



## Burren Signage Plan

A report commissioned by Burren Connect, a project funded by Fáilte Ireland, in partnership with Clare County Council, Shannon Development, National Parks & Wildlife Service, National Monuments Service and Burren Beo..



# Executive Summary

The Burren Signage Plan is a component of the Burren Connect Project, a multi-agency tourism development project for the Burren. Field surveys and a public consultation programme were carried out during May and June of 2007. The signage plan is based on a set of fourteen principles that emerged from consultation, assessments of the Burren landscape and a review of practice elsewhere. The plan recommends that signage in the Burren countryside is kept to a minimum in recognition of the exceptional quality of the landscape. It recommends that primary reliance for navigation is placed on the standard directional road signs, which are in the process of being upgraded on all the national and regional roads in North Clare. The plan considers that there is a place for visitor signage in the Burren, but that signage and visitor information in general should, as far as possible, be concentrated in and near existing villages, at major junctions and at the larger established visitor sites. The plan recommends caution in deploying signage for new recreation initiatives such as looped walks and cycle routes in the remoter areas of the Burren.

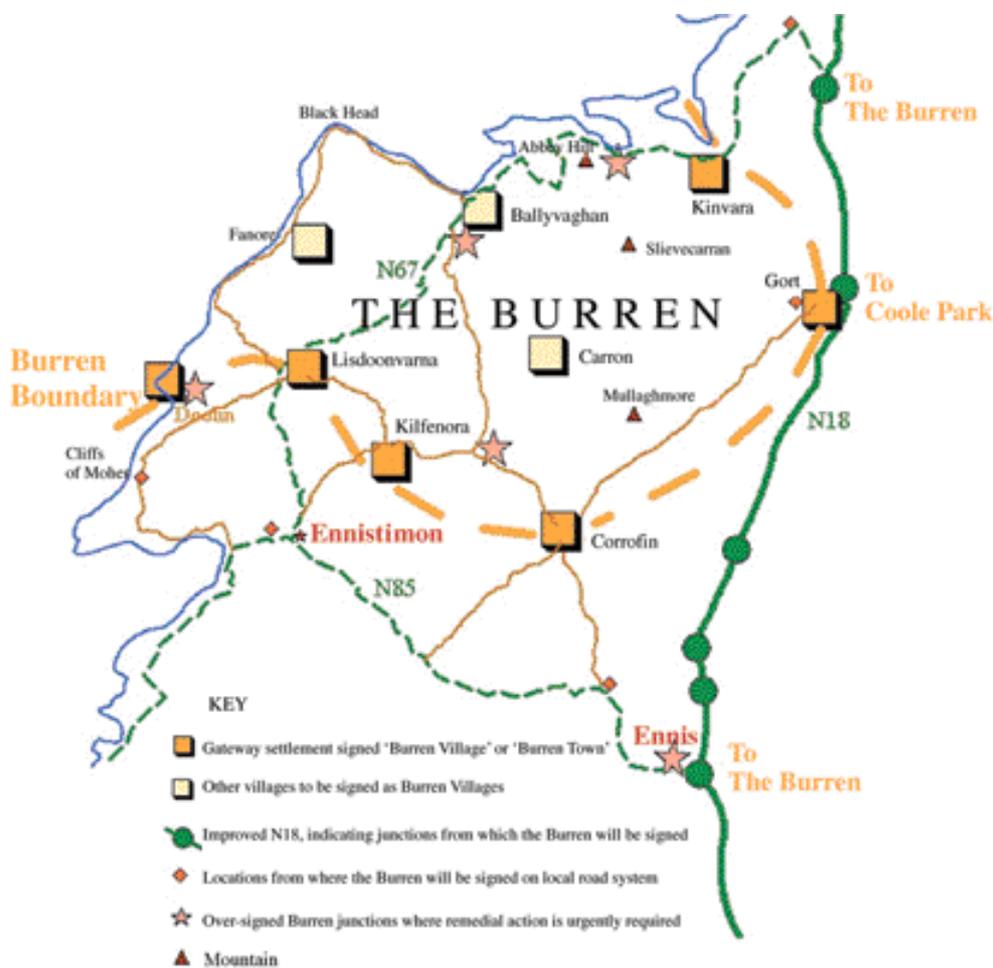
The Burren does not lend itself to precise geographical definition but a signage plan has to enable drivers and other visitors to be able to answer the question 'Are we there yet?' The plan recommends adopting the settlements that ring the area as boundary markers. This approach will provide a clearly signed geographical area without recourse to a precise line on a map or inappropriate signage in the countryside. The plan proposes distinctive Burren name boards, carrying the wording 'Burren Town' or 'Burren Village'. The area that is signed the Burren in this plan is based on the Clare and Galway landscape character assessments carried out in recent years but incorporates Kinvarra and Gort as northern boundary markers.

The plan incorporates a comprehensive scheme for directional signage for visitor attraction sites in the Burren. These signs are for directional purposes only and do not have an advertising function. All existing signs should be removed. From the N18, that part of the national primary road system that is in sight of the Burren, it is proposed that no individual sites are signed, with the exception of the Cliffs of Moher and Coole Park on the edge of the area. From the N67, the national secondary road that passes through the Burren, only sites with the facilities to accommodate substantial visitor numbers, should be signed. There are six Burren sites in this category; Aillwee Cave, Burren Centre Kilfenora, Burren Perfumery, Caherconnell Fort, Cliffs of Moher and Doolin Cave. These and some other sites will also be signed on the regional road system, generally following the standard approach of advance directional signs, directional signs and confirmatory signs, and any amendment thereof, that is set out in the Traffic Signs Manual (DOE, 1996). The majority of Burren sites, many of great cultural and ecological significance, e.g. Corcomroe Abbey and Mullaghmore, should not be signed, other than in the immediate vicinity of the site, because these sites do not have the capacity to accommodate large numbers of visitors. The same reasoning applies to Poul nabrone which will not be signed from the national road system. The plan includes provision for a number of supplementary confirmatory signs outside the gateway villages. These signs do not feature in the Traffic Signs Manual but, given the concentration of visitor sites in the Burren, they are needed to provide an adequate navigational framework.

All guidance on road signage highlights the fact that signing an excessive number of destinations at a junction is both unsafe and counterproductive. With this in mind the plan states that no more than four places, whether villages or attraction sites, can be signed in any one direction at a junction

The plan recommends the local application of the comprehensive regulations and guidelines that already exist for the control of visitor signage in Ireland. This would require signage control being given a much higher priority by the two local authorities than is presently the case. The public consultation revealed a widely held opinion that there is existing visual pollution as a result of uncontrolled visitor signage. The plan argues that signage control should be a priority in a landscape of international renown and for an area where tourism is a critical part of the local economy. In order to be included in a future signage scheme, visitor attractions should be required to remove existing signage that does not comply with the recommendations contained herein and accepted nationally. In the short term a significant improvement in the general perception of local signage could be achieved by regularising signage at a small number of over-signed strategic junctions.

The plan includes a sign manual to facilitate visitor management and which demonstrates a practical application of the graphic identity that has been developed by the project and which could be deployed for a variety of purposes



Spatial aspects of the signage plan

## Key principles underlying the plan

The various considerations underlying the plan can be summarised by the following set of principles:-

1. The Burren is a destination of international renown that requires an effective and attractive signage plan for visitors,
2. The design and siting of signs must not compromise safety considerations,
3. Reliance for navigation should be placed on the standard directional signage to towns and villages, and to otherwise difficult to find places
4. Signs are only one means of conveying information. (SatNav, maps, brochures and info from websites can also be utilised)
5. The design, location and maintenance of signs should respect the exceptional quality of the Burren landscape,
6. The capacity of the Burren landscape to accommodate signage is variable, being relatively robust in the villages but highly sensitive in the remoter countryside away from main roads,
7. The greater part of the Burren is in County Clare but the Burren straddles the boundary with Galway and an integrated approach requires the involvement of both Clare and Galway County Councils,
8. Signed attractions should satisfactorily accommodate the number of visitors that they attract,
9. The design of signs should be in accordance with the standards and guidelines set out in the Traffic Signs Manual, in PD 12/14 issued by the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government and, in respect of cycling signage, the guidelines for the Eurovelo cycle route network, and any future national and international guidelines
10. There is scope for signage design that reflects and celebrates the distinctive character of the Burren,
11. Signs must be bi-lingual but do not need to be multi-lingual,
12. There should be no advertising signs in the Burren countryside, without a licence or planning permission.
13. There should not be a net increase in the number of signs in the Burren countryside and where new signage replaces existing signage, the redundant signs should be removed.
14. In the interests of road safety, four is the maximum number of destinations (villages, towns and visitor attraction) that can be signed in one direction at any junction. Normally not more than three destinations will be signed.
15. To be included in the signage plan visitor attractions should be required to remove all unauthorised signage.

## Policy proposals

### Policy proposal 1.

The Burren should be signposted on  
 N18 : at Killow (Ennis) and Kilcolgan  
 N67: at Ennistimon and Kilcolgan  
 N85: at Killow and all subsequent roundabouts on the Ennis western relief road, and at Fountain Cross  
 R478 at the Cliffs of Moher

### Policy Proposal 2. Define the Burren by naming villages and towns as Burren villages and Burren towns

The existing 'welcome-The Burren' signboards should be removed. Existing signboards for the villages and towns of the area should be replaced by distinctive signboards that include the information 'Burren Village' or 'Burren Town'.

Table 9 . Villages and Towns of the Burren

Places to be signposted as Burren Towns or Villages are:

Ballyvaghan

Carran	Gort
Corrofin	Kinvarra
Doolin	Ruan
Fanore	Tubber
Kilfenora	
Lisdoonvarna	

### Policy Proposal 3.

Sign the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience from the N18 at Clareabbey .  
 Sign the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience from the N18 at Killow (Ennis).

