LANDSCAPE HIGHLIGHTS

Heritage Outlook 2004 — 2009

An Chomhghairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council
LANDSCAPE HIGHLIGHTS

Heritage Outlook 2004 – 2009
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Since revamping the format of Heritage Outlook in 2004 the Heritage Council has consistently (some might say stubbornly) carried regular articles of direct relevance to the Irish Landscape its management, its conservation and its development. The following is a selection of those printed to date. It is not a comprehensive list but serves to highlight the range of Council’s activities that reflect its landscape agenda and assist it in achieving the objectives laid out in its 2002 landscape policy proposal. They highlight undoubted weaknesses in current structures and legislation but more importantly suggest very positive steps that we can take to overcome those weaknesses.

In presenting these articles as part of the package available for the 2009 Landscape Conference it is intended that the information and knowledge they contain will reach a wide audience. Above all the intention is to communicate the value of landscape and broaden everyone’s understanding and enjoyment of our natural and cultural landscapes.

The articles are presented chronologically.

Michael Starrett
Chief Executive
The Heritage Council
Free access to the countryside is a contentious issue.
Eleanor Flegg considers each side in the debate

Irish law is clear on the subject of access – if you want to cross privately owned land, you must have the permission of the landowner. It is not the case that you can walk anywhere you want. That walkers have, until recently, been widely tolerated is testimony to the easygoing nature of most landowners, and to the fact that the relatively small number of walkers caused little disruption to farming activities.

In Ireland, the vast majority of land is privately owned, and most of it is farmed. As with the fox hunting issue in the UK, access has become the focus of a division between urban and rural society, and elements of the farming community restrict access to walkers as a way of demonstrating their frustration. The dramatic polarisation of the issue at ground level has much to do with dissatisfaction with current agricultural policy. Although agriculture remains the lifeblood of rural society, an industry that makes a far greater contribution than can be measured in terms of production, it is currently an industry that feels semi-redundant, manipulated, and cross.

The ownership of land is particularly dear to the Irish psyche and we have a tendency to identify ourselves in terms of it. When walkers tramp across the family farm, many farmers feel that their ownership rights are being called into question. Fears that allowing access to walkers will create rights of way over property are unfounded. A waymarked way cannot cross private land without the permission of the landowner and establishes not a right of way but a ‘permissive path’ which may be revoked by the landowner at any time. Although rights of way do exist in Ireland, the network is limited and the development of a network of walking routes has depended largely on agreement between the organisers and individual landowners. Due to the fragmented nature of landownership, it can be no small undertaking to trace landowners and find out if they are willing to allow a walking route to cross their land. A three-kilometre section of a recent projected route crossed land owned by 29 families, each of them with a story to tell. Some lived in Australia, some in the UK, some people didn’t know that they owned the land, and in some cases the owner couldn’t be identified.

It is important to clarify that access to uplands is a separate matter from that of established walking routes or waymarked ways, which are low level, and carry relatively large numbers of walkers on signed routes previously agreed with the landowners. These two issues are often run together in the media and can be confused. Upland walkers are small in number...
and operate independently, their activities are concentrated in mountainous areas, and they require routes by which they can find a way up to the hills. This often involves crossing farmland. Farmers’ concerns about the insurance implications of allowing walkers to access upland areas through their land are understandable. The Occupiers Liability Act (1995), so carefully negotiated by the farming sector, is being tested in the courts following the Rossenalagh ruling last summer. A woman who was injured after a fall from a scenic roadside embankment took a case against the landowners, the Franciscan Order, and was awarded damages when they were found liable. The case, which sets a dangerous precedent with alarming consequences for all landowners, is under appeal to the Supreme Court and is expected to be heard later this year. Until then, landowners have to continue to take ‘due care’ of any visitors on their land, but it is not clear how far they are liable.

The liability situation regarding waymarked ways is different. As part of the development of the route, an insurance policy is put in place whereby the landowner or occupier is indemnified against all claims by walkers of the route, even if they stray from it. The route is insured, developed, and maintained by the route promoter, usually the local authority or local development agency. To date, no case has been taken on a walking route recognised by the National Waymarked Ways Advisory Committee (NWWAC).

The Irish Farmers Association (IFA) maintains that farmers have the right to determine whether or not people have access to their lands, and that, if access is granted, there should be some form of remuneration for farmers whose lands are used for recreational purposes. The abolition of the access measure in the first Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS1) has been interpreted as establishing a precedent of payment for access, whereas in actual fact it merely compensated farmers for the improvement of facilities on their land. Few farmers actually availed of this widely misunderstood measure, and it has had more impact in abolition than it ever did when it was available.

The walking community too is sharply divided: Keep Ireland Open (KIO) actively campaigns for a legislative solution amounting to freedom to roam. In fact, the much quoted ‘freedom to roam’ in Scotland is a traditional privilege rather than a legal right, a de facto resumption of a historic arrangement interrupted by the sheep farming estates of the 18th and 19th centuries. Similarly in Sweden, freedom to roam relies on tradition rather than law. Other
countries, such as Norway, Denmark, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, do give some legal protection, while in England and Wales the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) allows the public to walk freely on open country and registered common land shown on new official maps. There is no European norm for access issues, which are resolved individually, based on the landownership traditions of each country.

More moderate Irish organisations such as the Mountaineering Council of Ireland (MCI), the National Waymarked Way Advisory Committee of the Irish Sports Council (NWWAAC), and the Heritage Council believe that access routes across farmland must be negotiated in partnership with landowners and the farming sector. There is general agreement among these groups that landowners should be paid to maintain access routes across their lands, but that direct payment for access would be problematic to administer. There is also a strong interest in this issue from the tourism sector – walking has been described as the silent performer in Irish tourism and there are fears that ongoing disruption may discourage tourists. There have been rumblings that hill-walking holidays to Ireland may be on the decline at a time when Irish tourism can least afford it.

Comhairle na Tuaithe

In response to calls for a government-led Countryside Recreation Council, Comhairle na Tuaithe was established in January 2004 by Éamon Ó Cuív, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The current main aim of Comhairle na Tuaithe is to address issues relating to waymarked ways and access to land, and its creation follows the publication of the report of the Consultation Group on Access to Waymarked Ways. This council, which includes representatives from such disparate bodies as Coillte, Cork Kerry Tourism, Fáilte Ireland, The Heritage Council, ICMSA, IFA, Irish Sports Council, Irish Uplands Forum, Keep Ireland Open, The Mountaineering Council of Ireland, and Walking Cycling Ireland, will consider this important matter with respect to all countryside recreation activities and all who are affected by these activities. The new council will also include governmental and environmental representatives, should the Minister accept all of its recommendations. The Minister also announced that he intends to make provision for maintenance of waymarked or approved locally agreed walks to be included as rural services for the purpose of the new Rural Social Scheme. If this comes to fruition, it may form an acceptable replacement for the access measure in REPS1.

The establishment of Comhairle na Tuaithe is good news for both the farming and the walking community, and it remains that the battle between walkers and farmers is not universal and many walks continue to work well at ground level. The success of the Wicklow Uplands Council, for example, lies in that it represents the interests of all parties: farming, landowning, community, environmental, recreational, economic, and tourism; and takes a partnership approach to sustainable development. There are many other instances around the country of walks that work well, and it may be that there is no sweeping national solution to the impasse. Whereas the introduction of a payment for farmers who maintain access routes is called for, some will see an advantage in allowing walkers to cross their land, and some will not. In all probability, the solution will remain local and piecemeal and will depend on how well the situation is handled at ground level by the individuals involved.
The Heritage Council

- Has promoted and facilitated countryside recreation since its establishment in 1995
- Believes that countryside access and recreation offers people a way to enjoy, appreciate, and encounter many aspects of heritage, including landscape, wildlife, habitats, archaeology, and architecture
- Sees the farming community as key to maintaining the fabric of our rural areas, environmentally, socially and culturally
- Believes that users of walking routes may need to be made more aware of the requirements of farming and how to behave in the countryside
- Recognises that farmers should receive payment where they maintain routes that cross their land, on condition that these routes are in accordance with the agreed standards of the NWWAC in terms of path condition and information supplied
- Believes that walking routes can also make a significant contribution to a balanced healthy lifestyle and that funding for preventative health care through promotion of access to the countryside should be investigated in the long term

Good Practice for Walkers

- Keep the number of cars used to the minimum; consider hiring a bus for group outings
- Park safely, with particular regard to allowing for entry to property. Many access problems have arisen from inconsiderate parking by recreational visitors. Remember that farmers work at weekends and that a tractor with a trailer attached needs a wide space to turn into a field or gateway
- All land is owned by somebody and we use that land with the goodwill of the owner, not with a legal right
- Avoid aggravating known problems, use approved routes in these areas
- Be friendly and courteous to landowners and local residents
- Respect private property and do not interfere with machinery, crops or animals
- Make no unnecessary noise, especially when passing houses
- Be careful not to damage fences, walls or hedges - these are livestock boundaries and expensive to repair
- Use stiles and gates where they exist, leave gates as you find them (open or closed)
- Leave no litter behind; even biodegradable items like banana skins and tea bags take years to disappear
- For environmental and safety reasons, keep group numbers small. Ideally group size should be less than 10 people and should never exceed 15
- Avoid taking dogs on the hills at any time
- Walk on rock, stones, or the most durable surface available, rather than on vegetation or soft ground
- Avoid using eroded paths
- Avoid taking short cuts on zigzag paths as this creates new lines for run-off of water and increases erosion
- The building of cairns detracts from the wild character of the hills; new cairns can mislead other walkers
- Have respect for all natural things and take care not to disturb plants, birds, and animals

A recent ‘Walk Safely’ information leaflet produced by the MCI and NWWAC giving advice to all walkers in the Irish countryside is available from the Heritage Council and the MCI. See www.mountaineering.ie and www.heritagecouncil.ie
As the Government releases new guidelines on rural development, Planning Officer Stephen Rhys-Thomas explores the emotive issue of one-off housing

The Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government recently released a consultative draft policy document – Sustainable Rural Housing Consultation Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities – to provide guidelines in relation to one-off rural housing. Essentially, the guidelines favour one-off rural housing contrary to good planning principles, such as traffic safety and groundwater protection. In rural areas suffering persistent and substantial population decline, anyone wishing to build a house will be accommodated, subject to good planning practice, even if they have no roots in the area. There are numerous conditions and exceptions to this rule; however, it is assumed that rural housing will be permitted save for exceptional circumstances described in the guidelines. The premise for this change of policy is to enliven a dying rural community base, and to ensure that the people who belong to a rural area or who need to live there will be able to build houses. Planning authorities are being instructed to implement the new guidelines even though they are still in draft form.

This policy replaces a strategy published by the Government in 1997 to achieve sustainable development in Ireland, which contained a presumption against granting permission for urban-generated housing in rural areas. Despite this, one-off rural housing has thrived over the last seven years, accounting for at least 36% of houses built in Ireland each year. Local authorities have approved 85% of applications for one-off houses. Approximately four out of every 1,000 of these planning decisions are appealed, usually on the grounds of the risk of groundwater contamination from septic tanks, the creation of traffic hazards, or visual obtrusiveness. These appeals were based on public policy, and 90% were upheld by An Bord Pleanála. Just 6% of the total number of decisions to grant permission have been refused on appeal.
A considerable outcry has accompanied the recent projected change in policy; rural housing is a contentious issue. People like to live in beautiful countryside, they often like to live close to their families or in the place that they grew up, and they like to live in a house that has been built to suit their requirements. It is also considerably cheaper to build than to buy, and the option of building on land that may already be in family ownership is an attractive one. However, one-off rural housing has the potential to raise a number of issues. These include: groundwater pollution from domestic septic tanks; increased traffic hazard due to new vehicle entrances; visually obtrusive and inappropriately designed houses; habitat fragmentation due to inappropriate planting and removal of existing habitats; social isolation due to dispersed housing patterns; unsustainable car dependency; a greater burden on rural transport systems; a stretching of resources with regard to social services; and increased surface erosion caused by the increased use of minor roads. There are also fears that people will build and sell on – it would seem an obvious way of making money.

The policy is also considered by some to be at variance with certain aspects of the National Spatial Strategy, which seeks to accommodate housing needs within existing settlements. The guidelines argue that Ireland has always had a rural and scattered settlement pattern. While this is true, historical patterns of development are inextricably linked to the economic forces of the time; transport in the past was primarily by foot, and the economy was based around agriculture and local production. We risk recreating an anachronistic settlement pattern in a world that has changed beyond imagining. An over-supply of one-off rural housing sites could make it less attractive to develop villages and towns. As car dependency grows, people will tend to use the services in the larger centres to which they commute. At worst the countryside could come to resemble a dispersed suburb from which people travel by car to work, shops, and schools, with worsening congestion at peak times, even on rural lanes. Even now, in many rural areas, the roads carry so much traffic that it is no longer safe to walk to school or to the local shops. There is concern that new vehicular entrances will cause traffic hazards on rural roads. Local authorities are in an impossible situation in this regard: they are instructed to remove hedgerows from the entrances to one-off houses to improve visibility, and at the same time to protect and maintain hedgerows for the sake of biodiversity.

It is best to keep the shape of the house very simple, minimising modelling of the front façade, and incorporating the simplicity of older houses in the area.
The need to protect the quality of our water is also a major consideration. One-off rural housing depends on effluent treatment systems, in most cases septic tanks and percolation areas, and more frequently mechanically operated systems. If these are faulty or poorly maintained, the resultant run-off will cause ground and surface water pollution. There is as yet no effective compliance or monitoring regime to ensure that domestic effluent treatment systems do not pollute water and such a system is at present beyond the scope of pressured rural authorities. Ireland’s water resource is currently among the best in the EU and must be maintained under the Water Framework Directive. The minister may yet insist on putting monitoring measures in place to ensure that effluent treatment systems do not pollute ground and surface water.

Another problem is that much recent housing in rural locations is both inappropriately designed and visually obtrusive. The guidelines set out standards for good design and encourage planning authorities to develop their own design guidelines, but these are accompanied by fears that planning authorities will either become a type of ‘style police’ or will zealously promote ‘traditional vernacular’ development at the expense of allowing innovative contemporary design. These fears may be unfounded. Cork County Council has produced a very sensible book, *Cork Rural Design Guide: Building a New House in the Countryside*, by Colin Buchanan and Partners and Mike Shanahan and Associates, which offers many solutions to rural design issues. The advice is to keep the shape of the house very simple, minimising modelling of the front façade, and incorporating the simplicity of older houses in the area. Recommending that an architect should be engaged, the authors encourage concentrating on proportion, scale, and form rather than detail as ‘no amount of frills will compensate for a potentially clumsy, awkward and unattractive structure’. Currently, as it is considerably cheaper to manage without, only 10–12% of one-off rural houses are designed by an architect. The guide indicates that the new house should be located in the most sheltered part of the site, orientated to maximise daylight and solar gain, and set back from the road with a secluded garden behind retained hedgerows. The emphasis is on linking the structure with the countryside around it, treating house, garden, and landscape as a unit, and using indigenous plants. Although other county councils have produced rural housing design guides, this is one of the best and is admirably clear on what works in the countryside and what does not.

The consultative guidelines clearly set out the various elements of heritage and the need to identify and protect it, with an emphasis on pre-planning discussions. It is accepted that local authorities should clearly map all areas of natural and cultural heritage in order to inform policy decisions in relation to rural housing. However, it is widely believed that the systems that are currently in place to deal with heritage issues in relation to planning will not be able to cope with the extra workload. The Department may consider addressing the staffing issues within the rural planning authorities, and it may be useful to have heritage expertise located within the local authority structure to speed up the consultation process. The Heritage Council have developed a heritage appraisal methodology to be applied to development plans which has proved successful in the past in highlighting problems areas. It is envisaged that the Heritage Council will continue to carry out this work as a third party neither connected to the local authority or the Government.

Ultimately, the view is that the guidelines do not fully complement issues of sustainability. The new guidelines, in moving from their draft form should address the issue of improving the quality of our towns and villages whilst promoting a rural lifestyle. To allow one-off rural housing go unchecked may result in the decline of our smaller rural settlements and damage the sustainability and viability of rural communities in the present and in times to come.

Stephen Rhys-Thomas is Planning Officer with the Heritage Council

Article featured in Outlook Summer 2004
Aiveen Kemp explains the formation of raised bogs and explores a developed cutaway bog in Offaly

Somewhere between 7,000 and 6,000 BC, the Stone Age hunters that inhabited a lakeshore of what is now the area of Boora, Co Offaly, may have noticed the size of their lake beginning to decrease as it became overwhelmed with vegetation, the first step on its way to becoming a fen. This was the beginning of the formation of a raised bog in Lough Boora. This type of peatland, known as oceanic raised bog, started to develop in Ireland as far back as 10,000 years ago and at one stage covered 311,300 hectares of the Irish landscape.

At the end of the last glaciation in Ireland, approximately 10,000 years ago, central Ireland was covered by a series of shallow lakes, remnants of the melting ice of retreating glaciers. The lake in Boora, Co Offaly, was one such lake, and would have been characteristic in its shallowness and by having a base of clay and glacial deposits covered by lake marl. The mineral-rich water of these lakes had its source in springs and from groundwater. As the floating plant communities of the lake died, their remains accumulated on the lake bottom to form a thin peat layer. The reeds and sedges growing on the lake’s edges also contributed to the peat layer when they died, and over time this layer became thicker, until it was so thick that the roots of the sedges that invaded the peat surface could not reach the mineral-rich groundwaters below.

It was at this stage that the vegetation colonising the ‘fen peat’ changed. Sphagnum moss now colonised the peat due to its ability to tolerate the mineral-poor environment and obtain sufficient nutrition from rainwater alone. Sphagnum moss is also able to draw up and hold up to 20 times its own weight in water. It also changes the acidity of its local environment and so facilitates the colonisation of acid-tolerant plants such as bog cotton, ling heather, and sundew. Raised bogs are so called because the surface of an intact raised bog is many metres above the surrounding landscape.

Cutaway bog

Although over 93% of Ireland’s raised bog has been removed to date, our remaining intact raised bogs are some of the most important in
Europe and are some of the most extensive in the world. The importance of preserving what remains of our raised bog cannot be overemphasised, but what of the 6,000 hectares of raised bog that has already been exploited? These areas of raised bog that have been stripped of all of their commercially viable peat are know as cutaway bogs.

Some 2,000 hectares of cutaway can be found in the Boora bog-complex, 16 kilometres west of Tullamore in Co Offaly. During the early 1950s, Boora Bog was the first bog in the Irish midlands to be developed for the production of milled peat to generate electricity. This milled peat supplied the ESB station at Ferbane, which was the first station outside Russia to produce electricity from milled peat. By the 1970s, areas of cutaway were already emerging and Bord na Móna began to investigate ways in which these areas could be used. They focused initially on forestry and grassland plantations.

In 1994, some of the local Bord na Móna workers in Boora set up a group that established an integrated land use plan for the then 1,170-hectare cutaway area in the Boora Bog complex. The Lough Boora Parklands Group, as it was called, is now made up of representatives from the local communities, the voluntary and enterprise sectors, the West Offaly Partnership as well as employees of Bord na Móna. Together they envisaged the parklands as a patchwork of commercial forestry, grassland, and amenities for tourism and education. This vision is certainly being fulfilled. There are now fishing lakes, walkways, bird hides, areas of natural re-colonisation and wetlands, making the parklands what the group had hoped for – ‘an integrated resource with something to offer everyone’.

Back to water

Some of the cutaway areas could not be drained sufficiently for agriculture or forestry, and were prone to flooding in winter. One such area is known as Turraun. Peat had been removed from the raised bog at Turraun for over 150 years, and in 1973 it was the first of Bord na Móna’s peatlands to become cutaway. Before peat can be extracted from a site it has to be drained, and the site at Turraun was drained by a series of gravitational arterial drains that emptied into the Boora River. When peat extraction ceased at Turraun, the drains could not be maintained and the presence of a series of springs meant that the site had areas that were permanently waterlogged. Therefore, Turraun appeared to be an ideal choice for the creation of a cutaway lake.

In 1990, Dr Brendan Kavanagh of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland conducted a baseline survey of Turraun, and supported the recommendation by Bord na Móna that the site be developed into a wetland. Work to turn the cutaway area at Turraun into a wetland began in 1991. Much of the remaining peat was removed from the site and some was used to build three islands. The outflows were blocked and an embankment was built to the north of the site. The springs fed the basin with mineral-rich water to form a shallow lake of 60 hectares in area, which then became part of the Lough Boora Parklands. Because peat extraction in Turraun was stopped almost 20 years previously, vegetation had re-colonised the site naturally, and now covered over 80 hectares.

