

# Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Fund in English National Parks, 2002-2009.

## Land Use Consultants **Summary Report**

March 2010



The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) is a grant scheme that supports new ways of living and working within National Parks in a sustainable manner. The funding is provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and is managed by the National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority<sup>1</sup>. Sustainable development encompasses projects that can demonstrate social, economic and environmental development.

### Background

In July 2002 the then Minister of State for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael, launched a Sustainable Development Fund for English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority as a programme to provide a flexible and non-bureaucratic means of funding projects to "aid the achievement of National Park purposes by encouraging individuals, community groups and businesses to develop practical sustainable solutions to the management of their activities". Following an initial review in March 2004<sup>2</sup>, in September 2009, after seven years of operation, Land Use Consultants (LUC) undertook an independent Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Fund across the English National Park Authorities<sup>3</sup> and the Broads Authority. The purpose of the Evaluation was to assess the impact of the Sustainable Development Fund and help inform its future direction.

### Scope and Approach

All Authorities operate their Sustainable Development Fund relatively independently, taking local needs into consideration. The Sustainable Development Fund Officers Workgroup collated findings across the Authorities and provided a numeric spreadsheet of data from 1,235 separate projects, undertaken between 2002 and 2009, for LUC to interpret. LUC then undertook telephone interviews with the Sustainable Development Fund Officers Workgroup and a sample of grant recipients and stakeholders.

### Summary of Sustainable Development Fund Activity, 2002-2009

The purpose of the Sustainable Development Fund is to encourage projects that contribute towards objectives established by the Defra in 2002. All Authorities have consistently applied these, while also taking new and emerging priorities (for example climate change) on board in a positive manner.

## Case Studies

### Nestwatch

#### PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK



This project protects and monitors vulnerable birds of prey in the Upper Derwent Valley. For 3 years attempts have been made to show live footage of raptors breeding in the UDV at Fairholmes visitor centre. Success has been limited by restricted power supply and the proximity of a suitable nest site close to Fairholmes. It is proposed to purchase a solar powered CCTV system that will enable remote nest sites to be monitored benefitting education and aiding protection.

### The Wetland Demonstration Project

#### NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK

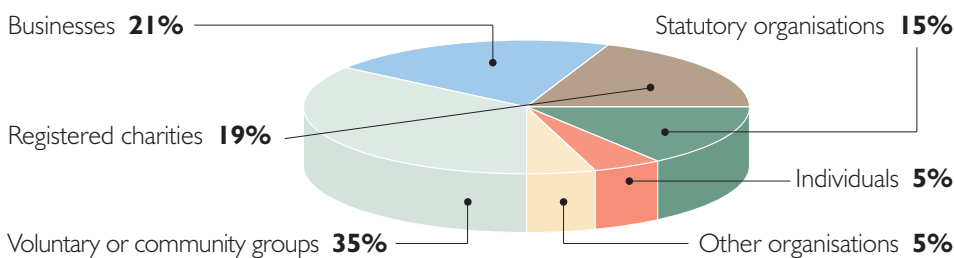


This constructed wetland is a small-scale sewage treatment system. Water is cleaned by microorganisms living on the reed roots, utilising the sewage for growth nutrients, resulting in clean effluent. The project is an exemplar of sustainable development, with over 1,000 visitors planned until 2013, including local schools, universities, and organisations looking to undertake similar projects.

### Total investment and match funding consequently secured.<sup>4</sup>

Total number of projects completed	1,235
Total value of Sustainable Development Fund investment	£9.9 million
Total value of Cash Match Funding	£42.5 million
Ratio of Sustainable Development Fund to cash match funding	1 : 4.3
Ratio of Sustainable Development Fund to cash and in-kind match funding	1 : 4.6

### Percentage types of grant recipient in relation to the total number of projects that took place.



### Percentage of total Sustainable Development Fund projects delivering the Defra priorities established in 2002. Many of the projects were cross-cutting across those priorities.

