



BURREN AND CLIFFS OF MOHER GEO PARK



unesco

Global Geopark



2025 to 2030 OPERATIONS PLAN





CHECK THESE OUT



■ Burren Discovery Trail
& Discovery Points

👤 Visitor / Education Centre

📍 Geopark Site

🏛 Monument

🚶 Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk

🔄 Looped Walk

👣 The Burren Way

GEOPARK GEOLOGY

🔵 Limestone

🟤 Shale

🟡 Sandstone and Shale



www.burrengeopark.ie



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PERSPECTIVES ON THE BURREN & CLIFFS OF MOHER

A landscape that has captivated through the centuries.

Lloyd's Tour of Clare, 1780

Burren, Mohar, Liscanor Bay

This Barony or Territory of BURREN, is a rocky, high, Country; the subsequent Description thereof is humbly submitted. —The Barony of BURREN (saith General Ludlow in his Memoirs) is a Country, where there is not Water enough to drown a Man, Wood enough to hang him, nor Earth enough to bury him, which last is so scarce, that the Inhabitants steal it one from another, and yet their Cattle are very fat, for the Grass growing in Turffes of Earth, of two or three Feet square, that lie between the Rocks, which are of Limestone, is very sweet and nourishing; this Country belonged to the Ancient Family of the O'LOGHLENS, who then certainly aim'd at the Nominal Title of Kings and Princes of Burren —from this Principality along the adjoining Barony of CORCAMROE, and the Northern bleak Coast, is one continued Ledge of high, rocky, Cliffs to the West End of TUOHARAN; on this Western Cape or Headland lies the famous, Old, Fort RUAIN, call'd MOHAR, which is nearly the same as Fort in the Irish Language; this Mohar is the summit of a very high, stupendous Cliff, surrounded with a Stone Wall, a part of which is up; inside of it is a green Plain, which exhibits a clear Prospect of the gloomy Highlands of EYR CONNAUGHT, the Isles of AREN, of almost the whole Coast of MALBAY, and of the adjacent Country for many Miles.....

Numbers of different Ranks, from far and near resort hither every Summer to see this amazing Appearance and Curiosity of Nature.

Multitudes, likewise, in the fine Season, repair to various Parts of this Coast, for the benefit of the Northern Waters.

SOURCE: [Part 4 of A Short Tour; or, an Impartial and Accurate Description of the County of Clare with Some Particular and Historical Observations \(ucc.ie\)](#)

Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland 1845

The general features of the greater part of the barony of Burrin, are altogether different from those of any other part of the country. In the central portion of this district, the entire surface seems one unbroken mass of limestone rock; and the bare hills, rising from the shore to a great elevation, in regularly receding terraced flights, present a vast amphitheatrical outline. The disjointed blocks, composing the surface of this immense concavity, though not deposited with all the precision of the trap rocks, are laid generally in horizontal lines, giving to the whole, at a distance, a regular and formal character. The more elevated parts are destitute of herbage, and present to the eye an arid, cold, and joyless waste, unchanged by either summer's sun or winter's cold, and but little varied by either light or shade

SOURCE: https://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/places/burren_barony.htm

“Postscript” by Seamus Heaney

*And some time make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffeting come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.*

SOURCE: https://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/places/burren_barony.htm

INTRODUCTION

The Burren and Cliffs of Moher have long been recognised for their ethereal qualities and the interplay of a perceived sense of rocky barrenness with Mediterranean-like fertility. The grandeur of coastal cliffs and viewsapes; the Burren's subterranean mysteries and ancient neolithic sites; and the exceptional diversity of flora and fauna of this glacio-karst landscape have attracted visitors for centuries, and have been a source of inspiration for writers, poets, and artists alike for generations. Today, it continues to inspire through its geological and archeological sites, its discovery points and trails; its folklore and traditions; its local foods and contemporary art; and its community events and authentic welcome. The warmth of the rocks reinforce an inherent sense of wellbeing and connection with an ancient landscape.

It is this rich earth heritage that prompted the local authority, with the support of businesses and communities, to pursue international recognition for the area's geological value as a distinctive landscape, and in 2011 the Burren and Cliffs of Moher achieved Global Geopark status. The significance of this achievement was further reinforced in 2015 when the area was incorporated into the UNESCO Global Geopark programme. Designation remains in place for a period of four years at a time, after which the functioning and quality of the Geopark is thoroughly re-assessed. In 2024 the UNESCO status for the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark was revalidated for a further four-year period.

The ongoing management of the programme and the designation is fully supported by **Clare County Council** and **Geological Survey Ireland**. The Global Geopark, an area of 530 km², is recognised as a key attractor for the county within the 2030 *Clare Tourism Strategy*, and is regarded as critical to the growth of geotourism, and exemplary in its focus on practices in sustainable tourism.

This plan has been developed to provide direction for the next five years, and to ensure that the Geopark continues to focus on the key criteria of the UNESCO programme and the priorities of the Global Geoparks Network. In so doing, the county and North Clare in particular, will benefit from the international recognition and sense of accolade that is associated with the designation.



WHAT IS A GLOBAL GEOPARK AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE BURREN AND CLIFFS OF MOHER?

Quite simply, as UNESCO states: ***a UNESCO Global Geopark is like nowhere else on Earth. It is somewhere to touch, explore and connect with part of the Earth's story. As an area of unique geological interest, a Geopark is a place where you can discover extraordinary landscapes, places and people.***

The UNESCO Global Geopark programme is about finding ways to elevate exceptional natural heritage (landscapes and ecosystems); it is about promoting how the geographical terrain and geological characteristics have shaped human history – both the tangible and intangible elements of the cultural heritage within the geopark boundary; and it is about pursuing opportunities to use the designation to facilitate sustainable development and to explore other key issues facing society that are linked to our natural systems.

In 2025 there were 229 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 50 countries. The designation is designed to give local communities and businesses a sense of pride in their area and a renewed appreciation for landscapes that have international significance. It is not a legislative designation and does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside the Global Geopark, with ongoing activity continuing to comply with existing local and national legislation.

