

Section 2b
VALENTIA ISLAND LOCAL AREA PLAN

1.0 CONTEXT

1.1 Location

Valentia Island (Dairhbre; the island of the oak forest) is located off the western coast of the Iveragh peninsula. It is the largest island off the County Kerry coast and is directly connected to the mainland by a bridge to Portmagee and by ferry to Renard during the summer months. The island is approximately 11 kilometres (6.8 mls) long by almost 3 kilometres (1.9 mls) wide.

1.2 Population

The DED of Valentia covers the towns of Knightstown and Chapeltown and the remainder of the island. The 2006 census showed 713 persons. This figure increased from 690 in 2002. This represented a 3% increase in population. The figure in 2011 was 664, this represented a 6% decrease in population.

1.3 Functions & Facilities

The island contains two main settlements at Knightstown and Chapeltown. These are designated as village/small village settlement nodes in the Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015. The settlements provide a range of services to their rural catchment area. Many of the residential units on the island are holiday homes.

The island has a broad range of facilities most are contained within the boundaries of the two settlements. Due to the seasonal nature of demand for services in the area a number of businesses on the island are closed throughout the winter period.

The Valentia Hospital is a 16 bed hospital which provides long stay and day care.

The Valentia Heritage Centre is located on the island. It tells the story of the geology, human, natural and industrial history of the island, with exhibits on the Cable Station, the Marine (Coastguard) Radio Station and the RNLI lifeboat.

The Skellig Experience tells the story of the Sceilig Mhichil the works and lives of the Skellig monks of the early Christian period, their activities, their endurance and their dedication in gaining a foothold on a tiny, inhospitable, offshore island and creating a community there that survived for some 600 years

The Valentia Observatory is part of Met Éireann service. The observatory was set up in August 1868. Valentia island is, on average, the wettest weather station in Ireland. Planning permission has been obtained for a new air monitoring facility on the island. The Valentia Coast Radio station (Marine Rescue sub centre) is located in Dohila in the north of the island.

An important quarry on the northern part of the island which opened in 1816 still operates today. The famous Valentia Slate has been used in many prominent buildings including the British House of Commons. Adjacent to the slate quarry is the grotto.

Glanleam Gardens is a 40 acre site on an east facing bay on Valentia Island.

It was created in the 19th century by the 19th Knight of Kerry, with plants sent back by plant collectors from all over the world, particularly Australasia. Much of the collection and its descendants survive, spreading and growing to enormous proportions due to the warming influence of the Gulf Stream.

Valentia lighthouse was once a Cromwellian fort, guarding the harbour with a similar fort across the mouth of the harbour on Beginnis Island.

1.4 Infrastructure

There is a waste water treatment plant in Knightstown only. The island is served by public water. While there is ample water for the duration of this Plan, some water management measures may be necessary at times of seasonally peak demand, because of limitations in the sizes of some of the pipes.

1.5 Built Form

The two villages on the island are connected by the R565 which continues onto the Maurice O'Neill Memorial Bridge which links the island to the mainland. The R565 forms the spine of development on the island with the majority of development in close proximity to it. The island consists of dispersed rural dwellings mostly located along the road network.

1.6 Built Heritage

The island has a rich architectural and built heritage. There are a large number of protected structures within the Knightstown boundary. The Cable Station building which is one of over fifty Protected Structures in Knighttown was designed by the renowned 19th century Cork architect Thomas Deane in 1868.

Valentia Island was the eastern terminus of the first commercially viable transatlantic telegraph cable. The first attempt in 1857 to land a cable from Ballycarbery Strand on the mainland just east of Valentia Island ended in disappointment. After subsequent failures of cables landed at Valentia in 1858 and Foilhommerum Bay in 1865, the vast endeavor finally resulted in commercially viable transatlantic telegraph communications from Foilhommerum Bay to Heart's Content, Newfoundland in 1866. Transatlantic telegraph cables operated from Valentia Island for one hundred years, ending with Western Union International terminating its cable operations in 1966.