### Policy Proposal 4. Rationalise visitor directional signage

We recommend a comprehensive and detailed visitor signage scheme for the Burren. As part of the Signage Plan we are presenting, as a demonstration project, detailed signage (sign design and layout and sign siting) junction at Leamaneh. We recommend the drawing up of a comprehensive visitor signage scheme for the Burren, in accordance with this plan. We recommend that, as soon as possible, the councils implement improved visitor signage at four key junctions (See Fig. 5 : nos 17(Leamaneh), 82 (Roadford), 122 (Corker Hill) and 135 (Newtown)). This will involve removing unauthorised signs and erecting signage in accordance with national standards and guidelines. We recommend that for this limited initiative the new signage is financed by the local authorities (Refer to Part 2 of the report for graphic details of signage)

### Policy Proposal 5. Primary reliance for navigation should be placed on the national and regional road networks and on the accompanying directional signage.

The local road network should not in general be signed for visitor sites and services except for the very last stages of journeys where no alternative is available.

Policy proposal 6 Remove unauthorised signage with the cooperation of local businesses/local operators that have erected large road-side directional/ advertising signboards.

Policy Proposal 7. Resource a staff position in Clare County Council dedicated to signage control and use the Burren as a demonstration area for signage control

Policy Proposal 8. Develop a visual identity for the Burren incorporating a distinctive logo.

Policy Proposal 9. Give expression to the distinctive identity of the Burren by erecting distinctive sign structures i.e. settlement name boards and information boards with maps.

Policy Proposal 10. State-run sites in the Burren should have an expressed Burren identity as well as a national identity

Policy Proposal 11.

The following visitor attraction sites in North Clare and South Galway should be signed from the improved N18:-

- Coole Park at Gort
- Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience at Killow

Policy Proposal 12. Sign the following attraction sites from the N67

- Aillwee Cave from Newtown Cross on the N67 via R480
- Caherconnell Fort from Newtown Cross on the N67 via R480
- Doolin Cave from N67 via R478
- Burren Centre, Kilfenora from junction on N67 north of Ennistymon, via R481
- Burren Perfumery from Bell Harbour on N67 via L1014
- Cliffs of Moher from N67 via R478

Policy Proposal 13. Restrict signage for attraction sites at junctions

In the interest of road safety, four is the maximum number of destinations (villages, towns and attraction sites) that can be signed in one direction at any junction. Normally not more than three destinations will be signed.

Policy Proposal 14. Adopt a flexible approach to signing the large attraction sites in villages and towns.

It is not essential to provide directional signage for visitor attractions in towns and villages. Visitors for these sites can use the signs for villages and towns. Attraction sites in villages and towns will be signed where conditions permit but the level of signage will be curtailed if there are road safety or landscape issues that dictate a reduced level of signage.

Policy Proposal 15. Route confirmatory signs for visitor sites (and if required supplementary confirmatory signs) should be provided on regional roads on the Burren side of the gateway settlements as follows:

Ballyvaghan, on R480 south of Newtown

Corrofin, on R476

Corrofin, on R460

Gort, on R460

Kilfenora on R476

Lisdoonvarna, on R476

Policy Proposal 16. Small rural visitor sites with a car park should be equipped with advanced road distance (eg 1 km, 2 km) signs and a sign at the site entrance.

Rural sites which do not have a car park should not have advanced road signs but it may be desirable to place a sign at the entrance

Policy Proposal 17. Locations of visitor sites in towns should be indicated in a Village/Town information board located at strategic points in the settlement.

Policy Proposal 18. A regulatory system and set of standards exist for accommodation signage. The local authorities should implement the standards and procedures that set out in PD 12/14 and in Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

Policy Proposal 19. Design a new Burren Information Board-with Map and erect boards at the following locations

Corrofin

Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience (beside the path to the car park)

Doolin (Fisher Street & Roadford)

Doolin Pier

Ennis (either at railway station or tourism office)

Fanore

Lehinch

Kilfenora

Ballyvaghan

Lisdoonvarna

Gort

Kinvarra

Ennistimon,

New Quay

Carran

Tubber

Boston

Policy proposal 20. The provision of an on-site Burren Information Board-with-Map should be a requirement of Visitor Attractions that are signed from the national road system

Policy Proposal 21. Remove current Burren Code Boards and rely on other means, including incorporation into on-site information boards and signage at designated viewing points, to publicise the information on best environmental practice

Policy Proposal 22. Places should be signed in both English and in Irish using the English names and spellings recommended by the Ordnance Survey and the Irish names and spellings recommended by the Placenames Commission to comply with the policy used by Clare County Council and the National Roads Authority.

Policy proposal 23. Work programme

Commence consultation with local stakeholders

2008

Implement improved signage schemes at key Burren junctions

Implement an overall rationalisation of visitor signage in consultation with the local stakeholders

Set up an effective system for administering signage licenses

Implement improved visitor signage scheme for the N67

2009

Implement improved visitor signage scheme for all regional roads and villages in the Burre







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## **1.0** Introduction



# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 The project

In May 2007 Brendan McGrath and Associates and the Public Communications Centre were commissioned by the Environmental Protection of the Burren through Visitor Manager Initiative to produce a visitor signage plan for the Burren and to develop a visual identity for the area. During May and June a survey of existing signage and signage practice and a consultation programme was carried out. Consultation included one-to-one interviews with people in the local community including people running tourism businesses, meetings with officers in the local authorities and other agencies, holding public meetings in Corrofin, Ennis and Ballyvaghan and a presentation to members of community bodies in Ennistimon at the end of May. Publicity about the project was facilitated through the Burren Beo newsletter. Feedback was assisted by a forum on the Shifting Ground, rural art website. Reports on the signage audit and the consultation programme have been submitted to the project steering committee.

## 1.2 The Burren

The Burren is a highly distinctive rural area of North Clare and South Galway. Much of the complex character of the area is expressed in its exceptional landscape. Landscape character assessment (LCA), a technique for describing landscape in a comprehensive and objective manner, has been carried out for both Clare and Galway. Both LCAs identify Burren character areas. The Clare LCA describes two areas which it names Burren Uplands and Low Burren, while the Galway characterisation describes an area called Lower Burren, that extends along the boundary with Clare (Refer to Figure 1). These three areas: Burren Uplands, Low Burren in Clare and Lower Burren in Galway, taken together, are similar to the area mapped by Robinson in 1977 and proposed by Lysaght as a Burren national park in 2005.

The Clare LCA describes the Burren Uplands as an area of classic limestone karst scenery, renowned for its high diversity of arctic-alpine flora, as an area that contains numerous historical and archaeological features and that, in places, has an isolated and remote character. The Burren Uplands character area includes limestone upland and valleys as well as coastal slopes and coastal farmland.

The Low Burren is lower terrain south of the Uplands. The area is made of extensive exposed limestone and limestone farmland. It contains a wealth of historic monuments as well as the modern villages of Corrofin and Killinaboy and is described as having a strong rural character.

The Lower Burren in Galway is described 'as a flat open landscape' that includes large areas of exposed limestone. In this respect it is similar to parts of the Low Burren in Clare. However, the Galway Burren does not have a strong historic settlement heritage and the contemporary settlement pattern is dispersed housing rather than nucleated settlement.

What emerges from both character assessments is that the Burren is a landscape of the highest quality. The Clare LCA states that the Burren Uplands are internationally recognised for their flora and fauna diversity and that it is considered to be one of the best preserved agricultural landscapes in Europe. The characterisation states that the Low Burren contains limestone, calcareous grasslands and lakes that are of international significance. The Galway LCA gives the Lower Burren area the same rating, 'outstanding' in terms of its cultural, socio-economic and environmental characteristics, as it accords to Connemara in the west of the county.

1. This report generally adopts the place names and spellings approved by the Ordnance Survey and adopted by the National Roads Authority and by the Transportation and Infrastructure Department of Clare County Council.

What also emerges from both LCAs is that the Burren is a landscape in fine condition but one that is sensitive to change. The Clare LCA describes the Burren Uplands area as being in exceptional condition but highly sensitive to change and the Low Burren landscape to be in good condition and also highly sensitive to change. The Galway part of the Burren is identified as being of 'unique' sensitivity.

Both the high cultural value placed on the Burren by the characterisations and the extent to which the landscape is identified as being highly sensitive to change are reflected in official assessments, plans and policies. In the first and only national assessment of landscape quality, by An Foras Forbartha in 1977, The Burren is identified as an 'outstanding' landscape of 'outstanding botanical and entomological interest'. In successive county development plans Clare County Council has identified the Burren as a 'vulnerable landscape' in which development restrictions apply. A similar approach applies to the western part of the Lower Burren in Galway. Also in Clare, a considerable portion of the Burren road network is designated as scenic route, on which specific development restrictions apply (Refer to Figure 2). There is probably no other district in Ireland where there are so many places that have a cultural value that goes beyond the local. Only a fraction of these places are managed in any way for leisure, cultural or tourism purposes and, in most instances, the management does not extend beyond a sign board. At a limited number of sites a car park and other facilities are provided and significant visitor flows are generated. Most of the North Clare and South Galway attractions listed below are site specific in that the attraction of the site relates to specific characteristics of the site. The exceptions are some of the attractions in and near the villages which interpret general aspects of the Burren, rather than the site where the attraction is located.



Figure 1. The Burren, as identified by the Clare and Galway landscape character assessments (LCAs) and proposed as a national park by Lysaght in 2005

Table 1. Visitor attractions in and near the Burren in 2007

Aillwee Cave	Doolin Cave
Bishopsquarter Beach	Dunguaire Castle, Kinvara
Burren Centre, Kilfenora	Dysert O'Dea Castle
Burren National Park	Dromore Woods
Burren Perfumery	Fanore Strand
Caherconnell Fort	Kilfenora Cathedral and High Cross
Cahercommaun Fort	Kilmacduagh Monastic Site
Cliffs of Moher	Michael Cusack Centre
Coole Park	Moher Hill Farm
Corofin Heritage Centre and Museum	Poulnabrone Dolmen
Corcomroe Abbey	Rock Shop, Liscannor
	Smoke House, Lisdoonvarna

Increasingly, the Burren is being developed as an area of outdoor recreation with the marking of cycle routes and walking routes and proposed development of scenic driving routes. Doolin has been proposed as a regional hub for cycling and it is likely that looped Burren walks will be created in the near future. These developments will significantly increase the demand for signage in the Burren.