There are actually over 140 hectares of naturally re-colonised areas in the parklands. As rushes are often the first species to colonise bare peat, they are one of the most common plants found. At Turraun, a variety of grass species have sprung up and some areas have developed into rich wildflower meadows containing bee orchids and common spotted orchids. Surrounding the wetlands at Turraun, bog cotton, water horsetail, Phragmites reeds, bulrush and marsh arrow-grass can be found. Because Turraun was one of the first cutaway areas to emerge, the process of regeneration has progressed to the stage of open woodland, with trees such as willow and downy birch present.
Bird haven

Between 1990 and 1995, flocks of over 200 whooper swans were recorded at Turraun. Because this is over 1% of the Irish whooper swan population, Turraun has since been listed as an internationally important wetland. Other waterfowl recorded at Turraun include tufted duck, mallard, wigeon, and teal, with the most abundant waders being lapwing and snipe. Small numbers of Greenland white-fronted geese have been observed within the swan flocks.

The grey partridge, *Perdix perdix*, is one of Ireland’s most endangered birds. It used to be a common game bird but the only remaining native breeding birds in the country are in the Lough Boora Parklands. This last remaining population numbered only 24 in 2000. Dr Brendan Kavanagh is in charge of the National Conservation Strategy for the Endangered Grey Partridge, sponsored by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and aided by the Curlew Trust. Some 150 hectares of undeveloped cutaway were leased to the project by Bord na Móna to be managed in such a way that was conducive to the survival of the birds. The project has created nesting banks for the partridges and has planted chick-rearing cover crops that are rich in the insects needed by young partridge chicks. Thanks to this project, partridge numbers have remained stable over the last four years. However, because of the small population size, the problem of inbreeding has arisen. According to Dr Kavanagh it was necessary to introduce a small number of wild grey partridge from abroad to the population to resolve this problem and increase genetic diversity. The birds were imported from France, and have bred successfully with the native birds. A limited number of these birds were recently released.

Predation on nesting hens is also a threat to the partridges, so there is a permanent gamekeeper in the area, who controls fox and crow numbers.

According to Dr Áine O’Connor, of the National University of Ireland, Galway, one of the reasons for the high density of birds found on these lakes is the abundance and diversity of large invertebrates on which they can feed. The large numbers of invertebrates is a result of the absence of large fish predators in these water bodies. In fact, the largest predators present are invertebrates such as beetles and dragonfly nymphs.

In addition to the ecological value of the Lough Boora Parklands, the creation of the parklands has provided the local population with an invaluable amenity, but that should not distract us from the bigger issue here. Ireland’s raised bogs are disappearing rapidly and we should do everything in our power to preserve those that remain.

Aiveen Kemp is a writer and Zoology graduate from TCD, who specialised in Freshwater Biology.

IPCC: To find our more about Irish bogs and how you can help to conserve peatlands, contact the Irish Peatland Conservation Council.

Email: bogs@ipcc.ie Tel. 045-860133 www.ipcc.ie

Tim Christophersen talks to Michael Starrett, Chief Executive of the Heritage Council and President of EUROPARC, about protected areas.

How would you describe a successfully managed National Park in Europe?

In Europe, people always have to be factored into the management of any national park. There is no doubt in my mind that attempting to manage nature for nature’s sake will not work. We have enough evidence from trying that approach in Europe and world-wide to know better now. High levels of community participation are critical to long-term success.

Do European protected areas have special characteristics compared to other regions of the world?

Back to those people again. Our population densities tend to produce special characteristics. I would like to think that we have gained much experience in conflict resolution as a result, but not all evidence would support this thesis.

There are only a few, and relatively small, marine protected areas in the pan-European region, in contrast to the recommendations of the World Parks Congress. What do you see as the main reasons for this?

Simple. We don’t live in the sea. By our very nature we are a pretty selfish species and will only react when something affects us directly. It is only now that we are waking up to the fact that, directly or indirectly, the marine area is hugely significant to our survival and the quality of life we lead.

The CBD Conference of the Parties adopted a very ambitious Work Programme on Protected Areas earlier this year. In concrete terms, what does this mean for your work in the coming five years?

Both as President of EUROPARC and as Chief Executive of the Heritage Council of Ireland, the impact will be quite dramatic. Encouraging work with young people, seeking to promote wider community involvement and, of course, setting biodiversity in a wider landscape context will occupy a lot of time.

The theme of the EUROPARC 2004 annual meeting will be ‘The challenge of Natura 2000: \n
We Need to ‘De-expertise’ Protected Areas
Conservation and Opportunities for People. Do conservationists sometimes promise local stakeholders too much in terms of real opportunities from protected areas?

Not as I see it. It is, after all, their nature and their protected area. At least if it isn’t, we are all fighting a losing battle. Of course, opportunity doesn’t always translate into financial opportunity. Giving people responsibility for, and ownership of, protected areas also represents opportunities.

Natura 2000 at present is a collection of more or less disconnected sites. How could it become a real network?

Let’s await the outcome of EUROPA RC 2004. I have my own views, of course, as evidenced by the need to set biodiversity within the context of the wider landscape (both natural and cultural landscape), but our members in Spain have been doing a tremendous job to ensure this year’s conference is truly participative. The answer to your question will come from that participation.

What main threats to protected areas do you currently see in the pan-European region?

It would be easy to focus on the usual culprits such as lack of resources and poor legislation. However, at the risk of upsetting a lot of readers (many of whom may have voted for me as President of EUROPA RC) I see the biggest threat as being a failure on behalf of us as practitioners to change our mindset. Whilst retaining the need for good science, we need to ‘de-expertise’ protected areas, i.e. make sure they are not viewed as the preserve of experts and that they are relevant to people in their everyday lives.

Please complete the following sentence: ‘In 2010, I would like Europe’s protected areas to...

... not need to exist at all because everyone shares the values and significance we attach to them, and applies those values across the whole range of our territories. OK - I am a realist. Maybe by 2020.’

EUROPA RC is a pan-European body with almost 400 members in 38 countries. EUROPA RC is a member of IUCN, the World Conservation Union since 1985. Further information can be found at www.european.org and www.iucneurope.org

Michael Starrett was elected President of EUROPA RC in 2002 and was appointed the first Chief Executive of the Heritage Council in 1996. He is a graduate ecologist and biologist and has worked in protected area management and policy development since 1979. (This interview appeared in the newsletter of the IUCN Regional Office for Europe)

Article featured in Outlook Winter 2004
Tax Incentives Schemes in Ireland
Throwing mud without first taking aim

Tax incentives for development in Ireland have been with us in their present form since the early 1980s. They began with the Temple Bar Renewal Scheme, followed by the first of two rounds of the Urban Renewal Scheme; the Seaside Resort Scheme and Town Renewal Scheme; and the Rural Renewal Scheme for the Upper Shannon. They have been a popular item on the political agenda for the last 20 years and have been consistently good for votes. But have they been good for planning? Can the planning system cope with the pressure-cooker environment that arises, and do we spend enough time planning what we want this increased development activity to achieve in the long term?

The purpose of the tax incentives that have been on offer in Ireland since the early 1980s is to promote development in areas that have been identified as being economically slow to develop, or have suffered from steady population decline.

The original of the species was the Temple Bar Urban Renewal Programme which was presided over by a company (Temple Bar Properties) that operated independently of the Planning Authority. It was recognised in this case that the level of management and coordination involved in implementing the scheme was beyond the available resources of the Planning Authority at the time and a dedicated organisation was required that could focus entirely on the task in hand. A vision was formed and a plan was made. However, this has not always been the approach in subsequent incentive schemes.

Although a separate development company for each incentive scheme would be unnecessary, a vision and a plan is certainly not. Planning is a means of identifying spatial and socio-economic problems and addressing them in a structured way over an extended period of time. When a quick-fix solution such as a tax incentive scheme is applied over a short period of time, the result is akin to throwing mud at a wall and hoping some of it will stick. This has been the approach adopted in the Seaside Resorts Tax Incentive Scheme, which has left the towns they touched with as many problems (many of an environmental nature) as they solved.

The purpose of the Rural Renewal Scheme, which was applied to counties Longford, Leitrim, and parts of Cavan, Roscommon and Sligo, was to increase the level of development activity within these counties, with no corresponding increase in planning staff whose job it is to ensure that all development complies with the principles of sustainable development. Nobody can deny that development is needed in these areas, nor that it brings certain socio-economic benefits to the areas, but are we getting value for money? Are the slash-and-burn techniques of the tax incentive schemes really the way to ensure long-term benefits for the majority of the population? Planners are under pressure when this happens and the quality of decision making suffers.

Whilst the renewal schemes for urban areas became more focused over time – from the Urban Renewal Scheme which designated whole areas of towns for incentives, to the Town Renewal Scheme which designated individual buildings within identified areas – this focus disappeared in the case of the Rural Renewal Scheme which designated entire counties. While the Rural Renewal Scheme has brought many sorely needed benefits to the region, how much valuable mud has slid off the wall and landed on the ground? What other benefits could have been achieved if a properly considered vision and plan were in place at the outset? In the case of the Urban Renewal Scheme and the Town Renewal
Scheme, it was necessary to prepare a plan in advance of the implementation of the scheme. This was even done for towns that already had a Development Plan in place. This recognised that such incentives were likely to create a level of development that the Development Plans may not have anticipated and had not been designed to cater for. This was good planning. It was the creation of a vision before the scheme started. It made sure that people were agreed on what they would get before they got it. To fail to have done so would have been bad planning, or more accurately, an absence of planning.

What will the indicators of the success of the Rural Renewal Scheme be? Will we only look at the figures for economic growth, or will we also have the wisdom to take into account the environmental cost of this growth. An environmental cost that could have been significantly reduced if a proper plan and vision were in place from the start. It’s much easier to know you’ve arrived when you know where you’re going. Having in place a plan and vision is not just to satisfy the planners and environmentalists – it ensures focused development which achieves the widest benefits possible for the community – and it saves expensive mud.

Paddy Matthews is a Conservation Consultant with John Cronin & Associates

In 2003/4, three communities in Westmeath took part in the preparation of Village Design Statements. Mark Brindley introduces this exciting new course for rural planning.

Irish villages that have not previously benefited from any sort of plan have had their form and character brutalised by inappropriate, unsympathetic and alien additions. The cutting and pasting of semi-detached suburbia onto the edges of our towns and villages, whilst maybe meeting commuter-driven housing demands, has also served to reinforce the problems associated with such piecemeal, unplanned, developer-driven housing on the fringes of our villages and towns. We have a legacy of developments that poorly integrate with the original village/urban form. The rise of the cul-de-sac development, with inappropriate highway design standards, allows cars to reach speeds unsuitable within such supposedly residential areas, and serves to reduce pedestrian access between developments and physically segregate new residential developments from the traditional village centre.

Unfortunately, patterns of development are dictated by land ownership, and limited foresight is being shown, or rather facilitated, by planning authorities bound by the ethos that development in any form is preferable to no development. I am passionate that the role of the professional planner is to, where possible, ‘add value’ to the development process ‘in the public interest’ and, as per the Planning Act 2000, ‘in the interests of orderly planning and sustainable development’. It is no longer acceptable to entertain development proposals that perpetuate the suburban, semi-detached, cul-de-sac culture and the unsustainable pattern and form of development that goes with that. Hence the need to ensure that our towns and villages are permitted to grow in a sensible and rational manner with a suitable range of supporting services. The quality of the physical environment definitely affects the attitudes and behaviour of the local people. For example, segregated residential estates within their own system of segregated cul-de-sacs, with no direct walking routes to facilities or services, will make those facilities appear further away and increase the propensity to use the car. This for me is where the Village Design Statement can best assist.

Act locally

The Village Design Statement is an idea borrowed from the UK’s Countryside Commission who felt similarly that the identity and feel of the original village was being lost by inappropriate additions. The approach is easily adaptable to local situations and has already been undertaken in other rural counties in Ireland such as Sligo and Offaly.

The ‘Village Design Statement’ (VDS) is a good way to help all those involved with planning the future development of their village to understand its distinctive character and what makes it such a special place in which to live. A VDS describes the character of a village and
provides broad design guidelines which address the qualities that local residents consider worthy of protection or improvement.

Between September 2003 and March 2004, local communities in Strete, Killucan/Rathwire, and Tyrellspass were invited to participate in planning the future development of their villages. Westmeath County Council (WCC), with the generous financial support of the Heritage Council, was able to appoint consultants to undertake three VDSs for these three very different villages within the county. It was decided at a very early stage that the consultation process would not involve the Planning Section and was led by the County’s Heritage and Conservation Officers, Bernie Guest and Sinéad O’Hara respectively. This decision was made because it was felt that there was a general mistrust of all things related to ‘planning’. This perception is personally disappointing, but has been formed in part by the decision-making authority rather than the ability of individual planners in the organisation and the profession.

The consultants Manogue, Soltys-Brewster, in association with the Planning Section and following the advice of the Council’s Community and Enterprise Section, identified the key community groups who were able to liaise with local people to promote interest in the project and elect representatives who formed a community steering group to input directly into the drafting of the guidelines. Meetings, workshops and follow-up sessions took place in all of the villages. The VDS has allowed the wider community to gain an understanding of their natural and physical environment, empowering them to formulate and create a guidance document, which provides the Forward Planning Section of WCC with a platform to better understand and inform future development patterns within all of the villages.

Constructive consultation

The VDSs for Strete, Killucan/Rathwire, and Tyrellspass were launched on May 12th, 2004. The consultation process taught us that all the communities involved value their village, its buildings, surrounding countryside and open spaces, and they are ready for the growth of their community - as long as development occurs in a measured and considered way that appreciates the current form.

This assessment, to planning professionals, developers, architects and design practitioners, serves to reinforce our role and responsibility to these communities and ensure that we do not accept the ‘anywhere’ developments which are increasingly eating into the fabric of our traditional urban and village form. The VDS experience has helped us move towards three-dimensional planning and away from the one-dimensional zoning approach, and is part of a general move towards delivering orderly

it is no longer acceptable to entertain development proposals that perpetuate the suburban, semi-detached, cul-de-sac culture
developments which are complementary to the existing fabric of the village and provide permeability and the enjoyment of our built and natural environment.

While the consultative process has proved to be an overwhelming success in itself - building consensus amongst communities, bringing people together with a common purpose in some instances, and promoting an understanding of each village's unique character - the principal purpose from the planning officer's perspective is its ability to inform the statutory planning process.

It became increasingly apparent during the preparation of the VDSs in Westmeath that the future of our villages is best left in the hands of the community, who respect and cherish what is best about it, and to those who know the village well enough to determine its future, namely the local community.

Mark Brindley is a Senior Planner with Tom Phillips and Associates Planning Consultancy. Mark has extensive experience in local plan preparation, Village Design Statements and action area plans, having worked as a Principal Planning Officer in the London Borough of Merton (UK) and more recently as an Acting Senior Executive Planner with Westmeath County Council’s Forward Planning Section.
The Burren is a cultural landscape of inordinate importance. Human activity allied to a unique set of natural conditions has created a landscape like no other in north-west Europe. Signs of human occupation from at least 3,800BC to the present day are evident in the landscape, and the rich natural heritage is everywhere to be seen. Trying to separate the natural from the cultural heritage in the Burren is futile, it is one and the same thing. And the Burren’s heritage is a consequence of, and has been largely maintained by, generations of low intensity livestock farming.

The once dominant position of agriculture as the primary economic activity in the Burren has changed to it being only one component of the local economy, and increasingly a part-time activity. This has disrupted the balance between livestock grazing and species richness, resulting in, amongst other things, encroachment of scrub on the ecologically valuable grasslands. Tourism and recreation have become much more dominant economic forces, and the trend towards people living in the Burren but commuting to employment outside the region has increased. This has generated a vibrant local community, which fundamentally is a positive thing, but it has also led to pressure for development. These changing circumstances have not only socio-economic consequences, but also impact upon the manner in which the rich heritage of the Burren is managed and require us to address heritage considerations when planning to accommodate this change.

The introduction of more appropriate management in the Burren must begin from the starting point that the issue is much bigger than heritage; it is about influencing change; it is about appropriate decision making processes; it is about participatory forward planning; it is about realising local expectations; it is about keeping as many farmers as possible farming the land, and much more. In short it is an issue of good governance in the broadest sense.

Attempts have been made to grapple with management of aspects of the Burren. The Clare County Development Plan recognises the special environmental quality of the Burren and identified that the Burren is a visually vulnerable scenic landscape. The state has purchased 1,673ha in...
the south-east Bur ren, and declared it a National
Park; another tract of 145 ha at Keelhilla is a
National Nature Reserve. The remaining land in
the Burren Uplands is privately owned and most
is designated as Special Area of Conservation
(SAC) in recognition of its internationally
important status. There have been various
'strategies' attempted. The Tourism in the Burren
– A Strategic Plan, the Burren Monuments
Strategy and the Burren Consultative Committee
have all attempted, and failed, to produce any
strategic action or planning for the Burren.
And they failed for one reason. There is no
adequate management structure in the Burren
that can plan and deliver strategic action for the
area. The establishment of the state-owned
National Park at Mullaghmore is a case in point. It
has not provided the kind of strategic
management structure that can plan and deliver
strategic action for the Burren region.
What is needed is a radically new approach
to strategic planning, management and decision
making in the Burren region, one that fills the void
between the general policy context provided by
the County Development Plan and the more site-
specific planning provided by the Local Area
Plans. This could be achieved through the
designation of an area of c.63,000 ha of north
Clare from the Cliffs of Moher in the west to
Corofin and Gort in the east and Kinvarra to the
north, as a National Park, run by a special National
Park Authority. The task of a National Park would
be to reconcile national policies with local needs.
It would straddle the area between ensuring that
the needs and expectations of local communities
are realised while also protecting this special
place. This National Park would acknowledge the
landscape as a living landscape in which people
work, live, and where certain types of
economic development and tourism will be
facilitated and encouraged. The kind of protected
landscape envisaged would fall under the
Protected Landscape management category
defined by the IUCN (World Conservation
Union).
interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection, maintenance and evolution of such an area.

A landscape-scale National Park in north Clare would serve many purposes. It would be the appropriate scale for strategic planning and management and would draw in the necklace of villages on the periphery of the Burren to be part of, and benefit from the National Park. It would include the East Burren wetland complex, a truly magnificent, but often unheralded component of north Clare’s natural heritage. And perhaps most importantly the designation of a National Park has huge marketing potential – National Parks are recognised world wide as special places and such a brand is a distinct advantage.

The advantage of designating a large swathe of north Clare a National Park, including the special and not so special bits, is it allows for the introduction of a system of zoning upon which management policies and decisions can be based. It would provide a forum where residents and visitors, policy makers, academics and planners could input and ultimately determine the future direction of the Burren. People living in the Burren might regard this proposal with some anxiety, but if other National Parks in Europe are examined, the benefits to local communities can be substantial.

Take, for example, the 50,000ha National Park of Abruzzo, Latium and Molise in the Apennine Mountains, east of Rome, which started out as a 500ha protected site in the 1920s but has slowly expanded to its current size. In the 1960s it faced several threats from speculative development, economic decline and depopulation. By the early 1970s a master plan had been drawn up that aimed to bring the villages into the planning process and ensure that the creation of a National Park based on eco-development worked for them. Zoning the land was the obvious starting point, but the aim was to keep it simple and flexible and it was also done in conjunction with local authorities. Agreements were made with villages, but powers remained with the Park Authority to override zoning where necessary to protect the integrity of the National Park. The ongoing expansion of the National Park with the agreement of its outlying residents and its current record of inward investment highlight this as a success story to emulate.

Zoning is at the heart of management of National Parks, and the reality is that a form of zoning already exists in the Burren, with the SACs identifying the most important natural heritage areas, development being encouraged in existing built-up areas to cater for community growth while refusing one-off housing in rural areas, the protection of the coastal fringe, etc. What is missing is an overall system that ties all these designations and zones together in a coherent master plan for the entire region, and endeavours to treat the landscape as a dynamic entity where change and development can be accommodated.

Mountain avens, Dryas octopetala, is a spreading undershrub with white flowers. A rare plant usually found on high ground, the mountain avens is one of many noteworthy plants to have found a home in the Burren, where it is found almost down to sea level.