There are a number of protected structures outside Knightstown boundary

Ref KY-079-082 dwelling house, Knightstown

Ref KY-079-083 Coombe House, Knightstown

Ref KY-079-087 Cromwell Lighthouse

Ref KY-078-001 2 former staff cottages (near Grotto)

Ref 21307904 Glanleam House

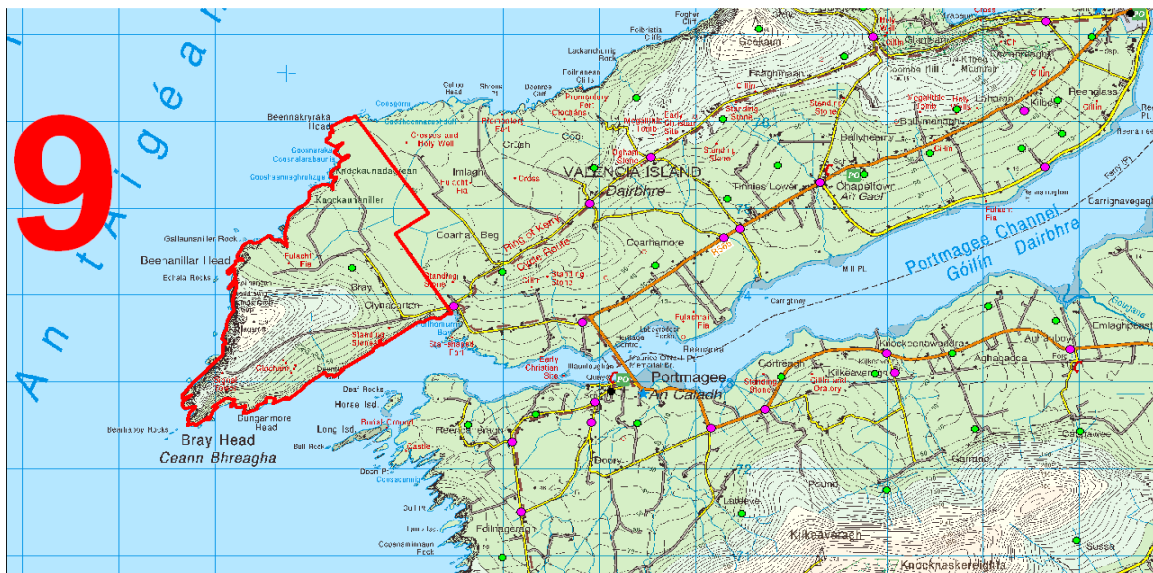
It is not proposed to include any additional structures on the Record of Protected Structures.

1.7 Archaeology

The general archaeology of the Island is dominated by prehistoric sites, early ecclesiastical sites and secular sites of the Early Medieval Period.

Frank Mitchell's study of Valentia Island illustrated the wealth of archaeological evidence buried under and within the peat, while subsequent excavation in the Bray area at the south-western end of the island has shown added many new features to this extensive medieval landscape

An extensive medieval landscape with earlier prehistoric features – houses, enclosures, field walls, pathways, corn drying kilns etc is found in the townland of Bray. These features would be particularly sensitive and provision is made to ensure that these areas are protected in as much as possible, given that they represent two outstanding examples of relict prehistoric and early medieval landscapes. The townland of Bray is the location of an extensive Early Medieval landscape that owes its outstanding preservation to its location in an upland area of marginal lands. Medieval houses with associated out-buildings, enclosures, corn drying kilns, paths and tracks attest to the lifestyle of people on Valentia during the Early Medieval period, while the finding of earlier prehistoric features within and under the peat illustrate the importance of this area from the earliest settlement of the region.



