



**GeoparkLIFE**  
**ACTION B1 TOURISM ENTERPRISES**

Date: October 2015

**Key Objectives of Action B1 Tourism Enterprises**

Action B1 relates to tourism enterprises and aims to strengthen the capability of enterprises in the use of natural resources, resource efficiency, use of renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste reduction, reduction of the carbon footprint. The action is planned to be implemented by four steps:

1. Improving environmental impact
2. Improving economic impact
3. Resource planning for the enterprise
4. Implementing the plan

2012-early 2015 focused on Steps 1 and 2. These two elements are ongoing throughout the programme. Work is now also progressed into Step 3 Resource Planning.

**OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

<p><b>Evaluation of Code of Practice Programme 2014-15</b></p>	<p>An Enterprise Survey of those completing Code of Practice Training Oct 2014-Jan 2015 was conducted in May 2015.</p> <p><u>Comparison of Outcomes Year 1 and Year 2 – Code of Practice:</u></p> <p>In terms of environmental indicators, the performance in Year 2 of the Code of Practice programme seems to be higher than that of Year 1. There are a number of possible reasons for this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A more efficient and effective training programme that has benefitted from experience gained in 2014-15.</li> <li>- A highly motivated group of businesses who were very keen to join the B.E.N. and to prove themselves eligible to do so.</li> <li>- Greater trainer understanding and empathy with challenges facing businesses in completing the Code of Practice programme.</li> <li>- A smaller cohort of businesses which resulted in greater individual attention.</li> </ul> <p>Year 2 group reported changes/improvements in every aspect of their business and environmental management systems, as well as how they engage with visitors. In addition, this group completed the programme very efficiently within a 12 week period and made good submissions for external validation. Undoubtedly, the efficiency of delivery and improved communications around the purpose and desired outcomes contributed to this. This greater efficiency and clarity arise from the experiences gained over the last number of years and from being responsive in fine-tuning and adapting the programme. This points towards the continuous review and evaluation process employed by GeoparkLIFE will ultimately lead to a fine-tuned model transferable to other destinations.</p>
<p><b>Communicating &amp; Sharing Best Practice</b></p>	<p>Sharing and disseminating best practice is a key objective of the Tourism Enterprises Option. A number of methods have proven very effective in this regard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participation at group training workshop lends itself to sharing of experiences and ideas and discussions around same. It also</li> </ul>

	<p>opens a comfortable avenue of communication with experts in the field, particularly from public sector agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organisation and co-ordination of familiarisation trips within the B.E.N. have been very highly valued by participating businesses. This allowed them to see at first hand the implementation of various environmental management ideas in peer businesses. Feedback shows that this type of exposure is the most memorable and impactful in terms of learning and sharing.</li> <li>- The GeoparkLIFE Awards Night was introduced in December 2014, as a means of recognising best practice within the participating businesses against each element of the Code of Practice programme. Participating businesses were invited to submit nominations (for themselves or other businesses), which were then adjudicated by expert panels drawn from within the GeoparkLIFE partners. The nominations provided the basis of case studies that now document best practice. The winner in each category also received a short video communicating best practice in the particular area. The case studies and videos may be viewed by following this link: <a href="http://www.burrengeopark.ie/community-business/the-geopark-code-of-practice/">http://www.burrengeopark.ie/community-business/the-geopark-code-of-practice/</a>. invitation to this event is shown:</li> </ul>
<p><b>Review &amp; Evaluation of Code of Practice.</b></p>	<p>GeoparkLIFE supported a stakeholder consultation process for Action B1 which took place through the month of May 2015. A key element of review was the Code of Practice with consultations across the Network, with Geopark Management and B1 Working Group. The majority of stakeholders supported the retention and development of the Code as the standard for membership of B.E.N. and for partnership with the Geopark. Refining the toolkit, reporting and evaluation system were seen as priorities as well as the creation of a user-friendly, intuitive support manual and an investigation of opportunities for technology-based reporting and evaluation.</p>
<p><b>Future Development of Code of Practice</b></p>	<p><b>Oct 2015- June 16</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a manual for businesses</li> <li>- Refine templates and tools</li> <li>- Explore online reporting and tracking system options</li> <li>- Test before launch</li> <li>- Pilot the mentoring approach with a business or two?</li> <li>- Train internal mentors and trainers</li> </ul> <p><b>2016-17</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New intake of businesses based on smaller number of workshops and one-to-one mentoring.</li> <li>- GeoparkLIFE Awards and Case Studies</li> </ul> <p>Refresher Workshops on Code of Practice will take place in early 2016.</p>
<p><b>Plan 2015-2017</b></p>	<p>All participating enterprises have at this stage completed Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice training. The environmental strand of the project will shift its focus towards sharing of best practice and periodic awareness-raising events.</p>

**OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVING ECONOMIC IMPACT**

<p><b>Networking &amp; Referrals Programme</b></p>	<p>Participating enterprises identified the area of recording and generation of referrals as a critically important ingredient in maintaining a strong Network. Based on this feedback, GeoparkLIFE introduced tailored training to build skills and a suitable model for referrals marketing. The objective is to create a low-cost, high-impact model that will endure after the GeoparkLIFE programme finishes. Certain variables of the tourism industry make the recording of referrals difficult. However, core principles of referrals request, generation and recognition are becoming engrained within the Network with plans afoot to simplify the model in the future. This model will in turn be documented as a best practice case study, outlining learnings and challenges encountered, which should lend itself to ready adoption by other destinations.</p>
<p><b>Marketing &amp; Communications Programme</b></p>	<p>See Communications Update Report.</p>
<p><b>Burren Food Trail</b></p>	<p>Burren Food Trail won the European Destination of Excellence Tourism &amp; Local Gastronomy Award, with an awards ceremony taking place in July 2015. Delegates from the destination attended Expo Milan in September courtesy of Fáilte Ireland and Bord Bia, with assistance in Italy from Tourism Ireland. Delegates will also attend the European Awards Ceremony in Brussels in December. This has considerably heightened awareness for the destination and is expected to provide a positive economic impact. Burren Food Trail has also secured considerable national and international media attention which is a key objective of the Economic support programme.</p>
<p><b>Training Programme 2015-16</b></p>	<p>The economic strand will focus on consolidating the new products developed and launched in the preceding 3 year period, moving the Network towards a more sophisticated and mature marketing and communications strategy.</p> <p>Training to support economic objectives will also be provided. As a key partner on Action B1, Fáilte Ireland is contributing training supports to enhance economic impact over the coming period, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Content Creation</li> <li>• Mobile Readiness</li> <li>• Contracting for International Business on the WAW</li> <li>• Marketing for Accommodation Providers</li> </ul>

### OBJECTIVE 3: RESOURCE PLANNING

As a result of the Geopark LIFE programme, it is envisaged that the Burren Ecotourism Network will emerge as an independent, self-sustaining organisation that will continue the key work of the GeoparkLIFE programme in the areas of environmental education and resource planning for sustainable tourism.

For this reason, the resource planning component of GeoparkLIFE has been modified. Originally, it was envisaged that supports in the area of resource planning would relate to individual enterprises. Experiences on the programme to date have led GeoparkLIFE to instead focus supports on resource planning for the B.E.N i.e. the collective of enterprises. Instilling a process of strategic planning for tourism conservation through the Network is now seen as the optimal means of sustaining environmental management practices in the After LIFE period. GeoparkLIFE expects a trickle-down effect from this collective level of planning (a process in which all members have the opportunity to participate) and that member enterprises will take a lead from the overall Network in developing business plans that complement each other and lead to greater coherence in the enterprise offering across the region.