The species-rich vegetation of the Burren supports a bewildering variety of insect life. Some, like the transparent burnet moth Zygaea purpurealhibernica are found nowhere else in Ireland, but can be very abundant in the Burren.


1 European Models of Good Practice in Protected Areas, IUCN (2004)
But this change and development would work towards the overriding objective to maintain and hopefully enhance the special character of this unique landscape.

The use of zoning as a management tool will only be successful if the process has general community support and is followed through with strict decision-making to adhere to this overall strategy. The key to achieving this is through the establishment of a representative statutory National Park Authority to oversee management of the National Park. The objective of the National Park Authority would be the collaborative management of the Burren with the support and participation of the local community. Such a structure is necessary for not only is it a good thing to get the public involved in the decision-making process, it is a basic right of citizens to be involved. This right is enshrined in the Aarhus Convention (1998), a convention signed by Ireland. If the National Park Authority was structured correctly and worked effectively, then this is one structure for delivering on participatory planning and collaborative management.

A model, albeit circumscribed, of how this structure might work already exists in Ireland. Wicklow Uplands Council was formed in 1996 with the objective to ‘... ensure community participation in the decision-making process affecting the future sustainable development of the Wicklow Uplands and to work towards full partnership with statutory stakeholders in the spirit of Local Agenda 21’. It is an organisation representing 30 non-statutory groups and individuals, divided into four panels: Farming and Property Owners; Economic and Tourism; Community and Recreational; and Environment. Though hindered in what it can achieve by not having received formal recognition by central and local government, it is an excellent model for how a National Park Authority could be constituted. Such a representative structure, given statutory powers and extended to include representatives of existing statutory bodies, would be the key to delivery of good governance in the Burren.

Traditionally National Parks in Ireland have had a well defined, but limited role. The model of National Park proposed for the Burren would require a radically different emphasis and approach, with a host of new functions coming within its remit. Its role should be to concentrate
its work at the strategic management level, and to work with and empower local communities to provide as many of the services as possible, thereby percolating the benefits of the National Park designation down to communities that live within it. It should also seek to work in partnership with others for achieving stated objectives of the National Park.

This would require staff with very different skills to those traditionally associated with National Parks in Ireland. While there is a clear need to appoint staff with expertise in nature conservation management to a National Park, there is equally a case to be made for appointing teachers, tourism specialists and even business advisors to assist the proper development of the area. It would be all about bringing nature conservation into mainstream rural development.

Underpinning and informing all of the management within the National Park would be the establishment of a programme of scientific research and monitoring. Research is needed to

The spring gentian, *Gentiana verna*, is a small perennial, which flowers in the Burren in early summer. The flowers are vivid blue. It is a mountain plant over much of Europe so it is of interest to find it on short turf over limestone at low altitudes in west Clare. Because it is very common in the area it is often used as a symbol of the Burren.

The network of green roads and recently developed walking routes provide great opportunities for walkers and other recreational users to explore the Burren.

The rich wildlife of the Burren has been maintained by centuries of extensive livestock grazing, and depends on continued farming for its maintenance.

Tourism has now surpassed agriculture as the key economic activity in the Burren. A properly managed National Park could greatly enhance the economic opportunities for all of the villages on the periphery of the Burren.
fill some of the many gaps that exist in our knowledge of the ecology of the Burren and its relationship to, for example, the agronomic and hydrological systems. The delivery of the research programme might best be done through a partnership arrangement with third-level institutions, whereby the National Park would benefit from the results of the research and monitoring, and the academic institutions would benefit from having ongoing research and teaching opportunities, and an opportunity to influence management decisions for the Burren.

The Burren is of such heritage importance that it requires special care and management. The landscape-scale National Park would appear to be the most appropriate one for the Burren, but the detail of how it would work in reality could only be agreed following extensive discussion and consultation. The efforts needed to make this National Park a reality would be considerable, but it would be well worth the investment in time and resources. The Burren deserves this attention.

By Dr. Liam Lysaght, Wildlife Officer, The Heritage Council

All images courtesy of www.burrenbeo.com

Tourism is a double edge sword. It can be the driving force behind the local economy, but it needs careful planning to ensure that the benefits of tourism are dispersed and pressures are not concentrated in ecologically sensitive areas, such as here at Poll Salach.

Development pressure is a natural consequence of a vibrant rural society, but planning to cater for this development in sensitive areas like the Burren is a considerable challenge.
Archaeological Monuments on Private Farmland

*a new approach*

Michael Lynch, Field Monument Adviser in Co. Clare, and Ian Doyle, Archaeology Officer with the Heritage Council, describe a successful new partnership approach to the preservation of archaeological sites and monuments

**Introduction**

Ireland possesses a rich array of archaeological monuments in our countryside and in our urban centres. From the work of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland we know that there are approximately 120,000 known archaeological monuments in Ireland. In the countryside these monuments take the form of ringforts, castles, ring barrows, promontory forts, lime kilns, megalithic tombs as well as many other types of earthworks and other site types. While large numbers of such monuments were removed during the 19th century when population figures, and associated agricultural pressure, was much higher, we do still retain large numbers of archaeological monuments in upstanding and visible positions. In the later 20th century the destruction rate of monuments gained pace following the mechanisation and intensification of agriculture. Such archaeological monuments can be seen as an integral element of the rich tapestry that forms the Irish landscape and that provides a tangible link with a distant past in today’s rapidly changing world.

The role of farmers as managers or custodians of this heritage resource is a critical one. Farmers are the day-to-day managers of the surrounding landscape and are the private landowners of the majority of archaeological sites in question. While such known archaeological sites are protected by the National Monuments Act 1930-2004, the Heritage Council, in partnership with Sligo and Clare County Councils, has been testing out a new parallel approach. This approach is based upon an archaeologist or Field Monument Advisor visiting archaeological monuments in farmland and meeting the landowner or farmer.

The objective of this advisor programme is to support landowners in the care of archaeological monuments in their ownership. The care which landowners have given and continue to give to heritage sites throughout Ireland has made a valuable contribution to the landscape we possess today. The primary objective is to identify and provide information on the field monuments of a given area to landowners and also to provide information to landowners on how best to care for sites in their ownership. A central tenet of the scheme as applied in Sligo and Clare has been that it is feasible to protect archaeological sites through improved awareness.
The County Clare experience

The pilot Field Monument Adviser programme for Co. Clare commenced in June 2004. The aim of this programme is to raise awareness of the vast archaeological resource in Co. Clare by advising landowners and occupiers on how to identify and manage the monuments on their properties. The initial area chosen for the project stretches from the west coast south of Lahinch, eastwards to Rath and Dysert O’Dea. This area is defined by three full Ordnance Survey map sheets (22, 23, 24 as well as part of sheet 25). These maps are at a scale of six inches to one mile and are the base map used for the creation of the Record of Monuments and Places. This is a list of known archaeological sites which are marked on the 6” Ordnance Survey maps. The different landscapes covered by this area include coastal areas with significant development, rural areas mainly of pasture with a limited number of known archaeological monuments and an archaeological landscape with some well-known National Monuments.

All the sites listed on the Record of Monuments and Places in the area will be visited and information on the sites will be passed on to the landowners and occupiers. New discoveries will be recorded and passed on to the Archaeological Survey of Ireland. To date, approximately 70 sites have been visited and most of the landowners were found to be interested in their monuments and all have been accommodating to the project. Many of the landowners were keenly interested and eagerly sought further information on their monuments. By providing this information to the landowners, their interest is increased, as is their awareness of the importance of the monuments to our heritage. Also the preservation needs and requirements are discussed. The indications to date are that the approach of building a good relationship between the custodians of the monuments and the Field Monument Adviser will prove to be most effective way of protecting our archaeological heritage. As well as visiting monuments, the Field Monument Advisor has been speaking with farmers on training courses and with the representative farming bodies to promote the care of archaeological monuments.

A similar methodology has been implemented in County Sligo. Overall the Sligo and Clare schemes can be seen to be meeting an appetite for information about archaeological monuments in our countryside. The supply of such information to land managers is one element of a strategy to ensure the preservation of these sites. Given the amount of change predicted for farming in Ireland over the course of the next 20 years, schemes such as this may have a valuable role to play.

This scheme is funded by Clare County Council and the Heritage Council.

Michael Lynch, Field Monument Adviser, Leana, Killinaboy, Co. Clare, and Ian Doyle, Archaeology Officer, the Heritage Council.
Landscape, Legislation and a Healthy Heritage

New Council members are about to take up the reins and take responsibility for the Heritage Council and all its activities.

As the organisation moves to its second decade the vacuum into which the first Council was launched in 1995 no longer exists. Two Strategic Plans have been prepared, reviewed and more importantly acted on. The National Heritage Plan and The National Biodiversity Plan are a fundamental plank of government policy. Council has forged strategic partnerships, in particular with the local authorities and other state agencies. The Council’s range of grant programmes has made a real difference to individuals and organisations alike.

The second Council built on those foundations. It emphasised the importance of communication and the significance of raising awareness at all levels. A national Biological Records Centre will soon be a reality and the museum sector has a standards and accreditation programme. New initiatives particularly in the areas of coastal and marine were introduced and, as a result of all of this, the Council was able to watch a very positive upward trend in the levels of public attitudes as to just how much they value their heritage.

Council has unapologetically set out to place heritage higher up the decision-making matrix. To make it a core consideration in all policies and plans. As well as using its national and international profile the Council has done this by working at local level, using this local input to inform policy, keeping all the heritage “dots” joined in a way that gives them strength. Council will not accept, no more than the public at large, that you can compartmentalise our cultural heritage from our natural heritage. After all we have built our culture in the landscape in which we live.

In recent times it can be argued for a whole variety of reasons (some financial, some structural, some philosophical), that the different values we attach to our heritage have become very polarised. Two very significant pieces of work will help to inform the direction the new Council will take to help it continue to redress the balance. The first will look at the value we as citizens attach to our heritage. Not just an economic value but auditing and evaluating its less tangible benefits to society. It will make the connection between heritage and health, the relationship between our heritage and our quality of life i.e. where we live. The second and linked work is evaluating current mechanisms which are in place to allow the development and management of our landscapes, also where we live. This work will see if new mechanisms for ‘joining up the dots’, making the connection between for example rural development, tourism and landscape quality might serve us better in to the future. New strategic alliances particularly with tourism and rural development sectors seem possible. Council has already called for new legislation to assist in the development of mechanisms to facilitate this work or at the very least to fully use the provisions existing in our planning act to this end. Somehow my experience tells me the former is the better option. Why not a Landscape (Ireland) Act 2010? Now that would be a positive legacy for our future generations.

MICHAEL STARRETT  Chief Executive

Article featured in Outlook Summer/Autumn 2005
The farmyard is an archetypal space of rural Ireland, yet one which is rarely celebrated for its architectural qualities. The yard is the heart of the farm, a robust space that must contain animals, allow carts, tractors or milk lorries to turn, and to shelter farmer, animals and machines from the worst of the weather, as it was always a ‘24/7’ working environment. The character of the buildings that surround the yard is rarely consistent as different functions were added at different times. The older elements are the byre and stable, hay barn and cart shed. The large corrugated iron hay barn is an addition from the 20th century. The yard is often the crossroads between the fields on the holding, with tracks and lanes leading further back in. The yard is the heart, the kingdom, of the farmer and often a private place, either secluded from the road or partially connected to it – a place set apart.

Apart from Patrick and Maura Shaffrey’s book Irish Countryside Buildings, there has been a tendency to see two polar opposite sets of value in the built heritage of the Irish countryside – the elite formal architecture of the landlord house and demesne, and the ordinary tradition of the thatched house. It is as if the story of the big house and the small was the only one that countryside buildings could tell. The buildings of the Irish countryside also testify to a stylistic middle ground between the two. Prosperous tenants built many plain two-storey farmhouses in the 18th century, for example. In the consolidation of land holdings in Ireland in the mid-19th century, new farm buildings were built with the formality of the big house, but with the modest construction materials and language of architectural expression of the older tradition, and smaller in scale and adapted to the functional requirements of a working farm. These sturdy buildings nestle into the landscape, often surrounded by mature trees. They have proved themselves over the last century as bastions of the rural agricultural economy. They create their own micro-environment and sense of place,
evolving in an orderly organic way to accommodate the craft of farming and the vagaries of the site.

The character of the farmyard has been transformed, often beyond recognition, as a result of the EEC-sponsored modernisation schemes of the last 35 years, although many historical and characterful groups of farm buildings do still survive. An aerial photograph of the family farm is often to be found on the mantelpiece or kitchen, tracing the industrialisation of agriculture over the past decades, showing the small-scale slated roofs of the earlier buildings and the larger-scale corrugated metal elements over 20th-century cow shed or hay barn. Depending on the way the farm has expanded, the new may have obliterated the old, or both may exist side-by-side to tell the story of the evolution of farming practice.

If something lasts long enough, the story it can tell becomes interesting. For example, small-scale pig sties and hen houses are often to be found as separate buildings at the back of the yard buildings. These were built in the drive for self-sufficiency in the 1930s and 1940s during the ‘economic war’ and the ‘emergency’ and are tangible remains of the de Valera ideal rural economy of a stoic and self-reliant people. These are some of the few material remains of a period that is passing in the public consciousness from contemptible through amusing to the point where it is puzzling and needs to be explained. By such an evolution of cultural attitude do we arrive at an historical appreciation of our material inheritance.

At a time of unprecedented change in agricultural policy, the usefulness of these built forms is now an open question. The countryside is experiencing rapid socio-economic change, and it is having a negative effect on the built environment and the historic landscape. Smaller farmhouses are being vacated by their owners of generations and their associated holdings are being allowed to lapse into disuse. At the same time, sites on formerly productive land are being sold to build new houses, which, to say the least, do not have the benefit of mature planting or a coherent visual image that would come through the use of a restrained palette of materials. It is an environmental tragedy that our systems for planning and land tenure cannot achieve efficiency in the use of resources between old disused farmhouses and the demands for new houses in the countryside.

These solidly built buildings, stone piled on stone, represent a material asset wrested from the environment by the labour of our forefathers. Their capacity to survive the ravages of time is likely to be proved superior to the cheaper structural systems that are generally in use today. The time may come when our society’s new construction methods will be assessed for their impact on the environment. We may find ourselves valuing highly the ability of a structure to have survived thus far, and to accept its existence as an available exploitable physical and

there has been a tendency to see two polar opposite sets of value in the built heritage of the Irish countryside - the elite formal architecture of the landlord house and demesne and the ordinary tradition of the thatched house
Aerial view of a farm at Ballinaboyle, Bennetsbridge, Co. Kilkenny. A tower house indicates that the site has been an agricultural settlement location for at least 400 years. Also visible are the slated house and outbuilding at right angles forming the earliest farmyard. Corrugated iron roofs of progressively larger span enclose barns and animal housing. A secondary house, probably associated with the farm is located a short distance away.

The palette of materials to be found in the farmyard. Corrugated iron hay shed and stone and slate cart house. A shallow elliptical arch of rough-hewn stone is painted to express its form and shape. Some artists, such as County Kilkenny based Blaise Smith, are beginning to portray the aesthetic qualities that can be found in the texture and composition of the enclosed volumes to be found on farm.

A cultural resource, not to mention the attractiveness of the time-worn qualities of old buildings. Many people find old things attractive, and the sense of age can add financial value to properties. We will have to devise ways of upgrading these buildings in terms of insulation, ventilation, space standards, etc. without detracting from their positive heritage, landscape and environmental qualities.

Whatever criteria are enshrined in the law regarding the protection of the architectural heritage, there will always be threshold cases that fall just short of the quality that merits protection. Groups of modest farm buildings will rarely make the grade as being of ‘regional’ significance and meriting protection by inclusion on planning authorities’ Records of Protected Structures. ‘Ordinary’ farm houses and farm buildings are likely to be seen to be of only ‘local’ importance, and thus to fall below the threshold of ‘special interest’ that justifies their protection. Many are sufficiently robust, or plain, to accommodate being extended and their character and special interest can survive without statutory protection. Farmers have generally proved to be the careful custodians of their property. In the hands of sympathetic and respectful owners, buildings with historic value can be expected to last long into the future.
REPS

The 43,000 farmers in the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS) have already committed to protect features of historical and archaeological interest, and to maintain and improve the visual appearance of farm and farmyard.

With the single farm payment and all that it entails in changing farming practice, farm owners might look again at their old farm building resources. From a conservation point of view, their continued use is essential for their survival. The sense of the farmyard as the private realm of the farm is likely to be the first obstacle to planning for the re-use of these buildings. In some cases farm house and farm will fall out of use together on the retirement of a farmer, leaving the re-use of the buildings an entirely open question. The more difficult case is where some of the historic farmyard buildings are no longer needed due to the lower level of agricultural activity which the farm will sustain in the future, and the farmer, with the family home close to the farmyard, has to consider the appropriateness of new uses, whatever their economic character, and the impact they might have on residential amenity. The worst case from the point of view of the built heritage is if this leads to complete inaction and dereliction of historic buildings.

Modern expectations

Modern expectations of a house demand that it be spacious and bright. In this context, the most grievous flaw of some old building is not that its gutters leak or that it is too cold, but that it is cramped and dark. With these perceptions of what is desirable in a house, older farmhouses run a greater risk of becoming redundant than of being changed beyond recognition. There is, of course, a middle ground, where the small-scale character of the existing building is accepted as a design constraint, but not a limit to creativity, or to the achievement of an acceptable standard of living accommodation. The Mourne Heritage Trust has recently published superlative guidelines and case studies of how this can be achieved in an Irish context.
With the support of the Heritage Council, Kildare County Council are investigating the threats being experienced by the unlisted older farm buildings of the county and intend to produce guidelines on their sensitive adaptation and re-use. The guidelines are intended to identify appropriate uses for the buildings that are compatible with the retention of their character, but recognising that economic use is fundamental to their continued survival. The forthcoming report may propose policies, or at least a replicable study methodology, that could be utilised across the country by other planning authorities.

By Colm Murray, Architect, The Heritage Council

Article featured in Outlook Winter 2005/Spring 2006
Integrating Policies for Ireland’s Inland Waterways

A new policy paper on Ireland’s inland waterways has been published by the Heritage Council. Drawn up by the Inland Waterways Committee over the past two years, the document builds on experience gained through the Waterway Corridor studies, and consultations with relevant organisations.

The first inland waterways policy paper was published by the Heritage Council in 1999. Since then, however, much has changed and many policies and suggestions acted upon. Waterways Ireland was established following the Good Friday Agreement; the National Heritage Plan and the National Biodiversity Plan were drawn up; and heritage officers have been appointed to over 25 counties resulting in the production of county heritage plans.

The focus of this policy paper is on the integrated management of Ireland’s waterways heritage. Waterways heritage ranges from individual sites of natural and industrial heritage to archaeological sites within the corridor and underwater biodiversity, water quality, etc. All these aspects of heritage require care and consideration in addition to ensuring the protection and enhancement of the whole. The experience and knowledge gained from the four waterway corridor studies carried out since 2002 have informed many of the policies. Because of this the policy paper advocates the continuation of these studies along the waterways network, and their monitoring and review.

The overall aim is: The inland waterways and their corridors should be managed in an integrated broad-based way, conserving their built and archaeological heritage features, and protecting their landscape and biodiversity. Recognising that the inland waterways are a unique part of our heritage, but which today are fulfilling a new role not envisaged for them originally, we aim to enhance the enjoyment and appreciation of them as living heritage, both for this generation and for future generations.

The main recommendations are summarised as follows:

i. Inland waterways are an integral part of Ireland’s transport and industrial heritage, and are themselves made up of different aspects of heritage. The conservation and enhancement of this heritage is vital to the long-term attraction of Ireland’s waterways. Resources should be dedicated to this. Notwithstanding the establishment of Waterways Ireland, the multiplicity of government departments and agencies that have some role in the management of the waterways resource leads to a lack of coordination and integration in relation to heritage issues.

ii. A strategic approach to waterways is needed to ensure that their integrity is not compromised, and that enjoyment of them is increased. Efforts should be redoubled to promote this strategic approach to waterways management. This should involve government departments and agencies with an interest in all inland waterways, navigable and disused.

iii. The Waterway Corridor Studies model, championed by the Heritage Council, presents one way of addressing the need for sustainable management. Experience from studies completed to date shows that partnership between Waterways Ireland, local authorities, and the Heritage Council is an effective way of ensuring better coordination and integrated management.

iv. Communication with, and participation in management planning by, recreational users of the inland waterways should be increased, as should awareness-raising activities and interpretation of waterways heritage.

v. Funding is allocated to Waterways Ireland by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, for inland waterways under its remit; monies for infrastructural projects are provided from the National Development Plan. Individual local authorities allocate to waterways projects out of their own annual budgets. Levels of funding should be maintained.

vi. It is the responsibility of the local authorities to ensure that disused and derelict waterways not under the remit of Waterways Ireland are protected.

vii. The long-term future expansion and development of the network requires consideration, in particular from a heritage perspective, and recommendations on this are made in sections 12, 13 and 14 of the document.