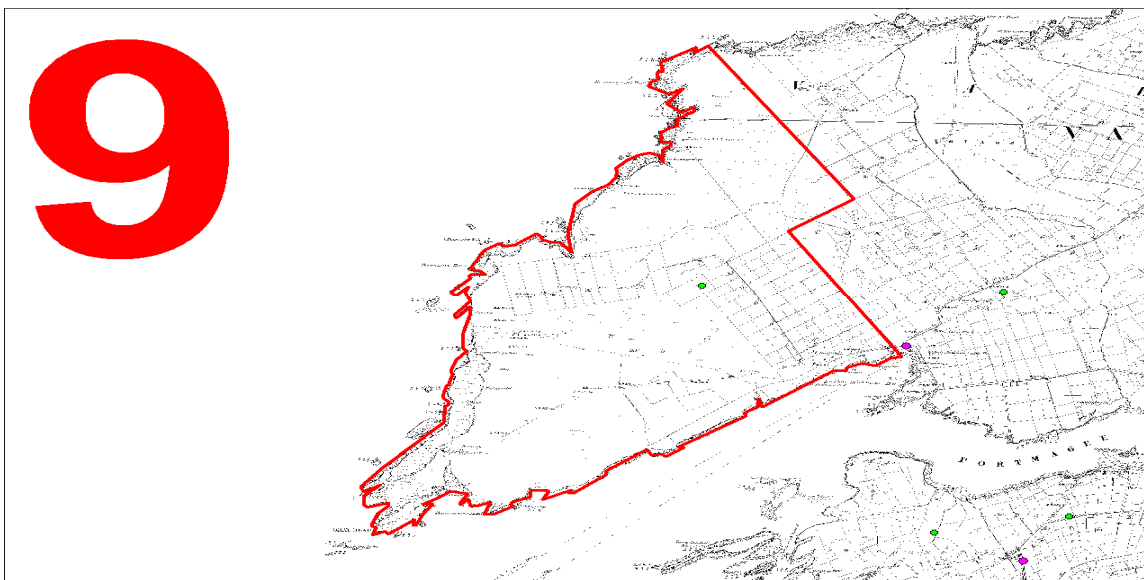


Figure 1; Bray, Valentia Island

1.8 Natural environment and Amenity

Knightstown is located on a flat coastal plain at the north eastern tip of Valentia Island. The village's sheltered harbour area makes it a popular location for water based activities. It is part of the Valentia Harbour/Portmagee Channel candidate Special Area of Conservation. The site contains important examples of reefs, shallow inlets and tidal mudflats. Part of the island is also designated as the Iveragh Peninsula SPA.

Fossilised tetrapod trackways and footprints have been preserved in Devonian rocks on the north coast of the island. These prints date to about 385 million years ago. The Valentia Island trackways are among the oldest signs of vertebrate life on land.

The Island predominantly consists of extensive agriculture/ natural vegetation, moors/heathland, pasture, broad leaf forest, transitional woodland/shrub, natural grasslands and complex cultivation patterns, (Source; Corine 2006 Landuse Database).

Part of the island is also designated as a Special Protected area (the Iveragh Peninsula SPA). This SPA is of special conservation interest for the following species; Chough, Peregrine, Kittiwake, Guillemot and Fulmar. Vegetative cliffs are the predominant habitat in the site and support a good variety of plant species such as Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris subsp. Maritima*), Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium maritimum*) and Rock Sea-spurry (*Spergularia rupicola*). The land adjacent to the cliff edges, areas of sand dunes and some uplands are also included within the SPA. The chough is a medium sized, red legged member of the crow family. It is a specialised feeder on soil invertebrates, although it also takes split grain. Coastal areas of the island are a stronghold for the Chough with feeding and nesting sites available. Particularly high densities of Chough occur at Valentia Island where livestock grazing presents the species with widespread feeding opportunities. The high cliffs of this Natura 2000 site are steeply sloping rather than sheer and are likely to be suitable for breeding Fulmar.

The frequent rock outcrops in the site provide excellent nesting ledges for peregrines, which utilise the coastal fringe, bog and heath habitat in the area for foraging.

