



LIFE Project Number
LIFE11 ENV/IE/922

MIDTERM Report
Covering the project activities from 01/10/2012 to 30/06/2015

Reporting Date
<29/02/2016>

LIFE+ PROJECT NAME or Acronym
Burren Tourism for Conservation (GeoparkLIFE)

Project Data

Project location	Burren, County Clare, Ireland
Project start date:	01/10/2012
Project end date:	31/12/2017
Total Project duration (in months)	62
Total budget	€ 2,225,245
Total eligible budget	€1,108,872
EU contribution:	50%
(%) of total costs	50%
(%) of eligible costs	50%

Beneficiary Data

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List of abbreviations

CCC	Clare County Council
SD	Shannon Development
FI	Failte Ireland
GSI	Geological Survey of Ireland
NMS	National Monuments Service
UCD	University College Dublin
HC	Heritage Council
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway
OPW	Office of Public Works
BEN	Burren Ecotourism Network
ETIS	European Tourism Indicator System

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objective

The Burren is a region spanning the areas of North County Clare and parts of East County Galway on the west coast of Ireland. The North Clare area was designated a UNESCO recognised Global Geopark in 2011. The Burren Tourism for Conservation (GeoparkLIFE) study area comprises approximately 530 sq kilometres, of which over 80% is designated Special Areas of Conservation. The area has thousands of national archaeological monuments and unique farming and cultural practices. 3% of the area is a National Park, the rest is in private ownership. Several government agencies are tasked with the care and management of the SAC's and the national monuments. The local authority implements the development plan for the county. Just over 5,000 people live in the Geopark and visitor numbers are now exceeding 1.1 million annually. There has been a significant growth in coach day trips since 2010 from urban centres outside of the Geopark, creating issues around environmental and social capacity and economic benefit.

The main objective of the Burren Tourism for Conservation (Geopark LIFE) project is to strengthen the integration of tourism and natural heritage, aiming to reconcile tourism development with the conservation of natural and cultural heritage in the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark region in Ireland. The project aims to secure the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and sustainable visitor management in the Geopark through partnerships with key agency, tourism business and community stakeholders and through the proposals for the integration of national and European policy instruments to support this partnership approach.

Administration

Partnership agreements were signed by a number of key agencies (beneficiaries) tasked with the administration of the region, the conservation of monuments and habitats and the implementation of tourism strategies and two universities providing expertise in policy and research. The beneficiaries provide 50% match funding and resources to the project. The lead beneficiary is Clare County Council (CCC) and the project is managed by CCC staff and external experts. The management system comprises a steering committee, advisory group and project management unit. The steering committee represents the beneficiaries and key stakeholders from other agencies, businesses and community groups invested in tourism and conservation. The advisory group is also composed of individuals with particular expertise in these areas living in the Burren who provide advice to the project as required. Three dedicated working groups are focused on the development of the three main actions of the programme; tourism enterprises (B1), monuments & habitats (B2) and conservation management (B3). The project is co-ordinated by CCC staff and external experts. Challenges encountered so far have been the overall impact of the national economic austerity programme on partner agency resources, the withdrawal of Shannon Development as a partner, the length of time involved in the decision making processes around some of the actions and the need to source administration support and the co-ordination of actions externally.

Action B1: Tourism Enterprises

Work in this action has concentrated on building on the existing network of tourism enterprises (Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN), which was established in 2008, and who already had a positive history of partnership with the Geopark and had a shared ethos towards sustainable tourism and conservation activism. The BEN acts as a core stake holder group within the LIFE project. GeoparkLIFE addressed issues around the adaptability the network had historically with third party certification systems by developing a Geopark Code of Practice in Sustainable Tourism and providing training in the achievement of its criteria across a range of environmental, economic and social targets. This training would provide the

competencies and knowledge for businesses to seek third party certification. It would encourage, rather than enforce, compliance with environmental legislation. GeoparkLIFE advertises widely to attract businesses outside the BEN for this training programme and encourages participants to join BEN. 64 enterprises have been trained to date. Templates and resources to support the Code have been tested and modified to be cost effective, fit for purpose and transferable to other destinations. Enterprise surveys monitor and measure the environmental, economic and social impacts of the training and of the ancillary programmes of product development, networking, marketing and conservation actions. Evaluations and stakeholder reviews have concluded that the best continued use of GeoparkLIFE to ensure the sustainability of tourism business engagement with conservation and best practice beyond the life of the project will be in resource planning for the network itself. Training in core competencies and capacity building in the areas of management, leadership, financing, training, mentoring, conservation, marketing and product development will ensure that there is life after GeoparkLIFE for the businesses who have invested heavily already in developing a sustainable tourism ethos and practice. The main enhancement in this action is that the indicator of success will not be in the number of businesses trained, but will be in the emergence of the network of businesses as a competent self sustaining organisation to continue the work of GeoparkLIFE in training and mentoring other businesses, in implementing the criteria the Code of Practice and in leading best practice in products and visitor services. The success of this action is down to the well established relationship between the Geopark and BEN, the learning experiences derived from certification programmes and the co-ordination provided by external assistants.

Action B2: Monuments and Habitats

The aim of this action is to use a series of demonstration sites, representing highly visible and popular monuments and habitats, both privately and publically owned, and exemplifying the three contrasting locations (zones) of mass tourism, general interest tourism and special interest tourism, to implement and test integrated management approaches. Seven demonstration sites were identified with tourism and conservation issues. Criteria were drawn up to evaluate each site, such as ownership, tourism impact, conservation impact, access, location demonstration impact and facilities. The main activities at the sites have been (a) site assessments including collection of baseline data, (b) establishment of monitoring schemes, (c) partnership and consultation with owners, managers and selected user groups and (d) the development of an individual site work programme. Activities in the work programme are progressing. Though significant capital interventions such as the construction of car parking is outside the scope of this programme, it can proceed with all aspects of the planning and provision of permissions of such works. Challenges encountered have mainly involved the level of integration of policies and procedures in the management of the sites and the time resources available from the partner beneficiaries to actively engage in this action. The monitoring element of the programme was underestimated, as was the need to establish baselines across a variety of areas from the condition of the sites, facilities at the sites to the impacts and expectations of various user groups. The quantity, collection, collation and usability of data required to inform good planning is also an unforeseen issue that needs to be addressed. To progress B2 it became necessary to engage an external expert to co-ordinate the site assessments and the development and implementation of the work programme. Once the co-ordinator was commissioned, activity escalated and a lot was achieved in a relatively short time.

Action B3: Conservation Management

In the approved project, the conservation management action aimed to develop models of best practice in the management of key heritage and natural sites. This would build up expertise of professionals and volunteers through training and case studies. Key steps were defined as

modules, case studies and evaluation. On investigation, it became clear that the development of accredited training modules would be time consuming, costly and difficult to sustain after LIFE. It also became clear that the target audiences did not, in the main, have the resources to commit to engagement with training at this level. The shift of emphasis moved from formal training modules to focus on the case studies as the ‘training’ mechanism with re-focused objectives:

- to develop the skills base of all stakeholders in the understanding, management and conservation of natural and cultural heritage
- to reinforce Actions B1 and B2
- to strengthen community support of, and activism in, conservation
- to assess and analyse current policy that impacts this action and make recommendations on future integration of policies.

The funding allocated originally to higher education modules will now be used to provide very practical best practice guides, tool kits and tailored training programmes for a range of community based user groups. These outcomes will be more practical in their application and transferability and more cost effective than the modules and case studies previously envisioned. The shift in focus is working well. 10 case studies are currently underway, and are co-ordinated by partner beneficiary UCD.

The policy mapping is undertaken by UCD. The approach was to address the policy implications of the project and the challenge of reconciling policy conflicts between sustainable tourism and other policies, especially regulatory environmental policies. All of the 3 actions are providing practical examples of policy in action and are providing important insights into their application at business, site management and community level. It is clear that the problem is not a lack of policy but the need to recognize the applicability of a range of policy instruments which may not be in direct alignment. The challenge then is to balance and resolve inter-policy conflicts.

Monitoring

The main monitoring actions are integrated into the body of work of B1, B2 and B3 and policy evaluation. Solid baseline information was absent in most areas and the quantity of data, the cost of its collation, analysis and usability for planning purposes is being analysed under B2 in terms of site management and in B1 and B3 where the application of the EU Commissions European Tourism Indicator System will be assessed in terms of business, agency and community engagement in a selection of its core indicators. The overall indicators of progress are the series of progress reports submitted to the Commission for review every 18 months.

Dissemination

The communication tools for this project are the web site, information boards, targeted communications, conferences, layman’s report and an AfterLIFE communications plan. Three public conferences will be held to inform stakeholders and the public on the progress of the project, its learning and outcomes. The website is continually updated and social media and press are utilised regularly and are attracting 1,500 followers. Information boards will be incorporated into a wider signage strategy for the Geopark, to be implemented during the next phase.

The targeted groups are

- Stakeholders (utilising newsletters, website with access to minutes and reports, and social media)

- Community (website, regular column in local newspaper, the Burren Tourism Story annual event, press and social media)
- Coach Drivers (targeted coach driver clinics in Sept 2015 and Leave No Trace awareness programme)
- Schools (GSI/NUIG/Geopark collaboration with local Transition Year Groups on information programmes on water resource management)
- Visitors (free maps, website, press and awards)

An annual communications plan reinforces our positioning as an authority on sustainable tourism destination development. Applying for relevant awards, and our success in this area, has provided local and national media attention and supporting our status as a sustainable tourism destination, as are the short videos that are posted on our website showcasing best practice in the Code of Practice. These videos are providing valuable examples of the Code's criteria to other businesses.

Financial reporting

To date, 34% of the approved budget has been spent. Some modifications between budget lines are required to reflect the emerging balance of spending on the actions.

3. INTRODUCTION

Environmental problem/issue addressed

The problem addressed by the GeoparkLIFE project is to strengthen the integration of tourism and natural and cultural heritage, aiming to reconcile tourism development with the conservation of heritage¹ in the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark. The project aims to develop management systems, involving all stakeholders, to ensure that conservation and tourism can become more integrated. This involves a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach, and the application of the myriad policies attached to the areas of conservation and tourism.

Hypothesis to be demonstrated/verified by the project

The main hypothesis followed was to focus on improved and integrated management, whereby the tourism activity would be managed in a way that would support the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; the very items that visitors are flocking to see. Therefore the protection of the heritage 'product' would automatically enhance the local tourism industry. Conservation becomes a social and economic driver, benefiting the environment, communities and visitors alike.

Description of the technical/methodological solution

The methodological solution has been to focus on three components: 1. tourism enterprises, 2. monuments and habitats and 3. conservation management. The *tourism enterprises* are the key interface between visitors and the landscape and are powerful agents of influence over visitor behaviour. By incorporating a greater conservation component in their actions and practices, tourism enterprises can counteract environmental damage and enhance respect for heritage. *Monuments and habitats* need to be conserved, but also increased in managed accessibility for visitors. *Conservation management* needs to be promoted so there is greater capacity amongst local communities to manage their heritage in a way that complements tourism.

Expected results and environmental benefits

GeoparkLIFE is aiming to develop collaborative, integrated and sustainable approaches to the conservation of heritage between agencies, communities, tourism businesses and visitors through training and practical projects agreed by the partners, specialists and stakeholders. These approaches will be presented as transferrable tool kits for other tourism destinations in Ireland and the EU. The environmental benefits are in increased awareness, responsible action and integrated management leading to better waste, water and energy use, wide spread adoption of Leave no Trace ethos, voluntary commitments to conservation, better visitor management techniques at popular monuments and habitats, better conservation skills community level.

Expected longer-term results

The GeoparkLIFE project will provide a well tested framework and transferrable tool kits for sustainable and integrated planning approaches and policies for the multipurpose use of land in tourism destinations in Natura 2000 regions. The environmental performance of SME's will be strengthened. The results will support the EU commitment to Sustainable Tourism, the European Landscape Convention and several EU Directives.

¹ The use of the word 'Heritage' denotes both natural and cultural heritage.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE PART

4.1 Description of the management system

Working Method

Project phases

There are four project phases: inception phase, progress phase, implementation phase and reporting phase (including After LIFE plan).

Activities and tasks per phase

The **first phase** covering the period **1/10/2012 to 31/05/2013** was reported by the Inception Report.

In this phase partnership agreements were signed by a number of key agencies tasked with the administration of the region, the conservation of monuments and habitats and the implementation of tourism strategies and two universities providing expertise in policy and research.

The steering group and the project management team had been established and held several meetings to discuss the development of the work programme and the partnership. A number of critical key developments that had to be managed were firstly, the announcement in May 2012 that the Irish government had decided to abolish Shannon Development. Fáilte Ireland agreed to take over all responsibilities, tasks and matching funding envisaged for Shannon Development under B1 (tourism enterprises). Secondly, due to significant issues around staff resources and a government embargo on staff recruitment, neither Clare County Council nor Fáilte Ireland could provide the full time or part time staff to manage the programme actions. Therefore, work programme actions co-ordination had to be funded under the External Assistance budgets.

Action for tourism enterprises (B1) concentrated on defining guidelines, developing the approach to environmental impact and promoting the action to the enterprises. For monuments and habitats (B2) action in this first period concentrated on site selection. Three steps were completed: site identification, definition of evaluation criteria and field review. In conservation management (B3) activity concentrated on more detailed specification of the terms of reference and project planning. Also, development work on the first component (modules) was initiated. Introductory work was also completed on other tasks: consideration of monitoring systems (C1), project web site (D1) and networking with other LIFE projects, in particular the BurrenLIFE Farming for Conservation experience and expertise (E1).

We also requested a change of the short name of the project from Burren Tourism for Conservation to GeoparkLIFE to reflect the emerging strong brand of the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark under which this project is incorporated and managed, and to ensure After LIFE sustainability.

The **second phase** covered the period **1/06/2013 to 30/09/2014** and was described by the Progress Report.

In B1 (tourism enterprises) training was delivered to 51 enterprises in the Burren and active engagement of the stakeholders was secured. A major event on the Burren Tourism Story in March 2014 attracted considerable interest and helped strengthen the foundations of the project amongst local tourism businesses and agency partners. In B2 (monuments & habitats) site selection was completed and site assessments and baselines (visitor profiles, observation studies, environmental assessments) were being established for the seven chosen sites. In B3 (conservation management) the original module-based approach was modified to focus on case-studies and skills development with the aim of strengthening and developing community involvement in conservation practices. This change caused a delay in the implementation of the actions for B3. At this point, NUIG were considering dropping out of the programme, as their main interest was in the development and delivery of the modules. However, are now participating in a B3 case study.

In Action C (monitoring & evaluation) work was in progress to finalise indicators and standards for each action B1, B2 and B3. Baselines were being established through enterprise surveys, visitor surveys, observation studies and site assessment reports. An evaluation of tourism and conservation policy frameworks was underway. The EU Commission's European Tourism Indicator System was launched in February 2013 and the GeoparkLIFE project was accepted as one of a number of destinations (Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark) across Europe to pilot the system as a framework and to test its effectiveness as a destination management tool.

The inclusion of People Counters as equipment was not foreseen in the original application, however, as the monitoring aspect of the B2 Action progressed, it was deemed essential to the assessment of impacts and to the development of the work programme to be able to quantify the number of visitors at any given time at each of the demonstration sites. This investment in equipment will provide valuable returns in terms of vital information for the ongoing management and monitoring of the sites.

In Action D (communication & dissemination), the project was launched at a major conference in October 2013, the project web site evolved as the project developed, information leaflets were distributed and information points were updated to communicate the LIFE programme.

The **third phase** covers this current implementation period from **1/10/2014 to 31/6/2015** and is detailed in section 5 in this document.