<p><b>Stakeholder Consultation Process May 2015</b></p>	<p>As a direct result of recommendations in the March 2015 B1 Evaluation Report (circulated in advance of last Steering Group meeting), the B.E.N., supported by GeoparkLIFE, commissioned a stakeholder consultation process. This was conducted by Tina O’Dwyer during May 2015. Key outcomes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Burren Ecotourism Network:</b> In general, participants felt that good progress had been made in the last few years and that a strong and positive platform for embedding a sustainable tourism model in the region existed. 6 priorities for work programme were identified by the members: Planning, Collaborative marketing, ‘Bigger’ Environmental themes, enhanced networking and familiarisation, advocacy, and training and mentoring.</li> <li>- <b>B.E.N. &amp; Geopark Partnership:</b> The B.E.N. and Geopark partnership is seen in a very positive light by both partners, and also by external parties. The key priority emerged as being the agreement of a strategy and action plan around areas of common interest. Priority platforms identified include: conservation, standards and training, advocacy, finance and marketing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategic Planning Process.</b></p>	<p>The above consultation and review process facilitated the logical advancement of the GeoparkLIFE programme into the area of resource planning, the third strand of the Tourism Enterprises Action. With clear successes recorded to date in the areas of environmental impact and economic impact as a result of the training and networking programme, focus has now turned to 3-year strategic planning and to addressing the critical issue of an exit strategy from the programme for the tourism enterprises. In the next phase, GeoparkLIFE will firstly support the development of a 3-year sustainable development plan for the Network itself, a plan in which the key principles of sustainable tourism will be embedded. It is expected that this plan will be complete by early November 2015.</p> <p>GeoparkLIFE will then engage in a 3-year programme planning process between the Geopark and the B.E.N., cultivating a situation where Geopark and B.E.N. engage as independent organisations who can co-operate on areas of common interest in a purposeful and deliberate</p>

	<p>fashion. This will yield a defined Partner Work Programme expected to be completed in January 2016.</p> <p>This initiative will engage the members in collective strategic and tactical planning, enabling and even forcing a focus on the completion of actions that support strategic goals and that are realistic within available time and resources. In this way, Geopark LIFE envisages that the principles and processes of sustainable business planning will be transferred to individual members and to planning processes within their own organisations. In addition, it is expected that supports for individual business planning will be provided in the period October 2016-March 2017, building on the collective process now underway.</p>
<b>Training to support Capacity Building</b>	<p>Aware of the need to have a comprehensive exit strategy, training in the period October 2015-March 2016 will focus on building capacity within the membership of the Burren Ecotourism Network in the areas of management, leadership, training, mentoring, planning, conservation best practice, marketing and product development. Specifically, the following training is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Train the Trainer and Train the Mentor</li> <li>- Geopark Heritage Interpretation Programme</li> <li>- Invasive Species Training</li> <li>- Universal Access/Universal Design</li> </ul> <p>The strategic planning process will also result in recommendations around management and leadership of the Network itself. Necessary training to support capacity in this area will be provided.</p>
<b>ETIS</b>	<p>While GeoparkLIFE remains involved in the ETIS pilot programme, there is a recognition at European level that the toolkit and framework needs review and perhaps further supports. GeoparkLIFE will continue to use ETIS as a framework but acknowledges that the level of data collection and stakeholder involvement across all criteria is beyond the scope of the programme. Over the coming 18 month period, Geopark LIFE will develop communications tools that enhance awareness of the value of ETIS and will focus on engaging stakeholders on two key sustainable destination criteria, namely Universal Access and transport/travel.</p>
<b>Measurement &amp; Monitoring</b>	<p>In September 2015, the B1 Working Group agreed the measurement and monitoring approach suggested in the March 2015 Evaluation Report (circulated in advance of last Steering Group meeting). This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Annual Enterprise Survey</li> <li>- 2015 Resident Survey (in conjunction with Young Scientists at Mary Immaculate School, Lisdoonvarna)</li> </ul> <p>A Millward Brown Visitor Survey was undertaken in late 2014. Decisions around the scope and nature of future visitor surveys are yet to be taken.</p>

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN**

Actions to be undertaken under this strand of Action B1 Tourism Enterprises can only be determined once the B.E.N. Strategic Plan and the B.E.N./Geopark Partnership Programme have been finalised. Evaluation and reporting on this element is expected to take place throughout 2017.