

The Bere Island Conservation Plan 2003:

Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Evaluating the Bere Island Conservation Plan

The Report sets out an evaluation of the Conservation Plan adopted by the Bere Island community in 2003, its inception, development, the document itself and its subsequent implementation. Details of how the Report was produced and is presented are contained in the first section.

Development of the Conservation Plan

The Report examines the background to the development of the idea for a Conservation Plan on the Island, the unique characteristics of such a large geographically defined focus, and the implications of these for the Plan. A brief overview of conservation plans and planning is also presented. The funding and support for the proposal is detailed and the process of commissioning consultants and drawing up the Plan is examined. The strong participation of the Island community in inputting to the process, and the adjustments that this demanded from the consultants, are discussed, along with a consideration of the limitations that budget, timeframe, available expertise and community involvement may have contributed to the final Conservation Plan. The importance of incorporating Island community concerns and integrating heritage conservation with these had a major impact on the Plan development and final report, but is perhaps one of the most important challenges that the document tries to address.

The Conservation Plan itself

A number of clear strengths are identified in the Plan itself:

- its very agreement and adoption is evidence of the success of collaborative working, particularly on the part of a local community, in a challenging area;
- the impressive nature of the document and its tailoring to the Island community;
- good quality content in areas of the Plan;
- its function as a powerful tool to secure further funding;
- it is a unique high quality input from local community level to forward planning by local government, and;
- has been a key means of information dissemination and awareness raising between the local community and partner agencies, and;
- it has led to enhanced relationships and increased credibility for all those involved.

The Plan is weakened somewhat four areas particularly:

- its failure to deliver convincingly either as a strategic plan or an action plan;
- its failure to highlight its unique nature;
- weak material in certain important areas, and;
- the questionable usefulness of the supporting reports and other documentation.

Implementation of the Conservation Plan

The initial approach to implementation is outlined and details of funding are presented. Five major strengths are noted in relation to both tangible and less tangible aspects of implementation:

- inclusion by the County Council of the management strategies within the Local Area Plan both recognises the importance of these and accords them maximum possible status, with further benefits to other islands in the County;
- agreement has been reached on the delivery mechanism for a representative Island Council and this is in the final stages of delivery;

- a wide range of initiatives are underway;
- implementation provides enduring evidence of the positive gains possible from community initiatives, and;
- an increased confidence is evident within the Island community.

Problems emerged in four key areas:

- difficulties with the initial implementation approach, particularly the failure to prioritise the formation of the Island Council;
- the role of the Steering Group as a voluntary management structure distinct from existing Island initiatives did not facilitate the most efficient implementation;
- the Plan contained a number of flawed development proposals, which absorbed considerable implementation time and resources before their shortcomings were appreciated, and;
- relationships with key agencies, particularly the Depts. of Defence and Arts & Tourism have not been developed and/or maintained to enable delivery of implementation in a number of areas for a variety of reasons.

The Future

The imminent delivery of the Island Council is seen as the strongest opportunity for the future implementation of the Conservation Plan, providing leadership and the opportunity to rationalise management, costs, and operational efficiencies. Similarly the very positive nature of the Plan, which supports mutual gain initiatives, should facilitate continued support for its implementation, which will be supplemented by momentum from the continued development of existing initiatives. Lack of resources and a relatively low profile on the Island are identified as the biggest threat to the Conservation Plan, but both are within the ability of the Island Council structure to address if it is motivated to do so.

Conclusion

A number of conclusions are made. The significance of the community involvement and subsequent agreement of the Plan is stressed. The considerable work on implementation despite unavoidable challenges is noted, as is the likelihood that substantial benefits (such as jobs, new enterprises and heritage related initiatives) take a considerable time to realise. The achievements of implementation to date are not all that might have been hoped, but they provide solid groundwork on which to build, and the opportunity to continue to do this exists.

Section 1: Evaluating the Bere Island Conservation Plan

1.0 Introduction and Background

The Steering Group for the Bere Island Conservation Plan commissioned this evaluation three years after the adoption of the Plan. The Plan itself recommends regular reviews of implementation and assessment against the implementation programme. While annual Progress Reports on the implementation of the Plan have been conducted in response to this recommendation, and a comparative review carried out as part of the EU ISLA Interreg IIIc Project (focusing on community consultation), this is the first evaluation undertaken. An exhaustive dissection of every aspect of the Conservation Plan is beyond the scope of this document; rather the task set was to present a succinct Report containing an overall appraisal of all aspects of the Conservation Plan to date. It is hoped that this evaluation will assist in ensuring that the maximum value is obtained from the Bere Island Conservation Plan, both in terms of ongoing implementation outcomes for the Island, but also through identifying the lessons to be learnt from how the Plan was initiated, developed and implemented to this point.

1.1 Objective

This document presents the findings of an evaluation of the Conservation Plan that was adopted by the community of Bere Island in 2003. The Report's objective is to assess the quality and worth of the Bere Island Conservation Plan in its broadest context; from its conception, through development and implementation to date, identifying its principal strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats currently experienced.

The Plan itself is unique in that it does not address a single site or complex that represents a specific focus of established heritage interest, but instead focuses on the geographic entity of an island. Neatly defined by the sea, Bere Island represents a very large area to include within a single conservation plan and it also uniquely represents the vital base of livelihood and home to a sizeable community of some 187 people¹. As such, the challenge involved in seeking to develop a useful Conservation Plan for the area, and proceeding to implement this, was considerable.

1.2 Method

The evaluation was conducted in the last quarter of 2006. It is based on a range of information and materials including interviews (both in person and by telephone), written submissions and questionnaire responses with key individuals and organisations (see Appendix 1), implementation progress reports, initial communications from the inception of the Plan both internal to the Island community and with outside agencies, and meeting reports from the process of developing the Conservation Plan itself.

It was not possible to establish communication with the consultants involved in drawing up the Plan (then M.C. O'Sullivan), although it should be noted that they in turn sub-contracted work in specialist areas to a number of other consultants as indicated in the Plan document. In addition, responses from the various external bodies (government agencies and other local development groups) were very limited in number. This is significant and addressed in the text.

¹ 2006 Census figures

1.3 Layout of Report

The Report is divided into 5 sections. This first section sets out the purpose and method involved in evaluating the Bere Island Conservation Plan. Section 2 contains a review of how the proposal for a Conservation Plan came about, was developed, agreed and delivered. It examines how the process of developing the Plan was conducted and how the Island community ultimately adopted it. Section 3 proceeds to look at the nature and content of the Conservation Plan itself. Section 4 considers the implementation of the Plan that has taken place since its agreement, and Section 5 identifies some key issues for the future. Finally, in Section 5 a number of conclusions are drawn from the preceding analysis.

1.4 Approach

This Report seeks to be an honest appraisal given the information available and the point at which it is conducted. It also attempts to recognise reasons why any less than ideal situations may have arisen, and to be constructive in its comments. Any process such as that associated with the Conservation Plan cannot but be one involving many lessons for all involved and arguably that in itself makes it valuable.

