and spring who stay in lovely hotels want to go somewhere and do something. The majority of European visitors want to find out about our heritage. They normally go to a heritage centre and, preferably, a local museum. While they are in the museum they do not necessarily want to find out about connections with Europe, which is a nice counter-product. They want to know about the local people and what makes them tick, what they do and how they live. Local museums are critical because people go to them to connect with local people, to find out about Irish society and to understand us. That is a very small strand of our heritage. If one thinks of a programme that the Heritage Council has set up, with huge consultation, and that raises the standard of all of our museums slowly bit by bit, and in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, then one has something that improves the quality of Irish life and that is part of Irish heritage.

Let us consider the work of the local authority heritage officer network. Across the country heritage officers promote heritage. If one is fighting for heritage, then one is fighting for something that is intrinsic to who we are and what we are going to leave for the future and for our young people.

Ms Shirley Clerkin: I will answer the question on just having one heritage officer in each area and explain how we can tackle contemporary issues in a contemporary society. One of the main roles of a heritage officer is to democratise heritage. We try to explain national legislation and policies, which committees like this one contribute to and develop at a national level. We,

as heritage officers, bring legislation and policies within reach of ordinary citizens and allow them to see that as relevant to where they are and where they live. We base all of our heritage work in the local area. Our work is very much based on what type of place someone lives in whether that is vernacular buildings, industrial heritage or industrial landscapes. We try to focus on the community in which people are based and not a fantasy community they see in textbooks or history books.

The local authority heritage officer network was established in 1999, which was innovative thinking by the Heritage Council. The aim was to reach the objectives of the Heritage Act that established the Heritage Council. The objectives would have been very unachievable with just 14 staff members of the Heritage Council, which is the cap on council numbers in legislation. The network allowed the Heritage Council to promote its heritage objectives in local authorities and heritage communities. The programme has been rolled out around the country since the establishment of the network. There is one heritage officer per local authority and the number of heritage officers has not expanded. However, the demand for our services has increased exponentially over the past 20 years, particularly over the past ten years during the bust because communities have re-engaged with their place and sense of place. There has been re-engagement with people and one another. We have tried to use heritage as a new driver for economic activity. We have tried to use local places and heritage assets as a way to move tourism into places that probably had not been reached by tourism before. We sought to use authentic heritage assets such as tour guides from local communities or whatever. The demand for such services is huge. In order for such heritage work to be done in an authentic way, we have provided support to local communities in order that their heritage objects or places are not commodified without their co-operation. We have worked with people in communities to identify what is important about their area, to help them to conserve it and then to build on that by promoting places through other tourism assets in order that the tourism asset can become part of tourism initiatives such as Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East of whatever.

The network works with communities. Sometimes we work with road sections on planning applications. We also work with economic development within our local authority and we work at the museum services with cultural teams. Finally, we work with all local communities and our heritage forum. The demand for our service has been at pinchpoint for the past seven or eight years. There is great opportunity to support and facilitate communities to further develop in this area, particularly when the new national heritage plan is out for consultation at present. There is a great opportunity for us to punch above our weight in this area. As Dr. Bourke has correctly pointed out, this country constantly sells its national Irish heritage and it is heterogeneous, not homogenous. Our heritage is very distinctive and is based in local areas and we could support it better.

Chairman: Does Dr. Gallagher wish to comment on the Donegal aspect?

Dr. Joseph Gallagher: I shall not comment specifically on the Donegal aspect but I shall reiterate some of the points made by Ms Clerkin. One of the constant challenges of heritage is raising awareness. In terms of all of our roles, that is a constant challenge among communities as well. We have successfully raised awareness. As Ms Clerkin has indicated, there is now a demand for heritage services at a local level. Very often it is about supporting local initiatives. Communities want to engage with all of the different aspects of heritage be it natural, built or cultural heritage. Locals know their heritage best and often, one only needs to give them a bit of direction, advice and support to support their initiatives rather than encouraging them to do anything. They have the capacity to deliver on the heritage agenda but they need direction early

on, which is important. Those heritage initiatives contribute to and are at the heart of their sense of identity and pride in their place.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I welcome all of the witnesses. They are one the most relevant group of people who have come here and I am delighted to see them.

I have had the privilege of covering many of the annual heritage weeks as part of a radio programme broadcast by RTÉ. The subjects for the radio programmes have ranged from moths in County Cavan to the sounds of nature at the dark sky park in Ballycroo National Park in County Mayo, which is extraordinary.

The witnesses sound extremely positive. However, there are fewer curlews and finches, our streams and rivers are not what they should be and we are way behind Europe in terms of all of these things. One can speak about people, place, nature and culture but each area is enormous. Do the witnesses think we need a Department dedicated to just heritage? People say that they are part of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Let us say that we are all part of one mother ship, that we are all going to shop at Tesco and soon they will be sending us to school. I am not sure about the mother ship business because the Heritage Council is so powerful and delves into so many different areas. One of the ways that the Heritage Council could become even greater at what it does is to become more independent. It fascinates me that the Heritage Council is stuck in the middle of the Department. In one way, I can see the tentacles and obvious connections. In another way, the Heritage Council does not have the same independence of thought. It seems to be caught with that tentacle, conduit and roadmap. Would the Heritage Council be better off fighting for its own heritage Department? I would do so, as well as keeping all of the other moments of people, place, nature and culture, which comes into the arts, language, music, song and everything that we do. I wonder about it the more I see about the mother ship and the more everybody is under this umbrella. Those involved in heritage are so important and while they are not at the end of a table they are part of a general table. When one thinks of the arts - music, drama, dance and visual art - they too demand a Department. At one stage heritage was with the same Department as sport and at another time it was with tourism. The word "sell" is used all the time. I do not like the word "sell". We are not selling. We have to learn to be. It is us, we do not want to sell it.

