

# Local communities working together with State agencies to plan a sustainable future, Bere Island - IE

## 1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

## 2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach

## 3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The Bere Island Conservation Plan and the processes involved in its preparation mark a way forward for other islands and mainland communities.

## 4. Overview of the case

The Bere Island Conservation Plan is an integrated strategy to ensure the long-term, wise-use and sustainability of the island's natural and built heritage. The development of the plan involved co-operation between the islanders, Cork County Council and the Heritage Council. The plan includes policies for agriculture, maritime activities, tourism and heritage.

## 5. Context and Objectives

### a) Context

Bere Island lies approximately 1.5km off Castletownbere in Bantry Bay on the south-west coast of Ireland. It is approximately 9.5km long by 3km wide and ca. 18.5km<sup>2</sup> in area. The physical characteristics of the island are similar to the undulating mountainous character of the Beara Peninsula on the mainland. The predominant habitats are species-rich, peaty grasslands and heathland. Land use is dominated by extensive agriculture with ca. 1,600 hectares available for farming; predominantly animal husbandry, particularly sheep. The waters around the island are generally sheltered and clean, supporting diverse fish communities and have contributed significantly to the livelihood of the islanders, with scallops, lobsters, oysters and sea urchins the most profitable species fished. Current commercial fishery activities are based principally on aquaculture (mainly salmon), shellfish farming (abalone, scallops, urchins, rope mussels) and the harvesting of seaweed. Tourism is another important economic activity – the population of ca. 200 trebles in the summer. The importance of the island's natural and cultural heritage lies in the diverse habitats and historic buildings found on the island and the lifestyle and traditions valued by the islanders. There has been a military presence, occupying 72 ha, since the 18th century which has continued to the present day.

The Bere Island population is declining and the number of permanent residents is currently at the threshold level for sustaining a viable community. Significant development is required to sustain the existing population and to attract additional permanent residents if a viable and vibrant community is to remain on the island into the future. After working with Bere islanders and Cork County Council since mid 2000, the Heritage Council launched the Bere Island Conservation Plan in 2003. The need for such a plan had evolved from the islanders' concern for the future development of their island. They wanted to have a say in it, ensuring that development would not be detrimental to the island or its way of life. Yet they recognised that new ideas and

activities had to be encouraged in order to maintain life on the island and e.g. are pioneering the growing of *Miscanthus* grass to fuel burners which dry the seaweed used to feed the abalone being farmed on the shore.

## **b) Objectives**

To develop a Conservation Plan for the island that would address both heritage conservation and the sustainable development of the island, taking into account the environmental, social and economic aspects of future developments.

## **6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)**

### **a) Management**

Cork County Council is the responsible Authority for the island. The Heritage Council is a statutory body which falls under the Department of Arts, Culture and Gaeltacht. It seeks to protect and enhance the richness, quality and diversity of the national heritage of Ireland by working with partners at local level.

### **b) ICZM tools**

The significance of Bere Island, as the Plan reveals, is due to the presence of a mosaic of different aspects of its heritage, both built and natural. Since any impact on one will impact upon the others, an integrated management strategy was required. For the purposes of the Plan, the term conservation was interpreted as meaning 'wise use'. Since the natural and cultural heritage of the island was largely unrecorded, unprotected and unmaintained, there was concern among some of the islanders that 'development' would have a negative impact on the island's heritage. Conversely, there was a perception that heritage conservation would effectively limit the potential for development on the island and thus negatively impact on the long-term viability of the island population. From this potential conflict of interest was born the concept of a Conservation Plan for the island that would address both heritage conservation and the sustainable development of the island, taking into account the environmental, social and economic aspects of future developments. It is not an economic development plan for the island but a framework within which any subsequent development plan should operate. The purpose of the Conservation Plan is to assist the community and various agencies to conserve the island's heritage; plan a sustainable future for the island and deliver the 'Islanders' Vision' of Bere Island's future

The principal policies identified that the focus of tourism development should be on enjoyment of the island's natural and cultural heritage. Furthermore, a co-operative approach among farmers should be introduced with Rural Environmental Protection Scheme-type plans which treat the island as a single entity. A fisheries co-operative should also be established to develop a sustainable fisheries/ aquaculture plan for the island's marine waters/foreshore.

In order to do this it was recognised that an Island Representative Body or Council should be formed to direct/promote sustainable development and to act as a consultative body for potential developers. A number of relevant, interest groups have been set up and delegated to implement specific policies and strategies. The Bere Island Community has approved the Conservation Plan and is now working on the implementation of the policies proposed. A co-ordinator has been in place since 2004 to progress this work. The implementation of the Conservation Plan should be reviewed annually.

## **7. Cost and resources**

The Plan was co-funded by Cork County Council and the Heritage Council. The Heritage Council is supporting the implementation of the Plan through specific-purpose grant aid and provided funding for the initial implementation stage.

## **8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)**

The sustainability of any proposed development now has to be assessed using a framework included in the Conservation Plan. Any proposed development must establish whether it will contribute to the sustainable future of the island community or whether it will have a detrimental impact on the island's heritage and resources. In order to do this, the proposed development has to identify the characteristics of the development in terms of the temporary and permanent impacts at all phases of the

development e.g. emissions and discharges (including solid waste); land take or use of resources and infrastructure. The overall sustainability has to be evaluated in terms of its positive or negative impact on the environment and heritage of the island; its impact on infrastructure and resources; the creation of employment and the compliance with the 'Islanders' Vision' for the future. If negative impact/s are identified, the developer has to propose measures to neutralise/minimise the impact. Only then can a decision be made as to whether the proposed development is considered sustainable and proceed. The development and agreement of this Plan demonstrates the ability of local communities to work with State agencies, Government departments and local authorities in planning for the future.

## 9. Success and Fail factors

The Plan was developed through a process of consultation with both permanent and temporary residents. The initiative was developed by the islanders themselves. The people of Bere are proud of their island and have a strong sense of civic and community responsibility and are active in local environmental, conservation, sporting and childcare groups. They have won the Tidiest Island Award in 2007. The island has also taken part in ISLA, an INTERREG project based on small islands in Europe.

## 10. Unforeseen outcomes

With Heritage Council financial support, the Bere Island Projects Group has published a Heritage Guide to Bere Island.

## 11. Prepared by

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## 12. Verified by

It has not been possible to verify this case.

## 13. Sources

- Bere Island Conservation Plan (2003) An Chomhairle Oidhreachta / The Heritage Council
- [www.bereisland.net](http://www.bereisland.net)
- [www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie)
- [www.oileain.ie](http://www.oileain.ie)



Bere Island Conservation Plan (7.65 MB) 