Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County
Council

HERITAGE SIGNAGE & HERITAGE TRAIL GUIDANCE

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1.0 Introduction

Interpretative signage of archaeological, historical and natural heritage sites can add significantly to the understanding and enjoyment of the site by visitors; it can highlight the presence and significance of a site thus raising awareness and consequently improving its level of protection; and it can be an important communication and education tool. Equally signage if done carelessly, placed badly or incorporating inappropriate or out-of-date information can have a detrimental effect on a site. For example, an ugly interpretation panel on the axis of a key vista can detract from the enjoyment of the view of the landscape.

The interpretation of archaeological, historical and natural Fingal County Council has developed Heritage Signage & Heritage Trail Guidance in order to:

- Establish an agreed process across all Departments for the integrated development of heritage signage and heritage trails across the County.
- Provide clear direction and advice to the public and stakeholders on the best practice, procedures and requirements for the development of heritage signage and heritage trails in Fingal;
- Safeguard the amenity and enjoyment of public spaces and areas by ensuring appropriate heritage signage within these public places.

1.1 Is signage necessary?

It is important to get a message across but also to avoid over signing. An excess of signs will create unnecessary clutter and can be intrusive, confusing and may dilute your message, whilst also creating a maintenance burden.
Interpretation of sites is currently dominated by panels which are costly, but there are alternatives. According to the international charter that guides interpretation this ‘can include print and electronic publications, public lectures, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programmes, community activities, and ongoing research, training, and evaluation of the process itself’ (Ename Charter, 2007, 3). For more ideas see the Heritage Council’s publication Bored of Boards https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/bored_of_boards_1mb.pdf

Consider the following carefully:

- Why are you interpreting the site?
- Will the addition of signage benefit the site?
- Who is your audience?
- What are the key messages and stories you wish to communicate?
- What information is already available?
- Is the site subject to legal protection under the planning, archaeology or wildlife acts?

1.2 Heritage Audit

Interpretation of our built, natural and cultural heritage should:

- Provoke curiosity and interest
- Relate to the everyday experiences of your audience
- Reveal a memorable message.

In order to develop a comprehensive interpretation plan for your area you will first need to gather information A heritage audit is a useful tool to establish your baseline of heritage assets, accessibility, and the stories you want to tell. It is also a means of exploring the best interpretation options for your area. A heritage festival to celebrate an historical event? A heritage guide? A heritage trail?

- Investigate what already exists. Is there signage in place already? Has a book been written on the area? Did a local society or group produce a leaflet years ago?
- Identify documentary sources, artefacts, and other material; investigate oral history, research folklore and legend
- Compile an inventory of the accessible historical, archaeological, ecological, botanical, architectural assets of your area (3km-6km radius) with a view to developing interpretive materials
- Analysis physical heritage assets in terms of current condition and accessibility
- Hold a community event to present information gathered on selected sites and seek input and suggestions with regard to lesser known sites within the district and to invite participation by the wider community in the gathering of data on the local heritage
- Produce a prioritised list in terms of suitability for future interpretive materials and promotion.
- Set out your priorities and proposals in an interpretation plan. This plan can then form the basis of funding applications as it will clearly demonstrate the rationale and community buy-in for heritage interpretation projects identified.

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1.3 Interpretation Plan

An interpretation plan can be one page or a whole report. It does not matter whether you are creating an interpretive panel or a whole trail an interpretation plan will provide structure to the process.

Who is it for?

Think about your audience, who they are and who do you want them to be.

Why are you doing this?

- increasing understanding
- communicating significance
- involving the community
- managing a place
- increasing visitor numbers

What will you interpret?

Think about:

- features visitors can see
- the unique stories associated with your place
- what is interpreted elsewhere
- the themes you will use

How will you do it?

Think about:

- choice of interpretive media
- location and timing of media
- the use of themes

Monitoring and evaluation

Think about:

- is the interpretation working successfully?
- how will you share and celebrate your success

How will it be managed?

