



**OPW** Oifig na  
nOibreacha Poiblí  
Office of Public Works

# **Sceilg Mhichíl World Heritage Property**

OPW Works Season 2024 UNESCO Report

Final Issue 11.12.2024



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# 1. Introduction

This report aims to outline the repair works completed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sceilg Mhichíl in the 2024 season. The works were overseen by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The report will outline the extent of the repair works carried out in 2024 and will also briefly summarise works to be undertaken in 2025. The report will also list potential threats to the site and how these threats are being managed by the OPW.

Sceilg Mhichíl opened for tourists on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2024. The OPW work crew carried out a safety sweep and necessary maintenance works to the monastic settlement and steps in advance of the 2024 tourist season. Sceilg Mhichíl officially closed on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2024 due to deteriorating weather conditions.

A rock fall occurred on the lower lighthouse road at Cross Cove during the 2024 season and resulted in damage to the timber boarding to the existing crash deck. The OPW replaced the damaged timber boarding at Cross Cove following a site inspection and issue of a timber condition report by Gordon Knaggs timber specialist.

The OPW organised an experts workshop on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023 in Dublin Castle. The experts workshop was part of the proposed Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) to be carried out at Sceilg Mhichíl. The CVA is part of a wider *Preserving Legacies* project. The aim of the experts site visit was to discuss and highlight the effects of climate change on the island's cultural and natural heritage. The experts workshop was followed by a community workshop organised by DHLGH on 8<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2024 in Portmagee.

The OPW co-ordinated with the National Monuments Service (NMS) and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) to ensure the protection of the island's archaeology and wildlife. All works were carried out under Ministerial Consent issued by the Minister for DHLGH. All future works at the twin lighthouses will be carried out within the context of an agreed Conservation Management Plan for the sites and in accordance with Objectives of the Sceilg Mhichíl Management Plan 2020-30.

Other tasks and works undertaken in 2024 include the following:

- OPW carried out a safety sweep before opening the site to visitors, following receipt of DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- NPWS carried out surveys on bird species populations and nesting locations.
- NPWS carried out a biosecurity audit on Sceilg Mhichíl.
- OPW Killarney Districts National Monuments Architects carried out 6 no. site visits to assess and monitor ongoing works on site.
- The stainless steel stays of the permanent Crash Decks on the Lower and Upper Lighthouse Roads were removed during the summer season. The stays were coiled up and secured in place on the bedrock below the existing retaining wall. The stainless steel stays were later installed in September 2024 before the season ended.



- OPW re-instated the historic drains under Crash Decks 1, 2 & 3 under archaeological monitoring.
- OPW replaced the timber boarding to a section of the existing Crash Deck at Cross Cove following damage by a rock fall.
- OPW continued with the maintenance works to the Upper Lighthouse Road.
- OPW replaced the damaged plywood protection to the floors at the Upper Lighthouse.
- OPW installed new solar panels on the existing guides huts.
- A community workshop was carried out by DHLGH on 8<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2024 in Portmagee as part of the Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) and the *Preserving Legacies* project.
- The Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) carried out painting works to the lower lighthouse tower.
- Crossing the Line productions continued with their ongoing filming of repair and survey works as a visual record of the works on site for OPW archives.
- The Discovery Programme carried out their survey and monitoring works in June 2024 and issued the final report to the OPW.

## 2. General Description

The island of Sceilg Mhichíl lies 11.6 km off the most westerly point of the Iveragh Peninsula, Co. Kerry (SMR: KE 104A-001; National Grid Reference 024812 060654). The island is approximately 21.6 ha in area. The World Heritage Property is owned by the Minister for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on behalf of the Irish State. The Lower Lighthouse. Lighthouse tower and helipad are owned by the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL).

The island's geological composition consists of Devonian Red Sandstone, formed in the Devonian Age approximately 400 million years ago. The topography that we see today is the result of rock formations that occurred circa 100 million years ago. Sceilg Mhichíl was also cut off from the mainland during the sea level rises resulting from the end of the last ice age approximately 10,000 years ago.

There are two main components of the WHS on the island. One is on the North Peak, the monastery enclosure located on the eastern side of the island that comprises a series of terraces, dry stone enclosing walls, three cisterns, seven corbelled cells (six intact) and two oratories. There are also the remains of St Michael's Church. This part of the monastic settlement was accessed via a series of three stairways, only one of which is accessible today.

The second part of the World Heritage site is located on the South Peak with the remains of a hermitage, constructed ledges and altar remains. The post-medieval industrial heritage of the island are the twin lighthouses and lighthouse road, built in the 1820s, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century pier, and the Commissioners of Irish Light's helipad.

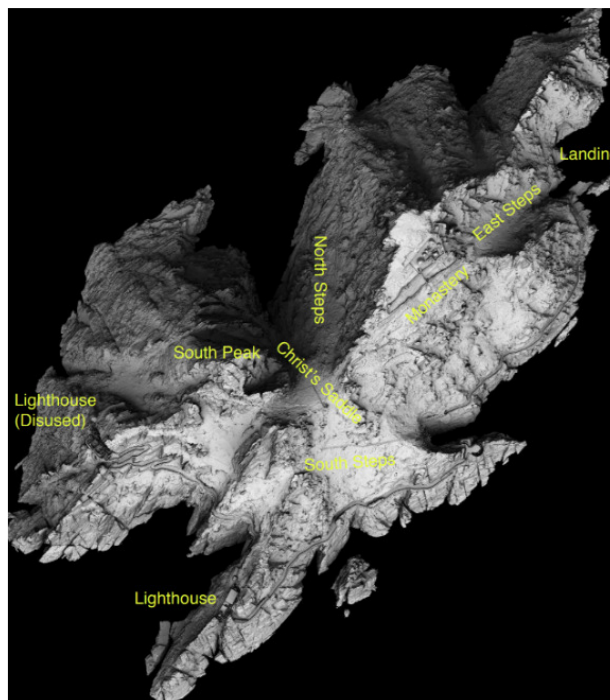


Figure 1 - LIDAR View of Sceilg Mhichíl (Bourke, Hayden, & Lynch, 2011)