It is important that the author records her previous involvement with the Conservation Plan. This has been at two stages and with very specific functions. Firstly, whilst working with the Bantry Bay Coastal Zone Charter, she facilitated a number of Workshop meetings during the development of the Conservation Plan. Since the adoption of the Conservation Plan, she has carried out work related to the Island Council proposed in the Plan².

² - Report on possible structures for a representative Bere Island Council (Dec. 2003)

- Community Consultation on the Proposed New Constitution for Bere Island Projects Group (July, 2006)

Section 2: Development of the Conservation Plan

2.0 Background

As the largest island in the southwest of Ireland, Bere Island has the fourth largest population of the 30 inhabited Irish islands, with 187 residents. The Island sits just 1.5km offshore of the nearest mainland town of Castletownbere, towards the mouth of historic Bantry Bay. Consisting of about 18.5km² of mountainous grassland used largely for extensive agriculture, the surrounding marine resources are also accessed for mariculture and some fishing, with tourism contributing the third most significant economic activity. A considerable number of people are employed on the mainland and access is served by two roll-on/ roll-off ferry services, one at each of the east and west ends.

It is important to note that the Island's population has experienced persistent decline over the last 150 years, although this has slowed and currently there is a healthy mix of ages. As with many small islands, the resident population faces a continual challenge to maintain a viable and vibrant community, and is aware of the need to capitalise on all their resources, including all aspects of the heritage of the Island.

Bere Island has considerable respect amongst the Irish island communities and more widely across other small rural communities for its varied achievements in projects intended to sustain and invigorate the community and economy of the Island. There is a relatively high level of community activism and a number of very innovative initiatives have been explored over the last two to three decades that demonstrate an open approach to considering possible options.

2.1 What is a Conservation Plan?

Originally conceived in Australia, the process of conservation planning has developed in recent years in response to the challenges of managing change in historically sensitive environments. This approach commonly involves use of a Conservation Plan methodology that includes a step-by-step approach to conservation including the following stages:

- Understand the object that you wish to conserve, providing basic information necessary for decision-making (In this case this involves the various aspects of the Island – its natural and built environments, its archaeology, history, culture, folklore, etc.)
- Assess its significance.
- Assess how this significance may be considered vulnerable.
- Write policies to guide its conservation, future use and development, whilst retaining the significance – including proposals for implementation, review and monitoring

It is easy to aspire to the conservation of something considered valuable; but it is far more difficult to develop and agree the framework to ensure its conservation, which is the objective of a Conservation Plan.

The process requires the participation of all those who have an interest in the object or area under consideration and seeks to advance initiatives through consensus and community involvement. The intention is that the agreed Conservation Plan (document) puts in place a general framework, which addresses the overall situation. This in turn provides a context for further specific actions (management strategies, option appraisals, development opportunities etc.). In this way, a Conservation plan can be seen to be a mechanism for managing change.³

³ Stakeholder participation in island settings. Role of Government Study II, Interreg IIIB ISLA Project.

2.2 Why produce a Conservation Plan for Bere Island?

The Heritage Council introduced the idea of a Conservation Plan in discussions with the Bere Island Projects Group and Cork County Council (local government) representatives, whilst meeting on the Island to consider ongoing individual heritage-related projects there. Prior to 2000 the Bere Island community had increasingly recognised the value of the Island's heritage and were exploring possible means of safeguarding and capitalising on this. Partly as a result of this, the Bere Island Projects Group had established good working relationships with the Heritage Council (Kilkenny) and the Conservation Officer of Cork County Council. In three-way discussions between these organisations in September 2000 it was suggested that some way for the whole community to become familiar with the whole range of heritage on the Island, and to prioritise and co-ordinate related work might be possible, that might also strengthen the community's ability to design and deliver various projects most successfully, obtain funding and so forth. The Heritage Council proposed a conservation plan as one potential means of achieving this. The Heritage Council were promoting conservation planning around the country at this point, and saw Bere Island as a pilot for how this might be applied to whole community settings rather than specific sites.

The Island community were kept informed of discussions on the proposal through the circulation of meeting notes and through meetings, at which their support was also sought before funding for the Conservation Plan was pursued.

Essentially, as understood on the Island, the aim of the Conservation Plan was to assist the community in planning its future while protecting their heritage. It can be seen as building on the recent experience of stakeholder-agreed management strategies as delivered in the Bantry Bay Coastal Zone Charter initiative (1997-2003), and was consistent with the Heritage Actions identified in the Charter. It was deemed feasible given the experience amongst the Island population of working in consultation with a range of agencies and groups. A Conservation Plan for a whole community and island was novel, certainly in the Irish context, where such Plans are more usually carried out for specific historic sites or complexes on a much more limited scale. While the area for the Plan was neatly defined geographically, the need to reach consensus across an entire, diverse community over the full range of the heritage found on the Island posed a new and considerable challenge.

The Conservation Plan project was launched in February 2001 at a meeting of invited participants representing various government and local agencies whose support for the proposal and ongoing assistance had been obtained. The location of the launch remains a matter of comment. Should the meeting have been held on the Island, or was the venue of the Ballincollig Gunpowder Mills an important effort to go to meet the centralised state agencies?

The potential benefits for the Island community were relatively straightforward: an identification of the heritage of the Island and its relative value, as well as management strategies and the identification of possible development opportunities, which would present a basis for planning works and seeking funding, etc. As a partner, the Heritage Council saw its role initially as ensuring that the project followed the format of conservation plans as conducted elsewhere, and that the consultants received the correct brief, i.e. that the Conservation Plan was not to be a Development Plan for the Island. The third partner, Cork County Council's involvement stemmed from the provision of support through its Heritage Unit for the Island community and its wish to carry out a conservation plan by way of finance, facilitation and liaising with the community. The staff concerned understood the process of developing a conservation plan whilst also having established relationships with the community and its representatives. The County Council was also likely to be a significant partner in achieving the implementation of the Plan.

2.3 Funding and Support

A total budget of £30,000 was secured with two-thirds originating from [the Heritage Council](#) ~~Cork County Council~~ and the remaining third coming from [Cork County Council](#) ~~the Heritage Council~~. This was a very considerable sum of money when considered on a per capita basis. However, when expected to include an audit and evaluation of *all* aspects of the heritage of the entire Island (18.5km²) the figure becomes relatively much smaller and able to deliver a much more restricted overall Plan. As shall be seen, the additional burden of considering the human economy dimension altered and increased the workload of the consultants, and it could be argued that the extent of engagement with the Island community also added to overall costs, and perhaps reduced the extent to which the Island's heritage could be examined in depth.

Given the challenges and constraints involved in drawing up a Conservation Plan for Bere Island, it is a pity that no process of rationalising the work took place. There was apparently no early recognition that the funds and time scale available could not deliver as in-depth a conservation plan as might have been originally hoped, and there was seemingly no attempt to work out a way of concentrating the Plan in areas where particularly significant heritage was identified – i.e. presenting a brief overview of all aspects of the Island's heritage, but focusing in more depth on those unique and 'high value' aspects such as the military/naval-related infrastructure and history, and the archaeological heritage.

This more detailed definition of the work involved should ideally have been done before it was put out to tender, but could still have been negotiated with the consultants once they were appointed. However, this did not happen and some of the shortcomings of the Plan, its structure, contents, and subsequent implementation can be seen to relate back to this.