Think about:

- skill requirements
- budgets and funding
- health and safety issues
- maintenance and life expectancy of media

1.4 Fingal's Standard Signage

- Heritage Trails
- Park Trails
- Coastal Walk

A Freestanding 'lectern style' interpretive display panel
B Freestanding medilith interpretive display panel
C Wall mounted interpretive display panel
D Freestanding medilith mapboard display panel
E Freestanding maxilith mapboard display panel
F Round pole with fingerpost
G Markerpost

Fingal County Council has developed a suite of signage that is being utilised throughout the County, to form recognisable information points and a visual coherence. The green header is for park trails; blue for the coastal trails and orange for heritage signage.
Please note: Signage must be bilingual (Irish & English).

Location:

- The placement of information panels should not be physically or visually intrusive to the site, or its context.
- Consideration should be given to relationship of the panel and the site; aesthetics, and the suitability of the environment for installation and maintenance.
- The site should not suffer detrimental impact-either physical or visual by the addition of interpretative signage.
- Foundation holes for signage should not be dug on or in close proximity to an archaeological monument as it may disturb sub-surface archaeological remains.
- Signage should not be affixed directly to masonry.
- Ensure signage does not cause sightline issues that would have a negative impact on pedestrian and vehicular traffic movement.

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Content:

- Text should be clear and concise using plain English and limited to 100 words.
- The text should be translated into Irish, also 100 words.
- The maximum number of images is 3.
- Copyright for the use of images etc. must be attained.
- The project's funding logo should appear.
- Content should be based on multi-disciplinary evidence (historical, archaeological, ecological, botanical, architectural etc.), local traditions and stories that relates directly to the site and its surrounding landscape.
- All signage content must be approved by Fingal County Council.

Permission:

- Have you permission from the site owner?
- If the site is an archaeological site then the National Monuments Service must be notified. Contact Heritage Officer Christine Baker Christine.Baker@fingal.ie for more information.
- Is your site a Protected Structure (RPS) or an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)? For more information contact Conservation Officer Helena Bergin Helena.Bergin@fingal.ie
- Heritage signs may require either planning permission of s254 licence. Section 254 of the Planning & Development Act (as amended) outlines the necessity to erect signs on public roads.

Remember before a place can be interpreted it must be accessible and safe to navigate. This is particularly relevant if considering using signage as a basis of for a heritage trail.

2.0 Why create a Heritage Trail?

An aim of all heritage trails should be to create a trail that has long term appeal, is sympathetic to the environment where it is developed and has the full support of all landowners and the community. Consideration should include the cost of developing the trail and its ongoing maintenance versus the potential number of users. What are your objectives and what type of heritage trail would be best to achieve those objectives? Is your intention to attract tourism? Provide knowledge? Or perhaps it is a community-based project? Are you participating in a thematic or regional project? Working at a larger-scale with several groups across a region of the county may produce a more comprehensive tourism offering.

2.1 Types of Heritage Trail

Is the delivery method engaging? Remember heritage trails do not have to be panel-based. They can be a combination of fixed elements such as way markers with a digital element or audio or digital trails that have little physical impact but may be reach larger audiences.

Self-guided heritage trails can use a range or combination of media:

Panels - Panels are easily available and can be placed on site. However, panels are usually only read by more motivated visitors and can be visually intrusive and clutter a site.

Leaflets-Leaflets are educational, containing maps and images; can give useful information that can be taken away, and being portable can encourage exploration. They can be difficult to store and distribute.

Audio trails & Podcasts - Audio trails & Podcasts can be used when the visitor chooses. Sound effects and voices can create atmosphere and experience. Audio trails for mobile phones need to be well-promoted or may go unnoticed.

Apps - Apps can be used when the visitor chooses, can be linked to GPS and are visually unobtrusive. However, not all visitors own or want to use a smart phone and Apps can be heavy on data transfer.

