

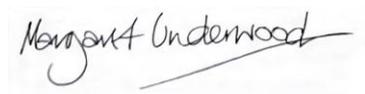
## **Title page**

**Scrutiny Study No: 4/2012-13**

**IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 6 (IO:6): Communities are inspired by and recognise the benefits of where they live**

### **Acknowledgements**

Scrutiny is one of the key tools for BBNPA in its aim to achieve continuous improvement and develop as a learning organisation. As lead member for this scrutiny study, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to external panel members for their enthusiasm and commitment, for taking the time to attend meetings and respond to emails and for their input into this study without which, it would not have been as robust or impartial. I would also like to extend my thanks to my fellow members for their continued support and input. Finally I would like to thank all officers who contributed either through giving direct evidence or through providing written comments, without that level of input, these studies could not meet their objectives.



**Margaret Underwood**  
**Lead member Scrutiny study**

### **Purpose of Report**

To report on progress to date on the delivery of Improvement Objective 6 (IO:6) and make any recommendations for future action as deemed necessary.

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# I Introduction

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In common with any public body - we are required to identify objectives each year – what we are going to do, what resources we will allocate etc. We have to publish these each year in our Business Improvement Plan. Out of these objectives we have to identify some that we consider to be priorities – called improvement objectives

The Wales Audit Office audits us against these, so we have to produce evidence that we have done what we set out to do. Sometimes we can evidence this through statutory measures, called performance indicators, but sometimes the objective is more subjective, less linked to service than perception, and these are more difficult to evidence. This scrutiny topic **IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 6: Communities are inspired by and recognise the benefits of where they live** is one of those where qualitative and anecdotal evidence is also used.

For this scrutiny study, the scrutiny panel itself consisted both of BBNPA members together with representatives from a range of outside bodies including One Voice Wales, arts, tourism, youth and community organisations who were invited to join us in looking at how well we are doing in meeting this improvement objective<sup>1</sup>. BBNPA is grateful for their willingness to participate, enthusiasm and contributions to this process.

## I.1 Selection of improvement objectives for scrutiny

Members and senior officers debate this, initially in a workshop and then in Audit and Scrutiny Committee, for final approval by the Authority.

From this year (2013) the public are able to ‘vote’ on the website for which improvement objectives they think should be the subject of scrutiny. This will be taken into consideration before the Authority approves its new topics for scrutiny. It is hoped that as this process continues, the public will have more involvement in the scrutiny process.

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<sup>1</sup> For a full list of scrutiny panel members see Annex 1

## 2 Background

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) relies on the active involvement of the communities within it. Our work to engage with many aspects of community life has far reaching effects.

Worldwide issues of climate change, change in agricultural practices and policy, economic decline and rising prices of fossil fuels all have a major impact on the resilience of our communities. Support from the Authority's Sustainable Development Fund and Conservation and Community Grant Schemes have ensured that local community sustainability projects will keep benefiting communities for years to come.

Great and innovative projects are already on-going across the National Park; from grassroots catchment based approaches, which encompass renewable energy generation like micro hydro schemes, to community regeneration projects, to our work with Community Councils and One Voice Wales<sup>2</sup> (their representative body). The latter includes together revising and delivering a Town & Community Council Charter and Action Plan<sup>3</sup> to work together better to benefit local communities. These are just some of the sustainable projects that receive continued support from the National Park Authority.

Community organisations, including town and community councils and voluntary organisations, have an enormous role to play in regeneration and community well-being. They can prioritise how resources are used locally as well as create a sense of place by promoting locally distinctive events. Choosing to apply for grant schemes or being involved in projects that support sustainability or regeneration involves communities being inspired by and recognising the benefits of where they live. The following sets out how we intend to build a solid foundation for the coming years.

Why we are focusing on this Improvement Objective (IO:6).	What we will do.	How we will we do it.
<p><b>We want to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To enable people's enjoyment of the National Park.</li> <li>To help bring income into the area.</li> <li>To fulfil our second statutory purpose</li> </ul>	<p><b>We will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with community and town councils and One Voice Wales (their representative body) to revise the Community Council Charter and Action Plan.</li> <li>Encourage, recruit and retain volunteers in the National Park, particularly in new work for the National Park including the new Waterfalls Country Volunteer Warden Scheme.</li> <li>Deliver a Social Inclusion and</li> </ul>	<p><b>By:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuing to support local community projects that encourage sustainability and rural regenerations through grants' schemes available through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Rural Alliances, Conservation and Community Grant Scheme and The Brecon Beacons Trust.</li> <li>Receiving, encouraging and acting on feedback from Community Champions.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that not all Town and Community Councils are members of One Voice Wales

<sup>3</sup> see Annex xx for the Charter and Action Plan

	<p>Child Poverty Action Plan that will increase numbers of children and families in poverty that benefit from the National Park and use of our services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities and the Council for National Parks to establish the MOSAIC project in Wales, part of which will help to establish Community Champions to share information on the Parks with Black Minority Ethnic communities.</li> <li>• Deliver Rural Skills programme to provide Agored accredited training for disadvantaged groups including NEET young people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a valued Education Service to schools visiting the National Park.</li> <li>• Continuing to promote the Park Ambassadors Scheme which encourages businesses to deliver a unique sense of place to those who visit the National Park.</li> <li>• Continue to promote sustainable tourism and the Fforest Fawr Geopark to our communities through achieving reaccreditation under the Europark Charter for Sustainable Tourism and being successfully revalidated as a Member of the European Geoparks Network.</li> <li>• Helping Members lead a Scrutiny review that will make further recommendations on how to help inspire our communities to recognise benefit from the National Park.</li> </ul>
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We have set out a number of ways in which we will know whether or not we have achieved inspiring communities to recognise the benefits of where they live:

- There will be a positive percentage % of good rating or above on surveys.
- There will be a percentage % change in crime statistics (eg. Illegal off-roading, theft from car parks.)
- There will be an increase in Town and Community Councils signing up to the Community Council Charter.
- We will meet Sustainable Development Match Funding ratios on grant aided projects.
- There will be increased feedback from tourism operators and user groups.
- Increased levels of inspiration measures.
- More Community Champions will be recruited.
- There will be groups submitting applications and gaining the Walkers are Welcome award.
- Increase in new community resilience groups supported by The Green Valleys.

It is interesting to note that not all the points mentioned above are captured within the actual performance measures set out below. We have found during this study that where departments do not actually have any designated indicators within the Ffynnon system, they do not input into the objective even when they clearly have some very robust evidence that the Authority is delivering the Improvement Objective. For example the Tourism section of the NPA has many actions which contribute both directly and indirectly to Improvement Objective 6 however, Tourism does not currently input any data into this Objective which could demonstrate that the Authority is meeting the objective in more than one area. Some of the surveys undertaken within the Tourism section have offered clear supporting evidence that the NPA is meeting this objective. Methods of adding supporting data within the Ffynnon

system are possible and officers should be encouraged to input any data collected as a routine element of their activities under any relevant objective. The table that follows sets out the actual measures of success that are reported upon:

Measure of success	2011-2012 Target	2011-2012 Actual	2012-2013 Target
Deliver Community Council Charter Action Plan.	Detail in action plan	Actions in plan delivered or progressed where - ongoing.	March 2013
Achieve and or exceed 1:1 match funding ratio with Sustainable Development Fund grants.	1:1	4.1:1 (Ratio exceeded)	1:1
Achieve The Green Valleys Service Level Agreement work targets for hydro power, community woodland, local food, carbon reduction and biodiversity.	Detail in Service Level Agreement	Targets achieved.	March 2013
Deliver a Social Inclusion and Child Poverty Strategy and Action Plan.	Detail in 2011-2012 Action Plan.	Achieved.	Details in the Social Inclusion and Child Poverty Action Plan including the increase numbers of children in poverty attending events.
Increase numbers of children and families in poverty benefiting from the National Park.	N/A	N/A. Child poverty is a new area of work for 2012 onward.	
Maintain Environmental Management System – 3% CO2 reductions.	3%	Reduced 8% to March 2011. Figures not yet available for 2011- 2012	3% CO2 reductions
**Total number of participants (students/teachers/assistants) receiving education messages from National Park Officers.	4,300	5852	5,000
**Average time each participant spends with Officers of the Education Service experiencing National Park messages.	2.5 hours	3.35 hours	2.5 hours
**Number of Participants receiving National Park messages through education in the medium of Welsh.	600	1026	600
**Level of inspiration.	10	10	Modal score of 10 on an 11 point scale.