Planning

As the project has progressed, the original timescales of the project's deliverables and milestones have changed and new deadlines are proposed. As many of the milestones and all of the deliverables are now towards the end of the project we will provide the Commission with interim documentation on the progress of the project. These new deadlines are presented in the following charts:

DELIVERABLE PRODUCTS OF THE PROJECT

Deliverable	Action Number	Original Deadline	Proposed Deadline
Report on Tourism Enterprises	B1	31-12-2016	31-10-2017
Report on Monuments and Habitats	B2	31-12-2016	31-10-2017
Report on Conservation Management	B3	31-12-2016	31-10-2017
Layman's Report	D3	31-05-2017	31-12-2017
AfterLIFE Communications Plan	D5	31-12-2016	31-12-2017
Overall Final Report	D4	31-08-2017	31-03-2018

MILESTONES OF THE PROJECT

Milestone	Action Number	Original Deadline	Proposed Deadline
Completion of environmental impact stage	B1	31-12-2013	31-10-2017
Completion of economic impact stage	B1	31-12-2013	31-10-2017
Resource planning	B1	31-12-2013	31-12-2016
Implementing the plan and completion of training	B1	31-12-2016	31-03-2017
Completion of site assessment	B2	31-03-2013	31-10-2014
Definition of work programme	B2	30-06-2013	31-10-2014
Completion of actions	B2	31-12-2016	31-12-2016
Maintenance and monitoring	B2	31-12-2016	31-10-2017
Report and evaluation	B2	31-12-2016	31-12-2017
Completion of modules	B3	31-05-2014	N/A
Completion of case studies and training	B3	31-12-2016	31-10-2017
Evaluation	B3	31-12-2016	31-12-2017
Impact report on tourism enterprises	C1	31-12-2016	31-12-2017
Impact report on monuments and habitats	C1	31-12-2016	31-12-2017
Impact report on conservation management	C1	31-12-2016	31-12-2017
Socio-economic impact report	C1	31-12-2016	31-12-2017

Policy impact report	C1	31-12-2016	31-12-2017
Project web site	D1	30-04-2013	30-04-2013
Information boards	D2	31-12-2014	31-03-2016
Opening conference	D4	31-03-2013	17-10-2013
Mid-term conference	D4	31-12-2014	19-11-2015
Closing conference	D4	31-12-2016	31-10-2017
Schools programme completed	D4	30-06-2015	30-06-2017

REPORTING SCHEDULE

Report Type	Original Deadline	Proposed Deadline
Inception report	31-03-2013	30-06-2013
Progress report	30-09-2014	30-10-2014
Mid-term report	29-02-2016	29-02-2016
Progress report	0	30-06-2017
Final report	31-08-2017	31-03-2018

SUMMARY TIMETABLE

No	Action	2013				2014				2015				2016				2017			
		I	II	III	IV																
B1	Tourism Enterprises	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
B2	Monuments & Habitats	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
B3	Conservation Management	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
C1	Monitoring			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
D1	Project Website		■	■																	
D2	LIFE Info Boards													■							
D3	Layman's Report																			■	■
D4	Targeted Communications		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
D5	After LIFE Plan																				■
E1	Project Management	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
E2	Networking with LIFE projects	■			■		■						■			■				■	

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4																
B2 Monuments & Habitats																				
Site selection & assessment																				
Planned	x	x	x																	
<i>Actual</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x												
Definition of work																				
Planned	x	x	x	x																
<i>Actual</i>					x	x	x	x												
Action																				
Planned			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x						
<i>Actual</i>									x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Maintenance & monitoring																				
Planned													x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
<i>Actual</i>					x	x	x	x	x							x	x	x	x	x
Report																				
Planned																	x			
<i>Actual</i>																				x
B3 Conservation Management																				
Modules																				
Planned	x	x	x	x	x	x														
<i>Actual</i>																				
Case studies																				
Planned	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x									
<i>Actual</i>				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Evaluation																				
Planned			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x							
<i>Actual</i>				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4																
C1 Monitoring																				
Planned				x	x					x	x					x	x	x	x	x
<i>Actual</i>				<i>x</i>																
D1 Project web site																				
Planned			x																	
<i>Actual</i>			<i>x</i>																	
D2 LIFE+ Info Boards																				
Planned								x												
<i>Actual</i>													<i>x</i>							
D3 Layman's report																				
Planned																			x	x
<i>Actual</i>																			<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
D4 Targeted Comm.																				
Planned			x																	
<i>Actual</i>			<i>x</i>																	
D5 After-LIFE Comm's plan																				
Planned																				x
<i>Actual</i>													<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>					<i>x</i>
E1 Project Management																				
Planned	x																			
<i>Actual</i>	<i>x</i>																			
E2 Networking: other Life projects																				
Planned	x		x			x										x			x	
<i>Actual</i>	<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>					<i>x</i>							<i>x</i>	

4.1 Description of the Management System

The following organigrammes describe the Management System

Project Partners



Project Organisation



People, Tasks and Functions

Steering Committee	Advisory Group	Working Groups	Management Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composed of representatives of all Partner Beneficiaries, Advisory Group, Working Groups and Management Team. • Currently meets Bi-annually • Chaired by Lead Beneficiary Clare County Council • Tasked with making strategic decisions on the direction of the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composed of representatives of key stakeholder groups in the region: Tourism Businesses (BEN), Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Burrenbeo Trust, Burren Farming and individuals • Provides advice on ad hoc basis to Management Team and Working Groups • Invited to sit on Steering Committee • Tasked with providing advice and guidance to the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up in April 2014 to assist with the progress of the Actions B1, B2 and B3 • Composed of partner beneficiaries and advisory group • Meets quarterly or as work programme demands • Tasked with assisting the Management Team with progresssing the work programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composed of Project Manager, four co-ordinators and part time administrative support. • Project manager is full time Lead Partner employee • Co-ordinators are External Assistants • Part time admin support is provided by Lead Partner officials and External Assistant • The team is tasked with the management and dissemination of the work programme and budget

Project Management

Initially, the project management of the LIFE programme was envisioned as mainly the responsibility of permanent full time and part time employees of Clare County Council and Shannon Development. However, as mentioned earlier in this section, a number of factors came into play which altered this plan. The main impact on the initial management plan for the work programme was the government embargo on staff recruitment and the resource issues with existing staff. This was the result of Government policy on the reduction of the public sector in response to the financial crises. This affected both Clare County Council and Failte Ireland, who had assumed responsibility for Shannon Developments contributions.

As a result, the only full time partner employee is project manager Carol Gleeson, who is a permanent staff member of Clare County Council. Financial control support is provided part time by Greg Davidson (Cliffs of Moher Centre Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Clare County Council). The co-ordination of B3 is provided by UCD Administrative Assistant, Joanna Gaffery. Otherwise, part time administrative support, communication and dissemination and support to the project manager for the co-ordination of B1 and B2 has been carried out by external experts.

External assistance in technical support to project management was provided by Brian Callanan. This role was envisaged in action E1 in the original project document (P70). Such support was deemed necessary as CCC did not have appropriate experience in EU project management. This was incorporated in the CCC external assistance budget as expert support to project management. Support to project management has been as follows: at start, briefings to individual partners on the programme; input to preparation of the partnership agreement; advisory input to the steering group on the programme priorities; guidance of the policy review; input to the Astrale visit by provision of guidelines on tourism/conservation interactions; inputs to the inception report and progress report; meetings with individual partners on the mid-term review, analysis of financial outcomes for each partner and inputs to mid-term report.

The following table provides details of the **Management Team**:

NAME	FUNCTION	POSITION
Carol Gleeson	Project Manager	Direct Personnel CCC (permanent/full time)
Greg Davidson	Financial Advisor	Direct Personnel CCC (permanent/full time)
Siobain O'Brien	Admin and IT Support	External Assistance
Tina O'Dwyer	B1 Co-ordination	External Assistance
Laura Cotter	Communication & Dissemination	External Assistance
Zena Hctor	B2 Co-ordination	External Assistance
Joanne Gaffery	B3 Co-ordination	Direct Personnel UCD (permanent/part time)
Dr Eamon Doyle	B2 Co-ordination assistance	External Assistance
Brian Callanan	Project management technical support	External Assistance

Project Planning

Planning for deliverables for the project has been at working group and steering committee meetings. The following is a list of the meetings held so far:

Steering Group	Working Groups		
	B1	B2	B3
6 Dec 2012	July 2014	26 Feb 2013	27 May 2013
23 Jan 2013	Sept 2014	14 May 2014	9 May 2014
3 March	13 May 2015	3 Sept 2014	26 Nov 2014
17 April		15 Dec 2014	12 Jan 2015
18 Sept 2013		9 Mar 2015	11 May 2015
2 April 2014			
22 Oct 2014			
22 April 2015			

Minutes of the Steering Committee meetings are to be found in *Annex 1*, and minutes of the Working Groups are to be found in *Annex 2*.

Changes to Project Requiring Amendments

The main changes to the project have been

1. The abolition of Shannon Development and amalgamation into Failte Ireland as noted in the correspondence from the Commission on 02/10/13, in point 3 of the Annex 'Matters Arising' that this proposal should be included in an Amendment to the Grant Agreement
2. The change of the short name/acronym from *Burren Tourism* to *Geopark LIFE*. Please note that in the correspondence from the Commission on 02/10/13, in point 5 of the Annex 'Matters Arising' that this proposal was accepted but should also be included in an Amendment to the Grant Agreement
3. Modifications to the budgets to reflect the following and which will be in excess of 30,000€ or 10% of the original project budget
 - Provision of co-ordination of actions from External Assistance instead of Personnel
 - Inclusion of monitoring costs in External Assistance
 - Inclusion of people counters into Durable Goods: Equipment
 - Amendments to budgets for actions to reflect actual spend across the actions, please see section 6.5 for details.

Partnership Agreement

This was completed in June 2013 and submitted with the Inception Report and reflects the change in the roles, responsibilities and financial commitments of the Associated Beneficiaries Shannon Development and Failte Ireland .

4.2 Evaluation of the management system

Problems Encountered

The abolition of Shannon Development, the resource issues with permanent staff and the settling in of the inter-agency partnership and partnerships with community groups under Action B3 caused delays in the progress of the actions. The time table of deliverables and milestones have to be re-evaluated. In hindsight, it would have been wiser to have availed of the 'preparatory actions' to allow for a settling in period for all of the partners. Delays in the progress of actions was addressed by the establishment of working groups and the employment of an external expert to co-ordinate B2, and the allocation of UCD staff to the co-ordination of B3.

Because of the changes to the approach from the original modular-based approach in B3, NUIG had considered withdrawing from the project. However this partner is still with us and is focusing on B2 condition reports and B3 case study relating to water resource management with schools. Also, UCD had difficulty developing an appropriate approach for the policy review but this was resolved.

Partnership

On March 2nd 2015, the Irish Management Institute facilitated a meeting with the Geopark LIFE stakeholders to help the group assess the current project status, understand the potential opportunity the project has for everyone involved, and identify the best approach for the group to move forward and drive the project to completion. During the workshop, the participants had the opportunity to engage with each other and share their perspectives in a collaborative manner and focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions.

The workshop focused on 4 key phases:

1. Understanding the potential consequences of not developing the process of engaged partnership and project delivery
2. Clarify the potential opportunity for a brighter future for all stakeholders
3. Identify the critical obstacles for such opportunity to become reality.
4. Agree clear steps that each project group needs to take to ensure the partnership and project is successful.

This workshop provided a useful reassessment of the partnership and the progress of the project. The outcomes are presented in *Annex 3*.

Throughout the course of the project to date it had become obvious that some partners had not fully recorded their contributions (time sheets, etc) to the project by way of inputs and resource allocation. This was the subject of mid-term review meetings with each individual partner organisation and the results were very positive, with each partner organisation reconfirming their commitment to the project, reviewing and agreeing their contributions, and reiterating deliverables and benefits.

Communication with the Commission and Monitoring Team.

The Monitoring team visited on December 2012, June 2013 and June 2014. Also, in June 2014, we were delighted to welcome the Astrale LIFE team to the Burren. Feedback from the Commission was received on the Inception Report (Oct 2013), following the Astrale visit (August 2014) and on the Progress Report (March 2015). The feedback and advice from each visit, both technical and financial, has been addressed and incorporated into this report. Copies of the communications from the Commission are to be found in *Annex 4*.

5. TECHNICAL AND DISSEMINATION

5.1 Technical part

5.1.1 Tourism Enterprises (B1)

Activities Undertaken and Quantifiable Outputs Achieved

Inception period, Oct 2012 – May 2013

Initial work in the inception period concentrated on defining guidelines for action, developing the approach to environmental impact and promoting the action to the enterprises.

Guidelines for action

Key issues included benchmarking, performance indicators and strategic marketing for the network. Baseline information had been found to be missing in most areas. The question of information days/evenings to assess levels of awareness was considered. It was agreed that Action B1 should be a vehicle for encouraging (as opposed to enforcing) knowledge and compliance with environmental legislation. It was further agreed that Action B1 should:

- take a holistic landscape and heritage approach
- develop a few core demonstration models of good practice
- utilise the experience of other EU LIFE projects, especially Burren Farming for Conservation
- look at interpretation of landscape practices
- address impacts of waste, water and energy management.

Environmental impact

Several methods were identified as a framework:

- The European Tourism Indicator System of the European Commission is a comprehensive set of indicators designed to benchmark and measure sustainable destinations.
- STEP Green Communities was a package that was offered by Sustainable Travel International (STI) whereby it was possible for the destination to ‘license’ the certification scheme and manage it locally in a way that is financially sustainable.
- Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism was developed as a local set of criteria for enterprises managed under the LIFE programme, based on the feedback of the LIFE Partners and the Network Executive.

Promoting the project to the enterprises

Work concentrated on building on the existing network of enterprises, and contact was made directly with over 50 enterprises during this first period. These were mainly existing and prospective members of the Burren Ecotourism Network, the network of tourism enterprises interested in eco-tourism which acts as a core group within the LIFE project. Prior to embarking on the B1 Tourism Enterprises Programme, the Geopark commissioned a sustainable tourism evaluation and benchmarking report. This evaluation included a survey of enterprises which confirmed the strong interest of the enterprises to engage in eco-tourism within a strengthened and expanded structure of the Burren Ecotourism Network. Major

emphasis was placed by the enterprises on marketing, networking, potential of the Geopark as a sustainable destination brand, attracting new members to the network, business planning, conservation training and spreading the benefits. The Executive Summary of this report is included in *Annex 5*.

Progress period, June 2013 – Oct 2014

Between October 2013 and March 2014, training was delivered to 52 member enterprises of the Burren Eco-tourism Network (the B.E.N.) in environmental management for tourism enterprises. Overall 52 enterprises had an opportunity to participate in a total of 504 training days. A developmental support package for the B.E.N. was delivered through Geopark LIFE, clearly outlining to businesses the basis for participation and the overall vision behind the GeoparkLIFE programme. An information leaflet distributed to interested enterprises outlining the complete programme is contained in *Annex 6*.

Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism Training Programme

The Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism, developed through GeoparkLIFE, provided the framework for environmental training, with a workshop dedicated to each element of the Code as well as the overarching elements of baselines, benchmarks and targets. The Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice is also included in the aforementioned *Annex 6*, as was the schedule of workshops and themes for the period (some of these dates were later re-scheduled). Through GeoparkLIFE, a folder of templates and resources has been compiled for tourism enterprises, with each participating business receiving a resource folder during training. This folder serves as an information and documentation-hub for the businesses Environmental Action Plan and was very well received by participants.



Code of Practice Training Folders

The output of the environmental training was the completion of environmental action plans by each enterprise. In order to ensure implementation of workshop learnings, participants were required to submit documentary evidence of having implemented the Code of Practice, which

was in turn evaluated externally. Importantly, each tourism enterprise received a report from the independent evaluator, indicating to them how they were progressing on their journey towards sustainability and highlighting areas for further action. A sample evaluation and feedback report is contained in *Annex 7*.

A number of guest speakers provided content through LAPN (Local Authority Prevention Network) which was facilitated by Geopark LIFE's lead partner, Clare County Council.

Following the training, a significant showcase event was organised in March entitled the "Burren Tourism Story". This showcased the tourism products developed by the B.E.N. group and reflected the collective work undertaken by the enterprises in terms of training and cooperation, demonstrating the economic added value that has been achieved. The event helped to consolidate the work done so far, engage the stakeholders and promote the value of participation to a wider audience.



Burren Tourism Story Event

This event was also important in terms of extending the impact of the LIFE programme to businesses outside of the B.E.N., as well as to the general community. Over 200 people attended this event with an open invitation to all enterprises and people in the community, as well as to tourism operators further afield.

An evaluation of the environmental training programme for tourism enterprises was carried out in March 2014. The evaluation focused on collecting data relating to the GeoparkLIFE core indicators and the detailed results on performance against the indicators are contained in *Annex 8*. Overall results were very positive. Some key highlights include: 97% of enterprises felt that the training programme had enhanced their awareness of environmental management techniques, 87% felt they had lessened their environmental impact as a result of the programme, while 97% found the Code of Practice to be a useful and effective standard of environmental good practice in the Geopark.

In the period March 2014-September 2014, the Code of Practice Training Programme and Toolkit was subject to review and revision. Ongoing advocacy work by GeoparkLIFE as well as positive word of mouth by participating enterprises led to interest from further tourism enterprises in the region in the work of GeoparkLIFE. A further 12 applications for membership of the B.E.N. were received, including a number of leading and large tourism enterprises in the area who had hitherto opted to remain outside the programme. In October 2014, these businesses commenced the 3rd round of Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice training through the GeoparkLIFE programme.

Current period, Nov 2014 to June 2015

Performance against core indicators - Evaluation of tourism enterprises action

Between October 2013 and March 2014, a total of 52 enterprises took part in a Sustainability Training Programme, and a total training provision in Year 1 of Geopark LIFE of 504 training days (or about 25% of total target delivery for the overall programme).

For the period October 2014 and March 2015, GeoparkLIFE built on the above programme to develop and co-ordinate the delivery of two parallel training strands:

- Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism training (targeted primarily at a cohort of 12 enterprises wishing to join the B.E.N., but also open to existing B.E.N. members)
- Structured Networking & Referrals Training/Facilitation (targeted primarily at a cohort of 45 existing B.E.N. members who had completed Code of Practice training in 2013-14, but also open to aspiring members).

