

The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) helps communities find enterprising ways to revitalise the old buildings they love. Our funds support charities and social enterprises in developing sustainable new uses for historic buildings that are redundant or under-used. We aim to both enable the conservation of historic buildings and also to help groups own and manage historic buildings for the long-term.

We do this by providing *grants* for early-stage project development; and *loans* at any stage.

This guidance gives further information on our **grants**.

The development work that we fund enables groups to test out ideas for re-using a building and to prepare detailed plans to the point of being ready to commence the works. In Northern Ireland, projects may be located anywhere – in cities, towns or rural areas.

This guidance is designed to help you decide if our support is right for you – please read the guidance in full. We try to be as flexible as possible in managing our grant-giving and are always happy to discuss projects and offer advice at any stage.

If you think your project is eligible and fits with our funding priorities, or you would like further advice, ***please complete the [online enquiry form](#) and one of our Support Officers will get in touch.***

In general, your project will be eligible if all of the following apply:

- your project involves an historic building, which we define as:
 - Listed - Category A, B+, B1 or B2
 - unlisted but in a Conservation Area and/or
 - highly valued by the local community for its demonstrable historic interest;
- your project involves a change of primary use and/or a change of ownership;
- your project is being led by a not-for-private-profit organisation

Things we cannot normally fund:

- work that has started before a decision to award a grant
- on site capital works
- repair costs that are not part of a larger scheme to find a new sustainable use
- ongoing maintenance costs

Please read on for further details on eligibility and what we look for in assessing applications.

Which of our grants could be right for you?

Stage you have reached	Grant scheme	Decision cycle
Just Starting Out <p>You may be thinking about forming an organisation or have recently constituted, or be a long-standing organisation tackling a new project. You have identified a building or buildings - either already in your ownership or one you are considering taking ownership of. You may have some ideas about how the building could be restored and used, but are wanting to explore the options and test whether these will work.</p>	Project Viability Grant <p>Up to £7,500</p>	Monthly
Ready to Move Forward <p>You have already completed the feasibility and viability work needed, but you need to do more detailed work to develop your plans and help secure capital funding to deliver your project.</p>	Project Development Grant <p>Up to £15,000</p>	Quarterly

In considering which grant best fits the stage you have reached in building design terms, you may find it helpful to refer to the Royal Institute of British Architect's Plan of Work. This may help you in discussing your requirements with your architect and professional team and developing briefs for their work. A summary guide to the RIBA stages can be found [here](#) and the relevant Plan stages are noted in the tables below.

AHF grants in Northern Ireland are supported thanks to funds from the [Department for Communities](#), [Garfield Weston Foundation](#) and [The Pilgrim Trust](#).



Who can apply

Your organisation must be one of the following not-for-private-profit organisations, or lowest tiers of local government

Unincorporated organisations (e.g. charitable trusts and associations) intending to incorporate (for Project Viability Grants only)

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee

Charitable Community Benefit Societies

Community Benefit Societies

Not-for-private-profit companies Limited by Guarantee

Community Interest Companies (CICs) Limited by Guarantee

Co-operatives

We will not fund

Private individuals

Local authorities or other public sector bodies (unless applying on behalf of an organisation still in formation)

Universities, colleges and other mainstream educational institutions, including independent schools

For profit companies, unless in a partnership led by a not-for-profit organisation

Unincorporated organisations (e.g. charitable trusts and associations) that are not intending to incorporate

Organisations with less than three Trustees or Directors (if there are only three Trustees/Directors none of these should be spouses or otherwise related to each other)

Limited liability partnerships

Churches or other places of worship, where the building will remain in use primarily as a place of religious worship – defined as hosting more than six religious services per year

How we assess your application

Potential for positive social and environmental change

A change of use and/or change of ownership is proposed, or you have recently acquired the building. With a new use, or by being brought into community ownership, the building and your vision for it must have the potential to increase the vitality of the place – increasing footfall, extending the hours when social and economic activity is taking place, creating a new offer for residents or visitors. We want to see that projects have potential to deliver both economic and social outcomes, using or from a heritage asset. This can include job and business creation, plus floor space brought back into use. Social potential can include an increase in volunteering, people developing new skills, increased pride of place, and improved wellbeing. We prioritise projects that demonstrate the potential to have positive impact in disadvantaged areas, such as urban communities experiencing structural economic decline, or isolated rural communities experiencing poor access to services. We look for evidence of strong community involvement and support in the project. We also look for you to have thought about the potential environmental impact of your project – what do you want to achieve and how?

