

COPPER COAST UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK SUBMISSIONS ON THE WATERFORD CITY and COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN, 2022-2028.



SUBMISSION 2

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the second of two submissions made by the Copper Coast UNESCO Global Geopark (CCUGGP) on the draft Waterford City and County Development Plan 2022-2028 (WCCDP) for consideration by the Council:

1. A set of observations on primarily community facing issues prepared by Orlaith Hamersley on behalf of CCUGGP. This was submitted on August 26th, 2021.
2. And this submission which focusses on the regional, national and international benefits and opportunities presented to the County by the region's UNESCO accreditation.

This submission summarises briefly the history and achievements made by the UNESCO designated Geopark over the last 20 years as a prelude to presenting a new vision for the future: the creation of a CULTURAL LANDSCAPE region extending from the Coast to Comeraghs, east to Tramore and west to Dungarvan. That vision seeks to broaden and deepen the value of that UNESCO designation to the County by association of that wider region with the UNESCO accredited Geopark, in the vision presented below:

The Copper Coast UNESCO Global Geopark: a gateway into a cultural landscape.

INTRODUCTION

- In November 2015 the 195 members of UNESCO unanimously supported the establishment of a new accreditation to join those of World Heritage and Man and Biosphere (MAB). Thus UNESCO Global Geoparks were established, a process that took over 20 years of diligent work and evaluation. The Copper Coast is one of 169 UNESCO accredited Global Geoparks dispersed across 44 countries and it is also one of the longest running with a pedigree extending back to 2001. It is currently one of three UNESCO Geoparks in Ireland. A further three regions have for a number of years been working towards submitting a formal application.

- That UNESCO designation has given to Co. Waterford an international profile and visibility of immense value, at virtually no cost to the County. This international visibility was largely created and maintained by voluntary effort and strong support from the Geological Survey of Ireland, Waterford County Council and the now no longer extant Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland.
- The Geopark has been sustained in recent years primarily by the voluntary commitment of local community groups and activists drawn from across the 7 villages, hinterlands and communities within the Geopark, as presently defined. The achievements of that sustained community based effort, and how that effort might be sustained and further developed over the period of the County Development Plan 2022-2028, are noted in our Submission 1.
- The Geopark has provided a strong sense of place and identity to the community. This is exemplified by the sign at the east edge of Bunmahon which proudly welcomes visitors to the historic mining village of Bunmahon – an acknowledgement and celebration of a recovered memory of what was once the second largest copper mining district in Ireland during the 19th C.
- That identity has been embraced also by names chosen by local businesses (e.g. “Engine House”, Bunmahon; Copper Coast Natural Skincare, etc.), as well as the Geopark itself which embraced the “Copper Coast” name created by a local community tourism group c.1997. That name was assiduously marketed thereafter by the Geopark, principally through an EU INTERREG 3B funded project (allowing signage etc.), an effort which established and promoted the name and brand identity, now one of the most valuable tourism assets in the County.
- Since 2004 the Geopark has operated as a “Company Limited by Guarantee” and benefitting from Registered Charity status.
- The Board is of the view that without a significant increase in financial support, volunteer enthusiasm will wane and the UNESCO status will be irretrievably lost well within the period of the new County Development Plan; and with that loss, much that has already been achieved and could be achieved will be dissipated.
- The Board considers that to continue activities, develop new opportunities and provide continuity it is necessary to have permanent staff and the finances to support them and offer a career. We note that sustainable financial support is provided by local authorities to the other two Irish Geoparks (Burren and Marble Arch); and the widespread use of the “Guaranteed Municipality Funding” model in many European UNESCO Geoparks. We would welcome discussion on how this could be achieved.

Looking forward towards how the Council could, if it wished, build on what has already been achieved and extend and broaden the benefits which the Geopark could bring to the County in the future, we herewith submit for consideration a new vision of how that might be achieved.

A NEW VISION:

The Copper Coast UNESCO Global Geopark: a gateway into a cultural landscape.

Introduction

The CCUGGP proposal is based upon the concept of “CULTURAL PARKS¹” as defined in Law 12/1997 of Aragon, Spain and its final declaration and implementation in May 2001.

In brief, the concept embraces the totality of the tangible and intangible heritage of any given region as the sustainable resource for marketing, promoting and developing the economy of the region. Intangible heritage embraces music, cuisine, art, folk lore, poetry etc., while tangible heritage includes, for example, natural (geology, flora, fauna) and built heritage (vernacular, ecclesiastical, industrial etc.).

CCUGGP and its broader hinterland up to the Comeraghs, west to Dungarvan and east to Tramore contains a wealth of examples of such heritage, which combine to reflect and represent a history of human occupation and adaptation of an ancient landscape which merges seamlessly into its even more ancient geological foundation – a continuum of natural and human history more than 400 million years in the making and still evolving.

It is that rich resource and how it might be promoted and marketed to the benefit of the region and the County which lies at the heart of this CULTURAL LANDSCAPE proposal. It places CCUGGP, with its invaluable UNESCO designation, in a pivotal role to work with the County and other volunteer/community bodies to broaden the benefit of that designation through the creation, management and promotion of a unique landscape within Ireland’s “Ancient East”.