Here in the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark, the UNESCO designation brings added value to communities through providing a very specific context for strengthening sustainable tourism and leveraging the exceptional qualities of the landscape and associated traditions of life as a basis for creating a strong sense of place. The programme promotes research and learning, and seeks to deepen residents' and visitors' appreciation for the geological and cultural heritage. It is an initiative that is designed to empower, to facilitate dialogue and collaboration, and to form the basis for exploring innovative approaches to sustainable economic development. As such, it is a vehicle for change – an additional and strategic tool to create momentum and to make things happen.

In many cases, the designation plays a critical role in providing the visibility that is needed to promote market awareness, and in creating an operational structure that supports visitor management and sustainable tourism growth. Here in North Clare, the Burren and the Cliffs of Moher already benefit from many of these elements of destination development, and the industry is considered mature as a sector. The work of the Geopark is not intended to replace or duplicate existing efforts – rather, it aims at supporting and identifying ways of leveraging programmes and actions on the ground to add further value. Over the past twelve years since initial designation, the Geopark has become well recognised for its role in education, research, sustainability and the promotion of geotourism. This operations plan focuses on ensuring that the designation remains in place and that the collective activities involved in building a sustainable destination are recognised and supported in a way that ultimately accelerates the realisation of shared goals and aspirations.



Credit: <https://smapse.com/burren-incredible-landscapes-of-ireland/>

THE ‘STORY’ OF THE BURREN AND CLIFFS OF MOHER

The geological heritage

The landscape of the Burren has been shaped by geological forces for hundreds of millions of years.

The story begins in a tropical sea near the equator, and includes the development of a major river delta, the migration and collision of continents, the expansion and contraction of the polar ice caps and last but not least, the rain that sweeps in from the Atlantic today.

The rocks that make up the Burren were all formed during the Carboniferous period between 359 and 299 million years ago.

In the Burren there are two major rock types; the lighter coloured limestones to the north and east and the darker siltstones, shales and sandstones to the south west. The limestones which are characteristic of the typical bare Burren landscape were buried by the slightly younger siltstones and sandstones which make up the Cliffs of Moher.

The different rock types were formed under different conditions; the limestones, which contain fossil corals, crinoids and brachiopods were formed in a warm tropical sea near the equator, very much like the Bahamas today. The limestones were deposited slowly over a very long period of time, around 20 million years, and much of the rock is actually made up of little bits of broken fossils.

The shales, siltstones and sandstones that make up the Cliffs of Moher and the area south west of Lisdoonvarna and Kilfenora were formed much more rapidly from sand and silt being washed into the sea by a major river system which has long since disappeared. Fossils are not easy to find in these rocks although the traces left by creatures that crawled through the mud are readily seen in the famous Moher flagstones.

Shortly after these rocks were formed the entire continent collided with what is now Europe, causing the rocks which were originally horizontal, to become gently folded. All the rocks of the Burren are tilted slightly to the south. The enormous forces that caused the folding are also responsible for the many cracks and fissures that run through the limestone today.

Much later, about 2 million years ago, the ice age started in northern Europe. Huge masses of ice over 200m thick came from the north and north east and scoured the surface ripping up soil and rock and carving valleys and then depositing the rocks and clay as the ice melted. Today there are glacial erratics scattered across the Geopark.

The last Ice age ended around 15,000 years ago. Since then, the rain has been slowly dissolving the limestone – widening the fissures and forming many of the caves that can be seen through the Burren. Ireland’s longest cave and the third deepest cave is found at Poulnagollum, and Europe’s largest stalactite can be seen at Pol an Ionain, known as Doolin Cave. The combination of features formed by rain and ice are known as a glaciokarst landscape. The Burren is a globally significant example of this form of landscape.

The landscape continues to change with weathering and coastal erosion. The coastal sea stacks, sea stumps and caves that can be seen from the Cliffs of Moher are reminders of this ongoing evolution of landforms.

The visitor has the opportunity to discover the distinctive characteristics of this glaciokarst landscape at a range of Geopark sites, including Flaggy Shore, Fanore Beach, Doolin Cave, Aillwee Cave, the Cliffs of Moher, Doolin Pier, and Carron Polje and Turlough.



The archaeological heritage

The earliest evidence of humans inhabiting the Geopark can be traced to Fanore where hunter-gatherers arrived sometime before 4,000 BC. Shell middens have been identified along the coast. More permanent marks on the landscape began to appear after the start of the Neolithic Period (4,000 – 2,500BC), as inhabitants began to commemorate their dead. The portal tomb at Poul nabrone is an iconic image of ancient Ireland and is the oldest large scale human structure that is visible in the landscape of Ireland. The Geopark has the densest concentration of wedge tombs with over 80 found across the Burren.

Built heritage

The Geopark has a rich medieval history, all of it shaped by the stone of the landscape. A number of stone forts that functioned as tribal centres or ‘túatha’ – the jurisdictional or ‘kingdom’ unit of Gaelic Ireland, can be found across the Burren, such as the great stone forts and cahers of Caherballykinvarga, Cahercommaun, and Caherconail. From the sixth century monastic communities began to emerge, and there are as many as nineteen churches of the Burren túatha that claim early Christian ancestry. The Kilfenora high crosses and cathedral, and the Cistercian abbey of Corcomroe highlight this era.

By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries tower houses and ruig fort settlements were constructed as strongholds of the key ruling families. With the dispossession of Burren Gaelic families and transplantation of families into the area during the Cromwellian Settlement, fortified house architecture and walled pleasure gardens began to emerge.

Biodiversity

The Burren is home to about 1,100 plant species, representing about three quarters of the total plant species found in the whole of Ireland, including 24 of the 28 native orchid species. This diversity is virtually unparalleled and over 30,000 hectares have been designated as Special Areas of Conservation. The Geopark has a distinctive mix of Arctic-Alpine and Mediterranean species, with much of this diversity reflecting the warm Gulf Stream which acts as the natural temperature regulator of the limestone pavements, and the traditional practice of grazing the uplands in winter, referred to as ‘winterage’, which largely removes dominant grass species and thereby enabling the dormant flora light and resources to flourish in the flowering season with little impact from trampling.