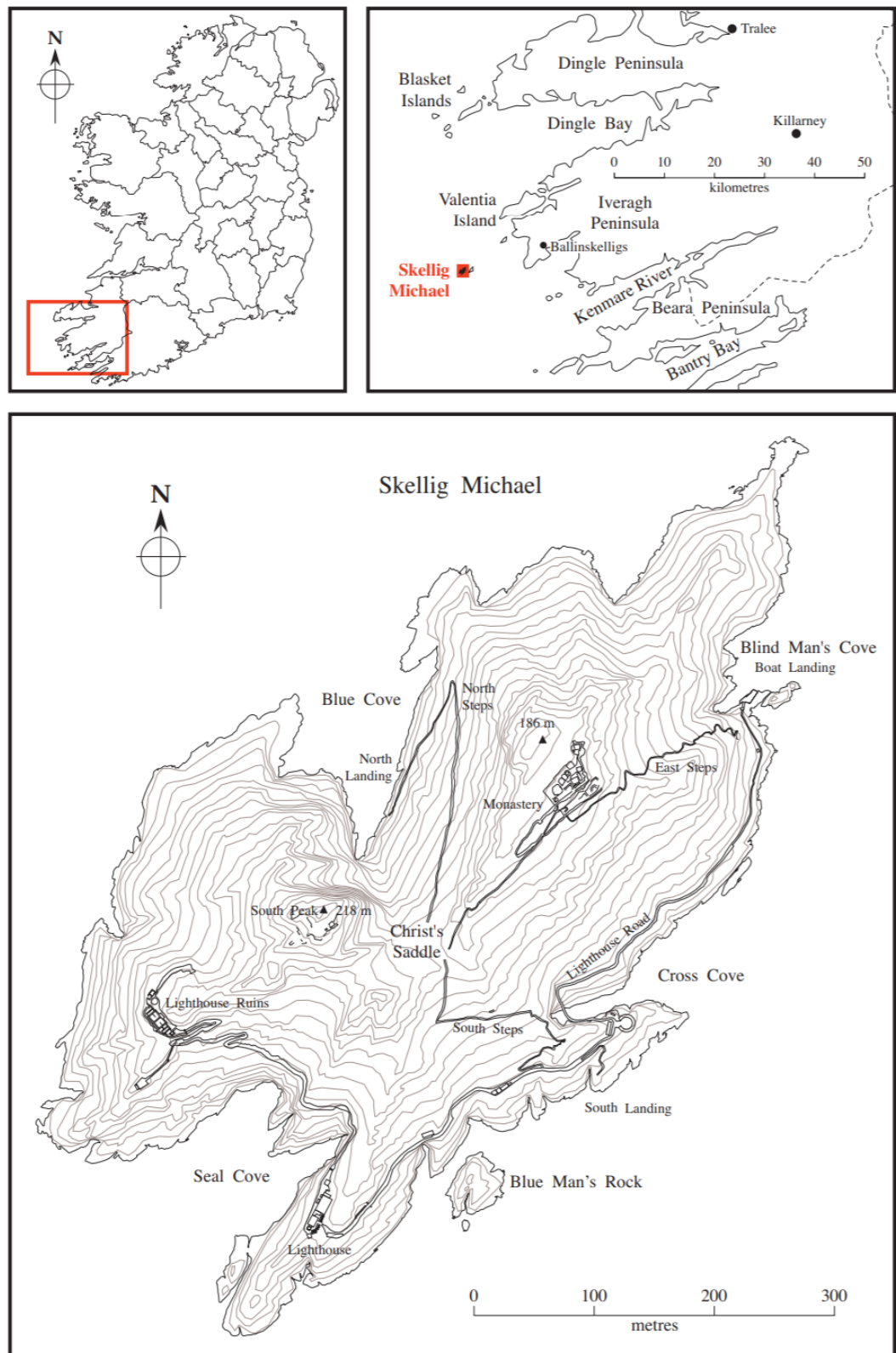


Figure 2 - Location Map of Sceilig Mhichil (Bourke, Hayden, & Lynch, 2011)

### 3. Brief site History

The following description can be found in *Skellig Michael World Heritage Site Management Plan 2008 -2018* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Office of Public Works, 2008, pp. 11-13):

The word *Sceillic* means a rock, particularly a steep rock. The first reference to Sceilig occurs in legend, where it is given as the burial place of Ir, son of Milesius, who was drowned during the landing of the Milesians. Françoise Henry, a noted academic, mentions a text from the eighth or ninth century in which reference is made to an episode of strife between the Kings of West Munster and the Kings of Cashel. Duagh, King of West Munster, is said to have ‘fled to Scellecc’. This event is attributed to the fifth century, but we have no means of knowing if a monastic settlement already existed on the island at this time. Charles Smith, writing in 1756, refers to the monastery being founded by St Fionan, who lived in the sixth century.