One of the main points in what was said by Mr. Starrett is that extra heritage officers are needed. That is fine, but if he wants to find a place in our psyche, be it educational, cultural and all those other areas from the time that we are five until we are 55 or 95, should he not be holding out for a more powerful place within a Department? It is a question. It is an awful pity that Senator Ó Ríordáin did not wait because it might have answered his question.

Mr. Michael Starrett: That is a very valid question. We fought long and hard to ensure that the word "heritage" is in the departmental name. Arts has gone now, so does that mean that culture and heritage are different? Someone touched on that earlier.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: No, it is just an amalgamation.

Mr. Michael Starrett: Culture and heritage are inextricably linked. The Senator asked whether we would be better as a Department? I will look at my departmental colleagues over there and say that is the last thing heritage needs. What one needs to remember is that the Houses of the Oireachtas established the Heritage Council. Under legislation, it gave it a degree of autonomy and independence. It has an independent board and an independent chairman. To go back to the fight, what is needed is the capacity and resources that allow it to effectively do

the job.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I do not mean that the Department would exclude all the brilliant things Mr. Starrett has created himself, I am suggesting that some sort of independence would allow him push forward the very things he is looking for. I suggest that the fact that heritage is amalgamated with culture and arts somewhat closes it down in so far as there is a pecking order.

Mr. Michael Starrett: There is that, but in comparison with, for example, the Arts Council, which has been around for nearly 70 years, the Heritage Council is still a whipper snapper and in the 20 years since it was established it has raised the level of awareness. Dr. Gallagher, Ms Clerkin and Dr. Bourke have touched on the fight and how they have raised the level of awareness. What is needed now, in the context of a new strategic plan from the Heritage Council, a new national policy on heritage, is that it is matched up and that the funds and resources are there to allow that independence to be carried out. All civilised states look after the things the state owns, such as their cultural institutions. The State invests significant amounts in that now. It is beginning to answer that question. It looks after the national parks and the things that the State owns. What we are talking about is investment in the rest, namely, the communities and the places where people live. That should be an easy sell at a political level but it does not seem to be.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I am offering a way for that to become-----

Chairman: Will the Senator please allow Mr. Starrett to reply?

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I am sorry, Chairman. I will stop interrupting.

Chairman: Ms Clerkin also wants to respond. We will come back again to the issue if need be.

Ms Shirley Clerkin: I thank the Senator for her very interesting perspective. We are used to working in collaboration with others from a local authority heritage officer perspective. We are based in local authorities and we are local authority employees. We are co-funded with the Heritage Council so we work very closely in that networked sense. We also communicate with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government but we are very strongly linked with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. That collaboration works very well for us.

I agree with what Senator O'Donnell said about the extinction of key wildlife species, biodiversity and the ecosystem services that those species and habitats support. That is very important. In our collaborative way we work with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which is based in this Department, the National Monuments Service and the national inventory for architectural heritage. We try to link with all of those different agencies and we work very closely with the Heritage Council. I do not know so much about the Departments but it is very useful that the Heritage Council is an independent established body to promote this national agenda.

The loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services is a very key issue for us. We work with biodiversity issues and heritage issues together. A lot of our heritage plans are now combined heritage and biodiversity. Heritage has a key role to play in sustainable societies, whether that is reusing heritage assets in historic buildings, which is retaining their resource value, or conserving wildlife habitats and helping communities to do that or promoting agri-environment schemes which are results based, and to try to help people have livelihoods in rural areas. We

are very much trying to work in that sphere but we definitely require more resources to help us to do that, in particular going forward. I agree with what Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell said about the need for more resources.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am delighted to welcome the witnesses here today because they play such an important role in ensuring that we retain our identity. If we do not respect heritage and culture and support it, how are we to know how we got here? It is so important to know how the people before us survived and lived and for us to retain that.

For tourism reasons we need to protect national parks, heritage centres and related issues but we also need to protect our identity as a people. Music, storytelling and Irish dancing were practised by the generations before us and they are the people who brought us to where we are today. Storytelling was and still should be an important part of our culture. I do not know if anyone knows of Frank Lewis, a Kerryman who arranged a very important gathering of storytellers a month ago, which was attended by Professor Brendan O'Keeffe and many others. We must support such gatherings and ensure that that aspect of our culture is retained. Wherever one goes today or no matter what gathering it is, everyone seems to be on their mobile phone.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: The Deputy himself included.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am not as bad. I use the phone for phone calls and not for anything else. I accept it is modern technology and people get to see what is happening in other parts of the world. When we were young we were anxious to hear what our father, grandfather and grandmother were saying but I do not think that is the case with young people today. They have no interest whatsoever. We were so curious that we found ourselves being told to go into the corner for a while. We were into everything. We wanted to know what older people were saying. To some extent I believe we are losing that in today's world. Our culture is our identity and people such as Frank Lewis and others need financial support as well as support from the heritage officers. I agree that service should be expanded within the local authorities and we should have more people employed. Our heritage officer, T.J. O'Mahony, is a great person and he is doing very well in Kerry. However, he is limited in what he can do because he is only one man and he needs help.

