

Impact Assessment and Development of Bonane Heritage Centre Bonane, Kenmare, Co. Kerry



September 2009

Bonane Community Co-Operative Society Ltd.

Bonane, Co. Kerry

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An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta
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Executive Summary

The Bonane Community Co-Operative Society Ltd has commissioned this study to investigate the potential and feasibility of a fully accessible Heritage Centre to support the continued development of Bonane Heritage Park. It is envisaged that the Centre would also provide badly needed facilities for the local community. The building would therefore be multi-functional and of a scale appropriate to the context of the site and to the range of archaeological monuments on offer to visitors. In addition the Centre could serve as an interpretation point for the attractions of the wider Sheen River valley.

The Bonane Heritage Park has been in existence since 2006 and has proved to be a popular destination for both overseas and domestic visitors. Since its opening numbers have steadily increased from 3,500 to 5,000 visitors per year. The Sheen River valley provides a magnificent setting and with the possibility of access to many other sites of archaeological importance, representing one of the highest concentrations in the country.

The Park contains a variety of well-preserved archaeological sites and includes one of the most significant Stone Circles in Ireland. The wider Sheen valley is a landscape rich in archaeological heritage with upstanding monuments dating from the pre-historic period up to post-medieval times. Many of these sites are considered to have astronomical relationships with the Bonane monuments, reinforcing the interest and national significance of the Park.

Historical/Cultural tourism is recognised as a growing market, requiring a sophisticated product and high quality facilities. Overseas tourism to the South-West increased by 35% during 2003-2007 and the region is the most popular holiday destination for Irish residents. Around 35 national attractions with similar visitor numbers as Bonane already have established Visitor Centres. The Park is well-located in relation to existing visitor attractions, including long distance walking and cycling trails, and conveniently located on the N71 between Kenmare and Glengarriff.

The proposed site for the Heritage Centre, adjoining the Heritage Park, is ideally located for such a development due to its proximity to the main archaeological monuments and its established use. A Heritage Centre in this location is not anticipated to result in any adverse environmental impacts.

Following public consultation and discussions with the Co-Operative Society Steering Group, it was agreed that a new Visitor Centre should cater for the needs of both visitors (refreshments, sales, toilets) and the essential requirements of the local community (meeting and activity

rooms). In order to achieve a development appropriate to the scale to its surroundings and to arrive at a realistic construction budget, it was agreed that the new building would need to be around 250m².

The estimated construction costs of the Heritage Centre would therefore be €540,000.

In order to meet the ongoing running costs of the new building (estimated at €12,000 per year) it would be necessary to increase the existing numbers by 35% to 6,750 visitors per year, and to increase the existing entry charge from €4 to €5. Given the continued popularity of County Kerry as a visitor destination, and the attractions of the Heritage Park and the wider Sheen River valley, together with the entry charges of other comparable Visitor Centres, it is considered that these increases would be feasible.

Notwithstanding these increases, shortfalls in revenue during Years 1 and 2 can be expected, and only a low profit margin likely to be achieved by Year 3. Combined with the unpredictability of related revenue sources such as the café and general sales, it would be necessary to secure external funding (public and/or private) in order for the Visitor Centre at Bonane to be viable. Such additional funding could be in the order of €10,000 per year for the first 3 years of operation, and thereafter according to the success of established management and visitor activities.

The full range of funding sources would therefore need to be explored and a partnership approach adopted for the Heritage Centre that could include the County Council, the South Kerry Development Partnership Limited, Fáilte Ireland, Energy Ireland and other local bodies and corporate groups.

Based on the findings of this feasibility study it is recommended that a Visitor Centre at Bonane could succeed subject to:

- Sufficient funding being secured for construction within a reasonable timeframe (2-3 years);
- Achieving adequate sources of continuing revenue to cover part of the running/staffing costs (Years 1-3 in particular);
- Achieving and sustaining an increase in visitor numbers of around 35%, by expanding the attraction of the facility;
- Successful promotion and marketing in co-operation with other similar attractions in South West Kerry;

- Obtaining planning permission within a reasonable timeframe, and minimising impacts through the EIA process; and
- Maintaining the full support of the local community and the dedication and commitment of the Bonane Co-Operative Society.

A new Visitor Centre would greatly enhance the attraction and interpretation of this important archaeological and tourist resource, while helping to sustain the local community. It would also provide a gateway to the wider Sheen River valley, thereby extending the visitor attraction of this part of the county and complementing the internationally recognised existing attractions such as Skellig Mhichil, Staigue Fort, Killarney National Park and Muckross House.

The Bonane Co-Operative Society has achieved considerable success to date in developing the Heritage Park and the realisation of a Heritage Centre has the full support of the whole community.



Aerial view of the Heritage Park

1. Introduction

1.1 The Project Brief

The purpose of the study is to research, identify and develop the Statement of Need into the development of a suitable Heritage Centre in Bonane that will provide an accessible and socially inclusive tourist attraction with minimum or no impact on the environment.

The site has only recently been set aside as a heritage attraction, through the efforts of the Bonane Community Co-Operative Society Ltd (formed in February 2002) with its principal objective being to enhance the historical sites at Bonane. The vision of the committee has always been that the Bonane Heritage Park should be owned and controlled by the community. All money generated through admissions contributes to the ongoing development of the Park. To raise additional funds, the group is also selling shares in the Co-operative Society.

As set out in the Project Brief, the objective of the study is:

To investigate the potential in developing a fully accessible Heritage Centre in Bonane with the aim of:

1. Improving the Archaeological and Historical awareness.
2. Improving the overall positive effect the Heritage Park has for the community.
3. Promote awareness and knowledge of regional and local flora and fauna, including any identified local unique material.
4. Promote awareness and knowledge of regional and local geology, including any identified unique formations.
5. Enhance the potential of the Tourism Economy.
6. Develop mitigation measures to minimise or eliminate any negative impacts on the environment in relation to development of the Heritage Centre and Park, inclusive of future potential project implementation.

In order to investigate the potential in developing a fully accessible Heritage Centre at Bonane, it will be necessary to improve the archaeological and historical awareness of the park. The archaeological sites in the park are varied and well presented at present. However further research into the monuments themselves and their setting in the park as a whole should be carried out.

A full and detailed inspection of the entire park should be carried out to ascertain if previously unrecorded archaeological sites or sites associated with the known monuments are present. Consultation with the relevant authorities and experts would be an essential element of the research.

The local, regional and national importance of the sites and the park should be assessed and the park should be settled comfortably and prominently into each category. Research to further enhance the sites in the park should also be carried out, including local studies, relevant journals other publications.

An estimated 250 archaeological sites are present in the wider area, representing one of the highest concentrations in the country. Recent studies show many of these sites are interrelated and some may have major astronomical significance. Further research is expected to identify the area to compliment if not equal other areas of national and international significance, such as the Boyne Valley in Co. Meath, Lough Gur in Co. Limerick and the Ceide Fields in Co. Mayo.

Methods to disseminate information in the park and in the centre should be devised, such as audio, visual and tactile techniques.

The park should be geared to welcome a variety of visitors and groups. Specific archaeological and heritage projects could be initiated during the year to include local, regional, national and international groups.

1.2 Scope and Content of the Study

The project area is primarily concerned with the Bonane Heritage Park but extends to include the wider Sheen River valley in order to provide the necessary context for the study.

Following this Introduction, Section 2 of the Study describes the Tourism Perspective in relation to the potential offered by Bonane in the national and regional contexts. Section 3 sets out the statutory planning context, with specific consideration of the provisions of the Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015 and the Bonane Local Area Plan. Sections 4 and 5 present appraisals of Landscape and Cultural Heritage respectively. Section 6 describes the main influences on the Visitor Experience and summarises the findings of the public consultation exercise. Section 7 makes recommendations on a possible Design Brief and Project Plan for a new Visitor Centre, while Section 8 presents an initial Environmental Impact Appraisal of the proposals.

1.3 Public Consultation

A Community Information Evening was held at the Lansdowne Arms Hotel, Kenmare, on Friday 3rd July at 8.00pm, to discuss the ongoing feasibility study on the Impact Assessment and Development of Bonane Heritage Centre. It was organised by the Co-Operative Society, and attended by around 35 people from the local community. Nicholas de Jong (Project Manager) and Sheila Lane

(Archaeologist) presented information on work carried out to date and initial impressions on the feasibility of a Heritage Centre. A questionnaire was made available at the meeting, requesting responses to some key questions relating to the need, purpose, content and location of a possible Heritage Centre, and 51 completed forms were returned.



View from the Heritage Park

2. Tourism Perspective

2.1 National Context

Tourism generally is recognised as an expanding national industry. Worldwide, international tourist numbers are expected to double over the next 20 years, but the profile and requirement of customers are changing rapidly and competition is becoming more intense. According to the Irish Government's Tourism Policy Review Group, tourism will in future be increasingly demand-driven with greater emphasis being placed on value for money, personal fulfilment, unique experiences, authenticity, emotional involvement and travel convenience.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-13, "Transforming Ireland", highlights tourism as an important indigenous industry with high employment intensity and the generation of substantial foreign revenue, which is largely retained within Ireland. The Plan indicates that the industry possesses the capacity and capital stock to achieve further growth in the future and to help promote regional development at a time when many indigenous sectors face major structural and trading difficulties.

Accordingly, the NDP provides for a product development and infrastructure sub-programme to upgrade and supplement Ireland's tourism attractions and activities. This targets facilities such as walking and cycling routes, jetties and moorings, angling stands, access paths to key areas of environmental and scenic interest, signposting and orientation facilities in heritage and historic towns. The Tourism Infrastructure Fund, the first initiative to be rolled out under this sub-programme, is of particular relevance to the future development of regional tourism, such as that promoted for Bonane.

It is recognised, however, that product development and innovation needs to be improved. The Tourism Policy Review Group indicates that Ireland's tourism product has become tired and lacking in verve and "bounce" for many tourists. The regional spread of tourism is giving cause for concern, with major gaps in growth between Dublin and the rest of the country. The Review Group has urged renewed action as follows:

Competitiveness, productivity and skills

- Wherever visitors go, it is the quality of their experience that will determine their perceptions. The challenge for the tourism industry is thus to provide high-quality products and superior standards of customer service.

Product development and innovation

- Ireland's tourism product must be based around the three pillars of people, place and culture. New products must provide visitors with memorable and positive experiences, especially unique about Ireland.

Access and marketing

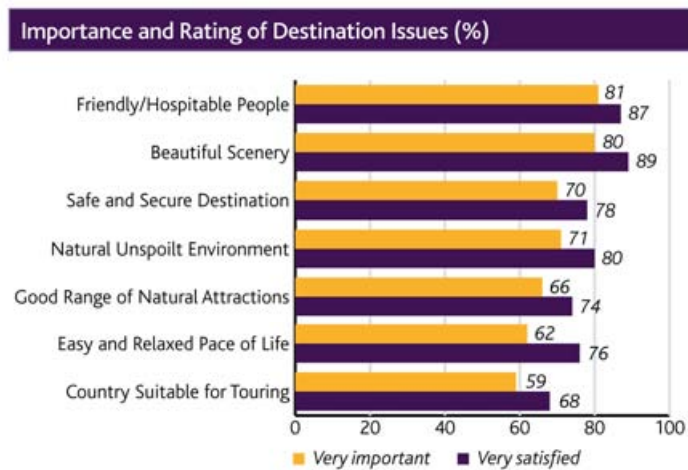
- Effective air and sea transport and easy access within Ireland is crucial. Marketing provides the essential link between Ireland's tourism products and potential customers at home and abroad.

Sustainability and regional spread

- Promoting a greater distribution of tourism across the regions is essential. There is considerable untapped potential to develop tourism in many areas of the country, particularly around nature and heritage.

Key Destination Issues

The most recent tourism market research¹ indicates that from a wide range of factors that might influence the choice of holiday destination, the most important in choosing Ireland compared with other locations are friendliness, scenery, an unspoilt environment, safety and security, the range of natural attractions, and things to do and see. Interesting history and culture, the anticipation of a new destination to discover and the prospect of a relaxed pace of life also rate highly.



Source: Fáilte Ireland's Visitor Attitudes Survey

¹ Fáilte Ireland Visitor Attitudes Survey 2008 – Millward Brown Irish Marketing Surveys Ltd.

Fáilte Ireland Visitor Attitudes Survey 2008

Generally it is the British and North American visitors that give particular weight to the Irish people, placing this consideration ahead of scenery. For German visitors, scenery is the definitive leader, whereas for the French, the choice is more equitable with the Irish people just slightly ahead of scenery as a positive reason for visiting Ireland.

Other market differences include the suitability of the country for a touring holiday which features strongly for North Americans, who tend to take in as much as possible of the country during their visit. Value for money features highly for British visitors, while the range of natural attractions and the prospect of an unspoilt environment are of particular importance to Mainland European visitors.

In 2008, a total of 8.3 million trips were taken within the Republic by Irish residents, with an associated expenditure of €1.5 billion. This represents an increase of 5% on the number of domestic trips taken in 2007 while expenditure declined by less than 0.5%.

The number of domestic holidays taken in 2008 increased by 3% to 4.4 million trips, while revenue from holiday trips at just over €1 billion was unchanged on 2007. Long holidays (4+ nights), declined by 11% to 1.2 million trips while revenue from long holidays fell by 9% to €429 million. The number of short domestic holidays (1 to 3 nights) increased by 9% in 2008 to 3.2 million trips, with revenue from short holiday trips growing by 8% to €599 million.

Specialist Tourism

Historical/Cultural Tourism is recognised as a growing niche market sector. Overseas participants in such activities increased by almost 70% between 2003 and 2007 (from 3.4m to 5.7m visitors/holidaymakers). The main origins of visitors and type of attractions visited were as follows:

Origin of visitors	
Mainland Europe	37%
Britain	35%
North America	22%
Other Areas	6%

Type of attraction visited	
Houses/Castles	32%
Monuments	26%
Museums/Art Galleries	22%
Heritage/Interpretative Centres	20%
	(1.5m visits)

The Top National Tourist Attractions during 2005-2009² (in order of popularity) were:

Attraction		Attraction	
1	Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience	23	Adare Heritage Centre
2	Blarney Castle	24	Clew Bay Heritage Centre
3	Bunratty Castle & Folk Park	25	St Mary's Abbey
4	Bru Na Boinne Visitor Centre	26	Newmills Corn and Flax Mill
5	Dun Aonghasa	27	County Sligo Museum
6	Glendalough Visitor Centre	28	Oakfield Park
7	Blasket Centre	29	The Old Courthouse Visitor Centre
8	Céide Fields	30	Patrick Kavanagh Rural & Literary Centre
9	Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetary	31	Lough Gur Visitor Centre
10	Hill of Tara	32	Tullynally Castle & Gardens
11	Bog of Allen Nature Centre	33	Desmond Banqueting Hall
12	Dr Douglas Hyde Interpretive Centre	34	Freemasons' Hall Museum
13	Royal Tara China Visitor Centre	35	Ballindoolin House and Gardens
14	Blessed Edmund Rice House	36	Geological Museum
15	National Transport Museum of Ireland	37	Killybegs Maritime and Heritage Centre
16	Clones Lace Gallery	38	Irish Seed Savers Association
17	Cobh Museum	39	Adare Castle
18	Patrick Pearse Cottage	40	Múseam Chorca Dhuibhne
19	Nenagh Heritage Centre	41	Cruachan Ai Visitor Centre
20	Boyce Gardens	42	Brian Boru Heritage Centre
21	Kilmokea Gardens	43	Sliabh an Iarainn Visitor Centre
22	Ormonde Castle	44	Moate Museum

All of the top ten attractions in the country have a Visitor Centre, including in the majority of cases WCs, a Gift Shop, Café/Restaurant, Parking and Disabled Access and Audi-visual interpretation facilities. Footfall in 2007 varied from over 940,000 visitors to the most popular attraction (Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience) to 15,284 visitors to the Hill of Tara. Entry fees vary from €2-€11. Each attraction has a good quality web site and is well represented on the major visitor search sites (e.g. Tourism Ireland, Discover Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Choose Ireland).

Ref Number	Name of attraction	County	Visitor Centre	Footfall 2007	Fee			Facilities						
					Adult	Senior / Student	Child	WC	Gift Shop	Café	Restaurant	Parking	Disabled Access	Audio Visual
1	Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience	Clare	Yes	940,455	€4.95 + Parking	€3.95	€2.95	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Blarney Castle	Cork	Yes	401,567	€ 10	€8	€3.50	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	U
3	Bunratty Castle & Folk Park	Clare	Yes	344,000	€ 16,	U	€9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Partial	✓
4	Bru Na Boinne Visitor Centre	Meath	Yes	241,265	€ 3 > € 11	U	€2 > €6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Dun Aonghasa	Galway	Yes	131,711	€ 2	U	€ 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Glendalough Visitor Centre	Wicklow	Yes	102,953	€ 3	U	€ 1	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
7	Blasket Centre	Kerry	Yes	46,356	€ 3	U	€1.25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Céide Fields	Mayo	Yes	33,746	€ 4	€3	€ 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetary	Sligo	Yes	30,244	€ 3	U	€ 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Hill of Tara	Meath	Yes	15,284	€ 3	€ 2	€ 1	✓	X	X	X	✓	Partial	X

² Source: Fáilte Ireland

The following table sets out the national tourist attractions with between 2,500-5,000 visitor numbers per annum (i.e. comparable to the average number of Bonane Heritage Park visitors to date). It is interesting to note that the majority of these (90%) operate an existing Visitor Centre, including attractions at the lower end of the scale with less than 3,000 visitors pa (such as Tullynally Castle and Gardens, Killybegs Maritime and Heritage Centre, and Adare Castle). Most of the Centres (65%) have a Gift Shop, while less than 50% have a Café/restaurant and around 40% have some form of Audio-visual display. There is no evidence that charging has a detrimental effect on the visitor numbers, as demonstrated by the variable charges at different locations (not necessarily related to the highest visitor figures).

Ref Number	Name of attraction	County	Visitor Centre	Footfall 2007	Fee			Facilities						
					Adult	Senior / Student	Child	WC	Gift Shop	Café	Restaurant	Parking	Disabled Access	Audio Visual
11	Bog of Allen Nature Centre	Kildare	Yes	5,000	€ 5	€ 5	Free	✓	✓	X	X	✓	Partial	U
12	Dr Douglas Hyde Interpretive Centre	Roscommon	Yes	5,000	Free	Free	Free	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓
13	Royal Tara China Visitor Centre	Galway	Yes	5,000	Free	Free	Free	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X
14	Blessed Edmund Rice House	Kilkenny	N/A	5,000	Free	Free	Free	X	X	X	X	✓	Partial	X
15	National Transport Museum of Ireland	Dublin	Yes	5,000	U	U	U	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓
16	Clones Lace Gallery	Monaghan	Yes	4,600	U	U	U	X	✓	X	X	✓	U	X
17	Cobh Museum	Cork	Yes	4,575	€ 2.50	U	€ 1	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X
18	Patrick Pearse Cottage	Galway	Yes	4,519	€ 3	€ 2	€ 1	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	X
19	Nenagh Heritage Centre	Tipperary	Yes	4,500	Free	Free	Free	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	✓
20	Boyce Gardens	Limerick	Yes	4,500	€ 5	€ 5	€ 5	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	Partial	X
21	Kilmokea Gardens	Wexford	Yes	4,250	€ 7	€ 6	€ 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
22	Ormonde Castle	Tipperary	Yes	4,165	Free	Free	Free	✓	✓	X	X	✓	Partial	X
23	Adare Heritage Centre	Limerick	Yes	4,145	Free	Free	Free	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Clew Bay Heritage Centre	Mayo	Yes	4,100	€ 3	€ 3	Free	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	X
25	St Mary's Abbey	Dublin	No	4,068	Free	Free	Free	X	X	X	X	✓	Partial	U
26	Newmills Corn and Flax Mill	Donegal	Yes	3,718	Free	Free	Free	✓	X	X	✓	✓	Partial	✓
27	County Sligo Museum	Sligo	Yes	3,700	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U
28	Oakfield Park	Donegal	Yes	3,500	€ 5	€ 3	€ 3	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X
29	The Old Courthouse Visitor Centre	Donegal	Yes	3,214	€ 5	€ 4	€ 3	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	Partial	✓
30	Patrick Kavanagh Rural & Literary Centre	Monaghan	Yes	3,057	€ 5	€ 3	Free	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
31	Lough Gur Visitor Centre	Limerick	Yes	3,010	€ 5	€ 5	€ 3	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
32	Tullynally Castle & Gardens	Westmeath	Yes	2,800	€ 6	€ 6	€ 3	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	Partial	X
33	Desmond Banqueting Hall	Limerick	Yes	2,748	Free	Free	Free	✓	X	X	X	✓	Partial	✓
34	Freemasons' Hall Museum	Dublin	Yes	2,500	U	U	U	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	X
35	Ballinoolin House and Gardens	Offaly	Yes	2,500	€ 6	U	U	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	Partial	✓
36	Geological Museum	Dublin	No	2,500	U	U	U	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	X
37	Killybegs Maritime and Heritage Centre	Donegal	Yes	2,500	€ 5	€ 4	€ 4	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
38	Irish Seed Savers Association	Clare	Yes	2,500	€ 5	€ 5	Free	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X
39	Adare Castle	Limerick	Yes	2,500	€ 6	€ 5	€ 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Partial	X

2.2 Regional Context

The South West is renowned as home to some of the most widely recognized locations in Ireland – Killarney, the Dingle Peninsula, and the County Town of Tralee make “The Kingdom” well known all around the world. The geography of the region includes mountain and sea, with peaks that number among the highest in the country. Mount Brandon and Mount Carrauntoohill grace the coastal peninsulas. Rainfall is abundant, and the proximity of the Gulf Stream just off the Kerry coast adds warm water temperatures to the mix, making it the perfect environment for a wide variety of greenery and exotic plant life.

The Kerry County Development Plan (CDP) 2009-2015 identifies that Kerry’s tourism industry is a significant economic and social force in the county with 15% of the county’s workforce employed in this sector in 2006. An estimated €1,233m was spent by 3.6 million visitors to the South West region in 2006, having increased by an average of 10.6% per annum since 2001. Outside of Dublin counties’ Kerry and Cork have the greatest inventory of tourism infrastructure in the country- combined they account for 20% of the country’s capacity. The region dominates across most tourism product categories and has particularly strong position in the organised tour market.

Fáilte Ireland South West, the tourism authority for the counties of Cork and Kerry, has established through surveys of tourist satisfaction levels that the quality of Kerry’s tourist product is amongst the highest in the country. Fáilte Ireland³ identifies significant opportunities for product development and improvement in relation to the quantity and quality of the county’s tourism resources, which on fruition will further enhance the tourism function and potential of the area.

In particular, Fáilte Ireland has identified the nature and heritage sector, combining wellness centres and facilities, as a market in which Kerry’s natural resources make it well placed to succeed. The CDP indicates that these resources also lend themselves to the further development of the recreation sector through the development of niche markets, such as cycling/ walking holidays, archaeological and nature tours, English language learning tours, and specialist markets such as activity holidays, environmental or cultural based tourism. Each of these activities provides the opportunity to diversify and grow Kerry’s tourism product and benefit from the generation of spin-offs and demand for additional services.

