



## GeoparkLIFE ACTION B1 TOURISM ENTERPRISES

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> February 2017

### Key Transferable Outputs from the Geopark LIFE Programme for Action B1 Tourism Enterprises

The transferable output from Action B1 is the Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism. Through its work in the area of engaging with tourism enterprises, the Geopark had been aware of a number of challenges that face destinations and tourism enterprises in achieving sustainable tourism practice. The Geopark LIFE programme set out to address these. The resulting Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism distinguishes itself in the following ways:

- it provides a framework for the destination rather than the individual operator;
- it provides tourism operators within a destination with a common understanding of what sustainable tourism means for their area;
- It is applicable to all business types within a destination - avoiding the complexity and management challenge of different operators working within different third-party frameworks;
- it is mentally accessible and written in plain English; it is tailored to the drivers of the individual destination;
- it balances and combines the resource management aspect of sustainability with the socio cultural aspect;
- it enables tourism enterprises across a destination to **start** on the journey towards sustainability and provides a clear framework for them to progress incrementally. It opens the doors to those who are not yet all the way 'green'.
- it explicitly gives equal weight to the three pillars of sustainability - environmental, economic and social.

### In terms of transferability, the following outputs will be available to other destinations:

#### 1. The Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism Online System

This is an integrated online system that enables tourism operators to work through the Code of Practice in a phased and supported way. Tourism operators may submit evidence of adoption of Code and this can be accessed and evaluated through the system. It also has inbuilt measurement and data management functions that will support analysis and reporting by destination managers. The online system will be managed by Clare County Council on an ongoing basis and the method of making it available to further destinations is under consideration.

All instructions and supports for tourism operators are contained within this system and come in a variety of formats: video tutorial, templates, guidelines and case studies.

The system will also be supported by an Administrator's Manual and an Evaluator's Manual.

## 2. The Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism Good Practice Guides

A series of 6 guides will comprise recommendations and good practice guidelines to support the effective implementation of the Code of Practice system at destination level. It will be useful to destination managers and tourism network champions within destinations. The guides mirror 6 key principles of the GeoparkLIFE approach to working with tourism enterprises:

- a. **Make it together** (*referring to the collective approach*)
- b. **Make it real** (*referring to localised standards*)
- c. **Make it possible** (*referring to the training and enterprise support programme*)
- d. **Make it pay environmentally** (*referring to sustainable environmental management*)
- e. **Make it pay economically** (*referring to collective marketing and promotion of destination*)
- f. **Make it last** (*referring to achieving financial and managerial sustainability*)

### **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

#### **OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

<b>Review &amp; Development of the Code of Practice</b>	<p>The Code of Practice system was rolled out on a pilot basis in April-May 2017. A total of 15 enterprises made Code of Practice submissions – 11 were new members and 4 had made Code submissions in previous years. The pilot went well overall, albeit it with some technical and timing issues. Some key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Mentors from within the Network were employed. New members found the mentoring very practical and beneficial. Members who had previously completed a Code submission did not feel a need for mentoring.</li><li>- The overall feedback from businesses was positive, reporting the system to be intuitive and efficient.</li><li>- External evaluators were appointed. Site audits were carried out at 9 enterprises to supplement the desk reviews of all 15.</li><li>- Evaluators found that the claims of businesses online were found to be true in reality during site visits. If anything, businesses were found to understate their level of activity in relation to the Code.</li></ul> <p>The completed system will be rolled out to the remaining Network members from early October. The calendar of events that support the final roll-out of the Code are contained in Attachment 1.</p> <p>The 2nd Geopark LIFE Awards will take place on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017 in Hotel Doolin, starting at 7pm.</p>
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#### **OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVING ECONOMIC IMPACT**

<b>Networking &amp; Referrals Programme</b>	<p>The Networking &amp; Referrals Sub-group of BEN held a gala networking event in April 2017 in The Pavilion Lisdoonvarna. It was well attended and this group remains active and committed to maintaining and promoting the networking and referrals programme created during GeoparkLIFE.</p>
<b>Marketing &amp; Communications Programme</b>	<p>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.</p>

### 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, the focus from early 2016 to January 2017 was 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).

