

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

15 September 2006

LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE 'PUBLIC SPACES, PRIVATE PLACES' PROJECT

Purpose of report

To provide an assessment of the 'Public Spaces, Private Places' (PSPP) project and to identify lessons learnt from it, which should be taken into account in the development of future Authority projects.

Strategic Planning Framework

The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

- ***Best Value Performance Plan***
Introduce arrangements for reports on progress and lessons learnt from major projects to go to the appropriate Committee

Background

The background is set out in the earlier report on this agenda on 'Lessons Learnt from the 'Out of Oblivion' project.

However, unlike 'Out of Oblivion', the PSPP project is still running – and is not scheduled to be completed until January 2007. This report has been prepared now following a specific request at the last Audit and Review Committee.

Public Spaces, Private Places

A description of what has been achieved so far through the project, and an evaluation of the way in which the project has been delivered, are set out in the attached **Annex**. A short presentation on the project will also be made at the meeting – to give Members the opportunity to see some of the work produced.

Conclusions

The Public Spaces, Private Places project is now delivering some tangible benefits. However, it has been a long and very difficult project. It is certainly questionable whether the end results – for all their benefits – represent good value for the time and effort that has gone into the project.

It would be easy to say that the project has been 'unlucky' because of changes to key staff at critical times, and the loss of two project officers. However, there is no doubt that some of these difficulties could have been avoided had the Authority had clearer arrangements in place for developing and managing major projects. As such, the project highlights a number of critical lessons. The first, and most obvious, is that the Authority should only commit itself to community projects where there is clear evidence of commitment from that community. This may require preliminary research/surveys or the piloting of particular approaches. The second is the need for officers to be much more realistic in their assessment of the time and resources that will be needed to deliver the project outputs. A realistic assessment is even more important in cases where the Authority is looking to engage with communities (as in this case), the general public or work in partnership with other bodies because it is easy to underestimate the time required to make things work, and getting it wrong has more significant implications than is the case for 'in house' projects.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members note the achievements to date of the 'Public Spaces, Private Places' project and endorse the recommendations for future projects.

GARY SMITH
HEAD OF CONSERVATION AND POLICY

Background documents: None

6 September 2006

Lessons learnt from the 'Public Spaces Private Places' (PSPP) Project

INTENTION OF THE PROJECT

WHY WAS THE PROJECT SET UP?

As part of its then Conservation Area Strategy, the Authority considered (and in most cases designated) a number of villages in the northern Dales during the late 1990s and early 2000s. It would be fair to say that this process was difficult, with some members of the local communities expressing dissatisfaction about their village being designated as a Conservation Area.

The PSPP project was intended to meet a number of complementary objectives, including environmental improvements, supporting tourism, improving skills etc. However, in light of the experiences described above, the underlying rationale for the project was community engagement in the North of the Park. First, to take some positive action to enhance a number of villages in the Northern Dales (thus providing a 'carrot' alongside the perceived 'stick' of Conservation Area designation). Second, to raise community awareness of their local historic environment, thus gaining support for more active management and enhancement in the future.

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT INTENDED TO ACHIEVE?

The stated aims of the project were to:

- raise community awareness and understanding of their local environments and help communities develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to play a more active part in the management and enhancement of village environments.
- engage with local communities in the production of detailed character appraisals for their village environments.
- work with and support local residents and business groups on the development of an agreed Action Plan for each settlement that will contain guidelines and policies for safeguarding the special character of the area, identify potential environmental improvement opportunities and include design briefs for neglected areas and potential development sites.
- offer advice to the communities on the management of their local environments and give support to assembling resources to implement the agreed Action Plans
- facilitate local volunteering and development of skills to assist the implementation of works.
- raise awareness and understanding through interpretation of communities' village environments.

More specifically, the project was intended to:

- Produce 20 character appraisals;
- Prepare 19 village Action Plans (an Action Plan had already been developed for Gunnerside);
- Increase awareness and understanding of the cultural heritage of the area encouraging community-led action and raising confidence;
- Create 1 temporary full time job;

- Assist local businesses through securing the tourism resource, thereby helping to protect job security;
- Build the tourism resource of the area and assist in marketing the region as a quality, heritage environment;
- Install 20 interpretation boards to increase visitor understanding and enjoyment and help build on the tourism resource.

ORIGINAL TIMESCALE

Two Years and 6 Months – from 31st July 2002 to 31st December 2004.