Mr. Starrett spoke about how houses can be improved so people can live in them. While I support him in that, in other places there is a need for a radon barrier and it is not possible financially to retain the building, particularly where it is not feasible for a person to live in it without a such a barrier being put in place. We now know that radon causes health problems, including cancer. One place that springs to mind in this regard is Castleisland, where we have lost three people in one family in a short period as a result of the effects of radon. Things like that need to be overcome. I do not know if the walls can be left standing but people tell us it is often not possible to deal with it properly. Perhaps people could be encouraged to build the same type of building again in a modern way. However, it is by talking about these things that we see what can be done to overcome the problems, and they are problems. Sometimes we cannot understand why a house is left standing with no one using it, when it might not look too bad and might look as if it could be reused, but there are physical problems that need to be dealt with. We need to work together to overcome these issues. I welcome our guests and thank them for their contributions.

Mr. Michael Starrett: I will come back to the Deputy shortly on the building side. On his point on storytelling and the connection with young people, that is fundamental. Dr. O'Keeffe has a background in education and works with young people, and she has been driving our heri-

tage in schools programme. A huge part of that is getting young people to connect in the way the Deputy has described. I invite Dr. O’Keeffe to say a few words.

Dr. Helene O’Keeffe: In reference to Senator Ó Ríordáin’s earlier question on increasing diversity and access to different groups and new communities, the heritage in schools scheme also allows for that. We have a panel of 160 heritage individuals who are experts in the realms of cultural heritage, built heritage and natural heritage. From a directory of experts, schools will book an expert to visit them. The expert will then visit the school and, usually, where possible, will bring the students outside to their local heritage site or to a local aspect of their own heritage so they can see what is around them and appreciate that intrinsic connection between their own place and their own heritage.

This facility has been incredibly successful in terms of accessibility and diversity up to this point in the year. We offer a system whereby the Heritage Council will pay a percentage of the expert’s costs for the day and the school pays the balance. In addition, we offer a scheme for delivering equality of opportunities in schools, DEIS, whereby the Heritage Council will pay a greater percentage. This facilitates access for those schools to these heritage experts perhaps more than would otherwise have been the case. This year, 796 designated disadvantaged schools have availed of that Heritage Council service. It is allowing students to become more aware of, more familiar with and more appreciative of their local heritage and very much articulates the work of the Heritage Council in the context of its statutory obligation to educate and inform people about their heritage. I hope that covers it.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Our heritage is important in the context of selling our tourism product. There is a difficulty with the current set-up in rural areas. Heretofore, visitors came to small villages and the meeting place was usually a pub and the visitors enjoyed those, but most of the local pubs have now closed. We are losing one of our selling points because people really enjoyed the old fellow singing the local song, telling the local story or playing the local tune, and people came from all over the world for that. We are at the point of losing that completely with new rules and regulations and everything else. Rural life and the number of rural people are in decline. We are losing that aspect and I do not know how it can be addressed.

Dr. O’Keeffe stated that this is now available on the Internet. It is a problem that people abroad can get to know everything about us without coming to visit us at all, so in one way it is great, and in another it is not. I appreciate what Dr. O’Keeffe is doing in the schools. It will be the only way the youngsters get to know what we were before, what the people before us did and how we got here.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: Before Tesco took over.

Senator Fintan Warfield: I welcome our guests. I would add that we will be judged on what we choose to remember and how we choose to remember it. Nothing horrific has been mentioned in what we choose to remember, particularly industrial schools, Magdalen laundries and all of that. Although it is uncomfortable, the uncomfortable stuff is important too, although I probably do not have to say that.

I completely agree with Mr. Starrett’s comments regarding heritage. Irish people take great pride in it, as is evident in the 66 monuments that were found in Meath over the summer. There was a generous warmth online from all quarters in response to that. Before I continue, I want to extend solidarity to the archaeologists who are on strike at the moment. It is probably not a question for our guests but I want to extend solidarity to them. None of this would be possible

without them.

I am interested in the strategic objectives in advancing national policy and engaging with policymakers to do so. If the Heritage Council has legislative priorities, I would like to hear them before we conclude, whether those are priorities for the years to come, amendments or specific legislation it believes should be worked on.

Another priority should be the need for a national storage facility for our cultural institutions. When artefacts are found or donated, it is unfortunate that so much is not on display. The National Museum has a major difficulty in keeping artefacts within its limited space. We saw something similar at the National Library during a visit by members of this committee.

In terms of the budget, we were treated to an array of announcements by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in budget week. All of the big ones were listed - the Arts Council, Screen Ireland and Culture Ireland, which was left to the end of the week because it was not as great an increase as the others. We were never informed by the Department of the increase to the Heritage Council because there was no press conference by the Department after the budget. What was the increase?

Mr. Michael Starrett: There was a specific increase in the allocation for heritage in schools of €200,000.

Senator Fintan Warfield: There was no change for the council overall.

Mr. Michael Starrett: It was €200,000. It is essentially the same as last year.

Senator Fintan Warfield: It was €7 million in 2008 and €5 million in 2009. It went down to €1 million from 2012 to 2016. It was €2 million in 2017 and 2018, so there is no change.

Mr. Michael Starrett: That is quite right.

Senator Fintan Warfield: That is the capital. Those are questions for Government to answer.