Engages local communities and/or volunteers in planning, delivery and operation	72%
Involves young people	52%
Engages people from an urban centre with the National Park	52%
Adds value or new dimensions to an existing sustainability project	41%
Brings different organisations together to tackle rural problems in the spirit of partnership	64%
Exemplar of Sustainable Development	43%
Develops models for sustainable living in the countryside that can be applied elsewhere	43%
Involves the sustainable management of land (e.g. irrigation, peat bog management, reforestation)	24%
Educates and raises awareness of the need for sustainable development and safeguarding the environment	74%

### A selection of other notable findings from the Evaluation.

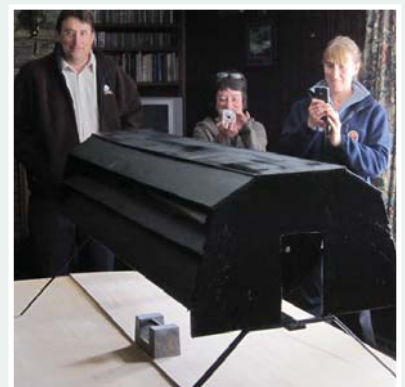
Number of projects that created employment	198
Number of jobs created	340
Percentage of projects working with the tourism industry	43%
Percentage of projects involving public access to the National Park	40%
Percentage of projects that addressed climate change during 2003/2004	5%
Percentage of projects that addressed climate change during 2008/2009	20%

### YMCA Forest Schools Project BROADS AUTHORITY



The YMCA Forest Schools project is aimed at young people between 16-19 not in employment, education or training, who socially are in danger of exclusion. The project enables young people to get involved in a variety of ongoing conservation projects such as putting in steps and hand rails to improve accessibility, clearing, weeding, planting trees, clearing ivy, laying woodchip pathways and creating signage.

### The Ridgeblade Project NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK



This project aims to construct and test a proof-of-concept prototype for an innovative, low cost, low tech, low visual impact and high performance wind MicroGeneration system suitable for individual, business and community deployment in rural and urban areas. This wind turbine is uniquely mounted along the ridge line of the roof and is being trialled for use in protected areas given its reduced visual impact.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Key Strengths

The Sustainable Development Fund:

- ✓ Delivers National Park purposes and especially their duty to foster social and economic wellbeing. A key strength of the SDF is its emphasis on a 'bottom-up' delivery, meeting needs identified by communities and businesses. This approach should be balanced with the 'top-down' priorities within the National Park management plan.
- ✓ Is Highly Accessible. The SDF was designed to minimise the administrative burden and this objective has been achieved.
- ✓ Delivers more than a grant. The input from the SDF Officers is invaluable, sharing knowledge of other funding sources and experience of similar projects that have taken place.
- ✓ Stretches aspirations. SDF input often pushes projects, providing practical examples of sustainable development in action.
- ✓ Reaches where other schemes do not. Applicants are free to identify the needs and objectives they wish to address. The SDF gives priority to innovative ideas and is prepared to take risks on projects with no proven track record, supporting initiatives that would otherwise fall between the gaps of other funds. The SDF often provides the first offer of funding from which other support can be generated.
- ✓ Draws down high levels of other funding. For every £1.00 of Sustainable Development Fund investment, on average £4.30 of funding from other sources is levered in, reflecting favourably compared to other grant schemes operating in rural areas.
- ✓ Creates jobs. Over 16% of the projects created jobs, and over half of those projects received less than £1,000 per job created.
- ✓ Involves partnership working. Some Authorities have developed strong linkages with strategic partners.
- ✓ Is cross-cutting within Authorities. The Sustainable Development Fund successfully draws out the skills available to the Authorities.
- ✓ Encourages a new perception of the National Park designation. The role of the Authorities has evolved away from a regulating, statutory planning body, towards an enabling organisation.

