

Economic Development and Transport Committee

Date: Wednesday 13 October 2004
Time: 9.00 – 12.30
Venue: National Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay
Title: Review of the Welsh National Park Authorities: Final Report

Purpose

1. This paper seeks the views of the Committee on the key findings and recommendations of the Review of the Welsh National Park Authorities. I published the review report on 18th March. I am particularly keen to have the views of the Committee on the economic development aspects of the report which are highlighted below. The review report has already been discussed by the Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee and was debated at plenary on 22nd September.

Recommendations

2. That the Committee:
 - i. considers the main findings and recommendations of the review and provides views on the economic development aspects in particular;
 - ii. notes the draft Action Plan which is intended to help guide implementation of the key recommendations. The Assembly Government is currently seeking the views of stakeholders on the contents of the Plan.

Background

3. The Review commenced in March 2003 and was the first independent review of the Park Authorities since they were established in their current form (as special purpose local authorities) in 1996. The review was undertaken by the firm of Land Use Consultants with Arwel Jones Associates. The terms of reference for the review were debated at plenary in December 2002 when it was agreed that it should focus on four key areas : the role of the Park Authorities; how they might do more to promote sustainable development; how social inclusion issues could be addressed more successfully; and how links and accountability to the local communities could be strengthened.
4. The Review was overseen by a Steering Group of key interests, and included an expert adviser, Professor Adrian Phillips, an acknowledged expert on landscape protection matters.

Review Process

5. The Review was undertaken in three stages :a Wales-wide consultation exercise with agencies, organisations and individuals with a direct, and indirect, interest in Park issues; visits by the consultants to all three Park Authorities, involving meetings with Park Authority members and staff and with local stakeholders; and a national seminar stakeholders.

Plenary debate – 22nd September

6. The review report and draft Action Plan was the subject of a Plenary debate on 22nd September. The motion that the Assembly should consider the findings and recommendations of the report and welcome the draft Action Plan was endorsed. In addition an amendment to the main motion was passed ie that the Assembly notes the importance of balancing the unique needs of the National Parks with the requirement for them to active parts of the economy, not museums.

Key Review Findings and Recommendations

7. The Overview Section at pages i to v of the report sets out the main findings of the review. The 30 main recommendations made are contained in Chapter 10 (and reproduced in the draft Action Plan).
8. Overall, the report is a positive endorsement of much of the good work that the Park Authorities are already doing in areas such as the exercise of their primary purposes (and the enduring relevance of these); recognises their contribution to the sustainable development agenda; indicates that the Park Authorities are engaged in an increasing range of projects within local communities; and notes their developing contribution to the social inclusion agenda by working with a cross section of people from beyond the Park boundaries. The review also reaffirms the existing and potential contribution of the Welsh National Parks to the nation – environmentally, socially and economically, and makes some interesting and useful suggestions on how the existing governance arrangements could be improved further.
9. The main recommendations made which are relevant to economic development and therefore to the Committee are as follows :
 - (i) the **Role of National Park Authorities (NPAs)** where the report recommends that : the NPAs examine how different funding streams might be brought together to support rural development initiatives in their areas (**recommendation 7**); that in partnership working, the Unitary Authorities, the WDA and the National Park Authorities should agree their respective roles in economic and community development in the Welsh Parks and the steps necessary to bring about the required uplift in this work

(recommendation 13); and that as part of an updated Policy Statement for National Parks, the Welsh Assembly Government should give clear guidance on the nature of partnership working needed to enhance the economic and social well-being of communities in the Parks **(recommendation 24)**; and that the National Park Authorities should become first stop shops, in partnership with other main providers of advice, on economic and social development, including sustainable tourism **(recommendation 21)**.

Consideration

In line with their statutory duty to promote the social and economic well-being of Park communities, the Park Authorities are already engaged in community and economic development in their areas, for example through the administration of the Sustainable Development Fund and through engagement with Objective One and other projects. As I made clear at plenary on 22 September, I am keen for the Park Authorities to continue with that role. Through closer partnership working, I think the Park Authorities can add value to the work of other agencies in this field, including the local authorities. But I do not think the case for the Park Authorities becoming one stop shops has been made in the review. Nor do I think that any formal transfer of functions is needed here. The draft Action Plan explains planned action to follow up these recommendations.