Similarly, the fauna is noteworthy. Twenty-eight of Ireland’s butterfly species are found here, with two largely limited to this area – the pearl bordered fritillary and the brown hairstreak. With the abundance of shell-building calcium carbonate, there are over 70 species of land snails. Seven of the country’s nine bat species are present, and 95 species of bird have been recorded within the Geopark, at least fifty of which have used the Park for breeding. A range of larger species are found, including feral goats, foxes, and pine martens.

The visitor experience

The Geopark offers the visitor a wide number of opportunities to discover the distinctive attributes of the landscape, the intangible cultural heritage, traditional music and contemporary community life. Watching working farm sheepdogs, learning about beekeeping and dry stone wall construction, discovering local foods, exploring trails, celebrating in local events and festival are all experiences that deepen the visitor’s understanding of the Geopark past and present, and how the distinctive geo-heritage has played such an integral role in shaping the communities and the local economy.

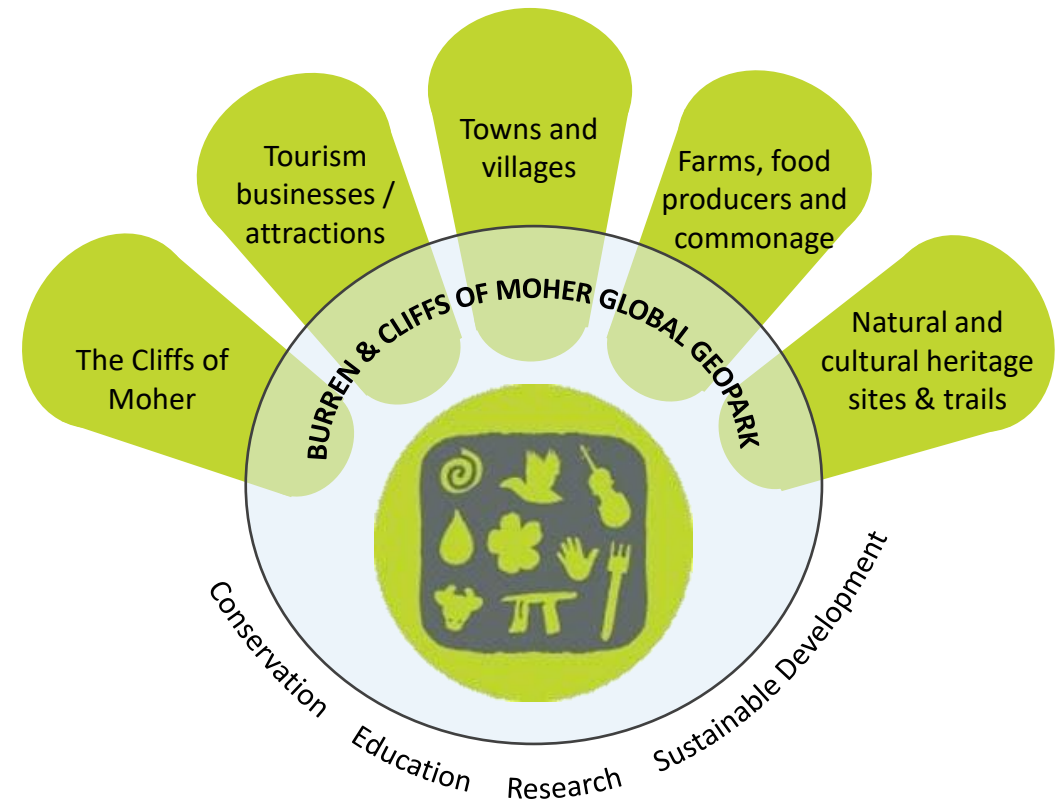


THE GLOBAL GEOPARK – A SHARED ASSET

A UNESCO Global Geopark leverages the international significance of its geological heritage, together with its related natural and cultural heritage to promote the visibility of a destination and to provide a platform for implementing sustainability. Geoparks are mandated to focus on conservation, education, research, and sustainable development, and are expected to use the area's geo-heritage to develop awareness of key issues facing society. In emphasising the sustainable use of the earth's resources, geoparks are playing a growing role in contributing to an understanding of climate change, geohazards and the impact of geo-processes on natural and cultural ecosystems.

The designation of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher as a UNESCO Global Geopark is a shared asset within North Clare. While Clare County Council acts as custodian of the designation and takes responsibility for the revalidation process that occurs every four years, and for ensuring that the area is meeting the UNESCO criteria, it can only do so through promoting the collective activities of all stakeholders. The Burren and Cliffs of Moher represent a 'mature' visitor destination with a strong cross-section of stakeholders that share in the stewardship of the area and in the delivery of a wide spectrum of programmes and experiences. On the ground, it is a composite of what already exists, now further unified through an international branding process and designation.

In this context, the Geopark should not be regarded simply as a defined geographic entity such as a national park, where a single stakeholder has entire responsibility for its management as a destination, but rather as a landscape and local economy that has evolved under the direction and vision of its communities, businesses, land owners, residents and state agencies. It is a tapestry of stories where the geological heritage and its impact on landscape, the cultural heritage and people's daily lives are interwoven and brought to the fore. When viewed from this perspective, **the UNESCO designation adds value to all that has been achieved to date** and has the potential to significantly raise the profile of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher as an internationally significant destination.



The Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark – a composite of existing economic attributes and elements of place

THE GLOBAL GEOPARK – ITS STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR PRIMARY IMPACT/ROLE WITHIN THE GEOPARK

STAKEHOLDER	NATURE OF ORGANISATION	PRIMARY IMPACT/ROLE	POLICY CONTEXT
Clare County Council	Local government – the day-to-day operations are carried out by a Global Geopark Manager and a Geologist. Both positions sit within the Tourism Development Directorate.	- Day to day operations of the Geopark. - Managing the designation and overseeing the re-validation. - Research; educational programming and events, management of the Geopark Code of Practice; branding and communications; Geopark sites and trails; Geopark signage and interpretation; liaising with stakeholders and global networking.	- Implementation of the <i>Clare County Tourism Strategy 2030</i>, including recommendations specific to the Geopark relating to traffic management, Geopark sites and trails, and a wide range of initiatives designed to support tourism across the county. - County Council owns the Cliffs of Moher visitor experience. <i>Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029</i> – wide range of policies that relate to the conservation and management of the landscape, ecosystems, cultural heritage, economic development and climate change – all applicable to the Geopark. - Enforcement of regulations on sites protected under the County Development Plan.
Cliffs of Moher	The Cliffs of Moher Centre DAC (COMCDAC) is a company established to operate the Cliffs of Moher Experience on behalf of Clare County Council through the Directorate of Rural Development and West Clare Municipal District.	- Development and operations of the Cliffs of Moher Experience – a Global Geopark site. - Delivery of a range of on-site interpretive and visitor experience services.	The Draft 2040 Strategy for the Cliffs of Moher – <i>Our mission is to deliver world-class experiences in a safe, accessible, authentic, and welcoming environment. We will champion best practice in managing for sustainability and conservation of the Cliffs of Moher, our environment and our culture and heritage, while protecting the status of The Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark.....</i>
Fáilte Ireland / Implementation Group for the DEDP	Ireland's National Tourism Development Authority. The Implementation Group is a multi-sectoral working group representative of stakeholders across the Geopark.	Convened regularly to oversee destination management within the Geopark area, through facilitating the implementation of the <i>Burren and Cliffs of Moher Destination and Experience Development Plan</i>.	<i>The Wild Atlantic Way Regional Tourism Development strategy 2023-2027</i> <i>The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Destination and Experience Development Plan</i> – designed to guide the management and development of all aspects of the visitor experience.

STAKEHOLDER	NATURE OF ORGANISATION	PRIMARY IMPACT/ROLE	POLICY CONTEXT
BURREN TOURISM BUSINESSES AND ATTRACTIONS			
Burren Ecotourism Network CLG (BEN)	BEN is a network of tourism enterprises with the objective of establishing the Burren as a premier internationally-recognised sustainable tourism region. Membership is subject to compliance with the Geopark Code of Conduct. It operates under the direction of a Board of Directors.	- Facilitates its members to build a sustainable tourism economy by providing them with training, networking, marketing, business development and partnership opportunities, and through enabling them to make an active contribution to the conservation of the region. - Provides a wide range of visitor experiences across the geopark – attractions, culinary and food producer experiences, accommodation, cultural heritage sites, and leisure activities.	<i>Burren Ecotourism Network CLG Draft Strategic Plan 2024-2028</i> – focusing on four pillars: - Environment and climate action - Networking and training - Innovation and inclusion - Marketing and promotion
COMMUNITIES AND RESIDENTS WITHIN THE BURREN LANDSCAPE			
Communities / North Clare Communities Group (NCCG)	NCCG is a joint initiative of Lisdoonvarna Fáilte and Clare Local Development Company (CLDC), the communities of Ballyvaughan, Carron, Doolin, Fanore, Lisdoonvarna, Kilfenora, Kilshanny and New Quay.	- Community-led planning for north Clare to address emerging issues and opportunities and to maximise cross-community relationships. - Individual communities play a key role in welcoming and servicing visitors through visitor centres and local businesses.	
Local community-based conservation groups and organisations actively promoting sustainability. Examples include: - Burrenbeo Trust - Hometree - Common Knowledge	- Burrenbeo Trust is a landscape charity set up to create greater appreciation for the Burren landscape (and beyond). - Hometree – focuses on establishing and conserving permanent native woodland in Ireland, and encouraging land regeneration and biodiversity. - Common Knowledge – a sharing of skills to promote sustainability	These community-based groups are all seeking to work towards a more sustainable future for the Burren – its landscapes, its biodiversity and its community well-being. Collectively, they are enhancing the role of local residents in place-based stewardship, dissemination of knowledge and skills development. The work of these organisations contributes to a sense of informed pride in the Burren and to the development of strong connections between local residents and unique landscape and ecosystems of the Geopark.	

STAKEHOLDER	NATURE OF ORGANISATION	PRIMARY IMPACT/ROLE	POLICY CONTEXT
FARMERS			
ACRES Burren Aran / funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM)	An agri-environmental scheme (building on the Burren Programme 2015-2022) that works with farmers in managing and conserving ecological, archaeological, geological and cultural heritage of the Burren.	- Supports results-based payments for the condition of the species-rich land, with a new focus on improving biodiversity and water quality within the farm lands. - Working with owners of commonages to create management and action plans through results-based payments.	<i>Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, CAP Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027</i> and in ACRES Terms and Conditions, Specifications and Circulars
HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION OF SITES AND TRAILS – OTHER RELEVANT AGENCIES			
National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)	An Executive agency that oversees policy and management of National Parks and Reserves, the Wildlife Acts and EU NATURA Policy, and invasive species management, in addition to other roles.	- Management of the Burren National Park and delivery of the park's visitor experience, including the operation of the Burren National Park Information Point in Corofin. - Promotion of home-based learning relating to the national park. - Seven way-marked walking trails in the Burren National Park and Slieve Carran Nature Reserve; guided walks.	<i>The National Parks and Wildlife Service Strategic Plan 2023-25</i> – identifies priorities in core areas which include nature conservation, and national parks and nature reserves. <i>Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030</i> - Enforcement of regulation and management of SACs and SPAs are protected under the EU Habitats Directive
Office of Public Works (OPW) and National Monument Service (NMS)	OPW: conservation and management (including visitor services) of heritage property and archaeological sites that are in state care. NMS: Archaeological issues arising at National Monuments in State care.	Management of visitor impact on archaeological and heritage sites – such as Poulnabrone; Kilfenora Abbey, cathedral and crosses; Corcomroe Abbey; Cahercommaun cashel and Ballyallaban ringfort.	<i>OPW Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-2026</i> – OPW is increasing its focus on implementing best practice for biodiversity in the management of its heritage sites. <i>NMS Built and Archaeological Heritage – Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan</i>
Clare Local Development Company	A local, community-led organisation committed to the support and empowerment of communities and individuals in County Clare.	- Manages the Walks Scheme in North Clare, maintaining the long-distance Burren Way (114 km), the Ballyvaughan Wood loop (9 km), the Blackhead loop (26 km), the Carran Loop (9 km), The Lough Avalla Farm loop (6 km), the Templecronan loop (5 km), the Fanore to Ballyvaughan Trek (21 km), and the Cliffs of Moher coastal walk (20 km). - Employs a Rural Recreation Officer to oversee rural recreation access. - Manages LEADER capital grants programmes for tourism development	