Currently all the reported evidence indicates that we will meet these targets and in some cases exceed them but these are relatively narrow and the study has found that we are delivering on both inspiration and benefit on a much wider scale. This first recommendation arises as a direct result of the evidence given by officers either in writing or verbally.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: Officers need to take responsibility for recognising that where they may not have direct KPIs, that they do have relevant data to demonstrate delivery of an objective.**

**The measures of success should be more widely linked across NPA departments to ensure a more robust capturing of existing data for any improvement objective. This would serve to enhance the roles of all departments in delivering this particular objective and meeting our secondary purpose and statutory duty. This should include perhaps a central storage place for all surveys so scrutiny panels can draw on this for future reviews whilst taking into account any Data Protection or Privacy constraints.**

### 3 Methodology

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Some of the techniques used evolved from those originally proposed at the beginning of the study. Rather than set up more formal evidence gathering sessions, members of the group together with NPA staff facilitated a series of sessions with external organisations. Any opportunities to use existing meetings were taken up<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the following data gathering methods were used:

- A review of existing surveys undertaken by the Authority<sup>5</sup>
- An on-line *Survey Monkey* survey for NP residents was used for the first time. The scrutiny panel worked together to devise 3 simplified questions based on the original questions the study would address.

These were:

1. *Do you feel that you benefit from living in the National Park - if so, please tell us how?*
2. *Does living in the National Park inspire you in any way - if so, please tell us how?*
3. *Do you think that the work of the National Park Authority has any effect on whether you are inspired or benefit? (For a list of services that the Brecon Beacons National Park provides please go to the scrutiny page on our website at [www.breconbeacons.org/scrutiny](http://www.breconbeacons.org/scrutiny) and take a look at 'background information')*

The questionnaire used a Post Code filter to ensure that respondents were from within or very close to the NP boundaries.

The survey was heavily promoted via press releases, Facebook, Twitter and on the NPA website. As part of this survey, but used also in meetings and group sessions, officers developed a brief list of NPA services<sup>6</sup>.

- A series of interviews with groups of NPA officers at which both NPA members and external panel members were present.
- A short questionnaire sent to key officers which asked the following questions:

1. *What do you think has changed as a result of your (Dept.) activities?*
  - a. *If things have changed - what impact that change has had?*
  - b. *Has it made a difference and in what way?*
2. *How do you think communities have benefitted from your activities? What evidence do you have to support this?*
3. *What evidence do you have that your work has encouraged / inspired local communities to undertake different / more / further activities?*

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<sup>4</sup> A full list of all meetings and visits can be found in Annex 3

<sup>5</sup> A list of surveys reviewed for this study can be found at Annex 4

<sup>6</sup> For a list of NPA services referred to in this study see Annex 5. Note: this is by no means a full list of the services delivered by the NPA but focuses on those services which have the potential to provide direct inspiration and benefit.

4. *If you do not do this already - how do you think we might capture some of this anecdotal evidence in the future?*
5. *How do you think we could make better use of any anecdotal evidence?*

This questionnaire served a double purpose – firstly to allow officers to prepare for the evidence hearing and secondly to allow those officers unable to attend the evidence gathering sessions to let the panel have their views.

## **Conclusions**

A large amount of data was gathered from these various sources which did pose a considerable challenge to filter. It has to be said that of those officers not attending the evidence gathering not all responded in writing, some needed several prompts before any information was received. However, it should be noted that officers do have a full workload and many were better able to respond when presented with a short relevant amount of text to comment on as needed at the report stage.

The methods used were very helpful in allowing us to interact with both existing networks and groups of people with whom we do not necessarily have regular contact.

The on-line survey yielded a reasonable response and is a method that could be used relatively simply in future studies, particularly as the public gets more used to this kind of engagement. There may also be future opportunities for using social media as another engagement tool within our scrutiny process.

**LEARNING POINT 1: Gathering much of the data in written format made presenting it simpler.**

**LEARNING POINT 2: There are opportunities for using social media as a consultation tool in future studies**

## 4 Definition of inspiration and benefit for the purposes of this study

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This was one of the major challenges facing the Scrutiny Panel. It is easy to use words like inspiration and benefit when describing what we do however we need to focus much more clearly on what exactly we mean by them. The following definitions only really emerged after the scrutiny study was well underway and were themselves subject to quite a lot of intense discussion not only amongst the panel members but staff and external bodies also.

The following definitions have been used for the purposes of this study:

### 4.1 Scrutiny Study definition of Inspiration

**Someone is deemed to have been inspired when the inspiration in whatever form leads to a creative action as a consequence.**

e.g. I see a view – I am inspired to paint a picture, get involved in conservation activities, volunteer for something, write about it, drive to the same point again to see the view on as different day, take a photo to record my memory.

e.g. I experience an activity – I go on to try out further activities, I return to have another go, I tell others about it and encourage them to try it out, I look for other similar activities to join in, I write / tweet / email / Facebook about the experience

e.g. I take my dog out at least twice a day because I need my 'fix' of `the Black Mountains and the Beacons. I am conscious that I am visibly smiling when the view is particularly clear or when the mountains are covered in snow, or have turned pink as a result of the sunset or are full of foreboding with threatening clouds and storms. I feel my creative juices are stimulated and I return home energised to do whatever I decide to do.

### 4.2 Scrutiny Study definition of Benefit

**Something that tends to increase well-being, worth or value. It could be emotional, personal, material, social or environmental. It should be recognised that any judgment or perception of individual benefit will always contain an element of subjectivity.**

### 4.3 Wellbeing

Inextricably linked to both definitions is the concept of wellbeing which offers its own challenges. Many people during the various session we ran as part of the study mentioned feelings of well being as integral to their feelings of inspiration and benefit. In arriving at the two definitions above it was clear that wellbeing could not be excluded in either case. The following diagram from the Health and Wellbeing UK website offers a useful visual explanation of the concept of wellbeing.

## What is Wellbeing?



### **Wellbeing is different from Healthy - the absence of disease.**

It is keeping in balance the physical, psychological, social, environmental, and economic factors which affect all of us in our busy lives. If one of these areas is out of balance, and disturbed then our overall wellbeing is affected and we need to do something about it.

The sense of wellbeing linked to inspiration and benefit is clearly illustrated in a response received in the on-line survey;

*“Mountains have a sense of scale, grandeur and majesty; rolling hills a gentleness that soothes. The national park has both in equal measure and my soul is lifted by both. The flora and fauna bring great, great pleasure. I know my well-being benefits hugely from being able to simply look and take in the wonderful vistas that are on display on any half-decent weather day. But even when storm clouds beckon the mountains provide a wonderful backdrop as the raw power of nature is unleashed. Without having to leave civilisation, we residents of the national park can find sanctuary away from many of societies' misguided values and explore our relationships with nature. For me the soul is not stirred so profoundly as when I am in an area that prioritises the natural environment above all other considerations.”*

**LEARNING POINT 3: Words such as inspiration and benefit can be profoundly emotive and as such can mean many different things to different people both within the NPA and to our partner organisations. This should not prevent us from using them, however, in future if such emotive / descriptive words are to be used in our Improvement Objectives we need to be clear as to how we are using them and set out the scope of such terms (to avoid the possibility of a narrower definition missing capture of additional unintended but beneficial outcomes in line with NPMP aims) before using them. This would make the setting of both output and outcome measures more relevant and cross cutting.**

## 5 Evidence

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In this section the information gathered during the study will be set out under the six questions we set ourselves at the beginning of the study:

1. *What is the NPA role in delivering inspiration and benefit? How does our interface with people help / hinder this?*
2. *How well are we are delivering our Corporate Objectives?*
3. *How do people get inspiration and benefit as a direct result of NP services / activities*
4. *In what ways can we demonstrate that people recognise the links between our activities and their benefit?*
5. *What do people understand / see as the role of NPA in providing opportunities for inspiration and benefit now and in the future?*
6. *How are NP policies and Authority direction helping people benefit and be inspired?*

As the study has progressed it is clear that the evidence gathered often addresses more than a single question. This in itself is a learning point to take from this particular study – that when setting out the remit of a scrutiny study, we need to be very mindful of the initial questions the study is designed to answer. However, while questions and scope of the study need to be focused, it is important to remember that there is still benefits to be gained through the ‘extra information’ that we receive even if not directly related to the scrutiny study in question.

