



UNESCO-accredited Geopark status for the Burren

Results of November series of public discussion meetings

Background

During November, Burren Connect held a series of nine public discussion meetings on Geopark status in various locations throughout the Burren. Each meeting began with a short presentation on Burren Connect by Carol Gleeson (Project Manager) and a presentation on Geoparks by Dr Maria McNamara (Geopark Geologist). These presentations were then followed by a lengthy open-floor discussion among all present, during which various issues were raised. Before the end of each meeting, attendees were asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide us with a record of individuals' thoughts and concerns.

This document summarises the responses in the completed questionnaires and the issues raised by those who attended the meetings.

Results: questionnaire responses

The meetings were attended by a total of 108 people. 99 completed questionnaires were returned to us.

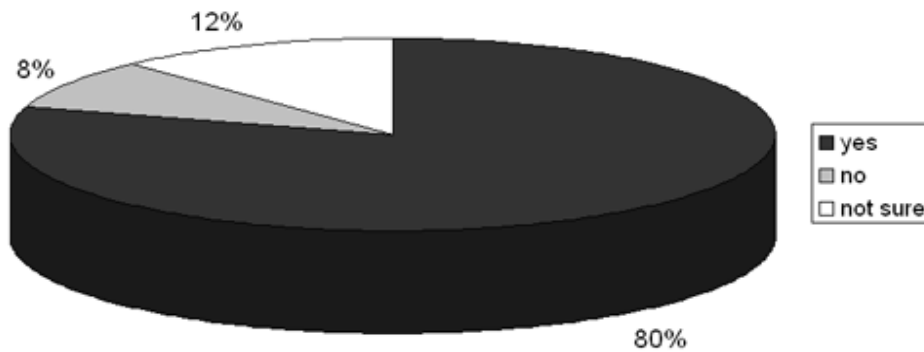
Attendees were asked to indicate their socio-economic group: landowner / education provider / tourism provider / interested resident / visitor / other.

Landowner	55%
Tourism provider	24%
Education provider	8%
Interested resident	40%
Visitor	2%
Other	7%

(the percentages add up to greater than 100 as many attendees considered themselves to fall into more than one category)

Question 1.

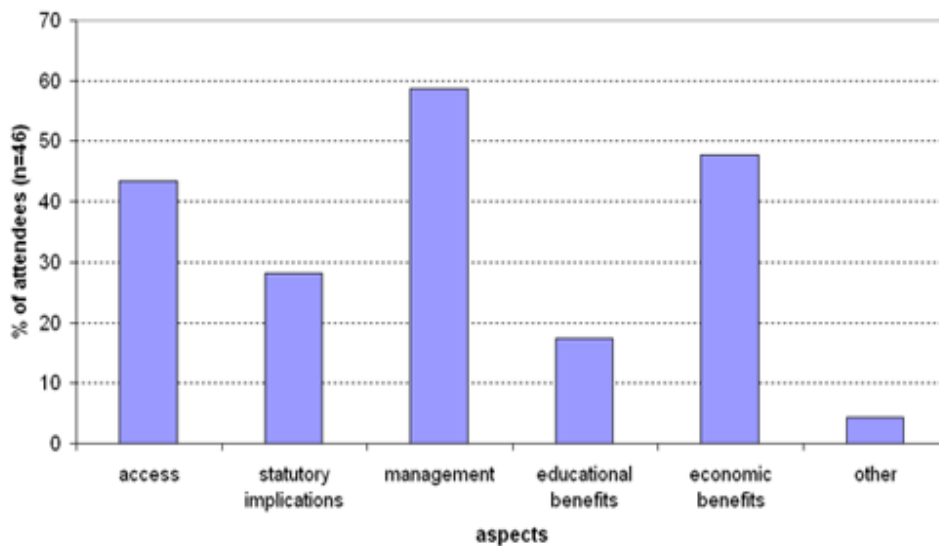
Q1: Do you feel you have a good understanding of what a Geopark is?



The majority of people who attended the meetings felt that they had a good grasp of the Geopark concept.