The views of the Committee on this matter would be welcomed.

- (ii) **Planning** - Planning was not an area that the reviewers were asked to examine, but given its importance to the functions of the National Park Authorities, the issue inevitably arose during the review process. The review recommends **(Recommendation No. 1)** that the Park Authorities need to promote the positive role of their planning activities and demonstrate a pro-active stance to appropriate development within the National Parks.

Consideration

There is the perception that, through the exercise of their development control function, Park Authorities act as a brake on development within their areas. This is not supported by statistics, with over 90% of planning applications that come before National Park Authorities being approved. The draft Action Plan outlines the action planned to follow up this recommendation. The views of the Committee are sought on what more the Park Authorities might do to promote their planning role more positively.

- (iii) **Sustainable Development** - the review recommends **(Recommendation 29)** that the Assembly Government should introduce a new third statutory purpose for the Park Authorities 'promoting sustainable forms of economic and community

development which support the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park areas”.

Consideration

As I made clear at plenary on 22 September, the Assembly Government is not convinced of the need for new legislation, as the aim of this recommendation can be achieved in other (non statutory) ways. The Assembly has a duty to promote sustainable development and by building sustainable development more clearly into their strategic objectives, the Park Authorities can play a full part in helping to deliver this. The draft Action Plan sets out the planned action. The views of the Committee on this cross-cutting issue are sought.

- (iv) Sustainable tourism – The review recommends **(Recommendation 26)** that the National Park Authorities with the Wales Tourist Board and others should prepare a new statement on recreation and tourism as a cornerstone to the economy of the Parks.

Consideration

Clearly more sustainable tourism is a key objective for the future of the Parks and the Assembly Government intends to include this in the updated policy statement it will be preparing as part of the follow up to the review. As noted in the draft Action Plan the Wales Tourist Board is also working with the Park Authorities on a new sustainable tourism initiative which is expected to be launched next year.

The views of the Committee are sought on this topic.

Next Steps

10. As noted in paragraph 2 above, the draft Action Plan, having been endorsed by the Assembly at Plenary, is currently the subject of consultation with local and national stakeholders. Its contents are also due to be discussed by the Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee on 3rd November. The Action Plan, when finalised in the light of this consultation, will guide implementation of the key recommendations in the report over the next 12-18 months.

Financial Implications

11. The overall contract costs were met from within the Environment, Planning and Countryside Main Expenditure Group’s allocated budget for 2003-2004. The resource implications arising from the review’s recommendations will be considered as part of the finalisation of the draft Action Plan – and will be taken into account by the Assembly in determining the future grant resources for the National park Authorities.

Action for Subject Committee

12. To note and comment on the key findings and recommendations of the review, with particular reference to the four areas identified in paragraph 9 above.

Carwyn Jones
Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside

Contact point: Richard Thomas, Environment Division, Ext. 5324

Key Recommendations (grouped by issue)	Lead Organisation	Action	Suggested Timetable
<p><u>Communication – Recommendation 1</u></p> <p>National Park Authorities’ (NPAs) individual communication strategies, should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote the vision for the Park and the broader vision for the National Parks collectively • highlight the benefits of national park designation and help engage local communities and business • emphasise that tourism and recreation are taking place in the context of a living and working landscape • as a part of a broader family of promotion material produced by the other key stakeholders, provide a common and consistent image of the Parks • promote the positive role of their planning activities and demonstrate a pro-active stance to appropriate development within National Parks 	<p>National Park Authorities (NPAs) with the Welsh Association of National Park Authorities (WANPA)</p>	<p>To date All three National Park Authorities (NPAs) have communication strategies in place. Welsh Association of National Park Authorities (WANPA)/ Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA) working on strategy for England and Wales</p> <p>Next steps Success stories on communication to be shared by the NPAs. WANPA strategy to be finalised. Communication to be included as issue in new policy statement (Rec. 24). New grant letter and policy statement to underline positive role for NPA planning function.</p>	<p>Agreed actions to be completed by March 2005</p>
<p><u>Dissemination of Good Practice – Recommendation 2*</u></p> <p>Welsh NPAs should adopt a more collaborative approach, passing on lessons learnt, as appropriate, with:</p>	<p>NPAs with other bodies listed in</p>		<p>Agreed actions to be completed by March 2005</p>