Currently the Ring of Kerry is established as the premier route for visitors who want to experience a comprehensive collection of the best examples of Ireland’s culture and scenery, and meet and interact with local residents. Beginning at the Village of Cahirciveen, the birthplace of the “Liberator” Daniel O’Connell, the Iveragh Peninsula contains some of the most dramatic and unusual coastal scenery in

³ Fáilte Ireland South West – Regional Development Plan 2008-2010

the country. The Gaelic language is an added attraction, in an area where it is spoken freely and studied in schools throughout this Gaeltacht region. The Blasket Islands provide a visit into Ireland's past, where life was difficult and primitive. Some of the country's great literary classics emerged from the hardship and isolation of the region.



The South West Region

The “Jewel of Killarney” is recognised as Muckross Estate and Traditional Farms, where the manor museum holds relics of the traditional past in furniture, art and design. Its working farms keep the agricultural past of the region alive, with a dairy, blacksmith shop, cloth weaving and live animals. The attractive gardens blend into the natural woodlands at the edge of Killarney National Park. The complete history of County Kerry can be vividly experienced at the heritage centre of the same name at Tralee. A variety of exhibits, presented with the use of a variety of interpretative methods accurately represent events and people of the region reaching nearly 8,000 years into the past.

Overseas tourism in the South West increased by 35% between 2003-2007 (to just over 2m visitors in 2007). County Cork accounted for 57% of the overseas tourism, with County Kerry at 43%. The estimated revenue generated by overseas tourists to Kerry in 2007 was €235m.

The South West also maintained its position as the most popular holiday destination for Irish residents in 2008 accounting for over one-quarter of all holiday trips taken. The South East (19%) was the next

most popular destination followed by the West (17%). The South East (19%) was the next most popular destination followed by the West (17%).

Regions Visited - Domestic Holidays	(%)				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Dublin	6	8	10	10	10
Midlands-East	8	9	9	11	10
South-East	20	20	18	17	19
South-West	26	25	26	27	26
Shannon	11	9	10	10	9
West	21	19	19	16	17
North-West	8	9	8	9	9

The distribution of visitors throughout the year shows a natural preference for the summer months (14%), but is interesting to note that visitors to the main attractions throughout other times of year remain reasonably constant.

Month of Arrival	% of Visitors	Month of Arrival	% of Visitors
January-March	14%	July	14%
April	7%	August	14%
May	12%	September	10%
June	14%	October-December	16%

Top Kerry visitor attractions (in no particular order)	
Killarney Town	Dingle Town
Lakes of Killarney	Dingle Peninsula
Killarney National Park & Muckross House	Kenmare
Jaunting Car Ride	Skellig Islands (boat excursions)
Moll's Gap	Blascoad Islands (boat excursions)
Lady's View	Ring of Kerry
	Crag Cave

The reinstatement of the Swansea-Cork Ferry Route (planned to be launched in Spring 2010) is expected to provide a further boost to tourism in the South West. The operators, Fastnet Line, maintain that the new service will contribute greatly to the development and promotion of tourism in Cork, Kerry and surrounding areas, bringing thousands of tourists directly to the region annually, as well as a viable sea crossing alternative for freight activity.



Lady's View

2.3 Coach Tours

Currently there are approximately 20 different (specifically scheduled) tour routes in the South-West that pass within 45km of Bonane – the majority of these stopping for at least one to two nights at Killarney. The total number of journeys in the peak season, between June and November is approximately 360. At an average of 35 persons per bus, this equates to an approximate figure of 12,600 tourists during the entire peak season, or around 70 tourists per day.

It should be noted that these figures are based on 'scheduled' journeys, with specific itineraries. It is not possible to estimate the total number of tourist busses and passengers due to the high number of smaller independent tour companies as well as foreign operators travelling into the country by ferry.

However, a reasonable indicator of volumes of all tour bus traffic in the region can be gained from trips using the Shannon Ferry Crossing from Tarbert in Kerry to Killimer in Clare. The route used by a large proportion of scheduled and un-scheduled coach services, and the only point where the volume of such traffic is specifically monitored on an ongoing basis.

The average number of tour coaches using the ferry in July from 2005 to 2008 was 620 – reinforcing the high number of un-scheduled tour busses travelling in the area when compared with the total number of known scheduled trips (360 for the entire peak season).

The figures for the ferry crossing also indicate that the total number of tourist coaches declined by 11% in June 2008 (compared to June 2007). Declines of 14% and 12% were also experienced in the following months of July and August respectively. Since May 2009, a slight improvement is evident however, as the rate of decline has moderately slowed.

There are around 10 coach routes either passing Bonane or within 10km (i.e. Kenmare), but as most of these are not specifically scheduled (i.e. tour dates by demand) it is not possible to determine the annual or daily footfall. The only known scheduled tour along this route (with a full itinerary) passes 29 times between July and November.

The majority of the scheduled coach tours, and most probably the un-scheduled trips, are travelling either direct from Dublin or Shannon. A considerable number would also travel down the west coast, in most cases having originally set out from Dublin. Almost all of these tours will stay for one or two nights in Killarney - the majority of tours approach the Killarney / Kenmare region from the north.

Approximately 75% of tourism related traffic crossing on the Tarbert to Killimer ferry travels from south to north on one-way journeys. This could suggest that the majority of such tours are either travelling from further south such as from Cork, or else they will have travelled from the east, mostly likely from Dublin, and after the stay at Killarney, have turned northwards to travel up the west coast.

Tour buses travelling from Killarney on towards West Cork (Bantry / Skibbereen etc) will travel the N71, through Kenmare and past Bonane. Searches have revealed at least two tour bus companies that travel this route regularly, with a frequency of between 10 and 20 trips per annum, depending on demand. It is likely that the majority of coaches visiting or passing through Kenmare / Bonane are customised journeys, rather than scheduled.

It is probable that the reinstated Swansea-Cork Ferry Route will help increase coach traffic in the region, and in particular offering the potential for increased traffic along the scenic N71 coastal route from Cork through Skibbereen and Bantry to Bonane and onwards to Kenmare.

However, some coach operators have recently been deterred from using the N71 south of Moll's Gap, and including the section through Bonane to Bantry, due to the restrictions posed by low rock tunnels on large coaches (particularly those with roof-mounted air-conditioning units). As a result, Kenmare has effectively been omitted from the popular Ring of Kerry tourist route.



Primary Coach Tour Routes and Destinations

As noted earlier, it is clear that the nature of the tourism demand has and is continuing to change, with a growing shift from tour led holidays to independent tourists seeking the infrastructure to allow them to move freely and conveniently between attractions in the county. The gradual decline in coach tours is a symptom of this change and is likely to further influence tourists preferences in the future. Whereas the Bonane Heritage Park can continue to attract coach tours, therefore, the most appropriate target for sustaining visitor numbers should be directed towards the independent tourists who expect a high quality and memorable experience.



Tour coaches at Moll's Gap between Kenmare and Killarney

3. Planning Context

Bonane is situated within the County of Kerry, with Kerry County Council as Planning Authority. The two statutory plans of relevance to the future of Bonane are the Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015 and the Bonane Local Area Plan.

3.1 County Development Plan 2009-2015

The Kerry County Development Plan (CDP) sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County. It provides guidance for planning applicants and sets standards for development throughout the County. The policies and objectives contained in the CDP have been developed in recognition of the unique characteristics of the County and in consideration of Government policy.

In relation to tourism, the CDP recognizes the importance of 'niche tourism', which by its nature has the capacity to develop in locations throughout the county and as such can contribute to the economic development of peripheral and rural areas with an otherwise weak economic base, and where tourism activity is often already focused. Such developments will be promoted where it can be demonstrated that no other location is suitable or where it is considered that the proposed development will not have an adverse impact on the landscape, ecology and environment.

The Plan provides a policy and objective framework for the development of a more diversified and sustainable tourism sector in line with the newly adopted South-West Regional Tourism Development Plan for 2008–2010. Amendment No. 2 of the CDP contains the following objectives in relation to sustainable tourism:

The landscape, cultural and linguistic heritage and amenities of the area constitute a prime asset on which the tourism industry is based. The size of the settlements and their unique character make them particularly sensitive to development. It is accepted however that expansion of the tourism industry is based on appropriate development. This plan, in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism development outlined by Fáilte Ireland promotes suitable sustainable tourism development. When considering proposals for new tourism development, priority will be given to those that are encouraging longer visitor stays and add to the range of facilities available to people who live in the area all year round.

It is an objective of the Council to have regard to the principles of sustainable tourism as follows;

ST -1: Tourism, when it is well managed and properly located, should be recognised as a positive activity which has potential to benefit both the local community and visitor alike. Sustainable tourism planning requires a balance to be struck between the needs of the visitor and the local community.

ST -2: Our landscapes, our cultural heritage, our environment and our linguistic heritage all have intrinsic value which outweighs their value simply as a tourist asset. However, sustainable tourism planning makes sure that they can continue to be enjoyed and cherished by future generations and not prejudiced simply by short term considerations.

ST -3: Built heritage and other activities associated with tourism should in all respects be safeguarded from encroachment by inappropriate development. These assets include, special landscapes, important views, the setting of historic buildings and monuments, areas of cultural significance and access points to the coast and open countryside.

*ST -4: **Visitor facilities, interpretation centres** and commercial/retail facilities serving the tourism sector should generally be located within established settlements thereby fostering links to a whole range of other economic and commercial sectors and sustaining the local communities. Sustainable tourism facilities, when properly located and managed can, especially if accessible by a range of transport modes, encourage longer visitor stays, help to extend the tourism season and add to the vitality of settlements throughout the year.*

The specific reference to 'visitor facilities and interpretation centres' (ST-4) is of particular relevance to the feasibility of such a facility at Bonane, and needs to be taken into account together with other objectives related to sustainable tourism.

In relation to Heritage Sites, the CDP (Section 6.7) indicates that:

...heritage holidays are becoming an important niche market through visits to particular sites, heritage trails, touring buses and educational tours. The County is particularly rich in terms of its heritage and history with internationally recognised features such as Skellig Mhichil (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Staigue Fort - two of the most renowned of the County's many features, and a large variety of other sites – ranging from the coastal forts to castles, archaeological sites and monuments.

In addition to built features, the landscape of the County is inherently linked to folk stories and a culture of traditional storytelling including stories of the fairies and historical events such as the famine. There is a need to preserve the county's heritage and setting for both its intrinsic value and to ensure a sustainable tourist product. While it is necessary to improve public access in order to make these assets available to both the people of the county and to visitors, these the natural values of these sites must be protected.

In relation to Museums and Interpretative Facilities, the CDP (Section 6.8.4) recognises these as an important part of the holiday experience providing a cultural, historical and educational aspect to the tourist experience –

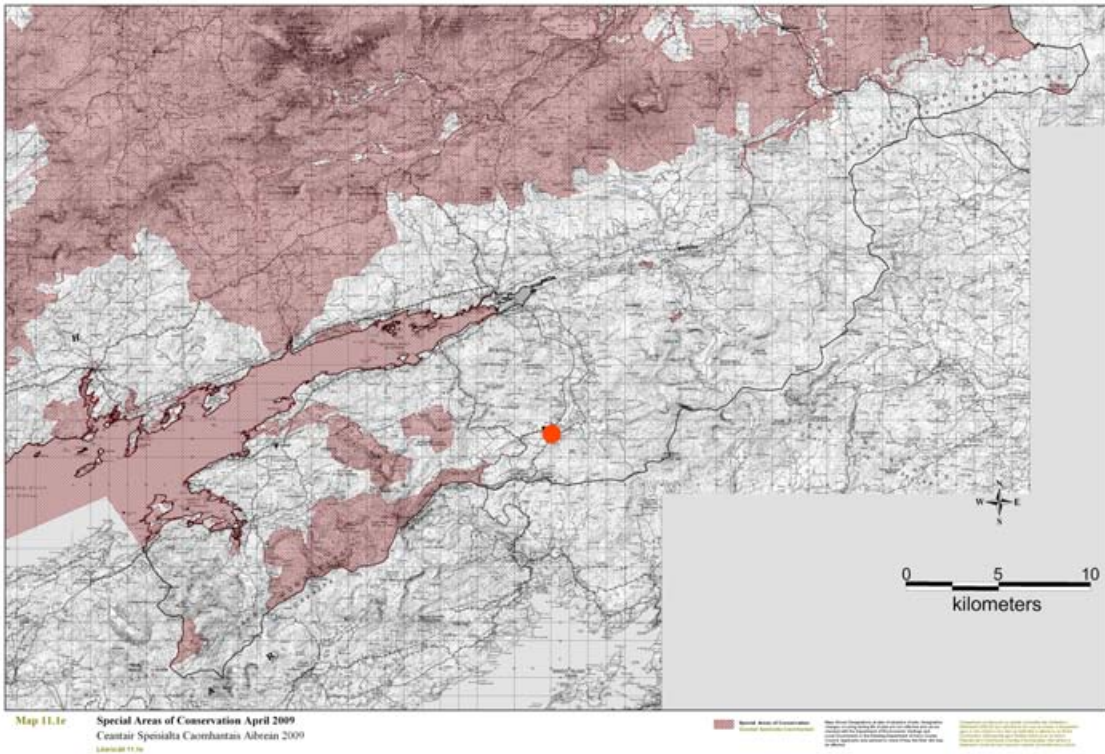
Throughout the County there are a range of museums such as the County Museum, which offers an audio-visual presentation on the County's landscape, monuments, towns and traditions. Other museums include the Seanchai – Kerry Literary and Cultural Centre in Listowel, Ballyferriter Museum, the Kerry Bog Village Museum, the Blennerville Windmill Visitor Centre and the Kilgarvan Motor Museum.

3.2 Designated Landscapes

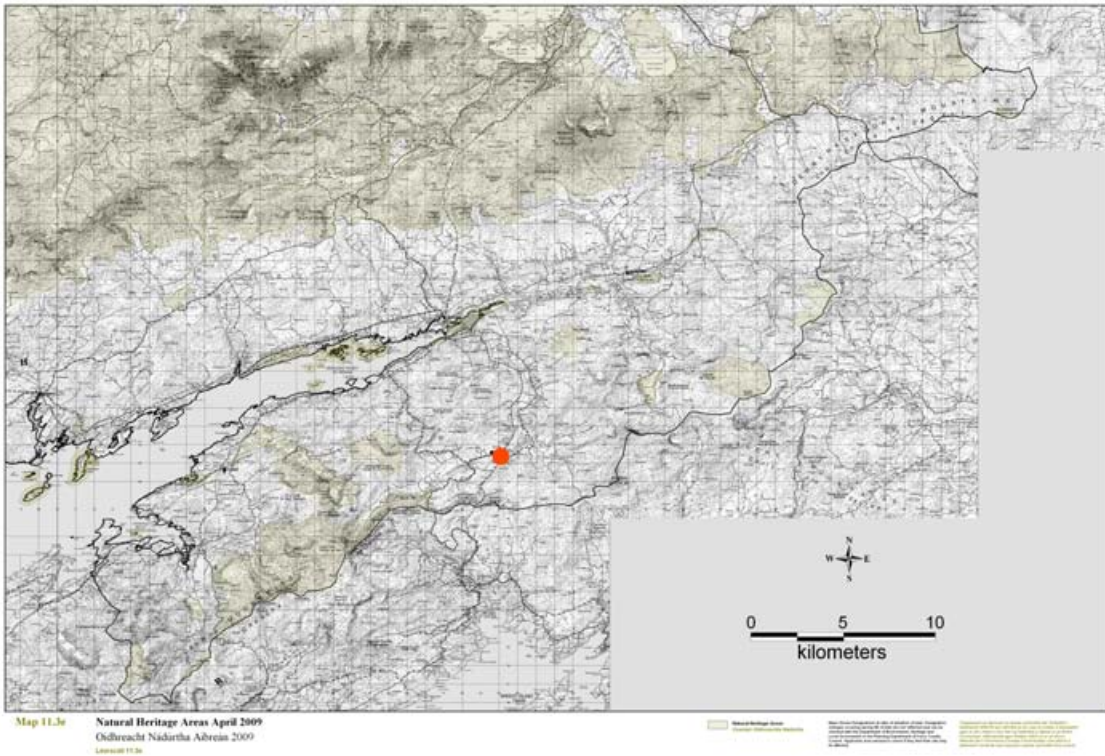
The landscape of an area is a combination of natural and man made features. In Kerry a variety of physical features and Biodiversity combine to produce some of the most intriguing diversity of flora and fauna and spectacular scenery in Ireland. The CDP recognises the importance of these natural elements to the overall landscape and will strive to protect and enhance the landscape and physical beauty of the county.

Consequently large sections of the Iveragh and Dingle Peninsulas as well as the Killarney area and extending eastwards to the Cladagh valley have been designated in the CDP as proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), with further designations such as nature reserve, Special Protect Areas (SPA) and three national parks in the Killarney area. Within such special areas all development will be rigidly scrutinised in the context of European and National directives.

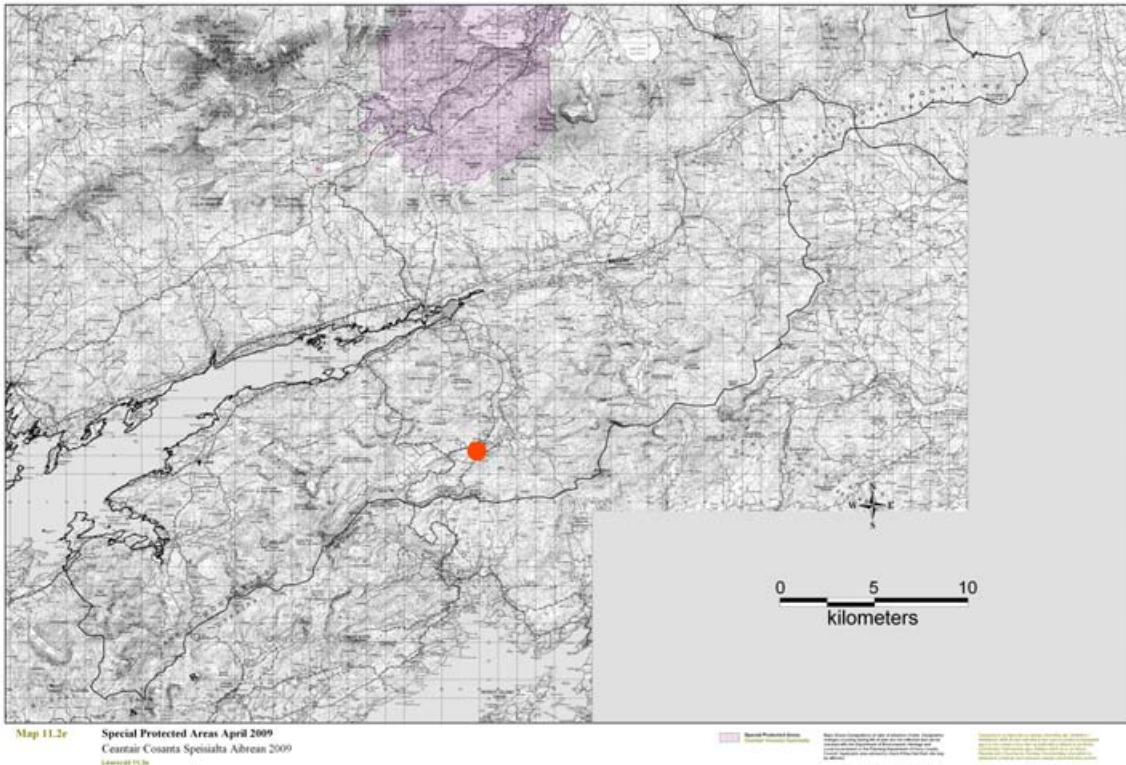
As can be seen from the following CDP Map extracts, Bonane does not fall within a designated SAC, pNHA or SPA, and there are no other landscape designations directly affecting the settlement. However, MAP 12.1r (Amenities Views and Prospects) indicates that the site of the Bonane Heritage Park falls within a Rural Secondary Special Amenity Area. The landscape of areas in this designation is generally sensitive to development. Accordingly, development in these areas must be designed so as to minimise the effect on the landscape. Proposed developments should in their designs take account of the topography, vegetation, existing boundaries and features of the area. Permission will not be granted for development which cannot be integrated into its surroundings.



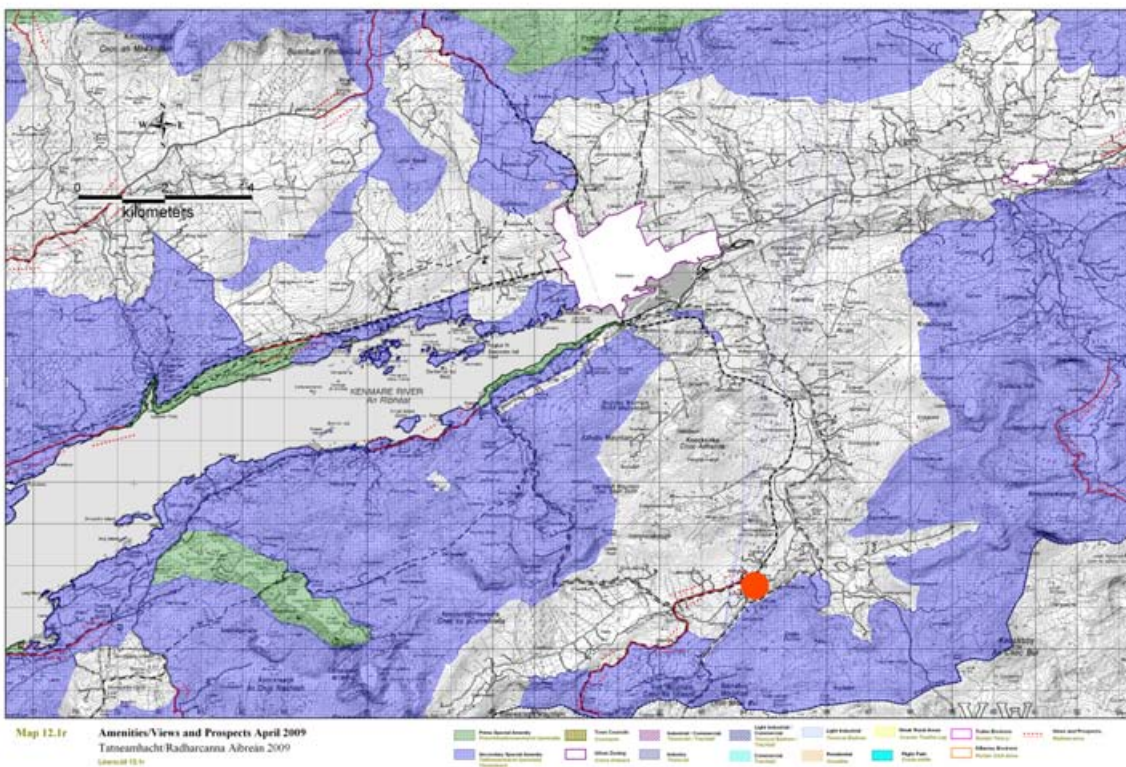
Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015: Special Areas of Conservation



Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015: Natural Heritage Areas



Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015: Special Protection Areas



Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015: Amenities Views and Prospects

The N71 to the immediate south of Bonane is identified by the CDP as having adjoining Views and Prospects worthy of particular consideration. For such designations there is a need to protect and conserve views and prospects for future generations –

In assessing views and prospects it is not proposed that this should give rise to the prohibition of development along these routes, but development, where permitted, should not seriously hinder or obstruct these views and should be designed and located to minimise their impact.

