



**LIFE11 ENV/IE/922**

## Minutes of Meeting

<b>Project</b>	Geopark LIFE Partners Meetings	
<b>Date</b>	22/04/2015	
<b>Location</b>	Civic Room in Ennis Town Council. Buttermarket Building, Drumbiggle, Ennis.	

<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Abbr.</b>
Yes (Chair)	Monica Meehan	Clare County Council	MM
Apologies	Helen Quinn	Clare County Council	HQ
Yes	Risteard Ua Croinin	Clare County Council	RUC
Yes	Congella McGuire	Clare County Council	CMcG
Yes	Tracey Duffy	Clare County Council	TD
Yes	Maeve Ryan	Clare County Council	MR
Yes	Karen Foley	Clare County Council	KF
Apologies	Sarah Gately	Geological Survey of Ireland	SG
Apologies	Pat O'Connor	Ex-Director Geological Survey of Ireland	POC
Yes	Michael Fitzsimons	Fáilte Ireland	MF
Yes	Gabriel Cooney	UCD	GC
Yes	Joanne Gaffery	UCD	JG
Apologies	Beatrice Kelly	Heritage Council	BK
Apologies	Margaret Keane	National Monuments Service	MK
Yes	Christine Grant	National Monuments Service	CHG
Apologies	Hugh Carey	National Monuments Service	HC
Yes	Ken Curley	Office of Public Works	KC
Yes	Enda Mooney	National Parks & Wildlife Service	EM
Apologies	Emma Glanville	National Parks & Wildlife Service	EG
Yes	Katherine Webster	Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience	KW
Apologies	Christy Sinclair	Burren Ecotourism Network	CS
Yes	Martin Waldron	Burren Ecotourism Network	MW
Apologies	Richard Morrison	Burrenbeo Trust	RM
Apologies	Frank O'Grady	Farmer Representative	MMcG
Apologies	Eoin Hogan	RRO, Clare Local Development Company	EH
Yes	Chris Corlett	Cultural Tourism Officer, Dept. AHG	CC
Yes	Brian Callinan	Consultant	BC
Yes	Siobain O'Brien	Admin/IT support	SOB
Yes	Eamon Doyle	Geopark Geologist	ED
Yes	Laura Cotter	Communications Co-ordinator	LC
Yes	Zena Hocter	B2 Co-ordinator	ZH
Yes	Carol Gleeson	Manager	CG

1.0	<p><b>Welcome and Opening Introductions</b></p> <p>MM informed apologies; as noted above.</p>	<b>Actions</b>
2.0	<p><b>Review of Minutes</b></p> <p>Minutes of previous meeting accepted. Proposed by RUC, seconded by GC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MM requested an update on the Smart Open Data project</li> <li>- CG- confirmed that nothing as yet has emerged from this programme and highlighted to the group that data analysis is critically important for the project – to measure, monitor and manage the destination</li> <li>- ZH – highlighted that an agreed location and system is needed to store the data that the project is collecting as currently none exists</li> </ul>	CG to follow up on Smart Open Data and look at alternative options
3.0	<p><b>Feedback on partners facilitation day and report</b></p> <p>MM summarised the feedback report from the Facilitator Fabio Grassi:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A positive day with mixed feelings but ultimately a success</li> <li>- Group identified tangible results of the project in the session</li> <li>- Solutions to Fabio’s report will be explored through the project</li> <li>- How the partnership would evolve – p.15 of report</li> </ul> <p>MM invited comments on how people found the day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TD found it very useful, “nice creation of space and atmosphere”, liked the format of Fabio’s event, it allowed people to be open – a positive feel, felt enthusiastic coming out of the day,</li> <li>- BC found it useful at the mid-way point- good to identify concrete outcomes</li> <li>- CG added a concrete outcome is a successful partnership with tourism and conservation agencies and businesses understanding each other’s agendas</li> </ul> <p>DUC – suggested a facilitator from the Burren would have been more beneficial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BC – felt with the group involved that someone from outside was more beneficial</li> <li>- The Group agreed a follow up session would be useful, however in a different format, such as site visits and group discussions in transit.</li> </ul>	CG to organise a field trip for partners to highlight tourism and conservation issues and solutions.
4.0	<p><b>Feedback from Commission on Progress Report</b></p> <p>MM- summarised the letter from the Commission in response to the progress report. The letter highlighted a number of issues in the report – namely the reporting of the communication plan and the B2 plan lacked sufficient detail and a request for further detail has been made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CG confirmed the project is at the mid-way point in expenditure and now needs to confirm partners contribution</li> <li>- CG reminded the partners of the importance of timesheets are important and also if any monetary contribution could be made it would be welcome</li> <li>- BC confirmed that 40% of funding from EU was given upfront and that the project is now due next 40%. To claim second 40% the project has to have achieved a minimum spend which we have just reached</li> </ul>	CG and BC to organise meetings with each beneficiary partner organisation to review budget and commitments to contributions  LC to produce