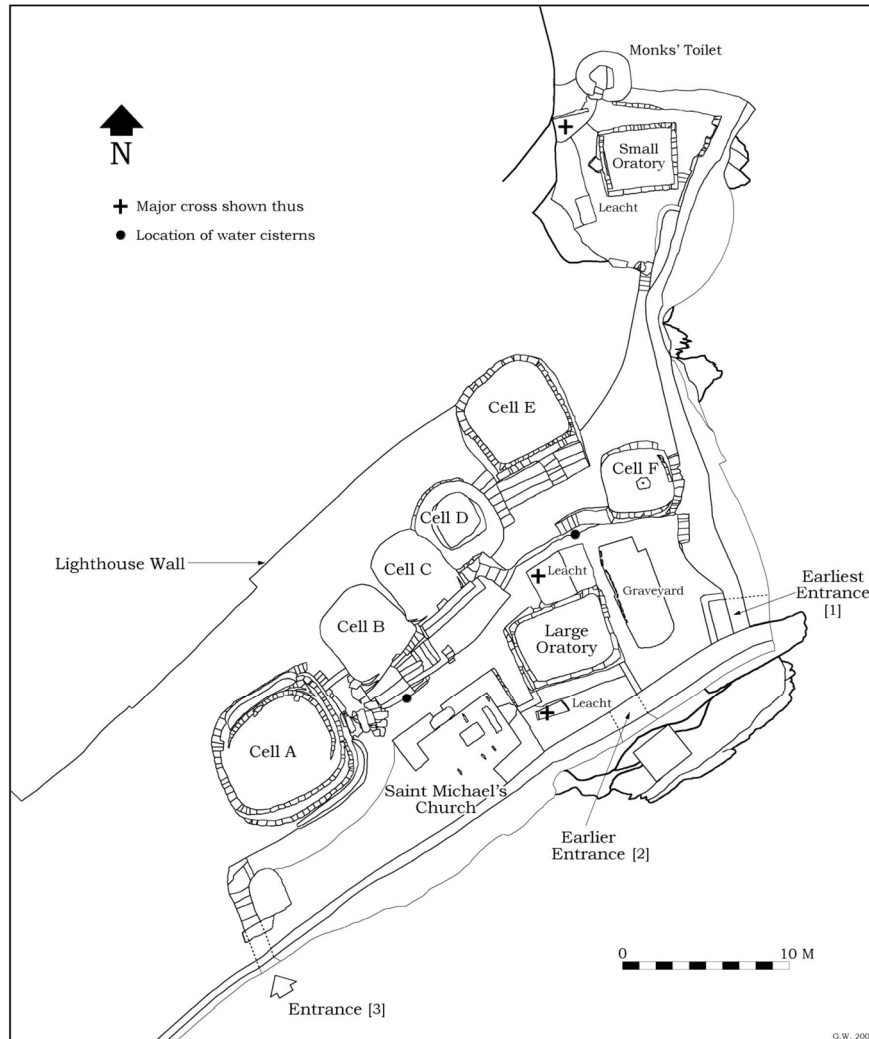


Figure 3 - Plan of the Monastic Settlement

The earliest documentary evidence is *The Martyrology of Tallaght*, written near the end of the eighth century by Mealruain. It commemorates the death of a monk from Sceilg called Suibhni ('Suibhni of Scelig'). This reference to Sceilg in the festology of one of the most celebrated monasteries of Ireland suggests that Sceilg was already well established at this time. A monastery may, perhaps, have been founded here as early as the sixth century, but in the absence of evidence, precise dating is impossible

Sceilg is referred to in the *Annals of Inisfallen* under the year 824 and also in the *Annals of Ulster*, which give an account of the plunder of the Monastery by the Vikings. In 882 the *Annals of Inisfallen* refer to the death of 'Flann, son of Cellach, abbot of Scelec'. The Monastery was dedicated to St Michael at some time in the tenth century. This is suggested by two references to the Monastery in the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* by the Four Masters. The first reads, 'Age of Christ, 950, Blathmhac of Sgeillic died'; the second reads, 'Age of Christ, 1044, Aedh of Scelic-Mhichil died'. Thus, one can assume that the dedication to St Michael occurred between the years 950 AD and 1044 AD. In monasteries, it was customary to build a new church to celebrate a dedication, and the oldest part of the church, known as St Michael's Church, fits architecturally into this period.

The church of St Michael was mentioned in *The History and Topography of Ireland* by Giraldus Cambrensis, who was in Ireland in the late twelfth century. His account of the miraculous supply of communal wine for daily Mass in St Michael's Church implies the constant occupancy of the Monastery at the time.

In the early thirteenth century, a general climatic deterioration resulted in colder weather and increased storms on the seas around Sceilg. This, along with a shift in the Irish Church from a monastic to a diocesan structure, signalled the end of Irish eremitic island colonies, with the result that the community of Sceilg Mhichil eventually moved to the mainland at Ballinskelligs. This was probably not a single event, but is likely to have happened over a period of time. The island probably continued to be used as a dependency of the Augustinian Abbey at Ballinskelligs, the island Monastery being occupied by some monks during the summer months. The prior of Ballinskelligs was still addressed in papal letters as 'Augustinian prior of St Michael's, Roche (de Rupe)'. The Augustinians must also have been actively involved in promoting and managing pilgrimages to the island and in maintaining the structures there.

Sceilg Mhichil remained in the hands of the Augustinian monks until 1578 when, as a result of the Desmond rebellions, Queen Elizabeth I dissolved certain monasteries that were under the protection of the Earl of Desmond. The Sceilg Islands thus passed into secular hands, to the Butler family.

Although the monastery ceased to exist, the island continued to be used as a place of pilgrimage. In 1756, Charles Smith gives his first recorded description of the rock. He refers to the difficult and dangerous pilgrimages and says that 'many persons, about twenty years ago, came from the remotest parts of Ireland to perform these penances, but the zeal of such adventurous devotees has very much cooled of late'.



In the early 1820s, the Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port of Dublin (the predecessor of the Commissioners of Irish Lights) purchased the island from John Butler of Waterville under a compulsory purchase order for the purpose of erecting two lighthouses on the Atlantic side. These were made accessible by an improved landing on the east side and a road that was blasted out on the precipitous southern and western sides of the island.



*Figure 4 - Painting of Sceilg Mhichíl by Admiral R. B. Beechey, R.H.A., mid 1800s (CIL)*

In 1880, the OPW took the monastic remains into guardianship and commenced a project for the repair of collapsed structures. Since that time, the OPW has continued in its efforts to maintain and preserve the monastic remains. The State purchased the island in 1989 from the Commissioners of Irish Lights, with the exception of the lower (working) lighthouse and its curtilage and the helipad area with its adjacent store. The Commissioners also retained a right-of-way over the road.

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## 4. Site Access

The site is accessed by boats departing from Portmagee or Knight’s Town on Valentia Island. The Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) conduct intermittent maintenance works on the light at the Lower Lighthouse and access the island through the use of helicopter, landing on the helipad. The OPW currently issues 15 boat licenses annually to private operators, subject to review. The number of daily visitors is capped at 180 visitors per day. Boats land at the pier and passengers disembark by climbing the steps. Visitors then ascend the Lower Lighthouse Road. A section of this route passes under a crash deck. The visitors reach the base of the eastern steps where an OPW guide gives an induction before directing them to the monastery steps. Additional guides are located at the monastery complex, completing the tour. On average, visitors currently spend three hours on the island. Toilet facilities for visitors are located near the existing helipad.



*Figure 5 - Tourists arriving at the landing pier*

## 5. Works Descriptions 2024

### 5.1. Upper Lighthouse Road Repairs

Repair works to the Lighthouse Road commenced in the 2017 season and continued through the 2021 season. The repair works to the Lighthouse Road are nearing completion. Maintenance works to the Lighthouse Road were carried out in the 2024 season by placing sandbags in certain locations to redirect rainwater runoff and by compacting any loose stones. The main purpose of the repair and maintenance works to the Upper Lighthouse road is to provide safe access for workers and future visitors to the fog signaling platform and Upper Lighthouse complex.