Ms Clerkin mentioned the Creative Ireland programme. I was trying to remember the name of the local culture teams she mentioned. Is she confident that heritage is not being left behind by those culture teams in any areas?

Ms Shirley Clerkin: Not really.

Senator Fintan Warfield: We see a huge disparity in arts spend across the local authorities, which is an issue of access. It is undemocratic. Would Ms Clerkin know if there a huge disparity in the heritage spend across local authorities? I do not have the figures readily available but they range from €1.89 per head on arts to €75 per head in other local authorities. Is there a similar disparity in the heritage spend across the local authorities? I support the call for an assistant heritage officer across the local authorities.

Reference was made to democratising heritage. In Britain, people are allowed to use metal detectors. Is that the case in Ireland?

Mr. Michael Starrett: No.

Ms Shirley Clerkin: No.

Senator Fintan Warfield: Is that right?

Ms Shirley Clerkin: When people use metal detectors they often disturb the archeology and the chronology of where they find objects. People are not allowed to use metal detectors in Ireland because they might disturb an archeological site and then lose the context for the finds, which means that they have an object in isolation without its context.

A number of very good archeological summer schools are being run through the Heritage Council and heritage officer programme, for example, the Blackfriary summer school in Meath. Quite a few have been set up recently through the heritage officer programme to democratise archeological practice and allow people get involved in actual digs. The Tea Lane one in Kilkenny is another example. Those are very good practices rather than allowing people go in with metal detectors. Will I take the Senator's other question?

Senator Fintan Warfield: Yes, please.

Ms Shirley Clerkin: He said that the uncomfortable stuff needs to be mentioned. I agree with the Senator. The vile with the valiant is always part of our heritage. People often do not want to remember the vile but it is very important to retain aspects of that for our own stability. If we start to erode the bits we are uncomfortable with, a false identity based on something else can be created. For example, many workhouses in Ireland have been retained and used, while not losing their history. For example, the children's dormitory in the Carrickmacross workhouse in Monaghan is still active in the top floor. The entire community uses the ground floors of the building, including a crèche. We very much need to do that. Those are issues we explore at a local level through talks we give and also through the various programmes we run in our particular counties - Donegal, Monaghan and Louth. In counties close to Northern Ireland we would do a lot of work looking at those difficult issues. We explore those issues through heritage and local heritage sites. It is a democratising way to look at issues, rather than focusing on politics.

On Creative Ireland and whether we are sure that heritage is not being left behind, I would not say we are sure that heritage is not being left behind. We are trying to do our best on the cultural teams to make sure that does not happen. I believe the chief executive of the programme, Ms Banotti, is keen to try to make sure that heritage comes to the fore and that we can use art as a new way to explore heritage. For example, there was a fantastic pollinator initiative in Laois and Offaly. It was done as part of the all-island pollinator plan, which comes through the national biodiversity data centre. We have an award through Tidy Towns to support that.

Creative Ireland supported a new composing element. Ian Wilson, from Belfast, made an entire piece where he interviewed local communities on pollinators and what they were doing with bees and insects. He created an entire saxophonist piece for it that was then performed in Emo Court. It was amazing. That is the type of measure we would like to see happen through Creative Ireland. It should be used to explore our natural and cultural heritage in a new way to allow us to meet new audiences.

I would be keen to ensure that the heritage spend keeps up to par with the new programmes that are coming into place, that we do not forget the asset on which all these areas are dependent, and to make sure to fund that appropriately.

Mr. Michael Starrett: To pick up on a number of the points the members raised, they said we are very positive. We have to be positive because if we did not stay positive, we would

be negative. If we do not stay positive we do not make any progress. We will stand still and people will pass us by. Everyone is positive, but there are issues, not least of which is the one of capacity and resources, which I touched on earlier. In the past 20 years, the Heritage Council has shown what is possible within the sector through a new way of working and at community level. The opportunity that needs to be taken now is to get the State to invest fully in that as well as in what I spoke about, namely, the properties it owns. There is a real need to get that investment. We looked for approximately €2 million this year. We got €200,000. I know we will be working with the Department over the course of the coming years to try to address that again. As I remain positive, I never believe we could say we will stop trying to get an increase in resources. There is a lot going on behind the scenes.

The legislative priorities are very relevant. Currently, the Heritage Council is working as an advisory body helping with reviews of national parks legislation. There is no such body in Ireland, which is not a normal situation in itself in comparison to other European countries. The Minister is currently examining the wildlife legislation. That is a priority the council has been pushing for a number of years. That needs to be updated.

New consolidated national monuments legislation needs to see the light of day as soon as possible. It has been sitting around for a long time but I am hopeful it will be brought forward.

In terms of the different approaches to doing things, some years ago, the council proposed to the Department what I would refer to as enabling and empowering legislation. That encourages communities and allows them to identify what they want to do and then come forward with a programme and a plan that would be supported through strategic funding. The initial proposal was coined as a landscape Ireland Bill because landscape was seen as embracing where people live, work and visit. That proposal still exists. It is not something to which the council has given priority in the past three to four years, but it is still very valid.

Senator Warfield mentioned storage facilities for the cultural institutions. The Heritage Council is not a collecting institution but we are part of the family. For many years, Dr. Bourke fought that fight within the National Gallery context so if I may, I will ask her to comment.

Dr. Marie Bourke: The Senator's many comments were very well made. His reference to the Magdalen laundries and that aspect of our past was very important. We need to identify issues that have not been a happy part of our past. It took us a long time to identify the Famine and all that went with it. That is continually being reviewed, revised and reinterpreted. That will come once we identify sites and mark areas, and it is very important. Already, stories and poetry are being written about it but it is still very painful in people's memories.