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BC confirmed that a budget review with each partner, including a person from their finance dept will be taking place over the next few weeks and that he and CG will be in contact with each partner to progress these meetings.</li> <li>- LC spoke about the communications programme that has been developed and confirmed that it is progressing with positive results but that it didn't get communicated sufficiently in the progress report to the commission</li> <li>- CC questioned whether communication is working within in the group</li> <li>- CG confirmed that the working groups are operating well and highlighted that the several working group meetings plus two steering committee meetings per year were as much as partners could commit to.</li> <li>- CC suggested an e-zine for keeping all partners up to date on all aspects of the project</li> <li>- LC mentioned a newsletter for partners has been planned and is in progress</li> </ul>	<p>and circulate a newsletter and e-zine on the project's news and progress</p>
<p><b>5.0</b></p>	<p><b>Action B2 Habitats &amp; Monuments</b></p> <p>Please note that these minutes refer to reports presented to the committee and available for review on <a href="http://www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/">www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/</a></p> <p>ZH reported on B2 and the main objectives and achievements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The B2 working group meets 4 times per year and the current agenda is set until the end of this year. Several surveys have been completed and baseline data gathered which has informed the work programme. Currently going through a process of looking at best practice to dealing with the issues and impacts that have been highlighted and how to link to the B3 programme.</li> <li>- Consultations have taken place with landowners at Blackhead, An Rath/Cahermore and Aillwee Cave to progress and develop the work programme. Meetings are planned with Leave No Trace Ireland, the National trails Office, NPWS and Mountaineering Ireland to develop Burren specific guidelines and trial monitoring techniques and a communication plan with hill walkers.</li> <li>- NPWS in conjunction with the National Trails Office and Fáilte Ireland are currently undertaking an audit of the walking trails in the National Park. We are seeking to link in with this to avoid duplication of work. Request for Steering Committee to inform the project of any other potential duplications.</li> <li>- Working with Leave No Trace who are developing area/destination specific codes and considering using the Burren as their first model</li> <li>- A dune expert is required with regards to development of a conservation plan for Fanore dunes, building on the work done in the past. We are currently working with Clare Co Council engineers to find out what needs to be achieved and how that work can be progressed in terms of conservation of the site. Storm damage has taken away a lot of fencing for visitor management that had previously been put in place.</li> <li>- Working with Eoin Hogan, Recreation Officer and the Rural Social Scheme to conduct further observation studies at the demonstration sites</li> <li>- Looking at Universal Access for the region as an overall aim using the demonstration sites as the primary focus. A selection of businesses will also be included for assessment in order that the whole experience is accessible from visitor centres to cafes and accommodation. This will</li> </ul>	<p>Steering Committee members to inform the project of any other projects they know of with similar activities.</p>