Figure 2. Landscape policies  
(The area bounded by the orange line is designated either a vulnerable landscape in the North Clare Local Area Plan 2005 or sensitive Burren landscape in the Galway County Development Plan 2003. The green lines are designated scenic routes in the Clare County Development Plan 2005)

### 1.3 Visitors to the Burren

The main access routes to the Burren are by road from the south, via Limerick and Ennis and the N18 or, from the north, from Galway via the N18 and N67. A secondary approach from the south is from Kerry via the Tarbert ferry and the N67 through Ennistymon. The ferry at Doolin in the Summer is another busy entry point though here most visitors are returning to North Clare after a short visit to the Aran Islands. There are year round, daily public bus services (augmented in the summer) from Galway City to Kinvarra, Ballyvaghan, Fanore, Lisdoonvarna and the Cliffs of Moher and from Limerick and Ennis to Corrofin, Kilfenora and Ennistimon. Limited information is available about visitors to the Burren. They are a constituent of the regional and county pictures that are summarised below. A visitor profile of visitors to the Cliffs of Moher is also relevant because this is by far the biggest visitor attraction site in North Clare and a proportion of visitors to the Cliffs of Moher also visit the Burren.

The profile of visitors to the Shannon region (based on preliminary 2006 data) can be summarised as follows

- There were over 2 million visitors in 2006 of whom 62% were overseas visitors.
- 64% of overseas visitors come in the five months of May to September.
- 38% stayed in hotels and 27% in guesthouses and B+B's.
- 37% of visitors were travelling alone and 36% as couples.
- 52 % of visitors were in the white collar social class and 32% in the managerial and professional class.
- Nearly half (46%) of visitors were over 44 years of age.
- The average length of stay of overseas visitors in the Shannon Region was 3.7 days, about half of the period they spent in Ireland.

County Clare had 727,000 overseas visitors in 2006. 36% came from Britain, 31% from North America and 28% from mainland Europe.

The data from a Summer 2006 survey of visitors to the Cliffs of Moher have some relevance to a signage plan for the Burren.

The survey found that:-

- 25% of visitors came from North America, 15% from Ireland and 15% from Germany
- English was the first language of 54% of visitors and nearly all respondents (more than 99%) considered themselves to be fluent in English
- 51% had travelled by car, 25% by tour coach and 6% by day tour coach
- The previous night 15% had stayed in Galway, 13% in Killarney and 13% in Limerick

Some information on visitor numbers at attraction sites is available (See table on following page). One of the newest attraction sites, Caherconnell Fort, is attracting 25,000 visitors a year and the Michael Cusack Centre, opened this year, has a target attendance of 8,000 visitors a year. The Burren Centre in Kilfenora attracted 35,000 visitors in 2005.

Table 2 Annual visitor numbers at attraction sites (2005)

Name of attraction	Visitors
Cliffs of Moher	760,906
Aillwee Cave	180,000
Burren Perfumery	45,000

Source: Fáilte Ireland

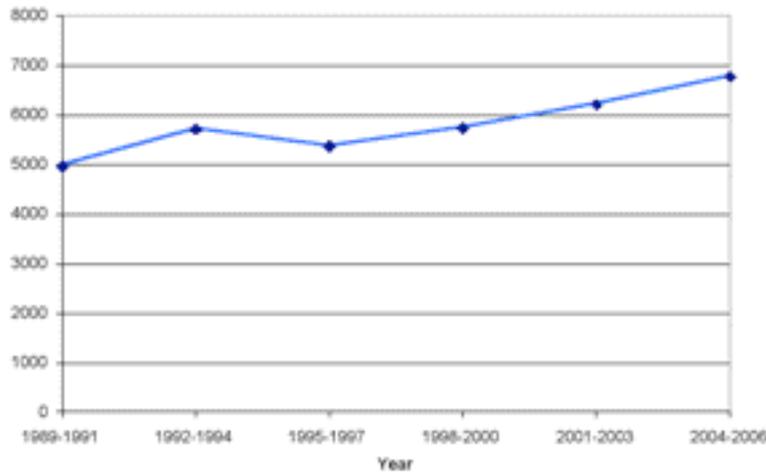
We can draw the following tentative conclusions about visitors to the Burren from the survey data

- Most visitors to the Burren stay outside the area
- Visitors travel into the area from different directions
- Most visitors travel by car while a large number also travel by coach
- Most visitors understand English.

With some knowledge and understanding of the diverse attractions of the Burren, and taking account of feedback from our consultation work, the following characteristics should also be taken into account:-

- There is wide variation in the type of visitor that is attracted to the area.
- The Burren is visited all-year round.
- Both visitors to the Burren and residents include significant numbers that are antipathetic to overt visitor management and to commercialisation of the landscape.

There has been a steady increase in the traffic on Burren roads, an annual growth rate of 2.5% over the past ten years. Table 2 summarises traffic count data collected by Clare County Council on a July weekday over an 18 year period. The traffic count points are Newtown Cross, Ballyvaughan, Callura Cross, north of Ennistymon and Leamaneh Cross.



(Source: Clare County Council traffic count data. The N67 Lisdoonvarna to Ballyvaughan traffic figures collected at Newtown Cross have been excluded from the totals because of gaps in that data set and large annual variations)

## 1.4 Visitor signage in The Burren

From a review of published literature and of official policy it is clear that The Burren is seen as an exceptional place that has an outstanding, but fragile, landscape. Such areas attract visitors and encourage tourism-based enterprises. Signage is one of the tools available to manage visitor pressures and to facilitate local business, in the form of directional signs and advertising. However, in the case of an area like the Burren, the use of signage can be problematical. The Burren landscape cannot absorb a large amount of new signage without its visual character being compromised. There are parts of the Burren which are widely perceived as being 'wild' and 'unspoilt', where, arguably, any signage is out of place and inappropriate. This is not to state that the Burren is a wilderness, where all directional and advertising signs are out of place. The Burren is a settled landscape with a population of about 5,000 (CSO, 2006). The area is traversed by public roads, where road signs, village name boards and advertising signs are part of the established character of the landscape.

For signage purposes it is therefore useful to distinguish four types of area within the Burren;

- the villages,
- established visitor attraction sites,
- the countryside beside roads and
- the remoter countryside away from roads.

In general terms village streets and the outskirts of villages are quite robust settings where there is scope for new signs without affecting established character. However, four of the Burren villages include designated architectural conservation areas (Ballyvaghan, Corrofin, Kilfenora, and Lisdoonvarna) in which new signage would have to be designed carefully and a net increase in signage could be problematical. Although several visitor attractions are in highly sensitive landscapes there is usually scope for the siting of additional signage in and around existing infrastructure, particularly car parks. Outside the village and attraction sites the context is entirely different. In general terms signage, which competes with or dominates roadside vistas is incongruous and out of place in the Burren. There is very little signage of any type in the Burren that is away from roads and the main visitor sites and this is probably how it should remain.

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County Council



## **2.0** Review



## 2.0 Review

### 2.1 International practice

A Web search has been carried out of approaches to visitor signage in other countries. Policies and standards were reviewed in Britain and Scotland, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, with a focus on scenic rural areas. Literature has also been reviewed from the United States, where there is a wide range of practice, from laissez faire to prescriptive signage regimes in Vermont, Hawaii, Alaska and Maine.

Signage can be used as an important element in official marketing strategies. For instance, the Statewide Tourist Signing Programme of the state of Victoria, in Australia, has a heavy marketing emphasis. There is a four tier hierarchy of signs; state gateway, product region, major tourism theme and local. The state gateway signs are intended to be 'motivational, creating a sense of anticipation', and the product region signs are intended to 'convey the personality of the region and encourage visitors to explore.' The major tourist themes 'identify a specific tourist route or attraction' and local signage identifies touring routes, attractions and services. However, in most of the literature reviewed, the main purposes of signage planning and regulation are meeting the basic directional needs of the traveller while ensuring traffic safety and protecting the environment. Three main reasons for controlling signage are given:-

*Traffic safety.* Excessive visitor signage and poorly sited signage can cause traffic hazards

*Environmental intrusion.* Signage can have a negative visual impact  
Traveller information needs. Excessive signage and poorly sited signage is counter-productive. Travellers are confused by a plethora of signage

*Traveller information needs.* Excessive signage and poorly sited signage is counter-productive. Travellers are confused by a plethora of signage

Some core principles for visitor signage can be identified.

- Visitor directional signage is an aid to safe and efficient navigation, particularly near the end of a journey and to otherwise difficult-to-find places. Visitor signage supplements information on existing directional signage, it should not duplicate it.
- The primary function is to guide travellers not to advertise. Visitor directional signage should not be used as a marketing tool. Signs should only be erected where there is a clear benefit to the user
- Signage should meet standardised design criteria in the interests of equity and visual impact

Visitor directional signage guidelines generally recognise two types of destination; visitor attractions and tourist facilities.

*Visitor attractions* are places of interest open to the public without prior booking where the sale of goods is of a secondary nature.

*Tourist facilities* are establishments which provide services within an area e.g. accommodation and restaurants

The North York Moors National Park in England has a tourism signposting checklist for operators which could easily be modified and applied to the Burren, given the similar regulatory context. The checklist is as follows:-

1. Is a sign necessary?  
Have I explored the alternative ways of communicating the information.
2. Will it be 'on the highway' e.g. between the road and a hedge or wall?  
If so, a white on brown sign application will be necessary. A fee will be payable for the application and, if successful, further payment will be required for the manufacture, erection and maintenance of the sign
3. Will it be 'off the highway e.g. on private land, in a field on a building'?
  - If so advertising regulations consent (or planning permission) may be required
  - Contact the area planning officer
  - If an application is required, a fee will be payable
4. An unauthorised sign, whether on or off the highway, may be a hazard. It could also result in prosecution
5. If you have any doubt, contact the National Park Authority.