STAKEHOLDER	NATURE OF ORGANISATION	PRIMARY IMPACT/ROLE	POLICY CONTEXT
GEOSCIENCE PARTNERS			
Geological Survey Ireland	Geological Survey Ireland is Ireland's public earth science knowledge centre and is a division of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications..	- Provides financial contributions to support the position of the Geopark Geologist. - Supports the research and education roles through providing expertise in all aspects of geology and geo-heritage in Ireland.	The Geoheritage Programme has responsibility for the promotion and protection of sites of geological importance
Burren College of Arts	An international college affiliated with the University of Galway. The Burren College of Art promotes a holistic understanding of the landscape, ecology and cultural history of the Burren through a variety of programmes and modules. The Geopark geologist contributes to these modules delivering classes and field trips in the Burren.		
Burren Outdoor Education and Training Centre	A campus of the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The Geopark geologist delivers an annual adult evening course on the geology of the Burren.		
Universities and scientific institutions	The Global Geopark works with a range of experts in various earth science and geological fields. A wide range of joint projects are underway. - University of Galway – Department of Earth Sciences - Dr. Tiernan Henry (hydrology projects); - Dr. John Murray (palaeontological research) - Dr. Gordon Bromley (glacial clay deposits of the caves of the Burren) - University College Dublin – School of Earth Sciences: Dr. Paddy Orr (trace fossils) - Natural History Museum, Paris, France: Dr. Olivier Bethoux and Dr. Damien Germain (paleobotany and vertebrate discoveries) - Decombeix University of Montpellier, France: Dr. Anne-Laure Decombeix (paleobotany and vertebrate discoveries) - University of Lausanne, Switzerland: Dr. Pierre Gueriau (new discoveries of fossil arthropods) - Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Netherlands: Dr. Stephen Donavan (new discoveries of fossil crinoids) - University of Milan, Italy: Professor Lucia Angiolini (isotope analysis of fossil brachiopods) - University of Durham: Professor David Harper (isotope analysis of fossil brachiopods) - University of Colorado, Boulder, USA: Prof Wayne Itano (new discoveries of fossil sharks) - Natural History Museum, Dublin: Dr. Aodhán Ó' Gogáin (new discoveries of fossil sharks)		

KEY PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

An analysis of the Geopark programme to date and the broader context has highlighted five key planning considerations that will need to be addressed in this operational plan.

RELEVANCE: UNESCO Global Geopark status has increasing value and status in the international market place. Continuing to build an understanding of this brand value locally and its relevance nationally and internationally, is critical in strengthening the positioning of the Geopark as a destination of global significance and in promoting pride in the designation. Recent research carried out by the UK National Commission for UNESCO¹ has demonstrated that affiliating with UNESCO can build global visibility, and can help to engage the local community, broker local partnerships and forge international partnerships. In 2023, the UK Commission launched a social media campaign to raise awareness of the country's UNESCO sites, and to encourage visitation through leveraging the international brand – with translations of an interactive map in seven languages. Similarly, Scotland has created a national UNESCO trail which has had considerable success in raising the visibility of designated sites and in attracting visitors with an interest in sustainability and world heritage. Here, in north Clare, deepening the level of local appreciation for the Global Geopark designation remains an ongoing objective.

FACILITATION: The UNESCO criteria for Global Geoparks are extensive and varied. The Global Geopark Network's most recent Strategic Plan (2024-2025) outlines the Network's key priorities, actions and expected results for its members. Meeting the UNESCO criteria and the GNN priorities successfully cannot be achieved in isolation to what is generally happening within the Geopark, and must be looked at in the context of what all stakeholders are working towards. To this end, it is recognised that the positioning of the Geopark within the wider community needs to be re-oriented to become a much stronger platform that enables and facilitates, rather than working in a singular fashion. There is an opportunity to assist in 'joining the dots' in a way that enhances the value of what all stakeholders are seeking to do in working towards a vision of a dynamic and sustainable destination.

SUSTAINABILITY: While this has been the cornerstone of Geopark activity to date² and characterises the work of stakeholders at large, these efforts need to be further aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria for the County of Clare as a certified sustainable destination³, and the GNN Strategic Plan.

Strategic alignment with Clare County's Climate Action Plan, Heritage Plan, Biodiversity Action Plan and the Greener Clare Programme is to be strengthened. Such alignment will further support key sustainable priorities in the GGN strategy relating to climate change, mitigating natural disasters, conservation and protection of heritage resources, management and protection of water resources and marine ecosystems, implementing the SDG's, empowering local communities and encouraging youth engagement.

COLLABORATION: Effective facilitation requires strategic collaboration – the underpinning Goal 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UNESCO/GNN networking criteria and the first step in GSTC Destination management. This includes networking with other UNESCO Global Geoparks – a key requirement of the GNN.

From the outset, the Geopark's foundation was firmly built on the concept of collaboration. However, the outworking of this has changed with a number of new structures and organisations entering the operating context. Building a strong 'partnership enabling ecosystem' will now need to be a priority for the Geopark if it is to maximise its objectives and continue to meet the UNESCO Global Geopark criteria and the expectations of local communities and businesses. This will require establishing a new approach to working together that recognises the importance of existing networks and seeks to work more effectively within a 'network of networks'.