Training Strand	Number of Training Events	Total Training Day Provision	Total Training Participation
Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism	11	212	130
Structured Networking & Referrals Programme	15	515	383
OVERALL TOTALS	26	727	513

A complete overview of training provision and participation is contained in *Annex 9*.

Comparison of Outcomes Year 1 and Year 2 – Code of Practice:

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:

- A more efficient and effective training programme that has benefitted from experience gained in 2014-15.
- A highly motivated group of businesses who were very keen to join the B.E.N. and to prove themselves eligible to do so.
- Greater trainer understanding and empathy with challenges facing businesses in completing the Code of Practice programme.
- A smaller cohort of businesses which resulted in greater individual attention.

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 which will ultimately lead to a fine-tuned model transferable to other destinations.

Communicating and Sharing Best Practice

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:

- Participation at group training workshop lends itself to sharing of experiences and ideas and discussions around same. It also opens a comfortable avenue of communication with experts in the field, particularly from public sector agencies.
- 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.
- 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. See *Annex 10* for the link to the case studies and videos. They can also be viewed by following this link: <http://www.burrengeopark.ie/community-business/the-geopark-code-of-practice/>.

The GeoparkLIFE team has also worked with individual enterprises encouraging them to apply for national and international awards in the area of sustainable tourism. This has proven a successful strategy for some businesses and has also highlighted that the building of capacity in the area of communicating best practice is desirable.

Relationship Marketing & Referrals

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.

Review & Evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation of the B1 tourism enterprises action was undertaken by consultant Tina O'Dwyer (March 2015). The report reached a number of overarching conclusions in the areas of strategic planning, the structures and functions of the B.E.N., the Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism and the usefulness of the European Tourism Indicator System as a management framework. This report also made a number of key recommendations for the ongoing development of B1 Tourism Enterprises action. Details on conclusions and recommendations of all aspects of GeoparkLIFE Action Tourism Enterprises are contained in *Annex 11*.

Stakeholder Consultation Process

As a direct result of this report, the B.E.N., supported by GeoparkLIFE, commissioned a stakeholder consultation process from Tina O'Dwyer, which took place through the month of May 2015. The Executive Summary of this report is included in *Annex 12*. Key outcomes may be summarised as:

- **Code of Practice:** 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.
- **Burren Ecotourism Network:** 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. Six priorities for the work programme were identified by the members: Planning, Collaborative marketing, 'Bigger' Environmental themes, enhanced networking and familiarisation, advocacy, and training and mentoring.
- **B.E.N. & Geopark Partnership:** 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.

Resource Planning

The consultation and review process has 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 (After LIFE). 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 will then engage in a 3-year programme planning process between the Geopark and the B.E.N., cultivating a meeting of independent organisations who can co-operate on areas of common interest in a purposeful and deliberate fashion. This will yield a defined Partner Work Programme expected to be completed in January 2016.

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.

Training for core competencies

Aware of the need to have a comprehensive After LIFE 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. 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. 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. Training to support economic objectives will also be provided.

Planned Output and Time Schedule

Please refer also to section 4.1 on the revised schedule of outputs of the project.

B1 TOURISM ENTERPRISES		
Deliverable	Project plan	Now Proposed
<i>Deliverables</i>		
Report on tourism enterprises	December 2016	October 2017
<i>Milestones</i>		
Completion of environmental impact stage	Dec 2013	To be continued throughout the project
Completion of economic impact stage	Dec 2013	To be continued throughout the project
Resource planning	Dec 2013	December 2016
Implementing the plan	Dec 2016	March 2017

Indicators used to test Actions

Indicators in use for the GeoparkLIFE Tourism Enterprises Action have been referred to throughout this section. Four indicator components were identified at the start of the programme and have been retained as a test framework for actions over the period of the programme to date. As previously mentioned, some modifications have been made, notably in the numbers of enterprises undertaking training as well as the focus for the Resource Planning component. The B1 Work Programme attached to this report also details the KPIs for each aspect of the programme for the coming period.

Overall Indicator:

Membership of the Burren Ecotourism Network to complete a training programme of 2000 days.

Component Indicators:

Environmental: Use of environmental management techniques by the tourism enterprises, comparing pre-training and post-training (measured through Enterprise Survey, the baseline for the participating businesses is from the survey conducted in 2014, see *Annex 8*).

Economic: attitudes and beliefs of enterprise owners and managers as to whether or not their business has been strengthened as a result of the programme (measured through Enterprise Survey, the baseline for the participating businesses is from the survey conducted in 2014, see *Annex 8*).

Resource Planning: the preparation of a robust strategic plan for the Burren Ecotourism Network and the existence of a framework for strategic planning for

tourism conservation through Network membership (measured through documentation and Enterprise Survey).

Implementation: the extent to which the strategic plan is implemented by the collective of enterprises, using the KPIs identified in the strategic plan itself (measured through strategic review and evaluation process).

Modifications of Action

While GeoparkLIFE originally planned issuing a broad invitation to the approximately 600 tourism enterprises in the region to participate in its environmental training programme, it was subsequently decided to work directly with the members of the Burren Ecotourism Network. The Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark and the B.E.N. had a strong collaborative relationship prior to the commencement of GeoparkLIFE, which enabled the Tourism Enterprises Action B1 to build an effective training schedule with interested participants from a very early stage of the programme. The Geopark sees the existence of a strong, independent, environmentally-driven network of enterprises as critical to the long-term development and maintenance of a sustainable tourism destination. Through GeoparkLIFE, a very strong and effective partnership has been strengthened and consolidated.

Information gathered through the GeoparkLIFE programme also highlights that 600 enterprises is a not wholly accurate number of tourism enterprises. This original figure of 600 included all 'standard' tourism enterprises and also included all service providers in the region e.g. supermarkets, fuel stations. If we consider 'pure' tourism, we now estimate that the number of enterprises in tourism is around the 350 mark, with a large number of those in the area of self-catering and B&B (lodgings) accommodation. While the B.E.N. has a membership of 60 members, this collection of businesses handle in excess of 90% of visitors to the area and so are highly influential in terms of visitor engagement and influence.

"100 enterprises completing the training programme" was named as the core indicator in the original application. The project now focuses not on quantity of participants, but rather on embedding high quality outcomes with the 64 enterprises that have completed the programme to date. GeoparkLIFE will use the period July 2015-July 2016 to refine the training and support tools and will invite further enterprises to the environmental training programme in October 2016.

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 also 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 will 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.

Problems Encountered

The co-ordination and management resources provided by GeoparkLIFE have been central to progress under Action Tourism Enterprises. The current public sector embargo creates issues around the continuity of contracts with external consultants, which has a knock on effect on the continuity of the co-ordination of the programme.

Review of the Code of Practice submission process in 2014-15 highlighted difficulties caused by template design and evaluation process, both for the enterprises and the evaluators. This has highlighted that investment in streamlining the toolkit and manual is essential in order to make it a truly transferable and usable system. This work will take place between October 2015 and July 2016, ready for implementation with a further cohort of enterprises between October 2016 and January 2017.

Action Tourism Enterprises has enjoyed strong momentum throughout the GeoparkLIFE programme and participating enterprises remain ambitious and committed. The question of limited capacity and resources in the face of a large number of positive opportunities in the areas of conservation and economy is now a real challenge. GeoparkLIFE is actively addressing this with the Network through the current consultation and strategic planning process.

Complimentary Action outside Life

The Tourism Enterprises Action provides a tight framework for support of the Burren Ecotourism Network and co-operation between the Network members and the Geopark. A healthy partnership and strong momentum has built up as a result and has led to both parties being involved in a number of complementary actions.

ETIS

The destination has been involved in the pilot phase of the European Tourism Indicator System and has participated at meetings in Brussels and online. Our experiences of ETIS implementation were presented in Brussels. The Steering Group members have also been introduced to the concept destination management as articulated by ETIS with a view to achieving a mindset change with regard to the role of conservation agencies in the development and management of tourism destinations. It has also highlighted to participants in GeoparkLIFE that a concentration solely on the activities of tourism enterprises is not a credible approach to destination management.

Awards

Two key recognitions for The Burren as a food destination were achieved in 2015. The Burren Food Trail and associated products were established just prior to the GeoparkLIFE programme. The strength of the partnership has meant a space for the ongoing development and promotion of this visitor proposition has been maintained. The area was recognised internationally as a European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) – Tourism & Local Gastronomy in July while in October, it claimed the title of Ireland's top Foodie Destination. Through applications for awards at Geopark level, confidence has grown amongst the individual enterprises to themselves apply for awards. In 2015, a large number of BEN businesses achieved national recognitions in the areas of sustainable tourism and food tourism, all of which enhance the overall profile and momentum of the destination.

Smart Open Data

SmartOpenData (Linked Open Data for environment protection in Smart Regions), www.smartopendata.eu, is a project partially funded by the European Union's Seventh Programme for research, technological development and demonstration (FP7) under grant

agreement No 603824. The project is being implemented with the concerted effort of 17 organisations across Europe, coordinated by the TRAGSA Spanish public agency, it began in November 2013 and ran until October 2015. The Geopark was the pilot case study for this project working on using data collected for key indicators such as visitor and enterprise sentiment.

Further Perspectives after the end of the Project

Discussions around an optimal 'exit strategy' (After LIFE) from the GeoparkLIFE programme are already underway. It is anticipated that much of the work commenced during GeoparkLIFE will be embedded in the activities and processes of the B.E.N. and so become inherently sustainable within the region. It is anticipated that a strong B.E.N. will emerge that can continue to partner with the Geopark (and indeed other public bodies) on key tourism for conservation initiatives into the future.

Tourism Enterprises Action will continue to support environmental impact and economic impact actions for participating enterprises and the B.E.N. overall. A major focus on resource planning at network and enterprise level will be the feature of proposed training programmes needed in future, as well as a strategic emphasis on building core competencies and capacities within the Network membership itself.

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 beyond the LIFE programme but acknowledges that the level of data collection and stakeholder involvement across all criteria is beyond the scope of Geopark LIFE. 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 transport/travel and universal access. From this exercise, we will be able to calculate the requirements for full participation within the ETIS framework.

An outline of the B1 Work Programme for the coming 18 month period is contained in *Annex 13*.

5.1.2 Monuments and Habitats (B2)

Activities Undertaken and Quantifiable Outputs Achieved

Inception Period, Oct 2012 – May 2013

The Burren has a multiplicity of geological sites of international importance, national archaeological monuments and natural habitats within Special Areas of Conservation. The responsibility for the ongoing care and management of some of these sites rests with a range of organisations; from the Office of Public Works, National Monuments Service, National Parks and Wildlife and Clare County Council. Many are located on private lands and do not fall within the remit of the organisations listed above.

The main focus of this phase of the action was to identify a number of demonstration sites of high heritage value that are experiencing increasing visitor impacts, that is, embracing tourism and conservation issues, in order to identify best practice methods of integrated management that can be transferred elsewhere in the Burren, and to other destinations in Ireland and Europe.

There are five major steps to be taken in this action:

1. site selection and assessment
2. definition of work programme
3. action
4. maintenance and monitoring
5. report and evaluation.

A list of sites were drawn up that included the sites identified in the application to EU LIFE as well as others which represented the variety of ownership and the perceived level of impacts. Criteria were drawn up to evaluate each site, such as ownership, tourism impact, conservation impact, access, location demonstration impact and facilities, see *Annex 14* for more details on the criteria. Site visits were undertaken by the steering group on the 29th April, 10th of May and 20th of May. These were very productive as a mechanism for inter agency discussion and understanding of various perspectives. The first challenge of an integrated management approach was apparent in the time it took to reach consensus on the selection of sites.

Progress period, June 2013-Oct 2014

In the Progress Phase, final site selection was completed. Key criteria were the need for highly visible demonstration projects, exemplifying the three contrasting locations of mass tourism, general interest tourism and special interest tourism in the Burren region. The zoning of these 3 areas helped in the final selection. The final selection also reflected the range of ownership and management conditions in the region. *Annex 15* is a map showing the sites marked in orange and the 3 zones.

The following table summarises the sites, zones and key selection criteria:

Demonstration Site	Reason for selection
<i>Zone 1: Mass Tourism</i>	
Blackhead/Fanore	Heavily-used high amenity site on coastal touring route with access, land-use and conservation issues.
<i>Zone 2: General interest tourism</i>	
Aillwee Cave	Mature and well-developed visitor attraction with conservation issues
An Rath Ringfort and Cahermore Stonefort	Undeveloped adjacent sites with high potential and access issues
Poul nabrone Dolmen	Mature attractions with growing visitor pressures and increasing demand for added services
Carran Church	Distinctive ecclesiastical monument on touring route with serious conservation issues
<i>Zone 3: Special interest tourism</i>	
Burren National Park	Park of international significance with access issues
Slieve Carron Nature Reserve	Sensitive site of local cultural significance under increasing visitor pressure

It became apparent that Action B2 required a significant amount of focused attention of the partners directly involved in the management of these sites and that this programme required a dedicated co-ordinator, as with Action B1. At the Steering Committee meeting of April 2nd, 2014, it was decided to develop ‘Working Groups’ of partners and advisors to focus and manage the 3 key actions. The Working Groups would report back to the Steering Committee on its activities and seek direction when necessary. An external consultant, Zena Hctor, was appointed in July 2014 to progress site assessments. *Annex 16* provides an organigramme and table of the approach taken to these assessments. From this appointment the following actions were initiated and progressed:

- On-site appraisal: Approach, facilities, information on site. Identify how visitors are directed. Condition of site and identification of visible recreational pressure points.
- Observation studies (Monitoring) Visitor movement and activities.
- Visitor Surveys (Monitoring) including visitor attitudes to the site, previous and present knowledge and perception of conservation issues, behavioural influences (if any).
- Agency reports; condition reports, management structures, plans and strategies.

- Landowner interviews on issues at the site and attitude towards visitors and their behaviour Coach Tourism survey (Monitoring); use of sites, ecological impacts at 3 demonstration sites, bus driver's attitudes.
- Agency interviews on site issues, policy implications (UCD) and steps forward.
- Selection of specific, measurable physical, environmental and social indicators
- Development of on-going monitoring programme. (Monitoring).
- Development of Working Programme for each site.

Current Period Oct 2014-June 2015

Work was accelerated in the current period, with four main activities: (a) the completion of site assessments including collection of baseline data; (b) establishment of monitoring schemes with ongoing monitoring of sites; (c) partnership for priority demonstration sites; (d) development of work programme

(a) Site assessments and collection of baseline data

This comprised four actions: site assessment, monitoring methodology, visitor survey and coach tourism study.

Site assessments

Each of the seven selected demonstration site was assessed in terms of:

- 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
- Access into and around site; identification of restrictive access points
- Identification of the intrinsic value of the site to the visitor in terms of natural, built and cultural heritage
- On site information/interpretation of the sites points of interest
- Identification of 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

Monitoring methodology

This project was used as a demonstration model for the assessments of visitor impacts on ecologically sensitive areas on the **Wild Atlantic Way**. The Wild Atlantic Way is a tourism product developed to attract visitors to the west coast of Ireland and has captured the imagination of tourism operators in a very short space of time. In little over 2 years it has become a significant economic driver for tourism in the West of Ireland. A monitoring methodology and survey template for assessing environmental impacts due to visitor behaviour and movement patterns was developed in conjunction with CAAS and Fáilte Ireland, as part of an overall Wild Atlantic Way survey. A pilot Visitor Observation Study and an ecological assessment to provide quantitative analysis to support the results was carried out at the demonstration sites in September 2014 and is attached as *Annex 17*.

The studies resulted in:

- A standardised Visitor Observation and Tracking Methodology for a range of site types

- An indication of the extent of effect zones
- An indication of types of impacting activities
- An indication of general patterns of visitor activity, movement and behaviour at selected sites

This work has resulted in the development of a generic monitoring methodology and template for measuring visitor impacts that may be used across a range of sites and conditions throughout the Burren and elsewhere.

Visitor survey

The Visitor Survey template was developed in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland (June-August 2014) and tested at each of the demonstration sites (Sept/Oct 2014) by Millward Brown Ltd. The results provide information with regard to visitor attitudes to the site, previous and present knowledge and perception of conservation issues, behavioural influences. The results of this survey are available in *Annex 18*.

The visitor survey template developed through this process is currently being considered for development as an online survey. It is envisaged that the survey will be available through the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark website and app for completion by visitors. It will also be promoted through the accommodation and service providers sector for completion by their clients. The survey will act as a monitoring tool to determine changes to visitor numbers, attitudes and behaviour due to interventions at sites.

Coach tourism survey

The ‘*Buses in the Burren 2014 – a study of the impacts and issues*’ was completed in February 2015. The study provides a baseline of bus/coach numbers within the Burren; identifies visitor activities and an assessment of their environmental and economic impacts. It identifies changing trends in this transport sector and an assessment of the potential impacts of these changes. Three of the B2 demonstration sites – An Rath, Murroughtoohy (Blackhead) and Poul nabrone were included in this study. Please see *Annex 19* for the results of this survey.