The questions we initially set ourselves to answer were set before we had a clear working definition of what we mean by both inspiration and benefit. Had we had these definitions initially, the questions we posed might have been worded differently but it should be recognised that the scrutiny process is still developing and each study undertaken adds to our working methodology and to the way in which the NP not only scrutinises its activities but the ways in which it undertakes its activities. The scrutiny process is as much about identifying suitable processes as it is about determining whether or not we have done what we said we would do in any area of work.

In this section we have used case studies, quoted widely from responses received and gathered anecdotal evidence to build our answers to each question. Contained within the Annexes to this report is much more additional information to add to our findings but which to include would have made this report far too unwieldy.

### **Measures of success**

**In terms of the table of actions and our measures of success as directly reported on in Ffynnon – see page 8, it is clear that we will deliver on all the measures, exceeding some and maintaining our high standards in others.**

## **5.1 Answering the scrutiny questions**

### **5.1.1 What is the NPA role in delivering inspiration and benefit? How does our interface with people help / hinder this?**

The NPA has a very powerful role in undertaking a range of actions that clearly deliver inspiration and benefit. This report includes a number of specific programmes and activities as examples. It is not an exhaustive list by any means but gives a flavour of the ways in which people living within the NP gain from doing so. It is also fair to say that those who do not interact directly with the NPA have little or no appreciation of the ways in which they benefit by our actions in managing a protected landscape – for example for some, the planning system is seen as a stifling mechanism but without it the landscape so much appreciated by both visitors and residents alike might look very different.

What is also clear is that while we have a very good relationship with certain sectors and within certain networks, as far as the wider public are concerned we still have and will always have more work to do. This was evidenced by the on-line survey where a simple analysis of the positive and negative comments overall showed that of the 78 responses received, 53% were outright positive in their views, 12% contained both positive and negative comments while 36% were completely negative. However it should be noted that 5 respondents simply put no across all columns and did not provide any form of additional reasoning which makes it impossible to analyse the reasons for the negativity other than a desire to express some general dissatisfaction simply because it is the NPA. Once these responses are removed, the percentage of negative comments falls to 31.5%.

Where people have expressed opinions, the following points encapsulate the main reasons for some of the negative answers.

- The natural beauty would exist whether or not the NP was here
- The difficulties of sustaining a business within the NP
- The perceived restrictive planning system
- The alleged unaccountability and governance of the NPA

This last issue is dealt with elsewhere in this report however, it should be noted that there have been recorded improvements within the planning system over the past 5 years. The people directly affected (planning applicants, agents, community councils, partner organizations etc) are aware of this and have benefited but for the general public, who may not ever have direct contact with us, they will always default to what they have heard from friends and neighbours (good or bad comments) and the perception that the NPA is a remote body despite the fact that all major meetings are now streamed live through our website<sup>7</sup> and are always available a few days later as an archived webcast . We need to continue to deliver and promote good service and gradually perception may change. Positive news stories such as Dark Skies can be a powerful tool to change people's perception about the benefits of living where they do.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.breconbeacons.public-i.tv/core/> to view the service

Where people have expressed opinions, the following points encapsulate the main reasons for some of the positive answers.

- The beauty and majesty of the landscape
- The fact that it is a protected landscape and all that entails
- The ability to be able to walk, cycle, and ride through the landscape along PROWs and bridleways
- Provides inspiration for artists, writers and photographers
- The information available about the landscape
- Sense of community and belonging

These points are also broadly echoed in feedback received from all of the consultation sessions.

### **How does our interface with people help / hinder this?**

Public perceptions of the NPA certainly influence our ability to help people. One of the first pilot scrutiny studies (Sept 2011) focused on an aspect of our Sustainable Development Fund. Of those interviewed, visited and who gave evidence to the scrutiny committee in this earlier study, all were very supportive and could clearly see the enduring benefits of such a fund within their communities. Likewise within this current study, comments received from tourism businesses could clearly identify benefits from their involvement with the Collabor8 and Rural Alliances programmes.

*“The Park has inspired us to form a local tourism group & host our own Dark Sky event to launch our own Dark Sky Discovery Site”*

*“Helpful and involved local communities”*

*“Dear National Park Authority – just some help for our young entrepreneurs who want to run before they can walk. They are full of ideas – making money – some good ideas. Draw them in the way we as tourist operators have been. No they can’t have the biggest unit / shed as it is an eyesore but they can work with you – many thanks”*

*“Ambassador scheme has been excellent innovation”*

*“Ambassador scheme – communication with other local businesses”*

*“Makes us more aware what’s around (events / scenery / business)”*

In contrast those who have felt frustrations in the past with our planning system still appear to cling to those views despite the clear evidence to the contrary.

*“Their useless planning methods slows down the process and delays employment.”*

While some recognise the frustrations of the planning system they still feel

aggrieved.

*“Open days for planners to visit businesses (tourism) in Park to see how they operate and the challenges they face”*

Others have succinctly summed up the critical balancing act the NPA must undertake to fulfil its primary purposes but also fulfil its duty.

*“Planning in particular is both too tight and not quite tight enough, I feel. Minor beneficial projects can get held up for years, at great expense, whilst other projects seem to get nodded through despite dubious benefit.”*

It should be noted that the NPA is ultimately bound by the Sandford Principle which states “Where irreconcilable conflicts exist between conservation and public enjoyment, then conservation interest should take priority”

**In other words:** If there is a conflict between protecting the environment and people's enjoyment, that can't be resolved by management, then the environment is more important and comes first.

*“The National Park Authority should control planning in the Park area, not to stop development but to ensure that it does not destroy the natural environment”*

**Conclusion:** it is clear that the NPA has a critical role in whether or not people living within the NP boundaries feel either inspired or recognise the benefits. Certainly through our funding schemes and through our work with the tourism sector it is clear that people are aware of our work and the benefits it provides for them and while they may still remain critical of some aspects of our work, they have a much greater understanding of the reasons behind our actions.

What is also clear is that perceptions of the NP and the NPA are clearly influenced by the manner in which we interface with them. It is clear that planning and how it is perceived will remain a particular challenge for us both positive and negative. Suggestions made that planners get out and visit particularly tourism operators might do much to dispel existing perceptions and prejudices. However, it should be recognised that while this is desirable it needs to be balanced against the officer workloads and the delivery of a good planning service.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Working with the Communications and PR Department, the planning department gives some thought as to how it might increase interaction with the public, particularly with the business sectors, through the Rural Alliances Programme and other networks, to promote understanding of the planning processes and regulation that governs how the NPA must manage its planning function. However, this should not be to the detriment of planning service delivery.**

### 5.1.2 How well are we are delivering our Corporate Objectives?

For the past couple of years BBNPA has been developing and implementing the Results Based Accountability methodology (RBA) to develop and measure its agreed corporate objectives. RBA looks at **why are we doing it, what**

**are we going to do with it, will anyone be better off as a result** – and does the cost justify the potential outcomes. This approach could usefully be applied to any of our ‘customer’ surveys. Do these surveys link into our corporate objectives - the ‘nice to know’ on its own is not sufficient a reason to measure.

While it is accepted that we need to take a proportionate approach both to the gathering of and uses of data and evidence in all its forms we do need to maximize the value of such information gathering to demonstrate (or not) that we are delivering on Corporate Objectives. The scrutiny process can be usefully used to identify the gaps, officers need to consider this when they develop PIs.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: We introduce Results Based Accountability methodology for all external surveys and data collection currently undertaken to ensure:**

- **Relevance to delivery of our Corporate Objectives – how useful is it?**
- **How this data or evidence could be further/better used to evidence performance across all our objectives – what we do with it?**
- **The data gathered will measure outcomes – is anyone better off as a result?**
- **Assess the resources to collect the data required versus the end usefulness of the data – is it cost effective?**
- **Shelf life – how often will it need updating?**

**Identify areas where we might have insufficient data – where the gaps are, then set priorities for the collection and use of data that address the above points.**

**Create a central point where all survey data can be stored providing a resource for all NPA staff.**

One of the key issues that this scrutiny study identified is that the NPA, as do many other organisations, collects substantial amounts of data in the form of surveys, anecdotal feedback, visitor comments, performance measuring, planning statistics, complaints and compliments etc. It is what the Authority does with this information that has been of interest. In our questioning and discussions with various members of staff we found that the NPA seldom makes full use of data collected outside the immediate department collecting it (ensuring that the requirements of the Data Protection Act are met). It is clear that in some cases, surveys and anecdotal evidence have clearly demonstrated that we are delivering this particular corporate objective but we currently do not have effective ways of allowing this data to contribute to the evidence base to demonstrate this.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: The Ffynnon system has the capacity to allow the addition of supporting data. Officers investigate methods of ensuring that relevant data / results from our various surveys can be added as supporting documents on the Ffynnon system to further evidence our set performance measures. All those undertaking surveys are encouraged to add this data as part of the general survey process.**

**Webcasting** As part of its move for transparency and openness, BBNPA began public webcasting its main meetings - National Park Authority meetings, Planning and Rights of Way (PAROW) and Audit and Scrutiny (ASC) meetings in April 2012. The table below sets out the number of ‘hits’ to the webcasting up to the end of February 2013.

