

Date: 27 March 2007

Report: ASSESSMENT OF SETTLE AND SEDBERGH NATIONAL PARK PARTNERSHIP CENTRES

Purpose of the report

1. To provide members with an update on the Authority's National Park Partnership Centres at Settle in TIC and Sedbergh Book Town centre, to assess how well each is contributing to the National Park purposes, and to discuss future arrangements for these partnerships.

Strategic Planning Framework

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

- ***National Park Management Plan objectives***

UE2. Promote awareness of the Yorkshire Dales National Park so that, by 2008, 90% of visitors are aware that they are in a National Park.

UE8. Raise awareness of the Yorkshire Dales so that by 2008 at least 10% of people in England and Wales can name it as being a National Park.

UE10. Promote environmental awareness amongst tourism businesses and visitors within the Yorkshire Dales National Park, so as to increase the number of businesses offering 'sustainable tourism products' from 25% in 2006 to 50% by 2010.

CC5. Support and contribute to meeting targets set in local Community Strategies and sub-regional programmes for improving access to services within or closer to communities.

- ***Best Value Performance Plan objectives***

Objective 2 priority B

Support sustainable tourism that helps to promote understanding and the conservation of the Yorkshire Dales National Park:

- Increase the numbers of people who access information through National Park Centres (NPCs) to 670,000 by March 2008

Objective 3 - Priority A, C, D, E

To provide accessible, high quality communications and services that positively influence people's enjoyment and understanding of the special qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park so that:

- The YDNP profile throughout England and Wales, as measured by the national opinion poll 2001, rises from 7% to 10%
- 90% of visitors are aware that they are in a National Park and at least 50% have an understanding of National Park purposes and/or special qualities by December 2007
- All residents are aware of the National Park, 80% are aware of the National Park Authority, and at least 70% have an understanding of National Park purposes and/or special qualities by December 2009.

Background

3. Following a Best Value review in 2000/01 the Authority decided to improve the structure of its information network by developing four flagship National Park Centres (NPC) and, by identifying opportunities to work in partnerships in order to access a wider audience and tap into existing information provision in the area. The same review also made recommendations about the future of the three National Park Centres in Clapham, Sedbergh and Reeth, stating that if these facilities could not become more cost effective other options should be considered about how this service could be provided.
4. This resulted in some fundamental changes to the information network; these changes included the closure of the National Park Centres in Clapham and Sedbergh and the relocation of the Reeth National Park Centre into the Rural Enterprise and Resource Centre at Hudson House in Reeth. The Authority now operates four flagship National Park Centres, has input into three Partnership Centres, and has established a network of park information points both inside and beyond the boundary of the National Park.
5. The three current Partnership Centres are located in Settle at the Tourist Information Centre, Sedbergh at the Tourist Information Centre in the Lakes and Dales Book Centre, and in the Hudson House Rural Enterprise and Resource Centre. This each has a different operational and management system in place which involves the NPA as a partner with others. The arrangements at Hudson House are quite different to the ones in place at Settle and Sedbergh and are being dealt with separately to this paper.
6. The tables below provide an overview to illustrate how the Partnership Centres have performed when compared to the flagship National Park Centres. This includes comparing the number of visitors dealt with by these centres, the net costs and the assessments against the minimum service standards which assess the network using a nationally agreed criteria which informs us how we perform in terms of our statutory purpose of Promoting Understanding and Enjoyment.

Table 1 - Visitor Numbers

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07 Estimate
Aysgarth Falls	151,342	133,909	149,656	128,905	156,500
Grassington	105,796	99,230	105,751	93,318	97,000
Hawes	127,319	127,007	137,247	117,181	136,400
Malham	109,257	110,764	116,063	113,494	121,000
Reeth/HH	51,327	49,115	48,266	42,200	45,400
Sedbergh	39,348	36,816	32,253*	43,858	55,900
Settle		36,000^	50,000^	67,367	66,400
TOTAL	584,389	592,841	639,236	606,323	678,600

For comparison the total visitor numbers for Clapham NPC were 30,693 in 2001/02 and 30,310 in 2002/03 when it closed.

* Sedbergh NPC closed to the public 1 November 2004 and reopened again as a Partnership Centre in time for the 2005 season.

^ 2003/04 and 2004/05 visitor numbers for Settle are estimates based on their previous recording methods. 2005/06 is an actual visitor figure based on automatic people counters.

All visitor numbers (unless otherwise specified) are actual figures based on automatic people counters installed in the doors.

Table 2 - Net Costs

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/7 Estimate
	£	£	£	£	£
Aysgarth Falls	6,577	12,439	18,070	15,633	17,280
Grassington	3,726	5,011	6,123	7,788	8,000
Hawes	586	3,354	2,183	1,696	100
Malham	6,143	8,865	9,442	9,558	8,400
Reeth/HH	6,639	14,116	13,230	10,312	12,000
Sedbergh	3,484	2,186	4,292	1,441	400
Settle	-	-	4,000	4,000	4,000
TOTAL	27,155	45,971	57,340	50,428	50,180

The Sedbergh NPC closed in October 2004 and the new arrangements with Sedbergh Book Town commenced in April 2005.