The UNESCO designation, its conservation and development lies at the heart of this proposal.

1. Coast to Comeraghs Cultural Landscape

The concept seeks to:

- Build a vision of an integrated geological-human history from Coast to Comeraghs, as recorded by its tangible and intangible heritage and united by the twin spines of the Tay and Mahon rivers.
- Expand the value of the UNESCO accreditation of CCUGGP by association with its hinterland, thus broadening the value of that designation to a much larger region in the County.
- Use the Greenway as an east-west entry corridor into the cultural landscape with designated cycling/walking routes north up to the Comeraghs and south down to the coast.
- Develop a network of thematic information “hubs” based on existing community based facilities and initiatives.
- Integrate/coordinate with existing initiatives to avoid duplication e.g. Comeraghs Wild Festival (<https://comeraghswild.com/>).
- Use EU funded project opportunities to fund tangible deliverables which contribute to the development of the story and history of the cultural landscape.

¹ This proposal prefers the equivalent, but non-legal term **CULTURAL LANDSCAPE** to avoid any implication of restrictions on the lives and activities of the inhabitants and communities within the region.

- Use this broader vision as a new foundation on which to seek sustainable financial support for staff, infrastructure etc.

The following list of tangible and intangible heritage assets is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, merely illustrative.

Tangible Heritage assets

- Geology: the foundation of the landscape. A history which goes back more than 400 million years but with a special emphasis on the deglaciation history over the last 10,000 years or so as the mute testimony of natural climate change, rising sea levels, coastal flooding etc. Link to national Strategic Development Goal 13 (Climate Action).
- Natural Heritage: Fenor bog (flora and fauna; hydraulic environment); SPAs etc.
- Prehistoric heritage from the Neolithic (<https://www.prehistoricwaterford.com/>); Bronze Age deforestation coupled with climate change and development of bogs; Bronze Age settlement remains in the Araglin valley – Waterford’s Ceide Fields; Iron age promontory forts, Ogham stones etc.
- Architectural heritage. Vernacular architecture; Churches; holy wells (a fusion between tangible and intangible heritage); civic buildings; fortifications etc.
 - Industrial architecture: mills, mine buildings, lime kilns, railway buildings and viaducts etc.
- Maritime heritage. Ship building and shipping industry (Dungarvan, Kilmurrin, Knockmahon, Stradbally); Fishing and copper ore fleets etc.
- Renewable Energy (link to national Strategic Development Goal 7, Affordable and Clean Energy). Water power: Tay and Mahon rivers - the twin spines which link Coast to Comeraghs; Mills and millers - historic to modern day hydro power along the Mahon river.

Intangible Heritage assets

- Landscape art from Coast to Comeraghs. Build upon the extant Ice, Fire and Water sculpture concept at Boatstrand to create the foundation of an annual international landscape sculpture festival (cf. Maestrazgo Cultural Park/UNESCO Global Geopark, Aragon, Spain)
- Magic road (Mahon Falls road);
- Fairy trees and forts;
- Folklore; examples noted by Des Cowman in the booklet “*Mystic Stones*”.
- Regional cuisine in support of the agricultural and artisan producer sectors
- Draw on the rich musical, dance and other traditions, such as road bowling, in the County.
- Crafts: pottery, felt, basket weaving, linen.

2. Proposed LOCAL AREA PLAN designation: the Bunmahon-Tankardstown Mine Heritage Complex.

CCUGGP suggests that the Bunmahon-Tankardstown 19th C mine heritage complex be designated as a “Local Area Plan” (LAP) as it would align with several objectives made in the Development Plan and provide an integrated framework for conservation, protection and promotion of that heritage for the benefit of local and district communities, as well as its UNESCO designation:

- Landscape requires protection as it is a key component of identity (p. 211). The Copper Coast cultural Landscape is unique in the County, founded as it is on the locus of the 2nd largest 19th C copper mining region in Ireland. This type of cultural landscape is not listed amongst the seven types recognised in the 2020 landscape assessment (last paragraph, p. 211), but lies within a zone designated as “most sensitive” (Fig. 10, p. 212)
- It does however conform with the definition of, and provide a framework for developing its value as:
 - an “*archaeological landscape*”, as defined in L 01, p. 212, and the protection thereof (objective L 02);
 - and it lies at the core of the Copper Coast “*proposed architectural conservation area*” which is listed specifically in Table 11, p. 226 (Section 11.3, p. 225 - 227).
- 10.3.1 (p.216). Opportunity to promote recovery of at least a portion of the mineral tramway (Tankardstown – Stage Cove) as a coastal footpath (a “*stand alone coastal trail*”, p. 219) to add to list of “*strategic walking/amenity trails*” (p. 217) and serve as part of a trail located within and linking features at the core of proposed LAP. Car parking in place at Tankardstown (cf. BGI 11 objective, p. 220; also objectives BGI 10, 13).

John Galloway,

Chairman: Copper Coast UNESCO Global Geopark

Date: August 30, 2021.