When the Senator mentioned the issue of the metal detectors, I was reminded of the recent find in Donegal a few months ago. That was through farming, the traditional way of sourcing finds. That is the ideal way to source a find. It was great that when that find was discovered, our colleagues from the National Museum travelled up literally overnight and it was on display the next day in Donegal County Museum. That is the way local communities need to work together so that it is shown in its county before it travels for research.

It is fantastic that the committee visited the National Library. I cannot but imagine that Dr. Sandra Collins was thrilled about that. The National Library is one of those institutions that is long overdue attention. I visited recently looking at the changing facilities and how they will provide a service to the public while they put so much of their material in store, in order to improve their storage facilities but, more particularly, in order to improve their public-facing

engaging facilities. What they have programmed coming down the track is fantastic.

When one has collections, it is difficult to manage them. The National Museum, which is, in fact, over four sites, has vast collections to manage. The National Gallery took the decision during its refurbishment programme to keep everything on-site no matter what was the best way to protect it. There is no perfect solution to this problem. Glasgow has formed a storage facility where several of their museums house their collections and it is accessible. However, it cost a great deal to set that up and maintain it and for the staff to make it available to the public. The institutions are working with the Department, the OPW and other bodies to see how they can better manage their collections, particularly at a time when conservation is becoming eco-friendly. There are new approaches to conservation that are not as rigorous as those in the past. Senator Warfield's comments were well made. In this arena, it is welcome to be discussing a subject like this.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I thank the representatives and officials for coming in today for what has been an interesting conversation.

I congratulate them on their work, as a starting point. Both the Heritage Council and each of the individual heritage officers, who we all would deal with in our own capacity in our counties on a regular basis, particularly on built heritage and around heritage week, play a crucial role. The council also plays a key role. I might not engage on a day to day basis with it but I am acutely aware of that.

I am struck by Senator Ó Ríordáin's point that heritage can be seen as a negative. I see ways in which in the past 20 years the Heritage Council has redressed that balance. The linkages between the Heritage Council and agricultural schemes such as REPS, and now GLAS, have been positive because farmers normally saw a heritage monument on their land as a negative where somebody was traipsing over their ground and there was a concern about being sued. It is positive that it could form part of one the environmental schemes to be enhanced. I recognise the role the Heritage Council plays in that.

I am chairman of the Friends of Athy Heritage Centre and Museum in south Kildare. The depth of heritage in Athy is phenomenal. Predominantly because it is an unemployment black spot and we have many challenges, heritage is blamed unfairly for a great deal. If I am on local radio speaking of the positives of heritage, it will be said to me afterwards that heritage has held the town back but it has not. One tries to show people the potential that Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartland have to open up people's minds. In all those spaces, tourism in particular can show what can be done.

To touch on some of the points that were made earlier, what the heritage centre and museum is doing in Athy is interesting. On the points made about the Magdalen laundries, part of the issue might be that this is so recent and so raw. No doubt recognising in one's place the heritage of that place is what will people will buy into. I refer to those who are not initially passionate about heritage and have a passing interest only. One pulls them in through linkages to their own area. In Athy Heritage Centre, the section commemorating local people who died in the First World War is most interesting. That is how one makes the linkages. People say such a person was a relation of theirs and they trace back their roots; that has got them in the door. Then they learn about Ernest Shackleton and the connections there and about the different elements of the centre.

There is a great deal more we have to do. The Heritage Council needs much more support. I

completely understand that and it comes across clearly here. I look at sites, such as the Curragh plains, in south Kildare and see considerable potential. The Curragh needs an overall heritage management plan and I work closely with Ms Bridget Loughlin and the good people in Kildare County Council to try to develop that. There are numerous agencies involved.

I am struck by the fact that Mr. Starrett stated there is no legislation for national parks. That is something on which he might expand. The Curragh is not a national park although I would like it to be. There is a means through which one can look to have a place designated but in terms of its overall management, Mr. Starrett might come back to me. I thank him for his presentation.

Heritage officers come under the remit of the Heritage Council but are members of staff of the local authorities. I am conscious they pointed out that, like arts officers, they are under a different Department than the local authorities themselves. Are the heritage officers suggesting it would be better if they were under the local authority structure completely? I am not convinced. If heritage officers were directly answerable to the busy Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, there would be a risk of them being overlooked. I am conscious of Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell's points on a stand-alone Department. The Constitution states we can have only 15 senior Ministers and Departments. Unless there is to be one cut, such as children and youth affairs or agriculture, or we hold a referendum, that will not change any time soon. There are linkages between culture and heritage. We must get the balance back. It is evident, in terms of funding, that in the future we need an increased focus on heritage to ensure that balance is correct. I am not convinced that it needs necessarily to be set alone but the heritage officers definitely need more support in what they are doing.

On Ms Clerkin's point on the possibility of an assistant heritage officer role, she stated that is a request she put in to the Heritage Council. I am sure Mr. Starrett would need more funds for that to happen. I presume Ms Clerkin is not saying that for Mr. Starrett to press a button. Is that something Mr. Starrett needs support directly from the Department for?