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<p>Section 62(2).</p> <p>Rec 4 * - CCW should develop a national Section 62(2) Strategy, setting out the reporting arrangements by which all relevant authorities should inform Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and CCW of the actions they have taken to comply with the Section 62(2) duty, (potentially within AONBs as well as National Parks) and the steps that will be taken to correct the actions of relevant authorities that have not complied. This reporting should be required on an annual basis</p> <p>Rec 6 -The NPAs, CCW and WAG should work together to ensure that CAP reforms and their delivery and the revisions of the Wales Rural Development Programme and on-going target setting, clearly and specifically address the needs of the National Parks both in terms of environmental conservation and their living cultures.</p> <p>Rec 13 * - Partnership working must be improved in support of the Section 62(1) duty: This requires that: WAG and CCW should urgently convene a process whereby the unitary authorities, WDA, and the NPAs agree their respective roles in economic and community development in the Welsh Parks and the</p>	<p>WAG</p> <p>WAG with NPAs and CCW</p> <p>NPAs with WLGA and WAG</p>	<p>Development Agency (WDA)</p> <p><u>To date</u> – NPAs to provide WAG with practical examples of s. 62 (2)working and not working <u>Next steps</u> – framework document to be drafted to promote awareness of s.(62) 2</p> <p><u>To date</u> – NPAs involved in CAP reform working groups Next steps – further engagement of NPAs in key processes, including with work of Rural Observatory.</p> <p><u>To date</u> - much useful work already going on eg through Objective 1 partnerships.</p>	<p>WAG to issue draft for consultation in autumn 2004</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>WAG to prepare updated policy statement for NPAs for consultation in autumn 2004</p>

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<p>steps necessary to bring about the required uplift in this work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WAG and CCW, within the current spending constraint imposed by Section 62(1), should ensure that NPAs have sufficient staff resources to allow them to take active role in partnership working in support of their duty • NPAs should act as advocates and champions of sustainable development within exiting partnerships <p>the Environment Agency should become more actively involved in partnership working with the NPAs to assist in the delivery of the first park purpose and in support of sustainable resource use .</p> <p>Rec 23 - WAG in association with CCW, WLGA, and the NPAs, should use existing national partnerships to promote the importance of the National Parks, the role of the NPAs, and the importance of the Section 62(2) duty in delivering the park purposes.</p> <p>Management Planning - National Park Management Plans - Recommendations. 5 and 27</p> <p>Rec. 5 - NPAs should ensure that all National Parks have an up-to-date Management Plan and State of the Park Report (SoPR) with a clear</p>	<p>WAG with key partners</p>	<p><u>Next step</u> – cover role of NPAs in these areas in new policy statement (Rec. 24) NPAs to share good practice in sustainable resource use.</p> <p>Next step – consider issue with Wales Rural Partnership in first instance. Issue for s. 62(2) framework document also.</p>	<p>Review recommendations to be considered by Rural Partnership in autumn 2004</p>

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<p>programme for their regular review. As part of these Management Plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPAs should ensure that the principles of sustainable development permeate all aspects of the Plan and that the SoPR measures the success of integrated outcomes • NPAs in partnership with park communities and key stakeholders should consider what forms of agriculture and other land uses will be appropriate over the coming years, in response to changing agricultural and forestry policy and climate change • NPAs and Wales Tourist Board (WTB) should convene appropriate partnerships to collectively agree on the special qualities of the Parks and the types of tourism and recreation that should be developed in their support • NPAs in partnership with key stakeholders should develop guidance on the types of economic and community development that are appropriate within their Park in pursuit of the first and second purposes. 	NPAs	<p><u>To date</u> – Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) has recently published its Management Plan and SoPR</p> <p><u>Next steps</u> – full coverage of Plans and SoPRs to be put in place</p>	Full coverage by March 2005
<p>Rec – 27 - In the coming year CCW should update the guidance on the preparation and use of National Parks Management Plans</p>	CCW		To be issued by March 2005