¹ UK National Commission for UNESCO, 2020, *The national value of UNESCO designations to the United Kingdom*

² Examples include, the Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism Businesses and the support for the Burren Ecotourism Network and GEOfood

³ www.visitclare.ie/sustainable

CATALYTIC: the work of the Geopark to date has had an impact well beyond the boundaries of the Global Geopark. The Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism Businesses and the partnership with the Burren Ecotourism Network to champion the Code have been foundational to promoting sustainable tourism development. The Code's success within the Geopark and its alignment with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's criteria for certifying sustainable destinations have set the stage for its application across the county. Similarly, the Geopark's work in spear-heading the county-wide Green Team initiative and its linkages with the county's participation in the national SDG Champions programme, together with the impact of the Burren Ambassadors Training module within and well beyond the boundary of the Geopark all demonstrate the catalytic effect that the Geopark is having across the county. These achievements highlight the potential of the Geopark to stimulate transformational development and to exemplify best practice on a national and international stage. Its stature as a sustainable tourism destination could potentially be further enhanced through the work that NPWS is spearheading in partnership with the Geopark to achieve Europarc status. Continuing to explore ways of strengthening this catalytic role through strong collaboration remains a key priority for this Operations Plan.

OUR ASPIRATIONS

Looking toward 2030, we aspire to:

- Strengthen the relevance of our vision
- Work with partners to establish strong national recognition for Global Geoparks as dynamic geotourism destinations in Ireland
- Re-energise our engagement with our stakeholders, and deepen the shared philosophical commitment to the Geopark as a basis for building a strong and sustainable tourism economy and a high level of appreciation for our distinctive landscape
- Assist in developing mechanisms to stimulate new thinking and facilitate collective action in education and learning (note: Burren College of Art is looking to lead on this)
- Position the Global Geopark as a key mechanism to implement measurable actions to achieve sustainable goals
- Promote recognition of the Burren for its local foods as an expression of its distinctive landscape, and continue to work collaboratively to animate the destination
- Extend our messaging to new audiences

The development of this Operations Plan offers an opportunity to address these planning considerations and to shape the Geopark's strategic direction in alignment with these aspirations.

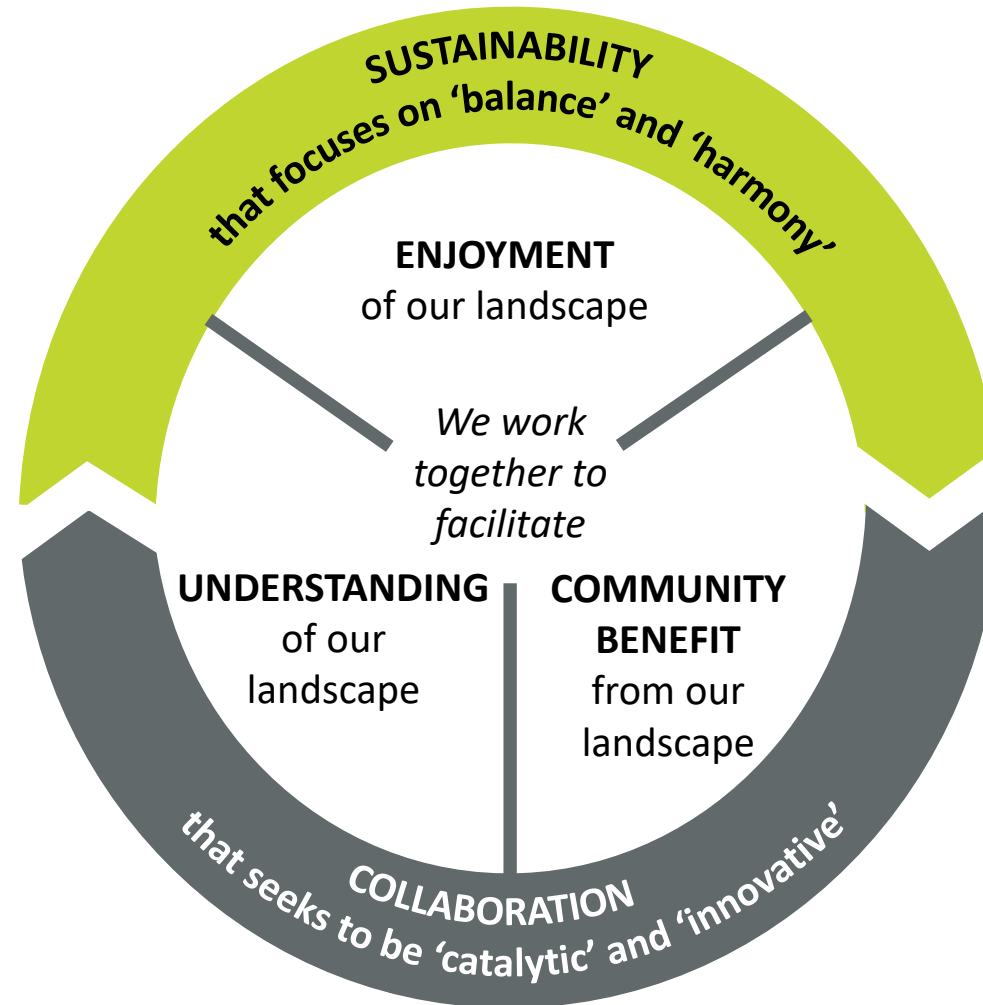




STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

OUR VISION
A dynamic and sustainable destination recognised for its globally significant landscape and diverse experiences, and its collaborative model of innovative co-management



OUR MISSION
We work harmoniously to facilitate the sustainable enjoyment of our Global Geopark landscape; promote a deeply embedded understanding of its international significance, and ensure the measurable enhancement of benefits to our communities and businesses through co-managed exemplary projects and programmes

OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

We will work to:

