



GeoparkLIFE
ACTION B1 TOURISM ENTERPRISES

Date: October 2016

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 progressing on Steps 3 and 4.

Objective 1: Improving Environmental Impact

Review & Development of the Code of Practice	<p>The evaluation process in early 2015 identified the following objectives in relation to the Code of Practice: Refine the toolkit, reporting and evaluation system; create a user-friendly, intuitive support manual; investigate opportunities for technology-based reporting and evaluation. This project is now underway:</p> <p>Phase 1: Review Code, criteria & toolkit (Feb-March 2016).</p> <p>Phase 2: Develop training specification and training manual (April 2016).</p> <p>Phase 3: Develop user manual and step-by-step guide for business (March-June 2016). Test toolkit and guide.</p> <p>Phase 4: Develop self-evaluation tool as well as evaluator guidelines and evaluation sheet. Investigate online options. (March-June 2016)</p> <p>Phase 5: Develop internal panel of trainers and mentors (March-June 2016 and October 2016).</p> <p>Phase 6: Run Code of Practice programme using new resources (Nov 16-Jan 17) (fewer workshops and more one-to-one mentoring)</p> <p>Phase 7: Externally assess 2017 submissions (Jan-Feb 17).</p> <p>Phase 8: Review and evaluate Code experience; Develop recommendations for transferable toolkit (March 2017).</p> <p>Phases 1-5 will all be complete by the end of October 2016 and the new Code of Practice programme will kick off on 14th November 2016. A panel of internal trainers and mentors is being formed and, for the first time this Autumn, the bulk of training and mentoring will be provided by members and partners of the Burren Ecotourism Network. This is a significant development in our overall progress towards ensuring a strong, self-sustaining Network in the After LIFE period. A highly innovative online portal/tool/resource to support the Code of Practice is under development and it has the potential to integrate all aspects of the tourism enterprises programme in one place and made available to the business/destination manager and evaluator in a user-friendly and accessible way. It may also provide the template for self-assessment in management of visitor sites and community projects. The Burren</p>
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	Ecotourism Network is accepting new members this year. They will be supported in their journey towards sustainability by a combination of workshops, peer mentoring and the online resources. Phase 7 and 8 will be completed slightly later than expected above due to an unforeseen delay in the development of the online system.
Geopark Heritage Interpretation Programme	An 8-week Geopark Heritage Interpretation Programme was delivered by Zena Hoctor between January & March 2016. The participants on this programme developed projects demonstrating how they can apply their heritage knowledge to create meaningful and enjoyable interpretive tools and experiences for visitors. A showcase of their work for other BEN members will take place on Wednesday 30 th November 2016, evening time (time and venue tbc). This programme was very well received and has clear legacy value and so it is planned to offer it to further tourism enterprises in Spring 2017. It is anticipated that the projects from both programmes will be showcased in late Spring next year and GEoparkLIFE partners will be invited to attend.
Sharing Best Practice: GeoparkLIFE Awards 2017	In order to stimulate the sharing of Best Practice Geopark LIFE will again run the Geopark LIFE Awards. The previously indicated date of 1 st December 2016 has been changed and will be confirmed in November. It is likely to take place around March 2017. This time, businesses will be asked to submit their nominations using the case study template designed for last year's award winners. We will also encourage businesses to submit a video, created by themselves, that showcases their best practice. We hope to involve members of the Geopark LIFE Steering Group in the judging process.

OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVING ECONOMIC IMPACT

Networking & Referrals Programme	The July 2015 consultations once again highlighted the potential economic benefits of a solid networking and referrals programme. While great progress was made in providing training and raising awareness of key principles and approaches in this regard, further finetuning of the model is required in order to make it more effective and transferable. This will be a focus of the work in B1 in Autumn Winter 2016 with the objective of defining the optimal networking and referrals model for tourism destinations. Tina is facilitating plan development with the B.E.N. sub-group that will lead this aspect into the future.
Marketing & Communications Programme	Consolidating the destination marketing strategy and enabling businesses to effectively harness the overall destination communications is the focus for the marketing and communications programme as it relates to B1. See Communications Update Report.

OBJECTIVE 3: RESOURCE PLANNING

An objective of the Geopark LIFE programme is that the Burren Ecotourism Network (B.E.N.) will emerge as an independent, self-sustaining organisation that will continue to implement key elements of the GeoparkLIFE programme for sustainable tourism.

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 is now on strategic planning, capacity building and identifying an exit strategy from the programme for the tourism enterprises.

At the B1 Steering Group Meeting of June 2016, it was decided to change the reporting indicator for the Resource Planning strand to “the creation of a viable sustainability plan for B.E.N.” (In the original application, the indicator was the number of businesses preparing business plans which integrated sustainable tourism practice).