The various codes have guidelines and standards about where visitor signs can be erected. The example of Tasmania in Australia is given below:-

*A directional sign shall only be approved at the junction providing direct access to the property or up to a maximum of two junctions from the property where*

- i. The business is in an area where visitors would not normally expect to find such a business*
- ii. The business is in a remote location and is difficult to find*
- iii. The absence of additional signage may cause unnecessary and indirect travel to find the business*
- iv. The business is some distance from a major tourism route normally travelled by visitors*

(Tasmanian Roadside Signs Manual 2006)

Codes limit the number of signs that can be erected or destinations that can be signed at any one place. A plethora of signage may be ugly, cannot be easily read and therefore may cause a traffic hazard. British guidance is based on research that drivers have up to 4 seconds to read a directional sign and states that 'limiting the amount of information will help to minimise the reading time and risks associated with large signs.' Examples of adopted standards are as follows:

- No more than 3 tourist destinations signed at junction approach exit at a junction on a 50mph road (Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Highways Agency/Scottish Executive/Welsh Assembly/Dept for Regional Development Northern Ireland)
- Up to 4 attraction signs on one aluminium post structure (Nova Scotia Tourist Attraction Signing Policy)
- A maximum of 3 advance access tourism information signs on any one sign structure. Where more than 9 operators are seeking tourist signs in advance of a particular junction the preferred approach would be to develop a tourist information layby and consolidate information at that point (Tasmanian Roadside Signs Manual 2006)

- The maximum numbers of fingerboards (including road names tourist and destination signs pointing in one direction shall be 5. On any one post the maximum number of fingerboards (including road names, tourist and information signs) shall be 10. Where the total number of signs is likely to exceed the maximum number allowable the Manager, Assets and Contracts shall have designated authority to make the decisions to decided which signs may or may not appear (Central Otago District Council, New Zealand)

Signage regulations require visitor attractions and tourist facilities to meet certain criteria to be eligible for directional signage. By way of example the following criteria apply to visitor attractions in Nova Scotia:-

- Attractions must have a minimum annual attendance of 10,000 visitors
- Attractions must have adequate parking facilities to meet the normal demand of the attraction
- Attractions must have rest room facilities
- Attractions must have visitor orientation, either through the provision of staff or interpretative signage
- Attractions must be open to the public a minimum of 6 hours per day, 5 days a week, during the operating season
- Attractions must be in operation a minimum of 90 days during the operating season
- Attractions must advertise or be listed in the Nova Scotia Travel Guide, and have promotional literature distributed at visitor information centres
- Attractions must provide Tourism Nova Scotia with ongoing annual attendance reports

## 2.2. Irish Legislation

The Planning and Development Act 2000 provides the primary legal framework for signage but the road traffic acts and the Litter Pollution Act are also relevant. Certain types of sign are exempted development i.e. they do not require planning permission. These include small signs (less than 1.2m<sup>2</sup>) on the premises of businesses and some estate agents' signs (one sign per property not more than 1.2m<sup>2</sup> in size).

Most signage needs either a planning permission or a license from the local planning authority. An annually renewable license is required (under Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000) to erect a finger post sign or any other sign on the public highway, e.g. a sign attached to a signage pole on the side of the road. There is an annual fee of €50 for a sign for tourist accommodation and a fee of €630 for any other sign erected in this way e.g. a directional sign to a visitor attraction. The fee for making a planning application for a signboard is €80 or €20 per m<sup>2</sup>, whichever is the greater. The erection of a sign in a public place without the consent of the owner is an offence under the Litter Pollution Act and roads authorities, under the Road Traffic Acts are empowered to remove signs from public highways which may cause a traffic hazard. It is an offence to erect a sign without planning permission if a permission is required.

It is recommended that signs erected on public property not having a licence or agreement be removed. Planning permission for signage on private property should have a specific time period attached, for example, 5 years. Older signs on private property, not voluntarily removed, should be processed under the planning or roads legislation.

## 2.3 Irish standards and practice

The Department of the Environment has set down criteria and standards for visitor signage (Circular PD 12/14 and the 1996 Traffic Signs Manual). It is clear from the signage audit below that the prevailing situation in the Burren is one of non-adherence to these guidelines. Amongst the recommendations of PD 12/14 is that 'rather than deal with isolated requests for tourist signs, road authorities are recommended to prepare comprehensive plans for tourist signing in consultation with the Department of the Environment, Bord Fáilte and other relevant authorities and interests.' The guidelines provide designs and siting guidelines under the following headings: tourist attraction signing, signs to tourist information points, signing of named tourist routes and routes to tourist attractions, pedestrian signs to tourist attractions, signs for local services and other facilities for tourists (camping and caravan sites, picnic sites, youth hostels) and tourist accommodation.

Standards in PD 12/14 include the following:

### *Tourist attraction signing*

- Attractions to be signed must be approved by Bord Failte and meet any local authority criteria prescribed
- Attractions to be signed should generate more than 10,000 visitors per annum
- Attractions to be signed should be within 15km of the signed junction
- A maximum of 2 attractions in the same direction on any one directional sign

### *Signing of named tourist routes*

- Routes should be between 30 and 100km long
- They should ideally complete a circuit and be so arranged to encourage use in one direction, preferably anti-clockwise to avoid right-hand turns

### *Tourist accommodation*

- Generally one finger post for each premises located at the junction nearest the premises
- The erection of signs on national roads should be severely restricted

The need for visitor signage must be evaluated in the context of an upgrade in general road and directional signage that is currently taking place. An overhaul of signage on the national road system is under way. The National Roads Authority (NRA) has published a policy on the provision of tourist and leisure signage on national roads following a consultation process and reviews by Fáilte Ireland. The NRA states that the 'provision of clear tourist signage is an essential element in assisting the motoring tourist to locate --- attractions in a safe and efficient manner'. The policy identifies a three-tier road system; major inter-urban routes (the Mainline), other national primary roads and national secondary roads. In North Clare and South Galway the improved N18 Limerick to Galway road is part of the Mainline. The Burren is adjacent to the N18 and the Burren uplands are visible from the road. The Burren is crossed by the N67, the national secondary road connecting

Ennistimon, Lisdoonvarna, Ballyvaghan and Kinvarra to the N18 at Kilcolgan. The NRA has adopted the minimum criteria in Table 4 for the signing of tourist attractions from the national road system.

Road type	Qualifying minimum number of visitors per annum	Maximum distance of attraction from national road (km)
Mainline	75,000	30
Other national primary	20,000	20
National secondary	10,000	20

In the consultation document, though not the adopted document, the NRA identified those sites that would be signed from the Mainline. Only three attractions in North Clare and South Galway qualified for signage. These were Aillwee Cave, The Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre and Coole Park.

Visitor signage will be provided from the improved N18 as part of the signage contracts for the new sections of the road. Before the end of the year the Burren will be signed from the shortly to be completed Ennis Bypass section of the N18. A visitor signage programme is currently being prepared for the N67 through the Burren. These signage plans are the responsibility of the NRA although they are carried out in consultation with both the local authorities and Fáilte Ireland. It is noteworthy that improved warning signage on the N67 through the Burren, being designed by the NRA in consultation with Clare County Council, takes into account the visual impact of signs in the landscape.

Improvement of signage on regional roads is also currently under way. By the end of 2008 all the regional roads in the Burren will be signed in accordance with a national standard. It is a general requirement of the new signs that they 'reflect the needs of the user and be in harmony with the land/streetscape' (DOEHLG, 2006 Guidelines for Regional Road Signage).

A recent report for Fáilte Ireland, which identifies Doolin as a proposed base in a national strategy for cycling tourism, recommends adoption of the Eurovelo (the European cycle route network) signage system for cycle routes. This system was developed in Denmark and is now widely used in Europe.

A number of consultees referred to previous initiatives by the local authority to control visitor signage but that the initiatives were short-lived and unsuccessful. As part of this project an audit was carried out of applications to Clare County Council for planning permissions and licenses for signage in the Burren over the last five years. Surprisingly, there have been no permissions and no licenses issued although a large amount of signage has been erected in the period. Where there has been no decision by the Council there is generally a report on the file stating that the Council is not in favour of the proposed signage and inviting revised signage to be submitted for consideration. There were no applications for planning permission for signboards in the Burren in recent years.

## 2.4 Existing signage in the Burren

The Burren is not identified by existing signage except by a small number of 'Welcome The Burren Protected Landscape' signs erected in the last ten years. The commercial signs for visitor attractions such as Aillwee Cave, Caherconnell Fort and the Burren Centre in Kilfenora and numerous B-and-Bs named 'Burren View' and similar, provide the most obvious confirmation that the visitor is in the Burren.

There are four main types of visitor signage in the Burren; accommodation signs, signs for commercial visitor attractions, direction signs to public amenities such as lakes and strands and signs for cycling and walking routes. The signs for accommodation tend to be mainly modest finger post signs in a variety of styles, the signs for commercial visitor attractions come in a range of sizes but include freestanding panels more than a metre square. These signs usually have two purposes; to give direction and to advertise the attraction. All the main commercial attraction sites in the area use signage to an excessive degree. Several of these signs are more than 30 kilometres from the attraction site, many signs are large, in excess of 2m<sup>2</sup> and many have been erected in prominent positions in the landscape.

Directional signs to public amenities are modest white-on-brown finger signs. There has been a rapid increase in signage for walking and cycling routes in recent years. Signing a walking route connecting the Burren Way to the Mid Clare Way has recently been completed. As nearly all signed walking routes are on public roads, the route signs, which are scaled to be legible by car users, account for a significant proportion of the total signage.



Figure 3. Welcome sign on the N67 on the Clare-Galway border

In recent years there has been an increasing level of landscape interpretation through the medium of well designed, on-site information boards at some of the main attraction sites (e.g. Cahercommaun and Poul nabrone and The National Parks and Wildlife Service is in the process of providing on-site signage at Mullaghmore). The boards provide information which is accessible whatever the time of day or time of year and are of considerable value for this reason. There is also a place for this type of signboard at a limited number of designed viewing points, beside roads, to enhance the experience of a view. However, in the main, there are more appropriate ways of interpreting the landscape away from visitor sites than using physical signage. Generally, books, maps and local people are all better media of landscape interpretation.