3.3 Bonane Local Area Plan⁴

The Local Area Plan (LAP) describes Bonane as a small settlement with limited services, serving a rural hinterland. It has a Catholic Church and Chocolatier (chocolate shop) located in what was formerly the post office. The primary school is located approximately 1.5km to the north of the village. The LAP makes specific reference to the Bonane Heritage Park, as being located at Dromagorteen Forest to the north of the village –

This was a project undertaken by the Bonane Community Co-Operative Society. The park has several monuments of archaeological importance.

Although there are no population figures for the village of Bonane itself, it is located within the Electoral District of Banawn and the census figures for this ED had recorded a population of 214 in 2006, an increase of 8 persons or 3.9% on the population recorded in the 2002 census. The LAP indicates that previously, between the 1996 and 2002 census period, the population decreased by 19 persons or 8.4%.

There is no wastewater treatment plant in the village and the LAP indicates that there are no plans to provide one. Dwellings are served by individual septic tanks and waste water treatment systems. The lack of short-term plans for a waste-water treatment unit for Bonane is identified as a constraint on the future development of the settlement.

⁴ South East Kerry Settlements Draft Local Area Plan



Bonane School and Weaver's Shop

The LAP states that although there is little demand for residential development in the village, any development that may take place should be located between the Church and the Chocolatier. As this would represent a very limited area for potential new development, it needs to be considered in relation to the type and scale of development under consideration. The LAP goes on to identify that the building line should be minimised in order to provide a greater sense of enclosure and promote a more defined urban form. Any development must respect the character and high quality natural setting within which the village lies through sensitive design and siting.

Although the village is acknowledged by the LAP as being on the N71 national secondary road, where the maximum speed limit applies, there are no plans to introduce reduced speed limits in the near future.



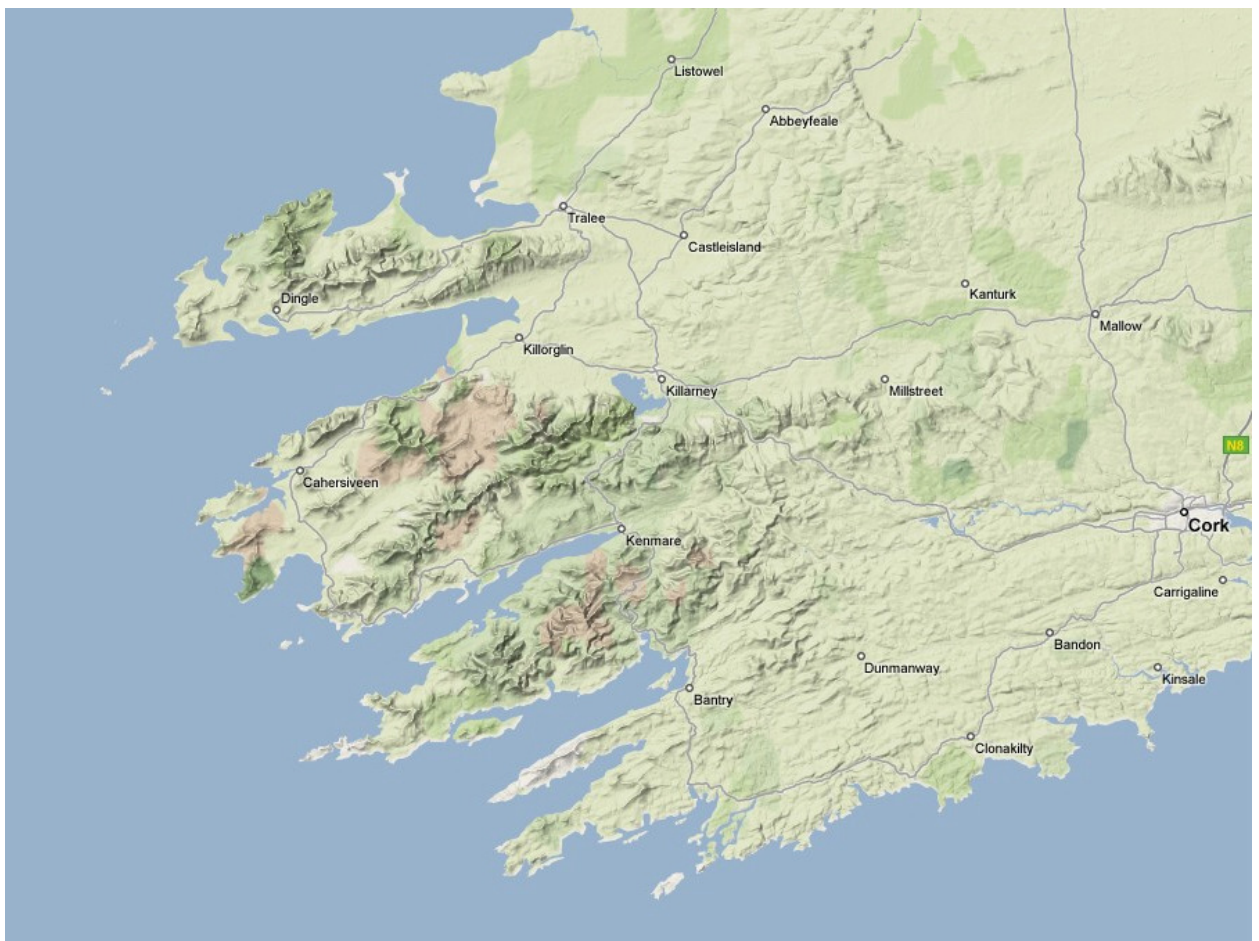
N71 through the village

4. Landscape

4.1 Landscape Context

Geology and Landform

South West Kerry is dominated by the dramatic mountainous scenery of the Atlantic seaboard comprising a series of glaciated peninsulas (Dingle, Iveragh and Beara) extending down to an irregular indented coastline of cliffs and bays and narrow deep water inlets (Dingle Bay, Kenmare River and Bantry Bay). The outstanding landscape is one of the defining features of County Kerry - from the beautiful unspoilt beaches and rolling hills and pastureland of North Kerry to the rugged coastline and elevated mountainous wilderness of South Kerry.



South West Landform

The shaping of the land has been greatly influenced by the quaternary ice movements and South West Kerry is an example of a 'pristine alpine glaciated landscape, which ranks among the best in

Europe'. Old red sandstone is the underlying rock formation over the greater part of the mountain areas, crumpled and folded by later earth movements. There are overlying layers of limestone over small areas. The layering is an east west direction. The high passes now carrying roads through mountains, such as Cahah Gap and Molls Gap, were created by the ice movement, which also changed direction of water flow from east west to north south.

The peninsulas are characterised geographically by predominantly west-southwest east-northeast running mountain ranges interspersed with many rivers and lakes. The rivers of the area follow the direction of the glaciated valleys and folded structure of the geology, generally flowing north to south into Kenmare Bay. South of Kenmare, the landform is dominated by the River Sheen that flows into The Sound at Kenmare, fed by numerous small mountain streams.

Mobility in the area is heavily influenced by this landscape; many of the primary roads are costal such as the well known 'Ring of Beara' or the 'Ring of Kerry' on the Iveragh Peninsula to the north. The N71 which runs through the Sheen Valley is an exception to this. It runs generally north south across the northern end of the Beara Peninsula. The road itself is a relatively modern one, completed in 1839 (Durell and Kelly 2002, viii) with a number of tunnels cutting through the mountains along the Cork Kerry border, however its predecessor, along which the Beara Waymarked Walk follows the topography of the valley and would have been an important routeway through the landscape from the earliest occupation of the area in the prehistoric period. The density of monuments within the valley may relate directly to this location on what can be termed a natural routeway through the landscape. The monuments date from the prehistoric period right up to historic times showing the continuing importance of the valley since the area was first occupied.

The geological interest of the region is recognised by the recent definition of the Kerry Geopark, comprising a large area of the Iveragh Peninsula, bordered by Kenmare Bay and extending inland to the mountains of to the north of Tahilla, Sneem, Castlecove, Caherdaniel and Valentia Island. A Geopark is a European designation for an area that includes a particular geological heritage and a sustainable territorial development strategy supported by a European programme to promote development. The park must work within the European Geopark Network and comprise a number of geological sites of particular importance in terms of their scientific quality, rarity, aesthetic appeal or educational value. Their interest may also be archaeological, ecological, historical or cultural.



Kerry Geopark

The Heritage Park is situated on the lower south and southwest facing slopes of Barreneen, within the Sheehy Mountain range, where the westernmost spur of the mountain runs down to the Sheen River.

Climate

The climate of South-West Ireland is largely the product of westerly atmospheric circulation and its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. These two factors interact to give westerly winds, mild damp weather and a narrow temperature range. Storms tend to occur between November and April with January producing some of the severest gales in recent years. South West Kerry is marginally warmer than the rest of the west coast. The nearest synoptic meteorological station at Valentia Island records (1961-1990) an average daily air temperature of 10.4 °C, an average rainfall of 1430 mm/yr., an average wind speed of 10.9 knots and an average daily sunshine duration of 3.39 hr. Rainfall in the lowlands is between 1250mm and 2000 mm per annum, while in the mountains it varies between 2000mm to 3000mm per annum.

Ecology

The topography and soils of the area contribute to a diverse range of habitats which together with the benign influence of the North Atlantic Drift encourage a variety of flora and fauna. The topographical influences combined with deep peats, several lakes, rivers and streams, enhances the biodiversity value of the area.

The mountain areas comprise mostly upland grassland, characterized by the presence of grasses, sedges, mosses and occasional blanket bog. Exposed rock is noticeable across the steepest slopes, where a variety of vegetation types occur. Sheep and cattle grazing occur throughout the uplands.

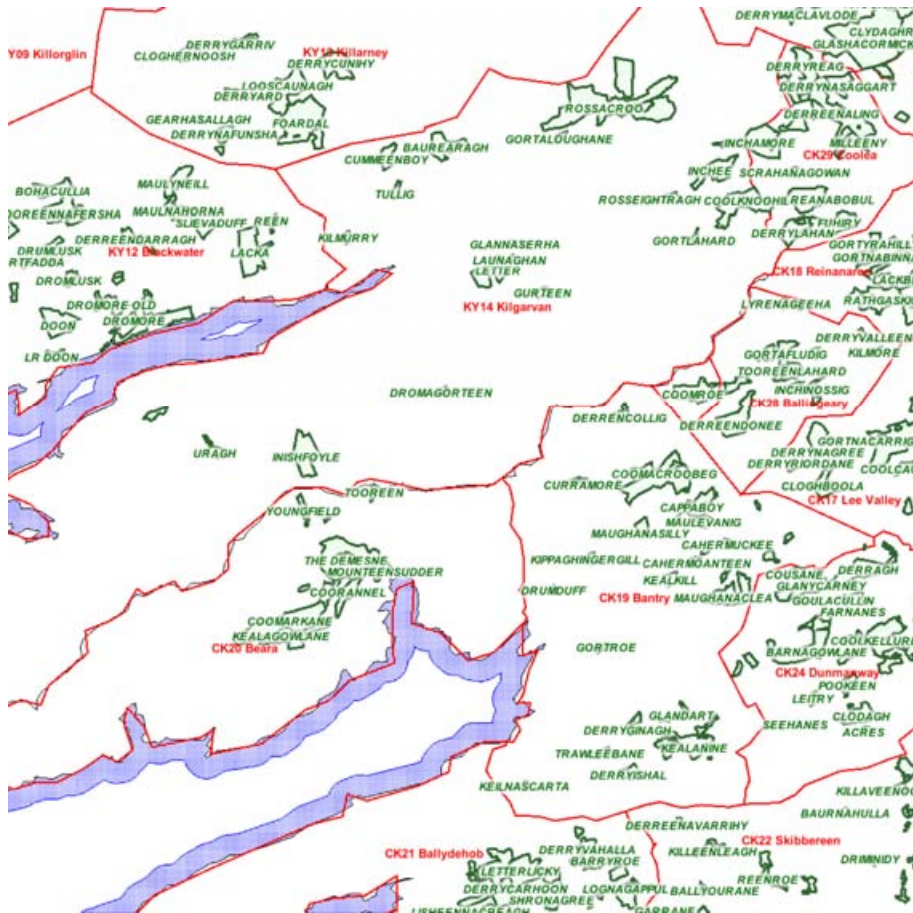
Within the more sheltered lower areas there are small, predominantly deciduous woodlands, fragmented hedgerows, riverside vegetation and isolated trees, defining an irregular patchwork of small to medium sized fields mostly given over to grazing.

In addition to the more common species, the wider area is known to support large numbers of Red squirrel, Red deer, Sika deer, wild goats and several lesser Horseshoe bat roosts. The substantial coastline supports large numbers of seabirds both residential and migratory as well as all the common land birds. The rivers support salmonoid species as well as many invertebrates. The freshwater mussel is also found in many of the rivers.

4.2 Visual Characteristics

The Bonane Heritage Park is situated in the heart of the Sheen River valley, surrounded by the spectacularly scenic Sheehy and Caha Mountains. The upper slopes are largely devoid of vegetation and the mountains form an impressive backdrop to the more sheltered valley landscapes. A small coniferous forest extends to the south of the Heritage Park, but unlike many other areas in the South West, forests are not an influencing factor on the landscape as a whole except in certain areas such as around Killarney and the Caragh Lake district.

Coillte are responsible for only two forested areas within the mountains to the south of Kenmare, one at Dromagorteen which has since been clear felled and leased to the Bonane Co-Operative Committee, and the other at Inishfoyle just within the Cork border.



Coillte Forest Areas in South West Kerry

The Sheen River valley follows the north to south course of the river and is enclosed on three sides. Between the Baurearagh and Esk Mountains in the south, the Caha Gap at the County boundary forms a natural gateway to the valley. The mountains of Deelis (355m) and Barrerneen (450m) define the valley to the east, while Derrynacaheragh (378m), Barraouff and Knockeirka (426m) form the western edge. Northwards the scale of the valley diminishes towards The Sound at Kenmare.

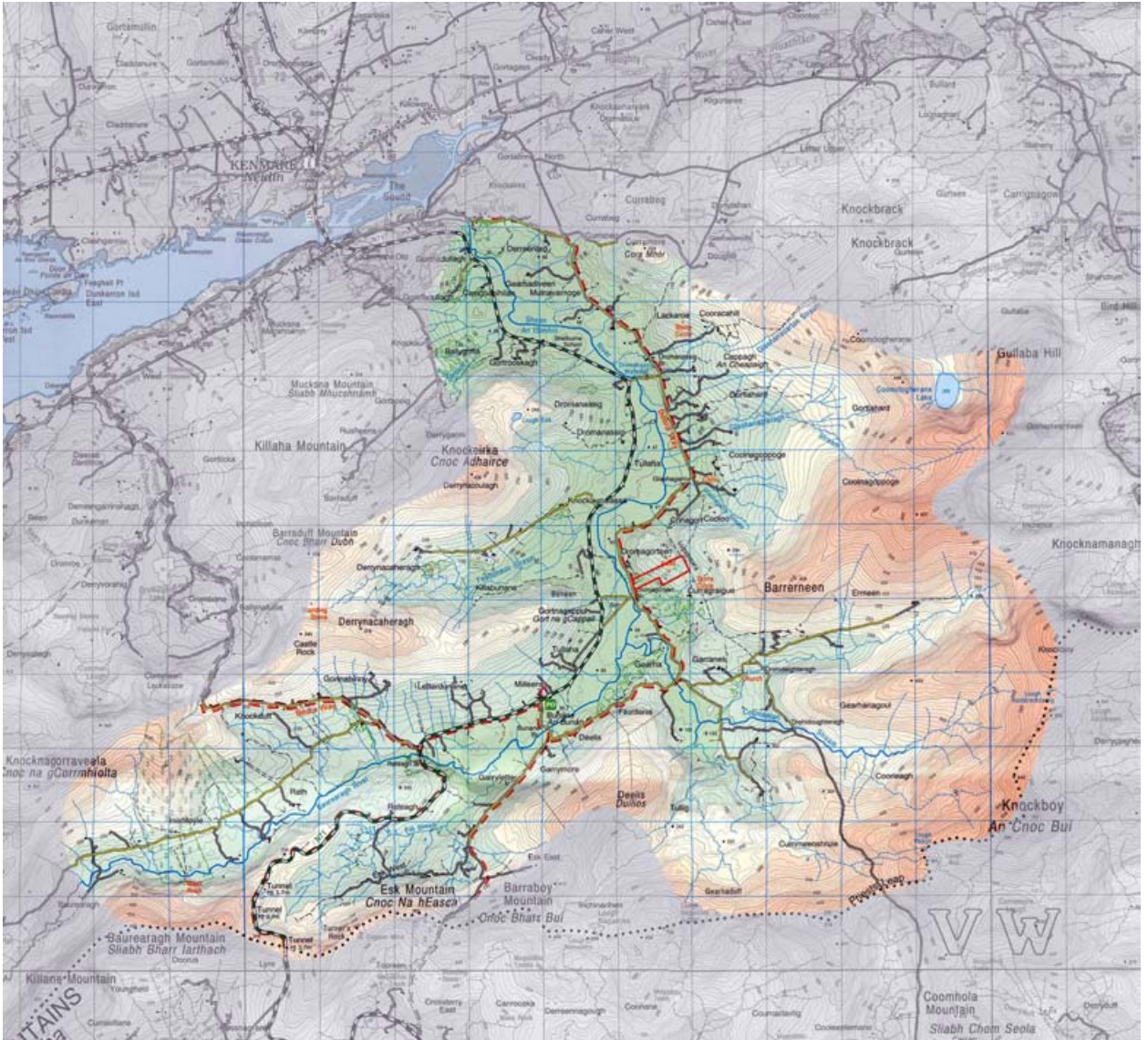
Settlement is dispersed along the N71 following the valley floor and with occasional farmhouses and isolated dwellings on the lower slopes. There are no linkages to the east or west, as minor access roads terminate in side valleys between the mountains.



View from the Cahahane Gap to the Sheen River valley

The Sheen River valley therefore represents a recognisable visual unit within the wider landscape pattern of South West Kerry. It is an unspoilt landscape of grandeur and tranquillity, immediately apparent when entering through the gap in the mountains to the south and when approaching the valley from Kenmare Bay in the north.

Although the valley presently has no formal landscape designation, further consideration could be given in the future to pursuing a designated Special Amenity Area Order (SAAO) or similar for the area, with the overall aim of protecting the unique character of this landscape and further enhancing its amenity potential without adverse effects on existing farming practices.



The Sheen River valley

5. Cultural Heritage

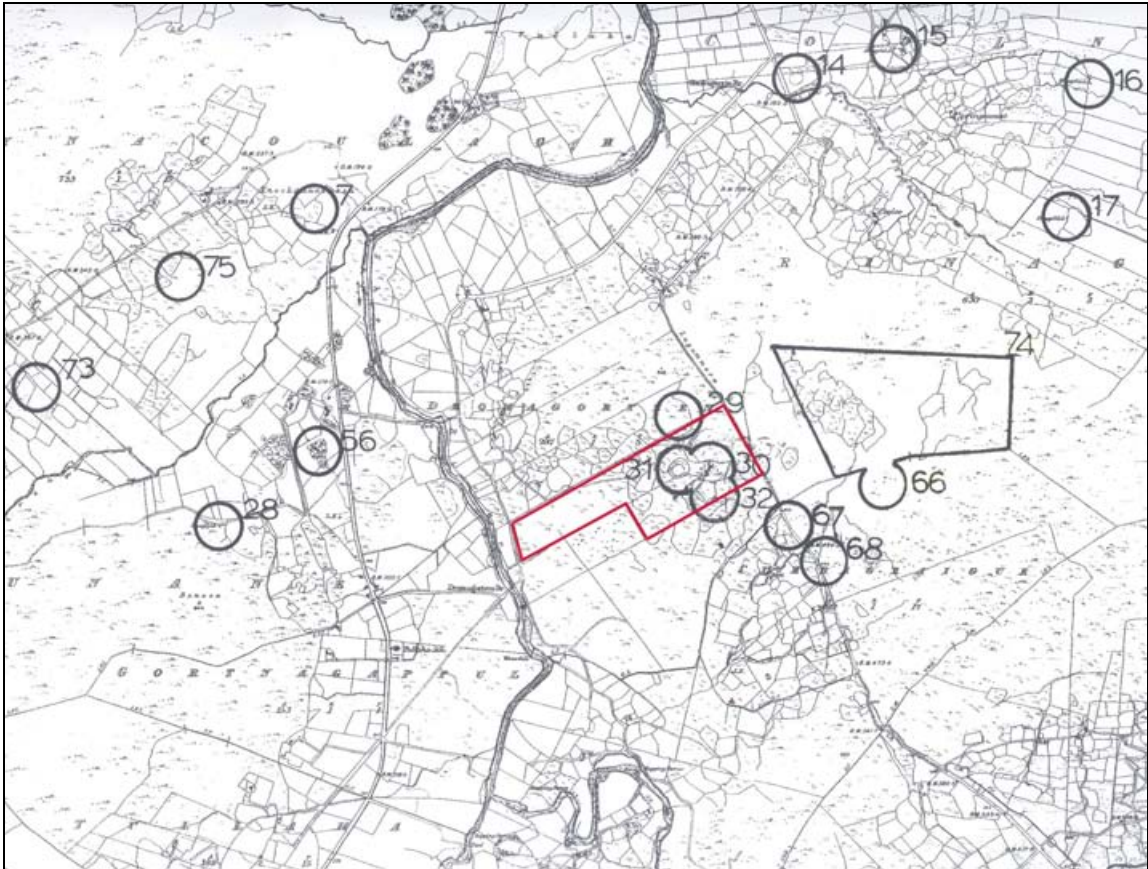
5.1 Historic Context

Introduction

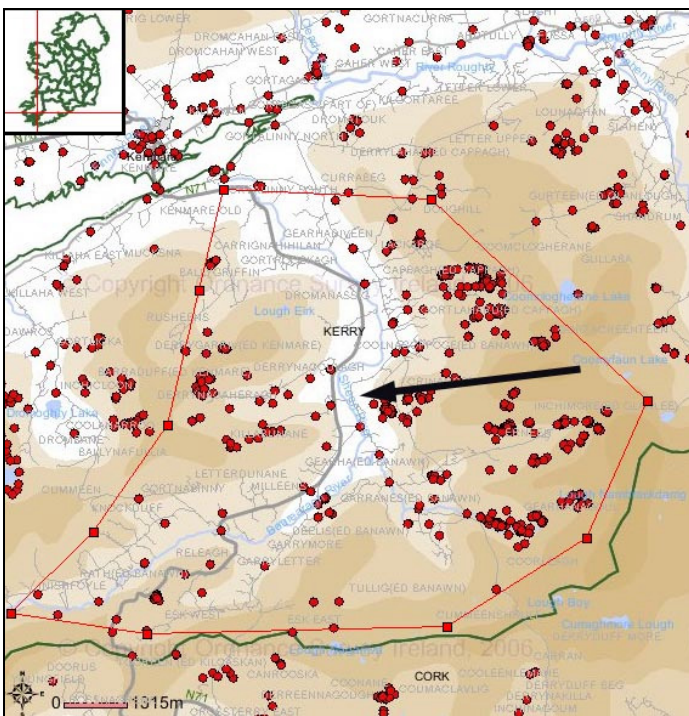
Bonane Heritage Park is situated in Dromagorteen townland to the east of the N71 National Secondary Road and the River Sheen close to the village of Bonane. The park is situated on the lower south and southwest facing slopes of Barreeneen, within the valley of the Sheehy Mountain range. The entire valley is rich in archaeological and cultural heritage with an extensive array of upstanding monuments as well as the Beara Waymarked Walk running beside the river.