ORIGINAL RESOURCING

The total cost of the project was calculated to be £190,000. In 2002, the Authority successfully bid for a grant of £60,000 from the European Regional Development Fund, Yorkshire and the Humber Objective 2 Programme. This was to be matched with a Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority contribution of £60,000 in cash and £60,000 “in kind” contribution from staff and volunteers etc. In addition, £10,000 would be provided by the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust’s ‘Dales Living Landscape’ scheme.

MEANS OF DELIVERY

The overall project was to be managed by the Building Conservation Officer with a full-time Project Officer PO to undertake the bulk of the day-to-day work. The Project Officer would work with the identified communities to appraise their village, prepare an Action Plan and create appropriate interpretive material about the village. Support for the project would also be provided by the Conservation Support Officer (Historic Environment) and the Interpretation Officer.

THE REALITY

ACTUAL ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

- 1 full time (temporary) post was created from January 2003-September 2004;
- 17 Character Appraisals have been completed;
- 17 Village Action Plans have been completed ready for consultation with the local communities at the end of this month;
- 17 Village interpretation projects have been completed and interpretation incorporated on YDNPA’s website
- Enhancement works have been carried out in 3 villages (Gunnarside Gill restoration works; West Burton Cross; and Gayle path works).

ACTUAL TIMESCALE

The Project Officer started work in January 2003 and the project should be completed with the publication of the final Village Action Plans in January 2007.

ACTUAL COST

To date, the project has cost £175,447. This is made up as follows:

YDNPA direct expenditure	£55,010
YDNPA 'in kind'	£56,576
ERDF	£54,553
YDMT	£9,308

There will be further 'in kind' costs to the Authority as part of finalising and publishing the Village Action Plans.

ACTUAL MEANS OF DELIVERY

The Project Officer post was subject to external competitive selection, with the successful candidate starting work in January 2003. However, the original Project Officer left the Authority in June 2003. A replacement was subsequently appointed and started in July 2003. This Project Officer was subsequently promoted to the Assistant Building Conservation Officer post in September 2004. The decision was then taken in consultation with Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside to employ consultants to complete the scheme. Competitive tenders were sought from a range of archaeological and historic buildings consultancies and tenders formally opened in April 2005. The Archaeological Practice was subsequently appointed in May 2005 to complete the outstanding Character Appraisals.

All members of the Authority's historic environment team have had some involvement in the project – taking on elements of the project officer work (when there was not officer in post); reviewing documents; and, providing GIS support and extracting information from the Authority's Historic Environment Record.

In 3 of the villages local people contributed significantly to the production of the village appraisals, carrying out substantial elements of work.

The interpretive materials were produced by the Interpretation Officer, based on input from the local communities. While the original brief envisaged that these would all be panels, the final materials were more varied – including leaflets, interpretive benches and exhibitions.

SUSTAINING THE PROJECT

The final Village Character Appraisals and Action Plans will be used to inform consideration of future development proposals within the 17 villages, and will be integrated as appropriate into the new local development framework.

For the 6 villages that are designated as Conservation Areas, the new documents will come to the Authority for adoption as the up-to-date Character Appraisals and Conservation Area Management Plans (Members will recall that there is a new Best Value Performance Indicator measuring these). They will then fall under the normal Conservation Area workload of the Built Heritage Team (a strategy for which is due to come to the Authority once PSPP is completed). In the meantime, we will be identifying potential sources of funding to carry out some of the improvements and enhancements identified within the Action Plans. Again, as part of the forthcoming Conservation Area Strategy, we will be seeking Members views as to how the Authority might encourage and support action to follow up these funding opportunities and carry out suitable projects.

LESSONS LEARNED

WHAT WENT WELL, AND WHY?

Choice of consultants

The use of consultants – although essentially a last resort - has worked well. They produced comprehensive documents, based upon the input of the communities and a range of specialists. These are more ‘academic’ than those produced directly by the local communities (see below) but are, therefore, more suited to the statutory requirements relevant in the case of the 6 villages that are designated as Conservation Areas.

Engagement with three village communities

The intention to engage village communities in carrying out much of the background work for the character appraisals and action plans was, in three villages, a very productive and valuable part of the process. Local people in Low Row, West Witton and Gayle were involved in researching village history, producing draft documents, carrying out local consultations and publicising the project. The documents produced have a distinctly local edge to them and there is a sense of ‘local ownership’ amongst those who championed the project within the villages. This increased awareness of the local heritage and of the impact that small scale change can have on the character of villages (with both positive and negative results).

Engagement with local schools and local children

Two of the most successful local interpretation projects (at Gunnerside and West Witton) had significant involvement from children within the local community. The input from local children was enthusiastic and created positive local feeling for this element of the project. However, it is worth noting that the staff resource involved in facilitating this was significant.