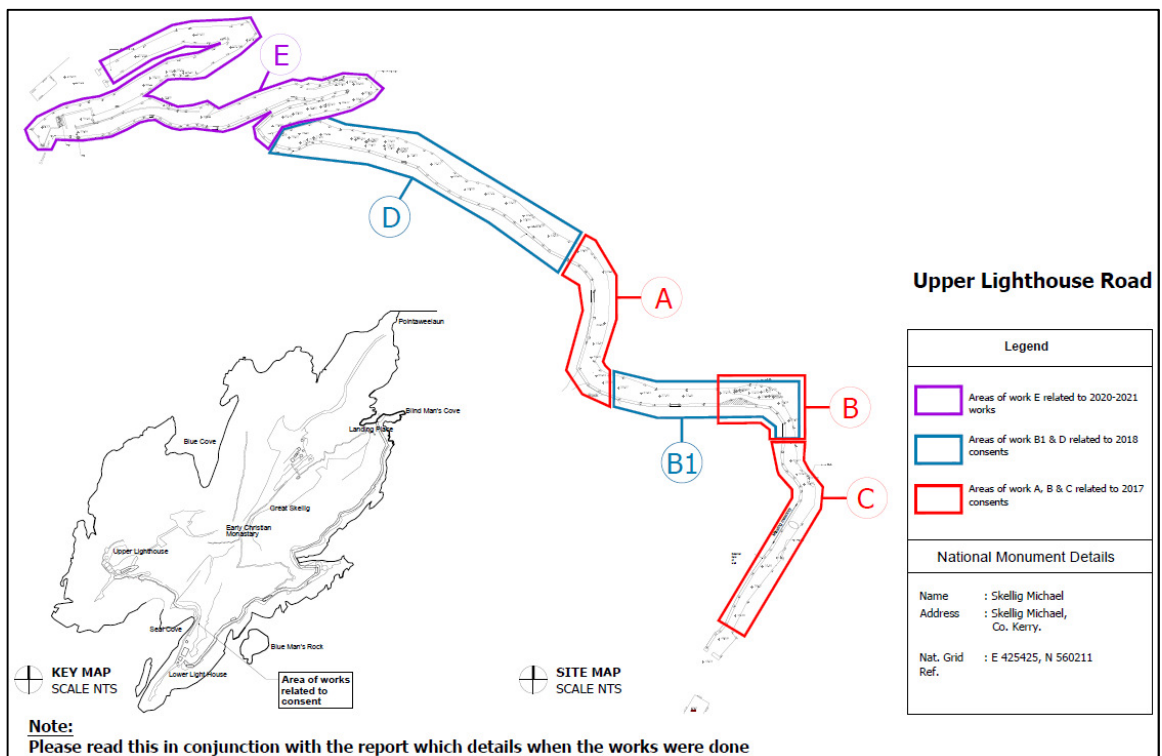


Figure 6 - Works to Upper Lighthouse Road 2017 - 2021





*Figure 7 - View of the Upper Lighthouse Road View of the Upper Lighthouse Road  
© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland*



*Figure 8 - View of the Upper Lighthouse Road from the Upper Lighthouse gate  
© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland*



The OPW re-instated the historic drains in the locations of Crash Decks 1, 2 and 3 located on the Lower and Upper lighthouse roads in the 2024 season. The historic drains were removed in 2022 to facilitate the construction of the crash decks. The works were undertaken following the completion of the works to the 3 no. crash decks in the 2023 season. The OPW appointed Alan Hayden consultant archaeologist to carry out archaeological monitoring of the works. Alan Hayden issued an archaeological monitoring report to OPW in September 2024 following the completion of the works (see appendix D).



*Figure 9 - View of the re-instated historic drains in the location of Crash Deck no .3*



*Figure 10 - View of the re-instated historic drains in the location of Crash Deck no .3*



## 5.2. Monastery

### 5.2.1. DISCOVERY PROGRAMME SURVEY

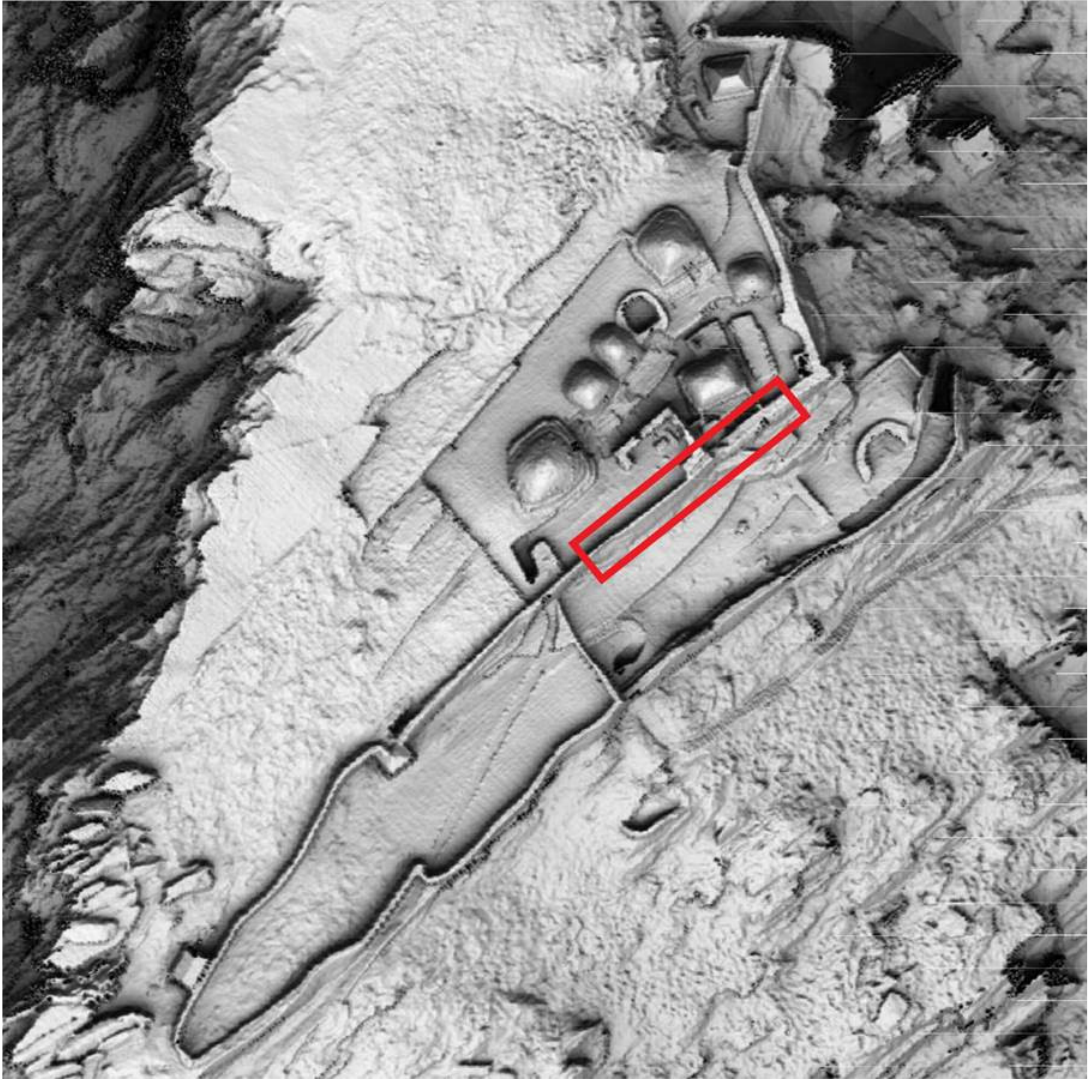
Since 2015, the Discovery Programme have been monitoring the movement of the main retaining wall of the monastic settlement. The Discovery Programme issue an annual report to the OPW with their findings and recommendations.

