



B2 WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

22-10-14

1. SITE ASSESSEMENTS

Each of the seven selected demonstration site is being assessed in terms of the current condition of its Infrastructure, visitor usage patterns, natural, built and cultural heritage. All information gathered will be presented in individual site condition reports.

Information has been gathered to date with regard to:

- Type and condition of approach roads in terms of the safety aspects
- On-site parking – number of spaces available - cars, coaches and bicycles and current parking patterns
- Directional signage to site (numbers of signs, information provided, siting and condition)
- Visitor facilities on site
- Mode of arrival of visitors to site
- Access into and around site (for all including elderly, disabled, children); identification of restrictive access points
- Identification of the intrinsic value of the site to the visitor in terms of natural, built and cultural heritage
- Evaluation of the presentation/interpretation of the sites points of interest
- Identification of past, current and perceived visitor impacts at each site on its natural, built and cultural environment (information from existing agency reports, observation and field work)
- Review of existing baseline reports, development plans, strategies etc. relevant to the sites

Information continues to be collated with regard to:

- Visitor movement and behaviour on site (supported by CAAS observation studies and Coach Traffic Survey)
- Visitors' numbers to sites (Millward Brown Visitor Survey and traffic counters) and present knowledge/perception of conservation issues and behavioural influences.

All information gathering will be complete by mid-November.

From the above information gathering process the following items will be identified:

- Sensitive pressure and impact points at the sites
- Issues which need to be tackled at these points which will inform future work programmes

- Baseline information data gaps (e.g. lack of required information in agency reports) and possible need for future site survey work (e.g. path erosion measurements/habitat sampling etc.)
- Potential indicators for development of maintenance and monitoring programme

The compilation of site condition reports will include:

- Maps of sites
- Site descriptions and current condition
- Key issues at sites
- Constraints at sites (legislation restrictions, physical environment, health and safety etc.)
- Recommendations for a phased work programme where required to address visitor impact issues

And will be completed by mid-December.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF SITE SPECIFIC TEMPLATES FOR FUTURE INFORMATION GATHERING AND MONITORING

- A. A template for visitor observation surveys is being developed in conjunction with the CAAS/Fáilte Ireland WAW survey. The CAAS template will be adopted in light of the findings of this survey to be specific to all Burren sites. This will allow it to be transferable and replicable in future for standard surveying within the Burren.
- B. The Visitor Survey template was developed under B1 and B2 in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland (June-August) and has been tested through the recent Visitor Survey (Sept/Oct 2014). The forthcoming results, will provide information with regard to visitor numbers, attitudes to and behaviour at sites for the B2 baseline studies. It is proposed that the visitor survey will be repeated on an annual basis to act as a monitoring tool to determine changes to visitor numbers, attitudes and behaviour due to interventions at sites.
- C. Ecological quadrat surveys at the seven demonstration sites will be carried out as part of the CAAS survey over the next month. The ongoing Coach Tourism Survey is also undertaking ecological surveying at three of the sites – An Rath, Burren National Park and Poulabrone. This information will provide a baseline from which indicators of change will be identified for future monitoring.
- D. In conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Ranger the development of a systematic approach to walking trail path management is being explored using fixed point photography and a mobile phone APP. This will be tested for the seven trails within the National Park and Slieve Carran through the B2 work programme. If this system is successful, it will be transferable and replicable for the monitoring of environmental impact on all walking trails within the Burren.
- E. Work is currently underway by the B2 working group on the development of a template for monitoring archaeological and architectural sites using Slieve Carran as a pilot site (see 3 below)

3. DEVELOPMENT OF WORK PROGRAMMES, MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING – A PILOT SITE APPROACH

The B2 working group (which includes representatives from NPWS, NMS, OPW, BFCP and the Geopark) are working collectively on the development of the baseline condition reports, proposed work programmes, indicator and monitoring templates for each of the seven

demonstration sites. Slieve Carran Nature Reserve was chosen as the first site to be assessed and is being used as a **pilot site** to produce and test a methodology which will be transferable to the other demonstration sites.

To date the working group, following an initial collective walk through assessment of the site, have produced preliminary baseline geology, ecology, archaeology and architectural baseline reports for the site. Following a group review of these reports, a more in-depth archaeological survey is being undertaken and will be completed by mid-December. Due to the collective workings of the group and the collation of baseline information, discussions are underway to explore the possibility of transferring the responsibility for the maintenance and monitoring of the St MacDuach oratory site (which is located within the Slieve Carran demonstration site) from the NPWS to the OPW.

Consultation with users of the Slieve Carran site including walking guides, pilgrim path organisers, landowners and local residents was initiated through a day long workshop held in the Cusack Centre Carran and on-site on October 18, 2014. Discussions were held with regard to visitor impacts at the site (including access, erosion of pathways and deposition of votive offerings) and the condition of the heritage features of the site. Concerns expressed with regard to these issues and the wider environmental management of the Burren will be used to inform the development of future work programmes at the site. Further consultation will be undertaken with this group in the future and with the landowners of all sites and areas surrounding the sites to determine their attitude to visitor management of sites and visitor behaviour at sites.

The B2 working group will be developing a schedule of works for the Slieve Carran demonstration site to address visitor impact and conservation issues identified through the baseline assessments and community consultation. Essential to this work will be the identification of constraints at the site (legislation restrictions, physical environment, health and safety etc.) and the development of a methodology which will allow for a phased work programme and a maintenance and monitoring scheme, while addressing all the constraints identified.

Specific, measurable physical, environmental and social indicators will be selected to monitor changes in the identified site issues over time. These will form the basis for the on-going monitoring and maintenance programmes for the site.

The proposed schedule of works and the maintenance and monitoring programmes will be strongly linked to training provision under the B3 element of the programme and informed by the assessment and analysis of policies being carried out by UCD.

From January 2015, the working group will extend their focus to the other six sites to develop work programmes and monitoring schemes, using the methodology developed at Slieve Carran.