WHAT WENT LESS WELL, AND WHY?

Specification for Project Officer.

The diverse range of skills required in the post, along with the short term nature of the contract, meant that it was extremely difficult to recruit an appropriate person for the post. Both times the post was advertised (see below) there were only a small number of applicants. While some candidates met the historic environment requirements and others met the community engagement requirements, none could fully meet both. It was felt at the time that strong skills and experience in local community involvement was the priority. In hindsight, this decision placed considerable strain upon other members of the Built Heritage Team to provide specialist advice. It may perhaps have been wiser at this point to have selected two candidates for employment possibly on a part time basis.

Involving Local Communities

While involving the local village community worked really well in three villages, it was much less successful in the other sixteen. Indeed, two villages (Thwaite and Appersett) were eventually dropped from the scheme after repeated attempts to engage the local community failed completely. The remaining fourteen villages engaged in some aspects of the project but did not wish to become directly involved in the production of documents or in researching the factual histories of the village and its surroundings. There is no doubt that local people were suspicious of the Authority’s intentions (either because their village had recently been designated as a Conservation Area or because of concern that PSPP was a means of designating villages ‘by the back door’). Building relationships with the communities was certainly hindered by the loss of the original project officer. Subsequently, a lot of staff time did go into trying to engage with some of the communities. With the benefit of hindsight, it might have been better for the Authority to have

recognised much earlier that some communities did not want to be involved in the project and reduced the scale of the project (focusing just on those villages that did).

Project continuity

There were significant changes in key staff throughout the project – 2 different project officers, 2 different Building Conservation Officers and 2 different Heads of Department. The involvement of different members of staff at different and individually crucial stages of the project led to difficulties and delays in implementing the scheme and, perhaps more importantly, different interpretations of what was meant by the wording of the business plan and bid documents.

Project design

The project design was over-ambitious. Significant elements of community engagement were added to the original design to help the project to secure external funding. This created two major problems. First, the local communities themselves were not involved in the gestation of the project. In effect, therefore, it was a project that was done *to* the community rather than one that had built up from a groundswell of local support. The subsequent difficulties in engaging village communities are therefore not surprising. Second, the additional work required to engage effectively with local communities was not properly costed in. This meant that the scale of the final project and its timescale was wholly unrealistic. In addition to the two villages that were dropped from the scheme because of lack of community support, Hawes was also cut from the project simply because it was the largest settlement and this freed up resources to enable completion of several other villages.

Reliance on a single project officer

As with many Authority projects, PSPP was based around a single project officer carrying out the bulk of the day-to-day work. In this case, the problems in recruiting and retaining the project officer caused massive disruption. The problem was particularly acute in the early stages when much of the first project officer's time had been spent on research, planning and building relationships with the local communities (rather than tangible physical outputs). No contingency was built into the project to deal with this situation.

Failure to make sufficient allowance for input by YDNPA staff

The project design envisaged much of the work being carried out by the Project Officer but with significant contributions of time from the Building Conservation Officer and Interpretation Officer (accounting for much of the Authority's contribution 'in kind'). However, the interpretation team had not been involved in developing the project, and so the project had not been included in their work programme. This caused inevitable difficulties. It would also have been helpful to have had their advice on interpretation matters at a much earlier stage. For the Building Conservation Officer, the reality of the level of contribution required (roughly 40% of the officers time) was never properly factored into the work programme. The problems of managing other elements of the workload were exacerbated by the fact that many of the meetings for PSPP had, by necessity, to be in the evening or at weekend.

The involvement of other members of the Built Heritage Team was also higher than originally envisaged – largely as a result of the recruitment difficulties outlined above and the subsequent use of consultants who required assistance in accessing information from the Authority's Geographical Information Systems and Historic Environment Record.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The project has identified a number of issues that should be considered as part of the development of future guidance on the management of major projects. A number of these duplicate the recommendations from the review of the 'Out of Oblivion' project, and so are not repeated here. The additional recommendations are:

- Projects that are dependent on significant community involvement should only be pursued where there is clear evidence of community support for them.
- Community engagement requires time and effort – this needs to be realistically built in to the project plan.
- It is not enough to simply identify the time needed for project management. Line managers need to ensure that it is factored realistically into individual officers work programmes.
- All project plans should identify and consider the risks from the loss of the project officer. The Authority should identify a range of potential options for managing this risk.
- The Authority also needs to improve 'handover arrangements' to improve continuity when change of staff occurs. This was identified in the NPAPA last year. The Authority should develop appropriate administrative arrangements, including consideration of 'live' project notes, process manuals, library of key documents etc.