By Beatrice Kelly,
Inland Waterways / Marine Officer

Article featured in Outlook Winter 2005/Spring 2006
Tim Carey discusses the conflicting issues of development and heritage and how they may be compatible

We are all tediously familiar with the story. Heritage holds up development or heritage destroyed because of development. It seems to be an almost constant news item in this country. The current unprecedented level of economic activity has transformed the country. At the same time there are more safeguards for heritage in terms of legislation and conservation groups. When the two worlds of heritage and development collide opinions frequently become polarised and fraught with difficulty. There are few more vexed issues.

Sustainability on one level is about wider environmental sustainability relating to resources, energy and materials. But sustainability is also about retaining aspects of the world we have inherited, as custodians, for future generations. It sounds glibly simplistic. Indeed, it is, as the reality is far more complex. While much attention in this country has focused on heritage and infrastructure development it is in the far more numerous smaller residential and commercial schemes, that have a larger incremental effect – something akin to death by a thousand cuts.

As a nation we are very fond of being the best or the worst at something. In soccer we have the best supporters in the world, in literature we produce per capita probably the finest list of writers of any country. Conversely we are rip-off Ireland, we have the highest house prices in Europe and the M50 toll bridge is the most idiotic traffic jam in Europe. In terms of the protection of our heritage we are very hard on ourselves.

Perspective is as important in relation to heritage as it is in other areas of life. However, perspective is something that we lack on our island and it is as well to remind ourselves at times that we are not as bad as we think we are. While we of course have our own particular difficulties there are horrendous examples in all countries.

On a recent holiday in the Marche region of Italy we passed through, on a daily basis, the largest Roman settlement in the region - which is saying something - at Urbisaglia. Dating from the first century BC the complex includes the substantial remains of the theatre and
amphitheatre. Oh, and also a petrol station.

The Loire Valley is the patrimonial heartland of France from which springs for many French people their sense of national identity. Sitting in the back garden of our rented gite we looked over the well-tended fields to the sixteenth century fairy tale castle of Ussé which provided the inspiration for the fairy tale sleeping beauty. It was an idyllic scene the illusion of which was more than somewhat shattered when the warning siren went off in the Chinon nuclear power plant six miles away (after some minutes of sipping our coffee nervously we concluded from the lack of panic in the area that it was a safety drill) the huge plume of vapour from the plant taking on an even more ominous hue than normal. Or what about the state of large stretches of Roman wall in London, which makes our own city wall of Dublin seem positively resplendent in places.

Dealing with heritage and development in a mature way is not easy. Of course there are times when it is a case of “either/or”. On some occasions it is heritage that is given precedence. To take perhaps extreme examples it would not be acceptable to build apartments on the Wexford Slobs or to demolish the burial chamber at Newgrange for a Lidl store. In others it is development that gains – archaeological sites will be excavated and trees felled to make way for houses. The most important sites are afforded protection under various pieces of legislation, including the National Monuments Acts, the Planning Acts, the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the Wildlife Act.

However, rarely is it an absolute case of ‘either/or’. This is the grey area in which most residential and commercial development takes place. How can development and heritage be compatible? One of the basic ways to try to ensure that this does happen is to actually put heritage on your mental map when you first start to run with an idea for a development. Very rarely can heritage be adequately accommodated as an afterthought. Heritage needs to be incorporated at the planning and design stage whether this be in a local area plan, the first draft design for a new building in an architecturally sensitive area or in doing a habitat survey of a site to be developed.

Archaeology

Archaeology often provides the most difficult of problems due to the fact that often the very existence of an archaeological site may not be imagine the scene in London when excavations were taking place for the Guild Hall gallery in the City and they discovered the Roman amphitheatre. It must have been an interesting moment replete with choice expletives
known until ground is broken. While we have our own examples - imagine the scene in London when excavations were taking place for the Guild Hall gallery in the City and they discovered the Roman amphitheatre. It must have been an interesting moment replete with choice expletives. That they did not know where the Roman amphitheatre is surprising but it does put into context some of our own recent discoveries.

In architecture a quick fix solution, or lazy approach, is to put up a pastiche building that imitates the more historic buildings in its immediate environment. However, this often mocks the original structures by being merely a cheap and nasty imitation. At the same time it is somewhat dispiriting isn’t it? Each generation should be allowed or have the philosophical confidence to put its own vision forward. One difficulty is that it can be difficult for people to pinpoint the reasons for liking or not liking something. How many lay people could discuss the particular merits of any building with precision? Often people fall back on the prejudicial position against anything that looks modern - the woeful standard of much of the building of the 1960s, 70s and 80s is perhaps largely to blame for this.

An often over looked alternative is for an existing building to be re-used rather than being replaced. A recent Dublin City Council survey indicates that not only does the re-use of buildings assist in retaining character but it is also environmentally sustainable and cost effective. In England the extremely successful property development firm Urban Splash has redeveloped some amazing structures with local authorities, but on a sound economic footing. Some of their buildings include the daunting scale of the Lister Mills in Bradford and the challenging economic environment around the Midland Hotel in Morecambe.

Ecological landscape design

In some ways the issue of ecological landscape design has begun to take root. In Ireland we are at an early stage with Biodiversity Plans in various stages of progression in a number of local authorities, with many going someway down the road of addressing biodiversity and planning. However, there is no doubt that ecological issues can be very emotive. Take, for example, the felling of trees on the main urban thoroughfare in Ireland at O’Connell Street.

The heritage equation is not all one-sided. On the other side there is the question of providing for our own heritage of the future. Each generation should be entitled to make their own mark. But very often there is a negative reaction...
to anything new. It is interesting to speculate if today we would object to the construction of some things that we now cherish? Taking some examples from my own area (there are hundreds, if not thousands, of examples like these throughout Ireland) - would we get away with putting up the Lead Mines chimney on a hill outside Bray, would we get away with construction of houses on Sorrento Terrace, or a railway along a pristine section of coastline in south Dublin? These are pertinent questions and those who object to all new development should reflect on them.

However, at the same time this argument is used by some to mask often poor quality design that we have to endure on a daily basis. Their argument can be a vacuous one when confronted with the reality of what they are building. However, often it is an argument that has merit. Just because something is new does not mean it does not have merit. Things, alas, are rarely clear-cut in heritage.

One problem is that heritage is given a bad name by people who use it as a weapon. These people will find, indeed intensively seek out, a heritage issue to support their objection to a particular development to hide reasons that do not relate to that heritage - for example it will block their view or increase traffic on their road. Those who promote development then see heritage as a crank subject. Using heritage as a weapon like this rarely advances the cause of that heritage.

There is no doubt that heritage and development is an issue that is going to continue to feature as Ireland continues its rate of economic development. The beginning of the conservation movement in Ireland has been traced back to the Wood Quay controversy of the late 1970s. We have come a long way since then. However, we are far from dealing with the issue in a mature way. Too often it is confrontational and ‘either/or’. I would suggest that what we need to do is to concentrate on policies, projects and practice beyond ‘either/or’.

By Tim Carey from the Conference Planning and Design for Heritage and Development: Projects, Policies and Practice Beyond Either/Or held in Killiney Castle, October 18 and 19, 2005. A Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Heritage Council Event. For more information see www.dlrcoco.ie/heritage/conference.pdf or email tcarey@dlrcoco.ie

Article featured in Outlook Summer 2006
In Ireland upwards on 100,000 sites of industrial archaeological interest survive, varying in size from small rural lime kilns (probably the most common) to Ballincollig Gunpowdermills, County Cork, which, at 435 acres, is the largest industrial archaeological site in Ireland and the second largest of its type ever to have been constructed in Europe. Many of these sites are commonly found within incredibly rich and varied landscapes which, up to the advent of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy, had survived without almost any human interference. This extremely fortunate state of affairs is, for the most part, a consequence of the general lack of industrial development in Ireland. However, while this has enabled a large number of important sites in Ireland to survive – even within the environs of the major towns and cities – these have been hidden from view.

The landscapes of industrial and industrialising Ireland have remained as much undiscovered as they have been unimagined. Up to very recently, they had barely been acknowledged by legislation in the Republic of Ireland, where all buildings of post AD 1700 date had long been seen as ‘colonial’ and thus iconic of British rule. This misplaced, some would say warped, sense of national identity, has long since ceased to influence most people’s perception of Ireland’s built environment in the period of European industrialisation. While historic industrial sites and monuments are still ‘undervalued’, in the sense that they have been subject to much less scrutiny relative to sites of earlier periods, within the last two decades both local and national government in Ireland has begun to act more favourably towards them.

Owing to severe industrial resource restraints in Ireland – principally the lack of coal and iron ore – eighteenth and nineteenth-century Irish industries tended to be concentrated within the environs of port towns. Most of the centres of production and consumption, indeed, were on the east coast, where some four-fifths of the coal imported into Ireland was directly consumed. Yet some industrial activities, such as mining, were generally located quite some distance from existing centres of population. As early as the seventeenth century, Irish ironmasters had been obliged to provide, in varying degrees, accommodation, land and a basic social infrastructure for their skilled workers. These latter measures were largely an inducement to attract the requisite personnel from English – and even European – ironworking regions to settle in this country, and by this means relatively large immigrant communities were to become temporarily settled throughout the island. This
same settlement pattern was to be continued in the nineteenth century in key Irish extractive industries, where again English and Welsh mining specialists were to be housed in what were often self-sufficient industrial communities.

Mining settlements, then, tended to be sited away from existing settlements, but so also were early factories and other industrial installations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in order to harness a reliable supply of water power. In this way, whole new villages were created in which housing and other amenities were provided by companies anxious that their workforce be close at hand and also, to a certain extent, be easier to control. Workers’ housing in nineteenth-century Ireland could also be built under the auspices of philanthropic societies or local authorities, although the accommodation provided was intended to improve the living conditions of the working classes in general and was not specific to any factory or, indeed, industry.

Ireland’s partial and largely incomplete industrialisation was truly one of bold contradictions. Her shipbuilding, linen, brewing and milling industries were all, during certain periods, of international significance. But in other sectors industrial growth was extremely limited, a circumstance which was not to significantly change after Independence. As with archaeological sites of most periods, historic industrial buildings and landscapes have survived basically through inertia. Even buildings in a ruinous state have continued to exist simply because of the expense involved in demolishing them. Others, however, are extant because their original function is still valid, as in the case of many railway stations, or because an alternative use has been found for them. Some buildings, indeed, have been re-used several times for different industrial purposes. At any stage during a building’s history accretive adaptations are likely to have occurred, and it is these adaptations which define the building’s function over certain periods of time. These adaptations can vary greatly. They can be purely structural, as in the case of the addition of an extra storey, an annex or fireproof flooring. Motive power and plant can also change through time either through modernisation or a complete changeover to another manufacturing process. In the latter case, internal changes to the building may be much more in evidence, but in all instances changes to a building’s form and function will determine the extent to which it will survive the next period of technological modernisation or economic change. A building or complex whose form has become too specialised is unlikely to be re-used when its original purpose has become obsolete, and in consequence its chances of survival would, in normal circumstances, be considerably reduced. But in Ireland de-industrialisation in many areas during the nineteenth century and subsequent economic underdevelopment has created a relatively high survival rate for many different varieties of archaeological site. Many important Irish industrial archaeological sites have also benefited from this circumstance, and have survived in recent times without protective legislation.

Since 2000, the Local Government (Planning

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the predictable complacency of the state authorities entrusted with the protection of historic buildings and landscapes towards nearly all structures associated with the later historic period

and Development) Act, has obliged local authorities to list important historic buildings. Under the provisions of the act, they must now set up and maintain a Record of Protected Structures (RPS), in which they are to include buildings and structures of special architectural, historical, artistic, cultural, scientific or technical interest. The act also provides for the creation of Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), in which groups of important buildings and their setting can be afforded protection in local authority development plans. The Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) Act of 1999 empowered the minister for Arts, Heritage, the Gaeltacht and the Islands to recommend to Irish local authorities that certain historic buildings be included in their listing of protected structures. Structures listed by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage as being of regional, national or international significance can now feature in these listings. In 2002, the control of the government departments responsible for built heritage was transferred to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DOELG). The Heritage Act of 1995, which established the Heritage Council as a statutory body, also made provision (Section 10[4]) for the designation of structures in public ownership, as in the case of semi-state companies such as the Bórd na Móna or the Electricity Supply Board, as heritage buildings.

Inevitably, perhaps, given the AD 1700 cut-off date for the inclusion of archaeological sites deemed worthy of study and preservation in the early National Monuments Acts, the specific study of industrial monuments in the Republic of Ireland did not really get underway until the late 1960s and early 1970s. In reality, though, it was already flourishing, albeit under other names. The Irish Railway Record Society (IRRS), established in 1946, with active branches in the larger Irish cities and in London, has long been involved in the conservation and preservation of Ireland’s railway heritage, and the establishment of an all-Ireland Steam Preservation Society has resulted in a series of ambitious restoration schemes. An abiding enthusiasm for Irish canals, coupled with a realisation of their enormous potential for amenity use and tourism, led to the establishment of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI), co-founded by Colonel Harry Rice and Vincent Delany in 1954. The IWAI has been actively involved in canal conservation projects and scored a notable success in its campaign to save the Dublin section of the Royal Canal. The 1990s witnessed further important developments such as the re-generation of the Ballinamore and Ballyconnell Canal (now restored as the Shannon-Erne Waterway) and the creation of a cross border initiative called Waterways Ireland, in 2000.

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm shown for railways and inland waterways in Ireland was slow to spread to other areas. In the early 1970s the Irish Society for Industrial Archaeology was established, and its members (notably William Dick, Gavan Bowie and Ken Mawhinney) published a wide variety of short pieces on the more notable Irish sites in the magazine Technology Ireland (1969-). The latter were aimed at a general readership, and their expert insight, when wedded to an attractive magazine design, did much to focus attention on the country’s industrial heritage. Yet by the end of the 1970s this society was defunct. A new organisation, the Society for Industrial Archaeology in Munster – a predominantly Cork-based body – was established in 1986. The latter also sprang from promising origins but eventually met with the same fate. However, in June 1996, a new society, the Industrial Heritage Association of Ireland (IHAI), with a 32-county membership concerned with the preservation and recording of the industrial heritage of Ireland, was established. Since its foundation the membership of this society has been actively involved in survey work, conservation, and in influencing government policy on matters of relevance. Its most successful project to date, run in conjunction with Fingal County Council, has been the restoration of the former Shackleton’s Anna Liffey Mill near Lucan, County Dublin.

The Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland (formerly the Mining History Society of Ireland) was established in 1996 to cater for a growing interest in the development of Irish mines and their history. In 2004 it completed important conservation works on a rare man engine house
Blennerville windmill near Tralee, County Kerry, restored to working order in the late 1980s.

Far Left: The interior of the turbine pumping house of 1888, at Cork Corporation Waterworks.

Left: Lancashire boilers at Cork Corporation Waterworks, built at Belfast and installed in 1904.
at Allihies, county Cork and is currently undertaking (2004-6) similar works on the Bunmahon/Tankardstown mining complex in County Waterford, where it plans to provide interpretive facilities.

The contribution of voluntary organizations in Ireland north and south, as in the UK, to the preservation of industrial heritage, has been enormous. And here, as elsewhere in these islands, the predictable complacency of the state authorities entrusted with the protection of historic buildings and landscapes towards nearly all structures associated with the later historic period, has provided an extra fillip to their efforts.

But how long can such a ‘hands off’ approach be sustainable, where the state heritage authorities continue to value archaeological sites and monuments grouped in the conventional (one might say, ‘safe’) chronological categories, over those of the later historic/industrial period? The perception that a building’s historical value is directly related to its age (regardless of the frequency with which similar building types occur elsewhere or even within a particular locality) is, unfortunately, an erroneous but deep-rooted one.

Dr Colin Rynne lectures in the Department of Archaeology, UCC. His excellent book Industrial Ireland 1750-1930: An Archaeology, has recently been published by the Collins Press, Cork.

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In August 2005, the Irish Government announced its intention to prepare the new National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP 2007-2013), as a successor to the current National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006. The Government stated in its briefing documents that the new Plan intends to build on the success of the previous plan and in particular will 'seek to address the investment now necessary to maintain national competitiveness within a sustainable economic and budgetary framework'.

As part of the initial NDP 2007-2013 preparatory process, the Government commenced an extensive consultation process with 'social partners, regional bodies and other concerned interest groups'.

In this context, the Department of Finance, as the Government Department charged with coordinating the preparation of the next NDP, invited the Heritage Council to make a submission on the proposed scope and purpose of the NDP 2007-2013. The Heritage Council’s written submission (March 2006) is available to download at www.heritagecouncil.ie. A summary version is set out below.

The Heritage Council - a statutory body

The Heritage Council considers that the National Development Plan 2007-2013 provides a timely opportunity to ensure that the Government’s strategic planning functions will facilitate, and encourage, the accrual of long-term benefits and opportunities for the sustainable management of our national heritage, in accordance with stated Government policy and our obligations under various EU Directives and International Conventions and Treaties. These include opportunities to raise public awareness of the ‘intrinsic value’ of our national heritage (including its economic, social, spiritual and cultural value) and to ensure that any current ex-ante cost-benefit appraisals (CBA) fully consider the long-term impact and benefits of (monetary and non-monetary) potential investment priorities on all aspects of our national heritage.

It is important to highlight that in everyday life, a number of the heritage elements, as defined in The Heritage Act 1995, are often experienced together, rather than in isolation. For example, the ‘character’ of landscape may derive from a range of prehistoric, historic, cultural, and belief attributes, as well as modern day land use. As a consequence, effective protection, conservation, management and development of such landscapes requires an holistic and strategic approach, one which ensures the connections between elements are not only recognised but are maintained and strengthened.

As a result, the Heritage Council’s submission recommends that the new national development plan’s guiding principles should fully endorse the adoption and implementation of a ‘systemic management approach’. This...
approach should be embraced during all stages of the plan, including its design, implementation, monitoring and review, to ensure successful and sustainable change-management during the plan period. Such an approach will not only assist in the sustainable management of our national heritage, but will also recognise the dynamic and changing landscape in which it sits.

The Heritage Council recommends that the emerging NDP 2007-2013 be informed by the following national heritage and sustainable development strategies and plans:

- National Biodiversity Plan 2002
- National Heritage Plan (April 2002)
- Sustainable Development Strategy (1997)

In addition, the Heritage Council strongly advocates that the emerging Rural Development Strategy 2007-2013 should be prepared in parallel with the formulation of the National Development Plan 2007-2013 to ensure synergy in relation to cross-sectoral rural regeneration and farm diversification programmes and priorities.

Environmental assessment

Since the preparation of the previous NDP 2000-2006, the Irish Government has adopted the requirements of the EU SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 S.I. No. 435 of 2004. This represents a profound alteration to the context within which the emerging NDP will be developed and there is evidence of the need for a robust environmental assessment for the new NDP\(^2\). The Heritage Council recommends that a robust environmental evaluation (ex-ante and ex-post) should inform the formulation of emerging (and future) NDPS. Such provision would greatly assist the validation of the core principles underpinning the Plan.

Rural regeneration and diversification

Successful regeneration means bringing social, economic, environmental and cultural activity back to an area. Regeneration transforms

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\(^2\) It should be highlighted that the SEA process is similar to the Heritage Appraisal approach, which was introduced into the Irish Planning System by the Heritage Council in 2000 (Heritage Appraisals of Development Plans, The Heritage Council, 2000). To date over 40 plans have been influenced by a heritage appraisal being undertaken at draft stage, including in 2005, the Draft Donegal County Development Plan and the Draft Laois County Development Plan. Copies of these heritage appraisals are available on the Heritage Council website, www.heritagecouncil.ie.
places, strengthens a community’s self image and ‘sense of civic pride’ and recreates vital, viable and attractive places, which encourages sustained inward investment. Regeneration is a rural, as well as an urban imperative in Ireland. Although the end result may look very different from urban regeneration, rural development, e.g. the revitalisation of rural communities, landscapes and buildings, is necessary to address pockets of social exclusion or to adjust to structural changes and upheavals in agriculture and the rural economy. This is particularly relevant in Ireland given the reorganisation of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and discussions at the recent, although inconclusive, World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Hong Kong.

