

Ecotourism Meeting
The Pavilion Theatre,
Lisdoonvarna,

June 26th 2008

Attendance:

Sean Davoren, Caherconnell Stone Fort
Mark Davoren, Caherconnell Stone Fort
Marie Neylon, Corofin Camping and Hostel
Frances Connole, Burren Centre
Gerry Mc Donagh, Clare Farm Family Support
Noel Walsh, Rockyview Farmhouse
Joanna McLnerney, Burren Outdoor Education Centre
Cathleen Connole, Ballyvaughan Development Group
Elodie Totain, Doorus Youth Hostel
John Connolly
Tony Burke Moran, Sleepzone Youth Hostel
Bernadette Gallery
Michael Barry
Ruairi O Conchuir
Chris O Neill, Burren Painting centre
Tony Kirby, Heart of Burren Walks
Michael Moore, Ballyvaughan Craft Workers
Bridget Sweeney, Burrenview B&B
Mary Gillard
Marian O'Callaghan, Chair, Burren Connect Advisory Group
Elaine Cleary, Burren Connect Project
Carol Gleeson, Burren Connect Project

The meeting was facilitated by John Burke. John has extensive experience in the preparation of business plans for enterprise development, in particular tourism related enterprises. John provides mentoring services to SME owners involved in new and existing enterprises. For the past number of years John has been involved in project evaluation and in particular evaluation of projects funded under the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace I and Peace II) and FAS. John also has experience in community development and in working with target groups of various programmes of support with a focus on Enterprise development, Training, Job creation, Combating Social Exclusion and Disadvantage. John has been working in a professional capacity as a consultant for the past 15 years. His work to-date has covered a broad spectrum of economic and social enterprises, mostly promoted by community groups. John is currently undertaking project evaluation for a number of groups that are supported by Border Action under the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

1. Welcome and introduction by Carol Gleeson, Project Manager, Burren Connect Project.

Carol outlined the background to this meeting; the results of last summer's survey showing a significant interest in the development of ecotourism amongst visitors and service providers, followed by a research trip to the Green Box, and a workshop in Kilfenora on the Greenbox model and of certification and training. This led to an agreement that another meeting would be held on how the development of Ecotourism could be progressed and to provide more detailed information on training programmes available. This is the purpose of this meeting.

Carol then introduced the speakers, John Burke, Consultant and Sinead Barris, Manager Responsible Tourism Skillsnet with the Greenbox.

2. Important Steps for Moving Forward – John Burke

- Ecotourism is a long slow process and does not happen overnight.
- Certification in ecotourism will give the provider an important competitive advantage over other providers in the area.
- Ecotourism is seen as not only about commercial benefits but also about environmental awareness and it attracts a different type of tourism in an area.
- The Greenbox structure can be used, not necessarily as a model to follow, but to show the need for structure in moving forward.
- There is a need for key players in the structure who can access funding and help to develop ecotourism but in a way that suits the needs of the Burren.

3. Training available through the Greenbox - Sinead Barris

Sinead is the network manager with the Responsible Tourism Skillnet. Sinead began by outlining that certification in the Greenbox area was a viable option for increasing tourism in an area where tourist number were low in the past. The point of the certification is to provide a recognised and accredited standards system. Tourists are beginning to seek out certified business and a number of labels, such as EU Flower label are now well established. With responsible Tourism Skillnet training, providers in the Burren could access funding through Skillnet to help towards costs incurred in training. Skillnet can substitute 50% - 60% of the costs in ecotourism training.

A certification process can take a number of years, for example an EU flower certification will last three years.

There is an Eco labelling system in place for non- accommodation providers, developed by the Greenbox themselves, although it is not recognised internationally it is in the process of getting recognised nationally.

Sinead presented three key courses that may be of interest to tourism business in the Burren.

1. Cert in Ecotourism (Single Subject) offered by Sligo IT. Skillnet are currently looking at arrangements whereby we can offer this at a distance level. This course runs over 8 days. They need about 16 participants to run the course. Details of the course outline are attached.
2. EU Ecolabel (The Flower) for Tourist Accommodation. This training course prepares the participant for an NSAI audit and the award of the EU Flower, an internationally recognized standard in environmental management. Detail attached.
3. The EcoLabel Tourism Package. This training course prepares the tourism provider for audit to achieve the Greenbox EcoLabel, a standard which recognizes the standards reached in environmental management. Detail attached.