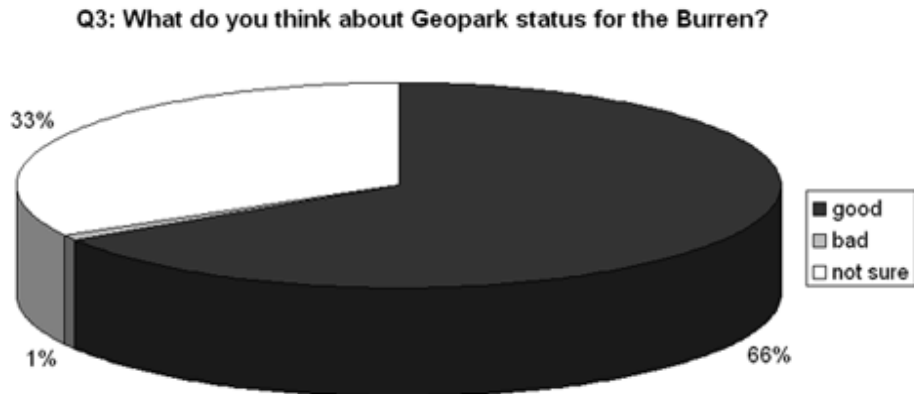
Question 2.

Q2: Would you like more information on...



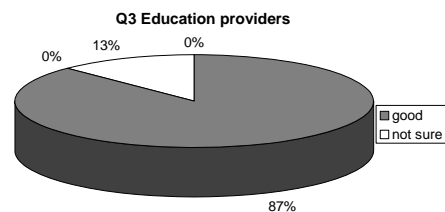
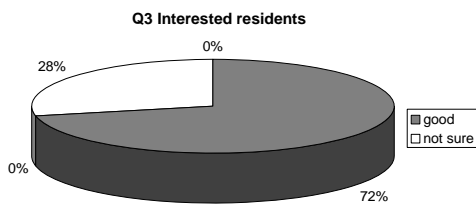
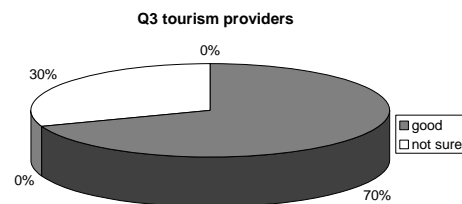
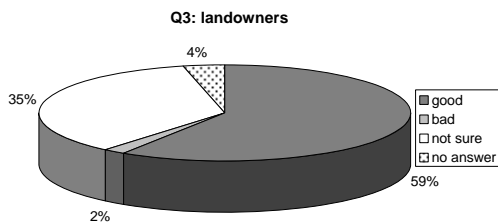
A total of 46 people – almost half of the attendees – indicated that they would like to receive more information on certain aspects of Geopark status. Management structure, economic benefits, and access issues were the areas most commonly selected.

Question 3.



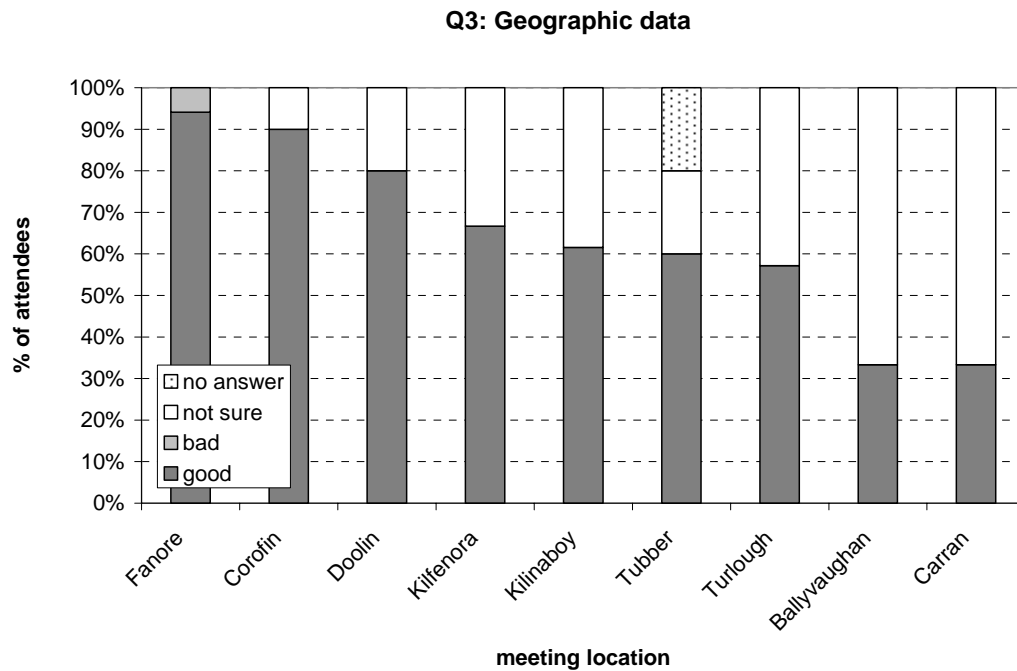
Two-thirds of attendees indicated that they thought that Geopark status would be good for the Burren; one individual thought it would be bad for the Burren, and the remaining one-third of attendees were unsure.

