



GeoparkLIFE Progress Report

October 2014

The following is a brief synopsis of progress in the areas of the GeoparkLIFE programme. Please review this prior to the Steering Committee meeting on Wednesday 22nd. To save time we will not repeat this report but will instead focus on matters arising from the report.

B1 Training Programme

A comprehensive training and networking programme for B.E.N. members commenced on 23rd September 2014. 10 workshops will be delivered to support tourism enterprises in meeting the requirements of the Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism. In addition, a series of workshops designed to support Network integration and capacity building amongst the enterprises will take place. There will be a strong focus on relationship-led marketing through networking and referral generation. There is also be a strong emphasis on ensuring and protecting the integrity and credibility of the Network members in terms of environmental good practice.

Outcomes of an Enterprise Survey of the 47 enterprises that completed the Code of Practice training in 2013-14 showed significant impact in terms of behaviour change in the areas of waste, water, energy management and sustainable transport. It highlighted needs for further supports in the areas of water protection and wastewater management, conservation contributions, target-setting and business planning. Overall confidence amongst the tourism enterprises is high with 80% indicating that they felt their business had been generally strengthened as a result of the programme.

At this point, a target of 100 enterprises in the Network by 2018 (as envisaged in the original application) seems optimistic. It is perhaps advisable from now to focus on 'quality over quantity' in terms of Network membership and also on enhancing good practice and awareness amongst existing members. In 2014, the Network expects to welcome up to 10 new members (approximately half previous intake). However, within those 10 members, the main tourism enterprises in the area not previously involved are expected to join e.g. Aillwee Cave, Caherconnell Stone Fort as well as the Michael Cusack Centre and Doolin 2 Aran Ferries.

B2 Site

After agreeing the selection of the Demonstration Sites, the next phase of the B2 Sites and Monuments programme is **Site Assessment**. This commenced in July. Zena Hctor was commissioned to co-ordinate the elements of the assessment of all 7

<p>Assessments</p>	<p>demonstration sites and meetings of the B2 Working Group.</p> <p>Slieve Carran Nature Reserve was chosen as the first site to be assessed collectively by the Working Group and is being used as a pilot site to produce a methodology for the other demonstration sites. This methodology will be completed by mid-December.</p> <p>The overall approach in 2014 to the B2 element of the programme includes the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On site appraisal: Approach, facilities, information on site. Identify how visitors are directed. Condition of site and identification of visible recreational pressure points. 2. Observation studies (see C Monitoring) Visitor movement and activities. 3. Visitor Surveys (see C Monitoring) including visitor attitudes to the site, previous and present knowledge and perception of conservation issues, behavioural influences (if any). 4. Agency reports; condition reports, management structures, plans and strategies. 5. Landowner interviews on issues at the site and attitude towards visitors and their behaviour 6. Coach Tourism survey (see C Monitoring); use of sites, ecological impacts at 3 demonstration sites, bus driver's attitudes. 7. Agency interviews on site issues, policy implications (UCD) and steps forward. 8. Selection of specific, measurable physical, environmental and social indicators 9. Development of on-going monitoring programme. (see C Monitoring). 10. Development of Working Programme for each site.
<p>B3 Conservation Training</p>	<p>The B3 Working Group have agreed to shift the focus on accredited modules towards a series of Case Studies which test training supports developed to increase conservation activism amongst a range of stakeholder. The group have agreed co-ordination and developed a methodology to record the process. All programme co-ordinators will liaise with UCD on Policy issues that arise in the course of the programme.</p> <p><u>Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN):</u> (a) Training in conservation awareness and contribution and Leave No Trace under Code of Practice_(b) Enhancing BEN Conservation Activism: Adopt a Road, Adopt a Monument and Meitheal_(c) Reading the Landscape programme for guides; developing interpretation skills, appropriate use, safety, and visitor management at the B2 Demonstration Sites_(d) Training the trainers and mentors. <i>Co-ordinated by Geopark (In Progress)</i></p> <p><u>Burren Conservation Volunteers (BCV):</u> (a) Training of Supervisors in observation, monitoring, survey, reporting and response techniques.(b) Minor repairs to walls</p>