The Discovery Programme carried out their site visit and surveyed the monastic settlement during the 2024 season. The Discovery Programme issued their final report to OPW in June 2024. The largest movements in the retaining wall are occurring in lines A, B and C over the nine-year monitoring period. Lines E, F and G are generally stable within the tolerance of the survey instrument and methodology (see appendix H).

Due to increased rainfall and pressure from runoff rainwater, the OPW will be undertaking repairs to this section of the retaining wall over the coming years. The OPW commissioned a digital survey of the Monastery in 2021 to facilitate the future repair works. All works will be subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent and best conservation practices will be implemented. All proposed repair works will be subject to an agreed archaeological mitigation strategy with DHLGH.



Figure 11 - Discovery Programme marker point locations at monastery retaining wall



*Figure 12 - Location of movement to retaining wall below St. Michael's Chapel*

## 5.3. Works to the Lower Lighthouse

### 5.3.1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Lower Lighthouse complex was completed by CIL in 1826 but has seen significant alterations in the intervening years. The Keepers' Houses originally had a pitched roof but this was removed in 1910 and a reinforced concrete flat roof was added. In 1968, the original lighthouse tower was demolished and a new tower constructed. The Keepers' Houses were inhabited until 1987 up until the lighthouse became fully automated.

The OPW signed a lease with the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) for the lower lighthouse building in 2024. CIL will retain full ownership and control of the lighthouse tower which will be inaccessible to building users.

In 2019, with the permission of CIL and approved Ministerial Consent, the OPW commenced internal stripping out works including the removal of the existing dry lining to expose the original building fabric beneath.

The Lower Lighthouse will be refurbished to accommodate OPW staff, as well as NMS, NPWS and external consultants that visit the island. The aim of these works is to provide safe accommodation with sleeping, washing, cooking, administrative and communication facilities for OPW site operatives, consultants and visiting academics. The OPW are currently working on the preliminary design for the proposed Lower Lighthouse refurbishment. The OPW will be appointing a full Design Team for the project in 2025.

DHLGH commissioned Colin Rynne from University College Cork to prepare a Statement of Significance report for the Lower and Upper Lighthouses at Sceilg Mhichíl in 2022. The Statement of Significance report was issued to OPW by DHLGH.

Peter O'Donnell MWP Consultant Structural Engineer carried out a visual structural inspection of the Lower Lighthouse building in August 2024. MWP issued their preliminary structural report to OPW in October 2024 (see appendix J).

### 5.3.2. INSTALLATION OF WORKERS COMPOSTING TOILETS AT THE LOWER LIGHTHOUSE COMPLEX

The OPW obtained Ministerial Consent from DHLGH in April 2022 for the installation of a proposed new workers composting toilet and associated works including the removal of a section of the



existing bund wall at the Lower Lighthouse complex. The section of the bund wall was removed in the 2022 season and the foundation for the proposed composting toilet was installed on site. The OPW will install the new composting toilet in the lower lighthouse compound in the 2025 season.



*Figure 13 - Foundation for the proposed composting toilet installed at the Lower Lighthouse compound*

### **5.3.3. ARUP ENERGY AND WATER STRATEGY REPORT**

The ongoing refurbishment of the Lower Lighthouse has highlighted many of the challenges, which have faced human settlement on the island over the millennia. The main challenge is that of water supply. There is no natural source of fresh water on the island. Historically, the monks and the lighthouse keepers collected rainwater. This required an innate knowledge of bird nesting locations, nesting season, saline levels due to windborne salt and other factors, as collected fresh water was easily contaminated due to local environmental factors. The island also lacks a supply to the main electrical grid. The Lower Lighthouse will be entirely off grid and energy usage proposals require expert advice.

The OPW commissioned ARUP to undertake a report for an energy and water strategy for the Lower Lighthouse complex in 2020. The report recommended the use of solar photovoltaic panels, the delivery of fresh potable water to the island by boat, the use of recycled water for other purposes, a natural ventilation solution and the use of composting toilets.

## 5.4. Works to Upper Lighthouse

### 5.4.1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Upper Lighthouse is located at the end of the Upper Lighthouse Road and is in a ruinous state. The construction of the Upper Lighthouse began in 1821 together with the Lower Lighthouse. The upper light only functioned until 1870 due to the establishment of a new light on Inishtearaght, 22 miles north of Sceilg Mhichíl. The Upper Lighthouse consists of a lighthouse tower and dwellings which were formerly used by lighthouse keepers. These were built using rubble masonry, cut stone, brickwork and slate cladding on the outer walls. The dwellings were one storey buildings with attic rooms on top.

The proposed works to the Upper Lighthouse are subject to further investigation by OPW and DHLGH. The aim will be to give the visitors a greater sense of how the lighthouse keepers and their families lived and worked on the island in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All proposed works will be subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent.

The OPW appointed Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2021 season to carry out extensive archaeological excavations of the existing debris at the Upper Lighthouse. A section of the debris was left *in situ* due to the presence of nesting birds at the time. Alan Hayden carried out archaeological excavations of the remaining debris at the Upper Lighthouse in the 2022 season. The original floors were exposed following the archaeological excavations. The OPW installed plywood protection to the exposed floors to protect them from the elements.

The plywood protection to the floors at the Upper Lighthouse was damaged over the winter period in 2024. The OPW removed the damaged plywood protection and installed new ones during the 2024 season.



*Figure 14 - Aerial view of the Upper Lighthouse and sea wall*

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*Figure 15 - Aerial view of the Upper Lighthouse and sea wall*

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*Figure 16 - View of the new installed plywood protection to the existing floor at the upper lighthouse*

## 5.5. Preserving Legacies Project and Climate Vulnerability Assessment

### 5.5.1. PRESERVING LEGACIES PROJECT

The OPW and DHLGH announced on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023 that Sceilg Mhichíl has joined a new global initiative to safeguard sites of cultural significance from the impacts of climate change. Sceilg Mhichíl was selected as one of ten global sites for the project which is funded by the National Geographic Society and Manulife in partnership with the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). The purpose of the project is to develop the scientific knowledge and technical training for site leaders and the local community to develop place and people-based climate change adaptation plans for the World Heritage Property of Sceilg Mhichíl.

