

SONAIRTE REDEVELOPMENT STUDY



MEATH ENERGY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

AIEA PROJECT SUMMARY 4

Summary

Sonairte was founded in 1988 as a National Ecology Centre based within an 18th century farm steading. The Centre was supported over a 10-year period, mostly through the Irish FAS Employment scheme, Training Authority grants, European Union grants and donations. Today the Centre's facilities have fallen into partial disrepair and the Centre lacks a full-time dedicated management staff. Nevertheless regular visits by school parties continue and gain considerable benefit from the facilities in the energy garden, the nature trail and the thriving Organic Garden which continues to produce vegetables, fruit, flowers and plants for sale. This is as a result of the dedication and goodwill of the volunteers. Meath County Council through the interest and baseline investigation conducted by Meath Energy Management Agency (subset of Council Environment Department) decided to pursue and part fund an economic viability study to assess the potential redevelopment of the Sonairte site as a Sustainable Energy Living Centre - a demonstration project for the Community of County Meath and ultimately a showcase example of sustainable living and learning for Ireland.

Objectives & Scope of the Feasibility Study

A Feasibility Study was required to develop the initial concepts, test the market, establish ownership between various partners, confirm the required hard and soft infrastructure, identify costs and funding sources and a series of clear next steps to progress the proposals.

The key focus areas are:

- ✍ Natural Environment and Heritage Visitors Information Centre
- ✍ Outdoor Interactive Renewable Energy Demonstration Park
- ✍ Indoor Interactive Renewable Energy demonstration Centre
- ✍ Hiking Trail
- ✍ Nature Walk
- ✍ Workshop/Lecture rooms
- ✍ Organic gardens
- ✍ Outdoor playground
- ✍ Organic Café/Tearoom

Project Classification

END-USER AREA	TARGET AUDIENCE	TECHNICAL
<input type="checkbox"/> NEW BUILDINGS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CITIZENS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENERGY EFFICIENCY
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REFURBISHMENT OF BUILDINGS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HOUSEHOLDS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HEATING
<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY	<input type="checkbox"/> PROPERTY OWNERS	<input type="checkbox"/> COOLING
<input type="checkbox"/> FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APPLIANCES
<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DECISION MAKERS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LIGHTING
<input type="checkbox"/> LEGAL INITIATIVES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES	<input type="checkbox"/> CHP
<input type="checkbox"/> PLANNING ISSUES	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORT COMPANIES	<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT HEATING
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UTILITIES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOLAR ENERGY
<input type="checkbox"/> USER BEHAVIOUR	<input type="checkbox"/> ESCOS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BIOMASS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WIND
<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER	<input type="checkbox"/> FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GEOTHERMAL
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER	<input type="checkbox"/> HYDRO POWER
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER

CONTACT DETAILS



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Duration

Feasibility study process began in February 2005 and will be completed in June 2006.

Process

Environmental Engineering Consultants (Faber Maunsell) were commissioned to lead a stakeholder group in workshop discussions and community participation for a 're-vision' of the Sonairte centre. The Group included representatives from MCC/MEMA, Sonairte Steering Committee, and Meath LEADER. The project presented a real opportunity to build on what was a nationally recognised centre for ecology and sustainable living and still has the potential to be a thriving centre for the future. The Feasibility Study needs to lay the foundations for a centre of excellence that could result in significant educational, tourist and economic development resource in the north east of Ireland.

Three principles have been central to the approach namely:

- ✍ Establishing a **sound financial base** without losing sight of the centre's prime role as an educational resource for ecology and sustainable living
- ✍ Establishing **robust business management practices** for the centre
- ✍ Maximising the **involvement of the voluntary/community** sector

The Feasibility Study has 12 Tasks outlined below:

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| ✍ Task 1 | Commissioning Meeting | ✍ Task 7 | Outline Feasibility Study |
| ✍ Task1a | Site Plan & Topographical Survey | ✍ Task 8 | Partners & Community: Delivery Workshop |
| ✍ Task 2 | Partner Consultations | ✍ Task9 | Action Plan |
| ✍ Task 3 | Best Practice Review | ✍ Task 10 | Draft Final Feasibility Study |
| ✍ Task 4 | Stakeholder Group Workshop | ✍ Task 11 | Stakeholder Group Review |
| ✍ Task 5 | Confirming Key Elements | ✍ Task 12 | Final Report |
| ✍ Task 6 | Partners & Community: Development Workshop | | |

A table of target KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) was suggested as a basis for the project. It is considered that these objectives could be achieved without the expenditure going in excess of 10% over normal construction costs and, in the hands of an appropriately experienced design team, could be achieved without cost penalty. Included in those objectives were: Future-proofing building fit for future needs, Healthy Indoor Environment, Insulation, Airtightness, Energy Conservation, CO2 minimisation, Internal comfort, External comfort, Ventilation, Lighting and daylighting, Materials choice, Water conservation and Management, Waste minimization, Fuel source, Promoting Biodiversity

Financial resources and partners

Organisation		Country
Meath Energy Management Agency (MEMA)	MEMA	Ireland
Meath County Council (MCC)	MCC	Ireland
Meath LEADER		Ireland
Sonairte		Ireland
Faber Maunsell		Scotland

Impact

This Redevelopment Study has demonstrated that the time is right for significant investment in Sonairte to **secure the future of the centre as a beacon of sustainable living** recognised nationally in Ireland and as a model for Europe. The study has identified a redevelopment proposal for the next 5 years.

The proposals and financial model are designed to build upon what has already been achieved at Sonairte rather than move into other unknown areas with the associated risk. The development proposal is based on the existing facilities at Sonairte with major refurbishment and some limited new building where necessary. This approach allows for a much stronger presence behind the Sonairte brand whilst controlling the management and financial risks.

The Stakeholder Group now needs to formally assess the recommendations of the Redevelopment Study to be able to commit to implementing a preferred development of Sonairte. The vision for Sonairte is as an all learning centre for everyone that will:

'Integrate all aspects of responsible stewardship for the environment, demonstrate sustainable living through choosing sustainable energy options in a very practical, interesting and informed way, and will improve the quality of life for citizens and help shape future development in the region'