	<p>build on last year's pilot which was conducted with the Brothers of Charity and Tony Kirby. A RFT for a Universal Access Audit has been prepared and is under review by the Geopark team and the Brothers of Charity. Links will be made with Cavan Co Co who have been successful in completing a universal access project for Cavan town and with the National Disability Authority (NDA).</p> <p>ZH highlighted the overall project (B1,B2 and B3) is amassing a great deal of data which needs to be stored within a digital database with easy access. Projects such as the Adopt-a-Hedgerow and the proposed Adopt-A-Monument will involve citizen survey work and monitoring which will produce more information. This information needs to be collated, analysed and fed back in an easily understood and accessible manner to the public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CG questioned whether the Heritage Council have anything to contribute here</li> <li>- CHG responded that the heritage map view programme could possibly work in the Burren and be used for the GeoparkLIFE programme</li> </ul> <p>ZH highlighted a need for the GeoparkLIFE project to create its own indicators to measure and monitor progress and change for B2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BC stated that a lot of the proposed interventions seem to be soft management</li> <li>- ZH confirmed that having received the data back from the studies/surveys to date that visitor impacts at the sites are generally of low to medium level. One difficulty is in determining whether impacts are due to human or livestock activities. Counters have been put in place but they count both people and animals. Other impacts also need to be considered such as climate change and storm damage.</li> <li>- The group discussed the perceived impacts that large numbers of people in the landscape have and the impact on the visitor experience with visitors expecting to see remote landscape with no one else in it. The group questioned if it is a problem and how do we quantify it?</li> <li>- KC spoke about the Discovery Programme at An Rath scanning the site for 3D modelling, which will be posted on the website <a href="http://www.3Dicons.ie">www.3Dicons.ie</a> which includes educational materials and would be good for the Geopark site to link to.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>6.0</b></p>	<p><b>Action B1 Tourism Enterprises</b></p> <p>Please note that these minutes refer to reports presented to the committee and available for review on <a href="http://www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/">www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/</a></p> <p>CG reported on progress in B1 from a report prepared by Tina O'Dwyer, whose latest 1 year contract as B1 co-ordinator concluded at the end of March. The report highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identified a need to review the whole code of practice. Feedback from this year's training programme and the evaluation process has highlighted its heavy workload on businesses in relation to recording, monitoring and measuring. The original objective of the code was to help businesses to get on the road to certification, but it has become as labour intensive as certification.</li> <li>- Look at how the code of practice can become sustainable. The cost of</li> </ul>	