We then analysed the responses to this question for each socio-economic group.



Education providers were the most positive towards Geopark status, with 87% indicating they thought it would be good for the Burren, followed by interested residents (72%), tourism providers (70%) and landowners (59%).

We also analysed the responses to Question 3 for each meeting location.



Attendees at the Fanore, Corofin, and Doolin meetings were most positive towards Geopark status, with 94%, 90% and 80% of attendees indicating they thought it would be a good thing for the Burren. Attendees at the Kilfenora, Kilinaboy, Tubber and Turlough meetings were slightly less positive, with 67%, 62%, 60% and 57% of attendees indicating they thought Geopark status would benefit the Burren. Attendees at the Ballyvaughan and Carran meetings were least sure about Geopark status: in each case, 33% of attendees thought Geopark status would be good for the Burren. With three exceptions (one “no” and two abstainees), the other attendees at the meetings were unsure about Geopark status.

Issues raised

The main issues raised during the discussions at the meetings, and in the comments on the questionnaires, are as follows (statements in inverted commas are direct quotations from the questionnaires):

- *Future legislative implications; need to safeguard against same*

“People are genuinely concerned that this could further impact on their livelihood if not now, then maybe sometime in the future.”

“Concerns re further restrictions on development.”

- *Access to sites; adequacy of regional infrastructure*

“The word Park. What does this word mean to people. Freedom to roam?”

“Roads are not suitable for coaches.”

“Insufficient facilities for tourists at existing sites.”

- *Maintenance of sites, particularly any sites on private land*

“Who will police walk ways?”

“Evident problems re access to private lands - seems focussed on issue of liability.”

- *Lack of trust between local community and the County Council*

“We need more information and better communication between council and local residents”

“I'm very sceptical about beaurocracy and how much officials have our interests at heart.”

- *Management structure of a Geopark; how local residents will be involved*

“Should be part of an overall development plan for the area.”

“Feel that it is very important that it is resident-lead”

“Project should come through Burren communities”

- *Role of farmers/landowners; how they can benefit*

“Farmer must be central not alone in Geopark, but in any future considerations for the Burren.”

“What benefits will the people of the Burren see?”

- *Need to support existing programmes in the region*

“The benefit will come from co-ordinating and learning from Burrenbeo and existing ground-up initiatives.”

- *Other tourism issues*

“Anglers leave a lot of rubbish after them.”

“Unauthorised parking, campfires, travellers parking at beach.”

- *Benefits of Geopark status:*

“Seems to be a very good way of promoting the area and educating tourists and locals.”

“It would benefit all the community and should be put in place.”

“Good to hear you have plans for education programmes for schools.”

“My understanding from the meeting suggests the concept is positive, promotional and funding good sustainable tourism products.”

“The biggest challenge is to educate the local community about their resource they are sitting on and how will benefit from the area achieving Geopark status.”

- *Where to go from here*

“A further meeting outlining community feedback would be useful, with information on management and funding distribution etc.”

“Would like to discuss with other individuals and hear what people have to say on the idea.”

“Need to talk to people in another geopark about local feelings and interest.”

“All the various interested parties must be brought together and all their concerns addressed.”

“Suggest strong emphasis on potential for ecotourism development and local opportunities moving away from "honeypots". Try to put money into local pockets.”

What next?

We will be distributing an information leaflet on Geopark status to all households in North Clare during the first week of January. This will be followed by a public meeting towards the end of the month/start of February, to which we invite all interested parties throughout the region to attend. The purpose of this future meeting is to discuss the information in this document, particularly the issues raised at the November meetings, and to seek a way forward.