The monuments in the Heritage Park fall within three chronological periods, the Bronze Age, the early medieval period and the post-medieval period. None of the monuments in the park has been excavated; however the results of excavations of similar monuments in the southwest of Ireland are referred to and present a picture of the cultural and chronological position of the monuments in the park and in the valley.

There is, as yet, no archaeological survey published for the portion of south Kerry which is on the Beara Peninsula, including the study area. However an archaeological survey has been published for the Iveragh Peninsula, of south Kerry (O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996) and for the portion of Beara which lies within Co Cork (Power et. al. 1992). Both were extensively consulted during the compilation of this report. Information on the number and types of sites was compiled from the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for Co Kerry, and the National Monuments Service website (www.archaeology.ie). The website contains additional archaeological sites which are scheduled to be added to the RMP in the near future. The files of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland held by the National Monuments Service of the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government were also consulted.



Extract from RMP map (sheet 102) showing park in red



Extract from www.archaeology.ie showing all recorded monuments

5.2 The Early Prehistoric Period

There is no evidence of early Prehistoric activity dating to the Mesolithic (c. 7,000-4,000 BC) within the valley. This is not uncommon for the southwest of Ireland, Mesolithic hunter gatherer activity tends to be ephemeral in nature and because of its frequent location in coastal, riverine and lacustrine environments subject to erosion or submergence by water. Neither is the earlier part of the Neolithic represented in the valley. This period is generally characterised by the presence of three of the four classes of megalithic tombs (*i.e.* court tombs, portal tombs and passage tombs) and the subsurface remains of rectangular domestic structures which have emerged as large scale developments have been undertaken across the country. The fourth type of megalithic tomb the wedge tomb is very well represented within the Sheen River valley and dates to the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. Furthermore there are upwards of a dozen wedge tombs recorded on the Iveragh Peninsula (O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996) and twice that number on the Beara Peninsula (O'Brien 1999, 10).

There are five wedge tombs listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Kerry in the Sheen River valley. The closest site is in Dromagorteen (KE102-109---) approximately 100m to the north. The site is comprises a wedge shaped east west oriented chamber. Some of the roof stones have slipped from the side stones and some are embedded in the ground immediately to the west of the tomb (Files of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland). The other wedge tombs are in Curragraigue (KE102-066---) approximately 400m east of the Heritage Park, there are two in Esk East (KE102-071-- - and 102-072---) approximately 3.5km south of the heritage centre and a fourth in Derrynacaheragh (KE102-06201-) approximately 3km west of the Heritage Park. In addition to these classified tombs there is a possible megalithic structure again in Derrynacaheragh (KE102-06208-) approximately 3km to the west.

Wedge tombs are, at their most basic, burial monuments which commemorate the dead within the landscape of the living. They are wedge shaped in plan and section, reducing in height and width towards the rear of the monument. They are the most common type of megalithic tomb (Waddell 1998, 92) and have a very large presence in the south west of the country which, with a few notable exceptions, is devoid of the other types of megaliths. The dating of wedge tombs has, over many decades, proved controversial but there is now a broad consensus that generally their construction dates to c.2,500-2,000BC however excavation has shown that their re-use can continue for several millennia. Excavation of Alter wedge tomb, near Skull, on the Mizen Peninsula identified five phases of activity within the tomb extending from the Final Neolithic/Early Bronze Age right up to the medieval period (O'Brien 1999, 137-140).

In addition to the four classes of megalithic tomb mentioned above, there are unclassified tombs or structures. Many of these, due to their poor state of repair, cannot be more precisely classified in the absence of further investigation.

There are two known rock art panels in the valley both in Derrynacoulagh (KE102-073--- and 075---) approximately 1.5km west of the heritage centre. There are no examples known from the Heritage Park. Rock art comprises abstract geometric carvings on boulder, outcrop or more occasionally monuments such as wedge tombs. Although a low visibility monument in the landscape there are numerous concentrations of rock art on the peninsulas of the south west, the largest concentration being on the Iveragh Peninsula to the north. Although difficult to date because of its open air location and general lack of associations with other sites there is a general consensus that open air rock art was carved during the Late Neolithic, although Bradley (1997, 65) suggests a date as early as 3,300BC.

5.3 The Bronze Age (c. 2,400-500BC)

The stone circles of Kerry and west Cork are perhaps the characteristic and best known monuments of this landscape and have inspired more interest and curiosity than any other. There are four known stone circles listed in the RMP for Co Kerry or scheduled for listing in the record in the Sheen River valley. Two are in the Heritage Park in Dromagorteen (KE102-03002- and 032002-), although one (the former) is scheduled to be re-categorised as a redundant record and there is no above ground evidence for it. Boulder burials are associated with both stone circles (KE102-03003- and 03203-) although one (the former) is scheduled to be re-categorised as a redundant record and there is no above ground evidence for it.

The upstanding stone circle in the park (KE102-032002-) is an impressive example of this monument type. It is set on a slight platform on the south facing slope. The view from the circle is somewhat curtailed by the mature forestry plantation down slope of it, notwithstanding this there is a commanding view over the valley in particular to the southwest. The stones which define the circle are set on a slight mound with a southwest northeast orientation, the recumbent stone to the southwest. Towards the centre of the circle there is a boulder burial (KE102-03203-) which is capped with a very substantial boulder.

This stone circle has been extensively studied by Daniel O'Connor to gain an understanding of the lunar and solar alignments visible from the circle and how these relate to the other cultural features of the landscape. To date eight alignments have been discovered. This monument would have been an important focus of ritual activity within the valley. Its importance would have been added to due to the

presence of the boulder burial within the circle and the various lunar and solar alignments visible from it connecting the monuments with both the dead and the heavens.

The other two stone circles in the valley are in Doughill (KE093-042-) 4.1km to the north of the Heritage Park and Lackaroe (KE093-050001-) 3.2km north of the Heritage Park.



View of the stone circle (KE102032002-)

The stone circles found in South West Ireland are all recumbent stone circles and within this monument type there are two groups; the five stone circle and the multiple stone circle. Both comprise a recumbent (or axial) stone set opposite a pair of portal stones which define the entrance to the circle. This axis is often found to be aligned northeast-southwest, an alignment which is frequently associated with the rising or setting sun during significant times of the year. These monuments had other purposes beyond lunar and solar observation points, however, and excavation of a number of stone circles has revealed cremation burials, eg. Cashelkeelty (KE 108-013004-) (Lynch 1981) further to the southwest on the Beara Peninsula and Drombeg (CO 143-051002-) (Ó Nualláin 1984, 25) near Glandore in west Cork. This burial activity may have been secondary to the rituals carried out at these monuments (Power 1992, 20).

There is a strong association between stone circles, stone rows, single standing stones and boulder burials (Ó Nualláin 1984, 1, 4-5). As well as been frequently found in close physical association many share a similar northeast southwest orientation, this shared orientation does not extend to boulder burials.

The chronology of the stone circles has proved controversial, only a small number have been excavated and material suitable for dating the construction of the monument has not always been forthcoming. The consensus however suggests a construction date for the stone circles falling in the Middle to Late Bronze Age broadly between 1,500 and 800BC (O'Brien 1993, 70 and Walsh 1993, 112). Of the stone circles excavated within Co Kerry, Cashelkeelty returned a date for construction of 1,362+/-794 BC (*ibid.*) and O'Briens partial excavation of the stone circle at Lissyviggeen (KE067-020---) produced only an Iron Age date AD 20-80, although he suggests this unusual site may fit within the earlier circle-henge family of monuments (O'Brien 2000, 282).

There is a large concentration of stone circles on the Beara peninsula, O'Brien records 15 examples (1999, 10). On Iveragh the number is much smaller, there is one possible stone circle known from the south of the peninsula with two other examples known from close to Kenmare town, one of which has been given National Monument Status (KE093-03201-). It is a multiple stone circle and is the largest in the southwest of the country. It consists of fifteen stones with the boulder burial (KE093-03202-) in the centre.

As mentioned above there are two boulder burials within the Heritage Park in Dromagorteen (KE 102-030003- and 102-032003-), although one (the former) is scheduled to be listed as a redundant record. The upstanding monument is an impressive example of a boulder burial placed within a stone circle and incorporating a substantial capstone (Plate 2). There is one other boulder burial in the Sheen River valley, in Lackaroe (KE 093-050003-) approximately 3.2km to the north of the Heritage Park.

Boulder burials are a monument type frequently associated with the stone circle. They consist of a large single boulder sitting above three or more flat-topped stones. There is no evidence to suggest they were covered by a cairn or mound (Ó Nualláin 1978, 76). When located within a stone circle they are generally considered contemporary with them (*ibid.* 81). Excavated examples have revealed token cremation burials placed within a pit underneath the boulder (*ibid.* 76).

Standing stones, or gallans, are amongst the most common archaeological features on the Irish landscape, consisting, as they do, of a single upright stone, with occasional packing stones around the base for added support. There are nine standing stones listed in the RMP for the Sheen River valley including one in Dromagorteen (KE102-031002-) which is within the Heritage Park and is locally thought of as a bullaun stone. A second possible standing stone within the park is not listed in the

RMP nor is it scheduled for listing. The former is a large impressive stone which has an irregular deep, hollow carved into its surface as well as several smaller holes. The latter is a smaller stone which is inclined very strongly to the southwest.



The other standing stones in the valley are outside the Heritage Park and include one in Gortnagappul (KE102-108---) approximately 500m to the southwest of the Heritage Park. All of the other standing stones are approximately 2km to 3km from the Heritage Park including a standing stone in Releagh (KE102-081---) to the southwest, two standing stones in Coorleagh (KE102-085002- and 102-087---) to the southeast, two standing stones in Erneen (KE103-028--- and 103-037---) to the east and finally Gortalinny North (KE093-132---) to the north.

Some standing stones which have been excavated have proven to be burial markers, while some may have functioned as territorial or route markers. Like the stone circles described above this monument type is often found to have a northeast-southwest axis with possible astronomical significance. The building of stone circles, single standing stones and boulder burials are all considered to belong to the same traditions within the Bronze Age, tending to originate in the Middle or Late Bronze Age period.

Fulachta fiadh are amongst the most common type of Irish archaeological monument. There are twenty one fulachta fiadh and possible fulachta fiadh listed in the RMP or scheduled for listing in the record in the Sheen River valley. One of which is within the Heritage Park in Dromagorteen (KE102-032004-). This fulacht fiadh consists of a low horse-shoe shaped mound set in marshy ground. The low area between the arms of the mound would be the usual location for the trough.



View of fulacht fiadh (KE102-032004-)

There are two fulachta fiadh in Curragraigue (KE102-067--- and 068---) approximately 300m to the south of the park. The other fulachta fiadh in the valley are generally between 2km and 3km from the Heritage Park including sites at Killabunane (KE102-063003-) and Derrynacaheragh (KE102-084---, 102-062016-, 102-062012-, 102-062004- and 102-062003-) to the west of the park, a site at Ballygriffin (KE093-086004-) approximately 3.5km to the northwest, sites at Lackroe (KE093-089001- and 093-052001-) to the north, sites at Cappagh (KE093-054006-) and Gortlahard (KE093-092001-, 093-091002-, 093-097002- and 102-078004-) to the northeast and sites at Gearhanagoul (KE102-069003-, 102-041005-, 102-041004-, and 103-049004-) to the southeast of the park.

Fulachta fiadh are typically interpreted as cooking sites and the majority of excavated examples have been dated to the Bronze Age. They usually survive as small horseshoe shaped mounds of burnt stone and soil, or as black spreads of burnt material in ploughed fields. They are generally located near water sources, such as streams or in marshy areas. The food was cooked by immersing it in boiling water, the water having been heated by placing fire-heated stones in it. Experiments have shown that large quantities of water can be boiled in this way in about twenty minutes and joints of meat wrapped in straw can be cooked over several hours. Following the completion of each cooking episode the heat-shattered stone was removed from the trough and thrown up around the trough, after repeated use, the characteristic horseshoe shaped mound was formed. In addition to cooking there are numerous other possible interpretations proposed for the use of these sites including bathing, fat recovery, curing animal skins and soap production to name but a few and it is possible that several of these endeavours were undertaken at one site (Monk 2007, 24).

There are no known sites dating to the Iron Age (500 BC-AD 400) located within the study area.

5.4 Early Medieval (c. 500-1100 AD)

Christianity was introduced into Ireland during the 5th century, becoming widely established during the second half of the 6th century. There are a number of monuments dating from the early medieval period within the Sheen River valley, the majority are classified as ringforts and a considerable number of those classed as enclosures are also likely to be ringforts. Many of these enclosure sites have been levelled or ploughed out and generally cannot be further defined in the absence of excavation or additional investigation. Ringforts themselves are one of the most widespread monument types in the country (and are also known as rath, lios, cathair or caiseal). There are eighteen earth-built ringforts listed in the RMP or scheduled for listing in the record in the Sheen River valley. Of these one in Dromagorteen (KE102-031---) is in the Heritage Park. This is a very well-preserved example of this monument type (Plate 6). It comprises an impressive bank and outer ditch and is set on gently sloping ground from which there is a commanding view to the southwest. The entrance is to the southeast where the ditch is crossed by a causeway (Plate 7). There is no above ground evidence of domestic structures or outbuildings within the ringfort but it is likely that such features once existed as these were domestic homesteads or farmsteads. Within the ringfort there is evidence of ridge and furrow or lazy-bed cultivation, which is indicative of post-medieval agricultural activity.



Aerial view of ringfort (KE102-031---)



View of causewayed entrance to ringfort (KE102-031---)

There is one ringfort in Killabunane (KE102-056---) approximately 600m west of the Heritage Park and another in Derrynacoulagh (KE102-007---) approximately 1km northwest. There are a number of ringforts within 2km of the Heritage Park, three in Gortlahard (KE102-008---, 102-009---and 093-053---) to the north, two in Coolnagoppoge (KE102-011--- and 102-014001-) to the northeast, Coorleagh (KE102-086---) to the southeast and Deelis (KE102-036---) and Milleens (KE102-110002-) to the southwest. The other ringforts in the valley are generally between 2km and 3km from the Heritage Park including sites at Lackaroe (KE093-049---) to the north, Rath (KE102-043---) and Garryletter (KE102-070---) to the southwest, Baurearagh (KE102-042---) to the southwest, Letterdunane (KE102-057---) to the southwest and two sites in Derrynacaheragh (KE102-023--- and 102-024---) to the west.

There are also approximately 46 enclosures listed in the RMP or scheduled for listing in the record in the Sheen River valley, many of which are likely to be ringforts. These enclosures are generally found on the lower slopes of the mountains which define the valley.

Archaeological excavation has determined that ringforts were enclosed farmsteads, used in Early Christian times internal features identified include structural remains generally circular, plank or wattle walled domestic houses with numerous, generally rectangular, outbuildings. Radiocarbon dates from excavated sites have consistently returned dates from the second half of the first millennium AD (Edwards 1990, 11). A significant minority of ringforts have associated souterrains- manmade underground tunnels leading to a chamber or series of chambers. Such features would have provided refuge to the occupants of the ringfort during times of strife as well as making useful storage areas. At such times the bank(s) would have provided protection for the livestock of the occupants.

Although there is not an ecclesiastical site within the Heritage Park there is such a site nearby at Garranes (KE102-038001-, 102-038002-, 102-038003-, 102-038004- and 102-038005-) which comprises a church, graveyard, holy well and bullaun stones.

Bullaun stones are a feature associated with many early ecclesiastical sites, although their precise function remains unclear. The term bullaun generally means a bowl-shaped hollow carved out of a stone, within an archaeological context (Power 1992, 274). Locally held traditions associate many of them with curative powers although they may have had more mundane purposes such as for grinding or crushing in a similar manner to a mortar (*ibid.*). There are four bullaun stones listed in the RMP or scheduled for listing in the record in the Sheen River valley, of these three are within approximately 2km of the Heritage Park Killabunane (KE102-104---) to the west, Milleens (KE102-101003-) to the southwest and Garranes (KE102-038005-) to the southeast. The fourth site in Inishfoyle (KE110-004001-) is approximately 3km to the southwest. Within the park there is a standing stone in Dromagorteen (KE102-031002-) which has an irregular deep, hollow carved into its surface as well as several smaller holes.

There are no known sites dating to the medieval period within the Heritage Park (c. 1100-1650 AD)

5.5 The post-medieval period (c.1650-1850 AD)

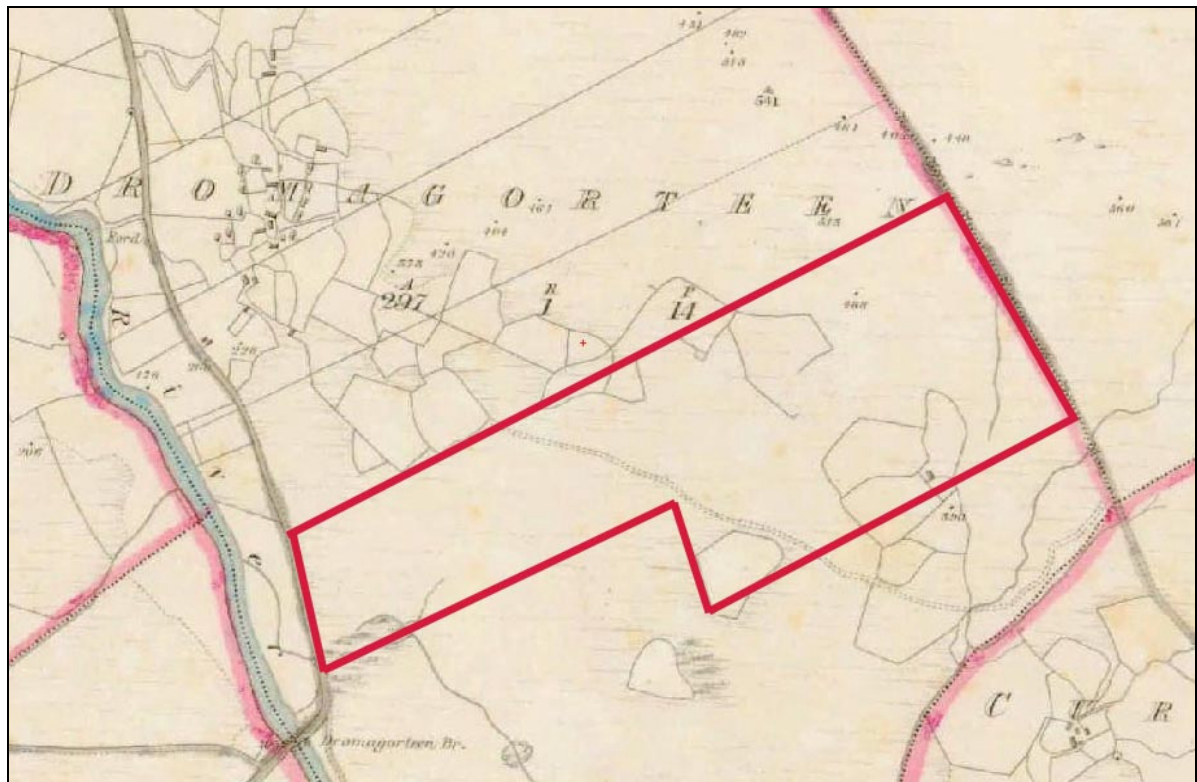
The post-medieval period is represented in the Sheen River valley by the density of settlement evidence scattered across the landscape. The evidence usually comprises hut remains which are either circular or rectangular in plan of dry-stone construction with either corbelled, thatched or sod roofed. Frequently these were single roomed structures. Although mud built cabins would have been quite commonplace these frequently do not survive in the landscape.

Within the Heritage Park there is one dry-stone building (KE102-032001-) which is depicted on the 6" OS map 1829-41 and thus is pre-famine in date (Plate 8). The hut is surrounded by a complex of six small fields laid out in an irregular pattern. There is a second similar building (KE102-031001-) within the park to the west of the ringfort (KE102-031---) although it is not apparent on the 6" OS map 1829-41. At a distance of approximately 300m north of the park a number of other structures set within a larger complex of irregular fields are shown. This dispersed pattern reflects the contemporary settlement pattern in the landscape. The buildings (KE102-032001- and 031001-) are not shown on the 25" map of 1879-1913 when the linear sub-division of the landscape, which is still in evidence today, is apparent.

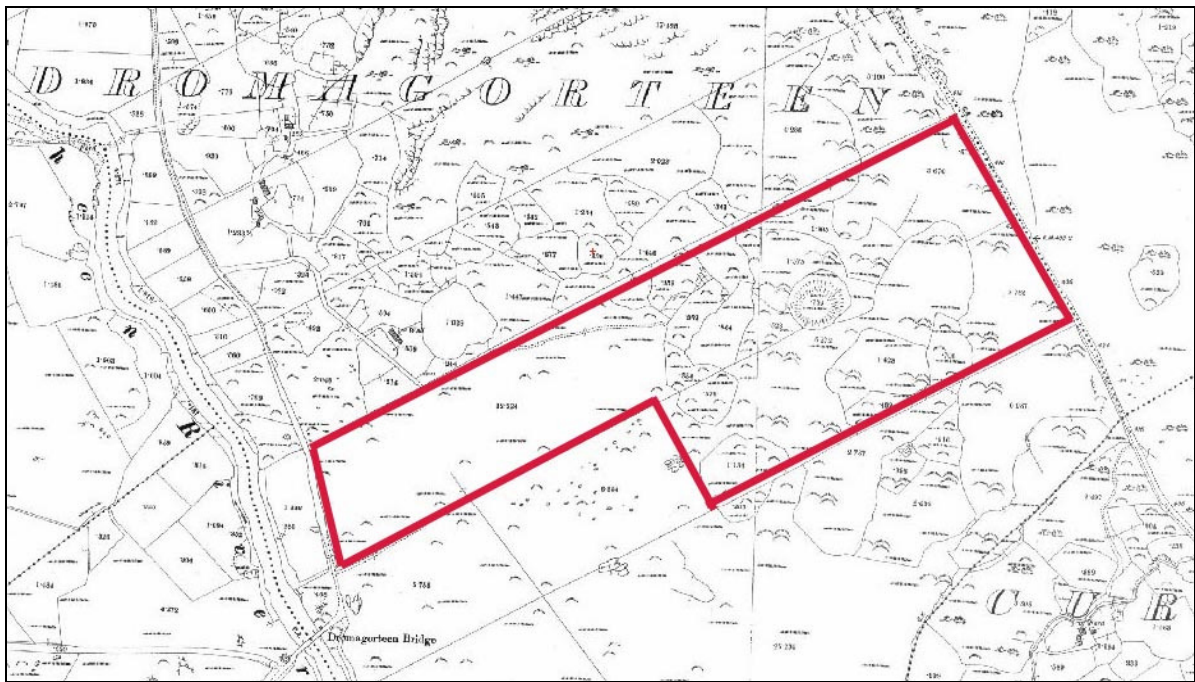
There are approximately 75 hut sites listed in the RMP or scheduled for listing in the record in the Sheen River valley. The majority of these survive on the mid-range mountain slopes which define the valley to the east and west. Most were probably domestic buildings which were inhabited all year round but some may have been seasonally occupied when animal were grazed on the summer pastures of the uplands, such huts are sometimes known as booleying huts.