<p>implementing the programme has been reduced by at least 50% from the first 2009 training programme undertaken, but there is a need to look at the resource and time demands implementation puts on the businesses. Next steps is to develop 3-5 year plan for the Code of Practice to make it fit for purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The B1 progress report also highlights a need to look at how BEN can manage sustainability among their businesses</li> <li>- There is a need to balance the contributions of BEN and the Code with the overall activities of the partners in terms of destination management actions and policy for the ETIS system.</li> <li>- There is a need to look at how BEN as an organisation can become sustainable.</li> </ul> <p>MW stated that the Geopark is critically important to BEN, informing the group that the Geopark destination brand which BEN has been marketing under is more impactful than branding under an eco-tourism network of businesses.</p> <p>KW stated that marketing under the Geopark destination brand is getting the sustainable message across and highlight the Geopark as the destination is becoming synonymous with sustainability.</p> <p>KW also provided updates on BEN activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Membership of BEN has increased to circa 60 fee paying members and friends. The increase is due to businesses seeing the value in the network and its activities.</li> <li>- Businesses are putting in financial and time commitment.</li> <li>- Businesses have seen reduction in costs due to implementing the code of practice.</li> <li>- Conservation matters to the businesses with 30 businesses taking part in the recent 'adopt a hedgerow' programme.</li> <li>- Message of sustainability is getting across, when each business talks to the media they highlight their sustainability</li> </ul> <p>CG stated that the report has quantified some of the time businesses have invested: 52 meetings, trainings and events taking place in the last year with a good turnout at all of the events.</p> <p>MM reiterated that the report highlights the code of practice as being onerous with a need to review it and asked BC if we review and we tweak the code how would that affect the project?</p> <p>BC informed the group that the process of development and testing is an important element of the project; the challenge is now revising it to lighten delivery and to attract more businesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MM stated that it is a positive that 60 businesses are involved and questioned whether the network is sustainable in its current form.</li> <li>- BC noted that we need to question how BEN moves on? What has Ireland and Europe to learn from BEN and how policy can be tweaked in relation to this?</li> <li>- MF stated a lot are learning from BEN already and the network is being held</li> </ul>
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	<p>up as a model by Failte Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- KW informed that two universities are doing studies on BEN</li> <li>- CG stated that the Geopark are being inundated by requests for research project and people looking for data and recommends that GeoparkLIFE controls project data as the intellectual property of the project, to be released through the projects reporting structures.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>7.0</b></p>	<p><b>Geopark LIFE Action B3 Conservation Management</b></p> <p>Please note that these minutes refer to reports presented to the committee and available for review on <a href="http://www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/">www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/</a></p> <p>Joanne Gaffrey reported on progress from B3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many of the actions in B3 are becoming more interconnected with Actions B1 and B2</li> <li>- Leave No Trace is an activity that spans all 3 Actions – is an excellent and adaptable programme but aspects need to be more tailor made to specific destinations. The organisation has approached the LIFE project to use the Burren as a pilot for this.</li> <li>- Meitheal, in association with Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers was a successful event, well organised and well received, it was a great network and collaborative event and is to become an annual event. KC noted the stone wall building festival on Inis Oirr and potential linkages to this.</li> <li>- The Adopt a Hedgerow is also a successful initiative. Training is required to identify invasive species. The Pilot which is currently underway with 30 businesses participating needs to be assessed and impacts recorded. Janet Cavanagh of BEN is completing a report on this.</li> <li>- A Biodiversity report on Ballyvaughan village has been completed and the project now has to work with the Tidy Towns group to develop a biodiversity working plan in the form of a template that can be taken to other groups. CG spoke about how this case study is focusing on developing a change in thinking among the tidy town group on how their work is affecting biodiversity.</li> <li>- The Cabhail Mhor case study, and its partnership with the Killinboy Heritage and History Group has brought up a lot of policy and procedural issues that need to be addressed. A safety audit has been conducted on the building which has highlighted safety issues and the sites suitability as a buildings conservation training site. It was agreed that the NMS, OPW and CCC would meet to discuss the best way to progress this case study. A date of the 11<sup>th</sup> May was agreed.</li> <li>- The Lisdoonvarna Failte case study originally set out to develop mechanisms for the group to research and present Lisdoonvarna’s heritage as a visitor attraction. The case study has now been absorbed into a much larger project. CG gave an overview of the project and the background to the group, their recent restructuring and their plans to develop their many property assets. Lisdoonvarna Failte, with assistance from FI and advice from CLDC, CCC and the Geopark, have decided to produce a feasibility study on the social and economic potential of their property. The GeoparkLIFE case study could be of more benefit if it was to be integrated into this overall study, and reframed as to how geology, hydrology and conservation can be assets for economic and social regeneration.</li> <li>- ED gave an overview of the Transition Year Hydrology Schools Education</li> </ul>	