Four other state agencies expressed their support for the initiative and their willingness to assist in the development of the Conservation Plan. These included:

- the Department of Defence - a significant landowner on the Island, where there is a military base^o;
- the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (formerly the Dept. of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht & the Islands) - which has responsibility for the development of Ireland's inhabited offshore islands^o;
- the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government) - which manages the Irish State's nature conservation responsibilities under National and European law, and^o;
- the National Monuments Service (formerly Dúchas), Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, - which looks after archaeological conservation within the State^o.

Apart from all the relevant sections within the above organisations, the Heritage Council and County Council (such as the Roads and Environmental Services divisions), a wide range of other relevant organisations and enterprises were kept informed, asked for support and invited to participate in the development of the Conservation Plan. These included:

- The Castletownbere Harbour Commissioners
- ESB
- An Post
- Dúchas^o
- Office of Public Works
- Teagasc
- IFA (and other farming bodies)

^o Representatives of these agencies attended the launch meeting in Ballincollig, Feb. 2001

- Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- FCA^o
- All Island-based community groups (12 at the beginning of the Conservation Plan) ^o
- Beara Tourism
- All local TDs and councillors

Information was disseminated about the Conservation Plan project via the three key partners (the Island community, Heritage Council and Cork County Council) through a variety of means,

2.4 Commissioning of Consultants

A Steering Group was selected to oversee the appointment of consultants. This reflected the partnership approach to the project between the Island community, the Heritage Council and the Cork County Council and included two Islanders (the late John G. Harrington and Jackie Sullivan), Beatrice Kelly (Heritage Council) and Louise Harrington (Conservation Officer with Cork County Council). The brief for the work was advertised nationally and the Steering Group in Dublin interviewed twelve consultants who had tendered for the task. Consultants M.C. O'Sullivan were appointed in the middle of 2001.

Those involved in the selection process and other outside observers have expressed surprise at the choice of consultants with such a strong engineering focus. While M.C.O'Sullivan introduced a number of sub-contracted consultants in other areas, some of the weaknesses in content of the report may be a result of relatively low levels of expertise in certain areas, lack of experience of working closely with local communities, and in drawing up conservation plans. (It is also reasonable to point out that the challenge of bringing experts in all relevant areas together to address the heritage of a whole island within the budget of £30,000 was unlikely ever to be fully realised.) However, it was recalled that in interview these consultants were the only ones tendering for the work who mentioned the local community.

M.C. O'Sullivan drew up an inception report once they had been contracted to undertake the work that was circulated to the Island community for comment. M.C. O'Sullivan as lead consultant provided in-house expertise in the areas of sustainability issues, infrastructure, waste, geology and hydrology, agriculture, fisheries/aquaculture and the marine. Other consultants brought expertise in natural heritage, archaeology, architectural heritage and folklore.

2.5 Research & Compilation of the Plan

The Inception Report was discussed at a public meeting on the Island, where a procedure for public consultation, the formulation, development and adoption of the Conservation Plan were agreed. The project timetable was negotiated between the Heritage Council, Cork County Council and the consultants, and to a lesser extent with input from the Island community. At a public meeting on the Island where the proposed nature and extent of the research, and more specifically the associated consultation, to be carried out on the Island was outlined, the Island community was galvanised into determining its own input. What the consultants initially proposed as appropriate community consultation for the available budget was not considered adequate by those present from the Island community. As a result it was agreed to distribute a questionnaire to all permanent and part-time resident households during June 2001 asking about their vision for the Island, issues that should be addressed, and so forth. The responses to these were available for public view during July. (In addition a number of Working Groups were also established. These are discussed further below.)

^o Representatives of these agencies attended the launch meeting in Ballincollig, Feb. 2001

Bere Island Projects Group also gathered a significant amount of baseline data, above what might initially have been anticipated, in the interests of freeing up the consultants' time to concentrate on the more specialist areas of work.

The various expert consultants visited the Island during the summer of 2001, in a number of cases they interviewed members of the community and/or benefited from their inputs in terms of information, as guides around the Island and so forth. Specific interest groups, such as those involved in farming, gathered relevant information and supplied this to the consultants also.

In addition three Working Groups were set up on the Island, relating to different aspects of Island life. These Groups undertook to collect information for the consultants and to meet with them in order to expedite more extensive research and active input by the Islanders. These three groups were in the following areas:

- Commercial activities incl. agriculture, fisheries and tourism
- Environment, heritage and culture
- Housing, infrastructure and waste management

As can be seen, only one of these Working Groups was overtly concerned with heritage. Yet it was apparent at the first meetings of these Groups in July that, from the Islanders' perspective, for the heritage of the Island to be safeguarded by the residents, the realities of securing a successful human existence had also to be addressed. The consultants were less than happy at being directed as to how to consult with the community and there was some friction over this, but the community effectively took control of the process and determined a more equal balance between itself and the consultants. The Heritage Council also stressed to the consultants the need to be flexible in order to achieve a workable Plan.

The outcomes of the initial Working Group meetings held in late July 2001 were forwarded to the consultants. At the following round of somewhat fraught, facilitated, Working Group meetings in which the consultants participated, it was clear that they were alarmed at how broad a consideration of these wider social and economic issues the community wanted. This was clearly a pivotal stage for the Conservation Plan. The Island community asserted strongly their role as equal partners in the process, and moreover as the vehicle by which any implementation would be achieved. The final Plan had to be acceptable to the community in order to be implemented. There was clearly some frustration on the part of the consultants at the areas that they would need to address in response to the Islanders' concerns, such things for example as service provision and affordable housing. At this point the nature of the final Plan is likely to have changed from what was envisaged originally by the consultants. They had by this point already undertaken most of the work they proposed on the Island and so it would probably not have been possible to restructure the Plan and its contents more effectively. They could only re-present the material they had gathered and supplement it with additional information that related to the concerns expressed by the Islanders.

It is possible that some differences within the Island community were set aside in the interest of the possible gain from the Conservation Plan project, particularly given the commanding position that the community took in the project. The extent of the negotiation over the content, and particularly the accommodation of the Island community's concerns, resulted in a Conservation Plan that arguably resembles more of a development plan with strong emphasis on sustainability. However, given the need to generate support from the whole Island, which must deal continually with the challenge of maintaining and ideally growing a viable community, this is perhaps understandable.

2.6 Community Involvement

At every stage from the very introduction of the idea of a Conservation Plan, the Island community was kept informed of progress, and asked for its approval where significant decisions were required. Notes were circulated following all meetings, and public meetings held regularly. A number of Workshops were held and those participating also engaged to assist M.C. O'Sullivan with provision of further information, etc. Through its own determined efforts the community of the Island established, maintained and made active use of communication links with the consultants, and were certainly far more active and involved than had been originally anticipated – and perhaps more than was welcome by the consultants at the time.