As noted above, the re-use and awareness of the inherent value of heritage assets is at the heart of sustainable development. The Heritage Council has been at the forefront of promoting the re-use of heritage assets in Ireland and in encouraging the adoption of heritage-led regeneration and development policies at a local, regional and national level. It should be highlighted that recent market research conducted by Lansdowne Market Research on behalf of the Heritage Council (August 2005) reveals that 86% of the Irish population believe the government should offer tax incentives to people to encourage heritage protection. To date such initiatives have been primarily concerned with safeguarding aspects of our built heritage, encouraging development in deprived areas and safeguarding heritage objects. There is now a case to be made in directing such incentives in a more integrated manner to ensure not only value for money (VFM) but to take account of the intrinsic value of our National Heritage.

Ireland’s built heritage

The Heritage Council’s submission makes reference to an important Council-sponsored study entitled *Built to Last: The Sustainable Reuse of Buildings* (2004), undertaken by Dublin City Council’s Heritage Office¹, which sets out a number of innovative recommendations, as follows:

- The many organisations and interests which constitute the Irish construction industry should be made aware that re-using buildings is a viable alternative to demolition and new construction, with additional environmental and cultural benefits that translate to more profitable buildings in the long term.
- The study findings support the acknowledged international view that the re-use of buildings minimises the depletion of non-renewable resources and is therefore essential to sustainable development.
- This study has shown that the re-use of buildings has greater value for the environment and cost savings over the future life of the buildings. Existing buildings can also have greater aesthetic and heritage values.
- The case studies show that constructing new buildings on brown-field sites is more expensive than retaining and re-using existing buildings except in situations where the extent of building repair and refurbishment required is extremely high. As the repair costs decrease, the re-use option becomes progressively more economic to a point where reduced costs of as much as 50% can be achieved.
- From a cultural perspective the existing buildings were considered to have added value and thus out-performed the replacement buildings.

(Source: *Built to Last: The Sustainable Reuse of Buildings, page 3-4*.)

As such, the Heritage Council recommends that the NDP promote the re-use of built heritage assets, in order to facilitate wider sustainable development and heritage-led regeneration, and to promote a sustainable construction strategy within Ireland.

Natural and cultural heritage - landscapes

The EU Landscape Convention (ELC) was signed and ratified by Ireland on the 22nd March

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² Source: [http://www.coe.int/t/e/Cultural_Co-operation/Environment/Landscape](http://www.coe.int/t/e/Cultural_Co-operation/Environment/Landscape).
2002. The Convention came into force in Ireland on the 1st March 2004. The European Landscape Convention states that the landscape:

‘has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields, and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activity and whose protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation; ... contributes to the formation of local cultures and ... is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity; ... is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas; ... is a key element of individual and social well-being and ... its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone’.

The Heritage Council recently completed a national evaluation of existing Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) in Ireland, with the cooperation of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Fáilte Ireland (March 2006). This timely study aims to complement earlier policy proposals from the Heritage Council and seeks to provide further detailed recommendations, which will inform the design of a clear national cross-sectoral work programme to be implemented in the short term. This proposed National Landscape Management Programme, which will embrace effective landscape management, planning and development and conservation and promotion, will enable Ireland to meet its requirements, as set out under the provisions of the EU Landscape Convention 2002.

Conclusions

The proposed National Development Plan 2007-2013 and resulting investment programme is likely to have a significant impact on the national heritage in the long term and indeed also presents a number of potentially significant benefits for the national heritage. These benefits need to be formally recognised and where possible assessed from the outset, and then realised during the Plan period.

The NDP, in recognising the vastly improved statutory and strategic context in which it now sits and building on these improvements, has an opportunity to be tested to the highest standards. By example, the NDP can create a much-needed boost to the economic and environmental significance attached to our national heritage in a manner, which will assist greatly in the overall realisation of the plan’s specific aims, objectives and investment priorities.

By Alison Harvey, Heritage Council Planning Officer

Article featured in Outlook Winter 2006 | Spring 2007
The Burren, Co. Clare, which covers over 600 square kilometres, is one of Ireland’s main tourist attractions as well as being one of the country’s most important heritage assets. According to the cartographer and writer Tim Robinson, the Burren is one ‘vast memorial to bygone cultures’. While the area is famed for its natural heritage, such as orchids, the blue gentian flower, and feral goats, it also contains a wealth of archaeological remains. The Burren is home to 72 wedge tombs dating from the later Neolithic – early Bronze Age period, and while these tombs represent the ritual monuments of the earliest farming communities, recent fieldwork has also revealed the settlements and field walls people used to manage the landscape. A little further on in time, during the early medieval period, farming communities built and lived in enclosures and ringforts, and some 630 of these survive.

According to the European Landscape Convention, which Ireland has ratified, a landscape is ‘an area perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’. Clearly the Burren is a prime example of such a fusion of natural elements (e.g. geology, flora and fauna) with the cultural elements of several millennia, such as agricultural activity, settlement, commemoration of the dead, etc. What this adds up to is a distinctive and striking cultural landscape. This important cultural resource has been the focus of research by scholars such as Westropp in the early 20th century and the Harvard Archaeological Expedition during the 1930s. The Burren continues to attract foreign and Irish researchers due to the quality and quantity of the archaeological resource. In short the physical traces of past generations, from the time of the first farmers to the present day, are preserved in this part of Co. Clare.

Yet this landscape is undergoing a slow and subtle form of change. A major new study, commissioned by the Heritage Council, has found

monuments once intended to be visible as markers in the landscape were gradually becoming shrouded by dense vegetation
what is clearly required is a vision and strategy for this outstanding cultural landscape

that the archaeology of the Burren is being endangered by the growth of scrub vegetation. The landscape of the Burren has been shaped and managed by a long tradition of farming. The established pattern of winter grazing has helped maintain the archaeology and has ensured its visibility.

Recent changes in farming practices, particularly lower levels of grazing, have allowed the regeneration of hazel and blackthorn scrub. This is not a new phenomenon for the Burren - analysis of historic pollen sequences has detected a complex interplay between hazel regeneration and agricultural decline during the Iron Age (circa 500 BC to 500 AD) followed by a decline in hazel and an expansion in farming during the early medieval (circa 500 AD - 1000 AD) period. It now appears that a similar relationship is at work again, as can be seen by regular visitors and locals and is quantifiable by studying satellite imagery and from basic fieldwork.

Into the scrub

Through fieldwork and aerial survey, using satellite imagery, the report finds that the Burren's archaeology is being threatened by scrub encroachment. Comparison of specially acquired 2005 Quickbird satellite imagery (see following page) with aerial photography from 1973/74, 1995 and 2000 has provided an accurate picture of the spread of scrub vegetation. The results indicate that in five km-square sample areas hazel scrub has nearly doubled during the period from 1974 to 2005. What is interesting is that the spread of scrub has accelerated in recent years. In the first 21 years there was an average increase of 1.6%; however, during the period 2000 to 2005 the rate of growth has increased to 4.4% per year.

Scrub was found to be damaging archaeological monuments at a structural level, whereby important built elements were being displaced and dislodged, where sub-surface deposits such as cremations and burials in tombs were at risk of being disturbed and where monuments once intended to be visible as markers in the landscape were gradually becoming shrouded by dense vegetation. Moreover, there is a danger that monuments would be at risk of future loss/damage through inadvertent scrub clearance.

What is equally worrying is that archaeological field survey carried out as part of the report found a 120% increase in the number of archaeological monuments over a sample area of 5km sq. This indicates that the existing baseline archaeological data for the Burren needs to be updated. In short, there is the potential that monuments we have not surveyed will become swallowed in dense vegetation.

But what is the solution?

One obvious thing to do is to devote extra survey resources to mapping and recording the archaeology of the Burren. This would have the immediate effect of correcting deficiencies in our baseline data of archaeological monuments and landscapes. However, this is a piecemeal
response and what is clearly required is a vision and strategy for this outstanding cultural landscape. Such a vision ought to lead to a comprehensive approach in the form of a well-researched and resourced management plan similar to those adopted for other outstanding landscapes in Europe and beyond. At one basic level we ought to establish what we see as the Burren landscape – is it an open, grazed limestone pavement or a low-grazing, hazel-rich landscape? Determining a vision to counteract ad hoc changes brought about by change in today’s economy and society will require full involvement from the local community and an integrated approach from the relevant State agencies. Is the Burren not worth this?

By Ian Doyle, Archaeology Officer, The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council-commissioned report, Assessment of Landscape change and effects on Archaeology and an Assessment of Habitat Survey in the Burren, Co. Clare, was compiled by ERA-Maptec Ltd in association with Wildworks Ltd, Sharon Parr (ecology) and Christine Grant (archaeology) and is available at www.heritagecouncil.ie

Article featured in Outlook Summer/Autumn 2007
Capturing your Landscape

Terry O’Regan offers a community tool for active participation in sustaining and enhancing our landscapes – the Landscape Circle Template

Rightly or wrongly the stability of our lives is anchored to assumptions, some not well founded – one is our expectation of an unchanging quality in our familiar, everyday landscape, an assumption so strong we often do not perceive negative landscape change until it is too late to intervene effectively.

Landscape and people are inseparable and where you have people, you have memory. It was no accident that Simon Schama gave the title Landscape and Memory to a book that was really about landscape and people. Memory is about time and the human perception of time changes a two-dimensional picture into a multi-dimensional deep landscape.

The most common question I have faced over the past 12 years has been “What can we do about the destruction of our landscape?” In response, I urge people not to treat their landscape as something remote, but to consciously 'see' their landscape, perhaps for the first time – to try to understand the processes that shape their landscape - i.e. to ‘capture’ it!

Simon Schama describes this as ‘a journey through spaces and places, eyes wide open, that may help us keep faith with a future for this tough, lovely old planet.’

European Landscape Convention

The Council of Europe (COE) European Landscape Convention (ELC), now in force, is about ‘capturing’ the landscape of Europe. Communities should turn to the Convention for support, direction and encouragement. The Convention places great stress on consultation, but citizens must have a more participative role to play if we are to achieve and sustain the high quality landscape envisaged by the Convention.

Ireland has been slow, at all administrative levels, to respond to the European Landscape Convention in a meaningful way. At home and on the European stage the inadequacies of the official response has been masked by the work of the Heritage Council and Landscape Alliance Ireland (LAI).

The former has been very dynamic with its
Policy Paper on Landscape and the National Heritage (2002); its fostering of awareness and understanding of landscape through initiatives such as County and City Heritage Plans and Village Design Statements; and its call for a landscape act and national proactive landscape management.

Landscape Alliance Ireland made the original call for a national landscape policy and has facilitated discussion, understanding and knowledge-sharing through National Landscape Forums and involvement with the ELC.

Irish landscape management, to date, has concentrated on the top-down approach of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and its use to inform policies and planning decisions of equally top-down administrators. Local authorities are slowly grasping the nettle of LCA – a useful, if limited, management tool.

Stakeholder consultation, where undertaken during LCA, provides a short-term, bottom-up gesture, often seen as token unless it forms an integral part of an ongoing community engagement with landscape.

The Landscape Circle Template

The ‘Landscape Circle Template’ is designed to help communities capture and own their landscape. For many of us our landscape has slipped its collar, is running loose, spending too much time with those who do not have its best interests at heart!

I have found that communities are not easily awakened to their landscape unless it is imminently threatened or abruptly altered. The ‘Landscape Circle Template’ is the most recent LAI initiative to provide an integrated community tool for active participation in sustaining and enhancing landscape quality, with the added value of engaging smoothly with scientific and administrative landscape management machinery.

I first introduced the ‘Landscape Circle Template’ last autumn as part of a West Cork Leader FETAC accredited training course organised by Dr. Harriet Emerson on the maintenance and care of local heritage.

A ‘Landscape Shamrock’, the core of the template consists of a trinity of interlinked processes involving a novel circle-based scoping approach, the LANSWOT analysis tool – a landscape variation of the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) business management tool, coupled with a Landscape Image Observatory.

The value of this three-pronged landscape approach is its capacity to integrate economic progress and heritage/environment/landscape in a community-based management framework. Embedded in the local landscape, it guarantees a ‘sense of place’ and a ‘sense of belonging’ to one’s own area and articulates the importance of local distinctiveness in reinforcing key life values.

The Seven Steps of ‘The Landscape Circle’

1. Scoping the study area – a circle on a Discovery Map – c.1km radius for urban locations, 2km for a village/surrounds, and 3-5km for rural areas.
2. Research – reading and looking at pictures.
3. Creating an Image Observatory – a landscape photograph album.
4. Information gathering – listing the landscape ingredients in the circle.
5. Evaluating your landscape – the LANSWOT analysis – prioritising the lists.
6. Identifying actions and actors linked to the prioritised lists.
7. Completing the report, publicising/communicating its conclusions and becoming a landscape-active community.

The sequential steps assist communities in identifying, assessing and valuing the elements of their landscape, equipping them to proactively

I urge people not to treat their landscape as something remote, but to consciously ‘see’ their landscape, perhaps for the first time.
For many of us our landscape has slipped its collar, is running loose, spending too much time with those who do not have its best interests at heart!

Protect existing landscape quality, and to intervene creatively in the processes of change and development at work in the local landscape.

Designed for individuals and groups, it can focus on landscape or facilitate a landscape/heritage study, as in West Cork. While ideally introduced over a number of workshop sessions, it is also suited to ‘distance learning’. A handbook is available from LAI, which introduces the concept of landscape, describing the seven steps and providing references, checklists, guidelines and templates for standard recording sheets. We recommend a landscape circle study time frame of at least six months to allow subjectivity to mature into objectivity.

An example: Capturing the Rathberry/Castlefreke landscape

I recently set out to capture the particularly well-endowed ‘Rathberry/Castlefreke Landscape’ as part of a community landscape management initiative. Located south-west of Clonakilty, with a radius of 2km, it demonstrates how a relatively small circle contains a landscape of diversity and high distinctiveness and yet is manageable for a small group or individual as a study area.

It contains many of the landscape elements common to the coastal areas of South West Cork – a gently rolling agricultural landscape, fields enclosed with earthen banks, gorse and some hawthorn hedgerow, with a more open, ‘former demesne’, landscape in the vicinity of Castlefreke Castle.

The circle also includes coniferous and deciduous woodland, public pathways, streams, a small river, a lake, wetlands and reed beds, an exceptional sand and shingle beach with dunes, and rocky headlands. The features making it a very distinctive area relate to the impact of the Castlefreke demesne which gave rise to a ‘landscape ensemble’ – the castle ruins, the Protestant parish church, the stone gate-lodges and other stone buildings in the vicinity. The Irish vernacular village pub is the exception. The location for the castle was chosen to command a sweeping view of the surrounding landscape and Rosscarbery Bay to the Southwest.

But in particular the landscape impact of the Castlefreke demesne relates to the boundary walls along the roadways and around the estate, constructed from the very distinct local slate-type stone quarried in the immediately adjoining fields, and set in both vertical and horizontal alignment, radiating out from the castle as ‘landscape corridors’.

The local community has achieved great success in the Tidy Towns competition. While some of the improvements have verged on the domestic, in the greens in the village area, they have recognised and largely protected the unique quality of their landscape and engaged in ongoing works, such as woodland footpaths and restoring the Sprigging School (originally erected by Lady Carbury to teach young ladies the skills of lace, crochet and needlework).

This landscape circle illustrates the
difficulties of trying to take cognisance of a very strong local landscape characteristic – new residential entrances inserted into the distinctive roadside walls are constructed in stone, but in different non-local stone and clashing building styles.

The integrity of the Rathbarry/Castlefreke landscape is very vulnerable; it deserves wider recognition on an Irish, and possibly on a European, scale. A landscape circle study would crystallise the local understanding of landscape, and assist those contemplating large or small interventions to do so in a manner that is fully cognisant of its very unique landscape character.

Not every landscape circle will be as blessed with natural and cultural heritage, but each ‘Landscape Circle’ study will reveal local landscapes of character and distinctiveness – each requiring its own balanced strategy of protection, management and enhancement/planning.

A living landscape requires community engagement and this will not happen easily of its own accord in our frenetic tiger economy. To meet the challenges of tomorrow’s landscape we need to ask questions of today’s landscape. The community has the answers and must be heard.

The most disturbing pattern that emerged from contributions by community representatives at successive LAI National Landscape Forums has been their sense of powerlessness in the face of rapid landscape change. Powerless citizens will turn their backs on their landscape regardless of research, legislation, landscape character maps, guidelines or, ironically, even the European Landscape Convention. It is vital that we marshal the energy and interest of all citizens into the process of day-to-day landscape management.

The West Cork experience indicates that ‘Landscape Circle’ studies could achieve important goals in building and strengthening landscape awareness, ownership and respect at community level; influencing and contributing to best practice for the enhancement/management of our landscape. Together we can create a new dynamic landscape awareness throughout the island of Ireland.

By Terry O’Regan, Landscape Alliance Ireland
Tel. 021-4871460 email: lai.link@indigo.ie

Article featured in Outlook Summer/Autumn 2007
Michael Starrett makes an appeal to protect Ireland’s unique landscapes, in a real and tangible way, before it is too late ‘Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, the character of which is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.’ * or Where we live, work and play!

It all seems so simple really. Whether rural, urban or peri-urban, landscape is about people. It is about where we live, work and play, and above all how we interact and behave towards others who share that landscape. That being the case one would imagine we would treat our landscapes well, plan carefully for their future use, and make sure that at the very least we would maintain their quality. That quality has, after all, a proven and direct benefit to our own wealth, health and sense of wellbeing.

At this juncture please remember how devastated you felt when you last visited, or took a friend or visitor to view, one of your favourite places and found it trashed. Trashed, either literally – through all the litter dumped on the streets – or metaphorically, through the insensitive design and location of some new development or the removal/destruction of some natural or cultural feature that you valued.

Such experiences show that despite its importance to our quality of life, landscape has an image problem, particularly within Ireland. This is something of a paradox as the definition of landscape given above is about how people look at or perceive the natural and cultural settings in which they spend their lives. Ireland is renowned for its natural and cultural landscapes and yet we really do pay them little or no respect. Is this just inherent in our attitudes or are there deeper and more profound reasons for such behaviour? At a European level, all countries bar Ireland have legislation, structures and resources dedicated to conservation, management and development of their landscapes. Why not us?

For example, a look at the Irish statute book shows there is no specific provision to allow us to manage and develop our dynamic landscapes in an integrated manner, in such a way that embeds their economic value fully within their environmental and health value.

We rightly change and use our landscapes for a plethora of economic reasons including building in them; attracting tourists to them; growing our food in them; and exploiting the natural and cultural resources they contain. Yet no specific connection seems to be made between those economic values and the environmental and health values of our landscapes. There are lots of agencies and individuals doing lots in the landscape and yet the connections between them all from a

* The European Landscape Convention, Article 1, Definitions.
landscape perspective are just not being made.

A little pause for thought would show we could have the best of both worlds, i.e. a first rate economy and first-class landscapes. The solution is simple. Legislate or use existing legislation differently.

Simple solutions

In any democracy the interests of people, primarily their economic, social and environmental wellbeing are provided for in legislation and, as a consequence, the programmes and projects of government reflect those interests. In France, major infrastructural projects proudly proclaim ‘L’Etat investit dans votre avenir’, i.e. ‘the State is investing in your future’. A careful piece of marketing one might say. It is, however, a bit more than that. Examination of the French statute book, and those of other European countries, shows legislative provisions for their landscapes that really do put us to shame. Legislation exists not only for protected landscapes, such as national parks and regional parks, but also contains provisions that ensure proper account is taken of the interests of people in the wider countryside and their urban and peri-urban landscapes.

What is more, French legislation is backed up by guidelines and resources to put structures in place that make a real difference on the ground. There is, as a result, a real sense of national, regional and local government working with people, bringing real and tangible benefits for natural and cultural elements of the landscape and for the socio-economic development of regions. Visit the French countryside and see how well the towns and villages (to say nothing of their roads) are developed and their character maintained. Travel to one of 40 Regional Parks and see how cultural tourism and ecotourism bring real benefits to the wider population, helping to sustain rural communities. These are Living landscapes, combining care of environment with the social and economic wellbeing of people.