Videos - Videos can be commissioned or made by heritage groups about local heritage sites and uploaded on to YouTube. QR codes on leaflets or interpretation panels can link smart phone users directly to the videos.

Sculptures - Outdoor art pieces art pieces can help people connect to the landscape and history of the site, adding to the visitor experience. Appreciation of sculptures is subjective and can be expensive to commission.

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2.2 Planning a Heritage Trail

Who is your audience?

Think carefully about the audience you are trying to engage as this will determine the design and content of your heritage trail. If tourists are your primary audience have you considered how they will hear about and connect with your heritage trail? Will you need to provide translations to common languages such as French and German? If new communities are your audience have you considered if guided tours or talks by local heritage society members would be a better way of introducing new residents to their locality and community? Consultation with stakeholders to identify users and their needs is an important element of planning a heritage trail.

A heritage trail represents a significant financial and infrastructural investment. Layout, accessibility, and health and safety are important elements when considering a heritage trail. It is also important to consult with your community and potential users about what they would like, what is feasible and to look at what heritage trails have already been developed in Fingal to assess what has worked well and difficulties encountered. Consider how your proposed trail sits strategically with other trail developments, other related amenities, parks services, business etc, in the local community and county.

When planning a new heritage trail, you need to develop a clear picture of the following;

- all positive and negative features on the route
- heritage sites and other important features on the route
- existing road or path infrastructure
- access points, car park areas, etc
- different habitats within the area and any protected areas or designations
- topography, ground conditions and landscape characteristics of the site
- areas that are unsuitable e.g. wet ground, hazardous etc
- any safety issues on site that may impact the trail development
- all existing activities that are carried out on the route e.g. farming activities, felling for timber production etc.

Layout

Does your heritage trail a fixed route with panels that need to be read in sequence such as a looped trail? Or is each panel stand-alone? If your trail is a fixed route people will want to know how long the trail is and how long they should allow to complete it when walking, cycling or driving. Other useful information may include what sort of terrain or gradients are involved which is especially important those with mobility issues or pushing buggies.

Will your heritage trail have a fixed start and finish? This can give structure to the narrative-the beginning and end. Trails should start and finish in a convenient place -e.g. a car park, access to public transport. Directions should be clear as users need reassurance, they are following a safe and reliable route. Many people are not confident map-readers and may require a combination of words, maps, on-the-ground markers or virtual geomarks. Likewise, people will not remember a map or written directions from an entrance panel so think about portable directions or including map boards along the trail.

Access

Can users get close enough to an interpretation panel (and to the feature being interpreted) to be able to read it, providing access so that all users, not just those on foot, can approach? Do you need to provide visual or auditory aids so that visitors with sensory needs can access the interpretation? Is the signage of appropriate height for access by all users? Avoid places likely to be obscured by vegetation or blocked by cars and ensure the sign text is readable from a distance.

Health & Safety

Identify hazards and obstacles, including gradients and path surfaces that may become slippery or wet. Can your heritage assets be reached safely via a footpath? Are there safe road-crossing points? A heritage trail route should not traverse areas which may endanger trail users. It is vital that the location of signs does not cause a sightline issue that would have a negative impact on pedestrian and vehicular traffic movements. The final locations must meet the agreement and approval of the area engineer.

Local knowledge

Local people know their own area best and are a useful source of information, such as where signs are required, which areas may be prone to vandalism and the location of hazards. Consultation enables people to take ownership of the signing process and can help to avoid conflicts of interest, as well as adding value to the project.

Maintenance

Is there a plan (and funding) for regularly checking the sign for graffiti or other damage? Has a replacement schedule been considered? Outdoor signage typically needs replacement every five to ten years.

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2.3 Content

The difficulty of presenting the knowledge you have gathered to your audience in 100 words should not be underestimated. If possible, a QR code linking your signage to a website that holds further information or a pdf of your heritage trail should be considered. This has the advantage of letting your audience follow up on the interest you will have generated with your interpretative signage. Although website content will need to be maintained.