The OPW Senior Architect and site manager for Sceilg Mhichíl is representing the OPW in the Preserving Legacies project. The project requires attending regular trainings and producing deliverables for the site. The OPW are working on the project in collaboration with DHLGH.

The OPW Senior Architect and DHLGH Senior Archaeologist for Sceilg Mhichíl attended a Preserving Legacies workshop in Petra, Jordan from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The workshop was hosted by the Petra National Trust (PNT) in collaboration with the Petra Development & Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA).

### 5.5.2. CLIMATE VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

The OPW commissioned Carrig Conservation International as consultants to carry out a Climate Vulnerability assessment (CVA) for Sceilg Mhichíl. The purpose of the CVA is to identify risks caused by climate change to Sceilg Mhichíl and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The CVA is also part of the wider *Preserving Legacies* project.

As part of the CVA, the OPW organised an experts site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The aim of the experts site visit was to discuss and highlight the effects of climate change on the island's cultural and natural heritage. A total of 24 no. experts from different professional backgrounds attended the site visit. The site visit was filmed and recorded by Crossing the Line Production. A number of experts were also interviewed during the site visit.

A follow-up online questionnaire was later issued to the attendees following the experts site visit. The results of the questionnaire will allow to prioritise impacts for discussion at the follow-up experts workshop to be planned later during the year.

The OPW organised an experts technical workshop on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023 as a follow-up to the experts site visit carried out at Sceilg Mhichíl on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The workshop took place in Bedford Hall in Dublin Castle over two half days. A total of 45 no. experts attended the workshop. The aim of the workshop was to evaluate the exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity of Sceilg Mhichíl to climate hazards based on stakeholder understanding of the site.



DHLGH also organised a community workshop on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2024 in Portmagee Visitor Centre. The workshop aimed at assessing community vulnerability and creating a holistic view of the impacts of climate change at Sceilg Mhichíl.

Carrig Conservation International issued their final CVA report to the OPW in July 2024. The main conclusion from the CVA report focussed on the results of the risk assessment carried out by the technical and community workshops attendees. The CVA report also outlined adaptation options including visitor management, human resources, monitoring and research, experimental and climate action.

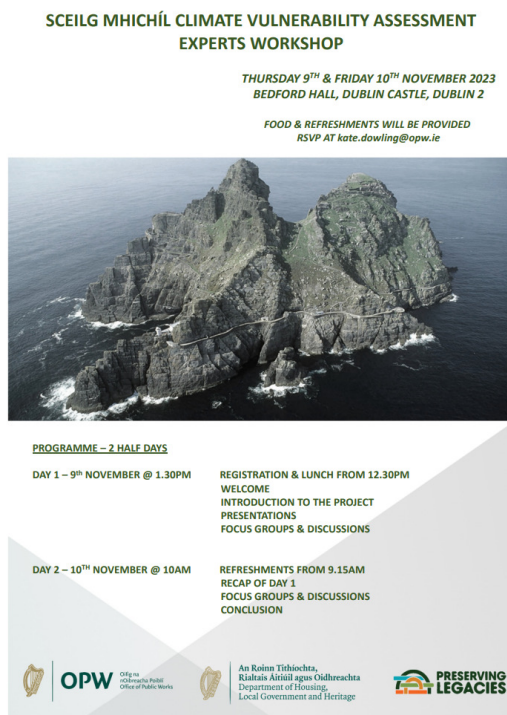


Figure 17 - Poster of the CVA technical workshop



Figure 18 - Poster of the CVA community workshop

## 5.6. Health & Safety

### 5.6.1. RESCUE EXERCISE

The physical nature of the island and the uneven monastic steps are challenging to visitors and can cause serious accidents and injuries. The OPW has carried out two rescue exercises in 2019 that involved bringing a dummy casualty from the monastery to the pier on a stretcher. The Irish Coastguard Mountain Rescue team were involved in the rescue exercise and it is envisaged that a rescue exercise will take place during June of every year. However, rescue exercises were not carried out in 2020, 2021 and 2022 due to the Covid-19 emergency and weather events.

The OPW held a meeting with the Valentia Coast Guards to organize a rescue exercise in June 2024. However, due to unstable weather conditions and logistical issues, the rescue exercise was postponed for the 2025 season.

## 5.7. 2024 Maintenance Plan

The OPW produced a maintenance plan outlining the maintenance works to be carried out by OPW at the start of the 2024 season at Sceilg Mhichíl. The OPW carry out annual maintenance works on the island four weeks prior to the commencement of the tourist season. The purpose of the works is to make the island safe for the general public, OPW personnel, contractors, consultant, etc. The works include site set up, safety sweeps removal of stone and debris, cleaning of vegetation, repair works, etc. The 2024 Maintenance Plan was issued to DHLGH in March 2024 (see appendix G).

The safety sweep Ministerial Consent application was submitted by the OPW to DHLGH in April 2023 accompanied by an AA / NIS document. Envirico issued a revised AA / NIS document to OPW in February 2024 (see appendix B). Ministerial consent for the proposed safety sweep was granted from DHLGH in March 2024. The OPW carried out the safety sweep at the start of the 2024 season prior to the guides and visitors arrival to the island.

The OPW inspected the existing solar panels on the site huts in the 2024 season as part of their yearly maintenance. The existing solar panels required replacement. The OPW replaced the existing solar panels on the guides huts on the lower lighthouse road with new solar panels in the 2024 season.



*Figure 19 - New solar panels installed to guides huts on site*

## 5.8. Puffin Survey

The School of Biological, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University College Cork (UCC) led by Mark Jessopp and Jamie Darby conduct a puffin survey at Sceilg Mhichíl each year. The aim of the research is to track the movements of the breeding Sceilg Mhichíl puffin population outside the breeding season. Due to an outbreak of avian flu, the survey was cancelled during the 2022 season. The puffin survey works resumed in the 2023 season and UCC carried out their survey in June 2023. UCC also carried out a puffin survey on Sceilg Mhichíl in June 2024. The puffin survey report remains outstanding.

## 5.9. National Park and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Surveys

Survey works were carried out by the NPWS on Sceilg Mhichíl in 2024. The NPWS appointed an Ornithological Clerk of Works, Brian Power for the duration of the 2024 season. His role was to monitor the potential impact of ongoing works on the island's wildlife.