On October 2001 the consultants produced the first draft of the Conservation Plan, on which the Steering Group made initial comments and agreed a schedule for a further round of community consultation. In response M.C.O'Sullivan returned an amended version of the Conservation Plan in February 2002 and this was then circulated to all households on the Island and to the various government stakeholder agencies for consideration and comment during March and April. Further Working Group meetings were held to identify any outstanding issues. An example of a persistently unresolved issue between the Island community and the consultants related to the import and use of undocumented vehicles and the subsequent dumping of vehicles on the Island. Strong feelings were expressed over this issue at the time and while it may represent a compromise, the final agreement of an acceptable form of words for the Plan demonstrates a serious commitment and determination on all sides that such issues should not jeopardise the potential good to be achieved from the overall Plan.

The timing of the Conservation Plan, following on from the Bantry Bay Coastal Zone Charter and dovetailing with the Heritage Actions contained therein seems to have had a positive impact on the process. Members of the Island community had participated in the Charter project and become confident at representing the Island's interests with equal voice to other participants. The relatively sophisticated ability of the Island community to articulate their position and negotiate effectively was remarked on by other partner agencies. As the participants with the most to gain, and arguably also the most to lose, the community participants clearly mobilised to ensure the maximum benefits possible from the Plan.

It should be pointed out that all the costs incurred and work involved in keeping the Island community informed through the various means identified above were born by the Bere Island Projects Group. The meaningful and consistent involvement of the community in the development of the Plan required a considerable amount of resources on the Group's part, which must represent a significant additional and undeclared cost to the overall production of the Plan.

2.7 Agreement of the Plan

A final stakeholder meeting was held on Bere Island in mid-June 2002 at which the Island community, Heritage Council, Cork County Council and other government agencies were represented in addition to M.C. O'Sullivan. The consultants took feedback from this meeting back for inclusion in the Plan, which was finally approved and launched on the 29th of June.

2.8 Dissemination

The completion of the Conservation Plan was announced through a variety of mechanisms. The three partners involved - The Heritage Council, Cork County Council and the Island all used press and other media contacts, websites, existing communications networks and all other means at their disposal to highlight the successful achievement of an all-Island Plan.

An update on the Plan was circulated to all Islanders in July 2002.

Section 3: The Conservation Plan

3.0 Appraising the Conservation Plan

A number of comments can be made about the final Bere Island Conservation Plan, the document itself and the less tangible impacts of the development process. These are set out below under the headings of 'Strengths' and 'Weaknesses', although they are in some cases relatively complex, often clearly relating to points raised in the previous sections. In reality the distinction between strengths and weaknesses may sometimes be blurred and a matter for interpretation.

3.1 Strengths

The achievement of the Conservation Plan itself is a significant positive outcome, but there are other intangible 'strengths' to which the Plan has contributed and some of which are referred to below.

3.1.1 A considerable achievement

The community-wide adoption of the Plan was a vindication of the work involved and high level of community involvement in the project. As such it established a 'roadmap' for future action by the Island community. It is clear that the community invested in the Plan and have gained something from that investment, which is in itself a positive experience, but more importantly provides a means to achieve tangible benefits.

Given the relatively limited study that the consultants initially intended to make and the restricted extent to which they planned to engage with the community, it is remarkable that a process completed within 18 months was capable of generating community agreement over a heritage-related document. 'Heritage' has become potentially controversial in modern Ireland and is often seen as a tool to prevent development. In a more vulnerable Island community context it is perhaps understandable that further impediments to development should be resisted, and so suspicion and hostility towards heritage issues might be anticipated. However, all those involved demonstrated flexibility and worked hard in a very short period of time to appreciate one another's positions. The resulting Plan may differ somewhat from the usual conservation plan template but it does recognise the realities within which caring for heritage on an Island must take place. If heritage is to be a valued asset it is not unreasonable that its care be placed in the context of the human society that will undertake that care. This Plan has attempted to acknowledge that, and this should be recognised.

3.1.2 An impressive document

The Conservation Plan does seek to remain true to the common pattern of such documents, i.e. presenting a general framework, which addresses the overall situation that provides a context for further specific actions (management strategies, option appraisals, development opportunities etc.) It does this while also considering the present human economy and society of the Island, in this way reflecting more of an all-Island plan with an emphasis on sustainability.

The use of an agreed vision, and supporting policies and strategies to deliver this reflects the positioning of the community as of central importance to the Plan. It also demonstrates how the authors attempted to write the plan in response to the considerable inputs from the community. This cannot have been an easy task given how much less of a role the consultants had originally intended the local residents to have, and involved a considerable shift in approach on their part.

The document is brief and simply set out. The supporting reports and additional documents are provided separately. These factors, which influence the physical size, appearance and layout of the document, do help to make the Plan accessible to a wider readership and emphasis on ‘ownership’ by the Island community..

3.1.3 Good quality content

In terms of specific content, certain aspects of the Island’s heritage were particularly well documented, for example the vernacular and built heritage. The availability of additional material and reports, which are held as appendices both on Bere Island and by the Heritage Council does provide scope for more policy development in these areas than may be immediately apparent in the Plan itself.

3.1.4 A powerful tool to secure further funding

The Plan provides a well-founded ‘shopping list’ in attractive format for the pursuit of further funding to realise the necessary work.

The value of such an asset cannot be overstressed for a small community, as in this case. The substantial nature of the Plan, the partner organisations involved and its community-wide adoption give it legitimacy and provides the basis for more detailed action-specific proposals. In the competitive environment that now exists for available funds, the Plan is a powerful tool to establish a strong case for well-justified and considered proposals.

3.1.5 Community-supported forward planning inputs

The Plan represents very substantial and high quality input for state agencies responsible for local administration. It provides the County Council with significant material for forward planning with established community support. It is possibly unique amongst small local communities in presenting such detailed, high quality and fully supported inputs for future planning.

In addition, there is also a clear plan for heritage-related works on the Island for consideration by the County Council’s own Heritage Unit.

3.1.6 Information and awareness raising

The process of developing the Plan proved a useful vehicle for provision of information and raising awareness. This is nicely illustrated by an example of a fear initially expressed on the part of the Islanders that having a Conservation Plan would mean they “won’t be able to build anywhere now”, to which the County Council were able to explain that it is not actually possible to “build anywhere” already - without obtaining permission. As a result it was more widely appreciated that a Conservation Plan would assist both residents and the County Council to deal with development proposals more efficiently and consistently in the future, and from a better-informed position.

There was an increased appreciation within the Island community that increased information and knowledge in relation to the Island itself and its heritage could deliver a range of benefits – better quality development proposals from within the Island, better informed responses to development proposals for the Island, and by default a more authoritative (and potentially more powerful) position from which to engage with state agencies.

Equally the Heritage Council and Cork County Council staff involved in the process gained valuable information in relation to Bere Island and its community, the particular concerns of island residents, and of how the process of conservation planning worked in the context of a small, rural, island.

3.1.7 Enhanced relationships, understanding and credibility

The Heritage Council gained considerable valuable experience in working with local and island communities, and built relationships with the community on Bere. This enhanced the organisation's credibility and gave it a clearer perspective on the reality of working in similar situations. Similarly Cork County Council gained substantial material to inform planning for islands in general and Bere Island in particular, and in this was the opportunity for a greater understanding of the challenges for Island communities. In this case detailed heritage-related information and well-established relationships were generated that provide the basis for successful ongoing partnerships between the Island and both organisations on heritage projects beyond the Plan document itself. The Island community also gained from experience of working with consultants and the two partner agencies, from establishing good relationships with agency staff, and in establishing themselves as a serious partner capable of participating constructively and proactively in a challenging process.