View of building (KE102-032001-)



Extract from 6" OS map 1829-41, with Heritage Park outlined in red



Extract from 25" map of 1879-1913, with Heritage Park outlined in red

Outside of the Sheen River valley the urban settlement of Kenmare developed during this period. Kenmare is the nearest urban settlement to the valley and village.

The origins of Kenmare can be tied back to the confiscation of land by the Cromwellian government in the 1650's following Cromwell's conquest of the country. Dr. William Petty, ancestor of the Lansdowne family, was the late physician-general to the Army of the Commonwealth in Ireland, as well as Director of the Down Survey and "in reward for his services obtained grants in 1657 of some 3,500 acres in Kenmare and Tuosist" (Lyne 1997). He added to this over time by purchasing from fellow officers, substantial adjoining lands, with the result that by around 1675 he had become the largest landholder in the region. He succeeded in establishing on his estate a flourishing settlement of English Protestants centred on the modern town of Kenmare (*ibid*). According to Richard Orpen, one of Petty's chief agents, the plantation established by Petty amounted to 815 persons (Lyne 1982). The town, then known as Nedeem, was founded by Petty in 1670. Petty's descendant Lord Shelbourne, who later became the first marquis of Lansdowne, had the present town of Kenmare laid out in 1775 (Barrington 1976). The town is a fine example of a planned town laid out to a triangular plan, which was in vogue from the 1660s onwards and is evident on Nimmo's map of 1812 (Fig. 6) and on both editions of the Ordnance Survey 6" maps.



Nimmo's map showing the town of Kenmare

5.6 Cultural Heritage Conclusions

The Sheen River valley is a landscape rich in archaeological heritage with upstanding monuments dating from the prehistoric period up to the post-medieval period surviving. The presence of these monuments demonstrates continued human activity in this landscape over the last four millennia.

The monuments within the park represent a microcosm of the archaeological heritage surviving within the valley within a relatively small, easily accessible area. For the visitor keen to explore the prehistory and history of the valley the Heritage Park provides an ideal starting point, giving a flavour of what is present. The ringfort (KE102-031---) and the stone circle and boulder burial (KE102-03202- and 03203-) are particularly impressive sites which are well-preserved examples of these site types. The extensive work done by Daniel O'Connor which led to the discovery of eight solar and lunar alignments gives an additional level of significance to the stone circle boulder burial site.

The park already forms a well contained archaeological landscape however there may exist scope for expanding the park beyond the current landholding. The presence in particular of two megalithic monuments in adjoining land, the wedge tombs in Dromagorteen (KE102-109---) and in Curragraigue (KE102-066---), highlight this potential opportunity if agreement could be reached with landowners.

A new purpose built visitor centre would provide additional opportunities for both the local visitor as well as those from further afield to explore the cultural landscape of the valley and gain an understanding of how the sites may have looked and functioned within their contemporary landscape. Computer generated graphics and interactive models of the sites could be incorporated and assist in bringing cultural heritage to a wider audience, particularly a young audience. The presentation of the information on the lunar and solar alignments visible from the stone circle would be particularly facilitated by the use of such techniques. This could also be extended to the natural landscape which could be further explored within such a venue. The focus within the park on the re-generation of the native flora and fauna species would be highlighted by this.

The presence of the Beara Way so close to the Heritage Park will channel pedestrian visitors into the valley. A purpose built heritage centre would be an ideal location in which to provide information on other sites of interest within the broader valley which landowners have agreed can be accessed. This could lead to the valley becoming a focus of walking tours.

The presentation of information on the cultural heritage of the valley would be disseminated to a much wider audience from a purpose built visitor centre, guidebooks and information leaflets could be sold or provided and talks and conferences could be hosted from such a venue.

The presence of facilities provided as standard in a purpose built visitor centre would improve the experience of the park, particularly in inclement weather conditions.

All recommendations in this report are subject to approval by the National Monuments Service at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

6. Visitor Experience

6.1 Visitor Context

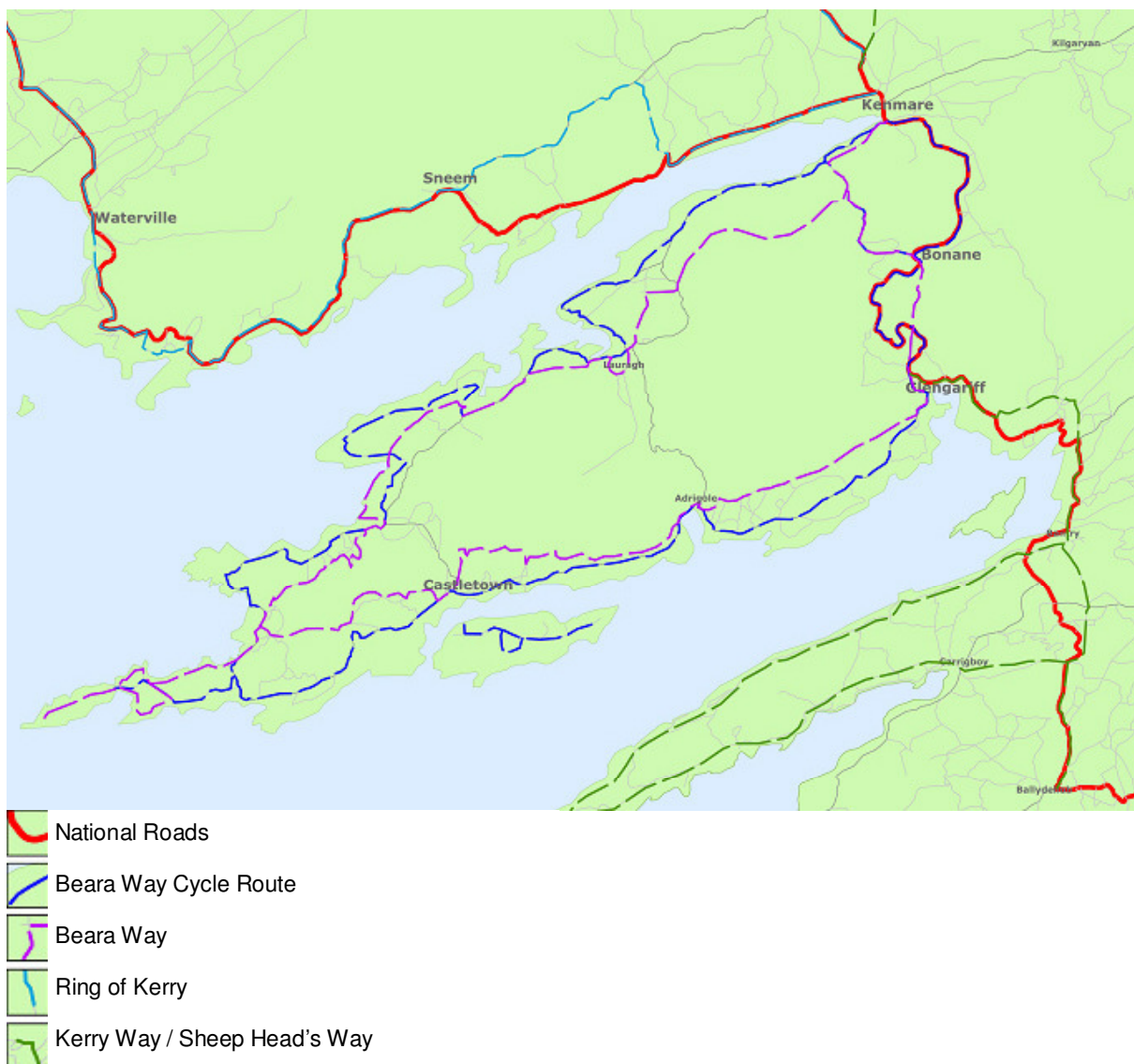
Bonane is conveniently located 10km from Kenmare on the Killarney to Bantry National Road (N71). It is therefore in close proximity to the most popular tourist destinations of Killarney National Park, the Ring of Kerry and Dingle Peninsular. It is also easily accessible to Cork, Killarney, Limerick and Shannon.



Bonane location in the South West

Bonane links both the Ring of Kerry and the Ring of Beara. The Heritage Park is immediately accessible from the Beara Way Cycle Route, Beara Way, and Kerry Way / Sheep Head's Way. The Beara Way Cycling Route is a National Cycling Route extending along the entire Beara Peninsula, mostly on country roads, passing through all the towns and villages along the way. The Beara Way is

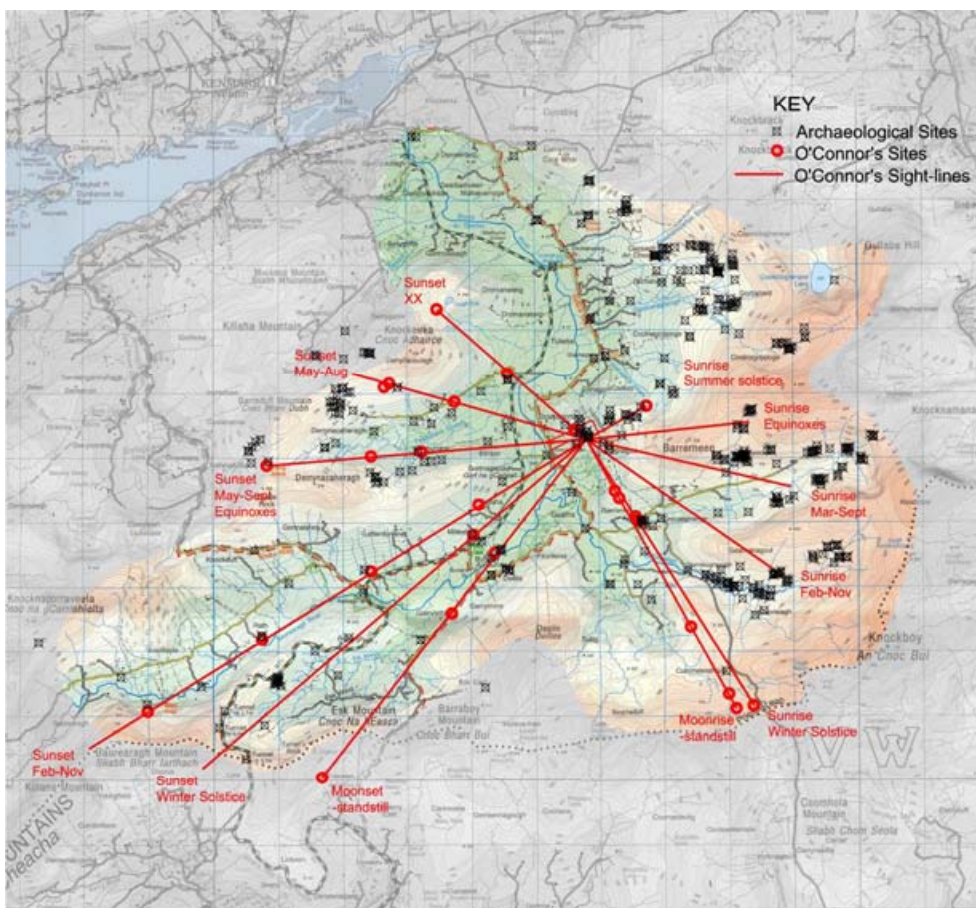
a walking circuit of the peninsula following side roads, boreens, bog roads and tracks, linking a variety of archaeological sites and natural features. It can be followed all the way to County Leitrim. The Kerry Way is one of Ireland's longest signposted walking trails, starting and finishing at Killarney around the Iveragh Peninsula. The Sheep Head's Way is one of the most recently created way-marked walking trails in Ireland, continuing beyond Bantry to Kilcrohane and taking in a wide range of dramatic coastal scenery, open moorlands and lowland terrain.



As described in Section 5, the Sheen River valley is particularly rich in archaeological and cultural heritage with several hundred monuments recorded in the valley. They range in date from the prehistoric period right up to the post-medieval period. The Beara Way-marked Walk runs through the valley generally along a third class road. This was the primary route through the valley prior to the construction of the N71 National Secondary Road.

The Heritage Park itself is unique as it contains within a relatively small area a Ringfort, a Stone Circle & Boulder Burial, a Fulacht Fiadh, a Bullaun Stone, a Standing Stone, a Famine Ruin and traces of field systems. The wealth and diversity of the multi-period monuments, dating from the Stone Age to the relatively recent past, is of national and international significance. Of equal importance is the folklore and legends associated with many of these monuments.

In addition to their regional and national significance, detailed research by local resident Daniel O'Connor⁵ reveals that the concentration of archaeological sites may well represent a sophisticated astronomical calendar, encompassing both lunar and solar cycles, with its hub as the Stone Circle in the Heritage Park at Dromagorteen. Monuments on the horizon mark the rising and setting of the sun and moon at significant dates, such as winter and summer solstice. The relative positions have been mapped in detail by Mr O'Connor and the observations indicate the relationship between some of the more important archaeological sites in the valley, reinforcing the importance of the area as a unique historical resource.



Extract from 'An Illustrated Map' by Daniel O'Connor showing astronomical alignments between archaeological sites

⁵ 'Antiquities of the Sheen River Valley, An Illustrated Map', Daniel O'Connor

Bonane is therefore particularly well-placed to meet the challenges of tourism due to its proximity to other regional attractions, the unique range of heritage, natural and cultural interests present, and the existence of an active local community co-operative committed to offering a unique visitor experience.

6.2 Heritage Park Facilities

The Park presently consists of a 3 km self-guided walk through the well-preserved archaeological sites. An existing visitor information hut is located at the entrance to the park, and car parking for around 30 vehicles. Toilets with running water and electric were installed earlier this year. A fee of €4/pp is currently charged for entry. Adjacent to the entry hut is an artificially created pond and Crannog feature.



The archaeological sites are located across the higher hillside, accessed via a steep driveway leading from the entrance gate. An alternative secondary access has recently been constructed, providing a less strenuous route. Vehicle access to the upper area is possible through prior arrangement with the Park Committee. A circular gravel pathway links the various sites, and information signs inform the visitor regarding the historical context of each monument.

There are outstanding views of the surrounding landscape in all directions. Seats have been sympathetically located at the main vantage points.



Existing seating areas positioned to exploit the views

6.3 Presentation and Interpretation

The Heritage Park benefits from a spectacularly scenic location on the lower slopes of the Barrerneen mountain and with panoramic views across the Sheen River valley. The overall presentation of the Park is complemented by a high standard of maintenance, currently undertaken by part-time staff employed under the Rural Social Scheme. However, due to its relatively recent opening, the landscape of the Park still appears somewhat disturbed and in parts unnatural in character. Whereas it is important to ensure that the monuments are discernible from their surroundings, a landscape that is too manicured will detract from the scenic qualities of the location and from the visitor's experience of the attraction. It can be equally interesting for a visitor to 'discover' a feature as opposed to having it fully on view from a number of directions. The general 'wildness' of the setting therefore needs to be carefully maintained, with essential elements subservient to the bigger picture. This should include, for example, avoidance of excessive signage and pathways, artificially placed rocks, posts and fencing which can collectively appear alien to their surroundings.



Map showing main park features



Too many artificial interventions in the natural landscape should be avoided

The clearance of the former coniferous forest has left a landscape that is still in transition. The site contains a mixture of vegetation types, including managed and rough grassland, young deciduous trees and regenerating scrub, and clumps of gorse, as well as occasional single conifers and remnant forest stumps. The new woodland trees, recently planted by school children, comprise a good mix of native species that will develop in time into an appropriate and attractive vegetation type. The gorse scrub is also effective where it is has developed as large clumps, interspersed with rough grassland.



Gorse and rough grassland



Regenerating scrub

The native scrub, mostly on the lowest slopes, should continue to be encouraged to develop into deciduous woodland.

Gravel pathways leading to the archaeological sites are wide, capable of taking vehicle traffic, and in good condition. Given the steep gradient of the initial access route (Fionns Hill) a more gentle secondary route (Druids Walk) has recently been constructed. Both tracks appear a little raw at present, but once the natural vegetation has re-established along the edges they should blend more comfortably with the surroundings.



Existing access tracks

Since its establishment in 2005 the Heritage Park has developed a high standard of publicity material that includes an attractive Welcome brochure introducing the main features of the site, and two comprehensive web sites (www.bonaneheritagepark.com) describing the natural and cultural history of the Park in greater detail. The Heritage Park also features on most of the Irish tourist web sites, such as Discover Ireland and Ireland Adventures.

Each archaeological monument has a clear descriptive interpretation board describing and illustrating the key features of the site. The signs are to a high graphic standard.



Existing interpretation boards

In certain instances, the interpretation boards appear to be placed too close to (almost on top of) the archaeological feature, detracting from the experience through their incongruous presence. The situation can be exaggerated in places where access paths also pass in close proximity to the feature, or where fences are erected, introducing artificial elements that detract from the natural setting and the individual mystique of the objects. A small crowd, or even 3-4 people, standing on the path by the Stone Circle or the Bullaun Stone would obliterate the view for others and no one would be able to take photographs easily. Other signs of different graphic style or painted on rocks, although well intentioned, further contribute to the unnecessary clutter.

In order to fully appreciate the special qualities of the site it is not always necessary to position signs immediately adjacent to the specific feature. It could also be argued that interpretation boards at each monument are not required – instead a larger well designed sign at the start of the park, or at the top of the main access route, could adequately describe the collective features of the park, especially if accompanied by a descriptive leaflet carried by the visitor. This also encourages visitors to bring media with them, and take it away again, creating little or no intrusion on the overall atmosphere of the place other than their presence.



Signage, access paths and fencing in too close proximity can detract from the attraction of the feature

Similarly paths can be routed away from the features, or more indirectly around them, allowing longer distance views from where the wider setting can be best appreciated without imposing on the feature itself. The same principle can be applied to directional signing, with only the absolute minimum being provided, and that should only be visible when sought out.

The Park is well sign-posted from the N71, with advance white-on-brown tourist signs and local directional signs, but vehicle speeds can be high through the village, indicating that traffic calming would be beneficial to help raise awareness of the Park whilst improving road safety.



Signage on the N71

Future interpretation techniques need to be continually assessed in order to ensure the optimum presentation and understanding of Bonane.

6.4 Heritage Park Management

The development of the Heritage Park goes back to 1999 when the Bonane Community Council began preparing an Action Plan for the parish, with the support of South Kerry Development Partnership Limited as facilitator. The basis of the plan was that the entire community should be given an opportunity to contribute to it by way of consultation.

One of the main areas identified for action was the need to improve the awareness of sites of archaeological and historical interest in the locality. The site at Dromagorteen, owned by Coillte, was known to contain a significant number of diverse archaeological monuments, and was identified as the main area for development.

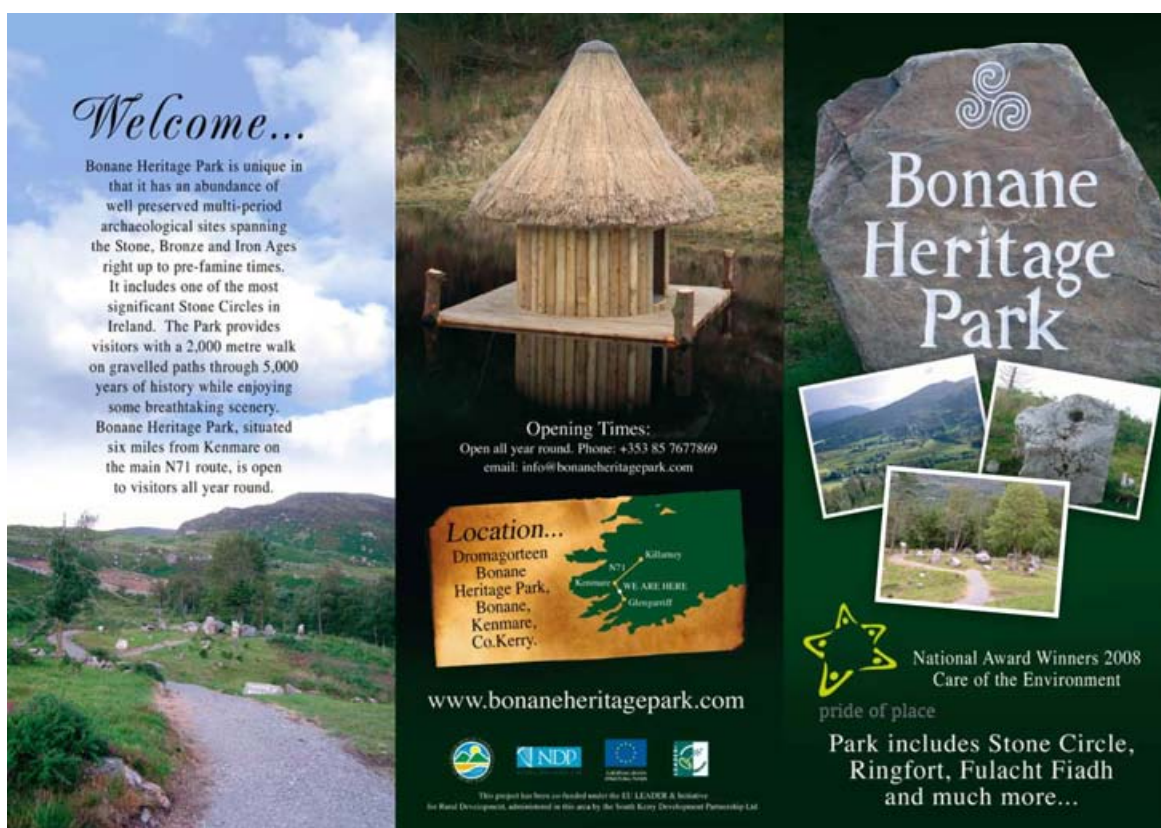
A sub-committee of the Community Council approached Coillte to lease part of the lands and, as a condition of the lease, the Bonane Community Co-operative Society Ltd was established in 2002. Its principal objective being – “To improve access to historical sites in Bonane”.

The Co-Operative was set up as a non-profit making society owned and controlled by the community. The Committee of Management operates on a voluntary basis and is subject to re-appointment each year at an Annual General Meeting, in accordance with the rules for Friendly Societies.

From the outset, the intention was that the Co-Operative would be owned and controlled by the community. Accordingly the Committee of Management invited and encouraged the people of Bonane and all others to subscribe for €1 shares in the society. Much of the work on the development of the Park has come from voluntary effort and local fundraising.