NPWS commissioned McCarthy Keville O'Sullivan (MKO) in the 2024 season to carry out a Biosecurity Audit of Sceilg Mhichíl.

## 5.10. Sceilg Mhichíl 2020-2030 Management Plan

The final version of the Sceilg Mhichíl 2020 – 2030 Management Plan was formally launched by the DHLGH and OPW on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and superseded the 2008 – 2018 Management Plan. The new Management Plan has been produced by DHLGH, in conjunction with the OPW, after being developed following consultation with local groups, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties. The plan provides information on the various aspects of the management policy for Sceilg Mhichíl, including conservation and preservation, visitor management, the legislative protections it enjoys and the development considerations necessary to protect the site into the future. Management challenges are also addressed, such as threats to the biodiversity and the impacts of climate change. All future works on the island will be closely monitored to assess their potential impact on wildlife.



*Figure 20 - The Management Plan 2020-2030 sets out the protocols and goals for the future repair works on Sceilg Mhichíl*



## 5.11. Archaeological Works

The OPW appointed Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist for the 2024 season to monitor works on site and carry out archaeological excavations as required.

The annual pre-season safety sweep at Sceilg Mhichíl was archaeologically monitored by Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2024 season. The final archaeological monitoring report was issued by Alan Hayden in April 2024 (Appendix C).

The re-instatement works of the historic drains by the OPW were archaeologically monitored by Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2024 season. The final archaeological monitoring report was issued by Alan Hayden in September 2024 (Appendix D).

The installation of a barrier at the south steps for health and safety purposes was explored in the 2024 season. Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist was commissioned by the OPW to carry out an archaeological impact assessment. The archaeological report was issued to OPW in July 2024 (Appendix A).

## 5.12. Carrying Capacity

The OPW appoint Creagh House Environmental (CHE) Ltd to carry out a report on the Visitor Carrying Capacity of the Monastic Enclosure at Sceilg Mhichíl on an annual basis. However, the Carrying Capacity survey was not carried out in the 2024 season.

## 5.13. OPW Architects' & Design Team Site Visits

The OPW Conservation Architects undertook 6 no. site visits to Sceilg Mhichíl over the 2024 season, from May to September led by Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Conservation Architect. A site visit report was drafted by the OPW with a photographic record following each site visit. The site visit reports recorded progress of all repair works and were issued by the OPW following each site visit.

OPW Architects and Will Megarry of ICOMOS Ireland carried out a site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024 to inspect the Monastery, Upper Lighthouse Road and Lower and Upper Lighthouses.

OPW Architects, OPW Health & Safety Unit and OPW HRM Section carried out a site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 to inspect the Monastery, Upper Lighthouse Road, Lower and Upper Lighthouses and the site huts.

OPW Architects and Rosemary Collier, OPW Head of Heritage Services, carried out a site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024 to inspect the Monastery, Upper Lighthouse Road, Lower and Upper Lighthouses and the site huts.

OPW Architects, Kevin Blackwood from Blackwood Associates Architects and Peter O'Donnell from MWP Engineers carried out a site inspection of the lower lighthouse on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

Site Visit No.	Date
1	24/04/2024
2	16/05/2024
3	12/06/2024
4	26/06/2024
5	25/07/2024
6	30/08/2024



Figure 21 – Photo of Pat O'Shea Site Foreman, James O'Donoghue Foreman, Kevin McKenna Architectural Assistant, Fergus McCormick Senior Architect, Eugene Boyle Architect taken at the Upper Lighthouse on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024





*Figure 22 - Photo of Will Megarry of ICOMOS Ireland and Alan Hayden consultant archaeologist taken at the Monastery on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024*



*Figure 23 - Denise Cronin OPW, Pat O'Shea OPW Site Foreman, Ruairi Millane OPW HR, Fergus Mc Cormick OPW Senior Architect, Peter Collins OPW H&S Unit, Patrick Fields OPW H&S Unit, Nigel Roche OPW Safety Officer, Maggie Keane OPW Guide and Eugene Boyle OPW Architect at the Monastery on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024*





*Figure 24 - Kate Dowling Architect OPW, James O'Donoghue OPW Foreman, Pat O'Shea OPW Site Foreman, Eugene Boyle Architect OPW, Rosemary Collier OPW Head of Heritage Services, Fergus Mc Cormick Senior Architect OPW, Liam Joy OPW Foreman Grade 3 at the Upper Lighthouse on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024*



*Figure 25 - Kevin McGrattan QS OPW, Pat O'Shea OPW Site Foreman, Ita Griffin OPW, Kevin Blackwood Blackwood Associates Architects, Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist, Terri Sweeney Meade Assistant Principal Architect, Heritage OPW, Fergus Mc Cormick Senior Architect OPW, Eugene Boyle Architect OPW at the Upper Lighthouse on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024*

## 5.14. Audio-visual Recording of 2024 Works by Crossing the Line Productions

OPW commissioned Crossing the Line Productions to film works on the island for the 2024 season. The aim of the film footage is to provide a visual record of the works during the 2024 season. An audio-visual synopsis of the 2024 works will be produced and issued to the OPW in 2025. The audio-visual files produced by Crossing the Line acts as a record of works in conjunction with site reports and photographic records.



*Figure 26 - Crossing the Line Productions filming on site at Sceilg Mhichíl*



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## 6. 2024 Challenges

### 6.1. Rock Collapse & Climate Impact

Rock falls have increased in frequency in recent years, due to the effects of climate change. The high levels of precipitation are leading to soil erosion and rock falls. The substantial rock fall which occurred in 2020 on the lighthouse road near the site huts resulted in the installation of a temporary timber crash deck at this location and at another two high risk locations on the Upper Lighthouse Road to protect OPW operatives from falling debris.



*Figure 27 - Rock Fall on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020*

A serious rock fall occurred on the lower lighthouse road on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The island was closed to the public with immediate effect for 3 weeks from 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and re-opened on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022. To mitigate the effects of rock falls, the OPW installed a new canopy on the lower lighthouse road of approximately 100 linear meters in length following a grant of Ministerial Consent by DHLGH.





*Figure 28 - View of the canopy installed at the Lower Lighthouse road following the rock fall that occurred on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022*

## 6.2. Crash Decks Installation Works

The installation of permanent and robust crash decks is critical for the safety and wellbeing of OPW workers on site and for the future access and use of the upper lighthouse road by visitors. The viability of the island as an accessible tourist location is dependent on safe access conditions on the Lighthouse roads.