Ownership & Organisational Capacity

Your organisation should own, or be intending to acquire, or hold a long lease on, the building. Your lease (existing or proposed) should have at least 25 years left to run following project completion. In some cases and where meanwhile uses are planned in preparing a longer term proposal, we may be able to consider projects with a shorter lease: if you are in this position then you need to discuss this with us before applying. We will consider your organisation's ability to deliver; for example, have you any staff; what is the background and experience of your Trustees?

Heritage value

Your building should be of special architectural or historic interest and your proposals should be heritage-led. It will be listed Category A, B+, B1, or B2 or unlisted in a Conservation Area. It will also be considered for support if a convincing case can be made for its heritage value to local people if it has no statutory designation. If located within a conservation area you will need to show that the building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. We give priority to buildings that are 'at risk' and look for evidence of this such as being listed on the [Heritage at Risk Register for Northern Ireland](#), or some explanation as to the nature of the threat.

Financial need

We prioritise applications that can show wider financial support in the form of some match funding. Match funding demonstrates wider commitment to your project and a willingness to share in some of the risk. Local community fundraising can help generate community awareness and support. Match funding requirements differ across the grants - see below. We can only accept in kind/pro bono contributions as match funding in exceptional circumstances. We will expect you to explain why you need grant funds from us, as opposed to other sources of fundraising.

Why now?

We look to understand how our funding would help you move the project forward. It may be that our funding would help achieve a project milestone, such as acquiring a building, creating a business plan, developing detailed designs, or submitting a funding bid. We wish to understand why the funding is necessary now and what difference it will make. If there are any time constraints, such as match funding deadlines or other restrictions, please make these clear in your application.

Project Viability Grants

You can apply for a maximum of £7,500. The average offer is £3,500.

We can fund up to 50% of the cost of work involved.

What is this for?

To explore the different options for re-use, or to test and cost a single option. Generally speaking, we can contribute towards the costs of any fees for work you are unable to do by yourselves.

This typically involves an initial assessment of the building's condition and repair needs, outline design solutions sympathetic to its heritage value that can accommodate the uses under consideration, and the outline cost of the works needed to repair and convert the building. It will also involve considering the outline business case for the possible uses, based on research and consultation, and how the project could be funded. In many cases, it may be necessary to obtain an independent property valuation, for example if the funding strategy may include Social Investment (loan finance) or to identify the conservation deficit, which is where the cost of the project will exceed the value of the restored building.

Equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stage 0 – 2

Points to note

We *prefer but do not require* to see some evidence of match funds having been secured or sought, although you do not have to have secured the match funding to be able to apply. Match funds means that you would contribute to some of the costs from your own resources and/or funds raised from other sources. For example, costs of £10,000 could mean you apply to AHF for £5,000 and apply to other sources for £5,000. You would set this out in the application form. *If in doubt, please discuss with the relevant Support Officer in advance of your application.*

If you do not already own the building, you will need to provide evidence that you have a reasonable prospect of securing ownership, for example, a letter from the owner giving you preferred bidder status, or that they have agreed to allow you time to raise the necessary funds.

You should generally be already constituted as one of the organisational types listed above, but if part of your work is to explore the best type to set up as, we will accept applications in advance of formally registering your group. At a minimum, we will still want to see that you have an initial governing structure, clear constitution and organisation bank account.

We prefer applications to be based on an actual quote rather than an estimate. If any item of work for which you are seeking funds is over £10,000, you must obtain at least three competitive quotes. *Please get in touch with a Support Officer if you need assistance with this.*

What will this grant help you achieve?

At the end of the funded work, you should be in a position to decide whether to commit to further cost, risk and effort in developing the project and be able to provide a route map for the next steps. We ask you to use our Project Viability Appraisal template to bring together the results of any professional reports and studies with your own knowledge of the area and potential project. This will also be a document you can then present to potential funders and supporters to help explain your plans.

Project Development Grants

You can apply for a maximum of £15,000. The average offer is £7,500.

We expect to see 50% match funds to be in place, or in the process of being sought.

What is this for?

To enable you to take forward the development of your capital project to the next stage.