The new partnership with Settle TIC commenced in April 2004 following the closure of the Clapham NPC.

(This is a summary based on expenditure minus direct income from bed-bookings, rent and licences. Retail income is not included.)

Table 3 - Best Value Assessment Scores

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
	%	%	%	%	%
Aysgarth Falls	57.60	81.33	79.0	71.53	75.79
Grassington	48.39	70.89	80.5	72.21	66.58
Hawes	62.79	83.11	86.5	76.64	81.21
Malham	77.69	64.82	70.5	71.26	74.26
Reeth/HH	66.58	87.28	79.0	74.53	78.37
Sedbergh	66.49	66.58	-	-	87.50
Settle	-	-	76.0	-	85.71

7. This is the annual national assessment for all NPA. Each assessed NPC is measured against a set of nationally agreed standards and scored accordingly. NPCs are assessed annually and in 2006, the Partnership Centres were also included in this process. The table (5) shows the Best Value scores for the NPCs and Partnership Centres. The evaluation is made via questionnaires, which visitors are encouraged to complete.
8. The Best Value scores are extracted from the individual centre's overall score. It reflects the ethos of Best Value and focuses on the way a NPC interprets the area and helps to promote understanding and enjoyment. This focuses on the level of enjoyment and understanding visitors think they have gained as a result of their contact with the centres and Partnership Centres. The scores are usually based on the information received from a member of staff or volunteer, interpretative displays or information relating to enjoyment of the area.
9. Settle and Sedbergh Partnership Centres have scored particularly well in this evaluation, although it should be noted that this data was extracted from extremely low sample sizes.

Settle TIC

10. Settle Tourist Information Centre became a National Park Partnership Centre following the closure of the Clapham NPC 2003. The TIC is based in the Town Hall in Settle and is staffed by a TIC Manager and a team of volunteers. The manager reports to a management board, which comprises members from the various tourism sectors together with Craven District Council and Settle Town Council. The NPA has officer representation on the board, this role being an advisory one. In its enhanced role as NPA Partnership Centre, the TIC –
 - Mails out copies of the Visitor newspaper with its enquiries,
 - Provides information about the national park to visitors
 - Issues Application forms for National Park Authority Parking passes
 - Displays National Park interpretation in the meeting/education room
 - Is used as a start point for National Park events
 - Offers education information to school groups

- Attends networking and training events with National Park staff
 - Provides a notice board for national park information and events promotion
 - Provides accommodation for a planning surgery
11. There is a good working relationship through this partnership; the Authority is represented by an officer on the TIC board. The Settle TIC manager often attends NPC staff briefings and is also involved with the Authority via the Tourism Partnership. The manager has also worked with national park staff towards achievement of the NVQ in Tourism Services. The TIC Board has stated that the joint work with the NPA is progressing well and this has been further enhanced with the recent introduction of the planning surgery. The board would like to see this partnership continue and develop further. This view is reinforced in this report.

Sedbergh Book Town

12. In 2004, following the closure of the Sedbergh National Park Centre, agreement was reached that the Sedbergh Book Town group would rent the redundant National Park Centre with the intention of providing a tourist information facility via South Lakeland District Council and Cumbria Tourist Board. This group would also run the facility as a NPA Partnership Centre. The facility opened briefly in April 2005 and was fully opened to the public as a book town centre and TIC in June 2005. Under this agreement the Sedbergh Book Town group -
- Mails out copies of the Visitor newspaper with its enquiries
 - Provides information about the National Park to visitors
 - Issues application forms for National Park Authority parking passes
 - Receives invitations to networking and training events with National Park staff
 - Provides a notice board for National Park information and events promotion
 - Provides Accommodation for the NPA ranger
13. The Book Town/TIC facility in Sedbergh is now fairly well established, although work continues to ensure its long term future. The NPA is not formally represented on this partnership although there is officer contact with the Book Town manager. The centre continues to show increased visitor numbers when compared to the old NPC.
14. The partnership is not as integrated as the Settle Partnership Centre, but this is probably as a result of the stage of its development. This facility has had to start up a new TIC, employ staff, attract funding and carry out a fairly ambitious marketing campaign alongside this to attract new business into the area. They have been successful in attracting funds to date and have just received additional funding for a post for the next three years. They have also received a favourable report from the Rural Regeneration Company (RRC)/Cumbria Vision which notes that the project is well ahead of initial forecasts for business growth in Sedbergh.
15. The manager has indicated that she is now starting to work with Kendal Buildings Trust to consider moving to a larger premises in the town, but this will not take place for 4-5 years. In the meantime they are very much hoping that the arrangement with the NPA will continue for the next three years.

Conclusion

16. This model of Partnership Centre offers a cost effective way to provide NPA services in key areas where the NPA does not have a presence. There are good working relationships with both partnerships, although there probably needs to be more contact with the Sedbergh Partnership Centre. The extension of the current arrangements would send out the message that the NPA is committed to these areas of the park, where there is still a perception that we have withdrawn services.

RECOMMENDATION

17. That Members authorise officers to enter into discussions with Settle TIC Board and Sedbergh Book Town Manager to extend the current arrangements for a further three years, to be reviewed in October 2010.

Julie Barker
Sustainable Tourism Manager

12 March 2007