- **Raise awareness of the value of the UNESCO designation**
- **Become a platform for dialogue and effective cross-sector engagement on achieving the vision**
- **Be a key instrument for sustainable goals, standards and actions**
- **Deepen the understanding and appreciation for the significance of our natural and cultural diversity**
- **Develop systems to support revalidation based on shared achievements**

OUR ACTIONS:

We will work to:

- **Raise awareness of the value of the designation**
- **Become a platform for dialogue and effective cross-sector engagement on achieving the vision**
- **Be a key instrument for sustainable goals, standards and actions**
- **Deepen the understanding and appreciation for the significance of our geo-diversity**
- **Develop systems to support revalidation based on shared achievements**

1. ESTABLISH A NEW APPROACH TO WORKING TOGETHER

The UNESCO criteria that underlie designation are multi-faceted, with a range of stakeholders contributing to the requirements. As a shared asset, it is important to strengthen the mechanism for multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral discussion on the Geopark – the sustainability of its landscape, its economy, the visitor experience, and its way of life. This will minimise a siloed approach and will provide the Geopark team with strategic input.

In assessing existing leadership structures, there are emerging opportunities to create a collaborative structure that links with the *Clare Sustainable Destination Certification Programme's* Green Team, the Implementation Group for Fáilte Ireland's *Burren and Cliffs of Moher Destination and Experience Development Plan* and the upcoming Europarc Forum's Tourism Action Plan that supports the application by the Geopark and the NPWS to the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas*.

These plans are working documents that address the overall management of tourism and include a wide range of initiatives that relate directly to the Geopark. The following actions are recommended:

- Facilitate stakeholder dialogue and engagement on Geopark opportunities through all three programmes.
- Reassess stakeholder representation and expand as appropriate.
- Establish thematic/project working groups as specific opportunities arise to stimulate more focused dialogue.

2. CONTINUE TO BUILD STRONG COMMUNICATIONS ACROSS ALL AUDIENCES

Enhanced communications is one of the fundamental elements in raising awareness of the value of the designation locally and nationally. Build on existing progress to communicate with a broad cross-section of audiences through the following actions:

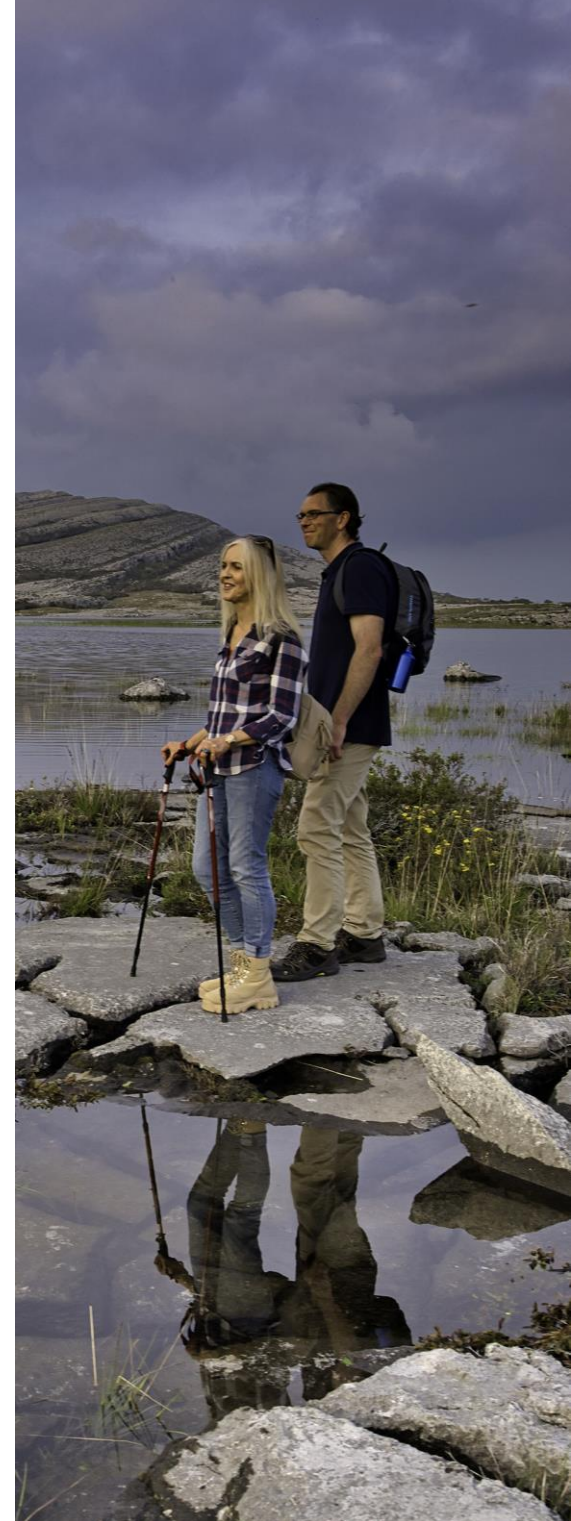
- Develop an internal communications plan that clearly identifies the audiences and the key messages by audience.
- Update the website and create a news section that highlights current activities. Work with stakeholders to promote and share events or news as relevant.
- Create direct links between the Geopark website and BEN website www.burren.ie to cross facilitate AI generated itineraries featuring businesses engaged in sustainable actions. Work with BEN to digitise the physical Geopark map.
- Establish a small working group through the Europarc, DEDP Implementation Group and BEN to discuss new ideas for creative and bespoke experiences. These can be promoted on the Geopark website, with the bookable feature linking through to the primary business.
- Expand the messaging on the website to raise the profile of sustainable tourism goals, standards and actions, climate change, biodiversity, and geohazards, and related research and/or actions; and work towards positioning the website as a comprehensive resource on geodiversity. A regular refresh will maintain interest levels.
- Develop a shareable image bank and promote it as a community resource.
- Prepare regular "Geopark Corner" material for the Clare County Council newsletter 'Banner Bulletin' and continue developing articles for 'The Clare Champion'.