In that regard, I do not know how the individual heritage officers manage. The key role that heritage officers play in each of the countries is engaging with local communities. Both Dr. Gallagher and Ms Clerkin made it clear. There is no point in somebody coming down from Dublin telling people their heritage. One needs to help the local community to see what is important and let the community develop it. I am aware that involves a lot of hand-holding. There are some really good people who volunteer their time, and whether they are applying for built heritage schemes or the development of county heritage plans, there is a great deal of work. It is not practical to think that it is down on one person. I ask the heritage officers to expand on what support they need to be able to get that assistant heritage officer role because it is important.

So that I am clear on how it works, will they state whether the role of the conservation officer is merely a planning authority role? Do conservation officers come under the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government? The work of heritage officers is something we as a committee should support. Their work in enabling local communities to ensure there is local ownership and buy-in of community initiatives is key.

Are the heritage officers happy with the plans, in terms of resources? Do they need more resources to implement the existing heritage plans or do the plans need beefing up? Are they happy enough with the structure? If and when we get additional resources, where best can they be spent and directed?

Ms Shirley Clerkin: I am not suggesting that we should come under the other Department. I am merely raising as a possible reason the section has not been expanded in recent years that we are not so obvious when the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is checking indicators for different sections from within local authorities; they have sufficient indicators in and around heritage services, and we are not noticed. I mentioned the assistant heritage officer programme because we absolutely raised it with the Heritage Council board and obviously the Heritage Council, because their budget was effectively not increased. They would need an increase in their budget to provide that support to us and the local authorities. I think that model has worked very well and that is the way that model should continue.

Conservation officers, for people who do not know, work within local authorities specifically with structures that are protected under the Planning and Development Act, formerly known as listed buildings. These are structures from 1700 onwards. Conservation officers primarily work within the planning sphere, dealing with exempted developments, section 57 declarations and that type of thing and do not really engage with communities in the same way we do. They primarily work within planning, although there would be some overlap, but it is a different role entirely. It is not community focused, it is focused on the building itself.

Did I cover all of the questions? The Deputy mentioned a lot of things there.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Does Ms Clerkin think our overall heritage plans are robust enough? Is it just that resources are needed to implement them?

Ms Shirley Clerkin: It is resources and personnel that we need, technical expertise at a local level. We cannot spend more money on heritage without having people to facilitate and enable local communities to do that work. It needs a resource of people. It needs both.

Mr. Michael Starrett: I hope I will cover all of the points I want to. In an Irish context, and still in some other European countries, the national park works on a model where the State owns the land and decides it is a national park. That would be less contemporary than most European countries, which would have dedicated national park legislation based not only on nature conservation but on socioeconomic and rural development needs as well. There is a need for that to be looked at in the context of the upland areas. Our national parks do a fantastic job, but they are very restricted in terms of the location and resources that are put their way. There has been a modest increase, I understand, in their allocation this year but, again, the legislation needs to be there for the legislators to really buy-in and see the value of it, and I welcome the fact that the Department is looking at that at the moment.

I have a particular interest in that because my background was in national and regional parks in the UK and France. I have made an art of looking at models and the ways in which countries cope with this type of situation. One of the issues, of course, in an Irish context was the resistance to the use of the term “national” for anything that was considered privately owned. That is an obstacle that needs to be overcome. Every other European country has overcome it with good and targeted legislation. The French regional and national parks are now focused on socioeconomic development. That is their ultimate purpose. It is a shame that Deputy Danny Healy-Rae is not here at the moment because it is really targeting rural depopulation and the decline in rural areas, so there is a job of work that could be done and heritage can play its part.

In terms of the need for capacity, the Deputy asked if we are happy. No, we are never happy with the resources and I will check the figures but I think that, in terms of our budget allocation at the moment, we are around 2006 or 2007 levels. The Heritage Council took a 65% cut

in its allocation and has never recovered that. Within the context of our new strategic plan and the working arrangements with the Department at the moment, I hope that is addressed in the course of the lifetime of this plan.

Where do the resources go? It is important to say that, during that time of cuts, the community-led sectors, exemplified by heritage, all knuckled down. They took the bad news, as did we all. They survived. They upped their ante. They did more for less, but that can only be done for so long. There is a point where that piece of elastic can be stretched to breaking point. There needs now to be some acknowledgement, recognition and not taking for granted of the community-led voluntary sector and we need to make sure the resources and capacity are provided to allow that to happen. I hope that comes through the Heritage Council as this plan is implemented.

The council's board, as represented here by Ms Marie Bourke, has a number of new initiatives and ideas and wants not only to build on what has happened over the past 20 years, but make sure that we address these contemporary issues. They touch on climate change and it is clear the role that heritage can play in that. It may sound as though it is a far stretch but again I appreciate, in the absence of Deputy Danny Healy-Rae, that he touched on the value of heritage-led regeneration to help overcome some of the housing crisis. It does not solve it, but it can play its part if it is properly resourced.

Our work has always tried to support the local level delivery of a service, and we are a public service and that is what we are focused on. I welcome the positive responses from all members of the committee to the way in which services at local level could be bolstered. That is something that the Heritage Council has listened to heritage officers about but the Heritage Council would know itself as well. Given the capacity and resources, the Heritage Council would be only too pleased to achieve that.

Chairman: I have one or two questions of my own. I think Dr. Gallagher wants to come in on the last question.