<p>Strategic Planning Process</p>	<p>As part of Action B1 Resource Planning, Tina facilitated the strategic planning process for B.E.N. in Autumn 2015 and a strategic plan was presented to the B.E.N. membership in November 2015. A broad strategy towards financial self-sustainability has been outlined and agreed.</p> <p>Through the GeoparkLIFE Resource Planning Action, Tina further facilitated an indepth member consultation process in July 2016 to seek support for a proposal around achieving sustainability. Arising from this process, Tina is currently working with a B.E.N. sub-group on the development of a business plan for the Network to effectively ‘commercialise’ it’s model and to produce a solid document that can be used for funding applications and business development. Failte Ireland contributed the services of a financial mentor to guide this process.</p> <p>The July 2015 consultations clearly identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - That environmental good practice, as articulated through the Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism is a cornerstone of the B.E.N. identity and a framework for its activity - that the marketing strategy and marketing co-ordinator support is the key membership benefit that businesses require from the Network - that the Network needed to be ‘run like a business’ if it is to achieve financial sustainability and that the members would welcome this development
<p>Resourcing of personnel to support B.E.N. AfterLIFE</p>	<p>B.E.N. currently benefits from the support of two co-ordinators, perhaps spending 2.5 days per week each on the areas of marketing, training and co-ordination. These positions will cease to be funded through GeoparkLIFE from mid January 2017.</p> <p>Plans are afoot to enable the B.E.N. to directly employ two part-time professional co-ordinators. The first would be a Marketing Co-ordinator to lead and manage the destination marketing strategy. This is essential to ensure ongoing membership benefit and to retain and attract members. The second position would be a Network & Funding Officer whose role would focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ identifying sources of funding, making applications for funding, networking and identifying opportunities for partnership and co-operation ☐ establishing revenue-generated ticketed events ☐ developing a corporate and individual donation opportunity ☐ seeking sponsorship and corporate supports ☐ managing membership of B.E.N. <p>☐ atriculating vision and strategy and linking activities of various sub-groups</p> <p>It is proposed that the Marketing Co-ordinator position would be funded through member fees. It is proposed that the Network & Funding Officer</p>

	<p>would be employed through a LEADER-funded animator role over a two year period. The overall role of the Network & Funding Officer is to commercialise the Network over the two year period to the point that it can support this type of role and further activity into the future. Tina has liaised with LEADER and the B.E.N. Executive on the application for the Networking & Funding Officer position, which will be brought to completion by the Executive itself.</p>
<p>Training to support Capacity Building</p>	<p>B1 Training continues to focus on building capacity within the Network. The Train the Trainer and Train the Mentor programme were completed in October 2016. The 'graduates' of this programme will support the delivery of the Code of Practice programme to future members of the Network.</p> <p>Further workshops and mentoring will focus on building capacity to manage and implement the Code in the future. It is envisaged that the Geopark itself will continue to independently own and support the Code of Practice.</p> <p>It is proposed to deliver the Geopark Heritage Interpretation programme again in Spring 2017.</p>
<p>Measurement & Monitoring</p>	<p>The annual survey of BEN enterprises was completed by August 2016. The results from the survey will be reported before year-end.</p> <p>The core indicators for Action B1 Tourism Enterprises are:</p> <p>Overall Indicator: 100 enterprises to complete a training programme of 2000 days.</p> <p>A breakdown of progress against this indicator is given in Attachment 1.</p> <p>Component Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the use of environmental management techniques by the businesses, comparing pre-training with post-training - attitudes and beliefs of business owners as to whether their businesses have been strengthened as a result of the programme. - the creation of a viable sustainability plan for B.E.N. - the implementation of the sustainability plan as well as the number of enterprises undertaking new activity as a result of the programme.

OBJECTIVE 4: IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The Resource Planning elements are underway. The B.E.N. Business Plan will be complete by early November 2016. The implementation of this plan will be monitored and reported on over 2017.

Attachment 1: Overview of Training Geopark LIFE programme to date

Training Cycle	Number of Training Events	Total Training Day Provision	Approximate Cost	Number of Businesses
Oct 2013-May 2014	23	512	10100	52
Oct 2014-May 2015	26	727	16700	57 (45+12)
Oct 2015-May 2016	18	355	11000	42
<i>Cycle 4</i>				
OVERALL TOTALS	67	1594	37800	

Anticipated Provision Cycle 4

<i>Oct 2016-March 2017</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>23000</i>	<i>50</i>
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Expected Outcome: Total training provision of about 2094 training days with nearly 90 training events impacting directly on 70 enterprises.