1.9 Vehicular and Pedestrian Traffic

The Valentia island ferry operates from March to October. The ferry generates quite an amount of traffic especially during the months of July and August. During the winter season access to the island from the mainland is via the bridge at Portmagee.

1.10 Employment

The 2006 Small Area Population Statistics for the ED in which Valentia is located (Valencia) indicate that the main source of employment for males in the area is the construction industry (20%) followed by manufacturing (10%). These figures are likely to have reduced due to the current economic situation. The majority of employed females are professionals, followed by those working in the service sector (28%). There is no major employment on the island other than Valentia Hospital and the Coast guard radio station. Small and medium sized businesses predominate. Employment opportunities on the island and within the villages are limited and many islanders travel to work on the mainland. In order to encourage indigenous businesses and more employment on the island and in the villages, lands are designated for tourism and small scale commercial/industrial use within the settlement boundaries. It is the policy of the council to promote the sustainable development of specialised niche markets and businesses such as the production and sale of local food, boat building/repairs and appropriate tourism related activities.

1.11 Growth and Residential Development

There has been a considerable amount of development on the island in recent years mainly in the two settlements and one off single dwellings type development. These developments cater predominantly for the holiday home market.

1.12 Amenity

It is proposed to develop green route (s) in a sustainable manner at appropriate locations on the island. Subject Environmental Assessments at project level, such routes could facilitate recreational activities such as walking, cliff/rock climbing, cycling and nature observation. These would provide a valuable amenity resource for the area with some spectacular sea and mountain views and would constitute an additional tourist attraction on the island and in the Cahersiveen area.

In deciding on exact routes Article 6, Habitats Directive Assessments will be required and alternative routes / solutions may need to be considered in order to avoid significant effects on biodiversity. Issues to be considered include the potential for wildlife disturbance (light, noise etc), trampling and erosion of sensitive vegetation / soils and the potential for the introduction / spread of invasive species.

1.13 Tourism

Tourism is an important element of the economy of Valentia Island. The existing tourism product needs to be protected, with greater value being derived from it. In addition, efforts need to be made to lengthen the tourism season.

Tourism needs to focus on the strengths of the area, namely the untouched rural landscape, birdlife, the marine environment, the built heritage and the areas interesting history which includes the Trans Atlantic Cable, the Skellig Experience, the Observatory, and the Slate Quarry etc. The area offers scope for outdoor pursuits such as birdwatching, walking, hill and mountain/rock climbing, astrotourism and marine leisure where compatible with nature conservation designations. The island also has the unique opportunity for astronomic activities due to its dark and unpolluted skies. The potential for eco-tourism in the area is immense, but is not fully developed.

Geo/Ecotourism is a form of tourism which appeals to the ecologically and socially conscious. It focuses on the local environment and culture, typically involving travel to destinations where flora, fauna, geology, high quality environment and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Responsible geo/ecotourism includes programmes that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment, and enhance the local community. An integral part of geo/ecotourism is the promotion and creation of economic opportunities for the local communities. The development of a small geopark at an appropriate location focussing on the tetrapod prints would greatly promote the sustainable development of geotourism on the island.

The landscape, cultural and linguistic heritage and amenities of the area constitute a prime asset on which the tourism industry is based. The size of the settlements and their unique character make them particularly sensitive to development. It is accepted however that expansion of the tourism industry is based on appropriate development. This plan, in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism development outlined by Fáilte Ireland promotes suitable sustainable tourism development. When considering proposals for new tourism development, priority will be given to those that are encouraging longer visitor stays and add to the range of facilities available to people who live in the area all year round.

Recreation and tourism activities can cause increased disturbance to habitats and species that are important for biodiversity. Accordingly, tourism and recreation projects, strategies and activities should ensure that the ecological integrity of the region's natural environment is maintained, particularly with regard to Natura 2000 sites.

In order to boost tourism, the profile of the Island needs to be highlighted with increased and updated tourist signage at strategic points in the functional area and throughout the island. Tourist signage needs to be improved. The Altazamuth Walk is a walk created by the Tidy Towns Committee. It begins at the Altazamuth Stone on Peter Street, Knightstown and is edged by wildlife habitats and gardens, ending on the seafront adjacent the Catholic Church.