An awareness programme for bus tour operators, drivers and users emphasising the impacts of their activities within the Burren is currently underway. Clinics will be undertaken throughout September 2015 at the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre to assess the level of awareness of the coach drivers and guides with regard to the conservation principles of the Geopark, its code of conduct and ‘Leave No Trace’ guidelines. A programme of work with the National ‘Leave No Trace’ organisation to produce a series of ‘Burren specific Leave No Trace’ guidelines will follow. (See Targeted Communications 5.2.2)

(b) Establishment of monitoring schemes and ongoing monitoring of sites

In conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Ranger the development of a systematic approach to walking trail path management within the Burren National Park is being developed.

A series of people counters were installed at each of the demonstration sites between September and December 2014. These are providing numbers of passers-by at each of the sites and can be broken down on an hourly, daily, weekly and monthly basis as required. *This is the first time that detailed visitor numbers have been collected for these sites.*

Using the template developed in 2014, visitor observation studies will continue at the demonstration sites to provide a more comprehensive profile of visitor activities and impacts at each of the sites.

Through the Visitor Observations studies and Coach Tourism Study carried out in 2014, ecological monitoring was completed at each of the demonstration sites using quadrat survey methodology. It is not feasible to complete this level of survey each year due to the level of resources involved but fixed point photography will be used to continue this monitoring.

Work is currently ongoing on the development of both site specific indicators and overall indicators with a planned date of completion in November 2015. Research has been carried out to determine whether an existing system could be used, but as yet none has been found. The European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS), does not include enough measurable indicators to cover the aspects being explored under B2. Indicators developed for World Heritage Sites are more applicable but are still lacking in addressing the Burren specific objectives of B2. This action needs further research and development and work is ongoing.

The development of monitoring strategies needs to be integrated with the identification and definition of indicators to ensure that these provide accurate information in an effective, efficient and easily replicated manner. The combination of observational studies undertaken and quantitative information gathered with regard to each of the demonstration sites, has provided the basis for the definition of monitoring for site-specific vulnerabilities as well as overall indicators. The former will be developed to guide specific project and management interventions, while the latter will be used to report on the sustainability of emerging use patterns on a larger basis over a longer time.

(c) Partnership for demonstration sites

The B2 working group (which includes representatives from the following national agencies - NPWS, NMS, OPW, BFCP and the Geopark) have worked collectively on the selection of sites, development of the baseline condition reports and the proposed work programmes. Through the B2 working group meetings, information is shared and collected from the various agencies.

Landowner Interviews

Landowner interviews on site specific issues and attitude towards visitors and their behaviour have been carried out for each of the demonstration sites. These consultations have been fed into the site appraisals and support the impacts identified through the Visitor Observation Studies.

Issues discussed amongst the partnership and landowners include:

- Discussed with NPWS/NMS/OPW: Future Management of archaeological site within National Nature Reserve at Slieve Carran
- Discussed with NPWS: Lack of parking areas in the Burren National Park and under utilisation of free bus service by visitors
- Discussed with owner/manager Aillwee Cave: Presence of Red Valerian and possible management
- Discussed with local owners/OPW/NPWS/NMS/CCC: Development of car/coach park An Rath/Cahermore. Permissions required. Potential purchase of land for development.
- Discussed with OPW/CCC: Provision of toilet facilities at Poul nabrone; Anti-social behaviour; access to car park by farm animals.

- Discussed with local owner and CCC: Review of signage to Carran Church; possible land purchase for provision of car park.
- Discussed with Clare County Council/local owners: Protection of archaeological sites from erosion by visitors at Blackhead; increasing number of visitors along Wild Atlantic Way; Erosion of the sand dunes at Fanore Beach and development of future management plan.

Consultation with other users

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 are being used to inform the development of future work programmes at the site. Please refer to *Annex 20* for details on the workshop.



Pilgrimage workshop and site visit

User guidelines

Meetings have taken place with the Brothers of Charity, Ennis and the National Disability Authority to determine a programme of work with regard to producing guidelines for Universal Access at each of the demonstration sites. The Brothers of Charity selected a group of young people with physical and intellectual disabilities to carry out an access audit of the demonstration sites with guide Tony Kirby. The results of this audit were captured in the video which is available in *Annex 21*.



Brothers of Charity site review with Guide Tony Kirby

A meeting has been held with the Educational Advisory Group of Leave No Trace Ireland to discuss the amalgamation of the Burren Code and the Leave No Trace Code of Practice. The aim of this programme is to produce a Burren area specific set of guidelines to advance the Leave No Trace Code. Area specific issues which have been identified through the baseline data collected for the demonstration sites will form the basis for this work.

(d) Development of work programme

WORK PROGRAMME ON MONUMENTS & HABITATS	
Issues identified	Actions
<i>Slieve Carran</i>	
<p>Slieve Carran Nature Reserve was chosen as the first site to be assessed through a collaborative approach by the project partners. Following an initial collective walk through of the site, the working group identified the lack of baseline information with regard to the condition of the archaeological monuments; possible unrecorded archaeological monuments on site; visitor impact on the geology of the site and the need for an architectural assessment of the upstanding walls of the Early Christian Oratory.</p> <p>This resulted in the production of preliminary baseline geology, ecology, archaeology and architectural reports for the site by the working group. Following a group review of these reports, it was felt that a more in-depth archaeological survey was required to identify where conservation work may be possible. The representative of the National Monuments Service completed this report.</p>	<p>Production of baseline geology, ecology, archaeology and architectural reports by the B2 working group.</p> <p>Archaeological Assessment of Oratory site completed by National Monuments Service (for discussion purposes within the B2 working group)</p>
<p>Five separate interpretive panels on site providing at times duplication of information and often using complex specialist language. Need for cohesion and prioritising of information presented to the visitor and review of directional signage along designated walking trails.</p>	<p>Review of Interpretation and development of overall interpretive plan to include all demonstration sites</p>
<p>Limited parking at site entrance. Approach road very narrow</p>	<p>Through site visits and discussions it was decided by the B2 working group that due to the sensitivities of this site and increasing visitor awareness, additional promotion of this site at present is inadvisable. The narrow approach road, lack of signage to the site and the small parking area help to discourage coach tourism and no interventions should be made at present.</p>

Lack of Universal Access/Design	Work to be undertaken with the National Disability Authority, the Brothers of Charity Group Ennis and the agencies/ landowners to design Universal Design Guidelines for Heritage sites in the Burren. At present there are general guidelines for built heritage sites but none for natural heritage sites and none specific to the Burren terrain.
Footfall erosion to walking trails	Monitoring of trails using fixed point photography in conjunction with the NPWS. Collaboration with the National Trails Office re monitoring of trails in National Parks in Ireland
Deposition of votive offerings at Holy Well – increasing numbers causing littering at site	Awareness raising seminar with walking guides and promoters of spiritual tourism on the Burren. Baseline study of number and type of votive offerings present. Monitoring of offerings deposited on sites
The Slieve Carran site is owned by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and managed by the NPWS. NPWS have a remit for natural heritage and not for built heritage and the archaeological monuments at the site are under pressure from increasing visitor numbers	Following the identification of issues and the production of baseline reports by GeoparkLIFE, discussion is to take place internally within the Department to decide on the future integrated management of this site and the possible transfer of the management of the archaeological monuments within the site from the NPWS to the OPW. <i>This site is proving to be a very good case study with regard to the lack of policies and actions for the integrated management of heritage sites between government agencies who operate within the same Government department and the conservation agencies within other Government departments.</i>
Burren National Park	
Traffic congestion at Gortlecka Crossroads, the main access point to the National Park.	An application for construction of a car park has been refused planning in the past. This issue cannot be resolved until a National Park Management Plan is produced by the NPWS and a traffic plan for the region.
Underutilisation of Free Bus Service from the Burren National Park Information Centre through the Park	A survey of bus users to determine the numbers utilising the service and how they became aware of it, in conjunction with the Burren National Park Information Centre staff.

Footfall erosion on walking trails	Monitoring through fixed point photography in conjunction with NPWS
Blackhead/Fanore	
Fanore Beach: Condition of dunes due to storm damage and recreational activity. Car parking pressure during bank holiday weekends may be impacting on the dune system.	Draw up a brief of work for an expert dune protection and beach management plan Commission plan.
Increasing number of casual and group walkers along Blackhead trail and across uplands.	Monitoring of visitor numbers and impacts along trail in conjunction with the Rural Recreation Officer Clare LEADER Company.
Damage to archaeological monuments (Caher Dun Irghuis and Carnesfin) caused by visitors climbing onto the walls of the monument	Installation of signs to inform visitors/walkers of importance of sites and damage caused by climbing on monuments. Production of baselines archaeological condition reports for the monuments. Carry out topographical survey of sites to determine extent of damage and possible solutions. Develop community based reconstruction project for Cairn based on results of topographical survey
Traffic congestion due to lack of parking facilities along narrow coastal route, now promoted as part of the <i>Wild Atlantic Way</i> , causing further traffic pressure.	A large study of this site was carried out by the Geopark between 2007 and 2013 resulting in land acquisition and documents prepared for Planning permission including Appropriate Assessment for 14 car parking lay-bys and pull in areas. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht subsequently advised CCC to defer a decision on planning pending Supreme Court ruling on European Court of Justice Case C-258/11 Peter Sweetman and others v An Bord Pleanala. Following this ruling an AA and NIA are required for the proposal which must be made to An Bord Pleanala. Discussions are underway with the NPWS and CCC to determine whether this issue can be resolved and if it is economically viable to proceed.
An Rath/Cahermore	
Increasing use of An Rath by coach tours resulting in road safety issues due to lack of official parking areas. Vehicles currently park in small lay-by opposite the site and visitors cross road at very dangerous bend. Entrance to	Development of plans for the provision of a car/coach park between the two sites and an internal pathway leading from the park to each site. Plans for the provision of viewing platforms at An Rath to

<p>Cahermore is also at sharp bend in road. Large numbers of visitor impacting on earthen banks at An Rath causing soil erosion. Very small numbers visiting Cahermore.</p>	<p>control visitor access and prevent further erosion of the embankment.</p> <p>Project Design Supervisor appointed and initial design drawings prepared and ecology screened out. Archaeological topographical Survey of site completed by OPW Discovery team April 2015. Options for preferred access points to An Rath proposed by OPW. Currently under review by NMS and necessity for archaeological excavation work being explored. Planning application to be made on completion of above and final preparation of design drawings. The next phases are outside the scope of this project.</p>
<p>Poulnabrone</p>	
<p>Lack of toilet facilities is an issue identified by visitors</p> <p>Anti-social behaviour (mainly theft of belongings from cars)</p>	<p>Explore possibility of provision of toilets on site - assess environment impacts. Also explore alternative of provision at nearby serviced site e.g. local visitor centre.</p> <p>Explore possibility of placing CCTV cameras at site.</p>
<p>Carran Church</p>	
<p>Lack of parking</p> <p>Consolidation of NW corner of the building</p> <p>Confusion over correct access to site – visitors using neighbours gate for parking and access lane</p>	<p>Investigate potential of developing a car park near the site. If possible, land owner is positive about development. Prepare plans to presentation for planning permission stage.</p> <p>Provide clear, visible signage from current parking lay-by to gate entrance to site.</p>
<p>Aillwee Cave</p>	
<p>Presence of Red Valerian (invasive species) on site</p>	<p>Research methods of removal Discuss with owners possible removal in conjunction with Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN) voluntary conservation group.</p>

Annex 22 provides a series of orgamigrammes of the B2 Demonstration sites work programme.



An Rath



Cahermore



Burren National Park



Carran Church



Poul nabrone



Slieve Carran



Blackhead



Fanore



Slieve Carran Oratory

Planned Output and Time Schedule

B2 MONUMENTS AND HABITATS		
Indicator	Project plan	Actual
<i>Deliverables</i>		
Report on monuments and habitats	Dec 2016	Oct 2017
<i>Milestones</i>		
Site assessments	March 2013	Oct 2014
Definition of work programme	June 2013	Oct 2014
Completion of actions	Dec 2016	Oct 2017
Maintenance and monitoring	Dec 2016	Oct 2017
Report and evaluation	Dec 2016	Dec 2017

Indicators used to test Performance

The major indicators are the key steps identified in the original project plan: site selection and assessment; definition of work programme; action; maintenance and monitoring; report and evaluation. Site selection has been completed, work programme has been defined, action has commenced, and maintenance and monitoring are under way. Reporting and evaluation are ongoing. Work so far on the demonstration sites confirms that the priority issues revolve around the provision of limited but key visitor facilities consistent with the conservation objectives of the sites. The focus is on the integration of these issues through management actions. Infrastructural development is outside the scope of this project, therefore, where infrastructure is identified as a requirement in the long term, the focus of GeoparkLIFE is on the preparatory and planning phases; survey, research, drawing of plans, consultation, screening, and preparation for planning application.

Problems Encountered

The major problem faced by the B2 action was in the completion of the site selection in the Inception and Progress phases. The complexity of the issues, the number of the partners involved, and their agency's perspective and defined responsibilities approach to site management, meant that there was much discussion and delay. Ideally, this issue should have been addressed at the preparatory phase provided by the LIFE programme.

Problems continue in relation to the time scale of responses of the partners and the resources available to them for the project. The public sector in Ireland has undergone major budgetary and staffing challenges in recent years, and this has affected the level of staff/personnel engagement with the project, resulting in delays with the action. Meetings with senior management in each organisation (lead and partner beneficiaries) will take place during the next months to address and resolve these issues. The engagement of a co-ordinator to assist the partners has made a major positive impact on the progress of this action.

The implementation of monitoring was originally conceived as a function of CCC personnel. However, the scope of monitoring required was underestimated initially, particularly with the

need to establish base lines in a range of areas, and this required the expertise and involvement of external assistants.

Complimentary Actions outside of Life

This action has attracted a number of organisations outside of the LIFE programme who are keen to establish partnerships on the access and use of the monuments and habitats in order to supplement and support their own best practice models. The key organisations are the *National Disability Authority* who wish to establish guidelines on universal design for access to the countryside (habitats) and rural cultural sites (monuments) and *Leave No Trace* who wish to test their outdoor ethics at destination level and have sought to partner with GeoparkLIFE to produce specific guidelines for the Burren. *Smart Open Data* and the *Heritage Council Map Viewer* are two data collation and analysis programmes that are complementary to our LIFE project and will provide us with valuable tools for the future management of monuments and habitats.

Smart Open Data (Linked Open Data For Environment Protection In Smart Regions)

www.smartopendata.eu, is a project partially funded by the European Union's Seventh Programme for research, technological development and demonstration (FP7) under grant agreement No 603824. The project is being implemented with the concerted effort of 17 organisations across Europe, coordinated by the TRAGSA Spanish public agency, it began in November 2013 and will run to October 2015. SmartOpenData has created a Linked Open Data infrastructure (including software tools and data) fed by public data resources, existing sources for biodiversity and environment protection and research in rural and European protected areas and its National Parks (such as the Burren GeoPark). The aim is to provide opportunities for SMEs (such as MAC) to create new innovative products and services (such as the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) service) that can lead to new businesses in the environmental, regional decision-making and policy areas among others. The value of the data is being greatly enhanced by making it available through a common data structure that gives access to related datasets available as Linked Open Data.

Heritage Council Map Viewer and the Geopark Life Project

The Heritage Map viewer www.heritagecouncil.ie/maps currently contains a number of databases for built and natural heritage collected by government departments and local authorities. The front end displays a mix of this national and regional information in map format. This allows the user to visualise heritage data on a geographical map base. This sharing of metadata meets some of the INSPIRE directive obligations. Clare County Council is one of the participating local authorities.

The project began in 2010 and the system went online in 2013. Since then the system has been reviewed and several issues have been identified. One of the main issues at local and regional level is the superficial level of information being presented in terms of the heritage resources present on the ground. This is due to a lack of survey work or where survey has been undertaken and information is available, it is not always in a digital format compatible with being entered as a dataset on the system. The Heritage Map Viewer is currently being revised.

The GeoparkLIFE project has gathered a large volume of information and data to date, through its baseline reports, site surveys, visitor surveys, visitor counters, visitor observations, enterprise surveys, residential surveys and general data collection. This information needs to be presented in a usable format so that it has a function and usability post LIFE. The GeoparkLIFE project will work in conjunction with the Heritage Council to develop a pilot for the presentation of area specific information on the Map Viewer. The GeoparkLIFE

project will supply its collected data in an agreed digital format to the Heritage Council for entry onto the system. On the revised system the GeoparkLIFE project will have a dedicated viewer button on the Home page. This will lead the user directly into a map of the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark.

The information will be presented in layers. For example, a specific layer will be dedicated to the B2 demonstration sites. When the user clicks on any of the B2 sites displayed on the map screen – information will be provided in terms of the various aspects of the site. The user can then select the information required e.g. information re access, signage, interpretation, archaeology, habitats, visitor numbers, site management etc. and can generate a report if required. The Heritage Council gains by having a pilot methodology template for the presentation for area specific heritage data which can then be rolled out to other areas. The GeoparkLIFE project gains in having a user friendly visual presentation of the information it has generated.