	<p>using the B2 Demonstration Sites as case studies. <i>Co-ordinated by Burrenbeo Trust</i></p> <p><u>Landowners:</u> Linking elements of BEN and BCV training to provide supports for farming families in conservation and visitor management (a) Meitheal, (b) Adopt a Monument (c) Information and awareness of relevant legislation, rights and responsibilities. <i>Co-ordinated by Burrenbeo Trust (In Progress)</i></p> <p><u>Local Historical/ Conservation Groups:</u> Developing Monument Conservation Teams: Skills training, monitoring around processes, methodologies on essential minor repairs to structures; Kilinaboy group and An Cabhail Mor as a case study, with elements of Carran Church included. <i>Co-ordinated by Dick Cronin, CCC Conservation Officer</i></p> <p><u>Tidy Towns Groups:</u> Engaging Tidy Towns groups to nourish and highlight biodiversity in more urbanised environments. Introducing issues around Climate Change and impact on biodiversity, using Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns as a Case Study. <i>Co-ordinated by Burrenbeo Trust (In Progress)</i></p> <p><u>Community Tourism Development Group:</u> Using Lisdoonvarna Failte as a case study for developing knowledge and visitor information around local landscape and heritage (geological/hydrology/water/Spa tourism). <i>Co-ordinated by Geopark</i></p> <p><u>Engaging local schools:</u> Lisdoonvarna Secondary School Transition Year (a) research and communication to Primary Schools on an environmental theme (Water)_and (b)Resident’s Survey on attitudes to tourism. <i>Co-ordinated by Geopark (In Progress)</i></p> <p><u>Project Partners:</u> Steering Committee, B1, B2 and B3 Sub committees and Advisory Panel developing partnership working models_ <i>Co-ordinated by UCD and Geopark (In Progress)</i></p>
<p>C</p> <p>Monitoring</p>	<p>The monitoring element of the GeoparkLIFE programme is established and will produce <u>benchmarks</u> and <u>methodologies</u> on measuring and monitoring the environmental and economic impacts of tourism in the region.</p> <p>An enterprise survey of the BEN members was carried out in May/June on the profile of members and the impact of the Code of Practice training on their business.</p> <p>People counters have been installed at 6 demonstration sites, we are awaiting agreement on locations with landowner at the Blackhead site.</p> <p>Caas have been commissioned by Failte Ireland to pilot observation studies of environmental impacts of the Wild Atlantic Way and have agreed to utilise the GeoparkLIFE demonstration sites to produce a survey methodology for assessing environmental impacts on sites and monuments. The observation programme was carried out on the 5th/6th and 7th of September. Two drafts of a report have been produced and commented on.</p> <p>Millward Brown were commissioned by GeoparkLIFE to develop and carryout a visitor survey methodology at all demonstration sites. The visitor surveys were carried out throughout September and early October. Analysis will be concluded in</p>

November and the results will be available on the web site.

Joe Saunders and Paul Murphy have been commissioned to carry out an assessment of the environmental and economic impact of **Coach Tourism** in the Geopark. The period spans a full year (Jan – Dec 2014) and the results will be available in January 2015.

We are working with Lisdoonvarna Secondary School on the development of a **resident's survey** on attitudes to tourism in the Burren, to be rolled out in November and December, with results available in January. This is part of the Young Scientist Programme.

Policy.

This aspect of the programme is managed by UCD. The following summary is provided by Gabriel Cooney and Joanne Gaffrey, University College Dublin, with advice from Brian Callanan.

Introduction

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.

Moving forward

One of the key strengths of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark LIFE project is the wide range and diversity of partners actively involved in the project. The B2 element of the programme is focused on a series of demonstration sites which provide foci on the ground in different parts of the Burren for the achievement of the aims and objectives of the project. The B3 element involves local actors in conservation management. The range and diversity of the project partners ensures that there is an opportunity to examine the range of international, national and regional/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. The B3 conservation management actions provide a complementary opportunity for policy impact study.

The Policy Review

Phase 1 Mapping the policy framework(s)

A desktop study providing the detail of the policies that operate in landscapes such as the Burren and their impact on conservation management and sustainable

	<p>tourism. This will drawn from documentary and digital sources and encompass the key policy drivers of all the project partners on their work. The outcome would be an overview of the relevant policies. Full draft by end of October 2014.</p> <p><i>Phase 2 Detailing the key policy conflicts</i></p> <p>Drawing on the reality and detail of the B2 demonstration sites as case studies and the broader experience of project partners on the ground, the conflicts between policies, and their impacts, would be detailed. The focus of this phase would be working with project partners (both regulators and regulated) to gain different perspectives on the conflicts and an understanding of the sources of conflict. Interviews will be held with key actors in the B3 conservation management to gather their experiences on policy conflict issues. <i>Full draft to be completed by March 2015</i></p> <p><i>Phase 3 Moving to reconciliation</i></p> <p>This phase would involve identifying those issues or conflicts on the ground which could be resolved sustainably at local level by improving communication and support networks, in effect by strengthening the interfaces between policies. On the other hand Phases 1 and 2 of the project may also reveal and document that there are issues which are having a negative impact on the relationship between sustainable tourism and conservation management which need to be changed. Recommendations in this regard would be proposed for inclusion in the final report. There will be three possible levels of recommendations, all around the reconciliation of tourism and conservation policies for sustainable tourism:</p> <p><u>Level 1 (Local):</u> Improvement of local management to reconcile tourism and conservation</p> <p><u>Level 2 (National):</u> Strengthening of national programmes to address the policy interaction between tourism and conservation</p> <p><u>Level 3 (International):</u> Development of a new policy framework at European level, including guidelines to the member-states, on sustainable tourism through joint implementation of tourism and conservation policies</p> <p>It is likely that recommendations will need to be made at all three levels.</p> <p>The full report (all phases 1-2-3) should be ready during the project life-time so that it can inform the development of pilot initiatives as an integral part of the project. The report should therefore be complete by December 2015. This will allow pilot initiatives on conservation/tourism reconciliation to be implemented and evaluated over the final two years of the project.</p>
<p>D Communications</p>	<p>Targeted Communications</p> <p>We are in the process of developing a methodology that will identify needs and produce tailored communication tools on sustainable tourism through the key people and locations where visitors receive information. These are:</p>