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<p>(NPMPs) and SoPRs in Wales. The review should reflect the revised roles of the two documents in Wales as informed by other elements of this review, giving greater emphasis to the processes of plan preparation and implementation.</p> <p><u>Financial Issues - Recommendations. 7, 8, and 14</u></p> <p>Rec. 7* - NPAs should consider how different funding streams, including those under the Wales Rural Development Programme, might be combined to support projects in Integrated Rural Development.</p> <p>Rec. 8* - WAG should review the resource implications of PCNPA and Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA's) work in association with the marine environment, which are expected to be modest.</p>	<p>NPAs</p> <p>WAG with PCNPA and SNPA</p>	<p>CCW to take forward building on guidance in England</p> <p>New grant letter to be issued by WAG to NPAs setting out key objectives and targets for year ahead. New 6 monthly reports to be produced by NPAs on progress against targets. NPAs to develop fuller annual reports on progress with strategic agenda.</p> <p><u>To date</u> - NPAs already doing this with SDF and other funding</p> <p>Next step - aim to continue to maximise funding sources in support of Park objectives</p> <p><u>Next step</u> – NPAs to provide details to WAG of extent of involvement / resource pressures</p>	<p>New grant letter for 2005/6 to issue in February 2005</p> <p>More regular meetings to be arranged between WAG and NPAs to monitor progress</p> <p>WAG to consider as part of budget round process</p> <p>Aim for any agreed changes to be in place by 2006/7</p>

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<p>Rec. 14 - WAG should conduct a review of the audit arrangements of NPAs under the Wales Programme for Improvement with a view to developing an audit scheme appropriate to the scale of NPAs' responsibilities and activities.</p> <p><u>Social Inclusion - Recommendations 11 and 22</u></p> <p>Rec. 11 - WAG with CCW and the NPAs should commission research on the cases where demonstrable financial loss would otherwise occur.</p> <p>Rec 22* - In light of research findings, WAG should convene a group to consider the social inclusion role of the Parks for the whole of Wales – communities inside the Parks, on their borders and more distant urban communities. The group should be charged with the setting strategy and priorities and considering the likely resource implication.</p> <p><u>Sustainable Development - Recs. 9, 15*, 13* (third bullet) and 29</u></p> <p>Rec. 9 – WAG should continue the SDF programme for the foreseeable future,</p>	<p>WAG with Audit Commission</p> <p>WANPA with NPAs and WAG</p>	<p>WAG to liaise with Audit Commission</p> <p>Key partners agree that this issue already fully researched. 'National Parks for All' statement issued in Nov. 2003</p> <p><u>Next steps</u> – NPAs + WANPA to review available research and build on existing initiatives like Mosaic project. WAG to cover issue in new policy statement.</p>	<p>Review by NPAs to be completed by March 2005 and Action Plan developed for implementation from 2005/6</p>

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<p>recognising the significant benefits that it has delivered in the pursuit of sustainable development.</p> <p>Rec. 15* - Building on their existing efforts in this area, NPAs should undertake a sustainability audit for their operations and methods of working, including considerations of energy use and the promotion of local purchasing in their activities.</p> <p>Rec. 13* (third bullet) – NPAs should act as advocates and champions of sustainable development within exiting partnerships.</p> <p>Rec. 29 – WAG should promote new legislation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a third Park purpose – “promoting sustainable forms of economic and community development which support the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the area”. • amend the Sandford principle (S.62(2)) to state that where there is conflict between the 	<p>WAG with NPAs</p> <p>NPAs</p> <p>NPAs</p> <p>WAG</p>	<p>No current plans to curtail SDF scheme</p> <p><u>To date</u> - PCNPA has achieved Level 2 of Green Dragon scheme. SNP and BBNP working towards this. PCNP and SNP have developed sustainability strategies. <u>Next steps</u> - NPAs to aim to achieve GD level 4 and publish results. PCNP and SNP to share strategies with BBNP.</p> <p><u>To date</u> - doing this with SDF scheme, etc. <u>Next step</u> – look to develop role further, including with Local Government SD officers group.</p> <p>New legislation not considered necessary. Updated policy statement first step.</p>	<p>By end 2005/6</p> <p>Review after issue of updated policy statement.</p>