Dr. Joseph Gallagher: To address Deputy Heydon's question, I think tremendous potential exists at local level and increasing the capacity of the local authority to work with and support those communities, and give them advice and direction, is very important. Taking the conservation of traditional buildings as an example, the GLAS scheme was mentioned, exemplified through the traditional farm buildings grant scheme the Heritage Council operates. That allows for increased capacity at local level to conserve a very important aspect of our built heritage. It also develops traditional building skills. Back in 2009, there was an all-Ireland report on traditional building skills which identified a need for training and capacity building in that area and, ten years on, there is still that need for investment in the development of those skills. That development of skills provides employment opportunities. We see it in Donegal, with our traditional building stock there and the work that is being done. There is employment for thatchers and traditional craftsmen like those who build and repair sash windows.

It is all about enhancing the local communities in which people live. They want to retain that aspect of their heritage because they are rightly proud of that and want to promote it. Visitors to our island want to see those aspects of our built heritage. Those types of programmes, with all those different types of aspects at local level, for locals and visitors to the area, for the skills sector and employment, are all very positive.

One thing we have done in Donegal every couple of years is to run vernacular architecture

seminars for the owners or occupiers of these traditional buildings, to encourage them to conserve them. We are oversubscribed every time we run it. Between 120 and 140 people attend on a Saturday morning to hear different experts talking about how to conserve their buildings, make them liveable, bring them back into use and then, in the afternoon, we have traditional craftsmen showing the practice of traditional skills. These are skills that are very much accessible to the local community. There is not necessarily a need for experts, but rather just a bit of direction and some of that work can be done by the owners or occupiers themselves. As we all know, the best way to conserve a building is to keep it in use.

Chairman: I have a number of questions. I represent an area which is, in many ways, spoiled for choice. Dublin South-Central includes Kilmainham, Inchicore and quite a number of buildings in terms of built heritage in particular, but there are also the canals and the Liffey and all of that. Much of my time in the area has been spent encouraging, though little encouragement is needed, and working with different aspects of local communities in trying to enhance or exploit heritage for the community and put it on show for people coming to look at it. We have been quite successful in recent times. We managed to get the local authority to buy an old mill that NAMA was holding from us - Kilmainham Mill. The question now is what to do with it. A plan has been there over the years. It is great when we have a success like that because we have lost so much over the years. It allowed the committee to go into schools. I think two of the representatives had a far greater understanding of how the mill was used than most of us on the committee and now visit and present to local schools. The mill was in operation up until the 1980s. There is footage of it in operation. People, including my grandfather, remember it. Suddenly, matters have been stirred. Once we stir people, be it with regard to history, heritage or whichever way we want to describe it because it is so vast, it acts as a spark, particularly for many young people. It gets them to switch off gadgets and they look at their own areas in a different way.

We will be dealing with the museums in the near future. New technology can be an advantage, particularly in the context of storage. My father worked in a museum for many years. I remember the scary stories he told me about storage. To my knowledge, some of that is still happening. In this day and age, everything should be catalogued and made available online regardless of whether it is going to be in a box forever more. I do not mind. The idea is that somehow or other, it is accessible to the public. We cannot put everything on display but people should know that we have it and protect it and that it is available.

There are two areas in which I do not have expertise so I might be wrong about them. Bord na Móna has just announced the ending of peat-fired energy generation and the cutting of turf in vast areas. I do not know whether our guests have given some thought to this. What will we do with the heritage? Is this an opportunity for us to reintegrate some of the species - what was before? How do we interact with that? The Minister might tell us at some stage and invite submissions because it is so vast and gives us an opportunity to do a lot of stuff for which we did not have money or the vision in the past.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae has left. I thought he might have raised the next issue, which is how we protect some of our heritage sites in particular from the likes of rhododendron and Japanese knotweed? In the past, I saw a newspaper report that the men's sheds had gone down to Killarney to get stuck. Well done to them. From the little knowledge I have of rhododendron, I think they need to be on site every weekend for the next ten years to undo some of the damage and resurrect parts of the national parks. In my area, Japanese knotweed has held up a social housing project for a year because of questions about how to treat it so it does not just

affect our heritage sites. It also affects future sites.

I thank our guests for quite an enlightening presentation. I have taken my own scribbled notes because if the Minister comes before us again soon, there are a number of points we can raise directly with her. Alternatively, we might write to the Department to see whether it will give consideration to the assistant heritage officers. If we achieve nothing else over the next year, we will have done a lot to help the Heritage Council, the local authorities and ourselves. The local authority in my area has done tremendous work and I have worked with it on saving too many buildings at this stage. Some people say that this is all I am involved in. Prior to the restoration of Richmond Barracks, the local authority worked with the library service and put a call out to the community in the Kilmainham-Inchicore area to carry out an audit of material. I had not seen this previously. It was held in a hall and anybody with any bit of history was told to come along. The material was photographed and scanned. The library service now has a log of a lot of material that is not held in museums. It knows where it is and what it is about and has interacted with them since then. This was a big job and it took place on a Saturday. I saw more weapons on that day than I have seen all my life. It was interesting because it was a barracks. People brought old memorabilia from the days when British soldiers were there and when the national forces took over the barracks in 1922, bits and pieces from soldiers who had been abroad and people who worked in CIÉ and items of general historical interest. The barracks has the roll books of the school that was set up there in 1924. There are data protection considerations as some characters are still alive and there are little notes about them so we must be careful. They are on show in a roll book. The museum there is very small but it does something of which I am proud. We wanted to do a lot more but it is only a small building. I will leave it at that. Again, I thank our guests.