3. DEVELOP A PHYSICAL PRESENCE OF GLOBAL GEOPARK REPRESENTATIVES ON THE GROUND

- Work towards introducing a Geopark branded ranger presence.
 - Request Clare County Council to provide a ranger at General Operative level, working across all geosites to perform the role of site monitoring and visitor management
 - Consider utilising a Geopark branded vehicle to increase sense of presence.
 - Rebrand the County Council beach ambassadors on Fanore Beach as 'Geopark ambassadors'.
 - Develop a short training programme for both options to enhance the knowledge base of the ranger and beach ambassadors on the wider Geopark.
- Continue to deliver the Geoparks ambassador Programme to coach drivers, incoming operators and front of house staff at local visitor centres, accommodation and other services.
- Explore the potential to further tailor this existing Ambassadors Programme with the intent of training youth volunteers that could represent the Geopark at community events.
 - Establish a small team of volunteers that would engage informally with the public at events such as Ballyvaughan Farmers Market or community public spaces during select summer weekends.
 - Ensure youth volunteers are 'branded' in some form to increase visibility.
 - If beneficial, consider developing pop-up materials that will encourage dialogue.

4. MAINTAIN AN EMPHASIS ON SUSTAINABILITY AS A BEDROCK PRINCIPLE

- Continue to implement the Code of Practice within the Burren Ecotourism Network.
- Continue to work through Clare County Council to embed the county-wide Destination Certification programme on sustainability with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.
- Align the Geopark work programme with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the GGN sustainable criteria and the Council's Climate Action, Heritage and Biodiversity strategies.
- Work with NPWS on applying for Europarc Status for the Geopark region, emphasising and reinforcing the sustainable activities the Geopark and NPWS co-operate on. This programme will further strengthen collaboration between the two organisations.
- Expand opportunities to engage in regular research initiatives that will underpin the Code of Practice and the destination certification programme. This will include visitor, business and resident surveys, and will build an understanding of Geopark awareness, visitor spend, length of stay, and value of the designation to the community.



OUR ACTIONS:

We will work to:

- **Raise awareness of the value of the designation**
- **Become a platform for dialogue and effective cross-sector engagement on achieving the vision**
- **Be a key instrument for sustainable goals, standards and actions**
- **Deepen the understanding and appreciation for the significance of our geo-diversity**
- **Develop systems to support revalidation based on shared achievements**

5. CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN THE EMPHASIS ON RESEARCH AND GEO-HERITAGE EDUCATION

- Continue to work with and increase alliances with academic institutions and other Geopark based learning and educational organisations to promote research and educational interests in the Geopark.
 - Explore opportunities to further expand these interests into place-based research relating to climate change, biodiversity and/or geo-hazards.
- Promote the ‘working arrangements’ with institutions to the wider public to increase visibility of these relationships.
- Continue to deliver the existing school and adult education programmes, including the Geology of the Burren evening courses and the international geology summer school.
- Use the DEDP Implementation Group to discuss the role of education and interpretation with the intent of maximising all stakeholder interests and activities in a strategic manner.
- Complete and publish the forthcoming revised edition of *Stone, Water and Ice*.
- Continue to work with communities in citizen science initiatives and the partnerships involved in supporting the Young Scientist Competitions.

6. ELEVATE LOCAL FOODS AND RELATED EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE GEOFOODS INITIATIVE

- Establish a small working group to discuss new approaches that will elevate local foods, food producers, the geo-heritage of foods, and the opportunities to strengthen local food security.
- Establish links with the Department of Agriculture, Teagasc, Mid West Bio-District and LEO to develop connections with and support from wider regional local food strategies.
- Position the Geopark as a local think tank in the promotion of linkages between local food, sustainability and health to inform wider regional strategies, bringing together farmers, residents, researchers, artists, hobby growers and food producers.
- Explore ways of strengthening the use of the GEOfood label to preserve the integrity of what is local to the Geopark and to encourage the development of local foods and food experiences.
- Work with existing events and products, including the Burren Food Trail, to bring the brand of GEOfood increasingly to the fore and to ensure the brand adds value to participants.

7. DEVELOP AN EVENTS PROGRAMME THAT PROMOTES COLLABORATION

- Develop a short overview plan for Geopark events and supported events and clearly highlight the role of the Global Geopark in each, the objectives in relation to the Geopark, and the monitoring frameworks.
 - Highlight the Geopark signature events, such as the Food events, Burren Academy and Furnace Festival and clarify how the events will be developed and supported going forward. Consider exploring opportunities to work with partners in creating packages that will add value to the events.
- Host an event prior to or during each UNESCO revalidation visit that profiles the stakeholder activities and accomplishments – highlighting how they support the designation and the revalidation process. This event could coincide with a Code of Practice Awards event.
 - Encourage attendance from other Global Geoparks and their stakeholder audiences.
 - Invite the Irish UNESCO representatives.
- Use events to promote local foods and local producers.

8. CONTINUE TO DEVELOP AND DISTRIBUTE VISITOR INFORMATION AND UPGRADE SIGNAGE

- Continue to print and distribute the free visitor maps, *Stone, Water and Ice* and the Burren Explorer.
- Continue to implement the Geopark signage programme, using QR technology to enhance the messaging where relevant and manage the removal of old and out-dated signs.
- Ensure that the discussions through the Europarc and DEDP Implementation Groups include regular updates on signage to avoid signage initiatives being siloed.

9. MAINTAIN THE CURRENT FOCUS ON NETWORKING

- Continue to meet the Global Geopark Network obligations and to seek opportunities to pursue initiatives with international partners.
- Provide strong visibility for related projects.

10. DEVELOP SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THE REVALIDATION

- Work through the Europarc and DEDP Implementation Group and the Destination Green Team to develop stakeholder agreements on reporting protocols, work with stakeholders to report and acknowledge their activities that contribute to the designation criteria.
- Work towards developing an annual reporting template as a DEDP Implementation Group output and use these reports to simplify the preparation of the UNESCO revalidation documents.