Future Use

Possible future uses of the system are:

- as a land use planning tool by the public and private sector which could inform Local Area planning strategies and policies
- provision of information for Impact Assessments/Appropriate Assessment
- baselines and continuous information for visitor heritage site appraisals/monitoring of change – updating of monitoring indicator systems e.g. ETIS
- provision of baseline information for development of site and visitor management plans
- information for development of educational resources and interpretation
- research information for local heritage and tourism practitioners and community group

The provision of this area specific information in a user friendly format would also address the actions proposed in the [National Landscape Strategy](#) for Ireland, which has been developed under the European Landscape Convention.

Further Perspectives after the end of the Project

The main objective of this action is to develop a transferrable integrated management approach to the care and promotion of monuments and habitats. This project seeks to have the demonstration sites improved in terms of conservation and access, but the long term gain beyond the end of GeoparkLIFE would be the tool kit for landowners and agencies to work together on both conservation **and** visitor access; this requires a change in mind set and practices, and time is needed for such fundamental changes to happen. It will be important to find the optimum platform and the most cohesive and effective mechanism, supported by policy, for this type of collaborative and integrated approach to continue after GeoparkLIFE. This is where the policy strand of the programme will provide direction. The outcomes should provide the basis for a fully integrated management plan for the Geopark.

The importance of monitoring and measurement as a management mechanism at sites has been highlighted through this action. The quality and quantity of data, its collection and collation, its uses and accessibility has become a major consideration for this project. The evaluation and recommendations on this issue will be of significant importance to any future site conservation and visitor management programme. The opportunity to work with complimentary programmes such as Smart Open Data and the Map Viewer provides the project with tools for an After LIFE strategy for the long term monitoring and management of monuments and habitats.

5.1.3 Conservation Management (B3)

Activities Undertaken and Quantifiable Outputs Achieved Inception period, Oct 2012 – May 2013

In the approved project, the conservation management action aimed to develop models of best practice in the management of key heritage and natural sites. This would build up expertise of professionals and volunteers through training and case studies. The action aimed to develop training interventions and introduce case studies based on this foundation. Key steps were defined as modules, case studies and evaluation. Through the training the aim was to reinforce the ethos of the project - to create a level of standardised conservation practice that is transferrable and to build up expertise of professionals and volunteers by developing supports and encouragement to participate.

Work in this first period concentrated on more detailed specification of the target audiences for the training modules and the content of these modules. Potential case studies were also explored. The academic partners, UCD and NUIG, were heavily involved in this planning phase, providing advice on content, structure, delivery, accreditation and cost.

It became clear that the development of accredited training modules would be time consuming, costly and difficult to sustain after LIFE. It also became clear, through consultation within the partnership and community groups and research provided by Burrenbeo Trust, a member of the Steering Group, had independently carried out a training needs and cost analysis of individuals and groups involved in conservation, education and guiding, that the target audiences did not, in the main, have the resources to commit to engagement with training at this level.

The steering group re-examined the project and agreed specific guidelines as follows: modules need to be practical and tailored to the target audiences and should ensure policies and processes are clear and relevant. Existing training programmes provided by the OPW, Burrenbeo Trust, Failte Ireland, FETAC, Leave No Trace and Clare County Council's Environmental Section were analysed for potential linkages.

Four target groups were prioritised: enterprises, public authorities, conservation volunteers and communities. For each of these groups more detailed specifications were prepared under the following headings: What are their needs? What knowledge content do they require? How can the knowledge be delivered? Highlights of main needs included environmentally sustainable practice (enterprises), planning sustainable destinations (public bodies), Leave No Trace (conservation volunteers) and conservation of local heritage (communities).

The Inception Report emphasised that the initial approach needed to be re-examined with an increased emphasis on practical modules focused on the needs of the user groups and the active engagement of these groups. At this point it was felt that the objective of 20 conservation management actions would be achieved.

Progress period, June 2013 – Oct 2014

In this period the shift of emphasis moved from formal higher education accredited training modules and supporting case studies to more targeted user group case studies with the following re-focused objectives:

- to develop the skills base of all stakeholders in the understanding, management and conservation of natural and cultural heritage
- to reinforce Actions B1 and B2
- to strengthen community support of, and activism in, conservation
- to assess and analyse current policy that impacts this action and make recommendations on future integration of policies.

The funding allocated originally to higher education modules will now be used to provide very practical best practice guides, tool kits and tailored training programmes for a range of community based user groups. These outcomes will be more practical in their application and transferability and more cost effective than the modules and case studies previously envisioned.

Secondary schools have also been included as a User Group, providing a direct linkage with Action D.

The following table outlines the initial approach:

<i>User Group</i>	<i>Approach</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
Tourism Enterprises	Code of Practice training, focus on conservation actions	Adopt a Road Meithel (preparation and repair to private land heavily used by tourists)	Manual Best Practice Guides Case studies
Burren Conservation Volunteers	Training and development	Actions at Demonstration sites	Operational manual and tool kits Recording, reporting and response system
Landowners	Strengthening links between tourism businesses and landowners	Linkages to conservation projects	Practical training programme and facilitation.
Tidy Towns groups	Engaging tidy town groups with appropriate conservation activities	Case study with Ballyvaughan	Practical Tool Kit Guidelines
Local community conservation groups	Skills training and monitoring around methodologies and procedures with community engagement with conservation of buildings	Pilot with Kilinaboy Heritage Group and 'An Cabhail Mor'	Trained personnel in traditional building skills
Local tourism development groups	Developing a programme of research and information provision	Pilot with Lisdoonvarna Failte	Exhibition and information leaflets

	on key aspects of the Burren		
Schools	Developing knowledge and communication tools on hydrology and litter management	Case study with Lisdoonvarna Secondary School	Transition Year Schools programme
All stakeholders	Mapping current policies that impact on partners and the programme and how they are managed locally	Pilot exercises to address the interfaces of tourism and conservation policies	Recommendations based on pilot/case studies

This approach properly reflects the diversity of the stakeholders in tourism and conservation. This approach also places more emphasis on the divergent needs and potential of the user groups, and piloting creative systems to respond to these needs. Tool kits will evolve through practice and evaluation with each individual user-group, reflecting the requirements of each group. This is a substantial improvement of the methods envisaged to secure the outcome of the project plan goals for completion of conservation management actions.

This period of the project involved a lot of communication with stakeholders, refining approaches and defining outcomes. Most of the actual actions involved the preparation of programmes and the forging of linkages between groups and providers, such as the NMS and Conservation Officer of CCC with the Kilnaboy Heritage Group and others with the environmental section of Clare County Council, Burrenbeo Trust, Leave No Trace and specialists such as hydrology experts in GSI and NUIG and ecologists for the Tidy Towns group. This was very much a preparatory phase for the Case Study approach.

The policy mapping was undertaken by UCD. The approach was to address the policy implications of the project and the challenge of reconciling policy conflicts between sustainable tourism and other policies, especially regulatory environmental policies. It is clear that the problem is not a lack of policy but the need to recognize the applicability of a range of policy instruments which may not be in direct alignment. The challenge then is to balance and resolve inter-policy conflicts. A draft of this report was submitted with the Progress Report.

A review of the objective of 20 conservation management actions will be undertaken when the case studies are further developed.

Current period, Nov 2014 to June 2015

The Aim of B3 is to develop the skills base of all stakeholders in the understanding, management and conservation of natural and cultural heritage and to reinforce the Actions B1 and B2. It will strengthen community support of active conservation and also analyse the current policy that impact on these actions as well as making recommendations for the future.

The shift in focus from the original idea presented in the Inception report of the module based approach to a more practical application of case studies which focuses on the individual user group needs is progressing well. Actions have been devised for individual groups through developing approaches which are practical and actively engage with the target groups. There is a lot of cross over between the 3 main actions (B1, B2 and B3) in terms of training,

supports and policy. Below is a table which provides an update on the user groups, outlining the actions being undertaken and the linkages between B1, B2 and B3. More information on each case study is provided in the text following the table.

User Group	Case Study	Supports & training	Linkages
Tourism Businesses	Adopt a Hedgerow	Invasive Species	Influenced by the Code of Practice developed under B1 where contribution to conservation is a key measurement
	Meitheal	Burrenbeo Conservation training	Outcomes will be useful for landowners
	Leave No Trace partnership	Leave No Trace trainers	Collaboration with CCC Environmental Dept.
Community Groups	Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns	Biodiversity management report	Kilnaboy informing policy and procedures the same as with B2 demonstration sites.
	Kilnaboy Heritage Group	Building conservation reports as required by agencies	Adopt a Monument utilising B2 demonstration sites, with involvement by landowners and conservation volunteers
	Lisdoonvarna Failte	Information provision	
	Adopt a Monument (Burren Conservation Volunteers)	Supports from Heritage Council	Outcomes will be useful for landowners
Schools	Lisdoonvarna Secondary School	Training by Geopark Geologist Dr. Eamon Doyle, NUIG and Sonja O'Brien	Knowledge transfer to businesses (B1), community groups (B3) and local landowners
Partners (Public Bodies)	Policy review	IMI Facilitation Interviews with all participants in the GeoparkLIFE programme	Linkages and conflicts in policy across all 3 actions B1, B2 and B3 are being identified.
	ETIS as a destination management tool involving all partners	Testing criteria in Sustainable Travel and Universal Access	Linkages across the partnership and the 3 actions.

A methodology template was devised for the recording, monitoring and evaluation of the case studies and is currently being evaluated as a tool, *Annex 23*. Joanne Gaffery of UCD has undertaken the co-ordination and recording of the case studies as part of UCD's role in the project. The reporting on all of the actions below is a work in progress.

(a) Adopt a Hedgerow

This action has been devised to support Action B1 in the development of Codes of Practice for Tourism Enterprises which aim towards increasing business' contribution to conservation. The action for Adopt a Road (subsequently named Adopt a Hedgerow) originated as a proposal from the Conservation and Advocacy subcommittee of the Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN). The initiative would see BEN businesses maintaining a stretch of roadside, collecting litter, reporting dumping and invasive species. In turn it is anticipated that if deemed appropriate, a signage plan highlighting the businesses associated with a particular stretch of hedgerow, would be proposed to Clare County Council.

30 businesses are currently participating in the 'Adopt a Hedgerow' scheme and a pilot clean up took place between the 18th and 21st April. This was a very successful event and the outcomes will be reviewed and assessed. It is acknowledged at this time that the scheme is at an early stage and there are many details that need to be refined. One such example is the need to train volunteers in relation to invasive species. Further work is needed on this in collaboration with NPWS and Burrenbeo Trust. A strategy for monitoring the success of the scheme has been agreed with the Conservation and Advocacy Group of BEN.



BEN businesses on a section of road near Kilfenora

(b) Adopt a Monument

This action which would include Burren Farmers, BEN and Burren Conservation Volunteers is currently being researched by part of the B2 sub-group. Advice on the development of this module is being sought from the Heritage Council where the Scottish model is being looked to for details on how to bring this to fruition. Adopt a Monument would see landowners take responsibility for supporting the care and maintenance of a monument or habitat together with help from groups such as the Burren Conservation Volunteers. The focus for this would be around the B2 demonstration sites and would link closely or overlap with events such as Meitheal (see below). Development of this aspect of B3 will continue in the second half of 2015.

(c) *Meitheal*

The word *meitheal* describes the old Irish tradition where people in rural communities gathered together on a neighbour's farm to help save the hay or some other crop. Each person would help their neighbour who would in turn reciprocate. They acted as a team and everybody benefited in some way. This built up strong friendships and respect among those involved in the meitheal. Meitheal was set out as an annual or bi-annual event where tourism businesses assist farmers in repairs to farm infrastructure/access trails in areas of relatively high tourism impacts. This action will see the development of programmes that will support landowners in visitor management and conservation programmes. It will strengthen links between tourism businesses and landowners, two of the user-groups identified under Action B3. A meitheal event took place on 22nd November 2014 where BEN members undertook repair to walls on the Casey and Burke family lands at Fanore/Blackhead under the supervision of the Burren Conservation Volunteers. This was a very successful event with 30 participants organised in a general clean-up of the area and wall repairs including Stile construction (18 participants engaged in wall repairs while the remaining 12 engaged in activities such as litter collection). Wall repairs also included the construction of a stile which is hoped will influence visitors routes across the wall through its highly visible position.

There was good co-operation with farmers and overall the event was very successful where local tourism enterprises got a chance to show their support to local landowners. The practical event was followed by a social afternoon tea event hosted by local BEN members, which also added to the community development and inclusion of all participants at the local level.

The event was recorded by use of a short video which is available to view on the Geopark Website; *Annex 24* contains the link.

It is anticipated that this will become an annual event. It is also being considered by BEN whether more informal local ones throughout the year would be beneficial.



Meitheal at Blackhead, repairing a stile on Casey's farm

(d) Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace Ireland is an educational message that encourages tourism businesses and visitors to understand the consequences of their actions, and challenges them to make good choices when conducting activities in the outdoors. The Leave No Trace programme uses a framework of seven principles to guide people towards better choices:

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Be Considerate of Others
3. Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife
4. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
5. Leave What You Find
6. Dispose of Waste Properly
7. Minimise the Effects of Fire

GeoparkLIFE has established a partnership with Leave No Trace Ireland. Under this partnership the following is being undertaken:

- Set up a small group of operators within the Burren which will be trained up on the Leave No Trace programme
- This group will provide training in Leave No Trace to the B1 Code of Practice participants
- This group will carry out a review of how the programme is working for them and others from a Burren Specific viewpoint and its overall effectiveness – targeting specific Burren problems such as building mini-dolmens, votive offerings, littering etc
- Identify how best the message can be got across to all visitors and recreational users of the landscape, particularly to Coach Drivers
- Develop a new area specific code with the Leave No Trace group which incorporates the elements of the Burren Code based on their findings

This partnership is working to disseminate a basic conservation principle of Leave No Trace. The adoption of the ethic and its implementation in practice assists conservation management across a broad spectrum of stakeholders and actively engages the visitor and incoming operators, such as tour guides and coach drivers.



Training day in Leave No Trace

(e) Tidy Towns - Ballyvaughan Community Development Group

This activity was aimed at developing a template and recommendations on engaging tidy towns groups with appropriate activities to nourish and highlight biodiversity in more urbanised environments. The proposal came from the Ballyvaughan Community Development Group, and was embraced as a case study under GeoparkLIFE.

A Wildlife Survey was commissioned by the GeoparkLIFE programme and Ballyvaughan Community Development Group to take place during 2014. The survey identified habitats and physical features on a 1:2500 map, annotated with habitat descriptions and species lists, indicating notable species and those which are indicative of the health of the habitat.

The Wildlife Survey Habitat Map is based on Phase 1 Habitat Surveying as outlined in the Tidy Towns handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey. A literature review was carried out concerning the SACs and surrounding areas of interest to identify species which may also be present in the town. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland drew attention to a rare plant, found only in Ballyvaughan, which then was carefully searched for. Public consultation provides species lists for mobile elements of the fauna.

The final report from this study has been received and includes photographs of those habitats and a Management Plan. The next phase of this action is to develop a work programme and transferable tool kit for the management of biodiversity for Tidy Towns. *Annex 25* contains the Ballyvaughan Wildlife Survey and Management Plan.



Planting wildflower seeds in Ballyvaughan with local school children

(f) An Cabhail Mór – Kilnaboy History and Heritage Group

One of the more active and challenging aspects being looked at under community engagement is a proposed conservation training initiative at the site of a heritage building in Kilnaboy. This action was proposed by Dick Cronin of CCC and the Kilnaboy Historical and Heritage Group (KHHG). The community group aspire towards the conservation of An Cabhail Mor, a 17th Century building in a bad state of disrepair in Kilnaboy.

The priority for the site is a focus on training which will aid the consolidation of the walls and would include Conservation Volunteers, members of local rural social schemes and those that have shown an interest and commitment to the site, with the potential for those trained as part of the project to become future leaders of similar projects.

The program is expected to include aspects of training in research on historical backgrounds and building technologies with a focus on mortared buildings (not including dry stone walling). The proposed work on the monument itself would involve the re-pointing of the building where possible with lime mortar in an attempt to halt further degradation.

Conservation work at the site is a matter of urgency and the proposed training scheme is seen as a means of sustaining the conservation works. Training would be carried out by suitably qualified people and under appropriate supervision, all the while meeting health and safety and other legislative requirements.

So far a number of items have been completed as part of phase one towards making this concept a reality on the ground.

- A Conservation Inspection and Risk Assessment was carried out by David Humphreys of Architectural Conservation Professionals (ACP). The results of this assessment together with written notification which has been submitted by the group to the National Monuments Service (received on 6th May 2015) are expected to give rise to the need for a full Conservation Engineers report. See *Annex 26* for the ACP report.
- An application for request of a section 57 declaration for the proposed work on the protected structure was submitted to Clare County Council.
- Landowner agreements are in place and will be finalised when it is anticipated that work will begin at the site.
- A Wildlife Survey was completed on May 16th 2015 and is included in *Annex 27*

A lot has happened on the ground with this project and it is developing as a good case study for Action B3 community engagement and conservation with a very pro-active and enthusiastic community group. It has also provided good fruitful debates related to policy issues and the methodology for such projects. Current progress on this action is concentrating on the development of standards and best practice with the view to developing toolkits and a process template that could be used by other community groups for similar projects nationally. A detailed conservation plan for the structure needs to be drawn up in order to complete phase one of the project before moving onto phase two which will see active conservation work on the monument.