It is an objective to promote and facilitate the development of 'green routes', in a throughout the island in sustainable manner. These walkways will promote sustainable ecotourism, geotourism and other niche markets.

The ‘Telegraph field’ at Foilhommerum Bay is located along one of the ‘green routes’. The redevelopment of the original cable station would be an attractive addition to the island and boost tourism.

2.0 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Valentia Island is probably one of the most attractive rural seaside areas in County Kerry with very few if any locations matching its mix of architectural, historical, natural and cultural heritage. The island still retains its innate character and it is essential, that this is retained. The retention of this heritage is critical to its future development as a tourist destination. The Island has a number of innate strengths including an attractive landscape, spectacular sea views, character and charm. It is important that the Island capitalises on its location and its heritage in a sustainable manner. It is considered, that the Island can enhance its development potential as a tourist destination with sustainable heritage and marine/water based activities as its main attractions. It is important that the features which attract tourists to the area are protected, while appropriate opportunities for employment generating tourist development are encouraged.

The development strategy for the Island is:

- That future development should support the existing roles and functions of Knightstown and Chapeltown as rural service centres and small tourist villages and should have regard to the local rural community living in an attractive landscape.
- That all future tourism developments shall be sensitive to the existing character of the island. Facilities and developments which are open on a year round basis should be encouraged in order to counteract peripherality and seasonality.
- To ensure that future residential development on the island should cater for the needs of the local population who wish to live on the Island on a permanent basis.
- Protect the natural environment and the architectural and archaeological heritage of the Island.
- To provide for greater commercial opportunities in a sustainable manner to meet the needs of the local island community and to provide for an expansion in the range and number of commercial services on the island. This in turn will provide local employment and improve the quality of life of the local community.
- To promote the development of sustainable ecotourism, geotourism and other niche markets along with the sustainable extension and diversification of tourist facilities as a possible source of employment.
- Encourage the development of a boat building, storage and repair facility at an appropriate location and in a sustainable manner.
- Promote and facilitate the development of ‘green routes’, in a sustainable manner.

3.0 OVERALL OBJECTIVES

Objective No.	It is an objective of the Council to:
OO-1	Encourage the sustainable development, extension and renewal of all aspects of tourism related activities.
OO-2	Ensure that the high quality natural setting of the island is maintained and protected from inappropriate development.

4.0 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Objective No.	Architectural & Built Heritage It is an objective of the Council to:
AH-1	Preserve the architectural heritage and encourage development to be designed in a manner that is in keeping with the scale and character of the island. New developments should respect local design features.
AH-2	Encourage the appropriate reuse and sensitive restoration of unused/derelict properties on the Island.

	Archaeology Objectives It is an objective of the Council to:
A-1	Secure the inclusion of the structures included the archaeological special protection area into the Record of Protected Structures
A-2	Protect the views and vistas around the monuments, the inter-visibility of the monuments and the integrity of the existing archaeological landscape setting in the prehistoric landscape identified (see Fig 1). Applicants are advised to liaise with the County Archaeologist in advance of any application for development within these sites.

	Amenity & Tourism It is an objective of the Council to
AT-1	Encourage the improvement of sensitively designed tourist information boards and signage at appropriate locations.
AT-2	Protect and encourage the sustainable development of literary, musical, artistic, sporting and other cultural heritage initiatives.
AT-3	Facilitate the development of 'green routes', in a sustainable manner, throughout the island at appropriate locations and subject to Article 6 Appropriate Assessment Screening. These green routes could be used, where appropriate, for recreational activities such as walking, cycling and nature/historical observation.
AT-4	Promote Geo tourism at appropriate locations and other scientific disciplines as form of sustainable development.

Objective No	Natural Environment It is an objective of the Council to:
NE-1	Preserve any existing mature trees where possible and promote additional planting of native trees and shrubs in new developments.