	Mtgs	Hits	TOTAL		AVERAGE	
			Live	Archive	Live	Archive
NPA	5	1739	193	1546	39	309
PAROW	7	1740	134	1606	19	229
ASC	6	1063	65	998	11	166
UBC/EGM	3	420	6	414	2	138
	<b>21</b>	<b>4962</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>4564</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>217</b>

Initially a pilot was run to assess reactions to the process and comments received from the pilot and subsequently included:

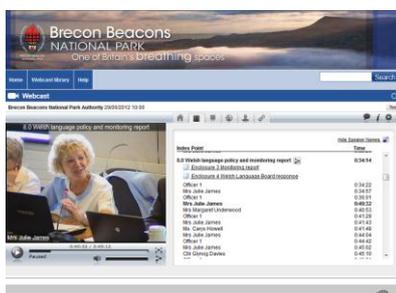
*“.. it’s excellent that the NPA are moving forward by showing meetings live on a webcast.... If the NPA continues with this it will benefit the communities and residents of the NPA area. It will also benefit the NPA with open and transparent governance.” From pilot web streaming.*

*“Congratulations on a very successful breakthrough in demonstrating to the public that National Parks are open, innovative and at the forefront of showing people what they do.” From pilot web streaming.*

*“A fascinating and very rewarding experience from this side of the screen”*

*“[we] watched the webcast for the Dark Skies part of the Agenda, and we both found it easy to follow. Sight and sound clear, and technically it worked perfectly well...If you continue I shall probably watch from time to time, and would do that rather than travel solely to be there.” NPA 29 June 2012*

*“The atmosphere in meetings has improved over the years and this gives officers the chance to understand, without feeling intimidated, the role and function of the NPA. No doubt these improvements are a direct consequence of Member training and other democratic improvements, for which the Authority has been recognised; all good. I suggest that being on camera will only improve the quality of debate and formality of proceedings and ease with which they might be chaired as the system beds in, which is to be welcomed.” – An NPA officer, 29 June 2012*



Comments have also been received particularly regarding the PAROW meetings - the webcasting system is much more convenient for members of the public who only wish to be present for a small part of the meeting – particularly if they live a considerable distance from NPA HQ.

*“looks really good, would have saved me a journey and several hours of my time today, it’s important to be able to see that the Authority is doing its job properly when dealing with our business” – first pilot of PAROW committee where the applicant attended the meeting to hear their application being determined*

In addition BBNPA has been able to share its experiences with other Authorities, some of whom have been to observe our meetings, as part of a wider move by the Welsh Government to encourage all authorities to webcast their meetings.

## **Conclusions**

In terms of fulfilling its corporate objectives, the Improvement Objective 6 that we are scrutinising only forms a part of the overall suite but it is clear that our actions regarding how we conduct our business are beginning to demonstrate clear benefits in terms of convenience and openness and transparency. Finally, we need to remain clear and focused on what data we gather and how this can help to demonstrate that we are doing what we said we would.

### **5.1.3 How do people get inspiration and benefit as a direct result of NP services / activities**

It is clear from the case studies and quotes below that our activities particularly in the areas of community, education, access and tourism are resulting in undeniable benefits for the people involved in them. It is also true to say that the majority of identified benefits occur where local businesses and communities directly interact with the NPA through its various schemes such as SDF, Rural Alliances, the various walking initiatives etc. What is not so apparent are the real and perceived benefits of our planning system. There was a very clear message from sessions with town and community councils that Planning /Development Control was a mixed blessing. The Local List<sup>8</sup> project in 2012/13 should help capture some of the positives of planning for the wider community. It should be recognised that this NPA is not alone in dealing with this kind of response, other NPAs and local authorities all face challenges in this area. The BBNPA has justly faced criticism in the past over our planning function but our processes and systems are much improved.

Planning is by default a tightly regulated and controlled system. We operate within the context of a protected landscape, our primary purposes and Welsh Government planning policies. We must also be mindful of our duty to foster the economic and social wellbeing within the NP. The checks and balances currently in place are leading to improving performance and improved systems. Added to this we have agreed a set of ‘excellence’ measures<sup>9</sup>, which will be used to evidence performance in the future.

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<sup>8</sup> For details of the Local List project see <http://www.breconbeacons.org/the-authority/communications-and-media/press-releases/archive/2012/april-2012/national-park-heritage-gems-sought-for-local-list/?searchterm=community%20councils>

<sup>9</sup> See Annex 6 for an extract from the NPA meeting of 17 Dec 2012 setting out the measures for excellence which were agreed at that meeting

## CASE STUDIES

**Sustainable Development Fund** In 2011/12 new communities have emerged with a desire to provide their communities with communal facilities on a sustainable basis including Ystradowen, Libanus and Hay on Wye. Other communities' projects reached fruition too. From Myddfai in the West to Talgarth in the East SDF has enabled regeneration projects to achieve their dreams. By providing relatively small amounts of funding which could then be used to develop their plans for the Village SoS competition both were successful and now have fantastic new facilities and businesses at the heart of their communities. An SDF investment of just over £100k has helped these two projects to a combined inward investment in excess of £1.5m. SDF continues to help financially, but also to support and advise these projects during their infancy.

The Myddfai project is now employing 5 people on a part-time basis, with 51 local art and craft makers receiving sales revenue or commissions from sales at the shop. In addition there are in excess of 60 people volunteering. At the Talgarth Mill the first year of operation has gone extremely well, with 4 part-time staff employed within the Mill itself. At the Café there are 4 'main players' and 5/6 ancillaries. The Craft shop, which has now been leased out to Beacons Crafts, has 5 staff working on a co-operative basis. In addition there are at least 20 active volunteers at the Mill. The next two years will be critical for these two fledgling social enterprises.

Renewable Energy installation & understanding of the potential across the Park continues to be extremely important and we have continued to support and advise "The Green Valleys" and "Talybont on Usk Energy". TGV (Hydro) Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of The Green Valleys CIC now employs six local people full time and one part time and are also using four local contractors for hydro installations. They anticipate purchasing £300,000 of supplies in the local area over the coming year. In addition the Community Interest Company itself employs 2 full time staff. SDF has been a major supporter of The Green Valleys CIC and will continue to work in partnership with the group.

SDF has supported "Llangattock Green Valleys" to increase its impact during implementation of their "Green Streets" programme and the latest community programme, the Local Energy Assessment Framework. Renewable energy and energy efficiency measures have been installed across the community leading to significant carbon savings, placing the village in a position to realise their ambition to become carbon neutral by 2015.

21 applications to the SDF were successful during 2011/12, with total grants of £158,456 awarded. These 21 applications have brought in match funding of £645,556. This represents a match funding ratio of 4.1:1.