Dr. Marie Bourke: From our perspective, it is a very welcome thing for us to be here to listen to members' comments and to present and give our answers, particularly regarding the Heritage Council's new plan and strategy, which is being launched in 2018 - European Year of Cultural Heritage. It will conclude in 2022, which is towards the end of the Decade of Centenaries. There is a sense within the council that it is happening at a historic time and that it could be a very good time for heritage and to improve the structure and funding of the council.

The Acting Chairman ranged over many areas. It is all to do with local communities. The fact that we are able to present here means that to a degree, the committee is an advocate for heritage. From our perspective, if the committee can fight our cause, it would be hugely helpful because heritage is Ireland's greatest national asset. It is a privilege to be here.

Deputy Martin Heydon: It is a privilege to have the representatives from the Heritage Council here.

Mr. Michael Starrett: I thank Dr. Bourke for those words, which I echo strongly. We really need all the support we can get. The Heritage Council would be very happy to administer any funding that was targeted at the assistant heritage officer programme. If we kick start that over the next 12 to 18 months, it would be a wonderful achievement.

There is a real job of work to be done with regard to Bord na Móna but, again, it is a tremendous opportunity. I know the area very well because the very first chairperson of the Heritage Council, Freda Rountree, was from the Fivealley-Blue Ball area just outside Tullamore so I spent a lot of time travelling up and down the road between the two places. Freda introduced me to the delights of the bogs of Ireland. Bord na Móna has done tremendous work and has again shown what is possible. If committee members have not visited Lough Boora parklands I

strongly recommend they do. There is potential to extend it so it is not only a nature conservation haven but a recreational site for people to visit and improve their well-being. They have built cycle tracks. They have done a lot but they can only do so much. I will return to the question about legislation. If there was a framework with empowering and enabling legislation that allowed local authorities and communities to identify what was needed for their areas and for areas to be designated as regional parks or something along those lines, as happens in the rest of Europe, there would be a legislative framework in which this issue of Bord na Móna could be addressed. There is an opportunity there and I hope the Heritage Council will help.

Heritage officers have been very active on the invasive species. The rhododendron and Japanese knotweed were mentioned. There is very good science now through the national biodiversity data centre. The national biodiversity data centre is the hub through which information on the spread of all invasive species, whether rhododendron or Japanese knotweed, are accessed. In terms of what can be done about it, it is very difficult. They are invasive species and the solutions are not easy. There are issues-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: There are some invasive species around here too.

Mr. Michael Starrett: I see.

Deputy Martin Heydon: They are hard to kill off.

Mr. Michael Starrett: I appreciate the meeting is coming to an end. If the Chairman will indulge me for 30 seconds, I will say I will be stepping down as chief executive of the Heritage Council at the start of the new year. I want to put on record my appreciation for the consideration that has been given to the Heritage Council and its work over the years that I have been chief executive and above all for the thought-provoking discussions that have taken place and the courtesy that consecutive Chairmen and members have shown to me during my time as chief executive. I thank members on a personal basis.

On behalf of the Heritage Council, Dr. Bourke might like to add something.

Dr. Marie Bourke: We are thrilled to have been invited to appear before the committee and to have had the opportunity to speak to it. I was not sure whether we were going to have the opportunity to mention the fact our esteemed chief executive officer will be stepping down at the beginning of January. I am very glad it has been mentioned because it is his legacy that will carry the Heritage Council through to its next phase. It is a moment to pay due regard and respect to that legacy.

I will end on one point. Heritage Ireland 2030 is the new Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht heritage plan. It works very closely with and complements the Heritage Council's plan. One of the things the Department has just initiated is an open public consultation. It is a very good time to alert people in one's own area to be vigilant to that consultation. It is very keen to involve as many people as possible in expressing their views and opinions about what can be done for Irish heritage. It is a really good way to get everybody to articulate their thoughts. I do not know if it has organised exactly where and when but it would be worth watching the website to see where and when the public consultations are organised so members of the committee can be there and can encourage their colleagues to express their views on things such as the Bord na Móna site which definitely should be marked by some very creative, innovative centre or whatever the appropriate thing is.

I thank Mr. Starrett for his work. His legacy has shaped and will shape the council into the

future. It is only fair to say we will be welcoming the new chief executive officer next year when we know who that person is.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Senators did not leave the committee room to vote in the Seanad because we cancel each other out. I would have been voting against the Government and Sinn Féin would have been voting with it. When I mentioned a separate Department, I meant it in a more ethereal sense and that the Heritage Council would have more money and decision-making power. I understand there can only be 15 Departments. I understand the link the Heritage Council has with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht but it is very important it has power, more money and more officers and is not vying all the time in some kind of an order. If we can do anything to help the Heritage Council in commencing legislation or with its officers, we certainly will. I wanted to make that clear.

Chairman: On behalf of the committee, and perhaps the people, I thank Mr. Starrett for his stewardship. His are big boots to fill by whoever is coming in. I doubt it is the last we will see of Mr. Starrett in public life. I thank all witnesses for their presentations and for answering our questions quite openly. We will return to the issue on an ongoing basis and there will be progress, which is key. Members will share my commitment to raising the issues with the Minister and Department officials when they come before us. If witnesses think they have missed out on any points, they should feel free to send us a note on it and we will share it with the members. I thank the witnesses and bring the matter to a conclusion now.

The joint committee suspended at 3.37 p.m., resumed in private session at 3.44 p.m. and adjourned at 4 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 28 November 2018.