<b>Strategic Planning Process</b>	The Strategic Plan for BEN has been created and was reported on in the last Progress Report. BEN continues to use this document to support its activities and planning.
<b>Resourcing of personnel to support B.E.N. AfterLIFE</b>	<p>Since the last progress report, the B.E.N. conducted a competitive recruitment process and contracted a professional marketing co-ordinator to lead and manage marketing activity on its behalf. This is essential to ensure ongoing membership benefit and to retain and attract members. This person will liaise with the Geopark on the overall destination marketing strategy. B.E.N. is funding this contract through its membership fees. Raquel Noboa has been appointed to this position. Raquel formerly worked at Hotel Doolin as the Green Manager and Sales &amp; Marketing Manager.</p> <p>B.E.N. has also completed the process of applying for LEADER funding and conducted a competitive public procurement process to select a contractor for the position of Network Development officer. The overall role of the Network &amp; 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. This is funded 75% by LEADER and 25% by B.E.N. through its membership fees. The contract for the position is expected to commence in mid September and Tina O’Dwyer is the designated contractor.</p> <p>These developments are very positive and further signal the emergence of an ambitious and forward-looking network. The funding applications and recruitment process were managed by the Network members themselves as well as other projects such as applications for festival funding and operational planning for 2017. GeoparkLIFE has operated an exit strategy since early 2016, the desired outcome of which was exactly this level of ownership and responsibility being assumed by the Network members themselves.</p> <p>With personnel in place to resume some of the roles and responsibilities formerly supported through GeoparkLIFE funding, meaning the B.E.N. can be an active and important player in the AfterLIFE plan.</p>

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: IMPLEMENTATION**

Given that the natural outcome of the Resource Planning Component of Action B1 is that the Burren Ecotourism Network assumes ownership of and responsibility for its own business plan and future, the implementation of the plan now rests with the Burren Ecotourism Network itself. The plan has Key Performance Indicators built in so that the Network Executive can monitor progress over time.

The implementation of the B.E.N. strategic plan is underway as evidenced in the creation of two part-time contract positions. GeoparkLIFE will continue to liaise with the Burren Ecotourism Network during 2017 to observe progress on the plan implementation.

As part of the AfterLIFE plan, it is anticipated that the B.E.N. will continue to partner with the Geopark office on both the destination marketing and network development programmes. It is planned that a work programme will be discussed and agreed between the B.E.N. and the Geopark over the coming months, which will be reported in the GeoparkLIFE Final report and included in the AfterLIFE plan. The implementation of the plan will be monitored by the Geopark office in the AfterLIFE period.

The Tourism Enterprises Report arising from Action B1 will document observations and findings in this area.

#### **MEASUREMENT & MONITORING**

The Progress Report of March 2017 contained full details of the measurement and monitoring on Action B1 Tourism Enterprises. The final part of this will conclude in December 2017, when the remaining members of the B.E.N. complete the Code of Practice using the new online system and when the final Enterprise Survey is completed.

The B1 element of the Layman's Report is currently being finalised. The B1 element of the Final Report will be completed in December 2017.

## Attachment 1: Code of Practice Events & Dates October-December 2017

Date	Event	Venue & Times
2 <sup>nd</sup> October	Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism Online System goes live. <i>Login details issued to all current and prospective members and partners on this day (excluding those who submitted as part of the pilot in April/May).</i>	N/A
4 <sup>th</sup> October	<b>Workshop: The Code of Practice System</b> The Code of Practice System (including navigating the system, resources, mentoring resource, GeoparkLIFE Awards, evaluation)	10am-1pm
5 <sup>th</sup> October	<b>Workshop: Briefing for members of the Geopark Mentor Panel</b>	10am-12noon
11 <sup>th</sup> October	<b>Workshop: The Code of Practice System</b> This is a repeat. Members attend one of these workshops only.	10am-1pm
18 <sup>th</sup> October TBC	<b>Workshop: Universal Access and any other items requiring clarification based on member feedback.</b>	10am-1pm
18 <sup>th</sup> October - 3 <sup>rd</sup> November	Mentoring Support available during this time.	
6 <sup>th</sup> November (9.00am)	<b>Submission deadline for Code of Practice.</b>	N/A
23 <sup>rd</sup> November	<b>GeoparkLIFE Conference 2017</b> This is the concluding event of the GeoparkLIFE programme and will be attended by delegates from the public, private and community sectors across Ireland.	9.30am-5pm Falls Hotel & Spa, Ennistymon
27 <sup>th</sup> November	<b>Application Deadline: GeoparkLIFE Awards</b>	N/A
7 <sup>th</sup> December	<b>GeoparkLIFE Awards Evening 2017</b> Details of categories and application procedures will be communicated at the workshops on 4 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> October.	7pm-late
8 <sup>th</sup> December	<b>GeoparkLIFE Final Enterprise Survey (SurveyMonkey questionnaire)</b> This provides the concluding feedback and evaluation of GeoparkLIFE's work with tourism enterprises. We are appealing for a quick turnaround on responses so that programme can be concluded before the end of the year.	N/A
13 <sup>th</sup> December	Deadline for member completion of Geopark LIFE Enterprise Survey	N/A