### Quotes from SDF recipients

*"The SDF has helped us realise the environmental ambitions of the capital project, supported us in the promotion of the project and demonstrated an in depth understanding of the challenges a small community like Myddfai face, in its social and commercial regeneration aspirations. SDF also helped us to extend our network."*

*“The Greener Future project as a whole is ongoing and doing really well, and has definitely been well supported by the BBNPA Sustainability Funding you so kindly offered us. Your funding has enabled us to get the furniture side of the recycling up and running, and the Coordinator has also been the organiser of the vehicle deliveries and collections, all sales and receipting, and the tonnage records kept, along with the audit trail.”*

*“We’d never have got the project started without Sustainable Development Funding. For such a small group to have achieved this in such a small space of time is excellent.”*

*“The Sustainable Development Fund has not only helped increase business potential of Gegin Fach expanding choice to customers but has also given disabled people of Brecon the opportunity to openly demonstrate integration in the work place and the positive part they play in the economy of the town’.”*

**Dark Skies** As part of the Dark Sky project we have a comprehensive education and events programme aimed at local residents and school children for them to understand and enjoy this very special feature unique to the Brecon Beacons. Working with local organisations and societies, we are developing a specific Dark Sky education programme, education materials and organising at least 6 events per year. Dark Skies has tapped into the public’s fascination with astronomy and is proving a useful vehicle for community engagement (as witnessed by the Turning the Lights off event in Talybont on Usk.) It has also provided a very powerful vehicle for partnership working with the BBNP Society.

**Visitor Services** The National Park’s information centres and National Park Visitor Centre provide a valuable service and are targeting local residents as well – to give a comprehensive one stop shop approach to helping residents enjoy the range of attractions and events being held in the National Park which directly helps enhance their understanding and enjoyment of the Park and its recreational opportunities.

**Sustainable Tourism Partnership** The Partnership is now fully fledged and has stronger representation from the tourism/business sector (including but not limited to being externally chaired).

**Fforest Fawr Geopark** One of the key strengths of the NPA approach to the Geopark is the strong focus on community engagement. We work very closely with several communities within the Geopark (Coelbren, Abercrave, Brynaman are amongst the best examples) on projects which instil community pride and develop capacity to undertake other projects. The social history project in Coelbren and the locally produced film on Abercrave have both had the involvement of the Geopark Officer and helped to inspire residents of those communities. The Geopark has recently had its designation status revalidated for a further four years until 2016.

**National Park Ambassadors** We have now had 120 local tourism operators ‘graduate’ through our training scheme to become NP Ambassadors. The scheme is all about generating pride in the NP and giving local people/businesses the information to be able to share that pride with visitors. The scheme has been so

successful since its launch that we have now developed a Geopark Ambassador module – believed to be the first of its kind anywhere. We are developing Dark Skies Ambassador and Local Ambassador modules as well.

**Walkers are Welcome** The Walkers are Welcome award initiative began in 2007 to encourage towns and villages to be ‘welcoming to walkers’<sup>10</sup>. The scheme brings communities together and strengthens a destination’s reputation as a place where visitors can enjoy outdoor activities. The initiative also encourages its member destinations to maintain footpaths and facilities, contribute to local tourism plans and regeneration strategies and provide the opportunity to engage with fellow Walkers are Welcome towns and villages.

Abergavenny recently joined Talgarth, Crickhowell and Hay-on-Wye to become the 100<sup>th</sup> place in the UK to achieve the Walkers are Welcome. All these towns were supported through the accreditation process by Brecon Beacons National Park Authority through the Offa’s Country Partnership’s Walking with Offa project.

**Rural Alliances and Collabor8** COLLABOR8 was an EU programme designed to get local tourism businesses working together locally to improve the tourism offer. This was strongly based on sense of place and sustainability as key values of the project. We established or supported 15 such clusters and spent some €1.1 million doing so. All is coordinated by the Sustainable Tourism Partnership working under the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

Rural Alliances (RA) picks up from where COLLABOR8 took us. Increasingly members of the local community wanted to get involved in the tourism story. Mostly this was about helping the local economy to develop but some also felt effort should be put into managing the impacts of tourism on such things as car parking, local footpaths etc. The key concept of RA is to make Alliances between the business and community sectors and get them raising the vibrancy of the community. In the National park, this is being expressed through tourism. The work is only now getting established but it is going down very well locally with 8 alliances being developed currently. People are keen to get involved!

Both programmes have and do support the Ambassador scheme (120+ members) and the Green Tourism Business Scheme (43 members) in expressing the purposes of the National Park designation through their businesses. Those with both accreditations become Champions.

As part of the RA programme, one of the partners is developing a Rural Vibrancy Measuring tool.

### **Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index**

The key issue of the Rural Alliances project is the creation of Business-Community Alliances to enhance rural vibrancy. Alliance building is seen as one tool (one of many) or strategy to increase rural vibrancy. But what is rural vibrancy? How can it be measured and what tools exist to enhance rural vibrancy? The draft paper prepared by Philipps-

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<sup>10</sup> Information about the scheme itself, can be found at [www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk](http://www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk)

Universität, Marburg brings together the first results of the Rural Alliances project concerning these questions. One result of this process is a common understanding of rural vibrancy. This common understanding manifests in the following working definition:

**‘Rural Vibrancy’ describes the nature of a rural community, which is characterized by active involvement and the creative, dynamic interaction of people from different groupings with the capacity to create common objectives and to act jointly to develop their community.**

Vibrant rural communities follow the aim to develop and/or maintain social, cultural and economic benefit, adapt to change and improve quality of life for everyone within the community.

Based on the definition of rural vibrancy, the evaluation of the vibrancy questionnaires and the workshops on vibrancy, Fig. 1 illustrates the main discussion topics (and includes a list of categories that constitute the Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index elements.

The next stage in the project is to test the “usability” of this index with an alliance.



Fig. 1: Categories that constitute the Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index elements

This Index might prove a useful tool for measuring future work.

**PROW** The rights of way network is the largest visitor attraction in the National Park and is the foundation of the area’s tourism income. It provides locals and visitors with the means to explore the National Park and to make journeys that are essential to their everyday lives in a sustainable way. The rights of way network provides opportunities to interact with the landscape and environment of the National Park and is key to the enjoyment of its special qualities. For anyone that is inspired by the National Park or seeks further inspiration from this special place the rights of way network is an ideal vehicle to encourage further enjoyment and understanding.

## Conclusions

What is clear from this small sample of case studies is that while the NPA can deliver clear benefits from its services, it is now having an increasingly important role as a facilitator, encouraging others to get involved and recognising that we cannot deliver everything ourselves. This empowering role – we cannot do it all but can actively help communities realise their aspirations, is clearly demonstrated in many of the responses we have had.

This empowering / facilitation role is not necessarily depending only on funding schemes. What is clearly evident and has been illustrated in both the previous SDF and PROW studies is the value of the interaction between NPA officers and communities. From the CEO and Head of Planning visits to town and community councils to the wardens talking to members of the public, from officers on secondment to NPA members, this interaction is a critical part of our work and should be recognised at all levels within the NPA.

A bit of funding and a lot of officer support goes a long way. As the funding ration of SDF has illustrated, for every £1 in grant aid we are able to provide, recipients are on average able to lever in an additional £2-4 in match funding from other sources.

**RECOMMENDATION 5: The practicalities of using the Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index as a tool to measure the benefits of NPA activities in the round is investigated.**

**RECOMMENDATION 6: CMT considers how the ethos of customer service can be further reinforced to members and all staff who have an impact on customer service delivery, at every level within the organisation, to aid our interaction with those who live and work within the NP boundaries.**

### 5.1.4 In what ways can we demonstrate that people recognise the links between our activities and their benefit?

As a first step we needed to set out a list of the activities we undertake. Each department was asked to identify services and activities they provide that have an element of public benefit. This comprehensive list was then refined into a format suitable for use in our external consultations.<sup>11</sup>

This proved a useful exercise in itself, as it raised awareness amongst those officers not directly engaged in frontline services that much of the work they undertake has an element of public benefit.

One of the results of using this list as a prompt both in the sessions we ran and as part of the on-line survey was the number of people who were surprised at the range of services we undertake. Officers running the sessions particularly noted that those they were working with commented on

*“I don't think National Park promotes itself as I was unaware of some of the services before I visited the website.” Respondent to the on-line survey*

<sup>11</sup> See Annex 5 for the list

the range of activities the NP undertakes.

This highlights a real issue for us. The lack of understanding on our role and what we are actually able to resolve problems and what is the responsibility of other agencies was highlighted in the Waterfalls Area and resulted in an officer producing a very useful 'contacts' guide for members of the South Wales Outdoor Activities Providers Group (SWOAPG)<sup>12</sup>. While it is accepted that almost as soon as contacts list are produced, they very quickly can become 'out of date', people need to be able to contact the relevant person or department (be it the BBNPA or another public body) as quickly as possible. An examination of the initial pages of the BBNP website did not reveal any information about what we are directly responsible for. The drop down menus are useful if you know the topic you are searching for however, as a service to the public, the provision of a clear list of what we are or are not responsible for would be a beneficial addition to the website front page as a clear 'one click' reference point.