- Demonstration site signage
- Farm infrastructure along trails
- Visitor Centres and information points
- Accommodation providers
- Coach and taxi drivers

Site signage is underway and the information points are currently being re branded. The Cliffs of Moher visitor centre will soon open an information point that showcases the Geopark.

2015 communications plan

A communications plan for 2015 GeoparkLIFE has been developed, and will be positioning the Geopark as an authority on sustainable tourism destination development. Initially, the content that will be used to showcase this is the results of the Code of Practice training and the Enterprise Survey that was conducted this summer. Case studies showcasing the standout results of this programme will be developed along with supporting video clips and press releases. As the B2 and B3 elements of the programme progresses, we will also highlight these case studies and achievements.

Product development and marketing

The product development and marketing programme in partnership with BEN for 2015 will continue to focus on food, activity, walking and will also begin to develop products that focus on heritage, accommodation providers and visitor centres.

Social media

The Facebook page has continually grown throughout the year. From January 1st to October 17th our Page Likes have increased from 514 to 875, an increase of 361. On numerous occasions our posts have reached over 1400 people, and it has proved an effective way to promote and inform of Geopark activities and events. The Twitter page has also continued to grow throughout the year from 397 at the beginning of February to 969 mid October, we are nearing 1000 followers.

Website update

We are currently undergoing a process of updating and reorganising **www.burrengeopark.ie** to ensure that the communications plan above can be clearly presented and that the work of the GeoparkLIFE programme is woven in more effectively into the promotion of the Geopark as a destination.

The website is going to be reconstructed to provide easier navigation and more detailed and regularly updated information on the GeoparkLIFE project.

Google Analytics for www.burrengeopark.ie Jan - Sep 2014

	Visitors 2013	Visitors 2014	Percentage increase	Page per visit	Visit duration	Bounce Rate*	By Desktop	By Mobile	By Tablet
Jan	n/a	1,938	n/a	3.29	02:55	49.90%	1,529	223	186
Feb	n/a	1,804	n/a	3.42	02:55	47.56%	1,455	194	155
Mar	n/a	2,527	n/a	3.06	02:45	50.73%	1,960	306	261
Apr	n/a	3,962	n/a	3.04	02:27	60.37%	2,180	1,267	515
May	386	2,377	516%	2.61	02:24	54.27%	1,735	324	318
Jun	713	2,439	242%	2.65	02:22	54.65%	1,683	397	359
Jul	747	3,078	312%	2.65	02:25	55.23%	2,011	571	496
Aug	837	3,194	282%	2.63	02:20	55.48%	1,915	673	606
Sep	885	2,191	148%	2.45	02:11	57.87%	1,500	374	317

*Most of the bounce rate is referred traffic to the BEN visitor site www.burren.ie

Press coverage

11 press releases issued to date in 2014 with over 100 pieces of coverage across radio, printed and online media. Press releases covered awards nominations, and festival and events sponsored by the Geopark along with the GeoparkLIFE Universal access pilot programme.

Awards in 2014

1. World Travel & Tourism Council – Tourism for Tomorrow Awards – Shortlisted
2. World Responsible Tourism Awards – Best Destination - Longlisted
3. Geological Society UK – Top 100 Geosites in UK & Ireland – Top Geosite Landscape
4. Green Hospitality – Responsible Travel & Tourism Awards – Winner of Best Destination, Winner of Overall Responsible Travel & Tourism Business

Upcoming Awards

1. National Geographics World Legacy Awards – Destination Leadership – Shortlist to be announced end of October at ITB Asia with Winners announced at the ITB in Berlin in March 2015
2. Irish Centre for Responsible Tourism – Responsible Tourism Awards - Best Destination for Responsible Tourism – Shortlist to be announced March 2015 with Winners announced at the World Travel Market in November 2015

International coverage in 2014: Aside from the opportunities provided by Award nominations, the GeoparkLIFE programme has been presented at European and Irish Geopark conferences and seminars and at the ETIS pilot meetings in Brussels. The programme is also showcased in the UN Environmental programme 'Global Clearing House' <http://www.spcclearinghouse.org/scp-initiatives/730-geopark->

sustainable-code-of-practice-for-tourism-wttc-tourism-for-tomorrow-finalist-2014.html

Intranet & website:

B1. The Tourism Enterprise Programme (Geopark Intranet)

The Geopark Intranet went live last year for the Code of Practice Training Programme. From the start a lot of users found it fairly difficult to navigate and the booking system, although altered a couple of times, was too complicated.