This project has carried out a survey of existing visitor directional signage. Signage on the national secondary and regional road system within the area has been recorded as well as signage on the L1014 Sheshymore-Carron-Corker Pass Road and L1014 'New Line' Boston-Burren Road. The total road length surveyed is 155 kilometres (Refer to Figure 3). The survey recorded signs that were not road traffic signs i.e. standard directional signs, regulatory signs and warning signs and were not name boards or advertising signs on business premises or estate agent signs. It should be noted that these latter categories have a significant visual impact on some stretches of road, particularly the approaches to some of the villages.

Most of the signs recorded fall into the category of white-on-brown directional signs for tourism and leisure purposes. However the audit also includes advertising signs and other non standard road signs.

The survey distinguished three main categories:

- Commercial signs which include directional signs for attraction sites, finger post signs for accommodation and advertising signs
- Directional signs for walking routes and cycle routes (mainly white-on-brown finger signs, erected by a public agency)
- Directional signs to amenities and features such as lakes, beaches, historical buildings and fishing stands (mainly-white on-brown finger signs, erected by a public agency).

Directional signage for walking, cycling and other leisure routes is becoming increasingly common. Currently these signs account for 17% of visitor roadside signs in the Burren.

Most visitor signage is at or near junctions. For the N67 national secondary road we have used the same junction numbering as per the recent NRA junction signage survey. For other junctions in the survey area we have assigned a unique number. What emerges from the survey is a generally low level of visitor related signage. In total 511 signs were counted. There is, on average, five visitor-type signs per junction. The most heavily signed roads are the roads in and around Doolin and the N67, the main road through the Burren. 60% of the signs are concentrated at 16 junctions where there are 10 or more non-traffic signs. Only a small number of sign boards have been erected in open countryside that are not at or beside junctions. The survey results contrast with the feedback from the public consultation exercise, which revealed a widespread perception of visual pollution as a result of signage. It seems to be the case that the chaotic state of signage at a small number of locations has a disproportionate impact on observers.

<sup>1</sup> Excluding signage in the villages, other than at main junctions

Table 5. Visitor signage in the Burren

Road	Number of sign locations	Number of visitor signs	Signs per junction	Junctions with >9 signs	Junctions with >14 signs	Signs per Km.
N67	31	189	8	8	4	5.7
R459/ 478/479	11	112	11	3	2	9.5
R460	5	6	1	0	0	0.5
R476	22	60	3	2	1	2.7
R477	12	63	4	2	2	2.5
R480	8	42	7	0	1	2.8
L1010	6	9	2	0	0	0.6
L1014	9	30	3	1	0	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3.8</b>

Signage standards usually limit the number of signs at a junction so that traffic safety is not compromised and the main directional signing retains its effectiveness. In countries where signs are bilingual, as in Ireland, the problems of effectively interpreting multiple signs are increased because of the increased volume of information presented on signs. By comparison to the international standards that are described in 2.1 above it is clearly the case that signage at at least 16 junctions in the Burren is seriously out of line with international practice about what is considered to be a minimum acceptable standard.

Table 5 is a summary of the signage at the 16 locations in relation to landscape impact. The assessment is made in the context of adopted designations by Clare County Council; vulnerable landscape and scenic route. Heavily signed junctions in the Burren villages also have a significant impact on streetscape. This impact is probably usually regarded as negative although some observers discern a quirky charm and the junction in Ballyvaghan is probably one of the most photographed places in the Burren. Nevertheless, it is a fact that this location and others in the Burren villages are designated Architectural Conservation Areas where one would expect that some restraint in the use of signage would apply. The junction of the R459 and R479 in Doolin, where there is an array of over 40 visitor signs, is a striking example of undisciplined over-signage in a semi-urban landscape.



Figure 4. Junction 133, in Ballyvaghan village

Eight of the junctions are in rural locations within the vulnerable landscape of the Burren and all but one of them is on a designated scenic route. These are the junctions that are primarily responsible for an overall impression of visual pollution. The number of signs is only one factor influencing impact. The number of signage structures is another factor. Table 8 details some of the characteristics of the rural junctions but a proper impression of impact is only gathered by reference to the photographic survey. Three of the locations are especially important because they are either a gateway to the Burren (junction 122 on the N67, the main approach to the Burren from the north) or they are strategic Burren junctions; junction 17 at Leamaneh and junction 135 at Newtown (Refer to photographs). In the case of Leamaneh the negative visual impact is especially significant because it detracts from the setting of Leamaneh Castle, one of the most important historic monuments in the Burren. The road junction at Leamaneh in fact bisects the protected grounds of the Castle. The Leamaneh junction also shows that the negative effect of a relatively small number signs can be considerable when the sign boards are large and they are placed in an irregular pattern.

The audit reveals that there is negligible control of visitor signage in the Burren at the present time. Some business operators interviewed regard signage as an essential advertising tool. However, there is also a general recognition that there is too much signage at some locations in the Burren. There appeared to be a consensus that a reduction of signage was desirable but that this could only be achieved by an equitable treatment of the affected businesses.

Table 6. Junctions with large numbers (10 or more signs) of visitor related signage.

Junction number	Road	Village/rural location	Vulnerable landscape Yes/no	Scenic route Yes/no	National monument site Yes/no
150	N67	Lisdoonvarna	no	no	no
148	N67	Lisdoonvarna	no	no	no
137	N67	rural	yes	yes	no
136	N67	rural	yes	yes	no
135	N67	rural	yes	yes	no
133	N67	Ballyvaughan	no	yes	no
129	N67	rural	yes	yes	no
122	N67	rural	yes	yes	no
17	R476	rural, Leamaneh	yes	yes	yes
66	R477	rural	yes	no	no
82	R479	Doolin	no	yes	no
84	R479	Doolin	no	yes	no
85	R479	rural	no	yes	no
104	R480	rural	yes	yes	no
105	R480	rural	yes	yes	no

Table 7. Junction characteristics of the heavily signed junctions in sensitive rural landscapes

Junction number	Road	Number of commercial signs	Total number of visitor signs	Number of signage structures
137	N67	7	14	4
136	N67	5	11	4
135	N67	5	24	8
122	N67	14	24	9
17	R476	13	17	7
66	R477	9	10	5
104	R480	10	16	3
105	R480	6	13	1



Figure 5. Locations of the heavily signed junctions in the Burren road network (Yellow stars indicate the junctions in sensitive landscapes. Numbers are those used in signage survey)



Figure 6. Junction 122 on the Clare-Galway border



Figure 7. Junction 135 at Newtown, Ballyvaghan



Figure 8. Junction 17 at Leamaneh



Figure 9. Part of the array of signage at Junction 82 in Doolin

## 2.5 Signage in villages and rural attraction sites

Tables 9 and 10 summarise the existing situation in settlements and at attraction sites in respect of visitor amenities, including the provision of visitor information. The summaries are simplified in that the categories cover a range of conditions.

Table 9 indicates that, with the exceptions of Fanore and Killinaboy, all the listed settlements have some capability to meet visitor information needs; ranging from asking a staff member at an information office or attraction site to viewing information on an information board.

Table 10 lists criteria that might be taken into account in assessing, on a systematic basis, whether a rural attraction should be eligible for directional signing. The sites fall into two groups; sites with only rudimentary amenities and sites with a range of amenities. Aillwee Cave, Burren Perfumery, Caherconnell Fort, Cliffs of Moher, Coole Park, Michael Cusack Centre and Dysert O’Dea Castle are developed visitor sites. Cahercommaun, Corcomroe, Dromore Woods, Kilmacduagh and Poul nabrone fall into the other category.

Table 8 Existing amenities in towns and main villages

Village/ town	Car park(s)	Public transport (all year)	Staffed Visitor attraction	Hotel and/or hostel	Information Office	County Information Board with Map	Burren Information Board with Map
Ballyvaughan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carron	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Corrofin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Doolin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Fanore	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Gort	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kilfenora	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Killinaboy	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Kinvara	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Lisdoonvarna	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

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### Ireland

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- Official business directional signage (OBDS) in Vermont <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/OBDS>
- Fighting back:Tools for Sign Control <http://www.scenic.org/billboards>
- Road signage to make touring easier in Victoria <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au>

Table 9. Amenities at the principal rural visitor sites

Visitor site	Toilets	Car park	Café/ restaurant	Public transport	Staffed	County Information	Burren Information Board
Aillwee Cave	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Burren Perfumery	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Cahercommaun	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Caherconnell Fort	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Cliffs of Moher	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Coole Park	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Corcomroe	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Dysert O'Dea Castle	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Dromore Woods	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Kilmacduagh	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Michael Cusack Centre	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Poulnabrone	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No





## 3.0 Visitor Signage Plan

### 3.1 Introduction

A signage plan is set out in the following sections and in Part 2 of the report. The plan consists of policies for the location of signage, qualifying criteria for signage, signage formats and standards and recommendations for the management of signage. The criteria and standards are largely based on published guidance by the Department of the Environment. Illustrations and the technical specifications of the proposed signs are presented in Part 2.

### 3.2 The purpose of the plan

The plan aims to meet the practical needs of visitors to the Burren and of the operators of the various visitor attractions and services in the area. This requires an effective system of directional signage and visitor information. The signs are not intended for advertising or promoting the Burren but to meet current and likely demands for information that are best provided in the form of signage. The plan aims to protect and reinforce local identity by defining the geographical extent of the Burren and deploying distinctive signage within the area. The plan proposes an approach that respects the Burren landscape and incorporates a suite of signage to facilitate visitor management in the area.

### 3.3 Key principles underlying the plan

This report has described how nearly all signs in the Burren are in landscapes of exceptional quality and sensitivity. This places an onus on the local authorities, Clare and Galway County Councils, to ensure that there is effective control of signage and that signs are sensitively designed and sited. There is considerable variation within the Burren in respect of the extent to which different places can accommodate modern signage and the plan must take account of these variations.