Substantial progress has since been made by the Co-Operative, including:

- Finalising a long-term lease with Coillte for part of the lands at Dromagorteen Forest, negotiated at a nominal annual rental of €127.
- Overseeing the removal of former coniferous forest by Coillte in 2003 as a pre-condition of the lease.
- Overseeing the repair of the access road by Coillte and its extension.
- Completion of additional pathways to the monuments themselves through voluntary effort.
- Arranging public liability insurance.
- Pursuing fund raising for further improvements.
- Initiating an initial archaeological survey, by Dr. Niall Gregory and colleagues, on a voluntary basis.
- Arranging official opening of the Heritage Park by the then Minister for Tourism (John O'Donoghue) in June 2006.
- Provision of entrance hut and necessary gates and fencing.
- Formation of parking and entrance area.
- Supply and installation of information signs and notice boards and completing the trail map and advertising flyers.
- Production of a Heritage Park brochure and web site.
- Organising site maintenance.
- Holding festivals and events at the Park, such as the Fulacht Fiadh cooking demonstration.
- Provision of guided tours to interested groups, including school tours.
- Participating in and winning National award Care of the Environment 'Pride of Place' 2008.
- Securing funding for and commissioning this feasibility study.



Heritage Park Brochure

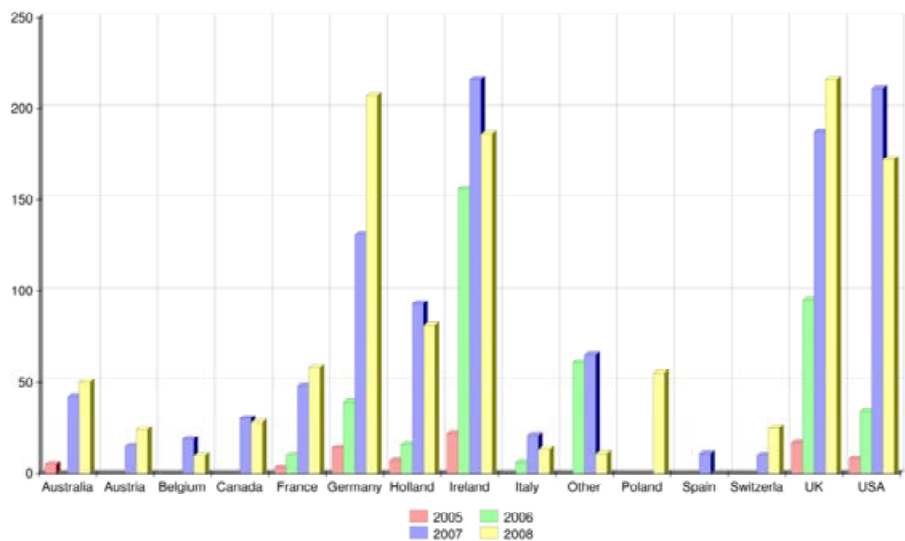
6.5 Visitor Impressions

A Visitors Book has been maintained at the Heritage Park since 2005, to which numerous comments have been added that are especially useful in determining general visitor impressions of the Park. The books have also provided important data on the origin of visitors and visiting times.

Based on these comments, during 2005-2008, an overwhelming number of responses (73%) were positive about the Park. Less than 1.5% were negative, and around 5% mixed.

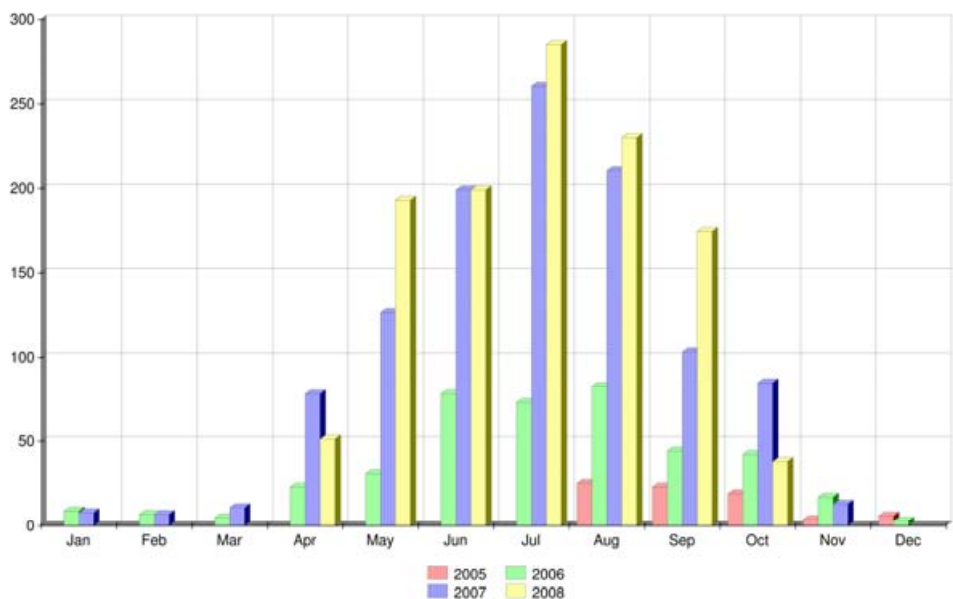
General Visitor Book Comments				
Year	Positive	Negative	Mixed	Other
2005	83%	2.6%	6.5%	7.9%
2006	80%	1.9%	11.8%	6.3%
2007	64%	0.6%	0.7%	34.7%
2008	65%	0.5%	0.8%	33.7%
Average	73%	1.4%	4.95%	20.65%

The most frequent origin of visitors on average was Ireland (32%), followed by the UK (23%). The most common nationalities of other visitors on average were Germany (10%), USA (9%), Holland (6%), France (3%) and Australia (3%).



Origin of Visitors 2005-2008

The great majority of visits to the Park were made between May and September (peaking in July). By comparison, visitor numbers during the winter months were especially low. This difference in seasonal use of the Park is surprising given the less uneven spread of visitors throughout the year as experienced nationally (see Section 2), and needs to be addressed in order to sustain the future development of Bonane.



Visitor Times

The most common written comments on the Park were as follows:

Positive

- Excellent panoramic view, maybe put a map up there - would be helpful.
- Wonderful park, very romantic, possibly conceived our first child by ringfort.
- Great walk with wonderful views, the best value for money trip in Ireland by far.
- Peaceful, mysterious and magical.
- What a treat to see so many ancient sites in a small area. Well worth 4 euro.
- Beautiful, peaceful site. Gentle walk with brilliant views.
- Well signposted with good information. Had a picnic.
- Lovely walk - a bit touristy.
- Looking forward to the heritage centre. It was better than expected – fantastic.
- Its a pity we have to pay to see our own heritage, beautiful as it is.
- Very nice and interesting site especially the astronomical interpretations.
- Do you do viewings / web casts for events of astronomical significance?
- Is it all real or are some parts fake?
- You can make the place even better by enlarging the possibilities.

Negative

- Not very buggy friendly.
- Could do with toilets and refreshments.
- More signage please.
- The explanation boards are too close to the sites. They dominate the monuments.
- Explanations could also be in French and German.
- Too big a climb, didn't make it.
- Price too expensive and increases every year.
- Not interesting, too much money.
- Bit vague, more info on life in various ages, artefacts etc.

6.6 Needs and Potential Users

The future of the Bonane Heritage Park will be determined by continuing to attract a sufficient number of visitors to sustain the existing facility and to support the potential of expanded facilities such as a Heritage Centre.

There are no definitive methods of assessing likely visitor numbers. Success depends on the quality of the attraction, visitor trends, accessibility, the facilities on offer (including year-round events), the amount spent on marketing, and the hours of opening.

To date the archaeological significance and attraction of Bonane has been demonstrated by consistently high number of visitors to the park. Since opening in 2005, numbers have steadily increased from around 800 in 2006 to 5,000 visitors in 2008⁶. The Heritage Park has been able to sustain these visitor numbers through minimal marketing and an acknowledged shortage of essential facilities. Bonane already performs well, therefore, in comparison with the annual number of visitors at other national and regional visitor attractions, e.g. Mayo North Heritage Centre (2,288), Adare Castle (2,500), Lough Gur Visitor Centre (3,010), and Bog of Allen Nature Centre (5,000)⁷. It should be noted that each of these attractions, as well as numerous others with a similar range of visitor numbers, operate a visitor centre as an integral part of the attraction.

A new Visitor Centre needs to aim to be financially self-sufficient, meaning that it has to generate sufficient income to cover all of its staff and running costs. As discussed in Section 7.9 of this Report, it will be necessary to increase the current highest number of visitors to the Heritage Park in order to meet the estimated average running costs of a new centre. Normal expectation is to aim for the visitor numbers to rise over the first three years, possibly by around 10-15% per year depending on the facilities on offer and effectiveness of proactive marketing, and then to plateau until further attraction regeneration takes place. For Bonane, this could equate to approximately 6,750 visitors pa three years after the opening of a Visitor Centre (i.e. 35% increase on current visitor peak). It is likely that this would be the minimum target figure to sustain a centre into the future.

This would place the Heritage Park at a similar level of attraction as the Nore Valley Park Open Farm, Kilkenny (6,300 visitors), and the St Nicholas Collegiate Church, Galway, or the An Mhuc Dubh Fintown Historic Railway (7,000 visitors each).

In terms of existing visitor attractions in County Kerry, a target of 6,750 visitors pa would position Bonane as follows:

⁶ Visitor numbers based on gate receipts as per Summary Financial Statements.

⁷ Failte Ireland – All Visitor Attractions 2003-2007.

County Kerry Visitor Attractions

Ranking	Attraction	Change in Visitor Numbers 2003-2007	Current (2007) Visitor Numbers
1.	Aquadome	-22%	166,147
2.	Muckross House, Gardens + Farm	-17%	163,280
3.	Dingle Oceanworld	+20%	108,000
4.	Crag Cave	-	80,000
5.	Blasket Centre	-2%	46,356
6.	Kerry County Museum	-30%	35,000
7.	St Johns Literary Arts Centre + Theatre	+17%	35,000
8.	The Skellig Experience	+13%	31,237
9.	Ross Castle	-7%	30,769
10.	Blennerville Windmill	+25%	25,000
11.	Kerry Woollen Mills	+9%	25,000
12.	Derrynane House + Gardens	+10%	18,715
13.	Skellig Michael	-	12,030
	Bonane		6,750
14.	Ardfert Cathedral	-15%	5,701
15.	Listowel Castle	-	2,316
16.	Musaem Chorca Dhuibhne	+55%	2,169
17.	Vintage Wireless Museum	-2%	294

However, it should be noted that the change in visitor numbers at the main attractions in Kerry over the past 6 years has been extremely variable (as shown above), with many experiencing a decrease in visitor numbers while others have maintained a steady increase.

Based on existing visitor patterns, it is likely to expect 75% of visitors to Bonane during the 6 summer months. The target of 6,750 visitors pa would be equivalent to an average 850 visitors per month or 200 per week (30 per day). In order to sustain these numbers, therefore, it will be important to attract as wide a range of visitors as possible during the summer months, while also extending the peak season to help spread the load and to support related facilities such as a café.

The following table illustrates a possible scenario of how this increase of visitor numbers could be achieved:

Potential Heritage Park Users		
Users	Estimated Number (pa)	Notes
Overseas visitors	3,000	0.175% of all visits to SW Ireland, or 0.4% of all visitors to Co. Kerry
Domestic (Irish) visitors	1,200	0.25% of all domestic visits to Co. Kerry
Coach tours	750	Say one coach per week during 6 months peak. Equivalent to 5% of all regional coach trips.
Local community	50	Incl. visiting friends + relatives
School group visits	450	Say one class per month throughout the year.
Café/shop only users	700	Average 2 per day.
Evening groups, meetings, Community uses	300	1 session per month, av 25 persons.
Special events + temp exhibits	300	3 events pa, av 100 persons
Total	6,750	

It is also important to consider visitor numbers in relation to the environmental qualities of the Park itself (i.e. the comfortable carrying capacity of the resource). An average 30 visitors per day could peak at around 50 per day, which may represent a requirement for 25 car spaces (plus staff and including disabled provision). A car park of 30 max. spaces seems suitable given the scale of the space available. Assuming a proportion of visitors (say 75%) do not venture further than the Visitor Centre, there could be up to 40 people in the park at any one time. If equally distributed between the different monuments, and with say 10 walking or sitting, this would be equivalent to between 4-5 visitors per monument. Any more than this could be considered as over-crowding which would seriously detract from the attraction.

Although these figures represent the maximum situation, and in reality the visitors would be unequally spread throughout the day/week/month, it does indicate that the target figure of 6,750 visitors pa is a reasonable estimate given the nature, content and likely carrying capacity of the Park.

6.7 Results of Public Consultation

At the Community Information Evening held on 3rd July 2009 at the Lansdowne Arms Hotel, Kenmare, a questionnaire was circulated to all those present to gain a fuller understanding on the type of facilities (if any) considered most appropriate by the locals for the future of Bonane, and also on the preferred location. A total of 51 responses were received. Summaries of the responses to the various questions are as follows:

Public Consultation Responses						
	Topic/Question	Very Important	Quite Important	Not Important	No Response	Conclusions
1.	Developing a Visitor Centre at Bonane	58.8%	17.6%	2%	21.5%	80.4% considered it very important that the building should be a combined Visitor and Community Centre.
2.	Developing a combined Visitor and Community Centre	80.4%	9.8%	2%	7.8%	
3.	Range of Facilities to be included:					
	Exhibition area - interpretation material	84%	5.8%	2%	7.8%	84% considered it very important to have an exhibition area.
	Café (light refreshments)	72.5%	21.5%	4%	2%	
	Shop (local arts + crafts)	62.7%	23.5%	7.8%	5.8%	72% considered that there should be a café.
	Offices	41.1%	21.5%	11.7%	25.5%	
	Meeting rooms	62.7%	19.6%	7.8%	9.8%	Other suggestions for facilities included Wooden Playground, Camping site, and Bunk House.
	Creche/family facilities	41.1%	21.5%	7.8%	19.6%	
	General purpose hall - meetings/games	76.5%	9.8%	7.8%	5.8%	

General Comments on facilities:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These may be desirable but is the demand sufficient to justify the costs? How does one fund on-going costs? • High quality interactive exhibition – not just lots of reading material. • Gallivans already provides as a shop in Bonane. • The community facilities should be large enough for meetings, dances etc. 						
4.	What type of architectural style?					
	Contemporary	17.6%	11.7%	5.8%	65%	45% considered that a traditional style building was most appropriate. 17.6% preferred a contemporary style.
	Traditional	45%	11.7%	0%	43.1%	
	Historic replica	39%	5.8%	4%	51%	
General comments on building design:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More cutting edge the better. • Contemporary in sense of self sustaining building. • Contemporary – Stone, Grass roofed. 						
5.	Sustainable building design:					
	Water re-cycling	43.1%	4%	0%	-	84% considered it very important to incorporate solar power into the building design.
	Solar energy	84%	4%	0%	11.7%	
	Wind energy	47%	9.8%	2%	41.1%	
	Geothermal energy	37%	17.6%	2%	43.1%	
	Biomass energy	25.5%	15.6%	2%	57%	
General comments on sustainable building design:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the incorporation of any or all of these options would impose sizeable capital costs, leave it out. • If suitable and cost effective. • All necessary to keep costs down and help the environment. • Grass Roof if in Dromagorteen as it will be looked down on from the Park. • Geothermal Energy – most suitable for site. 						
6.	Where is the optimum location for the Centre?					
	At the existing Heritage Park site	62.7%	11.7%	2%	23.5%	62% considered it very important that the new visitor centre be located at the Heritage Park and 27.4% preferred a site along the N71
	Along the N71	27.4%	2%	5.8%	65%	

	<p>General comments on Location:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonane extends far beyond the N71!! Existing Heritage Park Site would open up the immediate area, and encourage tourists to explore the backroads, therefore showing the true Bonane and not just a drive through busy road. • For meetings & tours etc. An entrance/exit onto N71 would be dangerous, where a large number of cars would be coming and going. • Heritage Park site will encourage tourists to explore Bonane & leave the main road – Priests Leap, old road to Kenmare etc. • There is a need for a Visitor Centre, but it has to pay for itself. So the most cost effective building in size + service + design is best. That is the reason I chose the Heritage Park as the site, so we would not have to buy more land on the Main Road – adding to the costs. • Possibly cheaper to build a Community Centre on a different site. • Having it on the Main Road will mean that passing traffic will stop by it. • Land already available at the heritage park.
	<p>Other General Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would suggest that the facility be grown slowly. i.e. don't begin by having a massive project that would be wonderful to have but the cost would sink the entire ship even before it gets off the ground. i.e let it be a phased development, and keep a firm grip on costs. Remember – if you have an elephant you must feed it! Coming up with the start up capital funding may not be biggest problem, but try and look down the road 5 years after the facility opens and try to anticipate day to day expenditure and ask where windfalls come from". For these reasons, Glengariff sports field have considerably modified their plans and rightly so in my view; and equally Glengariff Golf has quietly shelved an extension to the club house – and lucky for them that they did as the club would have folded by now if it had proceeded as proposed 3 – 4 years ago. • It is vital for the sustainable future of Bonane. • I am fully behind a development of this nature in Bonane. The benefits would extend far beyond just employment locally, Bonane needs a focal point for community activities. • How will the Visitor / Community Centre be funded & how will it be financially maintained? • When is this to be built by! Next 5 years? 10 years? • I like the idea of an eco friendly building. I think that it is important that there is a café & a shop as this will bring in more money. It is also important that this building houses a community room for use by the people in the area. • A combined centre would help ensure the future for the younger generation in Bonane & benefit us all. It is a facility that is badly needed. • Community Centre / Heritage Centre would provide a valuable focal point for the parish. It would provide numerous possibilities for a community, which is already vibrant. • Design could be circular (i.e. to reflect the stone circle & Ring Fort). Also to have decked area overlooking the lake. Grass Roofed as it is looked down upon from the Park & all other materials Stone Timber – very natural. • I would like to know more details on the financing of the project and the running of it. • The long term management of marketing and development will be essential and should be discussed at this stage. Costs need to be broken down a lot more and worse case figures established. • This is a fantastic idea. I don't think staffing is really a problem.

7. Design Brief and Project Plan

7.1 Visitor Centre Types

Visitor centres are a vital component in providing access to heritage and environmental resources.

As considered earlier (Section 2), the public now expects a much higher level of service and information and retail opportunities, as well as improved access through IT and facilities for less mobile visitors. The centre can have the following functions:

- Promotion – raising awareness of the location and attraction
- Orientation of visitors around the location
- Filtering of visitors through the building and to the main attraction
- Interpretation – educating visitors about the location and attraction
- Substitution – acting as the public ‘face’ of a location that may be inaccessible due to the isolation or fragility of the attraction.

For the Bonane Heritage Park, it is proposed that the centre should include all of these functions. It needs to raise awareness of the location itself as well as the attractions of the wider area (e.g. as gateway to the Sheen River valley and related attractions). It needs to introduce visitors to the archaeological features of the area, and within the park specifically, and provide high quality interpretation material. It should filter visitors through the building, offering retail, refreshment and toilet facilities. The building can also function as an attraction in its own right, providing visitors with the opportunity of appreciating the archaeological, cultural and natural attractions of the area without necessarily having to physically experience them, thereby opening-up the qualities of Bonane to wider range of visitors (through ‘virtual tourism’) while reducing the pressure on potentially sensitive resources.

It is also clear from the public consultation responses and from discussions with the Community Co-Operative Society that the consideration of any new building at Bonane needs to take full account of the current and future needs of visitors to the Heritage Park as well as those of the local community. There is presently no facility to provide essential community functions, such as for meetings, social occasions or other group activities. Both the Church and the school are inadequate for this purpose. The community of Bonane, estimated at around 250 persons, is dispersed over a wide rural area. It lacks a central focal point and, in most cases, it is necessary to use the facilities of Kenmare for community events.

As there are no suitable buildings or developed sites available for re-use, a new build will be necessary. This needs to be a high quality, multi-functional, energy efficient, landmark building that minimises running costs by intelligent design, providing for the needs of both visitors and the local community. Such a centre could represent a far more efficient building type in terms of dual use, resources and ongoing management. It could be developed as an architecturally interesting and environmentally sensitive package, gaining the support of the local community while promoting tourism at the local and regional levels.

A similar approach was adopted for the Dolmen Eco-Centre in north-west Donegal, opened in 1999 and the first Eco-Tourism and Community Centre in Ireland. The local Co-operative have developed an interpretative centre to celebrate the ancient and nearby Portnoo dolmen, as well as a year-round public facility that serves as a recreational and meeting point, bringing together the surrounding dispersed and rural community. The building utilises efficient energy technologies and waste management practices. Other key features include:

- The centre aims to encourage tourism in an unspoilt rural area and to promote clean, efficient use of natural resources while being used for both tourism and community activities.
- The Centre has a year round integrated field studies centre containing displays, an Activity Room for sports, a multi-functional hall, and a Tourist Information Point and Craft Shop, and is wheelchair accessible.
- Includes Wind Turbine Heat Pump, Solar panels, and Eco Reed-bed Waste Management System.
- There is continuous monitoring and display of ongoing savings from renewable energy uptake.
- Children's play area, multi-use games court, and landscaping to car park have been added recently.

7.2 Other Visitor Centres

The following images present a range of Visitor/Community Centres from a wide variety of locations. They are not intended to be directly applicable, but do demonstrate a number of different approaches which can help inform and inspire a suitable building for Bonane.



The Dolmen Eco-Centre, Co. Donegal



Holistic Community Centre, West Cork



*Visitor Centre
Connemara National Park*



Doolin Community Centre, North Clare



Croagh Patrick Visitor Centre



Dawyck Botanic Garden Visitor Centre



Belfast Zoo Visitor Centre



Ceide Fields Visitor Centre



*Sutton Bank Visitor Centre,
Yorkshire*



*North-West England Visitor
Centre*



The Skellig Experience



Lough Gur Heritage Centre



*The Moorland Visitor Centre,
Edale, Peak District*

7.3 Location

The location for a Bonane Visitor Centre needs to take account of the intended function of the building, cost considerations, planning and service provision requirements, and the general consensus of the local community. Essentially there are two broad options:

1. Within the village of Bonane on the N71
2. Adjacent the entrance to the Heritage Park

It is generally acknowledged that the new centre needs to function both as a tourism and community facility. It should therefore be readily accessible to a wide cross-section of potential users, preferably by means of transport other than the private car (i.e. on foot, cycle or by bus/coach). In addition to celebrating the unique collection of archaeological features within the park, the building can also serve as a gateway and information point to the attractions of the Sheen River valley and the wider area. Such considerations would indicate that the centre should have a prominent visual presence, capable of attracting passing trade and fulfilling a broader visitor function.

The Local Area Plan for Bonane⁸ indicates that there is little demand for development in the village and there are no plans in the short-term to install a treatment plant. Any new development will therefore be relative to scale and character of the existing village and will be low density. The Plan also indicates that generally any new development should be located between the Church on the western side of the village and the Chocolatier on the eastern side of the village (representing very restricted locational choice), and that any new development needs to respect the character and high quality natural setting within which the village lies through sensitive design and siting.

Assuming that alternative locations could be explored along the N71, for example in the vicinity of the primary school located approximately 1.5km to the north of the village, the new building would need to provide a sufficient 'presence' in order to be recognisable to passing motorists, often traveling at speed, which could have design implications in relation to the sensitive landscape setting. Any potentially suitable site would also require acquisition which is likely to be prohibitively expensive given the scale of development envisaged. Whereas there are distinct advantages with Option 1, therefore, these are out-weighed by the practical considerations of site suitability and additional cost.