3.2 Weaknesses

The whole-Island nature of the Conservation Plan makes it of limited use to judge it too closely against the norms for more standard site- or complex-specific plans. Instead, it is necessary to consider the Plan in the specific context of Bere Island.

3.2.1 Strategic Plan vs. Action Plan

While the document fits the general profile of a conservation plan it does not convincingly deliver either a strategic plan for the Island or a more specific review of options and development opportunities. As a result it might have been anticipated that implementation of the Plan would be problematic.

As suggested in Section 2.3 the funding available for the development of the Conservation Plan could not realistically have achieved as comprehensive a document, detailing the full extent of the heritage of the site (the entire Island), as would be anticipated in more conventional situations. However, although untried in Ireland on this scale, this is not to say that other situations have not occurred elsewhere where Conservation Plans have been the mechanism by which local communities have gained an understanding of what they had in terms of cultural and natural heritage and used this as a basis for making plans for action based on agreement.

Better recognition should have been given to this limitation before the Plan was developed, and some clearer agreement of the appropriate level at which to focus the Plan to allow for a slightly less in-depth approach should have been reached before the consultants began their work. That not being the case, it is remarkable that the consultants did not seek a clarification of this when they became aware of the broader approach they were required to take (including the Island economy and infrastructure, etc.).

As it is the Plan alternates between its overall Vision and management strategies, with a very limited number of quite specific proposals for action peppered throughout the document. In reality, most of these proposals originated in some form from discussions with the Island community and the consultants may consequently have isolated them as means of securing support for the wider document. However, as is apparent in the discussion in Section 4 below, the consultants appear to have included these proposals with little or no effort to ascertain their genuine potential. In such a situation, where consistent in-depth material could not be delivered or detailed proposals sufficiently well researched, it would have been preferable to restrict the Plan to a strategic document, rather than presenting more prescriptive specific proposals for development opportunities.

3.2.2 Uniqueness of the Plan is not stressed

Given that the concept of a Conservation Plan was comparatively unknown amongst the general public, and was very new to the Bere Island community, it would have been reasonable that the objective(s) be set out clearly at the beginning of the document. While these are nodded at in the Foreword and Executive Summary, they are not explicitly stated until section 3, half way through the document. It would have been quite simple to succinctly explain both what a conventional conservation plan would aim to do, how the challenge of developing a conservation plan for a whole island and within a limited budget makes this more complicated, and most importantly how – as a result – how the objectives of *this* particular conservation plan differ from the usual. This would have put the Conservation Plan properly in context: a well-proven conservation tool, applied in a unique setting where the approach was consciously amended to acknowledge the vital need to incorporate the sustainability of the human community and economy. In this way the clear shift in the nature of the Plan towards more of an ‘all-island’ plan could be explained.

Otherwise it may appear that the Plan merely conceals the inevitable friction between those for whom the viability and success of the human community is most important (and is thereby able to secure the conservation of the Island’s heritage), and those who would prioritise the heritage itself (as is more often the case where a more restricted and perhaps already highly valued heritage site is the focus of such a plan). As indicated in Section 2 above, the Plan is clearly to a large extent the outcome of a need to resolve these two perspectives. Unless the Island community were willing to adopt and implement the Plan, the Plan would be academic and of very limited use. However, the vulnerabilities of Island communities meant that the Plan had to acknowledge and address how the sustainability of the human community is interrelated with the conservation of the Island’s heritage.

The Bere Island Conservation Plan is unique and deserves to be viewed and valued in this context. It is unfortunate that more is not made of the very special nature of the Plan in the document itself.

3.2.3 Weak content material

Retrospectively it would appear that some areas, such as the marine side of the Island’s heritage were inadequately addressed. The point has been made above that this may be partly as a result of a lack of relevant expertise amongst the consultants involved, but also that an in-depth coverage of all aspects of the Island’s heritage was simply an unrealistic goal within the budget and timeframe as set out initially. The greatest disappointment here is that some of this weak material occurs in areas where the heritage may be seen as most unique and potentially therefore, most valuable in all senses. As a result the community does not have the full picture of all the heritage resource present, and subsequently its ability to identify, prioritise, protect and promote these resources is compromised.

3.2.4 Supporting reports and documentation

The Plan itself is a relatively short document, particularly for one addressing such a diverse range of heritage at such a scale. As has been stressed above, the document does not sit firmly within the realm of a strategic plan nor that of an action plan.

The Plan is supported by a number of more detailed studies and reports on different aspects of the Island and its heritage. These are officially Appendices to the Plan. These documents have not been reviewed as part of this evaluation and are held separately as explained previously. However, while these are referred to as detailed studies, policies and management strategies for specific heritage and

development aspects, enquiries suggest that they are not presented in a manner which is easy for the Island community to make further use of.

This illustrates a point which arises throughout this evaluation; in relation to the development of the Plan, the document itself and the requirements for its implementation. There appears to have been a relatively poor understanding by the consultants of the nature of the key client – namely the Island community. They addressed Island concerns in a reactive manner, in response to pressure from the community itself and do not appreciate how they could most successfully assist the community in relation to heritage planning or the challenge it faces in securing support for this and its ultimate delivery.

3.3 Overview

If some within the Island community wanted a fully comprehensive Island development plan it was never going to be possible to achieve this from a conservation plan brief or from this budget, and neither could the consultants deliver a fully comprehensive conservation plan within this financial limit – far less a conservation and development plan. So it is perhaps not surprising that there is some sense of “neither X nor Y” about the Plan. However, what was achieved did represent agreement and an attempt at an integrated approach that incorporated the necessary concerns of the Island community to allow it to give commitment to implementation. In this light, the Plan is highly successful.

As can be seen from the above discussion, a number of the strengths and weaknesses of the Plan appear to reflect opposing views of the same issue, and the trade-offs and final assessments of priorities that applied at the time.

Section 4: Implementation of the Conservation Plan

4.0 Approach to Implementation

When the community of Bere Island adopted the Plan, a number of individuals were chosen at a public meeting to make up a temporary Steering Group to oversee the initial implementation of the Plan. It was generally understood at this point that once the Island Council structure recommended in the Plan was established, the responsibility for implementation would transfer to that body.

The Steering Group, with administrative support from the Bere Island Projects Group, secured funding of €105,000 from the Heritage Council following its adoption for the remaining six months of 2003. On foot of this, the Group essentially took two initial steps towards implementation following discussion at a public meeting on the Island:

- 5 priority areas were agreed for implementation work in year 1 (aquaculture, agriculture, tourism and heritage, environment and the Island Council);
- it was decided to pursue the setting up of the Island Council separately and simultaneously to the other areas of implementation. A Project Co-ordinator was appointed to oversee the implementation of initiatives in aquaculture, agriculture, tourism & heritage and the environment from late 2003 to late 2005, and a further consultant was contracted to advise on the possibilities for developing the proposed Island Council.

At the time of writing, the Steering Group continues to oversee the implementation of the Conservation Plan. No co-ordinator or other staff paid for by Conservation Plan funding are currently working on implementation. Spending decisions and future implementation work will take account of the evaluation presented here.