A sign in the landscape is only one of a number of ways to convey a particular piece of information. This observation is of particular relevance to landscapes where signage may be problematical, either because of its direct visual impact or a perception of the undermining by modern signage of the cultural value of an ancient and 'unspoilt' landscape. In such a context there is an imperative to respond to visitor needs by deploying other, less intrusive media such as maps, brochures, guidebooks and electronic media.

The Burren, however, is a settled landscape in which signage is an established feature and where signs have a practical role to play. In recent decades there has been a standardisation of directional signage for visitors both in Ireland and in the rest of Europe. Now, in Ireland, all signs are bi-lingual by law. Visitors get benefits from standardisation as a result of familiarity with the icons and standardised formats that are employed. It is therefore desirable to use standard signage in the Burren and it is essential not to interfere with the formats of road and beach regulatory and warning signs in the interest of user safety. Nevertheless, we believe that there is also scope, within the overall signage suite for roads and other public places, to incorporate a distinctive graphic dimension that reflects the distinctive physical identity of the Burren.

The various considerations underlying the plan can be summarised by the following set of principles:-

1. The Burren is a destination of international renown that requires an effective and attractive signage plan for visitors,
2. The design and siting of signs must not compromise safety considerations,
3. Reliance for navigation should be placed on the standard directional signage to towns and villages, and to otherwise difficult to find places
4. Signs are only one means of conveying information. (SatNav, maps, brochures and info from websites can also be utilised)
5. The design, location and maintenance of signs should respect the exceptional quality of the Burren landscape,
6. The capacity of the Burren landscape to accommodate signage is variable, being relatively robust in the villages but highly sensitive in the remoter countryside away from main roads,
7. The greater part of the Burren is in County Clare but the Burren straddles the boundary with Galway and an integrated approach requires the involvement of both Clare and Galway County Councils,
8. Signed attractions should satisfactorily accommodate the number of visitors that they attract,
9. The design of signs should be in accordance with the standards and guidelines set out in the Traffic Signs Manual, in PD 12/14 issued by the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government and, in respect of cycling signage, the guidelines for the Eurovelo cycle route network, and any future national and international guidelines
10. There is scope for signage design that reflects and celebrates the distinctive character of the Burren,
11. Signs must be bi-lingual but do not need to be multi-lingual,
12. There should be no advertising signs in the Burren countryside, without a licence or planning permission.
13. There should not be a net increase in the number of signs in the Burren countryside and where new signage replaces existing signage, the redundant signs should be removed.
14. In the interests of road safety, four is the maximum number of destinations (villages, towns and visitor attraction) that can be signed in one direction at any junction. Normally not more than three destinations will be signed.
15. To be included in the signage plan visitor attractions should be required to remove all unauthorised signage

## 3.4 Signage to and from the Burren

### 3.4.1 Issues

The Burren is one of the most famous areas in Ireland and attracts visitors from all over the world. Most visitors travel to the Burren by road, either by car or coach, and make use of the system of standard directional signage, which is currently being upgraded on national and regional roads.

The Burren is beside the N18, which is part of the Mainline network of national roads that will be comprehensively signed for visitor attraction purposes by 2010. This signage programme is being implemented by the National Road Authority in accordance with its policy document, published in 2007. The policy provides for signage to visitor destinations including areas of heritage or scientific interest and to areas of major tourist interest. Implementation of the programme is in consultation with Fáilte Ireland and the respective local authorities. The Burren has now been signed from the N18 junction at Killow, outside Ennis.

From the N18 traffic uses the national secondary road system and regional roads to access the Burren. A signage plan for the N67, including visitor signage, is currently being finalised by the NRA. We recommend that the Burren is signed from the national secondary road system at Kilcolgan, the northern end of the N67, at Ennistimon at the junction of the N67 and N85 and at Ennis and Fountain Cross on the improved N85.

Erecting directional signage for the Burren raises the issue of a physical definition of the Burren, because, if visitors are to be directed from the main roads, there needs to be some means of indicating that they have reached the Burren. The present solution of 'welcome' signs on approach roads is unsuccessful. The solution would be an appropriate one for a statutorily defined area, such as a gaeltacht or an area in public ownership, such as a national park, which have defined boundaries. But the Burren is a different kind of entity and, as a result, the locations of these sign boards are arbitrary and unsatisfactory. The signs also carry a mixed message; on the one hand that this is a protected landscape but, on the other hand, that it is permissible to erect a prominent sign in a sensitive landscape. The signs may also not be very effective because the message on the signboard is not reinforced by other signs.

To overcome these shortcomings we recommend that the area is defined by signing the towns and villages of the area as Burren towns and Burren villages. The settlement structure of North Clare and South Galway lends itself to defining the Burren. There is a village or town at or near every main road entrance to the Burren. Using the village sign boards to signify the Burren would involve erecting signs in relatively robust landscape settings and it would avoid the difficulty of assigning the Burren a precise geographical description. We therefore recommend standardised signboards for the Burren villages and towns of the Burren incorporating the phrase 'Burren Village' or 'Burren Town', the Burren logo and reference to a distinctive aspect of the place. For instance the Corrofin signboard would include the phrases 'Burren Village' and 'A Fisherman's Paradise' and Carron's signboard might read 'Burren Village' and 'Heart of the Burren', or 'Largest turlough in Europe'. As the roads run through the different villages we do not see any merit in the signboards incorporating icons depicting the range of services available in each village.

We recommend signing the Burren from the N18 at the Killcolgan and Killow junctions. All the attraction sites and visitor services in the Burren would benefit from this initiative. Their marketing and other site information could include

directions from one or both of the N18 exits. We do not recommend signing the Burren from the new junction at Gort, given the limited capacity of the Burren road network west of Gort, and the undeveloped nature of the tourism infrastructure of the east Burren.

The Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience is an exceptional case because of the very large numbers of visitors it attracts. This site would not benefit from 'Burren' signage because it is not a Burren site. We recommend that the Cliffs is signed from the N18 at Killoow via the N85 and R477, in order to ensure visitors are directed on a convenient route from the mainline and to discourage Cliffs of Moher visitor traffic using the Burren road network, including the N67 through Ballyvaghan.

We also recommend that the Burren is signed (north on the R478) from the Cliffs car parks, given the amount of information provided about the Burren at the visitor centre and the proximity of the Burren to the centre.

#### **Policy proposal 1.**

##### **The Burren should be signposted on**

N18 : at Killoow (Ennis) and Kilcolgan

N67: at Ennistimon and Kilcolgan

N85: at Killoow and all subsequent roundabouts on the Ennis western relief road, and at Fountain Cross

R478 at the Cliffs of Moher

#### **Policy Proposal 2. Define the Burren by naming villages and towns as Burren villages and Burren towns**

The existing 'welcome-The Burren' signboards should be removed. Existing signboards for the villages and towns of the area should be replaced by distinctive signboards that include the information 'Burren Village' or 'Burren Town'.

Table 9 . Villages and Towns of the Burren

Places to be signposted as Burren Towns or Villages are:

Ballyvaghan

Carran                      Gort

Corrofin                    Kinvarra

Doolin                      Ruan

Fanore                      Tubber

Kilfenora

Lisdoonvarna

#### **Policy Proposal 3.**

**Sign the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience from the N18 at Clareabbey .**

**Sign the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience from the N18 at Killoow (Ennis).**

## 3.5 Signage within the Burren

### 3.5.1 Issues

The special character of the Burren landscape is beyond dispute and there is no doubt that signage in the area should be carefully designed and controlled. However, this is far from the case at the present. There is a widespread perception of visual pollution caused by signs and a feeling that something should be done about it. This is accepted by at least some of the operators responsible for the offending signage. These operators would accept a reduction in signage and more regulation of signage, provided that this was achieved in an equitable manner. Without exception all the Burren visitor attractions and facilities trade on the quality of the Burren environment so that their use of the Burren countryside for advertising purposes is indefensible.

However, the impression of unrestrained signage is created by chaotic signage at a number of junctions. There are 8 junctions in vulnerable rural landscape areas where the number of signs (more than 10) is in excess of normal standards. In addition the situation at the junction of the R459 and R479 in Doolin, where a sprawling array of 42 visitor signs dominates the view, is highly undesirable. At all these junctions the ability of motorists to read the general road directions is seriously impaired by the quantity of non-essential visitor signage.

A major improvement in perception could be achieved by rationalising and consolidating visitor signage at these junctions, in particular the four most prominent junctions in the Burren. These are the R476 and R480 at Leamaneh, the N67 and R480 at Newtown, Ballyvaghan, the N67 at the Clare-Galway border (the junction of the N67 and L1014) and the R459-R479 junction in Doolin. A focused initiative by the local authorities in respect of these junctions would lead to a significant improvement in the situation and signal that the 'laissez faire' days of unrestricted signage were at an end.

The local authorities and other public agencies are both part of the signage problem and part of the solution. There has been an increase in public signage in recent years adding to the overall volume of signage in the Burren countryside. Much of this signage is useful and of assistance to the visitor but there is also new signage which is ill-considered and of limited value.

There has been negligible signage control in either the Galway or Clare parts of the Burren in recent years. There is an issue of resource allocation by the respective local authorities to administer and enforce the legislation. The case can be made that, if not a priority in other areas, signage control should be an operational priority in scenic areas such as the Burren, which have significant tourism industries.

There are practical difficulties in rationalising much of the signage that is on private property. A successful initiative probably cannot be mounted without support from local tourism operators and involving the voluntary removal of signs. The signage audit, including photographic survey, that has been carried out as part of this project, should be used for baseline purposes when signage control is introduced.

We recommend the application of adopted Irish signage criteria and standards (that are also in line with international practice). These standards take account of the need for both effective signing and safe signing. Road travellers can only absorb a limited amount of information at any time and a profusion of signs is counterproductive in terms of providing visitor information that can be assimilated and potentially a safety risk as the signage distracts drivers and create traffic hazards, especially at junctions.

