



HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SUPPORT FUND (THATCHING GRANT) GUIDANCE NOTES



Scotland has one of the widest ranges of surviving traditional thatching techniques in Europe. However the number of thatched buildings and the variety of materials and techniques used has diminished drastically over the course of the last century, largely due to changes in land management, de-population and the availability of materials. This important element of Scotland's vernacular architecture is becoming increasingly rare and many types of thatched buildings are at risk of being lost to development or neglect.

Due to its perishable nature, a traditional Scottish Thatched roof will rapidly deteriorate unless it is regularly maintained. Historic Scotland encourages owners of historic and traditional thatched buildings to maintain and repair them by providing grants for the maintenance of thatched roofs under the Thatched Buildings Maintenance Scheme, which is administered by the Comhairle. The scheme provides grant funding to meet a proportion of the cost of repairing and maintaining roof structures. This can include re-thatching, replacement of top coats, repairs and associated minor works to roofing divots and roof timbers.

The scheme is targeted at maintenance of existing thatched roofs. Currently the grant is not available for the re-thatching costs of restoring a thatched roof to a building that has lost its roof. However, if sufficient evidence can be supplied to show that the original roof was thatched and the restoration is done to grant eligible standards, a grant towards the maintenance of the roof may be available in the future.

A grant of up to 85% of the eligible cost is available to applicants in receipt of Council Tax Relief or Income Support and up to 50% for other applicants. If the estimated cost of the thatching maintenance works is more than £5000, personal financial information must be submitted by the applicant in Section D of the application form to allow Historic Environment Scotland to determine the appropriate level of funding support.

If you wish to apply for a grant, please complete the attached application form and return it to Hannah Morrison, Planning Officer, Development Department, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Balivanich, Benbecula HS7 5LA. If you have any queries telephone 01870 604990 or email hmorrison@cne-siar.gov.uk .

Eligibility

- Re-thatching or thatch repairs to existing buildings thatched in a traditional manner using locally (within the Outer Hebrides) sourced materials and to the local Island style.

Grants will not be given to:

- Properties where the roof contains a layer of felt;
- Materials are not locally sourced;
- Style of thatch (including ridge and eaves detail) not to the original style of building; and
- New build thatched cottages and their subsequent rethatching.

PLEASE NOTE THAT IF YOU ARE APPLYING FOR GRANT, YOU MUST NOT START ANY WORK UNTIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED CONFIRMATION THAT YOUR APPLICATION HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL

Closing Date for Applications

The closing date is set for the 30th September every year to allow the application to be determined and the work to be carried out within that financial year. Exceptions may be made in exceptional circumstances. Any applications received after this date will generally be assessed under the budget for the next financial year.

Listed Buildings

If the thatched building is listed, alterations (e.g. a change in the thatching material or style from that specified in the Listing) specified in your grant application may require Listed Building Consent. This is required for works which affect the character of a listed building. If required, Listed Building Consent should be sought from the Local Planning Authority before applying for grant funding.

MAINTENANCE OF THATCHED BUILDINGS

General Guidance to Maintenance

- Thatch should be inspected regularly for damage especially following bad weather.
- Thatch, once settled, should never be stood on, or otherwise subjected to point loading.
- Any sudden sinking at the ridge or of the roof pitch should be investigated promptly.
- Holes made by nesting birds or by vermin should be filled as soon as possible.
- Moss should be removed and any repair made when thatch is slightly damp.
- The building should be heated (where applicable) and the thatch must be well ventilated .

Fire Protection

Thatched buildings can be particularly vulnerable to fire, as the material used are combustible. Defective chimneys and flues can allow hot gases to escape which can cause fires within the body of the roof. Chimney fires, particularly where wood is used as a fuel, and wind blown sparks from fires outside the property, can also cause fires in thatched roofs. When carrying out maintenance and repair to thatched roofs, the chimneys should always be checked and repaired to ensure they are safe and sound.

- Ensure that flues are lined where appropriate and well maintained.
- Have chimneys regularly swept.
- Ensure that wind is blowing away from house before lighting a bonfire.
- Keep bonfires, fireworks and other sources of naked flames well away from thatched buildings.

