

March 2012



HISTORIC SCOTLAND
ALBA AOSMHOR

THATCHED BUILDINGS MAINTENANCE SCHEME GUIDANCE NOTES AND APPLICATION FORM



Thatched Buildings Maintenance Scheme

Guidance Notes

Scotland has one of the widest range of surviving traditional thatching types 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 building 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. 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.

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 C of the application form to allow us to determine the appropriate level of funding support.

If you wish to apply for a grant, please complete the application form and forward it on to the Conservation or Planning Officer for the Local Authority within which the property is located. The Local Authority will consider the proposals in the first instance. If the works are deemed appropriate, the application should then be forwarded to the Historic Scotland Investment Team for processing.

If the thatched building is listed, alterations specified in your grant application may require Listed Building Consent. This is required for works which affect the character of a listed building. The Local Authority determines the need for Listed Building Consent and will deal with applications. If required, Listed Building Consent should be sought from the Local Planning Authority before applying for grant funding.

The attached notes give guidance on the types of thatching materials appropriate in Scotland, the importance of regular maintenance and where to go for further information or to find a Thatcher.

Please note that if you are applying for grant, you must not start any work until you have received confirmation from Historic Scotland that your application has been successful.

<p>For any queries on grant applications, please contact: Frazer Gibson, Project Officer, Historic Scotland Investment Team, Room 2.6, Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1SH. Telephone (Direct Line): 0131 668 8821 E-mail: Frazer.gibson@scotland.gsi.gov.uk</p>

Maintenance of Thatched Buildings

General Principles

- Thatch should be inspected regularly for damage especially following bad weather.
- Thatch, once settled, should not be stood on, or otherwise subjected to point loading.
- Any sinking or sagging 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.
- Thatch must be well ventilated and the building heated.

Fire Protection

Thatched buildings can be particularly vulnerable to fire, as the materials 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 and ventilated to maintain a dry roof. Thatched buildings which are unoccupied or otherwise left unheated and ventilated 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, bracken, broom, marram grass (grown on sand dunes) and eel grass (a type of marine grass). In fact over 20 different types of thatching materials are identified 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. Use of less common thatching materials such as broom, rush, bracken or seaweed will be supported where it can be sourced sustainably and is appropriate for the area and building type.

Wherever thatching is proposed, it is preferable that a local source is used. If imported, then traditional techniques should be employed in laying the thatch. This will help ensure continuity of traditional practice until a supply of local material can be found.

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. The Tayside region is a well known area for reed thatching, however water reed is found widely throughout Scotland and may be an appropriate material for re-thatching in many areas. 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. Historic Scotland is working with Scottish Natural Heritage to protect and manage reed beds in Scotland and provide a source of thatching materials.

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 the 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

Some thatched buildings, particularly the Hebridean types, have 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. Where the roof is pitched the thatching material itself may be used to build a ridge, typically in more decorative 'cottage orne' style buildings. Turf or concrete are the two most common ridge materials used in Scotland. Turf ridges should have layer of clay underneath to provide a waterproofing anchor coat.

THATCHED BUILDINGS MAINTENANCE SCHEME
APPLICATION FORM

SECTION A

1. Name/s of applicant/s:	
2. Address of building to be thatched: <i>please provide:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a location map • Photos showing the whole building • Photos of the areas requiring repair 	
3. Date of construction of the building to be thatched, (approx):	
4. Address for correspondence: <i>(if different from above)</i>	
5. Contact telephone number: E-mail Address:	
6. Do you own the property?: If no, who is the legal owner?	YES/NO
7. Do you live in the building?:	YES/NO
8. If you do not live in the building, what is the building used for?:	
9. Estimated cost of thatching, including VAT if applicable*: <i>(Please provide a copy of the estimates)</i> Can you recover VAT on the works?	£ YES/NO
* if the estimated cost of the works is more than £5,000 incl. VAT, please also complete Section C	
10. When was the building last re-thatched? (please provide details of what was done, by whom, and when)	

If accounts are available, the two latest full audited sets should be submitted.

Enclosed Yes/ No

15(b). For completion by a Partnership or Limited Company

Please enclose copies of the company's full audited accounts for the last two available years

Enclosed Yes/ No

If the latest accounts cover a period ending more than 12 months prior to the application, please submit draft accounts for the intervening period.

SECTION D

Signed Declaration

I/ We _____ hereby apply for a grant towards the cost of works described in this application. I/We declare that I/we cannot meet the full cost, but can make a maximum contribution of £ _____ from my/our own resources.

Signature(s): _____

Status: _____
(e.g. owner/lessee)

Date: _____

SECTION E

Endorsement of application by Local Authority Conservation/Planning/Development Officer

I confirm that _____ Council is satisfied with the terms upon which this application is made. I also confirm that, to the best of my knowledge, the proposed work is in accordance with the traditional style/type of thatching in the area and that, where appropriate, any proposed departure or variation from the traditional approach has received/will receive the necessary consent/Listed Building Consent.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
Position: _____

CHECKLIST

Please remember to:

- Fully complete the form, sign and date it and forward to the appropriate Local Authority for completion of Section E.
- Enclose photographs of the building.
- Enclose an estimate for the proposed work.

Useful Contacts

Historic Scotland Conservation Group

hs.conservationsgroup@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

0131 668 8600

We may be able to help with details of local thatchers or thatching specialists as well as giving guidance on traditional thatching techniques and materials.

The Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group (SVBWG)

c/o D Kidd

National Museums of Scotland

Chambers Street

Edinburgh EH1 1JF

www.svbwg.org.uk

Skye Museum of Island Life

Jonathan MacDonald

Duntulm

Portree, Isle of Skye

Highland

IV51 9UG

01470 552 206

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