Tips for Content

Engagement: Many people will decide in seconds whether or not they will read your sign. Keep it concise. The average attention span is only 30 to 45 seconds. Be sure that your main point is conveyed in this timeframe.

Message: What do you want people to be thinking of when they leave the site? What can people see? Are there physical features- views, mounds, doorways, natural elements of interest? Who created the site? Why how and when? What did they do here? Individuals associated with the place?

Illustrations: Fingal signage can accommodate a maximum of 3 images. For quality reproduction these images must be a minimum of 300dpi. You must obtain copyright/ permission for the use of images. Clearly label and annotate any illustrations.

Language: Avoid specialist language, jargon and technical terms. Use active rather than passive verbs e.g. “we look after…” rather than “the site is looked after by…”. Use short punchy sentences and write in a lively conversational style.

Signage must be bilingual (Irish & English). The Irish Officer will review to ensure that the style of Irish is consistent on all signage.

All signage content must be approved by Fingal County Council.

3.0 Procedure to make a proposal for Heritage Signage/Trail

Where a proposal for is initiated by a member of the public or a group, the following should be adhered to. An initial discussion of outline proposals with the Heritage Officer is required. Proposals should be sent to Heritage.Officer@fingal.ie or posted to Heritage Officer, Fingal County Council, County Hall, Main Street, Swords, Co. Dublin, K67 X8Y2

Proposal

Proposals for heritage signage/trails must include

- The rationale for the heritage signage/trial. Ideally an evidence-based demonstration of need in the form of a heritage audit and/or interpretation plan.
- A marked map and photographs of the proposed locations must be submitted This should consider the proximity of archaeological monuments, protected structures and ACAs, accessibility and health and safety to ensure signs are located in appropriate places and don't visually or physical impact on sites, monuments, views etc.
- Evidence of consent from land owners (including where relevant Fingal County Council), will have to be provided in writing at the time of application.
- Proposals will be brought to a heritage signage steering group comprised of relevant FCC stakeholders who will advise on the feasibility/appropriateness of the proposal. A walk through the proposed route/examination of proposed locations by Operations personnel to make sure it is safe, accessible, appropriate etc. will be required. Final locations must meet the agreement and approval of the area engineer.

Funding

To note the signs cost between 2,500-3000 euros per sign. The costs involved in the development of heritage signage/trail will normally be borne by the proposers. Proposers will therefore have to demonstrate in their application how funding will be raised for the proposal.

Installation

Once appropriate locations for heritage signage have been agreed, the Operations Department of Fingal County Council will, subject to budget/work plan, install the signage on Fingal owned lands. The schedule for installation must be agreed the by September of the year prior to installation.

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Maintenance

The proposers should include details on the provision of ongoing upkeep and maintenance.

Timeframe

Experience has shown the heritage signage process can take up to two years from conception to installation. This should be borne in mind when planning your project.

"Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection." — Freeman Tilden

Appendix 1

As can be seen from the preceding this guidance documentation is specific to heritage signage and heritage trails. Guidance on other types of signage is available;

Commemorative Memorials - plaques, monuments, sculptures that should be considered to mark significant historical events, anniversaries or people is subject to the *Naming & Commemorative Memorial Policy* https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2019-04/Final%20Naming%20and%20Commemorative%20Memorial%20Policy.pdf

Public Artwork is subject to a separate process for its commission and approval through the Arts Office of Fingal County Council. See http://fingalarts.ie/public-art/ .

The Open Space Strategy *'Keeping it Green'* sets out the policy for the Memorial dedication of **Benches and Trees**.

Directional and public realm signage information is also available:

NRA 2011 *Policy on Tourism & Leisure*

Department of Transport's *Traffic Signs Manual (updated 2019). 2838d2cb74114383b0a5e4f42561ae89.pdf*

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This Guidance was approved by the Elected Members at the County Council meeting held on 8th March 2021