A building located as Option 2 would function principally as a gateway to the Heritage Park. It could also provide information on the wider area, but slightly less effectively than Option 1 due to its location away from the main road and its direct association with the archaeological features at Dromagorteen. The Option 2 location is more directly related to the leisure route of the Beara Way, providing

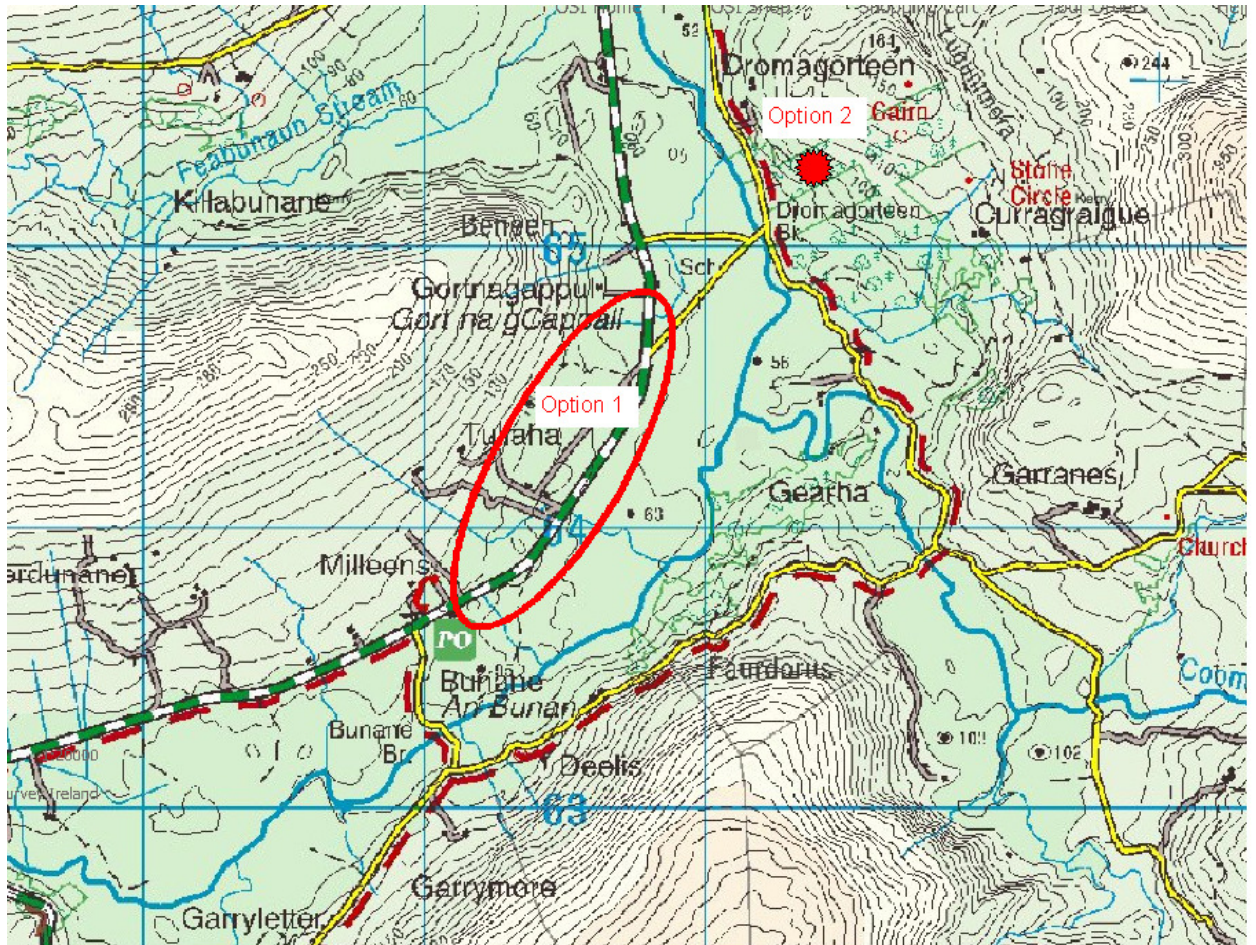
⁸ South East Kerry Settlements Local Area Plan, Kerry County Council

increased opportunities for alternative modes of access such as walking and cycling, but less accessible for public transport due to the narrow approach roads. The Heritage Park site would open up the immediate area, and encourage more visitors to explore the backroads, thereby showing the true Bonane and not just a drive along a busy road. The physical character of the site is also already known, and it is clear that a new building could be absorbed into the location without adverse impact on visual quality.

Both options would equally suit a dual use community function. Given the dispersed nature of the local community, it is inevitable that the large majority of local trips would be by private car. Although there could be some advantage to accessing more than one facility in the same location (e.g. visitor centre and church, or visitor centre and school) the village is also dispersed in character and has no particular centre.

The principal advantage of Option 2 is that the site does not require acquisition (as the land would remain on lease from Coiltte), representing considerable cost savings in relation to Option 1. A development at this location may also be more immediately deliverable given its defined nature and established use.

The results of the public consultation exercise were also more in favour of Option 2, with 62% responding that it is very important for a new visitor centre be located at the Heritage Park, and 27.4% preferring a site along the N71.



Location Options 1 and 2

7.4 General Concept

The new building should provide for and encourage tourism in an unspoilt rural area and promote the clean, efficient use of natural resources. It should:

- Be multi-functional, providing for both tourism and community activities
- Of high quality design and sensitive to the site context in the use of materials and form in relation to the surroundings
- Protect or improve the existing attraction
- Have positive effects on the viability and vitality of the local community
- Provide a high level of service, information and retail opportunities
- Secure improved access through IT and facilities for less mobile visitors

For the reasons given in Section 7.2, it is proposed that the new building is located at the Heritage Park, in the vicinity of the existing hut at the entrance to the park. It can be orientated south-west, to

take full advantage of solar gain, and with the hillside providing additional shelter and a natural background to help absorb the building into its surroundings. Sustainable design principles and energy efficiency should be an integral part of the building process (as promoted by Policy EE-2 of the CDP).

The location can take advantage of the lake as an existing amenity feature. Parking should be arranged between the access gate and the new building, partly sunken into the adjacent landform and defined by natural stone walling. New planting, comprising native trees and shrubs of local provenance, should be used to help further assimilate the development into its surroundings.

Materials for the external works should be limited to those occurring naturally in the local area (stone, gravels and timber). Signage should be kept to the minimum required for identifying the new facility, sensitively located and to a high design standard. External lighting should not be required.

The building should be distinctive and noticeable whilst aiming to fit as comfortably as possible within the landscape setting, merging into the natural folds of the landform and the backcloth of the vegetation.



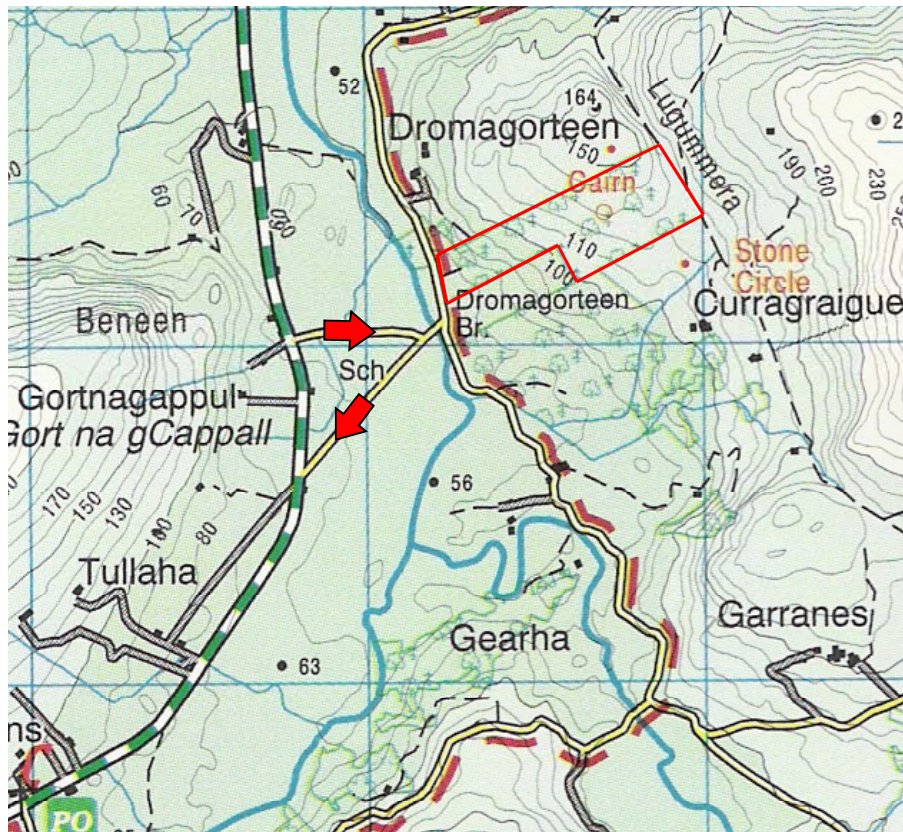
Proposed Building Location

7.5 Access

Currently it is possible to access the Heritage Park by from two narrow third class roads extending eastwards from the N71 and via Dromagorteen Bridge. Both routes are sign posted. It is proposed to retain this arrangement, but with a one-way system introduced (northern road in and southern road out) in order to limit potential conflicts from passing traffic at peak periods. Sign posting would need to be adjusted accordingly.

It is also proposed that further consideration is given to traffic calming measures through the village, including the incorporation of a right turning lane at the northern access road. This would not only improve the presence and accessibility of the Visitor Centre, but would also help to raise the awareness of Bonane generally.

Pedestrian and cycle access is already possible from the Beara Way, adjoining the Heritage Parks western boundary.



Proposed access arrangement

7.6 Building Components

The design and size of the centre is determined by the required function and estimated number of users. It is necessary for the new building to accommodate essential visitor needs (reception, interpretation, café/kitchen, sales, and toilets) as well as the needs of the local community for meetings and informal events (shared use of café, offices/stores).

Based on a maximum of 50 visitors per day during peak periods (refer Section 6.6), and the community meeting function, the minimum required space allocations would be:

Visitor Centre Requirements			
Space Function	Space Allocation/person	Space Requirement	Approx. Max. Persons
Entrance foyer + group gathering point	1.8 m ²	45 m ²	25
Exhibition area and retail outlets (combined with foyer)	1.8 m ²	25 m ²	15
Café + meeting room	1.2 m ²	70 m ²	60
Kitchen	-	30 m ²	-
Store rooms	-	20 m ²	-
Reception/Office	-	30 m ²	-
Toilets	-	30 m ²	-
Totals		250 m²	100

The total estimated building footprint (250 m²) represents a relatively small structure, but one that would be appropriate to the context of the site and to the maximum number of users envisaged. It could accommodate up to 100 visitors at any given time, and with sufficient space for community meetings or special events for up to 60 persons. The internal design should be sufficiently flexible to cater for a variety of uses. It is proposed that the café is limited to serving tea and snacks (locally made cakes, etc), positioned to over-look the existing lake and with decking to provide additional outdoor space. The use of moveable room dividers between the foyer and café is proposed to further increase the adaptability of the space.

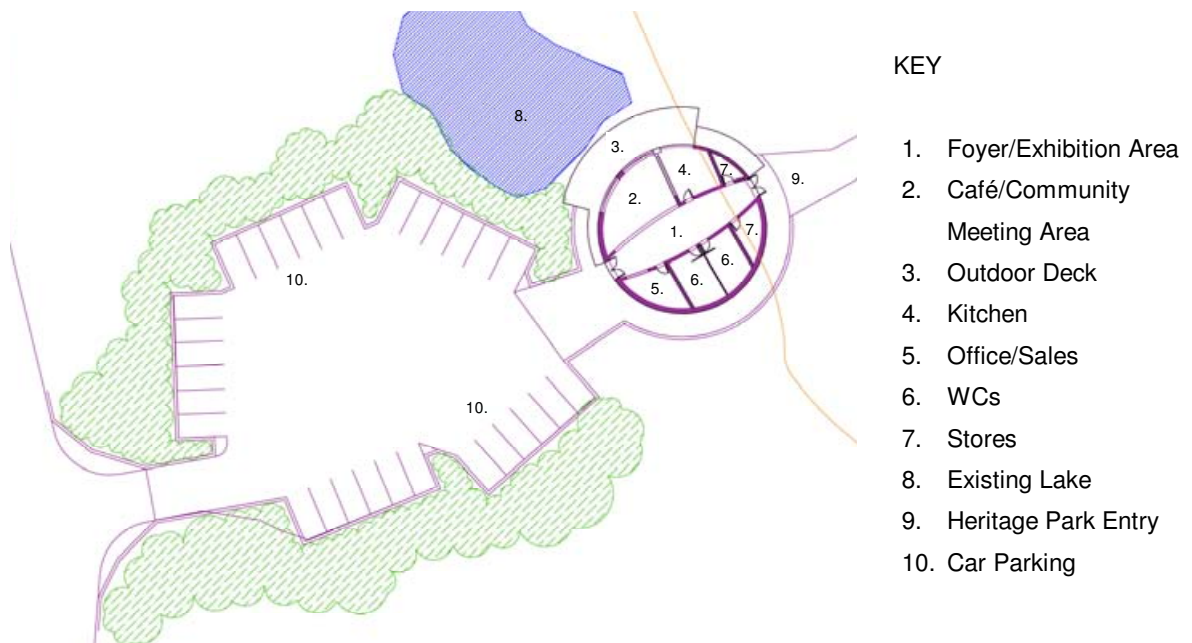
The entrance foyer should serve as a general gathering and orientation space, combining small retail outlets and interpretation display material. This could include local arts and crafts, postcards, brochures, art display/sales area, etc. However, the facilities provided within the new centre should be complementary to those already provided within the vicinity of Bonane, such as Molly Gallivan's (approx. 3km south-west of the Park) offering a traditional cottage and farm experience, tea rooms and craft shop. It would be beneficial for the existing Weaver's and Chocolatier to consider setting-up an additional outlet in

the new building. As the Centre must be able to be run with a minimum of staff, the sight lines between the different uses must be good, especially from the reception/retail desk.

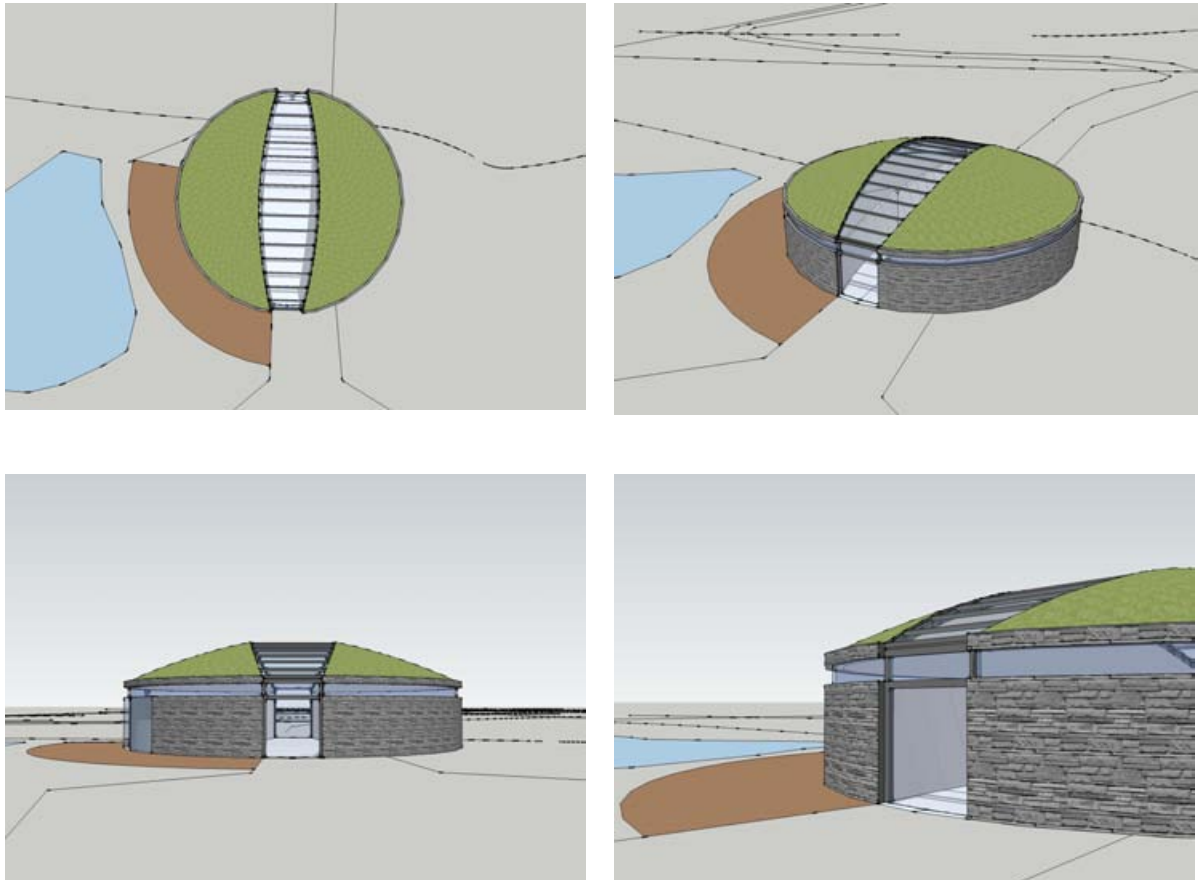


Flexible internal gathering, retail and display spaces

A circular building form is suggested, reminiscent of the Ringforts and Stone Circles in the vicinity, and to achieve a spacious and airy feel internally. However, if the project were to proceed the building design would be subject to further architectural studies commissioned through a separate process. The following images are therefore indicative of how the required objectives could be met, while minimising the environmental impact of development and allowing sufficient space for potential expansion in the future.



Indicative Building Form and Parking



Sketch views of proposed concept building form

7.7 Environment and Management

It is important that the external finishes should be natural, using materials typical to and readily available from the locality. Internal finishes should also be simple and robust, in keeping with the rural character of the building and the natural qualities of the surroundings. Natural light should be available from the south-west facing glazing, and from upper level glazing around ancillary rooms and public conveniences. Natural ventilation should be optimised, and heating and air handling plant kept to a minimum.

Running and maintenance costs of the new building should be minimised. Good thermal insulation and high thermal mass, together with passive solar gains in winter months and solar control to reduce overheating in summer months, will help keep running costs down. A living green roof will assist thermal control and give the building a soft organic profile suitable to the sensitivity of the site.

For general space heating requirements, consideration should be given to a heat pump system (loosely called a geothermal system). This utilises solar energy, which is banked in the earth one metre down - the earth temperature is always 7 to 8 degrees Celsius. This geothermal bank of energy can be harvested by means of a chilled fluid loop (a collector) which is buried outside the building in an area of approximately 700 sq.m.

An 'Eco Reed-bed' should also be considered for the Waste Management System, requiring the consent for reed planting on lower ground between the new building and the river. Rainwater harvesting should be adopted where practicable, together with sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) for the external areas (possibly linked to the proposed reed bed).

7.8 Phased Development

Whereas phased implementation of the proposed facility may appear an attractive possibility given the construction costs involved, an incremental approach is not recommended for a number of reasons. For a project of this nature it is extremely difficult to sustain the enthusiasm and commitment of the main supporters, who are mostly volunteers, over an extended and possibly open-ended timescale. The project has already taken several years to reach its current position, and much has been achieved to the credit of the Co-Operative Society. At this stage it would be preferable to retain a clear final objective, not too far away, that everyone involved with the project can focus upon. In this way the dedication of the committee can be rewarded through a major achievement that would help safeguard the future of the Heritage Park while also benefiting the local community.

It would also be preferable for potential funders to see that their support will result in a finished project within a given timeframe, not part of one that they might be asked to continue funding or that may fail altogether if other sources of funding are not found in the future.

Given the location and purpose of the project, only a high quality new build will suffice. Reducing the specification of materials or other cost saving measures would not be appropriate. Potential funders are more likely to want to see a high quality, energy efficient, landmark building that minimises its running costs by intelligent design and meets or exceeds national standards in sustainable design.

Constructing one large building is less expensive than constructing several smaller ones or phased extensions, and the disruption to the site and its surroundings is kept to a minimum. There is nothing more likely to frustrate visitors than coming to a building site, part open and perhaps not fully meeting expectations.

It is recommended, therefore, that full consideration is given to a single distinctive building that encompasses all of the recognised primary functions of exhibition, café/community meeting room, shop, toilets, offices and storage, energy efficiency and landscape suitability.



Sketch views of proposed concept building form

7.9 Budget Cost Planning

Construction Costs

Based on a new build project located at the existing Heritage Park site, it is estimated that the implementation costs for a multi-use Heritage/Community Centre would be as follows:

Estimated New Build Costs			
	Element	Rate	Cost €
1.	Construction 250sq.m.	€1,500/sq.m.	375,000
2.	Fixtures, fittings + interpretation	10%	37,500
3.	VAT on construction	13.5%	55,690
4.	Professional Fees	10%	41,250
5.	VAT on fees	21%	8,870
5.	Add Contingency	5%	20,625
	Total Construction Costs =		538,935 (say 540,000)

Running Costs

The annual running costs of the new building will be made up of Repairs/Maintenance and Operation Costs, and Staff costs. The following table summarises the estimated running costs (excluding staff), based on industry benchmarks available from the British Cost Information Service (BICS).

Estimated Running Costs			
Floor Area 250m ²			
	Element	Rate Per Year (€)	Cost Per Year (€)
1.	<i>Repairs and Maintenance</i>		
	Building fabric	11	2,750
	Building services	12	3,000
	Redecorations	3.5	875
2.	<i>Operation</i>		
	Cleaning	18	4,500
	Utilities	3.5	875
	Total Running Costs =		12,000

7.10 Operation Scenarios

The detailed operational costs of the new Centre are difficult to accurately determine due to the wide range of variables, such as visitor numbers and likely income from sales. Three different operation scenarios have therefore been developed in order to demonstrate the likely costs under different circumstances.

Building costs and estimated running costs (excluding staff) have been kept the same for each scenario. Although construction costs can fluctuate according to market conditions, given the scale of building envisaged and the timeframe until commencement of construction, the cost difference is not expected to be significant. Similarly, the repairs/maintenance and operation costs may vary (e.g. through more efficient use of energy), but the same figure has been included as a reasonable estimate for each scenario.

The total operation costs will be largely determined by the number of staff required to manage and maintain the Heritage Centre and Park. This will be the most costly element of ongoing expenditure and will strongly influence the economic feasibility of the project. Operation of the building functions should therefore aim to be by a minimum number of staff/volunteers.

In order to further reduce staffing costs, consideration should be given to exploring opportunities for involving community service programmes (e.g. Rural Social Scheme and FAS). The Centre could also be offered as a permanent base for existing Government environmental staff such as the NPWS District Ranger. It may also offer opportunities for in-work training on a range of jobs related to the environment, catering and event management, and the potential could be investigated for developing links with the Government's latest employment schemes as well as Colleges running vocational schemes involving work placements.

Whereas the main income for the Centre will be from visitor entry charges, in order to meet the estimated running costs it will be necessary for this to be supplemented by revenue from the café, sales and letting space for meetings and community activities, local art display and sales, hosting related festivals and events etc, and through other fund raising activities. Various combinations of estimated income from sales are included in the scenarios, based on figures obtained from other visitor centres in Ireland. Once the centre is in operation, it may be necessary to re-assess the proportion of space given over to café and sales (another visitor centre, for example, has indicated that sales have proved more profitable than the café, and provision adjusted accordingly).