Comparisons

Comparisons are they say invidious but why oh why is our image of how to develop and manage our landscapes so different to the rest of Europe? Or should that be ‘diffident’.

We have no specific legislation, not even for our National Parks. In terms of Government programmes, the recently published National Development Plan makes only passing reference to landscape issues. Traditionally one might turn to the Town and Country Planners to address these issues and yet effectively only one section in the 2000 Planning Act 2 refers to landscape and its designation. This section hasn’t been used at all since 2000. No local authority and no Government Minister has seen fit to use this provision in the Act. This must be part of the same image problem, or is it there are none so blind as those who don’t want to see. And, just in case the planners think I am having a go at them, it is fair to point out that some of the major forces for change in our landscape, for example, forestry, agriculture and major infrastructural developments, fall outside their direct control of influence.

For its part, the Heritage Council has been working with the forestry and agriculture industries on landscape issues for nearly 10 years and in fairness some progress has been made. Council has also worked with infrastructural agencies such as the National Roads Authority (NRA) and with the local authorities on planning at a European level, all countries bar Ireland have legislation, structures and resources dedicated to conservation, management and development of their landscapes. Why not us?

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2 Section 204 of the 2000 Planning Act provides for designation of Landscape Conservation Areas by Local Authorities and/or the Minister of Environment Heritage and Local Government.
and development issues. But the structures don’t exist to build on this progress. Council has fulfilled its statutory functions by proposing to Government a national landscape policy, a national landscape programme and a Landscape Ireland Act. It has evaluated and it has reviewed. Lots of words, and some action, but their seems to a blockage to what seems such a simple solution. New structures and dedicated resources are needed to meet specific and agreed objectives for our landscapes.

**Why the blockage?**

So, why this image problem? Why the blockage?

Is it the fault of Europe? The European Union is hung up on directives for nature conservation, while the Council of Europe concentrates on the cultural, some might say ‘more woolly and less scientific’ aspects of the landscape.

Is it due to the compartmentalised nature of our government departments, where all have an impact on our landscapes and yet none seem to have overall responsibility for sustaining them into the future?

Is it because if we pay attention to landscape it might itself block development?

The blockage is in fact a combination of the above and more. To quote Denis Hickie after the recent loss of the Six Nations championship, Grand Slam et al. ‘we have no one to blame but ourselves’. Take the eye off the ball for one minute and it’s gone. With current rates of change
to our very dynamic landscapes, our generation only has one opportunity to safeguard and indeed enhance their value for ourselves and for our children. One opportunity to do something special.

And yet we are currently treating our landscapes with a real lack of professionalism. In sporting terms we are still running around with an old leather football, laces and all, at a time when others are using modern equipment, methods and training. We have some very exciting landscapes but we have taken our eye, quite literally, off that ball. Or at least our management has. As a result we will, like the Irish rugby team, ultimately finish second best. We deserve better and could do better, but a few lapses in concentration will cost us dear. The rugby team will have a second chance, but unless we act we will end up with the landscapes we deserve. No point in looking back, no point in analysing why. Accept what we have and live in it, work in it and play in it. And what about the tourists? They won't care. They will have gone off to spend their money elsewhere. And what about us? Will we care? After all, we live in this landscape. What a shame it may be second-class.

If only...

By Michael Starrett, Chief Executive,

Article featured in Outlook Summer/Autumn 2007
Richard Nairn argues that local nature sites also need protection and the best people to care for them are the landowners themselves.

Everybody knows one. It’s the little stream that runs along the bottom of the garden; or the patch of trees behind the school; even the local graveyard could be a valuable area for nature in your parish or townland. It might be the place where you started birdwatching or where you first saw a deer in the wild. They are the local habitats for nature. They are not important enough to merit designation as, for example, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Natural Heritage Area (NHA). Usually, we take these areas for granted. We have grown up with them. They are part of the local landscape in a way that we thought would never change. But it is only when they are threatened by dumping or pollution, by construction of a house or a larger development such as a motorway, that we take much notice of them.

Richard Mabey, Britain’s foremost nature writer, wrote that: ‘Conservation begins precisely where the pain and destruction of modern development are most keenly felt – in the parish, that indefinable territory to which we feel we belong, which we have the measure of’ (The Common Ground: A place for nature in Britain’s future. Hutchinson, 1980).

Local Biodiversity Areas

Ireland is unusual among European countries in that we have no protected areas for biodiversity below the level of national importance. The Natural Heritage Areas network is protected under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, although even this has been slow to take effect as many proposed NHAs have not yet been
formally designated. NHAs have a certain amount of protection through the Planning Acts as they are generally listed and mapped in Local Authority Development Plans and Local Area Plans. There is a requirement to include objectives for the protection of the natural environment along with national monuments and listed buildings. However, there has been an over-reliance on these designations, together with a widespread but mistaken belief that these are the only areas of importance for nature.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Environmental Impact Assessments for large developments, such as roads and pipelines, often list hundreds of locally important habitat sites that have no legal protection at all. Also, the absence of national habitat surveys and inventories means that many important smaller sites may be unknown, and much is yet to be learnt about important sites for the more numerous but less known and less visible species groups, such as insects or molluscs.

A recent Inventory of Habitats in Galway City (jointly sponsored by the Heritage Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service) listed a total of 12 Areas of High Biodiversity within the jurisdiction of Galway City Council alone. This report coined the term Local Biodiversity Areas (LBAs). Most of these areas lack protection under national legislation, but now the City Council has undertaken to implement the recommendations of the report and undertake annual monitoring.

The city manager has stated his intention to establish a committee to monitor the protection of these areas and to prepare a management plan for one of them on a trial basis.

**Landowners are the custodians**

Most of the locally important nature areas are privately owned but they may contain some public land, such as parks, seashore or wetland. Some of the land, such as heathland or bog, may be jointly owned by a number of people as commonage. The listing of a piece of land as a Local Biodiversity Area does not confer any legal restriction on the site but simply confirms its value to nature. Nor does the LBA listing suggest that there is any right of access to the land. In fact the first priority should be for the landowners to be visited by an expert who can explain to them the importance of their land for nature. A valuable lesson has been learnt through the pilot Field Monument Advisor programme in Counties Sligo and Clare. Here each of the known archaeological sites was visited by a local expert and most of the landowners were found to be interested in “their” monuments and wanted more information about them. This direct personal approach is also likely to be the best way of encouraging the custodians of nature areas to take a pride in their natural heritage.

Clearly, unless something is done to protect...
The natural areas around Galway City, they will be eroded rapidly by development. Housing is encroaching on limestone pavement, heath and species-rich grassland in the east of the city, and on bog and acid heath in the west. Dockland development is gradually infilling more of the natural shoreline. The city is expanding upstream along the banks of the River Corrib, eating away at the natural corridor that links the lakes to the sea.

Links in the landscape

Local nature areas all have a role to play in the conservation of wildlife and their habitats. Larger animals do not live in isolated islands of nature. They move about the landscape throughout the season and through their life cycle. An otter may live a solitary life for most of the year, feeding along the coast, and on lakes or canals and moving between them along rivers, streams or even over land where there is enough cover. It leaves its droppings or spraints in prominent positions on the water’s edge where they act as ‘smellagrams’ to inform other otters who exactly has passed this way. If the streams or drains are culverted or infilled, the otter may have no choice but to move out of cover and many become road casualties.

Bats are also dependent on a network of habitats for feeding, roosting and commuting. They may be prevented from using some of the habitats due to barriers to open spaces, lighting and infrastructure such as roads.

Salmon are among several types of fish which can live equally well in the sea and in freshwater. Each year a spawning salmon makes an amazing migration from the ocean to the river or stream of its birth, via the estuary and the main river channel which may have many obstacles and hazards. These migration highways are as vital for the survival of the species as their spawning grounds in the headwaters. So, the corridors or stepping stones of habitat which link larger, more important sites, are equally valuable in maintaining wildlife populations.

Identifying the Local Biodiversity Areas is one thing, finding a mechanism through which these can be offered legal protection is another. The incorporation of information about LBAs into the planning process through the preparation of Local Area Plans by Planning Authorities is one such mechanism. The Planning and Development Act 2000 requires Local Authorities to prepare Local Area Plans for towns and villages within their functional areas which satisfy specific criteria². In 2006, Wicklow County Council, through its Heritage Officer, and with support from The Heritage Council, has commissioned reports on Local Biodiversity Areas for the towns of Wicklow.

² Section 10 (2)(c) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, states that a development plan shall include objectives for “the conservation and protection of the environment including, in particular, the archaeological and natural heritage and the conservation and protection of European sites and any other sites which may be prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph”. Section 19 (2) of the Act states that a local area plan shall be consistent with the objectives of the development plan.
Greystones/Delgany, Rathdrum and Blessington, to inform the preparation of Local Area Plans for these settlements. In each case the most important surviving features - woods, treelines, grasslands, ponds and streams - have been identified, with the linkages or habitat networks which connect them together. This information has been incorporated into the Plans and is supported by policy objectives and zoning. The Local Area Plans go through various public consultation stages before final adoption. The Local Area Plan sets out a framework to ensure that development occurs in a planned and sustainable (environmental, economic and social) manner over the plan’s six-year lifetime. Having LBAs included as part of the Local Area Plan ensures that the presence of locally important wildlife areas and habitats are considered from the earliest stages.

Richard Mabey also knew how the local areas should be conserved. ‘They are the features which the local community is uniquely placed to protect, either formally through parish organisations, or through the informal business of day-to-day living. Even features of wider interest often stand a better chance of being saved because of contacts between a landowner and his neighbours than because of any pressures from outside’. So, if you value a local area for wildlife, bring it to the attention of the landowner and the Heritage Officer in your local authority. This way, at least there is a chance that it will not be overlooked when the pressure for development inevitably comes.

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Article featured in Outlook Summer/Autumn 2007
Graham Fairclough introduces Historic Landscape Characterisation, a powerful tool used in England to provide a framework, within the aims of the European Landscape Convention, for broadening our understanding of the whole landscape and contributing, particularly through spatial planning and land management policy, to decisions affecting tomorrow’s landscape.

Inheriting landscape

The designed landscape – whether jewel-like garden or panoramic vista — is only one of the many ingredients that make up the English historic landscape. Most historic landscape lies beyond the park pale, and reflects the lives of ordinary people in the past. This wider landscape is arguably the most fundamental aspect of the historic environment yet until quite recently it was largely ignored or poorly understood. But it provides the setting for everything else and reveals the long interaction, sometimes harmonious but often not, of people with nature. This wide view of the landscape matches policy at the highest level and democratic aspirations at the most grassroots level, especially since the European Landscape Convention (www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/environment/landscape) was launched in 2000 (and since it came into force in Ireland in March 2004 and in most of the UK three years later).

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) looks beyond individual buildings, ornamental landscapes or archaeological sites to establish a generalised, but comprehensive, historic view of the whole landscape. Nowhere is left out because in all places landscape can be shown to have some historic and cultural dimensions which may be very important locally even if not ‘nationally’ important. HLC does not zoom into special places, whether focused on outstanding monuments or beautiful landscape, but works on the principle that landscape exists wherever people live and interact with their environment. It operates through a concern not for the past but for the present day – people’s quality of life, landscape as the physical manifestation of human rights – and with an eye on the future – how do we ensure that our successors can inherit a historic landscape?

Contents and frameworks

HLC includes components of the landscape that seem ‘natural’ but are actually the product of centuries of human action, such as hedgerows, woodland, ponds and modified watercourses or the very covering of the land. It takes account of
more intangible matters reflected in its physical structure: time-depth, and patterns such as settlement, land-use and the mixture of enclosed and non-enclosed land, arable and grazing, woodland and parkland. And, of course, it takes account of the activities and products of people over long spans of time – past and present settlements and their patterns, of archaeological sites, of the human-made structure of the landscape, of the historic and cultural dimension of places and, more important, of the whole landscape.

HLC is carried out in England at a county level, by local authorities with English Heritage support. The ambitious scale of the project required such a broad-brush approach, and the county as a working scale offered practical advantages, notably co-location alongside our other historic environment databases, close links to the level at which spatial planning and the management tools are operated, and the need for a scale of work midway between the local and the national.

Understanding the historic depth of the whole landscape

Before HLC, it was difficult to discuss the historic character of the whole landscape. There were many exemplary local studies of landscape history and archaeological landscape work, but no overall view. There was a common belief that the most important historic landscapes were simply the areas with the most and the best buildings or monuments - for a pre-historian, Dartmoor or Salisbury Plain; for an architectural historian, Bath or Westminster; for a garden historian, Stow or Chatsworth. Ordinary places, with their commonplace and typical qualities - where most people live - were overlooked, and the term ‘Historic Landscape’ was in danger of becoming just another badge of quality to pin on all the usual suspects.

With HLC, English Heritage adopted an approach to allow any area’s historic landscape character to be recognised independently. HLC can study and understand (and thus facilitate its management) on its own terms using archaeological analysis of its material remains. It is important, however, to regard HLC as an interpretation of landscape, not as hard data; this strengthens its ability to generalise, and to connect to other disciplinary or public viewpoints of landscape. It also recognises the role of perception in landscape highlighted by the European Landscape Convention and offers the potential to raise public awareness of the historic environment on everyone’s doorstep, not just in designated areas.

In creating its new basic understanding of the historic dimension of the whole landscape, HLC borrows some of its methods from Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), a technique used by landscape architects to grasp the overall character of landscape. LCA, however, is driven by aesthetic judgements, and is based on an assumption that geology, soils and geomorphology determine a landscape’s appearance. Between these poles of aesthetic and environmental factors, however, lies history and archaeology, which HLC can add to the mixture. The shared methods and nested scales of LCA and HLC, however, allow the two techniques to ‘speak’ to each other as part of creating more integrated, inter-disciplinary and holistic appreciations.
Historic Landscape Types

The basic source for HLC is the landscape itself, as portrayed on the latest maps and aerial photographs. Other sources are used, mainly modern mapping or digital data, for example, of semi-natural woodland or current mineral sites. Historic maps are used as guides to earlier periods, including those older than the maps themselves, to analyse the present-day rather than past landscape. Site-based data (e.g. archaeological sites, parks and gardens, conservation areas or habitats) are used with completed HLCs to provide a further level of understanding.

It is an important aspect of HLCs that they are computerised on highly sophisticated Geographic Information Systems (GIS). An HLC is not simply a single map, but a system that can be used (and continuously updated or enhanced) in many different ways: broad summaries of a county’s historic landscape character, more detailed portrayals of aspects of it, explanations of historic processes that have shaped the land.

HLC uses GIS to attribute to each block of land a range of Historic Landscape Types, some contemporary, some past, and usually at both broad and detailed levels. The basic building block is a group of fields or other land parcels. The size of the blocks varies according to the grain of the landscape, and is therefore a product of an area’s history. GIS databases allow the judgements and interpretations that underlie the HLC to be made explicit, and it allows multiple maps to be produced at whatever degree of certainty or detail is required for a particular purpose. Type descriptions, or correlations between the pattern of Types and other information – such as prehistoric monument distributions, ecological data or even socio-economic data – can be used to provide evidence for decisions about future land use. Types can also be aggregated into distinctive but mixed areas of character to provide a more strategic higher level of evidence.

Historic Landscape Types are based on historic processes, land-use and appearance. They take into account ‘time-depth’, the sequence of changes and layers in the contemporary landscape of any area that reflects its history. Previous landscape character can also be described, to show the chain of actions and events that lie below the surface of today’s perception. Examples of Types include different types of woodland (recent plantations, ancient woodland), heath-land and common (and sometimes former areas of heath and common), land used in the 20th century for military purposes (airfields) and still retaining military character, areas mainly characterised by mineral extraction or industry or ornamental designed landscape. Most notably, HLC Types cover the great diversity of land enclosed by hedges, walls and other boundaries that form perhaps the most important component of the English historic landscape, frequently assigning earlier dates for more areas than hitherto suspected, and filing out the deep-seated regional variations revealed by the Settlement Atlas.

Objectives of HLC

Improved understanding by experts is not HLC’s main goal. It involves a distillation of existing knowledge more often than the creation of new academic research. HLC aims to codify understanding in ways that can be appreciated not just by other archaeologists but by farmers and planners, or by the population at large. Its information is designed to have practical applications. The context it gives for individual
hedges, for example, is useful to guide decisions such as which hedge should be protected by the Hedgerow Regulations because of its own historic significance, not only because of how many rare birds or plants it might support.

HLC aims to provide strategic information for spatial planning and development policies, to influence the character and location of change, and to inform agriculture and land-use policy. It aims to integrate heritage with other facets of conservation, specifically countryside and nature conservation, but it also provides a wider context for our knowledge of the individual parts of the historic environment. At the same time we hope that by raising public awareness it will encourage people to decide for themselves what they value in their historic landscape.

What next?

HLC captures a particular view of the present landscape-day. Updating will be necessary as the landscape (and our understanding of it) changes, and as people’s perceptions grow. The contribution of farmstead diversity is currently being incorporated into the HLC picture, so providing a wider context for the protection of that part of the landscape as they pass increasingly from agricultural to residential use. Nor does landscape stop at the urban fringe. Towns and cities are landscape, too – or townscape – as the ELC emphasises, and the principles and practices of HLC have been added to existing methods of urban archaeological survey, all the way along the scale from small market towns in Cornwall through historic cities such as Lincoln to conurbations such as Merseyside and even to Greater London. Nor does it stop at land’s edge: we have just completed ‘Seascapes’ work, first in Liverpool Bay and this year in four other pilot areas, to present the historic character of the seabed and the sea, from the inter-tidal zone to (in the latest work) the median line with England’s overseas neighbours.

A greater challenge is to expand HLC to embrace the intangibles of landscape, such as cultural and psychological perceptions and historical associations: the ways in which ‘landscape’ embraces all the senses of belonging or alienation, familiarity or strangeness. HLC needs to incorporate how people react to landscape, often not through the accepted rules of aesthetics. A starting point is that a number of HLCs are now available in simplified form on the web, but we need to go very much further. ‘Our’ landscape within HLC and its parallel forms of characterisation are still ‘experts’ landscape’. What landscape do normal people see?

By Graham Fairclough, Head of Characterisation, English Heritage

English Heritage is the British Government’s statutory adviser on the historic environment, and is an Executive Non-departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. English Heritage exists to protect and promote England’s spectacular historic environment and ensure that its past is researched and understood.

www.english-heritage.org.uk

Though Ireland today is fast becoming a more urban-based, cosmopolitan, multicultural society, many Irish people still retain a strong connection with the land. For some, this relates back to youthful summers spent with the country cousins, saving hay, footing turf or picking blackberries. These rose-tinted childhood memories evoke images of a blissful countryside existence: when the weather was invariably sunny, the fields rife with birdsong and wildflowers, the food simple but wholesome. Central to this rural idyll was the farmer, honest and hardworking, ostensibly making a tough but deeply fulfilling living on the land, custodian of a rich and ancient heritage.

Perhaps this helps to explain the sense of personal loss many of us experience when, as adults, we revisit these childhood haunts to find hedgerows replaced with electric fences, flowering pastures with silage swards, square bales of hay with black bales of silage, the scent of flowers with the stench of slurry. We somehow resent the fact that many farmers have ‘moved on’ like the rest of us, adopting new technologies and systems in order to increase their efficiencies and earn a standard of living comparable with ourselves, their Celtic Tiger brethren. We are upset with this ‘simplification’ of the landscape, and yearn for the complex web of intimate interaction which defined the smaller, more diverse farming systems of our memories.

Yet in Ireland we are relatively fortunate in that significant refuges of the traditional farmed landscape still survive, where the farmer maintains an intimate relationship with the land and the forces of modern ‘industrial’ farming have yet to prevail. In many of these places, geographical and climatic constraints have
limited the relevance of new technologies designed to ‘improve’ the land or the livestock. As a result the farmer has had little choice but to continue with relatively ‘traditional’ management systems, facilitating the continued presence of the plants, animals and countryside that have evolved in harmony with these systems over many generations.