Indications of cost within the course outlines are attached. These may change pending numbers involved and alternative funding we can source.

She also spoke about the short workshops on offer, details of which are on the website on www.responsibletourism.ie.

4. Reasons for attendance at meeting

Attendees were asked to write down what were there reasons for getting involved in the proposed Burren ecotourism project.

Out of 21 comments

- 11 attended because of their business interest and sustainability and to develop their business further.
- 6 attended out of concern for the environment
- 4 attended for local interest and information, 2 of whom queried the existence of an ecotourism 'project'.

5. Discussion Groups and feedback.

The attendees were grouped into four discussion groups and were asked to consider who should be involved in a structure moving forward. Attendees were also asked to give reasons why nominees should be involved.

Feedback from discussion groups

Group 1

Nominees	Reason why
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• source of funding
Failte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• marketing and publicity
Burren Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• existing structure• local business knowledge• good connections
Shannon development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• experience in marketing
Local Businesses (up to 50%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• need for local business interest• local representation

Group 2

Nominees	Reason why
Accommodation Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• genuine interest• knowledge of product• network alliance
Farming Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• local knowledge•
Farm Heritage Tourism Co –Op (in process of setting up)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• custodians of the landscape• Attractive product provider
Political Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• connections• funding
Failte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• funding
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• funding
Greenbox representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• advise• have experience
Holistic Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• already into eco practices• advice

Group 3 (Comment: Should contain 9-12 people)

Nominees	Reason why
Environmental & Heritage Officer, Clare County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge • expertise • funding
Shannon Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advice • influence
Faillte Ireland (ecotourism officer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advice • expertise
Burren Connect, BurrenBeo, Burren Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local groups • cohesiveness
Private Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders
Visitor Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in tourism activity • experience • interest in ecotourism
Outdoor Education Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current market • connections to VEC
Clare Tourism Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current involvement • expertise
Tourism Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current involvement • expertise

Group 4 (comment: felt that there needs to be a focused body interested in retaining the tourist longer in the area, centred on eco related issues and to manage the ecotourism structure)

Nominees	Reason why
Faillte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding • national body • connections • marketing
County Council through Burren Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding • experience • good track record
Farming Body Representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • custodians of the Burren • access to land
Visitor Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dissemination of information
Shannon Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local interest agency
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding • linkages with Burren connect
People with Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local people with time and energy to give
Local Business Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders

6. How will the project be moved forward – discussion facilitated by John Burke

Introductory comment: John highlighted the need to move forward, as it is a long process, and there is a need to create a profile and to lobby for investment.

A discussion ensued on the need for a working group; which a majority agreed was necessary.

It was also agreed that the creation of a working group should be the next stage of development. The level of consultation required was also discussed, and it was suggested that Statutory Bodies should be involved. It was agreed that the working group will be responsible for a broader level of consultation, which will be ongoing. Further discussions and meetings would only delay progress and generate a sense of disillusionment.

It was agreed that the agencies identified by the discussion groups should be invited to participate on the working group and that representatives of tourism related business be advertised for in the local press.

It was also agreed (proposed by Frances Connole and seconded by Gerry McDonough) that Burren Connect would facilitate the development of the Ecotourism Working Group, as the Burren Connect steering committee already included a number of agencies that were identified as key participants in the discussions and that the Burren Connect Advisory Committee also contained a number of key representatives in the Burren.

Carol Gleeson agreed to facilitate in taking the project forward and added that bodies not in the Burren Connect committees would be included at the next meeting which would set up the working group. In the meantime Burren Connect would seek nominations for representation through the existing Burren Connect steering and advisory committees, through advertising in the local media and through the participants of both public meetings held on this topic to date.

The next meeting will be advertised locally through the local media channels.

Minutes prepared by Carol Gleeson/Elaine Cleary. Burren Connect Project.