This use of clear reference points was borne out by comments received from NPA Reception staff:

*"Visitors to the Office are also much more grateful of the help that we as Receptionists offer as we always try our best to help them with their queries and give them as much information as possible in a polite and cautious manner.*

*.....over the past few years we as Receptionists have found that customer attitude to staff and the Authority have changed and this for the better.*

*We no longer have the days where members of the public come in and make threatening/aggressive comments towards us. .... sometimes we do have people who are agitated or frustrated for one reason or another but in general it is much better. We believe that it is down a number of factors such as:*

*The Authority being more open and transparent to members of the public, evidence of this is via the webcasting of committee meetings.*

*The Planning department being more helpful should we say when members of the public come in asking for help. The girls on the helpdesk are knowledgeable and are always ready to pop down if they can to speak to members of the public who have come in asking for general advice or asking to see a specific planner without an appointment."*

**RECOMMENDATION 7: Providing a list of our direct responsibilities and a 'who does what' contact list as part of the BBNP website front page should be undertaken and also provided to all front line staff.**

There are certain areas of our work where we have clear evidence that people recognise the benefits of our work. These are demonstrated by comments received as part of this study and evidence provided by officers. These are a

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<sup>12</sup> See Annex 7 for full contacts list

sample:

### **Town and Community Council Charter**

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority became the first Welsh National Park to develop and sign a Town and Community Council Charter with local councils.

The charter and accompanying action plan look to strengthen and improve the Authority's working relationships with town and community councils from across the National Park.

This Town and Community Council Charter is the result of two years of consultation with local councils, and the goals of the Charter's action plan run through to the end of April 2013. Early feedback from local councils has been positive, with councillors saying face-to-face contact with Authority officers has helped to develop better working relationships.

*Mair Stephens, Chair of One Voice Wales, said: "We're delighted that this historic Town and Community Council Charter has come together. I really think it's the way forward for all National Parks, and it's great to see partnership working being delivered with such enthusiasm."*

The Charter and the associated action plan detail how the National Park Authority and town and community councils will work better together across a range of areas to benefit local communities. This work is the beginning to building better relationships and mutual understanding. Suggestions for the future have included the offer of planning training for community councillors to assist them in looking at and commenting on planning applications.

### **Rights of Way**

The rights of way network is the largest visitor attraction in the National Park and is the foundation of the area's tourism income. It provides locals and visitors with the means to explore the National Park and to make journeys that are essential to their everyday lives in a sustainable way.

The rights of way network provides opportunities to interact with the landscape and environment of the National Park and is key to the enjoyment of its special qualities. For anyone that is inspired by the National Park or seeks further inspiration from this special place the rights of way network is an ideal vehicle to encourage further enjoyment and understanding.

*I have been inspired by the variety of walks in BBNP over 30 years. At weekends when I was younger with a stressful professional life, a walk in the hills for a day would set me up for the whole week*

### **Education and Skills activities**

Last year's comments received about the **Rural skills training** included:

*'Enjoyed. Gave me something to wake up for and look forward to'*

*"I had an absolutely fantastic time and learned a lot more than I could fit on the sheets from the magnificent tutors. Please add an extra smiley face with a larger smile as the course and people running it are amazing. Thank you for the fine opportunity" (Gwalia housing)*



The current BBNPA Education Strategy takes the view (backed up by relevant research) that the NPA should prioritise unique learning experiences. This has meant a move away from visits to schools and efforts have been re-directed to encourage and support schools wishing to visit the National Park and have an enjoyable and meaningful experience. These experiences have been structured around the curriculum and also around communicating National Park messages. In 2008 the Curriculum was updated to specifically include National Parks at the Key Stage 2 (primary) school level and we have done much to support this learning.

From 2008 until 2010 the Education Manager worked on a project with all the UK's Education Managers on developing measures to reflect what National Park education services are about and deliver. Using the NP activities and fitting them into the Kellogg Foundation's logic model it was possible to develop the measures<sup>13</sup>

The big challenge was getting everyone at all levels within the organisation to believe that if teachers and young people were inspired by the park that was just as valuable (perhaps more valuable and meaningful) than them being satisfied with a visit. In reality though discussions as a group began with the image on the right.

Trials of data collection were made and data tested for reliability of the measures. The measure selected is one of 'Inspiration' as this is what we are about – inspiring people to care about and for our National Parks. Research also shows that inspired young people learn, have meaningful experiences and are more likely to become connected.



In order to measure inspiration teachers/group leaders were asked whether their students/learners were inspired by the National Park. In the last 2 years results have consistently shown a score of 10 on an 11 point Likert scale. Teachers continue to report that their learners were inspired by the National Park through their visit at a score of 10 points on an 11 point scale.

The Authority's Education Service offsets its costs at an average of 4:1 ratio, so for every £4 spent by The Authority on the Education Service, £1 is recovered and used to offset the cost of delivering the service.

### **Volunteering opportunities**

The Volunteers are now coordinated by the Authorities first dedicated member of staff, which is the first time a coordinator has been appointed to manage volunteers in general rather than for the previous project related post of Car Park Watch Coordinator. The Authority now works with volunteers in more diverse roles and throughout more aspects of the Authority's work than ever before.

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<sup>13</sup> See Annex 8 for the methodology for developing PIs for NP Education Services.

Numbers of volunteers have increased from 97 in 10-11 to 141<sup>14</sup> currently as NPA has developed the range of opportunities available for volunteering. We now actively recruit volunteers for specific projects using role profiles and in asking for a specific commitment of time, in reciprocation of the time invested by volunteers we in build training days, knowledge exchange, feedback sessions and social time to hopefully make volunteers feel valued and also listened to, and actively encourage the development of volunteer projects as a joint process between project staff and volunteers. There is a dedicated website page<sup>15</sup> for anyone looking to volunteer with the NP and good practice guidelines and a volunteering policy have been developed to ensure that volunteers gain the maximum benefit from their volunteering experience.

## Conclusion

As shown by the above, BBNPA can evidence many examples of links between our activities and benefits to people living and working within the NP boundaries. However what is not so clear is whether or not the majority of local residents clearly make the links between our activities and their benefits. Once again – where we have positive interaction with communities, the ability of the NP to demonstrate the benefits and communities to recognise these benefits is much easier to evidence i.e. The National Park Ambassadors Scheme, the Beacons Bus, the Mosaic project, funding schemes, Rural Skills and business skills training, managing ROW and providing information and interpretation across the NP.

We have certainly improved how we interact with our local communities both through the NPMP and LDP processes, the Local Lists work, SEWOPG, various forums and the meetings with the town and community councils. While these endeavours may be regarded as time consuming at a time when our resources are stretched to the limit, it is nevertheless showing clear benefit to the NPA to resource and maintain these valuable links.

### 5.1.5 What do people understand / see as the role of NPA in providing opportunities for inspiration and benefit now and in the future?

This is an interesting question to address fully – it is clear that in the minds of the majority of respondents to the on-line survey that planning was an important function of the NP and one that should remain fully within its control. Planning also came up as an important topic at sessions with town and community councils. There was a very vocal minority for whom the planning system is seen as stifling progress and an obstacle to business.

*“NPA is a vital mechanism for keeping balance over diverse populations and needs in NP. I might not always agree with them, but appreciate their role.”  
Respondent in the on-line survey*

The NP will never be able to satisfy everyone. One example from the on-line survey clearly illustrated the point. However we must never give up trying. Some of the

*“it is a corrupt self serving bureaucratic expense we cannot afford ... they add delays and expense to planning issues don't enforce planning conditions and respond to spurious complaints but not to real issues.”  
Respondent to the on-line survey*

<sup>14</sup> Correct at time of writing

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.breconbeacons.org/the-authority/volunteering>

comments in the on-line survey clearly demonstrated that a reputation once lost is very difficult to regain.

This can be clearly contrasted with a number of recent internal and external audits undertaken. The latest on governance<sup>16</sup> has given the NPA the highest level of assurance for its performance – an achievement rarely given. There has also been clear indication from Welsh Audit Office (WAO) that the NPA has greatly improved its performance both in planning and operations from a difficult position 6 years ago.