	Piers And Harbours It is an objective of the Council to;
PH-1	Support the sustainable development of the harbour as a potential economic generator for the island

APPENDIX 1

Proposed Protected Buildings

Unique identity number: RPS KY

Address: Reenglass House, Kilinane, Cahersiveen
Farranreagh, Valencia

Description: Two storey over basement structure,

Ordinance Survey Map: 6259D

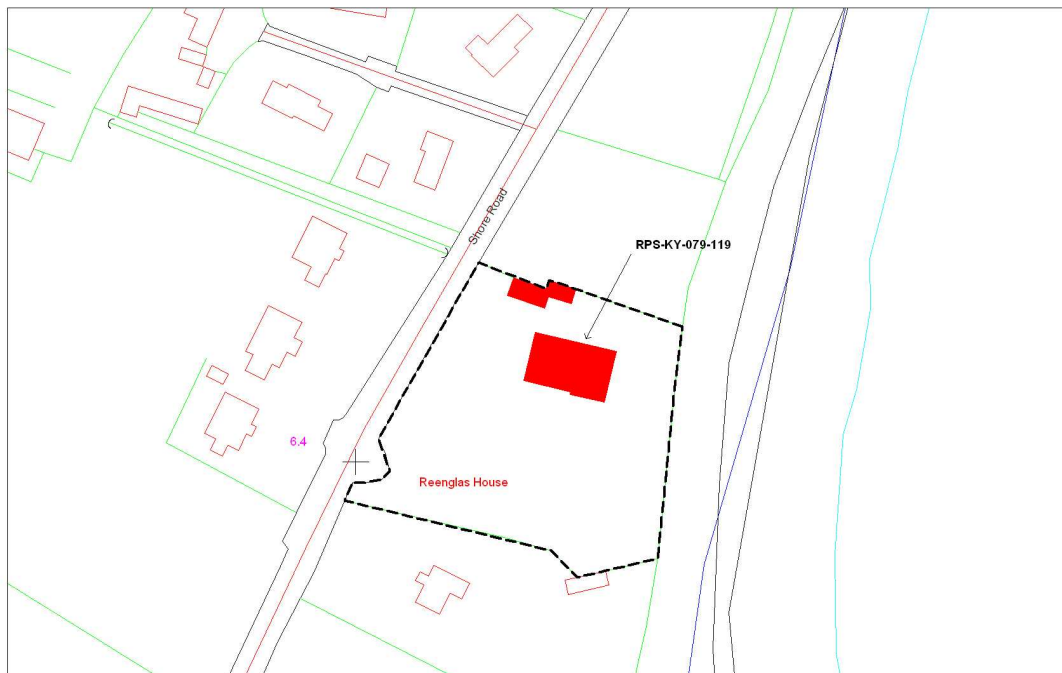
National Grid co-ordinates: 42,511m, 76,348m

Site features: Remains of a number of other structures and farm buildings to rear

Special interest; Architectural, historical, social



Location Map (not to scale)



Appraisal: Associated with the Fitzgerald family (Knight of Kerry) Part of the house once housed a thriving knitting industry

Unique identity number: RPS KY

Address: Ballyhearney House, Ballyhearney, Valentia

Description: **Detached** Two storey three bay structure, Gabled single storey porch to front, with two storey gabled projection to rear.

Ordnance Survey Map: 6306

National Grid co-ordinates: RPS-079-40,355m, 75,549m

Site features: Outhouses to the north of the building.

Special interest; Architectural, historical, social



Location Map (not to scale)

Appraisal: Built in the last decade or the eighteenth century, the large solid wall to window ratio is an indicator of its age. In terms of design this is a unique building. Used as a hospital during the Famine. The building was abandoned for a time and was reroofed by the Knight of Kerry in 1874. A modest scale house of informal design it nonetheless represents an important element of the architectural history of Valentia. This building has architectural historical and social significance and should be included in the RPS.