4.2 Funding

Funding for implementation of the Conservation Plan to date has come largely from the Heritage Council. Applications have been made annually by the Steering Group working with the Bere Island Projects Group and the following grant awards have been made:

Heritage Council funding for Conservation Plan implementation

2003 (June-Dec.)	€10,000
2004	€20,000
2005	€15,000
2006	€15,000
<u>Total</u>	<u>€60,000</u>

Additional funding has been secured for a variety of specific activities from other sources. Comhdhail Oileain na hEireann, West Cork Leader, and the EU Interreg IIIc ISLA Project have supplied funds that have supported the preservation of built heritage (the Old Schoolhouse Project), provided training (in aquaculture, business, and heritage-related skills), and marketing the island tourism product (the West Cork Islands initiative). The total additional funding generated exceeds €200,000. In addition, a number of student and work placements have been sourced which have allowed pieces of implementation work to be completed.

Beyond the Project Co-ordinator's position and a brief 6-week contract related to the waste management initiative in 2003, no new jobs have been generated by the implementation of the Plan as yet. However, implementation work may be effectively safeguarding a number of jobs. For example, the additional number of farmers now receiving REPS payments (some 7-10 individuals), those already involved in aquaculture, fishing, farming etc. whose incomes will be supplemented by participation in the aquaculture initiative once this is operational, the two individuals hired under the rural social scheme to manage the waste recycling service, and those who may benefit from the planned revitalisation of the traditional boat building sector, amongst others.

4.3 Strengths

A number of strengths are apparent in the implementation of the Conservation Plan, including some notable successes and the facilitation of new and complementary initiatives. These are considered in the following paragraphs.

4.3.1 Inclusion in the Local Area Plan

The most immediately identifiable success of the Plan's implementation was its full incorporation into the Local Area Plan of the County Development Plan. This was a key management strategy in the Plan (5.1.2[2]) and effectively gives the policies of the Conservation Plan the strongest possible status available in law. In this sense it is unique in terms of a community deciding its own future. No similar level of community determination of planning policy is seen elsewhere in the County, or possibly in the country. Moreover the County Council has copied these policies for other islands in the County, a fact which demonstrates the substance and value accorded to the Plan.

4.3.2 Agreement on Island Council

A pivotal mechanism for delivering implementation of the Conservation Plan is identified as an Island-wide representative Council. There have been incremental moves towards achieving this; the Bere Island Projects Group has agreed and begun the necessary changes to ensure its representative status and accountability. This was the preferred option chosen by the Island community to achieve the Island Council. Impressively high election turnouts in the past two years would appear to demonstrate widespread support for this (both the concept as contained in the Conservation Plan, and the proposal involving the Bere Island Projects Group). The process of amending the legal details of the limited company is now in hand and this recommendation of the Plan should be achieved within 2007.

4.3.3 Wide range of initiatives underway

It is not the purpose of this Report to list all the implementation work carried out to date (this can be seen in the Review/Progress Reports), but it is important to identify those significant achievements that have been realised. Not all of these are specifically mentioned in the Plan, and a number have taken on independent, autonomous structure, but their beginnings are found in the Conservation Plan. Amongst these are:

- The complete inventory of Island's built heritage
- An aquaculture (co-operative) group & training
- The West Cork Islands tourism marketing network
- The EU Interreg IIIc ISLA Project
- Increased REPS uptake
- Improved recycling services and composting practices

It is important for the profile of the Conservation Plan both on and off the Island that it is seen to be actively implemented and achieving results, and one means of encouraging people to engage is to be active in a range of areas thereby increasing the chance that they will have an interest in one of these.

4.3.4 Enduring evidence of the impact of community initiatives

The persistence of the Conservation Plan and its ongoing implementation is a powerful illustration of what can be achieved on an ongoing basis through community projects. Community involvement is often a burden in small communities and evidence that time and energy invested is worthwhile is an important encouragement to everyone and a strong basis for further work in all areas and likely to generate support for future implementation.

4.3.5 Increased confidence for the Island community

The process of developing the Conservation Plan appears to have given the Island community and its representatives an increased confidence that is often not evident in other similar settings. This is a valuable gain and linked to the positive relationships built up with its partner agencies, and to the professional nature of the Plan that was generated.

4.4 Weaknesses

When faced with the immediate and practical challenge of realising the goals and aspirations of a Plan such as the Conservation Plan, it is easy to see any set back as a criticism of the Plan. In many cases such difficulties might arise irrespective of the presence of the Plan.

4.4.1 Difficulties with initial implementation approach

With the benefit of hindsight it is reasonable to suggest that the initial steps towards implementation (outlined in 4.0 above) did not help achieve the most efficient implementation of the Plan in the subsequent 3 years. Firstly, the Island Council was effectively relegated to simply 'one of the actions to be carried out', instead of being recognised as the vital mechanism to involve all the community in the successful implementation of the Plan (as indicated in the Plan itself). Had the Island Council been prioritised, the strength of that structure and the resources at its disposal, as well as its rationalisation of work, would have made implementation far more straightforward and would have been seen to 'mainstream' the Conservation Plan implementation within Island initiatives.

4.4.2 The Role of the Steering Group

The members of the Steering Group have given their time freely and have maintained a distinct management structure in relation to the Conservation Plan, which until an Island Council is formed remains important to ensure the independence of the Plan and its implementation.

As has been explained the Steering Group is a body of individuals, who have relied on the Bere Island Projects Group for administrative support and assistance. This is quite reasonable given the Projects Group's involvement in the initial proposal for the Conservation Plan, and its continued support for the Plan. However, the blurring of distinctions between the Bere Island Projects Group and the Steering Group has in reality created confusion, most particularly in relation to the role of the Project Co-ordinator appointed in 2003. The realities of working to a temporary, voluntary Steering Group, alongside a separate but established and better resourced Bere Island Projects Group with which inevitably tasks overlap and support is sought, created significant difficulties for working in the most effective way possible.

The quality of the Conservation Plan and its acknowledged value creates a situation where to take the process further and deliver successful implementation a consistently high level of skills, expertise and advice is necessary. This applies to the overall administration and management of implementation as well as individual actions, and may be very difficult to access within the Island population, or to introduce from elsewhere and has a significant cost implication. This represents a very real challenge for the future implementation of the Conservation Plan. Agencies whose collaboration or co-operation is necessary will expect to deal in very sophisticated way with developments and maintaining matching performance for the Island community may be hard when it is trying to work in a much

wider range of areas than the Conservation Plan alone. (This will be true for the Island Council equally as for the Steering Group.)

4.4.3 Flawed development proposals

The Plan itself gives a clear indication of the stronger areas of expertise amongst the consultants, notably where it considers the natural and cultural heritage. Difficulties arise in that much of the content relates to economic activities in a wide range of sectors (farming, aquaculture, fishing, tourism) and community-related matters (including mechanisms of representation) and in these areas the consultants were perhaps less well-equipped to provide guidance. This is problematic particularly when specific recommendations are made in these areas that are then acted upon at implementation stage and discovered to be contradictory or flawed. Two examples are presented below that illustrate such difficulties.

