B2 WORKING GROUP MEETING REPORT

15-12-14

DATE AND VENUE

The GeoparkLIFE B2 Working Group Meeting was held in the Temple Gate Hotel, Ennis on Wednesday 15 December, 2014 from 10am to 1pm.

ATTENDANCE
In attendance were: Joanne Gaffrey (UCD), Dick Cronin (Clare County Council), Enda Mooney (NPWS), Ken Curley (OPW), Carol Gleeson (Geopark) and Zena Hoctor (consultant). Apologies: Sharon Parr (BFCP). Christine Grant (NMS), Eamon Doyle (Geopark), Emma Glanville (NPWS), John O'Brien (OPW)

Item	Discussion	Action	Responsibility
1 Agreement of previous minutes	Minutes of meeting of 15-10-14 were agreed.		
2 Update re: Archae - ological Condition Report for Slieve Carran and Blackhead	Christine Grant was unable to attend the meeting but had forwarded word that the commissioning of the condition reports for Slieve Carran and Blackhead were underway. She expressed concern re the ownership of the site at Slieve Carran as it does not appear on the folio. Enda Mooney stated that he would liaise with Christine directly on this matter.	Confirmation of ownership title of Slieve Carran Nature Reserve	Enda Mooney Christine Grant
3 Update on site assessment reports, visitor survey and observation studies	At a meeting, in Dublin on Dec 8th top line results of the data were presented. Final reports to be available by the end of January. The meeting was attended by representatives of Fáilte Ireland, CAAS, Millward Brown and the Geopark. Discussion at the Dublin meeting highlighted the huge amount of baseline data collected and the resources that would be required to continue/repeat the surveys. It was decided that careful consideration needs to be given to why information is being collected, what needs to be prioritised in terms of the end outputs required of the LIFE project and the cost involved. The information collected and how it is used should feed into the existing European indicator systems. Comments from the B2 working group – • the templates used by CAAS Ltd for the observation study are very useful for future data collection for the GeoparkLIFE project but will need tweaking to make more site specific • the number of sites selected for ecological monitoring (based on quadrat studies)by CAAS Ltd. is excessive. Replication of such monitoring would be extremely resource intensive and would produce large amounts of unrequired	The large amounts of raw data collected through the visitor survey, observation studies and coach traffic studies needs to be collated and reviewed in terms of the outcomes required for the overall LIFE project and to direct the development of a	Future B2 co-ordinator

	data. CAAS selected the quadrat positions from visitor movements observed over two days and the quadrat surveys were undertaken in October, which is not a suitable time of year for vegetation studies. • using the Burren as a template area for the WAW environmental monitoring may not be suitable as its landscape and ecology are so diversified within small spaces. • CAAS included the high volume of quadrat studies in order to deal with AA all along the WAW. The focus of the GeoparkLIFE project is to produce a template for how to develop a good management plan for the Burren that deals with the impacts of environmental and cultural tourism. AA is going to be an important aspect of that work due to the large area designated as SAC. Sufficient ecological data will need to be collected to screen out sites. Decisions will need to be made on the level and type of information required at the individual sites. It was decided that our focus should be: Identification of the real 'impact' issues at the demonstration sites and what needs to be monitored. Are the usual issues highlighted through past reports actual present day issues on the ground e.g. erosion, litter, grafftiti etc? The observation studies should identify the real issues at each of the demonstration sites (e.g. are a large number of people actually walking on the walls at a certain site?) and then interventions (if required) can be planned and a monitoring/indicator scheme created around the true issues, not anecdotal issues. It may turn out that the Burren is less vulnerable to visitor impact than is presently thought and we need to keep our minds open. Aspects such as water quality and the psychological impact of visitors perceiving that there are already too many visitors in the region should be addressed. Information on the latter should be available through the visitor survey by rating of visitor satisfaction. Issues identified will inform the promotion and development of sites e.g should there be directional signage to Slieve Carran? An example of a recent impact has been the increase in tying of votive offerings to trees at sites such as MacDuachs Church. Tony Kirby has been commissioned to undertake a study of this 'ribbon development'. Some 'pilgrimage' sites are becoming very well-known and spiritual tourism is increasing. Ken stated that legally there can't be any ritual practices on church temporality sites (ie churches passed from the Church of Ireland to the state). MacDuachs church may be a temporality site. We need to know who is bringing people to these sites and carrying out these rituals. Identifying these types of impacts is not possible using the CAAS model of observation. We must carry out local conversations and develop a local list of actual impacts, not a generic list as is used under the CAAS template. Our template must be Burren specific first and tested here, before we can develop a transferable model for elsewhere.	management and monitoring scheme for each of the demonstration sites.	
4 Update re: An Rath and Cahermore	Carol Gleeson showed a copy of the site plans for the proposed intervention at the An Rath/Cahermore site. An on-site meeting was held on Nov 11 attended by Seamus Hassett (NPWS) Penny Bartlett (NPWS), Helen Quinn (Senior Planner Clare County Council), Carol Gleeson and Zena Hoctor. The purpose of the meeting was to examine the site, discuss the proposed interventions and issues arising. *Issues arising:* • Seamus advised that the site should be screened out and as it is adjacent to an SAC there may be issues to be examined.		

