

WORLD FAMOUS HERITAGE SITES TO BE PROMOTED UNDER 'ONE BANNER'

Major new heritage network to be established in County Clare

County Clare, IRELAND, 17th May 2007 - Some of the world's most famous heritage sites are set to benefit from the establishment of a comprehensive new Local Community Heritage Network in County Clare.

The new group will link all heritage groups, associations and individuals in the County with the aim of promoting and preserving such established tourist attractions as the Cliffs of Moher, Bunratty Castle, Aillwee Cave, Knappogue Castle and Pol an Ionain - home of world's longest stalactite. A series of public workshops organised by CANTATA, in partnership with the Clare Heritage Office, will result in the establishment of the network later this month.

The establishment of a countywide Heritage Network forms part of the Clare Heritage Plan, 2003-2007. Objectives highlighted for Community Initiatives and Education in the Heritage Plan include the development of local community networks for heritage interest, the identification and promotion of flagship projects and innovative demonstration projects, and the production of heritage resource material for community networks and groups on heritage issues.

"The intention of the Clare Heritage Office is to establish a broad communication network for groups and individuals who relate in any way to natural, built or cultural heritage in the county", stated Tomás Mac Conmara, Acting Heritage Officer, Clare County Council.

Mr. Mac Conmara added that this two-way communication channel would be complemented by a number of other initiatives such as the establishment of an online forum for anyone involved or interested in local heritage to exchange ideas and news.

He continued, "As the Clare Heritage Office prepares to commence the Clare Heritage Plan preparation for 2008 - 2013, it is imperative that such a network is available to ensure that all opinions in the county are accessible and that all relevant groups and individuals have an opportunity to input into the Heritage Plan preparation."

Mr. Paddy Maher, the recently appointed Manager of the new EUR1 million Michael Cusack Visitor Centre in North Clare has described the Network as another positive move toward establishing a collaborative approach to promoting and preserving the County's vast and rich heritage.

"Cooperating in a county-wide arrangement like this enables you to bring together all of the many people who are engaged in various aspects of Clare Heritage. This, in turn, enables you to develop county themes, pool resources, save money and expand your marketing potential", added Mr. Maher.

Meanwhile, CANTATA in partnership with the Clare Heritage Office, will host three workshops at the end of May at which interested individuals and groups will have the opportunity to learn more about the objectives and benefits of the network.

Clare Live the Life is a community initiative of Clare County Council, Shannon Development and local tourism interests, supported by the EU INTERREG Programme CANTATA.

It aims to bring local people and local places together to create an authentic tourism product. The cultural, natural and built heritage are key elements of the tourism product and their protection, enhancement and promotion are fundamental to the local tourism product. Linking heritage interests through the establishment of the network, will contribute to the preservation and promotion of heritage, which in turn strengthens the tourism product.

According to Candace Ingram of CANTATA, "We believe that the cultural, built and natural heritage when developed correctly can help attract visitors, boost local pride and foster economic development in rural areas. An area that develops its potential for cultural heritage tourism creates new opportunities for tourists to gain a better feel for the place, its people, and time. For this reason the Clare Heritage Office in partnership with CANTATA, has organised a series of workshops aimed at building a comprehensive heritage network. Those in attendance will have an opportunity to express their views and take advantage of the expertise that will be present."

The upcoming series of workshops will commence with keynote speaker from Carol Gleeson, Project Manager, Burren ECO Tourism Project in Clare Museum on Monday 28th May from 7.30-9pm. The second event will be held at the Vandeleur Walled Gardens in Kilrush on 29th May from 7.30-9pm when Adam Clare of Vital Spark will address those in attendance.

The final workshop will take place at the East Clare Heritage Centre in Tuamgraney on 30th May from 7.30-9.30pm and will be addressed by Pádraig Cleary of Mayday Consultants.

"Strengthening the obvious links between tourism and heritage can do more for local economies than being promoted separately but this link cannot be created alone. Its success is dependent on co-operation between operators and enthusiasts. It takes teams of players working together", explained Mr. Tomás Mac Conmara.

"Because the workshops are free, demand is certain to be great. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis", he concluded.

If you are interested in attending, or know anyone who should attend, please contact **Patricia Keane at 022-55961 or patricia@exodea-europe.com**.