As previously described, the eventual viability of the Bonane Visitor Centre will be dependent on increasing the average existing numbers by around 35% to 6,750 visitors per annum. It is unlikely that the Park could accommodate more than this number without appearing 'over-crowded'.

The other significant factor is the entry charge to the Park. Since opening the charge has remained at €4 and, based on responses in the Visitor Books, this is generally considered appropriate for the facilities on offer. Given the expanded facilities that would be available with a new Centre, however, and the additional operation costs that would be incurred, it would be reasonable to consider increasing the entry charge to €5. This charge would be the same as many other existing Centres with similar (or fewer) visitor numbers, such as the Bog of Allen Nature Centre (Kildare), Boyce Gardens (Limerick), The Old Courthouse Visitor Centre (Donegal), Lough Gur Visitor Centre (Limerick), and Killybegs Maritime and Heritage Centre (Donegal).

In order to help meet the estimated operation costs, an increase in the entry charge to €5 will be essential, as demonstrated by Scenario 3.

	Scenario 1		Scenario 2		Scenario 3	
<i>Item</i>	Assumption	Cost €	Assumption	Cost €	Assumption	Cost €
Running Costs						
Administration	1 full-time (qualified) 1 part-time (part qualified)	25,000 10,000	1 full-time (qualified) 1 part-time (voluntary)	25,000 -	1 full-time (qualified) 1 part-time (voluntary)	25,000 -
Grounds maintenance	1 full-time	20,000	1 full-time	20,000	1 part-time + voluntary	10,000
Repairs/operation		12,000		12,000		12,000
Total Running Costs		67,000		57,000		47,000
Revenue						
Entry charges	5,000 visitors @ €4	20,000	6,750 visitors @ €4	27,000	6,750 visitors @ €5	33,750
Refreshments + sales	€1.50 per visitor	7,500	€2.00 per visitor	13,500	€2.00 per visitor	13,500
Festivals + special events	5no. x 100 persons x €5	2,500	5no. x 200 persons x €5	5,000	5no. x 200 persons x €5	5,000
Total Revenue		30,000		45,500		52,250
Balance		- 37,000		- 11,500		+ 5,250

Scenario 1 is the most pessimistic, with the estimated running costs and revenue resulting in a substantial loss during the first year of opening the Centre. This is due to the high full-time staff costs and the possibility of not achieving the required increase in visitor numbers. The entry charge is kept at €4. It also assumes relatively low revenue from refreshments and sales, and up to 100 persons attending 5 festivals and events throughout the year. Should the increase in visitor numbers be achieved under this scenario, the annual loss could be reduced by €7,000, while increasing the entry charge to €5 could reduce the loss by €5,000 (for 5,000 visitors).

Scenario 2 would also result in a loss during first year of operation, although not as great as the first scenario. This assumes that voluntary part-time staff would be available to support the administration, and that the increased visitor numbers can be achieved. The entry charge is kept at €4. It also assumes slightly higher revenue from refreshments and sales, and up to 200 persons attending 5 festivals and events throughout the year. Should the entry charge be increased to €5 under this scenario, the loss could be reduced to around €4,750.

Scenario 3 is the most favourable, resulting in a slight profit after the first year of operation. However, this would also require one voluntary part-time member of staff to support a full-time administrator, and only one part-time grounds maintenance person (with voluntary support as necessary). The increased visitor numbers would need to be sustained, and the entry charge increased to €5. The same slightly

higher revenue from refreshments and sales as Scenario 2 would need to be attained, together with up to 200 persons attending 5 festivals and events throughout the year.

Scenario 3 is therefore the most realistic in terms of financial viability and provides the operational basis recommended by this study if development of a Visitor Centre is to proceed.

However, it should be noted that this scenario is wholly dependent on achieving the increase in visitor numbers from Year 1 of operation, together with the other revenue assumptions shown in the table. Evidence from similar visitor centres indicates that the normal expectation is for visitor numbers to rise steadily over the first three years of opening, usually by around 10-15% per year, and then to plateau. As considered previously, 6,750 visitors per year is the likely threshold given the scale and type of facilities on offer at Bonane. Assuming that a 12% increase in numbers can be achieved at Year 1, through active promotion of the new facilities on offer, it would take a further two years to reach the this required threshold. Thereafter, income and expenditure can be expected to be reasonably constant if the visitor numbers and related sales/activities are sustained.

The following table therefore projects the Scenario 3 assumptions over three years:

Item	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Assumption	Cost €	Assumption	Cost €	Assumption	Cost €
Running Costs						
Administration	1 full-time (qualified) 1 part-time (voluntary)	25,000 -	1 full-time (qualified) 1 part-time (voluntary)	25,000 -	1 full-time (qualified) 1 part-time (voluntary)	25,000 -
Grounds maintenance	1 full-time	15,000	1 full-time	15,000	1 full-time	15,000
Repairs/operation		12,000		12,000		12,000
Total Running Costs		52,000		52,000		52,000
Revenue						
Entry charges	5,600 (+12%) visitors @ €5	28,000	6,270 (+12%) visitors @ €5	31,350	6,750 (+8%) visitors @ €5	43,750
Refreshments + sales	€2.00 per visitor	11,200	€2.00 per visitor	12,540	€2.00 per visitor	13,500
Festivals + special events	5no. x 200 persons x €5	5,000	5no. x 200 persons x €5	5,000	5no. x 200 persons x €5	5,000
Total Revenue		44,200		48,890		62,250
Balance	Year 1	- 7,800	Year 2	- 3,110	Year 3	+10,250

On this basis the centre would be running at a loss during the first two years, and then moving into a reasonable profit situation by Year 3 and thereafter once the increased visitor numbers had been achieved. From Year 3 onwards, therefore, it may be possible to replace the voluntary assistant with a part-time paid assistant.

However, importantly, many other visitor centres contacted have indicated that their operation is dependent on support from public bodies, such as County and Town Councils, Fáilte Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Office of Public Works, ERDF grants, American Ireland Foundation and the Millennium Fund. Corporate sponsorship has also been essential for many centres.

Given the expected shortfalls in revenue during Years 1 and 2 at Bonane, and the low profit margin likely by Year 3 (which would be further reduced if a part-time administrator was employed), combined with the unpredictability of related revenue sources such as the café and general sales, it would be necessary to secure external funding (public and/or private) in order for a visitor centre at Bonane to be viable. Such additional funding could be in the order of €10,000 per year for the first 3 years of operation, and thereafter according to the success of established management and visitor activities.

The full range of funding sources therefore needs to be explored and a partnership approach adopted for the Bonane Heritage Centre that could include the County Council, the South Kerry Development Partnership Limited, Fáilte Ireland, Energy Ireland and other local bodies and corporate groups.

7.11 Indicative Interpretation Plan

The main aim of interpretation should always be communicating ideas and feelings which help people enrich their understanding and appreciation of the place, without detracting from the experience of the place itself.

As described in Section 6.3, the Park would benefit from an overall review aimed at simplifying the existing presentation and interpretation while minimising the visual impact on the sensitive environment.

Other interpretation techniques to be explored could include audio devices with self-guiding programmes (possibly supplied from the Visitor Centre). There are many examples now of innovative audio and hand-held computer interpretation to demonstrate the growing use and potential of this medium. Technology may also be the key that allows the removal of all footpaths and signs altogether. By linking a Global Positioning System (GPS) to an audio tour, for example, every visitor could be told exactly where they are, and where everything else is, at any point in the landscape. Such satellite technology would help get rid of unnecessary signs and help conserve the landscape by encouraging

visitors to take different paths through the site in order to reduce wear and tear on the fragile environment while enhancing the visitor experience.

Audio tours are already being used in very wide areas, such as in South Wales where an audio 'wand' has been used on a county-wide basis. This is based on a hard disc drive which can currently store up to 40 hours of information. Visitors are given a leaflet with the many attractions and sites featured in the area, each keyed to a number. Visitors can listen to information about a variety of destinations and choose which to visit. When they get there, they can use the wand tour to tell them about the site itself. There are many different themed tours that could be followed, linking aspects of different sites. For Bonane, such an application could include descriptions of all the archaeological sites within the wider valley, or particular themes such as astronomical relationships between sites, bronze making, Fulacht Fiadh cooking techniques, pre and post-famine history, and local folk stories, etc.

The latest mobile phone technology presents the possibility of tourists being able to call up images and video footage of major attractions for the cost of a phone call. This is likely to include audio interpretations for sites and towns as well as recreations of particular attractions to any point in their history. The application is based on GPS technology and image recognition software to identify the user's location when a phone's camera is pointed at a building or ruins. Images of the attraction, restored to its original splendour, can be transmitted onto the screen, as well as options for other features such as dramatised video footage.

A new purpose built visitor centre would provide additional opportunities for both the local visitor as well as those from further a field to explore the cultural landscape of the valley and gain an understanding of how the archaeological sites may have looked and functioned within their contemporary landscape. Such a venue would be an ideal location in which to provide information on other sites of interest within the broader valley which landowners have agreed can be accessed. The small scale of the existing heritage park ticket office greatly curtails the opportunity to provide such information.

The full range of contemporary interpretation techniques needs to be explored in order to realise the potential of the new facility.

The interpretation should also emphasise people stories. Most visitors are interested not so much in artefacts as the people behind them, the people who made them, used them, lost them or left them behind. The main emphasis should be on the social history of Bonane and its people. The lives of local characters and families will guarantee interest from the community as well as from visitors.

Repeat Visits

It will be important to encourage repeat visits to help achieve sustainable visitor numbers. This can be achieved by regularly changing key elements of the primary displays, to have a programme of temporary exhibitions and to develop a series of events or demonstrations throughout the year.

Temporary exhibitions can cover anything that is relevant or topical, from school children's artwork to local seasonal customs. Exhibitions or special seasonal events related to the astronomical significance of the monuments could be especially effective, attracting a diverse range of visitors from home and abroad. Similar events have already been successfully held at the monuments and these could be combined into an overall programme of activities aimed at extending the visitor appeal of the Park throughout the year. Many museums and arts organisations also generate travelling exhibitions that can be loaned or hired for specific periods. This all requires the time and resources for someone to compile, author and mount the events, which may warrant a full-time employee experienced in event management and interpretation. Such activities also provide media opportunities to market the venue, as well as providing opportunities for the continued involvement of the local community.

8. Impact Appraisal

8.1 General

The proposed Visitor Centre would provide badly needed facilities for 'niche tourism', reinforcing the cultural, historical and educational aspect of the tourist experience in line with the South West Regional Tourism Development Plan (2008-2010), while contributing to the economic development of a peripheral and rural area with an otherwise weak economic base. Tourism activity is already present in the wider area, at Killarney and the Ring of Kerry in particular, and there are a number of visitor trails passing through or close to Bonane.

The Visitor Centre would be located within an established settlement, with the potential to provide a range of other economic and commercial sectors and thereby helping to sustain the local community. The proposals are based on the principles of sustainable tourism – the facilities would be accessible by a range of transport modes (vehicle, cycle, walking) and would encourage longer visitor stays, helping to extend the tourist season and add to the vitality of the settlement throughout the year. In addition, a multi-functional facility is proposed to serve the needs of both visitors and the local community. Such a centre would represent a far more efficient building type in terms of dual use, resources and ongoing management.

The proposed location of the new facility is at the site of the existing Heritage Park, thereby reducing potential impact of the development through the re-use of land that has previously been disturbed and by reinforcing an existing established use. It is considered that the proposed development would not have an adverse impact on the landscape, ecology and environment. It is envisaged that the development needs to be a high quality, energy efficient, landmark building that minimises running costs and the use of environmental resources. It would be developed as an architecturally interesting and environmentally sensitive package, and has the full support of the local community.

8.2 Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the term applied to the systematic examination of the likely impacts of development proposals on the environment prior to the beginning of any activity. In principle, EIA should apply to all actions likely to have a significant environmental effect. In the case of certain large scale, or other sensitive developments an EIA must be carried out.

EC DIRECTIVE 85/337/EEC came into force in Ireland on 3 July 1988. The European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Motorways) Regulations, 1988 gave effect to the Directive for

motorway projects. The European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations, 1989 provided for the incorporation of the Directive into Irish law. The Local Government (Planning and Development) Regulations, 1990 which came into effect on 1 February 1990, set out the detailed requirements for EIA in respect of applications for planning permission and planning appeals and also established procedures for EIA with regard to developments by or on behalf of local authorities.

The Local Government (Planning and Development Regulations) 1990 incorporate an additional provision that, at the discretion of the relevant local planning authority, an EIS may be required for projects which are less than the specified thresholds, in terms of quantity, area or other limit. This is a most significant provision, the guiding principle being the extent to which the planning authority 'consider that the development would be likely to have significant effects on the environment'. The 1990 Regulations also provide that, in the event of an appeal to An Bord Pleanála, the Board may require an EIS where such was not already required or requested by the local planning authority.

Although the proposed development at Bonane does not fall within the specified thresholds, it is possible that an EIA may be required at the request of the planning authority due to the sensitive location of the site and the scale of development in relation to its rural context. In the case of such sub-threshold development, the requirements for an EIA will be determined in accordance with guidelines issued by the DEHLG in August 2003 published by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The objective of an EIS is to outline the possible impacts of the proposed development and identify the mitigation measures which will be taken to limit any potential negative effects on the environment. The results of the EIA need to be collated into an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which must accompany any relevant planning applications.

An EIS will require input from a number of specialist consultants covering a wide range of issues including, traffic, noise, air, soil, water, flora and fauna, archaeology and landscape and the possible impacts on, or of, these factors by the proposed development.

Paragraph 2(c) of the Second Schedule of the 1989 Regulations outlines the following headings as specified information which need to be included in an EIS:

A description of the likely significant effect, direct and indirect, on the environment of the development, explained by relevance to its possible impact on:

- *human beings*
- *flora*
- *fauna*
- *soil*

- *water*
- *air*
- *climate*
- *the landscape*
- *the interaction between any of the foregoing*
- *material assets*
- *the cultural heritage.*

In the context of a project involving a planning application and submission of an EIS, such as will be required by the Bonane development, the following four stages are identified as comprising the EIA process:

- i. Planning Application - including drawings and specifications submitted as in the case of any planning application, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Regulations 1977.
- ii. Environmental Impact Statement - an assessment by the applicant (developer) of the effects (impacts) of the proposed development on the environment.
- iii. Consideration of Application/EIS - consideration by the local planning authority or An Bord Pleanála (if appealed) of any submissions or observations on the EIS.
- iv. Decision of Competent Authority - the decision of the local planning authority at local level or An Bord Pleanála at national level.

For the purpose of this Feasibility Study, an initial assessment of the prescribed environmental topics is as follows.

Human beings

The proposed Visitor Centre is expected to benefit the community by providing facilities that will be accessible to local people as well as visitors, and with the potential to provide a range of other economic and commercial sectors, thereby helping to sustain the community.

Flora and Fauna

There are no designated natural heritage sites of International or National Importance in the vicinity of the proposed development. Non-designated features such as hedgerows, ditches and banks, stone walls, woodlands, rivers, streams and associated riparian zones would be protected and enhanced as part of the development process.

As there are no known local bio-diversity audits available for the area, an ecological survey would be undertaken during the design stage. This would identify the presence or not of protected species or

other features of bio-diversity sensitivity that would require protection or mitigation measures as part of the EIA process.

Soil

To date, there is no legislation, which is specific to the protection of soil resources. However, there is currently an EU Thematic Strategy on the protection of soil which includes a proposal for a Soil Framework Directive which proposes common principles for protecting soils across the EU. Soils would be protected during construction according to the directives, local authority requirements and the provisions of a Method Statement to be submitted with the application where requested by the planning authority.

There are no Geological Sites or Geological Heritage Areas within the vicinity of the development area.

Water

The proposed development site lies in close proximity (25-50 metres) to the River Sheen, forming part of the South West River Basin District (SWRBD), Sub-Basin Waterbody category. The overall status of the Sheen Waterbody is classified as 'good'. The overall risk to the waterbody is classified as '2b – not at risk'. The policy of the SWRBD for the water body is one of 'protection'. The proposed development will need to comply with the following basic measures:

- Drinking Waters Directive
- Major Accidents and Emergencies (Seveso) Directive
- Environmental Impact Assessment Directive
- Sewage Sludge Directive
- Plant Protection Products Directive
- Nitrates Directive
- Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive

As the Sheen is identified as a salmonid river, any application for development bounding the river needs to be accompanied by a report detailing proposed river treatment. It is also an objective of the County Council to ensure that any private development proposals involving the abstraction of surface waters would be thoroughly assessed for any potential ecological impacts and to prohibit any such abstractions which would be considered potentially detrimental.

The site is underlain by the Beara Sneem Groundwater Waterbody. The overall status is 'good'. The overall objective is to 'protect'. The overall risk is '1a at risk (drinking waters)'. It will be necessary to assess applications for new unsewered systems by applying risk mapping/decision support systems and codes of practice.

The development proposes the use of SUDS for all external surface water drainage, and the creation of a reed bed system for wastewater treatment. A flood impact assessment and proposals for the storage or attenuation of run-off discharges (including foul drains) will be required to accompany an

application for Planning Permission for development exceeding 1 hectare to ensure that the development does not increase the flood risk in the catchment.

Air

The proposed development is not expected to result in any deterioration in air quality as a result of increased levels of vehicle traffic to the facility.

Climate

Current predictions of climate change in Ireland indicate that winters will become wetter and the rainfall distribution 'stormier', and that sea levels will rise. This would mean that areas not currently prone to flooding may be at risk in the future.

Although this is not considered to present a problem to the Heritage Park, due to the local topography, the development should aim to incorporate the maximum provision to reduce the rate and quantity of run-off through the application of sustainable design/construction methods.

Landscape

The proposed site is not located within the vicinity of any designated landscapes. Nevertheless, there are features present which are extremely attractive and representative of the natural landscape of Co. Kerry and which warrant retention to ensure that the development has a positive amenity value and retains the interrelated ecological functions. Non-designated features such as hedgerows, ditches and banks, stone walls, woodlands, rivers, streams and associated riparian zones would therefore be protected and enhanced as part of the development process.

Material assets

There are no known material assets that would be adversely affected by the development proposals.

Cultural heritage

The proposed location for the Visitor Centre, at the existing entrance to the park, is not near or within the zone of archaeological potential for any recorded archaeological monument. This area has been disturbed with the construction of the car park and lake feature and it is likely that any archaeological material that may have existed here was removed during this work. It is possible, however, that archaeological material may still remain undisturbed in the area. In the event of the Visitor Centre being constructed, it is recommended that archaeological testing be carried out in all previously undisturbed areas in advance of development. If archaeological material is identified it should be retained in situ or preserved by record.

All recommendations in this report are subject to approval by the National Monuments Service at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Overall, the proposed development of a Heritage Centre at Bonane is not anticipated to result in any significant adverse impacts on the environment. Indeed many aspects of the development should result in positive impacts for the local community and the regional tourism sector.

9. Feasibility Appraisal

9.1 SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strengths

- The Bonane Community Co-Operative Society already exists and has achieved considerable success to date in developing a Heritage Park and in securing funding from external sources.
- Since its opening in 2006, the Heritage Park has continued to be a popular attraction, with between 3,500-5,000 visitors per annum.
- Historical/Cultural tourism is recognised as a growing market, requiring a sophisticated product and high quality facilities.
- Approx. 35 national attractions with similar visitor numbers already have established Visitor Centres.
- Bonane is well-located in relation to existing visitor attractions, including established long distance walking and cycling trails, and conveniently located on the N71.
- The Sheen River valley provides a magnificent landscape setting to the Park and with the possibility of access to many other sites of archaeological importance, representing one of the highest concentrations in the country.
- Many of the archaeological sites present in the wider area have astronomical relationships with Bonane, reinforcing their national and international significance.
- There has been considerable energy and investment directed at the Park, and the vast majority of existing visitors are highly impressed.
- Realisation of the project has the full support of the whole community and the commitment of the Co-Operative Society.
- Development of the project is not anticipated to result in any adverse environmental impacts.

Weaknesses

- Any future development will rely on substantial funding support from outside bodies, estimated at nearly €550,000 for implementation and around €10,000 per year for the first three years of operation and possibly after that.
- Running costs will be an ongoing commitment required to be off-set by income generated by the retail, catering and community event elements of the Centre (which are difficult to predict).
- Existing visitor numbers will need to be increased by around 35% in order to sustain the Centre, particularly staff costs.

- The lack of professional staff will require the appointment of a dedicated person to manage and promote the Centre.
- Members of the Co-Operative Society will have to adopt a hands-on role indefinitely, requiring considerable dedication and time commitment.
- Bonane is not a natural tourist honeypot, being removed from the main existing tourist attractions and not on the route of established tour operators.
- Many tourist attractions have experienced a decline in visitor numbers during the last 5 years, while others have seen a modest increase.
- The existing presentation of the Park partly detracts from the atmosphere of the monuments.

Opportunities

- A new Visitor Centre would greatly enhance the attraction and interpretation of the Park.
- A multi-purpose building could provide badly needed community facilities.
- The proposed site is ideally located for such a development due to its proximity to the main archaeological monuments and its established use.
- A Centre in this location would help draw passing visitors from the main road, introducing them to the real character of Bonane.
- Running costs of a new Centre could be off-set by revenue from visitors, sales and community activities, local art display and sales, and hosting related festivals and events.
- Any such building could promote clean, efficient use of natural resources while being used for both tourism and community activities.
- Co-operative marketing with other developing attractions, such as the Skellig Experience and Kerry Geopark, would enhance tourism both locally and regionally.
- Interpretation of the Park could be greatly improved through state-of-the-art audio-visual techniques.
- The folklore and legends associated with many of these monuments could be positively developed.
- There would be opportunities for involving community service programmes, in-work training and for developing links with employment schemes.
- Collaborating with schools and colleges would help develop educational initiatives.
- Site management could be developed to promote bio-diversity.

Threats

- Not achieving the desired objectives for a multi-use, sustainable, high quality building is unlikely to attract the required funding support.

- If the Visitor Centre project fails to happen it would have a serious effect on the future of the Heritage Park.
- Given the current economic climate, it may take over two years to secure the necessary funding. It will be hard work to sustain energy, commitment and motivation over that time, especially as this timeframe will almost inevitably slip and take longer (e.g. planning).
- The funding strategy is likely to be heavily dependent on support from public and private funding sources. Without it the project is unlikely to proceed.

9.2 Conclusion

The Community Co-Operative Society has commissioned this study to investigate the potential in developing a fully accessible Heritage Centre in Bonane. Based on the research undertaken it seems likely that the project would succeed subject to:

- Sufficient funding being secured for construction within a reasonable timeframe (2-3 years).
- Achieving adequate sources of continuing revenue to cover part of the running/staffing costs.
- Achieving and sustaining an increase in visitor numbers of around 35%, by expanding the attraction of the facility.
- Successful promotion and marketing in co-operation with other similar attractions in South West Kerry.
- Obtaining planning permission within a reasonable timeframe, and minimising impacts through the EIA process.
- Maintaining the full support of the local community and the dedication and commitment of the Bonane Co-Operative Society.

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