	He recommended that the screening be completed by an external expert. Carol has since contacted Paul Murphy, Environmental Consultant, (due to his work to date on the demonstration sites as part of the Coach study with Joe Saunders and environmental monitoring with CAAS) to undertake this screening work. • The current site plans were drawn up in 2008. In 2011 the requirements of the Road Traffic Act were changed and the site plans need to be updated to satisfy these requirements. Due to a backlog of work within Clare County Council this work cannot be carried out internally and will need to be commissioned externally • Written permission from the landowner will be required to progress a Part 8 planning application. Negotiations with the landowner are currently being carried out through a company called Martin and Ray on behalf of Clare County Council. Martin and Ray require the updated site plans for their negotiations with the landowner. • When new plans have been drawn up, permission to proceed obtained from the landowner and screening completed, the part 8 application can go ahead. This process may take up to 3 months from the time of application. • If the part 8 application is successful, decisions will be made as to who purchases the land e.g. Clare County Council or the OPW. Ken Curley stated that the OPW has no resources at present to purchase land and would look to the County Council to make the purchase as was the approach taken at Poulnabrone. • Ken stated that it may be possible to start the OPW review (re: impacts of the proposed intervention at the site) as the section 8 application is in process, if by then a purchase agreement had been reached with the landowner subject to planning. This review will be done in-house but at present there is no set time scale for this type of work– it could be turned around within 2-3 months but Ken cautioned that it can also go on for a longer time period. One example of such work in 2014 took 15 months. The actions being proposed at the site must be justified under the OPW review. The site is included in the 'Burren Monuments Strategy' and from an OPW viewpoint increasing traffic at the site will need management. Ken stated that there is a need for a healthy balance between the conservation of the site, the number of people visiting and health and safety. Carol stated that she sees 2015 as the year of negotiations and progressing of the part 8 application. It is highly unlikely that there will be any on-site interventions before 2016.	Screening out Commissioning of new site plans Obtain landowner permission to proceed with Part 8 OPW Review	Paul Murphy (EirCo) Carol Gleeson Carol Gleeson Ken Curley
5 Proposed work programme for 2015	Zena circulated a draft work programme for discussion. Work that can immediately progress: • Collation of raw data from all surveys: Nessa Skehan of Fáilte Ireland will be helping the Geopark team to collate the raw data and develop indicators. • An Rath/Cahermore; negotiations with landowner and screening out to progress toward part 8 application • Slieve Carran: Cutting back of hazel, archaeological condition report (Christine Grant); possible future management of MacDuachs church by the OPW; Tony Kirbys 'votive offferings' study	Development of Indicators Part 8 Cutting Hazel Condition	Nessa Skehan (Failte Ireland) and B2 working group Carol/Clare Co. Co. NPWS Christine Grant

	• Blackhead: Archaeological condition report (Christine Grant) Work for the longer term: • Interpretive Review and Plan in conjunction with NPWS – including results from visitor survey • Access Audit of all sites - using template used by OPW and NPWS to date. • Path erosion survey with Emma Glanville (NPWS) and Eoin Hogan (Recreation Officer) • Parking issues at various sites – Gortlecka, Blackhead etc. Need to re-examine car park controversy at Gortlecka and focus on a way forward for visitor traffic management within the National Park • Fanore: commission dune expert to advise on protection measures and way forward. • Carran Chuurch: development of parking area and possible structural remedial work. • Development of linkages between work of B1 and B3 working groups. Development of toolkits that link all actions. Looking at the processes that need to be undertaken to address identified issues at all sites • Issues at Poulnabrone and Aillwee may arise from the visitor survey and observation studies. Issues such as pavement erosion and anti-social behaviour after caretakers have left site in the evening at Poulnabrone and Valerian at Aillwee.	Report Votives study Condition Report	Tony Kirby Christine Grant
6 AOB	A schedule of meetings for 2015 was agreed as follows: March 9 June 8 October 12 December 1 A tender for the position of Co-ordinator for the B2 action of the GeoparkLIFE project will be issued with closing date for applications 9/1/15. Whoever is successful in this bid will be continuing the work Zena has carried out since July 2014 with the B2 working group.		