	<p>case study with Lisdoonvarna Secondary school and teacher John Simms. The study takes GSI and NUIG research, expertise and knowledge to the TY students, who adapt this knowledge and bring it to local national schools. The students will also be doing community survey on attitudes to tourism this year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- JG highlighted that the B3 programme has to address policy and are in the midst of a review of policy. JG and GC will be interviewing partners in and stakeholders in the next few weeks on policy impacts and issues.</li> </ul>	
<b>8.0</b>	<p><b>Geopark LIFE Action D Communications</b></p> <p>LC gave a brief overview of the communications strategy for the GeoparkLIFE programme highlighting planned and ongoing activity including the development of the web site, a newsletter, B1 case studies and video clips that support the case studies.</p> <p>LC also gave an overview of the marketing programme with the Burren Ecotourism Network that has dominated the communications programme this winter and spring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food &amp; Activity leaflets and series of events on Saturdays and Mondays updated for 2015 season</li> <li>• Attended trade events to promote destination</li> <li>• Burren Tourism Story event launch in March, aimed at accommodation providers and other tourism businesses in the County</li> <li>• Co-ordinated BEN social media and website strategy, including creating stories for blog post every week</li> <li>• BEN website upgraded to mobile responsive site</li> </ul> <p>A mid-term review Conference or Seminar is required for the EU LIFE programme. GeoparkLIFE will host this on the <b>9<sup>th</sup> of October, 2015</b> in the Falls Hotel, Ennistymon. The programme and invitations will be issued at the end of May.</p>	
<b>9.0</b>	<p><b>Action C Monitoring</b></p> <p>CG reported on the various surveys that have been carried out to set baselines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ED: People counters installed at B1 demonstration sites</li> <li>- CAAS &amp; ZH: Observation and visitor impact surveys on the B2 demonstration sites</li> <li>- Millward Brown: Visitor surveys at B2 demonstration sites</li> <li>- TO'D: B1 Enterprise surveys</li> <li>- ED/T'OD worked with John Simms of Lisdoonvarna Secondary School on a Residents Survey to be carried out this summer by TY students.</li> </ul> <p>EM queried if landowner attitudes were recorded. ZH and CG noted that the landowners of the B2 sites were being regularly consulted and updated. Residents survey will also provide general landowner opinion.</p>	
<b>9.0</b>	<p><b>Coach Tourism Survey</b></p> <p>CG gave an overview of the results of the coach survey to the group along with the recommendations. The full report and summary presentation are available for review on <a href="http://www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/">www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/partner-meetings/</a></p> <p>CG provided the main headline topics and key facts and figures from the study.</p>	

	<p>KW provided info on how Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience is addressing capacity issues by looking at rout licensing, safety issues, off peak discounts on pricing, asking tour operators to vary visiting times. Highlighted that an increasing issue is the impact of increasing visitor numbers is having on the visitor experience of the site itself. Also noted that the Cliff have staff to address these issues where as the 'free' sites such as Aillides, does not.</p> <p>The ensuing discussion looked at capacity for spreading coach tourism throughout the Burren and acknowledged that visitor demand, tight bus schedules, lack of infrastructure, capacity and services limit the ability to do this.</p> <p>CC and CG noted that a national policy of increasing numbers, as opposed to revenue, is having an impact on visitor experiences and this is now a national issue</p> <p>MF noted that this has not been researched elsewhere in Ireland. CG noted that this is important information and should be presented to key influencers and requested advice on who should be contacted. CG will present to County Councillors shortly.</p> <p>MM suggested that the group should be given opportunity to review coach report again and to feedback any thoughts and actions to CG.</p>	
<p><b>10.0</b></p>	<p><b>LIFE administrative matters;</b></p> <p>CG advised the group that NUIG have left the project and this allocation is now available to the other partners. This will be discussed in more detail at the Partners budget review meetings.</p> <p>BC and management team will prepare a mid-term report and request for 2<sup>nd</sup> instalment of EU LIFE funding for submission asap.</p> <p>CG informed the group that an advisory panel of locally based expertise has been established to advise on the 3 main actions of the programme;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- B1: Michael Roberts, Birgitta Curtin, Niall Hughes, Frances Connole</li> <li>- B2: Mary Howard, Ralph Doyle, Brian Farrell, Karin Funke</li> <li>- B3: Frank O'Grady, Cathleen Connole, Mary Hawkes Green</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Report on UNESCO status for Global Geoparks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CG informed the group that the formalisation of the UNESCO status for Global Geoparks is on the agenda at a UNESCO committee meeting this November</li> <li>- CMG informed the group that a technical review is being carried out Galway and Clare County councils to see if the Burren could be a UNESCO World Heritage Site</li> <li>- CC asked if WHS status is now needed if Geopark status gets same UNESCO endorsement and branding.</li> </ul>	



	<p><b>Global Geopark Status Revalidation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CG informed the group that the Geopark revalidation of Global Geopark Status, which takes place every 4 years, is taking place this June 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> and that the Geopark will host a social evening for the partners to meet the revalidation group undertaking the audit.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>9.0</b></p>	<p><b>Next Meetings</b></p> <p>Steering Group - October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015</p> <p>GeoparkLIFE Conference – 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2015</p>	