

CASE STUDY

The Clean Coast Project in Morriscastle Beach, Co. Wexford and Sandycove Beach, Co. Dublin.

ABSTRACT:

This case study focuses on the Clean Coast Project as an example of collaborative beach management between communities and local authorities at two beaches located on Ireland's east coast. Morriscastle beach in County Wexford is a large coastal stretch in a rural setting that faces a number of management issues throughout the peak tourism season during the summer months. Sandycove beach in County Dublin is a smaller beach but experiences constant visitor pressure owing to its more populated location. Both beaches participate in the Ireland-Wales INTERREG funded Clean Coast Project, which consists of two components: 1) the establishment of Coastcare groups and; 2) the Green Coast Award. The Green Coast Award is offered to a beach that has been nominated by its local authority, after fulfilling certain obligations involving bathing water quality, consultation with conservation organisations, development of facilities and signage designed and located to minimise the visual impact on the landscape, and sensitive beach clean activities. The Coastcare groups are established to maintain these criteria to ensure quality beach management and take on a guardianship role for their respective beach. In both Morriscastle and Sandycove the local authorities established a productive relationship with local Coastcare groups that raised awareness and supported management and voluntary beach clean ups. Morriscastle beach has received the Green Coast Award every year since 2001 while Sandycove received the award in 2005 but faced difficulties in maintaining the standards especially for bathing water quality.

LOCATION:

Ireland, Morriscastle Beach, County Wexford and Sandycove Beach, County Dublin

KEYWORDS:

Bathing water quality
Beach litter and cleansing
Beach management in practice
Education and training
Stakeholder and public participation

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1. Introduction:

This case study focuses on the Clean Coast Project using the example of two areas that face similar and contrasting issues concerning beach management in Ireland. Morriscastle beach in County Wexford features excellent fishing waters and comprises a large area of sandy coastline. This beach is situated in a rural setting and attracts large volumes of visitors during the peak summer season. In comparison, the smaller beach of Sandycove in County Dublin is located closer to urban areas and encounters constant visitor pressure throughout the entire year. Resident groups and organisations representing both areas are participating in the Clean Coast Project.

Clean Coast is funded by the EU INTERREG programme and the project aims to promote, protect and acknowledge the environment of rural beaches in Ireland and Wales. The project has two distinct components, the establishment of Coastcare groups and the Green Coast Award. The concept involves a Coastcare group taking on a guardianship role for a beach that has been awarded the Green Coast Award by a local authority.

The application process involves a local authority nominating a beach it feels worthy of the award. This will be followed by the establishment of a Coastcare group to aid in maintaining the quality criteria of the beach as stipulated by the award.



Green Coast Award plaque at Morriscastle beach car park

The Green Coast Award places a strong emphasis on community involvement and is aimed at smaller rural beaches, which do not qualify for the Blue Flag Award.

Beaches, which are eligible for the Green Coast award must:

- Comply with the Guideline Bathing Water Directive
- Be carefully managed in close consultation with conservation organisations
- Ensure that facilities and signs where present are designed and located to minimise the visual impact on the landscape
- Ensure that beach cleaning is carried out sensitively without removing seaweed and natural debris such as driftwood

2. Morriscastle Beach, Co. Wexford and the Clean Coast Project

2.1. General Description, Designations, Ownership and Inventory

Morriscastle beach is located in Co. Wexford on the east coast of Ireland, the beach is situated within Wexford Bay. The main urban centres include the village of Kilmuckridge situated just over 3km from the beach and Wexford Town a further 24km away. The gently sloping beach is accompanied by a sand dune system and the entire area is of substantial environmental interest.