Site visits to An Cabhail Mhor

(g) Lisdoonvarna Failte

Lisdoonvarna Failte is a tourism and community group who own and manage the heritage property of the Spa Wells. The aim of this conservation action was to assist the community group to use their heritage story of hydrology and health to enhance the tourism attraction of the property. The aim was to find economic benefit in the conservation and promotion of the Spa Well. This process would provide a tool kit for other communities with interesting heritage assets available for development as a tourism and community resource.

This is a wide reaching project involving multiple partners with several meetings taking place between a range of agencies, including the Geopark, Failte Ireland, Clare County Council, and Lisdoonvarna Failte on the development of the Spa Wells. A feasibility study on the development of the site to properly interpret heritage and conservation values for locals and visitors.



Lisdoonvarna Spa Wells

(h) Lisdoonvarna Secondary School

This case study involves working with the Transition Year (TY) students of Lisdoonvarna Secondary School to develop a programme of research, interpretation and communication of the Hydrology of the Burren, the importance of water management and the impact of Climate Change. The aim is to develop a template for engaging Secondary schools in research projects which can, in turn, be shared with local community groups and Primary schools. A TY project around the Hydrology of the Burren is developing a programme of research and information provision on the importance of water together with their teacher John Simms and will hopefully become an entry in the BT Young Scientist Competition.

The Lisdoonvarna secondary school groundwater awareness project kicked off in April. Dr. Tiernan Henry of NUIG gave a presentation on the Hydrology of the Burren followed by workshop with seven TY students under the guidance of their teacher John Sims. The students received expert tuition on various aspects of the geology, hydrology and caves of the Burren from Dr. Tiernan Henry (NUIG) Colin Bunce (Burren Outdoor Education Centre) and Dr. Eamon Doyle (Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark) as well as a presentation on littering and pollution from Sonja O'Brien from the Boghill Centre, Lisdoonvarna. They embarked on further research and created a lesson plan to present to students at Fanore National school, gaining teaching and research experience as well as valuable presentation skills. The National School students in return received information about their environment from a local source, closer to their own age than the usual teachers or guest presenters, which they were more readily able to identify with.

Other proposed activities under this action include dye tracing by GSI in collaboration with CCC and a local caving club. GSI are also collaborating with TCD on a 3D hydrology project for schools while NUIG are conducting post doctorate research in hydrology in the Burren.

NUIG are proposing to develop this programme further as a participatory approach to water resource management, utilising a model known as Integrated Catchment Management (ICM). The initial idea is to use the Lisdoonvarna TY programme and a particular catchment are in the Burren to develop a tool kit for students on ICM, identifying how the TY students can engage stakeholders in their communities in water resource management. This will be developed during the next phase of the programme.



Transition Year students with Primary school children presenting a class on Hydrology

(i) Policy mapping

Phase one of the policy mapping action is completed. This has included a desktop study providing the details of the policies that operate in landscapes such as the Burren and their impact on conservation management and sustainable tourism. This has been drawn from documentary and digital sources and encompasses the key policy drivers of all the project partners on their work. The policies in operation can be as simple as those affecting day to day activities or can be as wide ranging so as to determine large scale infrastructural projects. It has become apparent that this is a complex and broad topic and there is a quantity of overlapping between sectors, with each group adapting policy to suits their own specific needs. Aside from policy, there is also a large quantity of best practice and strategic plans which are in place to attempt to bridge any gaps which may arise from lack of policy.

Phase one has also involved an interview process with key stakeholders, project partners and people on the ground about what they see as the key policy drivers and also the policy obstacles that impact on their work in relation to sustainable tourism, conservation management and the interface between them. Candidates have been interviewed from a variety of roles including farmers/landowners and members of a local group, to local government operators and those who hold positions in state agencies. This has provided a comprehensive and detailed overview of the current and relevant policy situation.

A key issue now in achieving the aims of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark LIFE project is to address the policy implications and the challenge of reconciling policy conflicts between sustainable tourism and other policies, especially regulatory environmental policies. The range and diversity of the project partners in this project ensures that there is an opportunity to examine the range of national (and more local) policies that impact on sustainable tourism. The B2 demonstration sites provide the opportunity to examine the operation of relevant policies on the ground, potential conflicts between them and foci to engage with project partners in thinking about achievable means of resolving policy conflicts. It is clear that the problem is not a lack of policy but the need to recognize the applicability of a range of policy instruments which may not be in direct alignment. Phase two is focusing on detailing the impact of policy on the ground through an evaluation of the activities of B1, B2 and B3. The challenge then is to balance and resolve inter-policy conflicts. This will become phase three of this action. The conclusions of Phase one of the Policy Review is in *Annex 28*.

(j) European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)

The European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) framework could be incorporated into the conservation management outputs for the project partners. ETIS is an EU Commission initiative and is presented as a framework for sustainable destination management. Inherent in its criteria is the desire to balance tourism and conservation. It also requires an engaged and integrated stakeholder approach to management. This system has been considered in the B1 Tourism Enterprises programme, and it has been acknowledged that the adoption of all the criteria is beyond the scope of this project. However, it is proposed for the next period that the ETIS model will be adopted and tested by the GeoparkLIFE partners and stakeholders on two criteria; transport/travel and universal access. This system has the potential to provide a conservation management tool for all of the project partners. Please refer to *Annex 28* for a copy of the ETIS Toolkit.

Planned Output and Time Schedule

B3 CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT		
Indicator	Project plan	Actual
<i>Deliverables</i>		
Report on conservation management	Dec 2016	Oct 2017
<i>Milestones</i>		
Completion of modules	May 2014	N/A
Completion of case studies	Dec 2016	Oct 2017
Evaluation	Dec 2016	Oct 2017

Indicators used to test Performance

The original project application envisaged 20 conservation management actions to be implemented. This has now been refined to 10 actions focused on major conservation analysis and interventions, with key user groups. The depth and range of these actions, and the extent of community and stakeholder involvement, will provide more than enough material for an impressive range of tool kits covering

1. the management of hedgerows by business communities
2. the management of monuments by community groups
3. the support of landowners and conservation of tourism assets on private land
4. the adoption of Leave no Trace by businesses and incoming tourism operators
5. the incorporation of biodiversity and natural areas into the Tidy Towns competition criteria
6. the provision of training in building conservation for community groups
7. the development of heritage assets as a tourism and community resource
8. the engagement of schools in promoting water resource management within their communities
9. the understanding of policy and procedure relating to tourism and conservation
10. the use of ETIS as a framework for integrated destination management, initially testing Sustainable Travel and Universal Access, providing linkages with B1 and B2.

Modifications of Actions

The original aim of this aspect of the programme was to develop the knowledge and skills of the stakeholders in conservation management through accredited training modules and the adaption of the learning outcomes to case studies. The project plan projected the completion of modules by June 2014 with case studies following to implement the modules. The new approach side steps the formal training proposal and utilises case studies solely as learning experiences and opportunities for skills development. The modification emerged out of a lot of research and consultation with the target groups. The development and delivery of the original accredited modules would be very expensive and would not be sustainable after LIFE. Focused case studies have brought a much more valuable engagement of the stakeholders involved. The learning outcomes from the case studies will then be incorporated into practical tool kits for similar projects in other destinations. This is a substantial improvement of the methods envisaged to secure the outcome of the project plan goals for

completion of conservation management actions. This modification proposal was noted in the Commissions letter dated 19/08/14 with a request for further information (point 4 in the technical annex) and was approved under point 2 of the technical annex in the letter from the Commission dated 19/08/2015.

Problems Encountered

In hindsight, the idea of developing modules did not reflect the diversity of the user-groups: too much emphasis had been placed on a “one-size-fits-all” approach. This approach was too remote from the needs of the user-groups, not cost effective and would not have attracted sufficient numbers to be sustainable as a training programme. This has now been resolved by a stronger emphasis on building on the capabilities of the user groups and enhancing their skill levels in conservation management from their present starting point (“bottom-up” and “many-sizes”). This approach also places more emphasis on the divergent needs and potential of the user groups, and piloting creative systems to respond to these needs.

The methodology developed to record and evaluate the case studies needs further evaluation, as at times it cannot fully capture the processes the target groups are experiencing as the case studies develop. We will be seeking advice from the NUIG team developing the ICM programme, drawing from their experience in community driven resource management programmes. Any advice on this issue from the monitoring team would be very welcome.

Further Perspectives after the end of the Project

The assessment and analysis of current policies that impact on the relationship of sustainable tourism and conservation management, and the proposal of recommendations on the integration of policies, is a key element in achieving the aims of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher LIFE project. Furthermore it has the potential to make a contribution to the wider discussion at European level of the challenge of developing a sustainable tourism strategy which has the conservation and management of natural and cultural heritage at its core.

It is now widely accepted that the future of our cultural heritage can be ensured only through the active involvement of communities. The community’s role in the process of heritage identification and management was anchored in the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, which called for “a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes”. In 2005 the Faro Convention recognised a “*framework for considering the role of citizens in the definition, decision-making and management processes related to the cultural environment in which communities operate and evolve. Citizen Participation has become an ethical obligation and a political necessity*”. The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015) looks at strengthening public participation by seeking effective methods of partnership, engagement and agreement between public authorities, the general public, voluntary organisations and interest groups to promote sustainable landscape change, protection and planning.

Europe 2020 establishes the framework for the European Commission’s legislative proposals for Cohesion Policy 2014 - 2020, and provides an important backdrop to the Irish Government’s policy framework for Local and Community Development. In the context of community-led local development, the Commission recognises a partnership approach involving public and private partners, such as local authorities, community interests and development bodies, working productively together to implement targeted and strategic responses to local challenges; some of the Geopark LIFE case studies could influence the development of future conservation projects under the various funding schemes associated with community development. The subsequent reforms in local government, as outlined in

Putting People First: An Action Programme for Effective Local Government (2012) and enacted in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 include measures which emphasise the need for more inclusive policy making processes and call for local authorities to secure greater citizen engagement and involvement in these processes.

The Clare County Development Plan (CDP) provides the vehicle through which specific goals and objectives can be achieved. Not only does it realise the importance of the County's tourism resource and the measures needed to protect it, it also recognises the importance of protecting, managing and enhancing its built and natural environment, affording appropriate protection to structures, sites and landscapes of intrinsic heritage value. These are the tourism resource and communities are the ultimate keepers of these resources. Community participation in conservation management will feature strongly in the next CDP.

The Conservation Management case studies will have contributed to the build up of skills and understanding between volunteers, communities and professionals in the management of monuments and habitats, thereby implementing the new perspectives on policy on the ground in the Burren. The case studies will provide important demonstrations of collaborative conservation management in action to stimulate further action beyond GeoparkLIFE. They will provide the foundation and guidelines for the engagement of communities and volunteers in the overall management of the heritage resource within the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark.

5.1.4 Monitoring

The original project application envisaged 4 monitoring actions;

- Tourism enterprises,
- Monuments & habitats,
- Conservation management
- Policy evaluation.

The main monitoring actions are integrated into the body of work of B1, B2 and B3 and policy evaluation. Solid baseline information was absent in most areas and the quantity of data, the cost of its collation, analysis and usability for planning purposes is being analysed under B2 in terms of site management and in B1 and B3 where the application of the EU Commissions European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) will be assessed in terms of business, agency and community engagement in a selection of its core indicators; sustainable travel and universal access.

The following table is a summary of the actions to date.

Actions	Progress to date
B1 Tourism Enterprises	Enterprise surveys of the participating businesses are conducted on an annual basis. The baseline established in 2013 can be viewed in <i>Annex 30</i> . The environmental, economic, resource planning and implementation components of the programme are addressed.
B2 Monuments & Habitats	The 7 demonstration sites have been thoroughly assessed from the owner and visitor perspectives, and from environmental, conservation and tourism access perspectives and baselines established for each site. The volume of data, its collection, collation, cost and use, has become an outcome requiring more investment and investigation.
B3 Conservation Management	A template for the monitoring of the case studies has been developed and is currently being tested. Each case study is a work in progress and the stages of progress, objectives and impacts are being recorded and reported on. Linkages to ETIS will be assessed.
Policy Evaluation	Policy evaluation is an ongoing process. Policy mapping has been completed. The integration of policy is being currently tested and assessed through its applications to actions B1, B2 and B3.

The overall indicators of progress are the series of project progress reports presented throughout the life span of the project. The progress of the activities is reviewed and reported at each reporting stage of the LIFE project (every 18 months). The socio-economic impacts will be reviewed at the end of the project. These are, specifically:

- Have Tourism Enterprises gained in competitiveness due to the integration of tourism and conservation?
- Has social awareness of tourism and conservation increased as a result of GeoparkLIFE?
- Has the conservation of monuments and habitats and engagement in conservation management been enhanced by GeoparkLIFE?

5.2 Dissemination Actions

5.2.1 Objectives

Communications and dissemination were envisaged over five actions:

- D.1 Project web site
- D.2 LIFE Information Boards
- D.3 Laymans' report
- D.4 Targeted communications
- D.5 After LIFE communications plan

5.2.2 Actions

(a) Authority on sustainable tourism destination development

We are positioning the Geopark as an authority on sustainable tourism destination development with the expert knowledge gained from the undertaking of the GeoparkLIFE project.

Initially, the content that will be used to showcase the Geoparks knowledge and experience in developing a sustainable tourism destination will be the results of we have seen to date in B1 and specifically from the Geopark Code of Practice for the sustainable tourism training programme. The outcomes to date will be presented in case studies highlighting the positive actions the participating businesses have taken since undertaking the Code of practice training programme.

As the B2 and B3 elements of the programme progresses, we will also highlight these through the development of case studies.

(b) Awards Applications

Applying for relevant awards has proven a great way of generating press coverage, raising the profile and gaining editorial in local and national newspapers for the GeoparkLIFE project as well as the Geopark as a sustainable destination and the organisation as a leader in sustainable destination development.

Some awards achievements

- Winners of the EDEN – European Destination of Excellence Award for Food and Gastronomy. The award recognises the development of a tourism offering based on local gastronomy that balances sustaining the local environment with the promotion of viable tourism. The prestigious EU-wide competition is designed to encourage and promote a more sustainable form of tourism development and The Geoparks Burren Food Trail programme was awarded this distinction
- World Tourism and Travel Award 2014; one of three finalists for the destination award; rewarding best practice in sustainable tourism world wide
- Green Hospitality Awards, November 2014 – winners of the Best Responsible Travel and Tourism Business of the year and Best Responsible Tourism Destination
- Irish Centre for Responsible Tourism, March 2015 - Silver award for the Best Responsible destination and Gold award for the Best Responsible Transport Initiative
- Irish Tourism Industry awards, April 2015 - The Geopark was top finalist in two categories (Best Local Authority Tourism Innovation and Best Environmental

Tourism Innovation) for the GeoparkLIFE project and the Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism

(c) Channels of communication

Conferences

Three public conferences are scheduled over the life of this project. The kick off conference, on 17-18 of October 2013, which introduced the public to the programme and its objectives and had guest speakers showcasing best practice in the USA, Costa Rica and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism, attracted 200 participants. The mid-term conference is scheduled for the 19th November 2015. The sum up conference will be held in the last quarter of 2017.

Social media

- The Geopark Facebook page has continually grown throughout the year. From October 17th 2014 to July 1st our Page 'Likes' have increased from 875 to 1,579.
- On numerous occasions our posts have reached over 1400 people, and it has proved an effective way to promote and inform of Geopark and GeoparkLIFE activities and events.
- The Twitter page has also continued to grow throughout the year from 969 followers in mid October 2014 to 1552 followers on 1st July 2015
<https://www.facebook.com/BurrenGeopark>
<https://twitter.com/>

Website update

- The website has been reconstructed to provide easier navigation and more detailed information on the GeoparkLIFE project which is regularly updated
- We are currently undergoing a process of updating and reorganising content on www.burrengeopark.ie to ensure that the communications objective is evident and that the work of the GeoparkLIFE programme is woven more effectively into the promotion of the Geopark as a destination.
<http://www.burrengeopark.ie/>

Press

- Since October we have received a number of press articles in both local and national papers with the biggest stories being the GeoparkLIFE awards, our success at the Green Hospitality awards and the winning of the European Destination of excellence (EDEN) award for the Burren Food Trail.
- We are currently undertaking a process to evaluate the monetary value of the coverage we have generated for the Geopark. Press releases and clippings attached

(d) Communication Initiatives by Target Audiences

Stakeholders

- Newsletter – A newsletter has been developed to communicate the GeoparkLIFE project progress and will be mailed out to stakeholders on a quarterly basis.
- Geopark website – There is a dedicated section to the GeoparkLIFE programme on the Geopark website where all steering committee meeting and working group meeting minutes and reports are filed along with any research presentations, keeping all partners up to date on the progress of the project in a transparent way.