We suggest the following checklist for businesses:-

1. Is a sign necessary?  
Have I explored the alternative ways of communicating the information?
2. Will it be 'on the highway' i.e. between the road and a hedge or wall?  
If so, a white-on-brown sign application will be necessary. A fee will be payable for the application and, if successful, further payment will be required for the manufacture, erection and maintenance of the sign
3. Will it be 'off the highway' i.e. on private land in a field or on a building?  
If so, planning permission may be required and you are advised to contact the local planning office. If a planning application is required, a fee will be payable
4. An unauthorised sign, whether on or off the highway, may be a hazard.  
It could result in a prosecution.
5. If you have any doubt contact the council planning office

Signage should be designed and sited in accordance with the existing standards as set out in the Traffic Signs Manual (1996) and circular letter (1988) issued by the Department of the Environment.

In summary, in respect of the visual impact of signage, we believe that this project presents an opportunity to take significant remedial measures in the short term. These are a) to 'tidy up' signage at a limited number of key junctions, the expense of the initiative to be borne by the local authorities and b) with the consent of the operators, to remove illegal signage. We recommend that a member of staff in Clare County Council is appointed to carry out these tasks with the assistance of the area road engineer. In the longer term an effective signage regulatory system will be most effectively managed as part of a quality assurance scheme for the Burren.

Most of the existing directional signage in the Burren is on or beside main roads. There has not been a need for signs away from main roads because nearly all signage has been directed at the motorist. This will continue to be the case but, in the future, more effort is likely to be paid to the needs of the walker in the Burren. The present signage for on-road walking, which largely uses finger post signs with symbol and text dimensions that can be read by a motorist, is unsatisfactory and should not be used in off-road situations and should be discontinued on highways. Should extensive off-road loop walks be developed in the Burren, great care must be taken that, while the signage serves its navigational purpose, the signs are discrete and do not interfere with the enjoyment of the landscape.

Directional signage can be a potent management instrument to address issues of traffic congestions and environmental carrying capacity. Other than endorsing a system of qualifying criteria for visitor attraction signage, the policies in this signage plan do not deal with these strategic issues. However, the suite of signage described in Part 2 of the report is at the disposal of Burren managers to achieve strategic objectives e.g. directional symbols for scenic routes being developed to guide visitors to parts of the Burren that can absorb visitor pressure. We would also point out that the proposed physical definition of the Burren by signing towns and villages is also a tool to advance strategic goals. Recognition of Kinvarra and Gort as a Burren village and Burren town respectively, for instance, would encourage the

development of Burren services, including information infrastructure, in these places.

We believe that the overhaul of signage in the Burren is an opportunity to introduce a distinctive signage identity, incorporating a Burren logo. Though this proposal received mixed responses at the public consultation process, and it was decided to progress the signage plan without developing and incorporating a Burren logo, it is the belief of the consultative team that such an initiative has the potential to serve a number of purposes, not least of which is recognition of, and celebration of, the unique character of the Burren. The development of a logo would be of considerable practical value in directional signage applications because it provides a means for a piece of important information to be conveyed quickly and elegantly through visual media. The introduction of a visual identity in Burren signs raises issues in respect of existing and proposed logos serving a number of purposes. Of particular importance is the relationship between the Burren and the sites and facilities administered by National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Office of Public Works that are in and around the Burren. These sites are currently presented primarily as part of a national heritage rather than outstanding examples of regional heritage. It is desirable that more emphasis is given to their regional setting and the relationship of the sites to the local landscape and to other local places. One aspect of a desirable shift of emphasis would be to give the Burren logo an equal footing with the corporate signage of the OPW and NPWS at the state-managed sites. Obviously, further discussion with stakeholders on this issue is required.

**Policy Proposal 4. Rationalise visitor directional signage**

We recommend a comprehensive and detailed visitor signage scheme for the Burren. As part of the Signage Plan we are presenting, as a demonstration project, detailed signage (sign design and layout and sign siting) junction at Leamaneh. We recommend the drawing up of a comprehensive visitor signage scheme for the Burren, in accordance with this plan. We recommend that, as soon as possible, the councils implement improved visitor signage at four key junctions (See Fig. 5 : nos 17(Leamaneh), 82 (Roadford), 122 (Corker Hill) and 135 (Newtown)). This will involve removing unauthorised signs and erecting signage in accordance with national standards and guidelines. We recommend that for this limited initiative the new signage is financed by the local authorities (Refer to Part 2 of the report for graphic details of signage)

**Policy Proposal 5. Primary reliance for navigation should be placed on the national and regional road networks and on the accompanying directional signage.**

The local road network should not in general be signed for visitor sites and services except for the very last stages of journeys where no alternative is available.

**Policy proposal 6 Remove unauthorised signage with the cooperation of local businesses/local operators that have erected large road-side directional/ advertising signboards.**

**Policy Proposal 7. Resource a staff position in Clare County Council dedicated to signage control and use the Burren as a demonstration area for signage control**

**Policy Proposal 8. Develop a visual identity for the Burren incorporating a distinctive logo.**

**Policy Proposal 9. Give expression to the distinctive identity of the Burren by erecting distinctive sign structures i.e. settlement name boards and information boards with maps.**

**Policy Proposal 10. State-run sites in the Burren should have an expressed Burren identity as well as a national identity**

### 3.6 Directional signage for the main visitor attractions

Visitor attractions are places of interest open to the public without prior booking where the sale of goods is of a secondary nature. We propose a system of signage for visitor attractions that takes account of the size of the attraction, the road hierarchy and the location of Burren villages,

We propose the following qualifying criteria for visitor attraction signage from the national road system (N18, N67 and N85)

Yearly Visitor Numbers (Greater than)	Maximum distance for signage
500,000	60 km
75,000	30 km
20,000	20 km
Less than 20,000	5 km or nearest junction

Attractions with more than 20,000 visitors per annum should have the following facilities. Locations without these facilities do not meet the signage requirement.

- Adequate parking facilities to meet the normal demand of the attraction
- Toilets
- Visitor orientation either through the provision of staff or interpretative signage
- Open to the public for a minimum of 150 days
- Provision of a Burren information board at the visitor site
- Provide annual report of attendance numbers to County Council

It is not essential to provide directional signage for visitor attractions in towns and villages. Visitors for these sites can use the road directional signage for the village and town which houses the attraction.

There will be a demand to sign individual visitor attractions in North Clare and South Galway from the N18. However, the large attractions; the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience is a considerable distances from the N18 and there is no justification for signing the smaller Burren sites, with annual visitor numbers generally below 20,000. Strictly applying the NRA qualifying criteria, no individual site in North Clare or South Galway would be signed from the N18. However, given its proximity to the N18 and its cultural importance, we recommend that Coole Park is signed at the Gort junction.

We recommend that the following sites are signed from the nearest junctions on the N67; Aillwee Cave, Caherconnell Fort, Doolin Cave, Burren Perfumery and the Burren Centre, Kilfenora<sup>1</sup>. We recommend confirmation signs on the N67 for these sites commencing at Kilcolgan going south and at Ennistimon going north, followed by repeater signing and direction signing to the site, as appropriate. The rural sites should also receive advance signing (within 1 kilometre of the site). Having regard to road safety issues and the ability of the driver to comprehend only a limited amount of signage information at a road junction, we recommend a restriction on the number of places that can be signed. We recommend a maximum of four places (village, town or attraction site) in one direction and normally not more than three places.

The only existing attractions outside the Burren, which should be considered for signing from within the Burren, are the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience and Coole Park (arguably in the Burren)

**Policy Proposal 11.**

The following visitor attraction sites in North Clare and South Galway should be signed from the improved N18:-

- Coole Park at Gort
- Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience at Killow

**Policy Proposal 12. Sign the following attraction sites from the N67**

- Aillwee Cave from Newtown Cross on the N67 via R480
- Caherconnell Fort from Newtown Cross on the N67 via R480
- Doolin Cave from N67 via R478
- Burren Centre, Kilfenora from junction on N67 north of Ennistimon, via R481
- Burren Perfumery from Bell Harbour on N67 via L1014
- Cliffs of Moher from N67 via R478

**Policy Proposal 13. Restrict signage for attraction sites at junctions**

In the interest of road safety, four is the maximum number of destinations (villages, towns and attraction sites) that can be signed in one direction at any junction. Normally not more than three destinations will be signed.

**Policy Proposal 14. Adopt a flexible approach to signing the large attraction sites in villages and towns.**

It is not essential to provide directional signage for visitor attractions in towns and villages. Visitors for these sites can use the signs for villages and towns. Attraction sites in villages and towns will be signed where conditions permit but the level of signage will be curtailed if there are road safety or landscape issues that dictate a reduced level of signage.

<sup>1</sup>The NRA has been designing a signage scheme for the N67 while this project has been in progress. This has enabled the adoption of a common, coordinated approach.

### 3.7 Signage for smaller and more remote attraction sites

Visitor sites and services in the Burren should place primary reliance on navigation to the nearest village, with the aid of the standard directional road signs. Their brochures and web-sites should show the site in relation to the nearest settlement e.g.

Aillwee Cave- Ballyvaghan  
 Corcomroe – Bell Harbour (Bealaclogga)  
 Burren Perfumery and Michael Cusack Centre - Carron  
 Corrofin Museum and Heritage Centre – Corrofin  
 Burren Centre Kilfenora - Kilfenora  
 Coole Park and Kilmacduagh - Gort.

We recommend that route confirmatory signs (lists of sites with distances to sites) are positioned on regional roads on the Burren side of the gateway villages and towns (ideally within the settlement limits).

No directional signage should be provided for visitor sites which do not have car parks. Sites with car parks should be provided with advance road signing in the interest of road safety and visitor convenience and a sign at the site entrance. Poul nabrone Dolmen is an example of a site where advance signing is necessary.

We recommend the following qualifying criteria for signing visitor attraction sites from the regional road system within the Burren:

- Minimum annual attendance of 20,000 visitors ,
- Within 20km. of the signed junction,
- Toilet Facilities
- Adequate carparking to accommodate visitor numbers,
- Open to the public for a minimum of 90 days and
- Provision of a Burren information board.