A year on we had a better idea of how the Intranet should work and where the problem areas were. The Intranet was redesigned to be more intuitive with a very easy booking system.

Below is a screen shot of the landing page:

The screenshot shows the landing page of the Tourism Enterprises Programme. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for HOME, TRAINING, RESOURCES, and RESEARCH. Below the navigation is a purple banner with the text 'Welcome to the Tourism Enterprises area'. Underneath, there is a section for 'Important Dates' with two deadlines: 'DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF FIRST CODE OF PRACTICE SUBMISSIONS: TUESDAY 27TH JANUARY' and 'DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF CODE OF PRACTICE UPDATE AND ANNUAL REPORT: TUESDAY 20TH JANUARY'. The 'Upcoming Training Events' section features four event cards: 'Understanding our Markets' (Oct 14, 2014, 36 spaces), 'Introduction to Geopark Code' (Oct 21, 2014, 68 spaces), 'Energy Management & Climate...' (Oct 28, 2014, 28 spaces), and 'Leave No Trace Awareness Session...' (Nov 3, 2014, 11 spaces). Each card has a 'REGISTER FOR EVENT' button. Below the events are sections for 'Code of Practice' (with links for 'Code of Practice Training' and 'Code of Practice Toolkit') and 'Resource Library' (with a 'View All' link). The footer includes the text 'The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark is managed by Clare County Council' and logos for various partners like Fáilte Ireland, OSI, OPW, and NUI Galway.

Annotations on the screenshot:

- Easy navigation & quick access to manage bookings area (pointing to the navigation menu)
- Editable Text box: to highlight dates, changes etc (pointing to the 'Important Dates' section)
- Quick view of the next training events and easy booking system (pointing to the 'Upcoming Training Events' section)
- Quick link to the Code of Practice training and Code of Practice Toolkit, this appears on the bottom of each page (pointing to the 'Code of Practice' and 'Code of Practice Toolkit' links)

E Project Management

Time sheets and financial administration

2012 - All correct

2013 - Missing time sheets from 1 partner

2014 - Missing time sheets from 22 partners

We have developed an efficient system of coding and filing invoices on a monthly basis.

Time sheets are recorded in soft copy and are filled in hard copy. As time sheets are received the hours are recorded in each partner's financial report. However, it has been very difficult to give clear monthly financial reports as time sheets are still not

being submitted on time.

Feedback from Commission

Lynne Barratt, our monitor, paid a site visit in June and reported on progress to the Commission. We then received a letter from the Commission commending the project on its progress in the areas of B1, our financial and admin systems and our communications programme. However, the Commission expressed concern over the level of progress on B2 and B3 and on establishing baselines. The above progress report will show that significant progress has been made in these areas since then.

Proposed changes in Partnership structure

Our partner NUIG is proposing to withdraw from the project. Initially, NUIG involvement was to provide archaeological work on the B2 monuments. As the programme developed, the focus on the B2 sites shifted away from research to more direct visitor management interventions. NUIG was then considered a suitable partner to develop and manage a series of accredited modules as part of the B3 programme. When researched further, it became apparent that this level of training provision would not attract the individuals and groups targeted and the focus moved towards more targeted training provision on a case by case basis. At this stage NUIG feels that its role is not clear and proposes that the funding allocated to its partnership could be best used by other partners in other areas of the project.

Proposal on the role and function of the Advisory Group

The composition and reporting mechanisms of the Advisory Committee to the project have not been addressed to date. The members of the original Burren Connect Advisory Committee are willing to continue their function as advisors and have nominated several other community and sectoral representatives to join the committee. The size of both the Steering and Advisory Committee will pose serious challenges for effective engagement at meetings. A proposed solution is to restructure the Advisory Committee into an Advisory PANEL and allocate relevant people on that panel to be available as advisors to the Working Groups. Seminars, workshops and conferences will provide opportunities for both the Steering and Advisory representatives to meet and engage as a group.

Progress Report

A progress report on the project is due to be submitted to the Commission by October 30th. Brian Callanan is helping the management team prepare the report, which will be submitted to Lynne Barratt for review before it is sent to the Commission.

Modification application

Given the changes in approach to the various work programmes, and to the original partnership structure, we will have to prepare a Modification Request after the Commission has evaluated the Progress Report.