- Social Media updates – we interact with our partner agencies through social media and use it to promote our successes.

Community

- We have taken a **column** in the local paper (the North Clare Local) to explain about the Geopark and the GeoparkLIFE project.
- **The Burren tourism story** event held in March this year was targeted at the local business community. The event showcased the products and experiences that have been developed by the Geopark and the Burren ecotourism network to promote the region as a sustainable tourism destination. The event reinforces our sustainable standards and messaging and it provides the tourism business community with information to encourage their visitors to ‘stay another night’ as the economic value of this is important to the community.
- Press – We highlight the activities and initiatives being undertaken by the GeoparkLIFE project to the local community through securing editorial in local and national papers.
- Social media updates – We share our news on the actions and initiatives we are undertaking.

Coach Drivers

- We have developed a programme to target coach drivers that travel through the Geopark region, which involves setting up a trade stand at the Cliffs of Moher to speak to drivers and guides, to gauge their level of knowledge of the Geopark, to promote leave no trace and to unearth what type of information they might require to aid them with the interpretation of the landscape for their visitors. An awareness programme for bus tour operators, drivers and users emphasising the impacts of their activities within the Burren is currently underway. Clinics will be undertaken throughout September 2015 at the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre to assess the level of awareness of the coach drivers and guides with regard to the conservation principles of the Geopark, its code of conduct and ‘Leave No Trace’ guidelines. A programme of work with the National ‘Leave No Trace’ organisation to produce a series of ‘Burren specific Leave No Trace guidelines will follow

Schools

- We are currently working on a schools education programme with Lisdoonvarna secondary school which sees transition year students working with the Geopark, the National University of Ireland, Galway and a local conservation activist, Sonja O’Brien to develop a methodology for training primary school students on the importance of conservation. This programme will be further developed with NUIG as a participatory approach to water resource management.

Visitors

- Maps – We have developed visitor maps that communicate what a Geopark is, the importance of the work they do, including the GeoparkLIFE project and how a visitor to the area can make the most of their visit in a sustainable way.
- Website – We have a section on the Geopark website dedicated to visitors to the area, which communicates how to visit the Geopark and provides information on the local and cultural heritage of the region as well as the actions being taken to take care of it.
- Awards and Press – Applying for sustainable destination awards and highlighting the work that is being done under the GeoparkLIFE project targets potential visitors and

encourages them to ‘get under the skin’ of the destination, to learn and to engage with the local community and the landscape in an appropriate way.

(e) *Signage*

There is an ongoing issue around the multiplicity of signage in the Geopark in general. The partnership has agreed to a review of all site signage and a proposal for the development of a single sign template, promoting the relevant owners/managers of the sites and the LIFE programme, has been well received. This will be implemented during the next reporting period.

The development of visitor signage for the Geopark incorporating the LIFE logo is currently under review. All of the Visitor Centres in the B.E.N have recently requested Geopark branded signage which will proclaim and underpin their participation in the LIFE programme and their commitment to the promotion and protection of the Geopark as a sustainable tourism destination. This is a direct outcome of the B1 Code of Practice training and the emergent product development workshops.

5.2.3 List of deliverables

The use of the LIFE logo on minutes, reports and videos can be seen in all of the Annexes in section 7. The LIFE logo is on our office signs, office equipment and B2 people counters.

The GeoparkLIFE website is <http://www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/>
Audiovisuals are available promoting the B1 Code of Practice, B2 Universal Access Audit and B3 Case Study Meitheal.

GeoparkLIFE notice boards will be erected at B2 sites and appropriate B3 locations during the next phase of the programme.

The following outputs are also available in the Annexes in section 7:

- Communications vision document, 2015
- Communications Plan, 2015
- B1 Training Pack
- Promotional maps and leaflets
- Press releases, Nov 2013 to June 2015
- Press releases, 2013-2014

5.3 Evaluation of project implementation

5.3.1 Methodology applied

The overall objective of the GeoparkLIFE programme has been the integration of tourism with conservation of natural and cultural heritage through a methodology of value to the EU Commission, to tourism and conservation agencies, to tourism enterprises and to local communities.

The approach has been to strengthen partnerships between agencies, and between agencies, enterprises and communities by developing and testing actions that aim to improve the environmental and economic performance of SME's, that promote strategic integrated planning approaches to the management of monuments and habitats and that empower local communities to actively engage in the overall conservation management of their habitats and heritage.

In carrying out these actions, existing policy and procedures in both tourism and conservation are being tested and analysed for their effectiveness in supporting the objectives outlined above, and in supporting the overall EU priorities in promoting the protection of habitats and culture and in the promotion of sustainable tourism.

The actions with the SME's (B1) are very successful and the results are obvious though challenging to report in quantitative measures. The Code of Practice development was greatly influenced by the businesses themselves, who identified the practical supports they required in order to achieve their environmental and economic aspirations. This collaborative approach cemented good relations between the businesses and the LIFE programme, and a sense of ownership of the process. The Code's training events bonded businesses together, and the outcome was an eagerness to work together to create economically viable and environmentally sensitive products and events. A major learning of this action is the absolute requirement for co-ordination to achieve these outcomes. The businesses themselves input a lot of time and energy to the process, however, they simply do not have enough time to take on the co-ordination of training, product development, marketing/PR and reporting that generates the results.

The case studies involving the Community Groups (B3) are providing excellent insights into issues surrounding policy, procedures and how best to engage with communities. The case studies seek to establish just what it is that communities and agencies require for conservation management at a local level to work. Procedures and policies are very important as a guide and a support to programmes like this. Procedures make all activities and expenditure accountable and they guide best practice when they are well developed and coherent. They provide important parameters. However, they should not become the primary aim, if so it could very well quench creativity, commitment, ownership and energy. The learning so far is that procedure should accommodate the real life challenges and needs of all of the partners. Those partners used to the public sector way of operating within procedures should understand and accommodate the elements of flexibility and creativity that businesses and community groups need to have to thrive, and the limits on resources and time they have to contend with.

The working towards agency partnership and integrated management systems at popular monuments and habitats in action B2 is proving more challenging. The reductions in agency budgets, the reductions in staffing and the embargos on staff replacement and recruitment is

having a knock on effect with this action. Expertise and time is the most valuable resource available at present and the allocation of time is challenging. The development of the working groups, as outlined in section 4, is certainly helping the programme progress, and there is a willingness amongst the participants on this working group to adopt an integrated approach to site management. However, the people in this group are mainly middle management, who are working in the Burren on a daily basis. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage in that they know the issues best but are not in a position to make strategic decisions. There is an emerging need to engage senior management in a more proactive role in order to shift the existing silo approach to site management.

With Policy, the interview with all stakeholders are ongoing and the B3 Case studies and B2 site actions are providing useful practical and on the ground testing. The interviews and the continuous evaluations of the actions will provide very useful pointers towards better policy integration and more effective procedures for communities and SME's to facilitate rather than impede engagement with conservation.

5.3.2 Results achieved

Task	Achieved	Evaluation
Collaboration and understanding between agencies, businesses and communities	Avenues of communication and collaboration have been opened through the project. Stakeholders are working together on specific projects and are making decisions together at steering and working group meetings.	Progress has been mixed. B1 is succeeding because the working relationships between the businesses and the agencies had been well established before the project commenced. B2 and B3 will need all the time the project can provide to achieve this level of collaboration. Positive progress with actions and measurable achievements are also vital to confidence and continued effort. More progress on actions B2 and B3 will be made in the next phase of the programme. Meetings will be held with senior management of the partner beneficiaries to encourage more active engagement.
Improving the environmental and economic performance of Tourism Enterprises	The Code of Practice training and the ancillary product development and marketing have increased engagement in environmental practice and increased confidence in economic performance. Please see section 5.1.1 and Annex 30 for more details	The training for the Code has been refined to respond to the needs of businesses and will be further refined as a mentoring tool between businesses. The relationship between the stakeholders is strong with both agencies and businesses strongly believing that they are gaining valuable outcomes. For businesses, in terms of skills, financial savings, networking with businesses and agencies and market profile. For the agencies, they have a well organised and committed network of businesses willing and able to engage with and champion environmental and marketing strategies and projects. Co-ordination has been one of the most valuable resources made available to the businesses and agencies through this project. It would have been impossible to reach this level of activity and success

		without dedicated co-ordinators providing supports and management.
Improving integrated conservation and visitor management approaches to popular monuments and habitats	Demonstration sites have been selected and assessed against environmental and tourism criteria and an integrated work programme and actions have been developed through a collaborative process.	Certain management obstacles and institutionalised thinking have to be overcome to achieve an improved integrated management approach. It will be key to the success of this action to agree a mechanism or platform for continuous collaboration on the management of natural and heritage resources for visitor use. At present the LIFE programme is facilitating and providing a platform, but it will be vital for After LIFE success and transferability to other destinations that a durable alternative is found. This issue is also being explored through the Policy mapping and analysis aspect of the project.
Engaging local communities in conservation management	An amendment to the initial project was required for this action. The proposed modules, on investigation, proved to be unsustainable and poor value for investment. The deliverables shifted to Case Studies, which focused on the needs of specific stakeholders and with specific outcomes in terms of collaborative engagement in conservation. The case studies are progressing and are being evaluated as they proceed. See 5.5.3 for details.	<p>The most important learning so far in this action is to not over manage and control community engagement in conservation. It seems best to identify and provide required expertise and supports and to then allow communities to proceed within their own structures and timeframes. This empowers and assists ownership of the programme, which would otherwise not be sustained.</p> <p>Another key learning is the need to find resolutions to bridge the gaps between agencies and their sometimes onerous processes, procedures and fears of community projects and the enthusiasm for action and impatience with lengthy procedures often felt by community groups.</p> <p>As the project proceeds, this element is gaining in depth and value. The processes and outcomes are providing useful inputs into policy, transferability and the After LIFE plan.</p>
Assessing and recommending the integration of tourism and conservation policy to support the 4 previous tasks	The mapping of the EU and national policies relevant to this project has been completed. Interviews with key stakeholders is ongoing to assess the impacts of policy on the ground.	This element of the project got off to a slow start but since the action was broken into 3 phases; 1. mapping, 2. identification of issues through the case studies and 3. moving towards integration, the action has progressed well. The utilisation of actions of B1, B2 and B3 as test cases for the impacts of policy has proved very useful, offering invaluable insights.

5.3.3 Visibility

Action B1 is highly visible and the impacts are obvious to the stakeholders as shown through the enterprise surveys (*Annex 8*). National and international recognition of our work in this area is shown through the quality of the awards programmes which have recognised our efforts: EDEN, World Tourism and Travel Council, Responsible Tourism International, Green Hospitality Ireland and the Irish Tourism Industry Awards. The media coverage leveraged by these awards has been invaluable.

Certain Action B3 case studies are beginning to gain momentum within their respective community groups, such as the Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns, Meitheal and Adopt a Hedgerow. These are measured through high levels of participation, positive impacts relating to the maintenance of hedgerows, collection of litter, clearance of scrub and repair of walls, levels of media coverage and in the case of Tidy Towns, increase in the competitions marks.

Action B2 has been less visible, as this action involves inter agency collaboration which requires a sensitive approach and carefully managed expectations. Success with the work programme in the next phase will provide opportunities for public acknowledgement.

5.3.4 Project amendments

The agreed amendments on 1. the project short name/acronym, 2. the B3 modules and 3. the proposed budget re-allocations (including the addition of people counters) will ensure that 1. the project is readily identifiable with UNESCO Global Geoparks and will not be confused with the previous BurrenLIFE farming for conservation programme, 2. the community conservation actions themselves are the most effective learning medium, providing cost effective, hands on, visible, practical, and transferrable results that the communities feel full ownership of, and 3. the most cost effective use of the LIFE funding, supporting the most effective transferrable outcomes and influential best practices.

5.3.5 Dissemination

GeoparkLIFE's connection to its stake holders and local communities can be shown in the level of media exposure it attracts (*Annexs 34 and 35*). Awards have been particularly effective in getting the core message of tourism and conservation across to a large audience. In the next phase, the schools outreach programme will be developed more fully and the Coach Clinics will provide us with the information we need to secure this stakeholder group's adoption of the Leave no Trace ethos. Our status as an authority on sustainable destination development has increased through this dissemination action and we receive regular requests to speak at conferences and to be the subject of dissertations and third level college field trips.

5.4 Analysis of long term benefits

5.4.1 Environmental benefits

Direct quantitative benefits

For the businesses in Action B1, the environmental benefits are measured through the setting of targets. Cost savings are experienced through the measurement of waste, water and energy. The contribution to conservation criteria within the Code of Practice also provides quantifiable environmental benefits to the region in the form of litter clean ups, wall repair, scrub removal, reporting of invasive species, etc.

For the agencies in B2 the setting of baselines around visitor numbers, behaviour, impacts, access issues, facilities and overall condition of the demonstration sites provides data never collected and collated before and provides an excellent resource for use in informing long term planning decisions on the management of popular monuments and habitats. The visitor observation template developed by CAAS for Failte Ireland at the GeoparkLIFE demonstration sites (*Annex 17*) is to be used as a monitoring tool for the Wild Atlantic Way, which stretches from Donegal to Cork along the west coast of Ireland, through a series of Special Areas of Conservation.

For the communities in B3, the case studies are best measured with ‘before’ and ‘after’ analysis and constant evaluation as the actions progress. As the purpose is to develop skills and to empower and support conservation management, it is important that the interaction of local enthusiasm and the slower processes of statutory obligations and processes is constantly monitored to catch issues as they arise and address them as efficiently as possible. This helps to maintain momentum and support for the processes. Some planning issues may not be resolved, yet valuable learnings will come out of the situations.

Relevance for environmental policy areas

There are many international policies relating to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, such as the World Heritage Convention, EU Policy on Culture and Heritage, the Valetta Convention, the European Landscape Convention, the Faro Convention, the Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development, the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive, Natura 2000, the Water Framework Directive, Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. The EU Policy on Tourism aims ‘to maintain Europe’s standing as a leading destination while maximizing the industry’s contribution to growth and employment and promoting cooperation between European countries, particularly the exchange of good practice. The EU’s competence in the industry is....to supplement the actions of member countries’ (EU Commission website). Sustainability in tourism is lauded, but not defined.

There is also a growing interest in Cultural Heritage by the EU Commission as presented in *Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe* (July 2014). The Horizon 2020 Expert Group for Cultural Heritage (December 2014 paper) set out a number of key areas for cultural heritage – Economy, Society and Environment, highlights the falling levels of government support for heritage, and a need for new models of governance and funding as outlined in the following key objectives;

- Objective 2. *How do we devise a more effective way of integrating the management of natural and cultural heritage?* There is a growing awareness across Europe that nature and heritage management cannot be seen in isolation and need to be tackled in a more integrated way.

- Objective 4. *How do we move from an object-oriented approach towards a spatial approach in heritage planning?* Many historic buildings, archaeological sites and landscape elements are protected and managed individually, so that they lack a proper connection with the rural or urban landscapes around them. This often results into alienating environments in which monuments remain as isolated islands in a world full of change. During the last two decades this object-oriented approach in heritage management is more and more criticized.

Internationally the framework is changing and the focus is now more on

- The development of holistic landscape based approaches to conservation
- A widening of heritage values to include communities
- A shift from control based approaches to conservation towards those based on dynamic management of change

The actions under this project are well positioned to test this change in thinking in natural and cultural conservation policy and to analyse the current capacity amongst agencies and communities, including the business community, to embrace this change. The project can also provide practical examples of where EU and National policy needs to become more defined in its supports for sustainable tourism at a destination level.

5.4.2 Long term benefits and sustainability

Long term qualitative environmental benefits

The increase in overall awareness of environmental and conservation issues and the development of environment policies at each business involved in the Action B1 Code of Practice training is filtering into the rest of the community and is acting as a model for other destinations. Participants in the Code develop knowledge and skills in maximising environmental benefits across a range of criteria from resource management to sustainable travel to contributions to conservation to the quality of interpretative information to green purchasing to Leave no Trace. The strengthened pride, networking skills, dissemination actions, and sustainable products promoting environmental awareness to visitors impact on general awareness and long term sustainability of this movement. With each award won, awareness spreads even wider. The core message '*tourism needs conservation*', is now synonymous with and embedded in the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark brand, in the Burren Ecotourism Network and with the Burren in general.

Should B2 succeed in achieving agency collaboration in integrated management systems, the planning processes for a future for the Burren landscape and heritage will become much more effective and sustainable and the inclusion and empowerment of local communities in the care and management of these resources (B3) offers even greater environmental dividends in the long term.

Long term qualitative economic benefits

The focus is on tourism as an economic driver. The GeoparkLIFE programme's mission is to highlight landscape and heritage as an important economic resource. All of the actions under the programme aim to strengthen the care and management of this resource, for the benefit of local communities and visitors. Products are developed to promote local resources (especially food, music, great guides, hosts and places to see), using sound environmental guidelines. The focus is on quality versus quantity, on revenue not numbers, on immersive experiences, on staying longer and experiencing more. Planning for the care of habitats and monuments focus also on the quality of the visitor experience at these sites; clear signage, safe parking, quality

interpretation, and universal access to encourage a deeper exploration of landscape and culture leading to longer stays and repeat visits.