Such dilemmas have arisen in relation to the hugely positive proposal to establish an Island-wide democratically accountable representative structure, but where the Plan also proposes to incorporate immediately a significant role in relation to development proposals on the Island, which would have the effect of strangling such an organisation before it could become successfully established. Moreover, it demonstrates a very poor understanding of the dynamics of a small and relatively isolated island community and the potential for conflict in relation to development proposals in this context. In these circumstances a less detailed and prescriptive proposal in relation to the Island Council's role in relation to planning issues would have been more constructive.

In relation to specific proposals for action, 5.3.2[1] is an example that received considerable investment of work in an attempt to simplify REPS planning for those on the Island and achieve a single all-island REPS Plan thereby securing the extensive farming practices important for maintaining the diversity of habitats and species in return for appropriate available farm supports. After much effort it emerged that such an approach would never have been countenanced within the administration of the REPS programme and that the work would more profitably have been directed at encouraging and supporting individual farmers to participate in REPS. While the Strategy 5.3.2[1] does refer to a REPS-type plan for the Island, the requirement for funding means in reality that the REPS Scheme was the only means by which such a plan could be pursued. The original idea came out of a discussion with a number of Islanders concerning agriculture on the Island and the challenge of dealing with the ownership and use rights of commonage areas in order to have these included in REPS plans and payments (and thus protected through the measures required in the Scheme). It would have been preferable for the strategy to highlight the specific challenge of the commonage areas and the need to address this in implementation and to encourage participation in schemes that support the maintenance of extensive agriculture.

4.4.4 Weak engagement of key agencies

Implementation to date does appear to have been less successful at engaging other potential stakeholder agencies, including those which expressed their support initially, so that the subsequent realisation of funding and co-operation to carry out desired works has been harder to secure. While the Plan is clearly 'owned' by the Island community, the Departments of Defence, and Arts, Sport and Tourism, amongst others, are effectively very remote and not adequately committed to the Plan for it to be as effective as it might be. The County Council, whilst closely involved does not have adequate funds to support implementation, so closer links with other potential sources of funding would be beneficial.

In reality, the key agencies named above are respectively a significant property owners and a promotional agency for a commercial sector. While neither are likely to prove a direct source of revenue, their support for ventures relating to military property and/or tourism ventures are vital. The Conservation Plan would have usefully advised on a communication mechanism through which the Island community could realistically built effective relationships and explore possibilities with these

organisations. Equally, implementation work has not been able to focus adequate attention on this dimension of relationship building and networking (due to lack of time, finance, and overall pressure to deliver in such a wide range of areas chosen for work).

As part of this evaluation, communications were sent to 12 individuals in 10 agencies that had been involved with the Conservation Plan whilst it was developed. Responses were received from only three of these. This illustrates how relationships between the Island community and these agencies in relation to the Conservation Plan have not been successfully maintained, endured changes in personnel, and so forth. For a small community, whose concerns overlap with only a very small area of the responsibilities of such large agencies, it is difficult to ensure that implementation will progress at a rate, which allows communications to maintain these relationships. Investing time in maintaining relationships in the absence of active collaboration can be difficult and is not always successful.

4.5 Overview

Many of the weaknesses highlighted above arose as a direct result of the Conservation Plan itself. Had the authors an understanding of the dynamics of community working, they might have appreciated

- a) the need to build in preliminary mechanisms to achieve the proposed Island Council in order to then effectively and efficiently deliver implementation and management of relevant staff,
- b) the need to encourage flexible approaches to option appraisal and choice of development opportunities rather than setting out too closely defined proposals, again to ensure appropriate and efficient actions are undertaken, and
- c) the need to establish appropriate relationships with key external agencies as a basis for delivering actions in a number of heritage areas.

Given the difficulties implicit in implementation of the Plan as it is written, by a Steering Group with no previous experience in conservation planning, the level of success achieved is significant.

Section 5: The Future

5.0 Future challenges

This section examines the principal opportunities and threats facing the Bere Island Conservation Plan in the future.

5.1 Opportunities

Three main opportunities can be identified for the future of the Conservation Plan.

5.1.1 Leadership

The imminent resolution of the Island Council issue presents a real opportunity for maximising the efficient and appropriate implementation of the Plan. The Bere Island Projects Group will complete the necessary transformations and be able to take over responsibility for the implementation of the Plan.

This will immediately enable efficiencies and greater co-ordination and integration with other Island projects. It should be possible to be more cost and time efficient, to acquire targeted specialist expertise in the relevant areas to progress specific focused projects which the community will have agreed to ahead of time, rather than leaving this to a considerable extent to the appointed individual who then looks (unjustly) as if they are to greater or lesser extent driving the agenda, and removes the ultimate responsibility for overseeing the project from the community or its representatives. Expenditure can be more tightly focused and results driven, and more responsive to time-dependent issues.

The implementation should receive a higher profile once it forms part of the Projects Group's agenda, and ultimately the Island Council will have greater authority in relation to seeking funds, negotiating with external agencies, and so forth. Successful implementation will need a high level of involvement from the community, community-agreed priorities for actions, and an easy and clear way for all to see what is being done on behalf of the community, why and how. As the Conservation Plan seeks to record the Island's heritage, identify that which is most valuable and to promote its successful conservation, if the content of the Plan is to be taken on board and acted upon then the community must be informed of it (and it in turn must inform their actions), and the actions undertaken as part of the Plan or stemming from it must be seen as 'community owned' actions. All of this should be more easily delivered through the Island Council.

This development presents the biggest single opportunity for the implementation of the Conservation Plan. However, it will require the Council to identify the Plan as important and prioritise its implementation, consequently investing time and resources to secure necessary further funding and community agreement for action proposals.

5.1.2 Opportunity for mutual gain

The way in which the Conservation Plan is focused – on the protection of such a diverse range of heritage by a successful and sustainable local community - has the potential to contain 'something for everyone'. Individuals and groups can pursue agreed proposals in areas that interest them whilst protecting the heritage involved. The opportunities that this creates for choice and positive initiatives are considerable and this remains one of the strengths and persistent opportunities for the future of the Conservation Plan.

5.1.3 Momentum of existing initiatives

A number of the existing initiatives, particularly those that have developed into distinct groups such as the Aquaculture Group or the West Cork Islands network will continue to progress their individual

projects. This is likely to assist in maintaining the profile of the Conservation Plan and, where successful, to generate continued support for new implementation projects.

5.2 Threats

Two very common threats face the future implementation of the Conservation Plan. These are a lack of resources and reduced profile.

5.2.1 Inadequate Resources

The single greatest threat facing the Conservation Plan is lack of resources. The Plan has secured generous support from the Heritage Council since its adoption, but it is unlikely that it will be possible to maintain this level of support.

If there are no funds, Bere Island Projects Group (as the Island Council) will have to take on board any costs, and the pursuit of further funds, if the Plan is to continue. Given that the Plan involves such emphasis on heritage, it is possible that the Council will not prioritise it in its work plan. However, the very respected and substantial nature of the Plan itself, would suggest that this is unlikely since it continues to constitute a strong tool for fund raising.