John McGahern immortalised such places in his simple but evocative writings of the laneways and hedgerow-lined fields of Sligo and Letrim, and the simple but significant existence of their inhabitants. Tim Robinson explored the intimacy of the landscape of Connemara and the Aran Islands, with their intriguing vestiges of agriculture. Many of us exalt in the expansive sweeps of heather-blanketed slopes of the Wicklow, Comeragh or Slieve Bloom mountains, where the ruined stone huts and straggly mountainy sheep earth the wild beauty, largely bereft of the presence of the modern interventions that elsewhere dominate our countryside. Similarly, our offshore islands constitute unique repositories of traditional farming practices and the associated landscape mosaic that these practices have created and sustained.

Worryingly however for these special places, current trends in farming would suggest that they face an increasingly uncertain future.

Managing our rural heritage

Heritage management is a relatively new concept in Ireland. To some observers, our efforts thus far at managing the rich heritage of the Irish countryside have not been very successful. EU-led designations such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) have been lambasted by farmers as being too nature-centred with scant regard for people who have farmed the land. In many cases the process of designation itself has driven a wedge between people and their heritage, and the sense of pride, ownership and responsibility necessary to effect meaningful heritage management has been lost. The agri-environmental approach on the other hand, as delivered through 55,000 farmers in the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS), has been criticised as overly focused on supporting farm incomes with insufficient regard for the needs of heritage conservation.

One of the clearest trends in the Irish countryside today is a polarising of the distinction between the commercially viable full-time farmer, and the subsidy-dependent small, mainly part-time farmer. Many studies project a continued decline in farming activity on most of our more remote, marginal farmland, as our agriculture industry continues to rationalise and the ongoing strength of the off-farm economy lures ever more young farmers from their increasingly isolated rural existence. The process is accelerated by the vagaries of global food markets and agricultural policy, as well as continuing animal health and food scares.

While the impact of agricultural intensification on our environment has been well documented, the threat posed by agricultural decline has scarcely raised an eyebrow. Though there may be short term biodiversity gain, in the long term the heritage value and intrinsic character of the countryside is often diminished as the farming systems that sustained it disappear. It is no coincidence that many of the ‘marginal areas’ most severely threatened by agricultural decline are our main repositories of natural and cultural heritage, as Natura 2000 maps, National Monument records - and indeed our tourism industry - will readily attest.

Farming on the edge

One of the clearest trends in the Irish countryside today is a polarising of the distinction between the commercially viable full-time farmer, and the subsidy-dependent small, mainly part-time farmer. Many studies project a continued decline in farming activity on most of our more remote, marginal farmland, as our agriculture industry continues to rationalise and the ongoing
In light of these shortcomings, and cognisant of the impending threat posed by a decline in farming on areas of high natural and cultural value, there is an urgent need for a new approach, one that celebrates and supports the positive role that farming plays in conservation.

High Nature Value farming - a new approach

One interesting emerging model in this regard is that of High Nature Value (HNV) Farming Systems, a concept that has received EU backing and is currently developing significant momentum across other areas of Europe. According to the European Environment Agency:

‘High Nature Value farmland comprises those areas in Europe where agriculture is a major (usually the dominant) land use and where that agriculture supports or is associated with either a high species and habitat diversity or the presence of species of European conservation concern or both’.

Three main types of HNV farmland have been defined: farms with a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation, farms with a mosaic of habitats and/or low-intensity land uses, and farms that support a significant number of rare or important species. HNV farming areas in Europe include a wide range of landscapes and habitats such as the Spanish dehesas and Portuguese montados, Alpine pastures, grazed salt marshes of northern Germany, and small, mixed farming systems that still prevail in many of the accession states.

But the term ‘HNV’ also represents a new approach to managing our countryside, one that acknowledges the integrity of existing farming systems, respects their inherent diversity and fosters the continuation of these systems without prescribing management ‘ideals’ for them. In terms of land management, HNV recognises that the nature value of any particular area is not delineated by a field boundary or a line on a map, but that it is wholly interconnected with, and dependent on, other areas within - and indeed beyond - that farm. Sustaining farming systems and their practitioners is central to the HNV approach, so the HNV approach is one of engagement, not estrangement.

HNV farming in Ireland

In Ireland the HNV concept is not widely known. This may be about to change however as one of the listed objectives of the new REP S IV scheme is to promote “the conservation of high nature value-farmed environments which are under threat”. The Heritage Council for their part have commissioned a report on HNV in Ireland (available from www.heritagecouncil.ie) and convened two workshops to stimulate debate on the issue.

The report recommends that HNV farmland in Ireland is defined and concentrations of HNV farmland are delimited. There should be regionalised HNV schemes specifically adapted to supporting the farming systems required to maintain the heritage value of a HNV region e.g. the Burren, Connemara, South Kerry or the Islands. Payments should reflect the real costs rather than taking a compensation-based approach, for example supporting minimum grazing densities where farming is uneconomic, encouraging mixed grazing systems over sheep only, rewarding the production of hay or small-scale tillage crops using traditional methods, encouraging breed types suitable for HNV farmland and/or supporting the targeted winter/summer grazing of livestock.

HNV farming would complement the REPS approach, but with a greater weighting towards...
more marginal, socially vulnerable areas which make such a large contribution to Irish biodiversity. While some would argue that REPS works to protect the environment from farming, the HNV approach recognises the need to promote and sustain proactive farming activity. This is a good selling point for a taxpayer increasingly cynical about compensation-based payments to farmers.

Farming for conservation

An interesting example of how a HNV approach might work on the ground comes from the Burren, one of Ireland’s more exceptional farmed landscapes, where an EC LIFE Nature-funded project ‘BurrenLIFE’ (www.burrenlife.com) has revised the prevailing (negative) farming-conservation paradigm by seeking instead to exploit the interdependence of farming and conservation. For the project partners - NPWS, Teagasc and Burren IFA - this new approach is something of a leap of faith, but one which is already paying dividends.

A few traits differentiate this approach from that of REPS or SACs. Firstly, the project and its staff are deeply embedded within the community so a bottom-up approach to meet the specific needs of the area and its people is ensured. Project actions operate at a farm level, relying heavily on advice and input from land managers and the systems they have developed over many generations to farm their land. The project embraces change and strives to evolve: rather than freeze-frame existing systems, BurrenLIFE attempts to accommodate change and optimise environmental and socio-economic outputs through ongoing practical research and innovations.

Each of the 20 monitor farms in this pilot project has its own unique plan, one that places the heritage value of the land on a footing with its agricultural value. Rather than restricting activity, the project promotes a proactive approach, implementing innovative methods of food, water and access provision for livestock in order to maintain suitable farming systems on marginal land, while recognising the time and labour constraints under which the farmer operates.

Payments are made only for work completed, and in all cases the farmer is expected to cover a proportion of the costs involved.

Within BurrenLIFE the farmer is placed firmly at the centre of the conservation process. Farmer liaison groups, producer groups and farmer collectives have been set up to support and empower the fractured farming community. Farmers themselves are contracted to do heritage work such as scrub removal, water provision and wall repair, while the farmers are also reclaiming their countryside custodian status in a meaningful way by delivering lectures and walks for the general public. For these farmers, farming for conservation is not a threat - instead, it is a new approach to the land which is creating exciting new options and opportunities.

The future of HNV

While HNV does appear to offer a model of some potential for Irish farmers and their heritage, a great amount of work will need to be done - including possibly the establishment of pilot schemes - before it can come close to fulfilling its worthy objectives. Lessons from the Burren show that a ‘HNV’ approach can provide an effective model for conservation while contributing significantly, and in a real way, to rural economies. Many people would baulk at the notion of yet another ‘scheme’ and the bureaucracy that it might entail, yet if we continue to lose our farmers and our rural heritage is in decline, we may have no choice but to embrace this new way forward and hope that it can succeed where other schemes have failed: in helping to sustain a vibrant Irish countryside where there is a meaningful and sustainable balance between the needs of farming and of heritage.

Brendan Dunford is a member of the Heritage Council and chairman of the Council’s Wildlife Committee. He is project manager of the BurrenLIFE project and co-founder of Burrenbeo (www.burrenbeo.com), a non-profit information and education provider for the Burren.

Article featured in Outlook Winter 2007/Spring 2008
Neil Foulkes explores the value of Ireland’s hedgerows - for tourism, agriculture, biodiversity and heritage conservation.

Hedgerows are such a familiar part of the Irish landscape. The main period of land enclosure in Ireland was from the middle of the 18th century to the mid-19th century. Agricultural improvement through land rotation programmes necessitated protection of crops by restricting the movement of livestock to particular fields. It was during this period that much of the familiar patchwork landscape of hedged fields originated.

Data collected by the Department of Agriculture and the National Parks and Wildlife Service at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s indicates that there could be as much as 380,000km of hedgerow in the Republic (Smal, 1995). If the average hedge is 2m wide this means that approximately 1.5% of the land area of the country is made up of hedgerows. This is more land than is covered by native woodlands.

Hedgerows hold different values for different people, some specific, some general. Hedgerows were traditionally planted as livestock barriers. To the farmer they are fences, and provide shade and shelter to livestock. In fact, a hedge provides shelter 15 times its own height on its leeward side, and three times its height on the windy side. Hedgerows also form a barrier to the spread of airborne diseases such as brucellosis and tuberculosis.

To think of the landscape value of hedgerows just cast your mind back to May when the countryside was smothered in whitethorn blossom. This landscape value of hedgerows was highlighted in a study by O’Leary, McCormack and Clinch (1998) who asked tourists which elements of the Irish landscape they deemed ‘most important’ in respect of their image of Ireland. Contrary to expectations, it wasn’t the hills, mountains, lakes, rivers or sea that topped the poll. Some 64% of those questioned considered the hedgerows, stone walls and green fields as the defining feature of the Irish landscape.

Some benefits of hedgerows are not widely appreciated or understood. On the continent one facet of hedgerows that is drawing the attention of researchers is the impact on water quality. In parts of France and Holland hedgerow loss as a result of agricultural changes in the latter part of the 20th century has been significant. In Holland they have lost over 80% of their hedgerow resource. Hedgerow restoration programmes are ongoing there, and in other parts of Europe, and the driving force is often water quality. Hedges
play a role in regulating the movement of water in the landscape. Hedgerow root systems act like sponges, soaking up moisture and releasing it slowly into watercourses. This can help in reducing the potential for flooding. This is particularly relevant to hedges that run across sloping land. Hedges also act as a buffer to nutrient loss from agricultural land, minimising the potential for eutrophication of waterways.

The wildlife value of hedgerows is well documented. They are habitats in their own right and are recognised as surrogate woodland habitat in a country such as Ireland with very little woodland cover. Hedgerows also form ‘arteries’ for the movement of wildlife through the landscape.

What makes a good hedge for nature conservation? Research on hedgerow ecology points to certain characteristics that, overall, are beneficial for flora and fauna. These can be broken down into four categories: Structure, Species Composition, Connectivity, and Associated Species.

Structure:

Tall and wide hedgerows are better than short, narrow ones, especially if there are hedgerow trees. Basically the more volume of woody growth the better. Dense woody growth at the base of the hedge is important.

Species composition:

The diversity of species that comprise a hedge impacts on its value for wildlife. More species means more types of food for insects and birds; and the flowering season is extended which is good for bees.

Connectivity:

If hedges link with other natural and semi-natural habitats (woodlands, ponds, bogs, etc.) the value for wildlife is increased - this includes links with other hedgerows. Research has shown that there is a significantly higher bird nesting density at hedgerow intersections than in straight sections of hedge. Gaps in hedgerows are generally detrimental to the wildlife value of hedges. They break the continuity of cover that means security for species moving across the landscape.

Associated features:

As part of their overall construction many hedgerows have an earth bank, a wall, and/or a drain. All of these features can improve the habitat potential of the hedgerow. Banks and walls provide a nuance of habitat and micro-climate that increase the opportunities for ground flora species. Wet drains offer refuge for amphibians.

So in terms of wildlife value all hedges are not the same - quality is as important as quantity. Baseline data on the quality of hedges in Ireland is limited. Fortunately, over the last four years a number of local authorities, with the support of the Heritage Council, have recognised the importance of improving our knowledge of the resource and have commissioned surveys of hedgerows based on a standard methodology (Murray and Foulkes, 2007). The authorities concerned are Cavan, Dublin City, Galway, Kildare, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath.

In Britain, as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan for Species Rich Hedgerows, a series of nine
‘Favourable Condition’ criteria have been identified to guide conservation practice. Of these five were sufficiently consistent with data recorded in Ireland to allow comparison. These were:

- Average height at least 2m
- Average width at least 1.5m
- Less than 10% gaps, with no individual gap wider than 5m
- Base of woody component closer than 50cm to the ground
- Less than 10% introduced/non-native species

Surveying has shown that, at best, only a quarter of Irish hedges meet all of these favourable condition criteria indicating that there is plenty of room for improvement in the quality of hedges if they are to fulfil their potential as wildlife habitats.

The heritage hedgerow

The recognition that hedgerows vary significantly in their quality and condition needs to be given more prominence in the planning process. There is a big difference in the heritage and ecological value between a single-species whitethorn hedge planted as a result of Land Commission divisions in the early 20th century and a species-rich townland boundary hedge with a large earthen bank and drain that may have been in existence for hundreds of years. I’ve seen planning applications, County Development Plans and Environmental Impact Statements that refer to ‘hedgerows’ but don’t differentiate between different types of hedge.

To help shape the distinction, I would like to see the introduction of the idea of the ‘Heritage Hedgerow’. A Heritage Hedgerow would be one with important historical or landscape value, or with notable structural or species composition characteristics. These hedges could then be given greater consideration in the planning process and could be prioritised for appropriate management in the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS).

A conservation issue

There is now a small new wave of hedge planting going on as a result of REPS. This is a...
voluntary scheme operated by the Department of Agriculture open to farmers who are recompensed for carrying out their farming activities in an environmentally sensitive way. The latest version of the Scheme, REPS 3, has an optional measure for participant farmers to plant new hedgerows during the course of their five year plan. Based on figures given at the National REPS Conference (Tullamore November 2003) this could result in over 2,000 km of new hedgerows being planted annually under the scheme.

One factor that concerns me in relation to this new phase of hedgerow establishment is the issue of the provenance of the shrubs and trees being planted in new hedges. Provenance relates to where the seed for a plant comes from. The most common shrub in Irish hedgerows is the whitethorn, but not all whitethorns are the same. Regional variations in environmental factors have resulted in small adaptations by plants to survive which means that an Irish whitethorn is not exactly the same as one from Britain or further afield. In fact, a Cork whitethorn will be slightly different to a Louth whitethorn and an upland thorn will have slightly different characteristics to a lowland thorn.

The results of research carried out on new hedge planting by Jones et al (2001) in Wales indicates greater establishment success where whitethorn provenance is closely matched to the planting site and that locally provenanced plants can be superior to commercially available material.

Anecdotal evidence from nursery growers and Teagasc staff would suggest that well over 90% of the whitethorn quicks currently available in Ireland are not of Irish provenance, much of it is of Eastern European origin. Most plants are imported but Irish nurseries may also be producing plants from seed gathered in other European countries.

What are the implications for biodiversity of this influx of non-native genetic material? Next spring take a look at the young (almost certainly non-Irish provenance) hedgerows that have been planted along new roads over the last few years. They will come into leaf (budburst) much earlier than the older hedges lining the fields beyond - up to four weeks earlier in some cases. This has repercussions for wildlife. Many insect and bird species have lifecycles that are timed to coincide with the seasonal growth patterns of trees and shrubs on which they depend.

Some species may be able to adapt quickly to these imported provenance plants, others may not. Ultimately, perhaps hybrids between local and imported varieties of the same species will prove suitable for wildlife. But what must be recognised at this point is that these are complex issues and we shouldn’t be walking blind down this road.

Hedgerows are an extensive and valuable part of our heritage. They have utility in the present but also mark the past. Their values are multi-functional in both practical and spiritual terms. They enrich our history, landscape, ecology, rural society and farming practices; they give character to an area and aesthetic appeal, creating a sense of place. We need to develop a considered and practical approach to their long term conservation.

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Almost every day in our newspapers, on radio and television, we hear about plans for new motorways, new railways, new water treatment facilities, or new electricity generating and distribution capacity around the country. We can see this new infrastructure being built all around us. We’re also investing heavily in new hospitals, schools and community facilities. As a country we’re investing more in our infrastructure than ever before.

But are we neglecting another type of infrastructural investment which is vital for the future? I believe that we are. We need to invest now in our green infrastructure to ensure that we maintain the quality of our environment into the future. Without this we cannot sustain our prosperity and quality of life. You may say that we’ve heard all this before and that we’re well aware of the need to care for the environment. Aren’t there a plethora of laws, EU directives, and policies dealing with all these issues? So what is green infrastructure and why do we need to invest in it?

Green ‘infrastructure’ means the networks of green areas around us that sustain ecological processes thereby maintaining the air we breathe, the water we use every day, the web of life we depend on, and the landscapes in which we live our lives. It’s no exaggeration to say that our lives and livelihoods depend on green infrastructure. Green infrastructure includes our parks and urban green spaces, nature conservation areas, river and canal corridors, floodplains, coastal lands, uplands, wetlands, hedgerows, woodlands, farmland managed in an environmentally friendly way, etc. We tend to take all this for granted because these green networks and the biodiversity they maintain have always been there, providing benefits to us free of charge.

At least this was the case in the past. Today the situation is different. Our economy has grown rapidly, delivering growth, employment and...
prosperity. We’re better off than we have ever been. With this growth we’ve also experienced rapid land-use change – growing towns and cities, the transformation of agriculture, rapid industrial and commercial development. One of the unintended results of these land-use changes has been a reduction in both the quantity and quality of our green infrastructure. We’ve lost and continue to lose habitats that sustain biodiversity. Water pollution is a persistent problem. Habitats are becoming disconnected and isolated in increasingly urbanised landscapes, making it more difficult for them to sustain wildlife populations. Floodplains are being lost, reducing the capacity of the environment to respond to future challenges such as climate change.

Given its importance we can no longer ignore the fact that we are degrading our green infrastructure and risking future environmental quality. It is time that we planned and invested in green infrastructure in the same way that we plan and invest in our roads and water services, in our schools and hospitals. We need to integrate planning for green infrastructure into our land-use planning system. Just as we plan at national, regional and local level for development and for the provision of other types of infrastructure, so too do we need to strategically plan, deliver and manage our green infrastructure.

A strategically planned green network performs many different functions and provides many different benefits. It can help to maintain and enhance biodiversity and landscape character. It can help to control water pollution, reduce flood risk and lessen the impacts of climate change. It can protect and conserve the historic landscape including important built heritage assets and designed landscapes. It can provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature and the outdoors, with associated benefits to health and wellbeing. It can provide opportunities to develop walking and cycling routes. It can provide opportunities for outdoor education. It can help to create a good quality of life for all our citizens. We will also be much better placed to meet our obligations in relation to the implementation of the Habitats, Birds and Water Framework Directives as well as our obligations deriving from the Ramsar Convention (on the conservation of and wise use of wetlands) and the European Landscape Convention.

But the task is not an easy one. Green infrastructure planning and delivery is a complex undertaking. To be effective green infrastructure needs to be planned and delivered both regionally and locally. For example, a green infrastructure plan for Fingal is unlikely to be wholly successful in the absence of regional green infrastructure planning for the greater Dublin area. How can we plan in this way at a regional level? Can such plans be implemented successfully? How can we finance green infrastructure provision? We need to answer all these and many other questions.

To answer some of these questions, we can look to experience elsewhere. We can draw on the experience in greenways and green infrastructure development in North America, the rapidly developing green infrastructure agenda in the UK, and the long experience in development and management of ecological networks in continental Europe. We also need to debate the issue nationally and arrive at solutions that meet our needs. To this end a two-day international conference will take place on 4th and 5th November 2008 in the Grand Hotel, Malahide, Co. Dublin. The conference will bring together practitioners from home and abroad to share experience in green infrastructure planning and development. The conference will also explore how the green infrastructure approach can be developed in Ireland. Why not come along and join the debate?

Information on the conference is available from Dr Gerry Clabby, Heritage Officer with Fingal County Council, Main Street, Swords, Co. Dublin. 01-8905697, email: gerry.clabby@fingalcoco.ie
Finola Reid offers an overview of our oldest gardens

Somebody said recently that we have too much heritage in Ireland. Perhaps when it comes to our historic gardens and demesnes that glib sentiment may help to explain why so many have bitten the dust with so little outcry or recrimination. So many demesnes containing ornamental grounds and gardens have been destroyed since the beginning of the 20th century when it was perceived that they had no intrinsic historic or cultural value in the new Irish State and were therefore useful only as opportunities for retribution, division and distribution or development. Yet, despite those losses, we still have a great number happily surviving and in recent decades we’ve never had so many open to the public and enjoyed by so many.