The Burren Food Trail is nationally and internationally acclaimed as a quality product. This is what can happen with a shared ethos, strong partnerships, empowered creativity and great co-ordination. The strengthened capabilities of the tourism businesses in networking, product development, marketing and communication, firmly rooted in the conservation of their most valuable resources, is already obvious. “... *People often ask me how to get their towns and regions on the tourism map. What can they do to penetrate the media, boost social shares and get on the visitor’s radar? I’ve a pretty standard answer now. I suggest a short break in the Burren.*” Pól O’Conghaile, Ireland’s Travel Journalist of the Year, Travel Editor of The Independent.

Long term qualitative social benefits

Networking and partnerships are the strongest social benefits of this programme. Members of the BEN frequently report on the social benefits of the friendships and contacts developed through the training and networking activities. Many had previously operated in isolation. The increase in confidence measured through the Enterprise Surveys will lead to continued engagement in working together, leading to greater capacity and more investment in their businesses, thereby providing more employment.

Continuation of the project actions beyond the life of the project

The momentum gathered by the B1 Tourism Enterprises will ensure its continuation beyond LIFE, this is the focus of the Resource Planning stage of this action. This activity will assess and address the sustainability of the Burren Ecotourism Network and its member businesses. Partnership between agencies will also continue. The working groups have proved to be a valuable working tool for all of the partners. The case studies are evaluating the conditions required on the ground and with policy and procedures to ensure the sustainability of community activism in conservation, and this approach is by far the best mechanism to ensure continuity beyond the life of the project.

5.4.3 Replicability, transferability, demonstration

All of the actions can be replicated elsewhere. The most cost effective approach to training of tourism enterprises will have been developed and tested. Tool kits will be provided for the following:

- Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism – Buildings, Activities, Transport
- Code of Practice Manual
- Code of Practice Workshop Support Programme
- Evaluation guidelines; measuring, monitoring, reporting
- Building partnerships guidelines; testing ETIS in 2 core criteria.
- Integrated conservation and visitor management techniques at monuments and habitats
- Best practice in community engagement in conservation
- Recommendations on the integration of tourism and conservation policy at national and EU level
- Best practice in target audience information methods

More detail on this deliverable will be available in the next reports.

5.4.4 Best practice lessons

Best practice is evolving all the time. In B1 best practice in the Code criteria was rewarded with the production of short videos which are available for view on the project website

(Annex 10). In B2 the work with the National Disability Authority and the Brothers of Charity in Universal Access is emerging as best practice in this area.

Some key overarching lessons so far are as follows:

A sustainable destination requires a plan involving many actors and many activities. To develop this requires partnerships of many kinds; partnerships between agencies, partnerships between agencies and businesses and communities, partnerships between businesses and communities, partnerships between businesses. Both planning and partnerships take time, time to build understanding, trust and a common vision. Any planning process of this nature needs to factor time into the equation.

Building partnerships and networks is about focusing on relationships and collective actions. The building of this process requires commitment of time and effort and creativity, and the realisation that there is only so much that people can do when their primary role is their main work or business. Everyone representing the agencies and groups involved in the partnership is involved part time, out of necessity. Businesses and community groups in particular are giving voluntarily to the process, and their time is a precious commodity. This project is effective because a dedicated team of people administrate, co-ordinate, implement, record and report the actions. This cannot be done as a small part of the day job or as a voluntary time commitment. This has been vital to the day to day management and to the progress of the actions. We would advise that the first line on the budget for any programme involving partnerships is the co-ordination fees or salaries.

Procedures and policies are very important as a guide and a support to programmes like this. Procedures make all activities and expenditure accountable and they guide best practice when they are well developed and coherent. They provide important parameters. Procedure should accommodate the real life challenges and needs of all of the partners, in particular community groups. Programmes involving partnerships with community groups must acknowledge limits of resources and time.

Communication is vital. Good communication gives people knowledge, understanding, security and recognition of the efforts being made, of what is working and what needs to change., of the journey we are all on. Investors of resources, be it time or money, are kept informed on progress and accountability. Local communities know or can easily find out what is going on and can see that the programme is fully transparent. Our partners know that their efforts are recorded and acknowledged, and are sometimes rewarded by the validation of awards and the attention of global organisations such as the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network.

5.4.5 Innovation and demonstration value

GeoparkLIFE embraces several areas of policy and practice in the normally disparate areas of conservation and tourism. The sustainable tourism, nature tourism and ecotourism movements have attracted much support worldwide and is now seen as a method of supporting conservation areas; tourism revenue is directed into the conservation of landscape, species and local communities and their culture. The innovative and demonstration value of this project is the practical application and testing of a partnership approach and methodologies involving local businesses and communities. How can local businesses and communities be empowered to assume an equal stake in the long term management of their landscape and cultural heritage? The capacity for agencies, businesses and communities to engage as co-

managers of these resources is tested in shared ethos, practices, actions, procedures and policy.

5.4.6 Long term indicators of the project's success

At present, the following indicators have been allocated to this project

Action B1: 100 enterprises with strengthened capability in tourism conservation

Action B2: Seven demonstration sites improved

Action B3: Achievement of 20 conservation actions

Action C: Monitoring reports, impacts on policy

Action D: conferences, media releases, schools programmes and packs, signage, active up to date web site

Action E: Number of meetings and reports, levels of networking

The original estimate of 600 businesses involved in tourism in the Burren was calculated by casting a very wide net and including all services in the area, from post offices to petrol pumps. The number of business who host or provide food and activities to visitors is more in the region of 300. At this point of the programme the vast majority of the key tourism businesses, who host at least 90% of tourists, have participated in the Code of Practice. Though we may not achieve the actual 100 businesses target in terms of full engagement with the Code of Practice training, we believe that the activities and ethos of the Code and BEN will influence and inspire at least 100 businesses in the region. The main modification in this action is that the indicator of success will not be in the number of businesses trained, but will be in the emergence of the network of businesses as a competent self sustaining organisation to continue the work of GeoparkLIFE in training and mentoring other businesses, in implementing the criteria the Code of Practice and in leading best practice in products and visitor services.

In action B3 we are now aiming to achieve 10 conservation actions through the case studies. We believe these will be of sufficient depth and value to more than compensate for lack in quantity.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

6.1. Summary of Costs Incurred

PROJECT COSTS INCURRED			
Cost category	Budget according to the grant agreement	Costs incurred within the project duration	%
1. Personnel	1,146,270	277,757	24.2
2. Travel	148,855	16,706	11.2
3. External assistance	740,620	321,962	43.5
4. Durables: total <u>non-depreciated</u> cost	7,500	21,542	287.2
5. Consumables	68,000	43,637	64.2
6. Other costs	42,400	14,657	34.6
7. Overheads	64,100	34,241	53.4
TOTAL	2,217,745	730,503	32.9

Overall 33% of the approved budget has been spent, with particularly high rates in external assistance, consumables and other. The high rate of overhead reflects the use of the 7% allowance, although this had not been included in the original application. The expenditure exceeds 150% of the first stage grant payment

6.2. Accounting System

- The accounting system is Agresso. The GeoparkLIFE expenditure is coded to a separate Job Code and Operational Codes are allocated to each action within GeoparkLIFE (T&S, B1, B2, B3, C, D, E, Audits and Overheads). Each invoice is marked with these codes and also the beneficiary short name, action number and budget category to tally with the analytical accounting system (for example; Web site: CCC/D1/EA).
- The procedure of approving costs is as follows:
 - CCC procurement rules apply for identifying suppliers
 - When costs are agreed PO's are then raised under the LIFE Code
 - Invoices are approved by the project manager Carol Gleeson, stamped and sent to the finance section of CCC for payment. Sundry expenses are claimed through the beneficiaries' T&S system.
- Electronic time sheets are filled in, printed and signed by the participant's line manager and submitted to admin support, Siobain O'Brien, who checks that the sheets are correctly filled in. The details are input into the financial reporting form. Requests for time sheets are sent to participants on a monthly basis.
- All suppliers are requested to quote the reference LIFE 11 ENV/IE/922 on their invoices. If this is not done, the invoices are returned to the supplier and are only processed if the reference is quoted. Sundry T&S receipts are stamped with a dedicated GeoparkLIFE stamp with the reference number and date.
- All payment transactions are recorded on Agresso and confirmation of payment can be obtained on request.

6.3. Partnership arrangements

All financial transactions have been processed through the Lead Beneficiary (CCC) admin and Agresso system. To date, no financial transactions between the coordinating beneficiary and the associated beneficiaries have taken place. Financial reporting is implemented solely by the coordinating beneficiary.

6.4. Auditor's details

Clune Lynch & Company Accountants, 50 O'Connell Street, Ennis, Co. Clare, are nominated as the external auditors for this project, and will be subject to confirmation closer to the date.

6.5 Summary of costs per action

Please see pg.74 for the table outlining the summary of costs per action. The discrepancies between this table and the summary of costs per action set out in the grant agreement (form FB) are as follows:

Action	Budget	Rationale
B1 Tourism Enterprises	External Assistance	68% of this budget has been used so far. There is a need for external assistance in the co-ordination of the programme. The original budget envisaged the allocation of personnel from Shannon Development for this role, however, this did not materialise for reasons outlined in section 4. We will be requesting a budget modification to reallocate costs from Personnel to External Assistance (EA).
	Consumables	Costs for both materials <u>and</u> workshops have been allocated to this budget, hence the over run. We can re-allocate the workshops under EA if required or we can request a budget modification from T&S/Other into Consumables.
B2 Monuments and Habitats	External Assistance	We envisage an under spend in this budget line, therefore we will be requesting a budget modification from this into other areas that require an increase in the original budget.
B3 Conservation Management	Consumables	This budget expenditure is under the GSI B.3 contribution for brochures, but we also included signage for the sites. Expenditure on 'gateways' to the Geopark is approved in the letter from the Commission on 19/08/2015 under point 5 of the technical annex. We will request a new budget line for signage.
C1 Monitoring	External Assistance	It was envisaged in the original budget that CCC personnel would carry out monitoring. As explained in Section 4, this was not possible and we had to use EA. We will be requesting a budget modification from Personnel into EA. We will also be proposing the allocation of a budget for people counters under equipment (see D2 Info Boards below)
D1	External	We spent more than originally allocated on the

Project Website	Assistance	web site to make it mobile compatible and to provide an intranet section to support the B1 training programme; allowing participants to view the training schedule details and to book on line. This adds great value to the web site and can also be used for other actions and beyond the time scale of the project. We will be requesting a budget modification from Personnel into EA.
D2 Info Boards	Equipment	This cost is for people counters, an element of monitoring that was not planned for in the initial budget. We will request the addition of a budget line for CCC Action C1 Monitoring.
D4 Targeted Communications	External Assistance	As with the other actions, personnel have not been available to carry out the actions and external assistance has been required. We will be requesting a budget modification from Personnel into EA and a reallocation from B2 EA to allow for a continuation of this core action within the project.
E1 Project Management	External Assistance	Again, as admin support was not available within personnel, we had to utilise external assistance. We also used EA for technical support in the setting up, initial running and reporting of the project. See section 4, Management Structure for more details.
E2 Networking with LIFE	Travel & Subsistence	We have allocated the travel to Brussels for the ETIS programme and also to present the project to MEP's as networking with LIFE To ensure sufficient budget for further LIFE platform meetings we will request an allocation from T&S E1

Additional commentary on the Financial Report

There are a number of items that were not foreseen as expenditure:

External Assistance

Financial administration was not available under CCC Personnel and had to be sourced under External Assistance, therefore all of Siobain O'Brien's invoices were not foreseen as expenditure.

Monitoring activities (surveys of coach tourism and visitors) were also allocated to be carried out under CCC Personnel but this expertise was not available within CCC and had to be carried out under External Assistance

Equipment

People counters were not budgeted for. However, we have discovered that they are a very valuable tool for measuring visitor impacts on sites and monuments and provide an independent evaluation that can be utilised in the development of ongoing monitoring and management plans. Monitoring has become one of the most important activities under GeoparkLIFE and is key to the development of policy and governance.

Consumables

There is no budget allocated for consumables in Conservation Management activities, aside from brochures. However, there is a need for expenditure on materials to assist conservation activities under B3.

Travel and Subsistence

The value of inviting speakers from the USA to the kick off conference in October 2013 is addressed as follows; the kick off conference was an opportunity to present GeoparkLIFE in the context of the global movement towards sustainable tourism and visitor management. This was an opportunity to invite speakers with long experiences and authority in these areas. Erika Harms set up and directed the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and Dr. Douglas Comer has unparalleled experience in heritage and visitor management in World Heritage Sites and National Parks all over the world. The inclusion of these speakers in the conference programme helped attract over 200 delegates and broad media coverage, and brought credibility and weight to the proceedings. Their presence introduced an important global dimension to the work of the LIFE project in the Burren.

The management team were able to avail of their experience in more depth through focused meetings with them before and after the conference on the topics we wished to address under the LIFE programme. Erika Harms went on to work with GeoparkLIFE on the evaluation of the training programme under the Code of Practice (B1), ensuring that it complimented the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria she developed.

Breakdown of costs per action

Action no.	Short name of action	1 Personnel	2. Travel and subsistence	3. External assistance	4.a Infra-structure	4.b Equipment	4.c Prototype	5. Purchase or lease of land	6 Consumables	7 Other costs	TOTAL
B1	Tourism Enterprises	€51,618.85	€1,969.59	€139,552.34	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€15,824.20	€14,656.77	€223,621.75
B2	Monuments & Habitats	€18,694.65	€777.82	€17,065.90	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€36,538.37
B3	Conservation Management	€56,399.93	€771.59	€6,664.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€5,931.27	€0.00	€69,766.79
C1	Monitoring	€0.00	€184.23	€17,885.38	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€18,069.61
D1	Project Web Site	€0.00	€0.00	€22,052.37	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€22,052.37
D2	Info Boards	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
D3	Layman's Report	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
D4	Targeted Communications	€0.00	€1,112.50	€71,250.54	€0.00	€21,542.30	€0.00	€0.00	€21,881.91	€0.00	€115,787.25
D5	After LIFE Plan	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
E1	Project Management	€151,043.87	€9,400.74	€47,491.93	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€207,936.54
E2	Networking with LIFE	€0.00	€2,489.40	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€2,489.40
Over-heads											€34,241.38
	TOTAL	€277,757.30	€16,705.87	€321,962.46	€0.00	€21,542.30	€0.00	€0.00	€43,637.38	€14,656.77	€730,503.46

7. **ANNEXES** (to be attached on a memory stick)

7.1 Administrative annexes

- Annex 1: Steering Committee Minutes
- Annex 2: Working Group Minutes
- Annex 3: Irish Management Institute Partner Facilitation Day Report
- Annex 4: Communication with the Commission and Monitoring Team

7.2 Technical annexes

ACTION B1 ANNEXES

- Annex 5: Sustainable Tourism Evaluation & Benchmarking Report 2013 – Executive Summary
- Annex 6: GeoparkLIFE B.E.N. Support Programme 2013-14
- Annex 7: Sample Evaluation Report – Code of Practice
- Annex 8: GeoparkLIFE Enterprise Survey March 2014
- Annex 9: Overview of Training Dates and Participation 2014-15
- Annex 10: Link to the case studies and videos. <http://www.burrengeopark.ie/community-business/the-geopark-code-of-practice/>.
- Annex 11: Action B1 Tourism Enterprises Evaluation Report March 2015 – Executive Summary
- Annex 12: Executive Summary of Stakeholder Consultation Report
- Annex 13: Proposed Work Programme B1 2015-2017

ACTION B2 ANNEXES

- Annex 14: Criteria used in the selection of Demonstration Sites
- Annex 15: Map of B2 Demonstration Sites and Zones
- Annex 16: B2 Demonstration Site assessments proposal
- Annex 17: Visitor Observation Study (CAAS)
- Annex 18: Visitor Survey (Milward Brown)
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- Annex 20: Invitation to Pilgrimage Workshop
- Annex 21: Link to Brothers of Charity Demonstration Site Access Review
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ACTION B3 ANNEXES

- Annex 23: Template for recording B3 Case Studies
- Annex 24: Link to Meitheal Video: <https://youtu.be/detKRcchOV8>
- Annex 25: Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns Survey of Wildlife
- Annex 26: Health & Safety Assessment on An Cabhail Mhor (ACP)
- Annex 27: Ecological Report on An Cabhail Mhor (EirEco)
- Annex 28: Sustainable Tourism & Conservation Management: Mapping Policy (UCD)
- Annex 29: European Tourism Indicator System Tool Kit

MONITORING ANNEXES

- Annex 30: Overview of B1 Baselines

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- Annex 31: Communications vision document, 2015
- Annex 32: Communications Plan, 2015
- Annex 33: B1 Training Pack
- Annex 34: Promotional maps and leaflets
- Annex 35: Press releases, Nov 2013 to June 2015
- Annex 36: Press releases, 2013-2014