Any long period of absence of funding, and associated lack of apparent progress with implementation and no 'success stories' to communicate both to the Island community and others, the greater the risk that the Plan will lose its relevance and be set aside. This would represent a huge loss of potential for both the Island's heritage and its people.

5.2.2 Low profile

There is a real concern that awareness within the Island community is already low in relation to the Conservation Plan (far lower than when it was adopted), and that there is a very poor realisation of what activities on the Island stem from implementation of the Plan itself. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency – and particularly if there is any delay in the formation of the Island Council – or the community will lose any grasp of its significance. This will pose a problem for the Steering Group and doubly so if there is a lack of funds. However, should the Island Council matter be resolved then the Council could absorb some of the lack of enthusiasm coming from low awareness until it has a chance to demonstrate some of the successes achieved as part of the Plan.

5.3 Overview

It would seem that the implementation of the Conservation Plan is presently at a crucial point. The threats to its future are real and significant. However, the means for its reinvigoration is also within reach. Certainly the potential for the Plan remains very considerable, but it is necessary for a sufficient proportion of the Island population to appreciate that and support it, in order for it to continue and flourish.

Section 6: Conclusions

Bere Island's Conservation Plan represents a unique achievement in the Irish context. It deserves to be recognised as a viable response to finding a realistic, community-based plan for heritage conservation

The community enthusiastically embraced the very challenging work of developing such a Plan in collaboration with the consultants and other partner agencies. One of the agencies involved described the community involvement as the "sine qua non"⁴ of the entire process, and it is universally seen as pivotal to the realisation of public support for the final Plan.

What was realistically achievable within the budget and timeframe for drawing up the Plan was not accurately assessed initially, and this created difficulties in ensuring the most useful eventual form and content for the Plan. Similarly, the necessary and intended extent of participation and influence by the Island community was not recognised by the consultants and there was some associated tension in the relevant relationships at times.

The final Conservation Plan represents an impressive document useful both by the Island community to guide the selection and prioritisation of actions and their implementation, to raise funds and garner other external support. It is also an immense resource for forward planning on the Island for the local authority, and has provided generic information to the benefit of other island communities. Its incorporation into the Local Area Plan for the Bantry Electoral Area is impressive evidence of its perceived value and status. Beyond the Island Council proposal, a more strategic approach that would allow the Island community to explore a range of options and assess the most appropriate at the time would have been preferable. In this way some of the difficulties with ill-advised development opportunities contained in the Plan that are detailed in section 4 above might have been avoided.

Realistically Bere Island has only a small community with a limited capacity to implement its Conservation Plan amongst all the other initiatives on which it is seeking to work. Both the Plan itself and the implementation to date would have benefited from acknowledging this. Better integration of the implementation work and employed staff with other Island organisations, most notably the Bere Island Projects Groups would have been preferable on a practical level, but would have raised questions about the independence of the Plan prior to the achievement of a representative Island Council. The failure to prioritise the Island Council formation and the subsequent delays in achieving this has proved detrimental to the implementation of the Plan. Implementation should ideally have prioritised a speedy resolution to the question of the Island Council, which would have resulted in the rationalisation of structures and greater clarity for staff, improved integration with existing initiatives, and so on. It would also have helped increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation work, perhaps permitting the appointment of specialist staff in specific areas, as and when needed. The demands to engage always on an immediate, professional and often highly specialist manner with external agencies to suit their work plans and schedules creates an additional burden for successful implementation.

The Plan was a very significant challenge for the Island community and one that was successfully met, although not without difficulties. Effective implementation of such a new tool was a very onerous and more challenging task taken on by a group of volunteers. More might have been achieved in implementation had the Steering Group access to more resources of information, advice and support. As it was they took on the implementation of a very diverse and ambitious plan and were operating almost parallel with (although receiving support from) the Bere Island Projects Group. The proposals in the Plan did not recognise or assist in addressing the difficulties that were bound to arise with implementation. This must reflect a lack of awareness or expertise on the part of the consultants in this area. Island communities follow very unique and individual 'rhythms' in relation to when and how progress is pursued in any one area and the Plan should ideally have allowed for this.

⁴ "without which it cannot be" or the key ingredient

Given the hurdles for implementation of such an extensive Plan, an impressive amount of work has been undertaken in a diverse range of areas. The full realisation of results in a number of areas (such as the aquaculture initiative) has yet to be achieved. It would be most unfortunate if this did not happen as a result of lack of funding or continued motivation. For reasons outlined in the previous section, it is hoped that this will not be the case and that implementation will continue and take place in a more effective and efficient manner in future.

Appendix I

Individuals consulted

Mr. David Andrews (member of Conservation Plan Steering Group, also employed on short –term contract in 2003 in relation to waste management initiative)	I
Mr. Barry Hanley, Bere Island (present Chair of Conservation Plan Steering Group)	I
Ms Louise Harrington (Conservation Officer, Heritage Unit, Cork County Council)	I
Ms Clare Heardman (Wildlife Ranger, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government)	Q
Ms Rita Kearney (Project Co-ordinator, Bere Island Conservation Plan, 2003- 2005)	I & W
Ms Beatrice Kelly (Professional Officer – Inland Waterways/Marine, The Heritage Council)	I
Mr. Oilbhear O herlithe (Dept. of Rural, Community & Gaeltacht Affairs)	Q
Mr. Ross Palmer (Senior Planner, Cork County Council)	Q
Mr. Stephen Sage (former Development Officer with Bere Island Projects Group when Conservation Plan idea was first promoted)	W
Mr. Jackie Sullivan (member of initial Steering Group that commissioned consultants M.C. O’Sullivan)	I
Mr. John Walsh (Development Officer, Bere Island Projects Group)	I

I - interview

Q – questionnaire response

W – written submission

Appendix II

BERE ISLAND CONSERVATION PLAN - EVALUATION

Please answer the following questions in as much detail as possible, in order to help us to effectively evaluate the Bere Island Conservation Plan, adding any relevant information not specifically requested as appropriate.

* * * * *

Are you familiar with the Bere Island Conservation Plan that was agreed in 2003?

Please indicate when, and in what way, your Department was asked to be involved in the Conservation Plan.

Please outline your Department's response to the initial approach concerning the Conservation Plan.

Please explain your Department's involvement in the development of the Conservation Plan.

Please indicate if your Department has been kept informed of work on the implementation of the Conservation Plan since its agreement in 2003 and, if so, how this has been done.

Please give details of any involvement your Department has had in the implementation of the Conservation Plan.

continued overleaf.....

Please indicate whether your Department has been involved in work with the Island community since 2003 that is unrelated to the Conservation Plan, and give a brief summary of this work.

Please explain what your Department sees as the advantages and strengths of the Conservation Plan, the way it was developed, and how it has been implemented to date (if any).

Please give details of any shortcomings/ potential weaknesses apparent to your Department in the Conservation Plan itself, the process by which it was developed, or its subsequent implementation.

Please identify any potential your Department sees in the Conservation Plan that may not yet been fully exploited.

Please indicate the level of awareness of the Conservation Plan within your Department, and identify any other personnel that have had an involvement with it.

Please use the space below to make any further observations in relation to the Bere Island Conservation Plan.