Visitors at Morriscastle Beach, Co. Wexford

A line of sand dunes forms a barrier across the lowland 1km north of Morriscastle beach, creating a wetland at Ballytiege Marsh. The coastal brackish marsh is a proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA)¹ supporting a diverse wetland flora and many birds, especially guillemots and razorbills between July and September. The Kilmuckridge/Tinnaberna Sandhills extend for approximately 4km from the south of Morriscastle to Ballynamona, this area has been designated as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) and is suggested for the inclusion in the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. The site is species rich and supports rare plants such as Night-flowering Catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*) and Moore's Horsetail (*Equisetum x moorei*). Furthermore, Wexford County Council included Morriscastle beach within their beach by-laws that prohibit and/or restrict certain activities such as the use of jet skis, the use of vehicles on the beach or camping in the area. The area is also part of the "An Slí Charman", the Wexford Coastal Path, which was established in 1993, by Wexford County Council. The path extends for 221km, from Kilmichael Point in the northeast corner of Wexford, to Ballyhack in the southwest.

The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources has the ownership of the foreshore while Wexford County Council and various private owners hold the land above medium high water mark (MHWM). The main recreational activities at this beach are walking and bathing. The beach has a beach lifeguard hut and life buoys for water safety. A large caravan park is located next to the beach. At a short distance (~100m) from the beach, parking for approximately 60 cars is provided at a car park that also contains public toilets and litter facilities. An information notice board can be found at the entrance to the beach.

¹ In Ireland, Natural Heritage Areas (NHA's) are the basic designation for wildlife under the Wildlife Amendment Act (2000). Sites are selected by having special scientific significance for one or more species, communities, habitats, landforms or geological features, or for a variety of natural attributes.



Lifeguard hut at Morriscastle beach



Notice board and litter bin at entrance to Morriscastle beach

2.2. Partnership and Issues in the Project

Morriscastle beach is one of a number of locations where the Clean Coast Project has facilitated partnership between Wexford County Council and local organisations in beach management. The council employs the lifeguards and samples the water during the bathing season, maintains the notice boards, and removes the rubbish at the litterbins.

The council also takes responsibility for water quality results and protection of the area as well as putting by laws in place if needed (e.g. by-laws prohibiting certain activities in the beach area). Furthermore, the council is the local authority in the area that would nominate the beaches for the Green Coast Award.

Kilmuckridge Tourism Development Group and St. Joseph National School share the role as Coastcare group in Morriscastle. Both groups participate in beach clean ups. Kilmuckridge Tourism Development Group is

interested in increasing tourism for the area, for St. Joseph's National School the focus is on environmental and coastal education. An Taisce's Clean Coast Project have supported the Kilmuckridge Tourism Development Group through the provision of a grant for tools, safety equipment, meeting room hire, and refreshments.



Access path to Morriscastle beach and information boards on parking and by-laws

Through the Clean Coast Project, An Taisce has also supported St. Joseph's National School in organising two beach activity days, which included beach clean (see photo below), educational talks and fun activities in the area. An Taisce further supported the school with grants towards clean up equipment and prizes for a coastal art competition.



Pupils from St. Joseph's National School participating in the Clean Coast beach activity day.

So far the Green Coast Award has been awarded to Morriscastle beach for every year since 2001. The partnership has benefited beach management in the area and all the requirements for the award are met such as quality of bathing water and the implementation of a beach management plan. However, certain management issues remain to be addressed, in particular litter inputs from the marine environment as well as from visitors, and infrequent collection of rubbish at the car park have been highlighted. Additionally, the lack of wheelchair access from the car park to the beach area has been raised as a key issue.

3. Sandycove, Co. Dublin Clean Coast Project

3.1. General Description, Designations, Ownership and Inventory



Sandycove beach, Co. Dublin

Sandycove beach is located south of Dun Laoghaire in Sandycove Harbour and is

approximately 100m in width. Because of its close proximity to Dublin City the area around Sandycove is heavily populated, which makes this beach location a popular destination all year around. The beach is a traditional bathing area and together with the James Joyce Tower an important tourist attraction. Sandycove Point is zoned in the County Development Plan as an area where no increase in the number of buildings is acceptable to "*protect and/or improve residential amenity*".

The area is owned by Dublin Port and Docks Board, and managed by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. Access to the water is provided via a slipway and pier with steps to the water. A free car park owned by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and parking bays offer limited parking around the beach. An automated toilet facility is provided as well as dog litter awareness signs. Litter bins are available at a number of locations around the beach. The beach has life buoys and a beach lifeguard hut.