This could include developing the technical and design details, additional support to build the capacity of your organisation by employing or contracting a project manager, refining your business plan, building community engagement and preparing funding bids. Within the maximum above, this could involve applying to us for more than one grant over time, enabling you to move forward in stages.

Equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stages 2 - 4

Points to note

We expect to see evidence of 50% match funds having been secured or sought, meaning that you would contribute to some of the costs from your own resources and/or funds raised from other sources. For example, costs of £30,000 could mean that you apply to AHF for £15,000 and apply to other sources for £15,000. You would set this out in the application form.

If you do not already own the building, you will need to provide evidence that you have a formal agreement to acquire it, such as Heads of Terms, which the owner cannot rescind without good cause.

You should be set up formally, as one of the organisational types listed above.

We require applications to be based on an actual quote rather than an estimate. If any item of work for which you are seeking funds is over £10,000, you must obtain at least three competitive quotes.

Please get in touch with a Support Officer if you need assistance with this.

If you have not completed a Project Viability Appraisal funded by us, you will need to provide details of the work you have done to test the viability of your plans – this could include an Options Appraisal, business plan or other documents. We will consider how likely it is that your project will be able to go on to attract the capital funding required.

You will need to show that the proposals will be sympathetic to and not harm the historic character of the building. We want to know that there is no reason in principle why planning permission and listed building consent would not be granted. This will need to be backed by evidence that you have taken appropriate advice, including from conservation-accredited professionals.

What will this grant help you achieve?

At the end of the funded work, or series of grants if more than one, you would be expected to reach the stage of securing capital funding to enable the delivery of your project.

What viability and development work can be funded?

You may already have undertaken or commissioned some of this work at the point you contact us, but still have some gaps to fill in. Or you may be starting from the beginning in looking at possible options. Our funding can help you to complete the picture or to move forward. **We cannot fund any work that has started or costs you have incurred before we issue a grant offer letter.**

Any work that is essential for taking the project forward towards to goal of revitalising an historic building will be considered, but you must be able to explain how a particular piece of work or activity will enable this.

Examples include:

- Employment of a project co-ordinator (either someone appointed externally on a consultancy basis or an existing employee(s) working **additional** hours on this specific project).
- Fees for consultants needed to help progress plans (*e.g.* architect, quantity surveyor, structural engineer, mechanical and electrical engineer).
- Property valuation by a RICS registered valuer.
- Fundraising consultants.
- Business planning consultants.
- Costs associated with developing a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund or other capital funders (*e.g.* Activity Plan, Training Plan, Conservation Management Plan).
- Costs of community engagement work (*e.g.* outreach, pop-up events, consultations).
- Legal costs, where this is critical in establishing ownership or the viability of proposed uses (*e.g.* advice on restricted covenants) or for advice on governance (*e.g.* to determine the appropriate constitutional model for delivering the project and operating the building following completion).
- Specialist VAT advice to identify the most tax efficient approach to the project.
- VAT costs that cannot be reclaimed.
- Organisational overheads/administration costs.
- Costs associated with converting an existing charity or social enterprise into a Community Benefit Society.

How to apply

Firstly, complete the [online enquiry form](#). One of our Support Officers will then get in touch to discuss your project. We will be happy to assist you in developing a draft application, offline. You will then need to complete the online application form on the [Grants in Northern Ireland](#) section of our website. Please download the Application Help Notes to guide you in completing the form. Please also refer to the application deadlines in the [Deadlines and Eligibility](#) section of our website.

What happens when a grant has been awarded?

You will receive a formal offer letter which includes terms and conditions. You will then need to confirm that you accept these before you start the funded work by completing a Grant Acceptance Form.

We provide additional guidance to grant holders, but key points to note at this stage are:

Our grant offers are normally valid for one year. Where work is not completed within the time limit on the grant we may withdraw the funding, unless we have agreed to a request from you to extend the time limit.

You will need to make regular progress reports during the work. Following completion, we may ask you to provide updates for up to 5 years, so that we can understand the outcomes our funding has helped you achieve.

We will ask you to publicise our support for your project, as a condition of the grant.

Grant payments are made in arrears, once work has completed: you will need to submit an online claim form and upload copies of invoices and evidence of work completed. For larger grants, we will be able to pay in stages. For Project Viability Grants we normally pay on completion of the Viability Report, once this has been reviewed by our Team. **You will need to plan how you will cover your costs until the grant can be claimed.**

For more information on claiming your grant, see www.ahfund.org.uk/grantholders