*This assessment is a good measure of governance practiced at the Authority, the interim Improvement Assessment Letter received from the Wales Audit Office on 28 August 2012 concluded that 'The Authority has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance'. Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Internal Audit Report 2012/13 Corporate Governance and Risk Management - Deloitte*

**RECOMMENDATION 8: Working with the Communications and PR department, promoting understanding of a quality planning service more widely within the NP to increase general levels of awareness and understanding should be investigated. It is accepted that we will never satisfy all diverse interests, however, the NPA needs to make more of the direct and indirect benefits of operating a quality planning system.**

**This and RECOMMENDATION 2 should be considered in tandem.**

#### **5.1.6 How are NP policies and Authority direction helping people benefit and be inspired?**

##### **Award winning activities externally**

There has been a clear recognition over the past few years that the NPA needs to adopt much more of a supporting / facilitating role. We do not have the resources either financially or in staff to undertake everything ourselves. There is clear evidence that this supporting role can reward communities. All the following awards have been achieved with help both financial and in-kind from BBNPA:

- Dark Skies designation – only the 5<sup>th</sup> such area in the world achieved in partnership with the Park Society received £4950 from SDF
- Talgarth and Myddfai national winners of BBC Village SoS scheme – Talgarth received £453,000 and Myddfai received £400,000. Both winners also received considerable officer support as well as £46,000 and £99,192 respectively from the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)
- The Green Valleys – one of three national winners of the NESTA Big Green Challenge, winning a £300,000 share of £1m – officer support, officer secondment and financial investment totalling £41,054 from SDF

<sup>16</sup> see Annex 9 for full report

- and latterly from the Conservation and Community Grant Fund
- Llangattock village – awarded £105,000 as a winner of the British Gas Green Streets
- Walkers are Welcome accreditation - Abergavenny recently joined Talgarth, Crickhowell and Hay-on-Wye to become the 100<sup>th</sup> place in the UK to achieve the Walkers are Welcome. Again all the towns involved have received officer support.
- Geopark revalidation (2012)
- Revalidation of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (2012)
- The first Geopark to create and train Geopark Ambassadors
- 43 local businesses are now accredited through the Green Tourism Business Scheme facilitated by the NPA.
- Secured around £200,000 p.a. investment through SDF with £2,554,254 match funding levered in 4 years to the end of March 2012 and £1.2m from Collabor8 the Rural Alliances programme with an estimated £500,000 additional investment levered in both in-kind and financial investment as a result of the two programmes.

Internally we have also been looking at how to improve our performance. Over the past 4 years we have achieved:

- The Member Charter (2008) and the Advanced Member Charter (2011) for our induction, training and support for members
- Achieved Investors in People which was revalidated in 2011.
- Agreed new clearer processes for managing complaints and FOI requests
- Introduced the OneAp system for planning applications together with simpler on-line procedures for reporting suspected breaches of planning
- Completed our National Park Management Plan to which our activities and corporate objectives are now closely allied
- Achieved the highest consultation rate with Town and Community Councils in Wales when developing our LDP according to Planning Aid Wales
- Developed and introduced a scrutiny process to oversee aspects of our work which includes the involvement of external representatives and members of the public
- Developed and adopted a methodology for measuring excellence in planning

The BBNPA clearly now has a track record in assisting communities to develop be it through joint projects or enabling local initiatives. This is further ingrained in the organisational philosophy that we cannot undertake everything on our own. The NPA is here to deliver its purposes and duties but it can achieve much more, increased benefits and outcomes by furthering its partnership approach.

**RECOMMENDATION 9: Officers investigate how we ensure that our outward facing, accountability philosophy remains enshrined in all future policy making. This will in turn link into the development of methodologies to ensure that sustainable development remains at the heart of our decision making processes. While many of the fundamental changes taking place within the NPA in terms of its public facing persona such as**

**webcasting and use of social media will undoubtedly serve to highlight and increase public benefit from our services and activities, the fundamental question we need to be asking after ‘does it deliver our purposes and duties’ is ‘how will local people be better off’ as a result of the NPA undertaking the proposed course of action.**

**It is accepted that there will be occasions when the NPA has some very difficult decisions to make in the current tight economic times, nevertheless this question needs to be included within our deliberations.**

## **Conclusion**

What has become clear throughout the evidence gathering process, particularly amongst less senior officers, is the lack of understanding of the benefits and uses of the whole evaluation process. This appears to be in spite of the proactive work undertaken as part of developing the RBA processes with officers.

**RECOMMENDATION 10: A programme of briefing / awareness raising on the benefits and uses of evaluation is carried out with relevant staff across the NP authority.**

**This should be considered in tandem with RECOMMENDATIONS 1 & 3**

## **5.2 Officer Evidence**

Much of the evidence provided by officers has been included in other sections of this report. It should be noted that the amount we are able to use in the report does not fairly reflect the amount of information given to us by officers.

We held evidence hearings where officers could attend and give information on their particular areas. In order that officers could prepare for the hearings and to allow those who were unable to attend the hearings, we set out a series of questions:

**For areas affected by your area’s service delivery can you advise/ give evidence of :**

1. What do you think has changed as a result of your (Dept) activities?
  - a. If things have changed - what impact that change has had?
  - b. Has it made a difference and in what way?
2. How do you think communities have benefitted from your activities? What evidence do you have to support this?
3. What evidence do you have that your work has encouraged / inspired local communities to undertake different / more / further activities? (this can include communities of interest eg walking groups as well as geographical)





## Conclusion

Throughout the evidence gathering both internally and externally it has been clear that the amount and nature of the range of activities and services we undertake is not universally known about and understood. To a certain degree we appear to be hiding our light under a bushel. This was evidenced by the session run with local artists, comments received included:

*“Not enough lateral thinking about how to consult with the Park visitors”*

*“Maybe National Parks should make the public aware of all the regulations they have to adhere to?”*

*“The Park Authority seems rather dry, distant, unreachable to people who live in it.”*

*“Communication – often remote”*

*“Lack of communication”*

While the NPA does make use of press releases and has an increasing following on social media, we still appear to have an uphill and perhaps impossible task to reach all our residents. This does not mean that we should not continue to try. During the study, the suggestion that we should produce some form of paper newsletter was made several times. It is accepted that this will have both a time and financial resource implication for the NPA.

*“I think that an easily readable and informative newsletter should be made available in paper form to members of the public (suggest biannual) describing an updated overview of ‘Parks News’ (based on the one produced by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park)”*

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** The production of a biannual paper newsletter is investigated perhaps in conjunction with the other Welsh National Parks as part of a wider communications strategy for promoting BBNP.

In addition and recognising that web access is not universal within the NP – thought is given as to how the NPA might make use of notice boards in TICs, towns, villages and local facilities to promote the NP

## **6 Executive Summary & Prioritised Recommendations and learning points from this study**

### **Introduction**

This study posed some challenges for the panel, particularly in establishing clear definitions for the terms 'inspiration' and 'benefit'. How we gathered information gathering was also critical. Some of the techniques used evolved from the more formal ones originally proposed. Rather than set up formal evidence gathering sessions, members of the group together with NPA staff facilitated a series of sessions with external organisations. Any opportunities to use existing meetings and input from networks were taken up. While this did represent a time resource for those involved, the benefits to the study were clear.

The methods used were very helpful in allowing us to interact with both existing networks and groups of people with whom we do not necessarily have regular contact. This was the first study to actively involve external representatives and full acknowledgement should be given for their part in this study. This study has also served to help the NPA interact with some of those with whom it has not previously had much contact.

A large amount of data was gathered during the study which did pose a considerable challenge to filter. The on-line survey yielded a reasonable response and is a method that could be used relatively simply in future studies, particularly as the public gets more used to this kind of engagement. There may also be future opportunities for using social media as another engagement tool within our scrutiny process.

Throughout the evidence gathering both internally and externally it has been clear that the amount and nature of the range of activities and services we undertake is not universally known about and understood. To a certain degree we appear to be hiding our light under a bushel.

### **Meeting our targets**

Currently all the reported evidence indicates that we will meet the targets set within this objective and in some cases exceed them but these are relatively narrow and the study has found that we are delivering on both inspiration and benefit on a much wider scale. The challenge for us is to ensure that we use all the relevant data we do collect outside our specific PIs to add value to them in a manner that does not have serious resource implications for NPA.