The proposed Crash Decks installation works commenced in the 2022 season on Sceilg Mhichíl. The OPW obtained DHLGH extension to Ministerial Consent in July 2022 for the installation of 3 no. permanent crash decks on the lighthouse road. The extension to Ministerial Consent was based on the revised crash decks design provided by Downes Associates consultant structural engineers.

The OPW appointed Eamonn Costello (Kerry) Ltd as main contractor the Crash Decks installation works following a tender process. To facilitate the transportation of construction materials, the main contractor installed a temporary crane at the landing pier. The structures of 3 no. crash decks were installed on site by the main contractor. The works were halted on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022 due to deteriorating weather conditions. The stainless steel mesh and canopy for the 3 no. crash decks were installed by the main contractor in the 2023 season. The stainless steel cable stays were also installed by the contractor in the 2023 season following receipt of an extension to Ministerial consent from DHLGH. The Consent application was accompanied by an AA / NIS document. The works to the 3 no. crash decks were completed in the 2023 season and the Certificate of Practical Completion was issued by the OPW Senior Architect in October 2023.

The Ministerial Consent conditions outlined the requirement for the temporary removal of the stainless steel stays on the seawall side of the crash decks during the summer season to avoid injury to the birds during the nesting season. The stainless steel stays are to be re-installed at the end of the summer season before the island closure. The OPW removed the stainless steel stays during the 2024 summer season to the 3 no. crash decks on the lighthouse road. The stainless steel stays were coiled up and attached to the rock face below the sea walls. The OPW later re-instated the stainless steel stays in September 2024 before the work crew evacuated the island.

Downes Associates consultant structural engineers issued a risk assessment and mitigation report to OPW in May 2024 for the 3 no. permanent crash decks (see appendix I). The aim of the report is to outline the residual risks associated with the 3 no. crash decks installed on the lighthouse road at Sceilg Mhichíl.



*Figure 29 – View of the stainless steel stays coiled up and attached to the rock face below the sea walls*



*Figure 30 - View of the re-instated stainless steel stays of Crash Deck no. 1 at the end of the season*





*Figure 31 - View of the re-instated stainless steel stays of Crash Deck no. 2 at the end of the season*



*Figure 32 - View of the re-instated stainless steel stays of Crash Deck no. 3 at the end of the season*



### 6.3. Crash Deck at Cross Cove

A rock fall occurred on the lower lighthouse road at Cross Cove early in the 2024 season that damaged the timber boarding of the existing timber crash deck. OPW architects carried out a site visit on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024 to inspect the rock fall and the damaged timber boarding. The OPW appointed Gordon Knaggs consultant timber specialist to inspect the timber boarding. Gordon Knaggs issued a condition report of the damaged timber to OPW on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (see appendix E). Gordon Knaggs also issued a report of the phases of repairs required to the timber canopy at Cross Cove to OPW on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (see appendix F).

DHLGH confirmed to OPW that a Ministerial Consent is not required for the removal and replacement of the section of timber decking to the crash deck at Cross Cove. The OPW completed the installation of the new timber decking in June 2024.

The OPW will be including the repair and maintenance to the crash decks at Cross Cove as part of their yearly maintenance programme. The OPW are proposing to replace the existing timber boarding with new timber boarding to the 2016 section of the crash deck at Cross Cove in the 2025 season.



*Figure 33 - View of the rock fall at Cross Cove and the damage to the timber decking*





*Figure 34 - Timber repairs in progress to Crash Deck at Cross Cove*



*Figure 35 - New Timber decking installed on Crash Decks at Cross Cove*

## 6.4. Landing Pier

The OPW are considering repair and enhancement works to future proof the landing pier against the effects of climate change. Measures will need to be discussed and agreed with DHLGH, including the possibility of constructing a wall on the pier to protect the landing area from increased swells and higher tides. There is a more long-term strategy of increasing the height of the pier to accommodate predicted sea level rises due to climate change.

OPW are in discussion with Met Éireann, the Irish national meteorological organisation, regarding the possible installation of a weather station on the site to provide an accurate record of weather events and to monitor changing climatic patterns.

## 6.5. Security

OPW guides typically have a full-time presence on the island throughout the tourist season. They are housed on the island and provide an informal security presence. Unauthorised landings outside the tourist season are undocumented and unquantified. OPW operatives work on the island from Monday to Friday. Due to the lack of a guide presence in the 2020 season, the site was exposed to unauthorised landings and excursions during the weekends. No damage was reported. A number of attempted landings were discouraged by operatives during the working week. The OPW has a number of signs in place warning unauthorised trespassers of the dangers posed to them; however, this alone is not enough of a deterrent. An unauthorised drone has also been previously noted. This occurred during the peak of the nesting season and could have caused potential stress and danger to nesting seabirds.

The OPW will endeavour to provide greater security to the site. The OPW installed a trial CCTV and solar panels on the storage building adjacent to the landing pier in the 2023 season. The OPW were granted DHLGH Ministerial Consent in April 2022 for the proposed installation of CCTV on the storage building adjacent to the landing pier. Technical information was provided by OPW M&E Engineering Section to accompany the Ministerial consent application. The installation of the trial CCTV was successful and the OPW will be installing the permanent CCTV in the 2025 season. The OPW will be installing CCTV signage at the landing pier on Sceilg Mhichíl subject to Ministerial Consent approval by DHLGH. The OPW will also be installing CCTV signage in Portmagee and other departure locations to Sceilg Mhichíl on the mainland, subject to the required statutory approvals.



## 7. 2025 Objectives

The objectives for the 2025 season can be summarised as follows:

- Collaboration with DHLGH on the drafting of the Lower and Upper Lighthouses Conservation Plan to inform future works, mitigation strategies and research frameworks for the lighthouse structures.
- Carrying out of the safety sweep at the start of the season, subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- Phase 2 of 3 – replacement of the existing timber boarding to the 2016 section of the timber crash deck at Cross Cove, subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- The installation of new OPW workers composting toilets in the compound of the Lower Lighthouse.
- Inspection of the existing plywood protection to the floors at the upper lighthouse and replacement as required.
- Installation of CCTV at the landing pier, subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- Installation of CCTV signage at the landing pier on Sceilg Mhichíl and at Portmagee and other departure locations to Sceilg Mhichíl on the mainland.
- Continuation of the repair and maintenance of the Upper Lighthouse road as required.
- The continued monitoring of the movement at the monastery enclosure retaining wall by the Discovery Programme.
- Ongoing wildlife surveys.
- Ongoing filming of the works on site.

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