We recommend that qualifying visitor attraction sites should be included in visitor signage confirmatory signboards, these signboards, as far as possible to sited at the outskirts of villages, within the village speed limit. The number of listed sites should not normally exceed 4 on a board. At some locations, where it would be helpful to list more than 4 sites, consideration could be given to providing a layby for motorists and a more detailed information board. This option should only be explored where landscape conservation and traffic safety considerations are not compromised.

Such is the density of attraction sites within the Burren, there are locations where more than four sites would qualify for listing under the above listed criteria. We recommend that, in these instances, the nearer sites are listed.

**Policy Proposal 15. Route confirmatory signs for visitor sites (and if required supplementary confirmatory signs) should be provided on regional roads on the Burren side of the gateway settlements as follows:**

Ballyvaghan, on R480 south of Newtown  
 Corrofin, on R476  
 Corrofin, on R460  
 Gort, on R460  
 Kilfenora on R476  
 Lisdoonvarna, on R476

**Policy Proposal 16. Small rural visitor sites with a car park should be equipped with advanced road distance (eg 1 km, 2 km) signs and a sign at the site entrance.**

Rural sites which do not have a car park should not have advanced road signs but it may be desirable to place a sign at the entrance

### 3.8 Signage for visitor sites in villages and towns

Sites in villages should be identified using the visitor information boards in the villages. These boards could also include local information of interest, such as architectural and heritage information and Town Twinning, etc

**Policy Proposal 17. Locations of visitor sites in towns should be indicated in a Village/Town information board located at strategic points in the settlement.**

### 3.9 Signage for accommodation and other services

Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which provides for the annual licensing of finger post signs by local authorities should be brought into full effect by Clare and Galway county councils. No signage for accommodation and other visitor services that are located in a town or village should be allowed outside the settlement limits.

**Policy Proposal 18. A regulatory system and set of standards exist for accommodation signage. The local authorities should implement the standards and procedures that set out in PD 12/14 and in Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.**

### 3.10 Non-directional signage in the Burren

Directional signs are the most common form of visitor signage in the Burren but other signage is also important. Other signage can be described under three categories; labels, interpretation and visitor guidance. It is an established practice that the more significant monuments of the Burren are named and labelled as national monuments. However, such is the rich archaeological and historical tradition of the Burren, as illustrated, for instance, in Tim Robinson's map of the Burren, that nearly every part of the Burren is interesting and distinctive and one could conceivably fill the landscape with labels. In general terms there should probably be very limited additional signing of structures in the Burren countryside although this stricture does not apply to the Burren villages.

There is a place well-designed on-site information signboards at attraction site and at a limited number of designated viewing points, beside roads, to enhance the experience of a view. However, in the main, there are more appropriate ways of interpreting the landscape away from visitor sites than using physical signage.

In terms of signage, visitor guidance in the Burren takes two main forms; the information boards with maps that have been erected in villages and towns under the auspices of Shannon Development and Ireland West, and the Burren Code signboards in four languages that have been put up by Clare County Council at a

<sup>1</sup>This plan has been formulated without the benefit of audited visitor attendance numbers in respect of Burren visitor sites. An annual audit of visitor numbers would form part of the recommended visitor services quality assurance scheme.

number of roadside locations. We believe that the information board-with-map is under-exploited information medium in the Burren. It is an information medium suited to a rural area with a year round pattern of visitor movements and limited number of permanently staffed visitor facilities. It is essential that the boards are well designed and the information authoritative and up-to-date. We recommend that there should be Burren information boards in all the main villages of the area and at Doolin Pier. We propose that there should also be a board in Ennis (either at the railway station or outside the tourism information office), at the car park of the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience, the largest attraction site in North Clare and at Lehinch (the main holiday accommodation centre in North Clare). We also recommend that the provision of an information board is a qualifying condition for directional signage from the national road system to a visitor attraction site. We believe that this information focus on the Burren is justified, given the unique character of the area. For instance, we believe that an information board in Ennis dedicated to the Burren, is justified but this would not be an acceptable precedent for dedicated signage for every district of the county.

In our view the Burren Code Boards that have been erected in some places are an example of an inappropriate use of physical signage. This information is better conveyed in other ways and these boards should be removed.

**Policy Proposal 19. Design a new Burren Information Board-with Map and erect boards at the following locations**

Corrofin  
 Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience (beside the path to the car park)  
 Doolin (Fisher Street & Roadford)  
 Doolin Pier  
 Ennis (either at railway station or tourism office)  
 Fanore  
 Lehinch  
 Kilfenora  
 Ballyvaghan  
 Lisdoonvarna  
 Gort  
 Kinvarra  
 Ennistimon,  
 New Quay  
 Carran  
 Tubber  
 Boston

**Policy proposal 20. The provision of an on-site Burren Information Board-with-Map should be a requirement of Visitor Attractions that are signed from the national road system**

**Policy Proposal 21. Remove current Burren Code Boards and rely on other means, including incorporation into on-site information boards and signage at designated viewing points, to publicise the information on best environmental practice**

### 3.11 Place names

The study also looked at other signage- related matters. Most of the North Clare villages have at least two English spellings. There is an official spelling recognised by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland, found on Ordnance Survey maps and used for road signage by the National Roads Authority. There is also a more common version of the place name, used by local media and local communities. Our consultation programme revealed a degree of embarrassment about the spelling confusion but it was generally the view that the existence of different spellings of the same place did not give rise to practical difficulties.

Table 11. Different versions of place names in use in North Clare

Ordnance Survey	Clare Champion/Explorit Map
Corrofin	Corofin
Killinaboy	Kilnaboy
Carran	Carron
Ennistimon	Ennistymon
Ballyvaghan	Ballyvaughan
Lahinch	Lahinch
Leamaneh	Leamaneagh

It is probably not possible to achieve a satisfactory resolution of the situation at the present time. Locally preferred spellings are embedded in local culture but the NRA and local authorities are currently implementing signage programmes that use the Ordnance Survey spelling. Several consultees emphasised the need for accuracy in the Irish versions of place names. One consultee suggested that all the Burren townlands should be signed in Irish.

**Policy Proposal 22. Places should be signed in both English and in Irish using the English names and spellings recommended by the Ordnance Survey and the Irish names and spellings recommended by the Placenames Commission to comply with the policy used by Clare County Council and the National Roads Authority.**

### 3.12 Work Programme

We consider that, given the number of initiatives currently under-way under Burren Connect and the Burren LIFE NATURE project, and the boost given to tourism in North Clare through the opening of the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience in 2007, that a visitor signage strategy is implemented as soon as possible. With this in mind we recommend the work programme summarised in the following table.

<b>Policy proposal 23. Work programme</b>	
2008	Commence consultation with local stakeholders
	Implement improved signage schemes at key Burren junctions
	Implement an overall rationalisation of visitor signage in consultation with the local stakeholders
2009	Set up an effective system for administering signage licenses
	Implement improved visitor signage scheme for the N67
	Implement improved visitor signage scheme for all regional roads and villages in the Burren

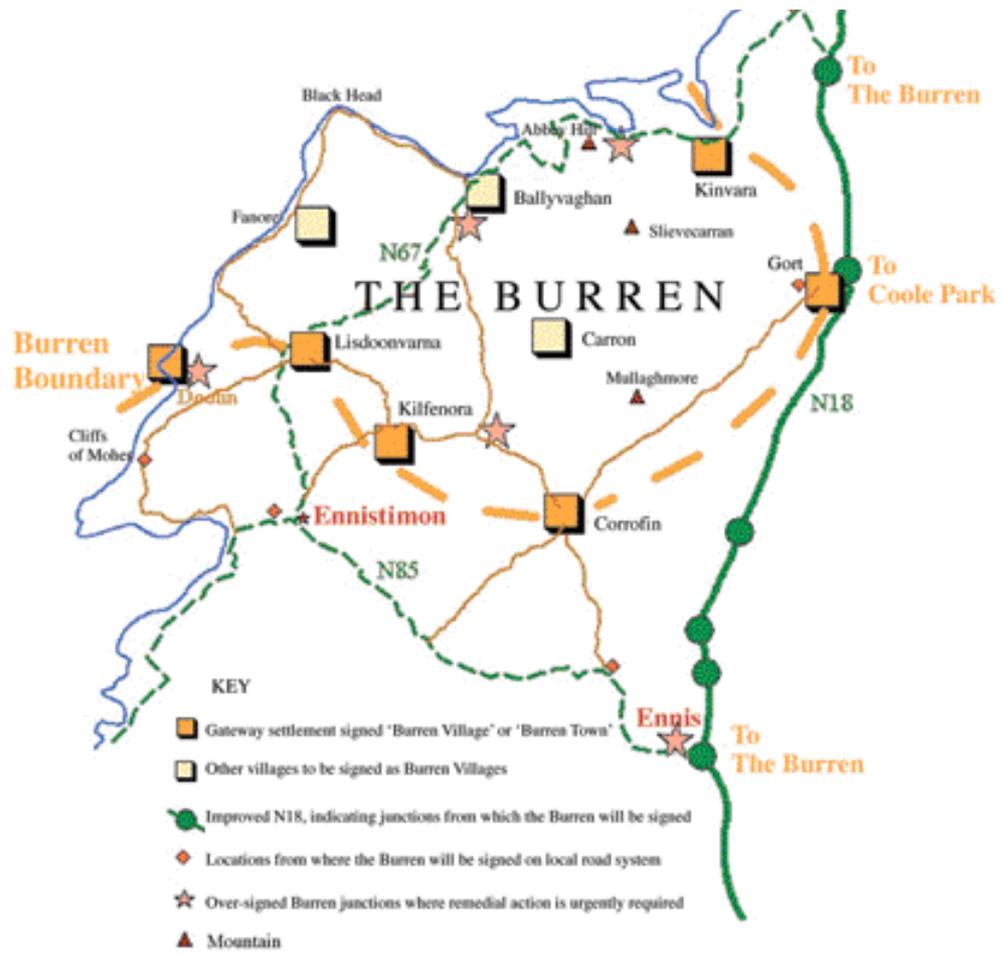


Figure 10. Spatial aspects of the signage plan

## **3.0** Visitor Signage Plan