### **Delivering inspiration and benefit**

It was clear from case studies examined that the NPA can and does deliver clear benefits from its services for local people. What was more difficult to measure was how much we directly influence levels of inspiration. From the varying responses we had it was clear that some felt they would be inspired whether we were here or not, while a small minority clearly felt they gained no inspiration from being within NP boundaries. However the majority did recognise the value of a protected landscape and our role in maintaining it. The only clear measure we have which directly related to inspiration is within the education programme. Here the evidence clearly shows that on a scale of

I-II where one is low and eleven is high – we are consistently achieving inspiration level scores of 10.

In terms of fulfilling corporate objectives, the Improvement Objective 6 only forms a part of the overall suite but it is clear that our actions regarding how we conduct our business are beginning to demonstrate clear benefits in terms of convenience and openness and transparency.

The role of the NPA as a facilitator, encouraging others to get involved and recognising that we cannot deliver everything ourselves is clearly increasingly important. This empowering role – we cannot do it all but can actively help communities realise their aspirations – is clearly demonstrated in many of the responses we have had.

This empowering / facilitation role is not necessarily depending only on funding schemes. What is clearly evident and has been illustrated in both the previous Sustainable Development Fund and Public Rights Of Way studies is the value of the interaction between NPA officers and members and communities. From the CEO and Head of Planning visits to town and community councils to the wardens talking to members of the public, from officers on secondment to the role of NPA members, this interaction is a critical part of our work and should be recognised at all levels within the NPA.

It is not easy to demonstrate whether or not the majority of local residents make clear links between our activities and their benefits. Where we already have positive interaction with communities, the ability of the NPA to demonstrate the benefits and communities to recognise these benefits is much easier to evidence i.e. The National Park Ambassadors Scheme, the Beacons Bus, the Mosaic project, funding schemes, Rural Skills and business skills training, managing ROW and providing information and interpretation across the NP.

Using our resources both in officer time and funding can be very productive in delivering tangible benefits. As the funding ration of SDF has illustrated, for every £1 in grant aid we are able to provide, recipients are on average able to lever in an additional £2-4 in match funding from other sources.

We have certainly improved how we interact with our local communities both through the NPMP and LDP processes, the Local Lists work, South East Wales Outdoor Activities Providers Group, various forums and the meetings with the town and community councils. While these endeavours may be regarded as time consuming at a time when our resources are stretched to the limit, it is nevertheless showing clear benefit to the NPA to resource and maintain these valuable links.

### **Issues**

What has become clear throughout the evidence gathering process, particularly amongst less senior officers, is the lack of understanding of the benefits and uses of the whole evaluation process. This appears to be in spite of the proactive work undertaken as part of developing the Results Based Accountability (RBA) processes with officers.

While the NPA does make use of press releases and has an increasing following on social media, we still appear to have an uphill and perhaps impossible task to reach all our residents. This does not mean that we should not continue to try. It is accepted that this will have both a time and financial resource implication for the NPA.

Finally, we need to remain clear and focuses on what data we gather and how this can help to demonstrate that we are doing what we said we would.

The following list of recommendations is drawn together from the report into a prioritised table.

<b><u>Number</u></b>	<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>	<b><u>Priority</u></b>
<b>1</b>	<p>Officers need to take responsibility for recognising that where they may not have direct KPIs, that they do have relevant data to demonstrate delivery of an objective.</p> <p>The measures of success should be more widely linked across NPA departments to ensure a more robust capturing of existing data for any improvement objective. This would serve to enhance the roles of all departments in delivering this particular objective and meeting our secondary purpose and statutory duty. This should include perhaps a central storage place for all surveys so scrutiny panels can draw on this for future reviews whilst taking into account any Data Protection or Privacy constraints.</p>	<b><u>High</u></b>
<b>2</b>	<p>Working with the Communications and PR Department, the planning department gives some thought as to how it might increase interaction with the public, particularly with the business sectors, through the Rural Alliances Programme and other networks, to promote understanding of the planning processes and regulation that governs how the NPA must manage its planning function. However, this should not be to the detriment of planning service delivery.</p>	<b><u>High</u></b>
<b>3</b>	<p>We introduce Results Based Accountability methodology for all external surveys and data collection currently undertaken to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance to delivery of our Corporate Objectives – how useful is it?</li> <li>• How this data or evidence could be further/better used to evidence performance across all our objectives – what we do with it?</li> <li>• The data gathered will measure outcomes – is anyone better off as a result?</li> <li>• Assess the resources to collect the data required versus the end usefulness of the data – is it cost</li> </ul>	<b><u>High</u></b>

	<p>effective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shelf life – how often will it need updating?</li> </ul> <p>Identify areas where we might have insufficient data – where the gaps are, then set priorities for the collection and use of data that address the above points.</p> <p>Create a central point where all survey data can be stored providing a resource for all NPA staff.</p>	
<b>4</b>	<p>The Ffynon system has the capacity to allow the addition of supporting data. Officers investigate methods of ensuring that relevant data / results from our various surveys to be added as supporting documents on the Ffynnon system to further evidence our set performance measures. All those undertaking surveys are encouraged to add this data as part of the general survey process.</p>	<b><u>High</u></b>
<b>5</b>	<p>The practicalities of using the Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index as a tool to measure the benefits of NPA activities in the round is investigated.</p>	<b><u>Low</u></b>
<b>6</b>	<p>CMT considers how the ethos of customer service can be further reinforced to members and all staff who have an impact on customer service delivery, at every level within the organisation, to aid our interaction with those who live and work within the NP boundaries.</p>	<b><u>Medium</u></b>
<b>7</b>	<p>Providing a list of our direct responsibilities and a ‘who does what’ contact list as part of the BBNP website front page should be undertaken and also provided to all front line staff.</p>	<b><u>Medium</u></b>
<b>8</b>	<p>Working with the Communications and PR department, promoting understanding of a quality planning service more widely within the NP to increase general levels of awareness and understanding should be investigated. It is accepted that we will never satisfy all diverse interests, however, the NPA needs to make more of the direct and indirect benefits of operating a quality planning system.</p> <p>This and RECOMMENDATION 2 should be considered in tandem.</p>	<b><u>High</u></b>

<p><b>9</b></p>	<p>Officers investigate how we ensure that our outward facing, accountability philosophy remains enshrined in all future policy making. This will in turn link into the development of methodologies to ensure that sustainable development remains at the heart of our decision making processes. While many of the fundamental changes taking place within the NPA in terms of its public facing persona such as webcasting and use of social media will undoubtedly serve to highlight and increase public benefit from our services and activities, the fundamental question we need to be asking after ‘does it deliver our purposes and duties’ is ‘how will local people be better off’ as a result of the NPA undertaking the proposed course of action.</p> <p>It is accepted that there will be occasions when the NPA has some very difficult decisions to make in current tight economic times, nevertheless this question needs to be included within our deliberations.</p>	<p><b><u>High</u></b></p>
<p><b>10</b></p>	<p>A programme of briefing / awareness raising on the benefits and uses of evaluation is carried out with relevant staff across the NP authority.</p> <p>This should be considered in tandem with RECOMMENDATIONS 1 &amp; 3</p>	<p><b><u>High</u></b></p>
<p><b>11</b></p>	<p>The production of a biannual paper newsletter is investigated perhaps in conjunction with the other Welsh National Parks as part of a wider communications strategy for promoting BBNP.</p> <p>In addition and recognising that web access is not universal within the NP – thought is given as to how the NPA might make use of notice boards in TICs, towns, villages and local facilities to promote the NP.</p>	<p><b><u>Medium</u></b></p>

**LEARNING POINT 1:** Gathering much of the data in written format made presenting it simpler.

**LEARNING POINT 2:** There are opportunities for using social media as a consultation tool in future studies

**LEARNING POINT 3:** Words such as inspiration and benefit can be profoundly emotive and as such can mean many different things to different people both within the NPA and to our partner organisations. This should not prevent us from using them, however, in future if such emotive / descriptive words are to be used in our Improvement Objectives we need to be clear as to how we are using them and set out the scope of such terms (to avoid the possibility of a narrower definition missing capture of additional unintended but beneficial outcomes in line with NPMP aims) before using them. This would make the setting of both output and outcome measures more relevant and cross cutting.

**LEARNING POINT 4:** Given the amount of information collected as part of this (and previous studies) and the restraints to using all of it as part of a report, we consider how this bulk of information might be used post individual scrutiny studies to ensure we gain maximum value from it and any learning not directly relating to the study topic is not lost.