Lifeguard Hut at Sandycove beach

3.2. Partnership and Issues in the Project

One of the Clean Coast partners for Sandycove beach is Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, who nominated the area for the Green Coast Award. The council employs a lifeguard and samples the water during the bathing season as well as maintaining the notice boards and dealing with water quality results. Furthermore, the local authority is responsible for rubbish collection and puts by-laws in place if necessary. Harold National School, Sandycove Tidy Towns Association and the Sandycove - Glasthule Residents Association have taken on the role of Coastcare group in Sandycove. An Taisce's Clean Coast Project has supported the Sandycove Tidy Towns with a grant for clean up equipment and for re-painting of shelters.



Pupils and staff from Harold National School at a clean up of Sandycove beach

An Taisce also supported the school with grants for clean up equipment and prizes for a coastal art competition, as well as organising a beach activity day, which included educational activities and a beach clean. The partnership achieved the Green Coast Award for Sandycove in 2005 but the water quality did not reach the necessary standards for the 2006 award.



Volunteers involved in the Sandycove Tidy Towns Clean Up



Parking, litter bins and noticeboards at Sandycove beach

Management issues arising in the area include traffic congestion on the narrow access road and car parking capacity during the summer months. Litter is also a problem, particularly when there is a sharp increase in visitor numbers, as would occur during weekends. The beach area is small and becomes overcrowded during the peak visitor season. A further issue is the lack of public drinking water facilities within the beach area.

It is anticipated that Sandycove will be included in the next Local Coastal Plan to be developed by Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. This plan includes a seafront promenade and cycle pathway from the county boundary at Booterstown to Sandycove. Furthermore, the review of the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown CCDA (Culture, Community Development and Amenities) Business Plan is expected to address beach management issues. The CCDA department is responsible for beaches in the Dun Laoghaire jurisdiction and deals with the drafting and implementation of beach by-laws. One example of a current issue that could be addressed by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is the problem associated with seaweed accumulation at Sandycove beach.

4. Summary

The Green Coast Award has been consistently granted to Morriscastle beach since 2001 showing that this beach is achieving highest bathing water quality and is carefully managed in consultation with conservation organizations and local residents. Facilities and signage are present in the area, which improve the amenity value while impacting minimally on the landscape. Beach cleans carried out in a sensitive manner and educational activities have also enhanced the visitor experience at Morriscastle beach. Management issues such as infrequent rubbish collection remain to be addressed but overall the project partnership has contributed to better maintenance and guardianship of the beach.

The small, picturesque Sandycove beach and harbour act as a safe swimming and beach area. However, this beach is situated in a heavy populated area and many management issues such as litter, parking and congestion of the area have yet to be addressed. The Green Coast Award was awarded to this beach in 2005 where the local authority in partnership with local Coastcare groups managed to achieve the necessary standards. Nevertheless, a number of standards, principally bathing water quality, haven't been met in 2006. The area is rich in heritage, wildlife and close to public transport and combined with the famous James Joyce tower - an attraction to locals and visitors. Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council focuses on management issues through publicity campaigns toward litter and control of dog fouling, continual rubbish collection and seaweed clearance. Building on previous partnerships of the Clean Coast Project there is increasing support, awareness and volunteering by the local community.

Beach management in both areas has benefited from the Clean Coast Project and issues common to both sites, such as litter, have been addressed through the partnership of the local authority with local Coastcare groups established during the project. The support of the local community in management programmes is vital for the continued success of such initiatives and their contribution to improved management of beach environments. In both cases this has been achieved through raising awareness, interactive and educational beach activities and beach clean ups. Although, Sandycove has not accomplished the Green Coast Award

for 2006 the local authority has the support of the local community, which has been built up during the project.



Sandycove Green Coast Award 2005

5. References:

Cummins V., Ballinger R., O'Mahony C., Dodds W. and Smith H. 2004. Coastal Communities Network - CoCoNet. INTERREG IIIA Ireland/Wales Secretariat. 51 pages.

6. Acknowledgments:

Images and information contained within this case study were kindly supplied by Aidan Gray - Clean Coast Project Officer, An Taisce. For further information on the Clean Coast Project please visit <http://cleancoastireland.org> or contact Aidan Gray at:

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