Heating and Ventilation

Thatch can be vulnerable to becoming damp or even saturated during prolonged periods of wet weather. This can be exacerbated by coverings of moss or other materials which hold water. Thatch should be kept free from moss growth, fungus and other debris or vegetation that may hold water. It is important to keep thatched buildings heated (where possible) and ventilated to maintain a dry roof. Thatched buildings which are unoccupied or otherwise left unheated and unventilated will quickly deteriorate and eventually fail. Where the building is used as a holiday home an inbuilt ventilation system is recommended. Keeping windows open can prevent dampness and rot throughout the building.

Traditional Thatching materials and Techniques

Thatch is a broad term which can apply to a wide variety of wild and cultivated plant fibre materials used for roofing. Thatch tends to be locally distinctive, with many variations of materials and vernacular traditions found even in relatively small geographical areas.

Materials found for thatching roofs in Scotland include oat and barley straw, rye, reed, heather, and marram grass. There are over 20 different types of thatching materials identified
CNES, Development Department, Thatching Grant Application Guidance Notes July 2015

in Thatch and Thatching techniques: a guide to conserving Scottish Thatching Traditions (Historic Scotland TAN 4). Some of the most common materials are detailed below.

Marram Grass

Marram Grass is an ideal thatching material for the Hebrides and exposed coastal areas as it can withstand strong winds and scouring from wind-blown sand. Imported materials are not naturally adapted to the climate and tend to perform less well. However, cutting and harvesting of marram can be damaging to the vulnerable dunes which provide a defence against coastal erosion. For this reason, marram grass thatching will only be supported under the grants scheme if it can be verified that it will be sourced from a sustainable location where permission has been granted for its removal.

Reed

Water Reed has commonly been used for thatching in wetland areas and may be an appropriate material for re-thatching. Reed benefits from regular cutting and removal and therefore the use of local reed thatch can benefit the natural environment as well as maintaining local traditions.

Straw

A wide range of straw types have traditionally been used for thatching throughout Scotland including barley, oats, rye and wheat. Techniques vary throughout the country, but normally the straw was cut whilst still slightly green, which makes it tougher and more durable. Straw should be well dried before use. Sourcing suitable straw for thatching nowadays is very difficult due to the change in farming practices and prevalent uses of fertilisers. Straw thatch is generally less durable in exposed areas. 'English' style wheat straw thatch has become more popular recently, as local skills have been lost, however this is normally not an appropriate style in Scotland.

Heather

Heather has been used as a thatching material for centuries wherever it grows locally, and particularly in the Highland region where cereal crops were scarcer. Long stemmed heather is the most suitable for thatching and the whole plant is normally used, tied in bundles and then secured to battens with roots pointing downwards. Harvesting heather helps promote growth and is therefore beneficial to the plant. Modern ways of cutting rather than uprooting heather can still provide decent thatching material and makes gathering the thatch much easier.

Fixing and Securing Thatched Roofs

Thatch may be weighted on with stones and/or secured with netting (originally fishing nets), tied on with ropes or secured with wooden or metal pegs or hazel spars. Replacement or modern thatching is sometimes secured with synthetic netting, twine or chicken wire. The way thatch is fixed and weighted is as important as the type of material used in terms of creating an authentic traditional thatch, therefore thought should be given to the way the thatch will be designed and fixed to the roof. Priority will be given to traditionally detailed roofs when allocating grants.

Ridge detailing

Traditionally the Hebridean style of thatched buildings has no separate ridge; the thatch is carried over the apex of the roof to create a rounded roof structure that is ideal for withstanding the high winds.

Useful Contacts

Historic Environment Scotland Conservation Directorate

technicalresearch@hes.scot

0131 668 8668

The Conservation Directorate aims to provide best practice advice and guidance to anyone who needs it – at a technical level that suits your purposes.

The technical staff can advise on most aspects of traditional construction and appropriate maintenance and repair techniques. However they can't make site visits but will usually give general advice and point you in the direction of more specific help.

The Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group

c/o D Kidd

National Museums of Scotland

Chambers Street

Edinburgh EH1 1JF

www.svbwg.org.uk

Further Guidance

Thatch and Thatching Techniques: A guide to conserving Scottish Thatching traditions, Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note (TAN) 4

The Archaeology of Scottish Thatch, Historic Scotland Technical Advice Note (TAN) 13