### Challenges and Opportunities

The Sustainable Development Fund has scope to:

- ➔ Continue to define and support innovative projects as a priority.
- ➔ Make more of the test-bedding role and better share project information. This could be achieved through use of the wider National Parks website to demonstrate ground-breaking projects and novel approaches showing best practice.
- ➔ Undertake more proactive engagement with communities outside of National Park boundaries. Although there is evidence of involvement of communities from urban areas, a shared funding pot specifically for this task could help to overcome barriers to people from further afield accessing the protected areas.
- ➔ Develop common criteria for awarding high rates of grant aid to ensure value for money.
- ➔ Further support and raise awareness of successful projects after completion. The Authorities could consider how they can best celebrate the achievements (e.g. an annual award for the best project, and awards dinner, website recognition, etc.).
- ➔ Continue to strengthen local partnership working.

### Rehabilitation Programme DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK



Low grade timber is harvested as a result of work carried out across the Dartmoor Forestry Commission forests by offenders from HMP Dartmoor. The SDF funding allowed four placements on the Commission's rehabilitation programme at any one time and provided 'small' lots of suitable, locally sourced, timber for Dartmoor woodfuel projects.

### Tracks and Traces - A Story of Exmoor EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK



Tracks and Traces - A Story of Exmoor was an interactive play telling the story of the landscape, people and animals of the National Park in a fast-paced, high energy romp through five decades of history. It was performed in all schools across the Exmoor area and allowed audience participation to debate current themes relevant to sustainability within Exmoor. Further resources allowed teachers to follow these themes up after the show. A digital version using electronic voting systems is now being developed for older children.

“The independent Evaluation concludes that the SDF is continuing to fulfil its original objectives. These objectives remain relevant, allowing the SDF to address emerging policy priorities and the needs of communities. The Authorities should build on these achievements. They should seek to maximise the value from the SDF to deliver the purposes of the National Park designation and their socio-economic duty, and to support the priorities of their partner organisations.”

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- <sup>1</sup> The Broads Authority is a Special Statutory Authority with parity to the other English National Park Authorities.
- <sup>2</sup> In March 2004 an independent evaluation of the first 18 months operation of the SDF was commissioned by the Countryside Agency. It found that the SDF had proved overall to be effective at delivering its intended outcomes. It found that good value for money was being obtained and beyond the direct benefit of individual projects, the SDF had produced a step change in awareness, creativity and entrepreneurship on the part of local communities and businesses. This directly led to a continuation of funding.
- <sup>3</sup> The Welsh National Park Authorities undertook their own separate independent evaluation in May 2007, by the Economic and Social Research Council. The SDF is not yet established at the Scottish National Parks.
- <sup>4</sup> Additional SDF funding was provided by the Regional Development Agencies in the South West (to Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities) and Yorkshire and the Humber (to North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authorities).

We can provide the information in the publication in large print, different formats and other languages on request. The full Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Fund in English National Parks, 2002-2009, is available from either the English National Park Authorities Association or Land Use Consultants.

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## The Lowick Community Hall Development Project LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK



This volunteer-led project brought a run-down rural community building up to 21st Century standards. The aim was to reduce operating costs, ensure its longevity and increase usage. An important element of the project was to reduce its carbon footprint using alternative energy sources and effective insulation. An air source heat pump, coupled with a photovoltaic roof system and thermafleece insulation now offers an exemplar model of what can be done with an old community building.

## Ipley Manor Farm Biomass Heating System NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK



The new biomass district heating system replaced an oil burning one. It now provides heating and hot water to five dwellings fuelled by woodchip produced from the sustainable management of the previously neglected farm woodlands. The success of the system has been influential in encouraging further uptake of biomass systems within the New Forest.

## Eco-Pod Trial YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK



Architects Feilden Clegg Bradley Studio have tested the viability of eco-pods in derelict barns in the Yorkshire Dales. A pod was inserted into an isolated barn on the Bolton Abbey estate, near Skipton, in 2009. The appraisal suggests that the pods could be used as short-term holiday homes or work spaces. The project could enhance the Dales' tourism sector and help individual farm businesses diversify. There are now plans for a larger study of several barns in the Dales.