It is just 14 years since the ERDF-funded and Bord Failte administered ‘Great Gardens of Ireland Restoration Programme’ (GGIRP) 1994-1999 was launched by the then Minister for Tourism, Charlie McCreevy TD. That scheme grant-aided conservation and restoration projects in 26 historic gardens and influenced many more owners into realising that they were custodians of very special and increasingly rare places. Fingal...
Co. Council manages Malahide Castle, Ardgillan Castle and Newbridge House; Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Co. Council manages Marlay Park; and Kilkenny Co. Council has done exceptional work conserving and restoring Woodstock in Inistioge with the blessing of the Tighe family. Turlough Park in Co. Mayo was restored as part of a major development involving the National Museum and Mayo Co. Council. All were funded under the GGIRP. More recently Carlow Co. Council, in an inspired move by its then county manager, purchased Duckett’s Grove, announcing its acquisition during Heritage Week 2005. Already its ruined castle has been stabilised with a grant from the Department of the Environment and the two superb walled gardens conserved and replanted with ‘Great Garden’ grant assistance from the National Development Plan.

So why all this activity after such a long period of neglect? Fáilte Ireland has repeatedly shown in its statistics over many years that visitor numbers to heritage properties is ever increasing and garden tourism is becoming a more highly valued market than previously realised. This is encouraging owners who continued to care for their gardens when all seemed hopeless and those who had abandoned them. Now there are about 50 gardens listed and open to the public in the ‘Houses, Castles and Gardens’ group which are publicly or privately owned. There are now many garden trails and garden festivals around the country where groups of owners join together and open otherwise private gardens for short periods in order that others may enjoy for a few weeks what they enjoy all the time – Wicklow, Carlow, Wexford, West Cork, and Connemara are some of the areas that have successful annual events. Others will follow with encouragement from Fáilte Ireland’s most recent statistics and an expected increase in home tourism with the downturn in the economy.

The OPW alone has some 100 historic properties in its custodianship, of which many are historic demesnes containing significant historic grounds and gardens. These include Heywood, Sir Edwin Luytens’s great masterpiece in Ballinakill, Co. Laois; Emo Court, the country house designed by James Gandon, also in Co. Laois; and Inlacullin, the stunning island garden in Glengarriff designed by Harold Peto. Doneraile Court, Co. Cork, home of the St Leger Family is one of the finest 17th century historic demesnes in the country, with surviving fish ponds, a deer park, parkland and impressive ornamental and productive gardens and orchards, but sadly is still waiting its turn for some respect and love. Coole Park in Co. Galway is in denial, its past importance is blurred although it is in state ownership and well cared for, there is no real acknowledgement of the enormous social and historic significance of its demesne. Castletown House has been rescued by the OPW but not before its grounds were carved up and built on but still it survives. Fota, struggling for survival for decades, is slowly gaining recognition once more as a historic garden with a famous botanical collection, not just an arboretum and wildlife park. The Irish Heritage Trust has taken on the house itself and its associated outbuildings, so many [of our historic gardens] have bitten the dust with so little outcry or recrimination.
stables and yards, and intends to develop it more fully for tourism. Ballinlough Castle, Co. Westmeath; Glin Castle, Birr Castle, Co. Offaly; Lismore Castle and Curraghmore in Co. Waterford still remain in the ownership of old families who have the determination and wherewithal to keep them so their foreseeable futures are safe. A shining example of a surviving 17th century demesne with superbly kept grounds and gardens is Killruddery, Co. Wicklow. Although suburbia is creeping towards it from Bray and Greystones, the Brabazon family, earls of Meath, for successive generations since the 1660s, have been exemplary custodians and the future is assured for this exquisite historic landscape. Constantly in demand for period film sets such as The Tudors, and its popular sylvan theatre hosting events that do not damage the historic fabric, the family’s handling of high quality understated tourism should be rewarded by both visitors supporting it and the local authority protecting its fragile setting and environs.

Golf has been an insidious blight on our historic landscapes. Development of golf courses are more common than restoration projects and continue to sweep away centuries of history, culture, architectural, botanical and horticultural excellence with little or no consideration of the actual damage and loss caused to our common patrimony. The exquisite landscape of Carton House has been irretrievably changed into a golf course with its associated housing schemes, as has Lough Rynn, Mount Wolsley, Mount Juliet, Straffan House and many others that are now golf resorts with a wrapping of overpriced houses and incongruous hotel appendages.

Farnham, Co. Longford, and Strokestown, Co. Roscommon, have escaped golf so far, fingers crossed. Castlehyde in Co. Cork and Lissadell in Co. Sligo, despite changes in fortune, continue to be privately owned by newly arrived owners so it remains to be seen what happens long-term for both. Both have 17th and 18th century landscape features that must be preserved intact for future generations to enjoy. Many more historic gardens survive still privately owned and are never in the public eye. Some are attached to estates, studs and farms, institutions, schools and other bodies and these, to varying degrees, are open or stay firmly shut to be enjoyed privately or at a premium.

Housing, industrial estates and business parks have also irretrievably damaged historic demesnes – witness the horror of Syngefield Demesne, only a stone’s throw from Birr Castle, or Oakpark in Co. Carlow, rezoned for development. It is inevitable that more will ‘bite the dust’ in this manner with the present
economic crisis. Powerscourt, with that sublime picturesque landscape and vista, has become a metal roofed shopping mall, complete with escalator, two golf courses, a hotel and a huge garden centre/lifestyle shop while Mount Usher is becoming the latest retail therapy for the well heeled. What is next?

All of these gardens are hugely diverse in their individual history and geography, designs and layouts, native vegetation, exotic plant contents and architectural features that together comprise a major national heritage asset. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has been conducting a national survey of historic gardens for several years and its preliminary findings are staggering. Ireland, because of its colonial history, has an astounding number of estates and demesnes. The number of historic gardens that are recorded on the first edition maps of the Ordnance Survey is in the region of 7,000 but it remains to be seen how many have survived to the present day. County by county site survey has commenced, with Co. Louth being the first and Co. Donegal now in progress. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) website is a fascinating one for anybody interested in the study of our historic houses, gardens and demesnes, various famines, war and strife, marriage, succession, genealogy and local history. Logging on to www.buildingsofireland.ie/Surveys/Gardens/ opens up a whole new wonderful world of lost, decayed, struggling and thriving historic properties. The gathered information from county surveys will provide the basis for future protection of the ones that have survived.

Our historic gardens are deserving of the very best in custodianship, legislation, planning and protection. They need specialised expert advice and conservation measures to avoid damage, or making inappropriate changes to their fragile fabric. Because they are substantially reliant on vegetation they are constantly changing and demanding attention, unlike a building which, provided its roof and main structure is good, can survive well with little intervention. Garden owners have to be daily vigilant to the needs of vegetation, trees, shrubs and perennials, as well as buildings and built structures, water courses, vistas and views.

Nothing remains constant in gardens and therefore they need ongoing investment of time, traditional skills and realistic budgets to maintain them. Vegetation waits for no man. Old buildings can be mothballed or with minimum maintenance survive until new uses are found for them but gardens wither and die rapidly without constant skilled care and protection from the ravages of time and weather. Despite losses over four centuries we know now from the work of the gardens survey that we still have a great number surviving and that coincides with so many being opened to the public and enjoyed by so many.

The Florence Charter Art. 15.
No restoration work and, above all, no reconstruction work on an historic garden shall be undertaken without thorough prior research to ensure that such work is scientifically executed and which will involve everything from excavation to the assembling of records relating to the garden in question and to similar gardens. Before any practical work starts, a project must be prepared on the basis of said research and must be submitted to a group of experts for joint examination and approval.

There are several historic gardens currently undergoing conservation and restoration by both private owners and public authorities. Specialised expert advice and conservation measures are used to prevent damage or inappropriate changes to their fragile fabric so enlightened owners do act responsibly. But there still is a lack of awareness by other owners who, with the unbridled enthusiasm of the true amateur, don't wait for proper research or professional advice and wade in, unwittingly destroying what they think they are conserving.
and restoring. Legislators and planners, developers, architects and designers need to be more vigilant and restrained in their handling of proposed ‘restoration’ projects, treating each garden as a unique historic place in its own right and not to be pulled and dragged about. The legislation protecting buildings must provide greater protection for its curtilage and environs, grounds and gardens, if we are to save them from unwitting development.

By reason of its nature and purpose, an historic garden is a peaceful place conducive to human contacts, silence and awareness of nature. This conception of its everyday use must contrast with its role on those rare occasions when it accommodates a festivity. Thus, the conditions of such occasional use of an historic garden should be clearly defined, in order that any such festivity may itself serve to enhance the visual effect of the garden instead of perverting or damaging it.

For many decades those gardens and parks owned by public authorities fared better than those with private owners, but more recently financial pressures and declining budgets are forcing parks departments to allow the use of historic sites in their care as venues for festivals and music events which cause major issues for the historic fabric. Facilitating public concerts and music events requires careful planning. The management policies for our public parks and gardens should be subjected to closer scrutiny because usage has changed from passive recreation to more regular use as venues for large scale events. Pressure on vegetation and root zones, ground compaction, disturbance to wildlife and habitat, light and noise pollution all contribute to long term damage. The Phoenix Park, Belvedere House, Marlay Park and Malahide Castle are better known as concert venues by young people than as beautiful gardens, and are becoming known as cash-cows for the coffers of county councils than as places of quiet recreation for all citizens. Is this indicative of a general dumbing down of historic properties or will it awaken a new generation to the existence of these beautiful places long after the music has died away and the stamped grass recovered? Is it time to rethink management policies or is it time for public authorities to hand over responsibility for historic parks and gardens to a single new authority with new protective legislation supporting its work and embodying international legislation? Should we tolerate the use of historic gardens in public care as venues for festivals and music events which cause major issues for the historic fabric. The management policies for our public parks and gardens have changed from passive recreation to actively promoted venues for mass events and is it time to say no more.

These gardens are hugely diverse in their individual history and geography, designs and layouts, native vegetation, exotic plant contents and architectural features. They are deserving of the very best in custodianship, legislation, planning and protection in law. Any actions, or lack of action, that causes Ireland to be marked out as a country that treats its historic garden heritage with less respect than other parts of its heritage has to be questioned and judged by our peers in our fellow European countries.
Anyone reading the various articles of ‘The Florence Charter’ and relating them to Ireland’s historic gardens could be rightly dismayed. Its articles, if applied to the Irish historic landscape as it is, are a damning indictment of national attitudes to these fast diminishing resources and our current legislation.

Just how far behind the rest of Europe we are in protecting our historic gardens and demesnes can be readily seen in every county where development has aggressively engulfed many of our historic and historical landscapes. Is it too late to save those that are still surviving and should we all make it easier on our consciences and collectively agree that we have too much heritage, too many historic gardens and we don’t need new protective legislation, sure what’s left to protect?

“Our shadows rove the garden gravel still,
The living seem more shadowy than they”
William Butler Yeats
The River Shannon is central to Ireland’s heritage. The river is also a focus of different interests for many people – angling, cruising, generating electricity, natural environment and unspoilt landscapes, water supply, tourism attractions, and attractive development sites.

Physical reminders of the different stages of our history can be found on its shore and in its waters, such as Clonmacnoise, Iniscealtra, the Shannonbridge fortifications, Ardnacrusha and its hydroelectric scheme. Native woodland such as at St John’s Wood on Lough Ree and the black poplars around Lough Derg, and the Shannon Callows are highlights of our national stock of natural heritage. However, current pressures on this fragile resource are reflected in the decline in water quality and fish stocks, the diminishing numbers of corncrakes, and the spread of alien species such as the zebra mussel.

The need to balance competing interests around the Shannon is becoming more acute. How can we conserve this heritage while allowing for economic and social development? To do this successfully we need to base decisions and future plans on a detailed knowledge of the current status and the environmental and heritage value of the Shannon’s shores and hinterland. Not only that, there are over 30 bodies with responsibilities relating to the management of the Shannon - ranging from government departments, agencies, and local authorities, to environmental NGOs and community groups. It is of course difficult to co-ordinate action among all of these. The Waterway Corridor Studies are a first step towards informing and co-ordinating action along the Shannon.

The waterway corridor

A waterway corridor is wider than the waterway, taking in the physical landscape, the towns and villages and their associated activities, including farming, factories, tourism, etc. The idea of studying waterway corridors has been developed in North America, and also in the UK. The aim is to manage a waterway in an integrated way, linking the water with economic and social activities which take place in its vicinity as well as the people and heritage through which it passes. A corridor study examines all these aspects, consults with people locally and nationally, and then draws up a series of recommended actions intended to protect the unique character of the corridor and to encourage appropriate development.

Since 2002, the Heritage Council has carried out five studies covering the entire Shannon from its source down to Limerick and also along parts...
of the Royal and Grand Canals. The local authorities along the river, Waterways Ireland and Shannon Development, also took part in guiding and financing these studies. The Corridor concept has evolved from the idea of a single corridor along the waterways containing all these aspects, to a series of overlapping corridors, each layer dealing with a particular aspect of activity, such as tourism or heritage such as archaeology.

How were the Shannon Waterway Corridor Studies carried out?

The archaeology, natural heritage, tourism, landscape, planning and development were examined in detail. Local communities were consulted through public meetings and wider consultation through requests for written submissions and meetings with relevant bodies. A series of policies and recommendations were then drafted. The opinions of local inhabitants and users of the waterway are very important in framing the recommendations, which work at two levels – some are general and overarching, for example, proposing a management structure for the Shannon Lakes. Others refer to places such as towns and villages along the waterway. Some refer to a particular part of heritage like underwater archaeology, or the potential effects of boat wash on nesting birds.

The five studies along the Shannon from north to south are:

- 2006 Lower Shannon from Meelick to Limerick City
- 2005 Upper Shannon to Roosky including Boyle River, Lough Key, Lough Allen and Carnadoe Waters
- 2004 Roosky to Lanesborough and the Royal Canal
2004 Lanesborough to Shannonbridge, including Lough Ree
2002 Shannonbridge to Meelick and Grand Canal

The complete studies can be downloaded in PDF format from www.heritagecouncil.ie/waterways/index.html

The main linking objective of all the studies is the recognition of the Shannon as a national asset that should be managed as an attractive place to live and work. This should be balanced with the need to preserve the waterway, its landscapes and heritage, for future generations.

Specific recommendations include:

- A recreational and interpretation strategy for the lower Shannon area;
- Strategies to conserve the heritage on the islands on the Shannon Lakes;
- Protection of floodplains from inappropriate development;
- An assessment of the carrying capacity of the Upper Shannon for additional recreational boating;
- Linking the waterways to existing and new walking and cycling trails;
- Identification of the waterway corridor area within County Development Plans;
- Development of framework plans for local areas.

Publication and dissemination of the studies

The studies have been published on CDs and in book format and are on the Heritage Council website. The data on the heritage, including industrial heritage, archaeological sites, natural heritage sites and species, are available in detailed appendices. However, it is clear that they are not as well known as they could be, and that the current manner of presenting the information and recommendations could be greatly improved to allow ease of access. So the Heritage Council is now looking at setting up a searchable database on our website which will allow people to search all the studies at once for recommendations referring to places, organisations, aspects of heritage or economic activity.

The local authorities will also be given the data in a format to be included in their GIS.

Beatrice Kelly, Head of Policy and Research, The Heritage Council

In order to publicise the corridors further the Council is hosting a seminar on the Shannon Studies in the Radisson Hotel, Athlone on November 27th, 2008. The purpose is to show the usefulness of the studies to planners in local authorities, and to other users such as NGOs. Speakers include Parks Canada on the Rideau Canal, local authority planners, the Shannon River Basin District, and the Shannon Fisheries Board. For more detail on the programme please see our website, www.heritagecouncil.ie. Booking is essential - please contact Christena Ryan at the Heritage Council at 056-7770777, or email: cryan@heritagecouncil.ie

Article featured in Outlook Winter 2008/Spring 2009
Michael Starrett maps the way for the 2009 Landscape Conference

Ten years ago, when the pace of change in our urban and rural landscapes was turbo-charged as the Celtic Tiger roared into life, the Heritage Council’s first Landscape Conference heard a warning from Professor Fred Aalen that ‘serious damage to our landscape and the environment must be anticipated when dynamic economic growth occurs’.

No one would argue with the fact that in the intervening years Ireland’s landscapes, and our people, have witnessed dynamic economic growth. The big question is whether we were well enough equipped to prevent ‘serious damage’ to landscape and environment.

In committing two years ago to holding a second landscape conference this year, the Heritage Council was seeking to see whether in the intervening decade we had indeed been equipped to deal with the inevitable landscape threats posed by the economic growth that was so welcome in so many respects.

In now setting the scene for this upcoming conference – in October 2009 – and not wishing to prejudge its outcome, it has to be recognised that the context in which we now find ourselves has changed very dramatically from that which faced us back in 1999. It is not now so much a 10-year review, but also an opportunity to set a 10-year plan.

I would, however, be shirking my responsibility if I didn’t say that we were in fact woefully ill-equipped to deal with the pace of development, and that serious damage has been done to our landscape. Let me cite just one or two examples to illustrate the point before moving on, on an optimistic note, to what the conference is designed to achieve.

Since any development will change the character of a particular building, or a particular landscape, the value that is attached to the building and/or the landscape is very subjective. What to one person may seem ugly may to another seem beautiful. Our society is eclectic and diverse in its appearance. And, some might
Add, is the better for it. Apply that same rule to the one-off house in the rural environment and you end up with an eclectic and diverse style of house scattered liberally across the rural landscape. No one would doubt that that is the situation pertaining in many parts of rural Ireland at present. Some people find that attractive; others don’t. And because there are no national guidelines on the manner in which that change can be planned, parts of our country are a mess of different designs and poorly situated housing.

It has all just been allowed to happen. The creeping change in character of huge parts of our rural landscape has been insidious. As a result, the loss in quality of that landscape – something of real economic and social value to the country as a whole – has been substantial. Just how substantial we are not sure because we are not equipped to find out.

Moving from rural to urban change, we only have to drive through our provincial towns and villages to see that large ‘bolt-on’ housing estates, with few or any facilities to improve the quality of life of the people who reside there, have sprung up like mushrooms. Unfortunately, there are many examples of bad village development and few good. Our system has relied not on good and clear guidance at a national level, but rather on the professional ability of individuals to plan for our landscapes correctly. Relying on individuals, professional or otherwise, is no way to plan a country.

One of the more horrendous pieces of management speak that has infiltrated the language in recent years is ‘we are where we are’. All too often this phrase is used not in the positive sense of ‘let’s do something positive and move on’, but rather it is employed as a means of avoiding discussion about how the mess was created in the first place.

The Heritage Council has been consistent in seeking ways to make us better equipped to meet the challenges that we have, and those we will face. In the current climate, with some breathing space possible, this work assumes even greater significance as we seek to highlight the importance of our landscapes and our environment to our social and economic wellbeing. Let’s not find ourselves in another 10
years’ time looking back and saying ‘that’s another fine mess we got ourselves into’.

The forthcoming Landscape Conference will see the Heritage Council showcase some major landscape initiatives. Speakers from Bere Island, the Burren and the Wicklow Uplands, to name but a few, will detail their wonderful community-led landscape initiatives, and the agricultural sector will also be well represented. The conference will also feature speakers from Europe and Canada, articulating how they have responded to the landscape management challenges they have faced, many of which are very similar to those we face in this country.

It will also feature a presentation from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, John Gormley, as well as Maguellone Dejeant-Pons, from the Council of Europe, and Prof. Richard Forman, the renowned landscape ecologist from Harvard.

Now is the time for optimism. Landscape is very much on the agenda and the Government is committed to the development of a National Landscape Strategy. The Heritage Council intends to inform that strategy. What we have to do is find a way to make its relevance and significance to our everyday lives even more clearly understood.

If that means new legislation for conservation and landscape management, and recreation initiatives, we should not be afraid of that. If we need new structures to deliver new landscape objectives for tourism, we should not be afraid of that either. If we need to find new ways of working in partnership and in cooperation with others that should hold no fears.

Michael Starrett, Chief Executive, The Heritage Council.

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