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<p>delivery of the purposes, the first would take primacy, followed by the second. In other words, sustainable development would be subservient to the first two purposes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amend S62(2) from a “duty to have regard to” to a “duty to contribute to the delivery of”. <p><u>Corporate Governance - Recommendations. 18, 19, 20, 21 and 30</u></p> <p>(a) Role/functions of NPAs</p> <p>Rec. 18* – CCW and Cadw should consider contracting the site monitoring and wardening work they undertake on their statutorily designated sites within the Parks to the NPAs through service level agreements with an appropriate transfer of resources</p> <p>Rec. 19 – NPAs, in partnership with the highway authorities, should review and strengthen the current service level agreements for the management of the rights of way network within each of the Parks, with clear priorities, timetable and funding agreements for the management of the rights of the way network within each of the Parks, with clear priorities, timetable and funding agreed. NPAs must also be closely involved in the preparation of all Rights of Way Improvement Plans relating to their Park.</p>	<p>CCW + Cadw with NPAs</p> <p>NPAs with LAs</p>	<p><u>To date</u> - CCW Council has endorsed piloting of possible new approach. <u>Next step</u> – for further consideration with lead bodies</p>	<p>Unlikely before 2005/6</p> <p>During 2005/6</p>

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<p>Corporate governance (continued)</p> <p>(b) Performance of / Appointment of NPA members - Recommendations. 10, 16, 17, and 30</p> <p>Rec. 10 – WAG should provide attendance allowance payable to NPA members in cases where demonstrable financial loss would otherwise occur.</p> <p>Rec. 16 - WAG / CCW, with NPAs and WLGA should make the appointment of NPA members more transparent and accountable by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and promoting job descriptions for all members of NPAs • developing an induction package for all NPA members. This should be delivered by the Chief Executive of each NPA, modified to reflect individual park circumstances and supported by continuous training and development • formalising the selection of nominated local authority members with the introduction of a simple selection process (including seeking recommendations from community councils) and a requirement 	<p>NPAs with WAG</p> <p>NPAs and WANPA with WLGA and WAG</p>	<p>(involvement in agri-environment schemes, SDF,etc).</p> <p>Next step – case not made, although further consideration with key interests on whether and how existing NPA role might sensibly be developed and add value. Portal concept to be explored further. No transfer of statutory responsibilities involved.</p> <p>Position covered by existing allowance regime.</p> <p><u>Next steps</u> – WLGA to take lead in developing job description with NPAs. New induction training package being developed by WANPA/ANPA. NPAs to share training plans</p>	<p>Aim to put in place by end March 2005</p> <p>Role of NPA members to be reviewed at WANPA seminar Nov. 2004.</p> <p>For submission to WAG alongside main annual report</p>

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<p>that all members should agree to be bound by a code of practice relating to the national park purposes.</p> <p>Rec. 17 – NPAs should consider the format, timing and location of committee meetings to encourage a wider cross-section of the community to become NPA members.</p> <p>Rec. 30* - WAG should consult:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> on proposals to modify existing legislation to allow for the direct election of one-fifth of NPA members or achieve such representation through a collegiate system with community councils holding elections amongst their members (with two-fifths being nominated by local authorities and two-fifths being WAG nominees). on the potential for the NPAs to take on statutory responsibility for the Rights of Way network within each Park. 	<p>NPAs</p> <p>WAG with NPAs and LAs</p>	<p>for existing members and to consult constituent Local Authorities (LAs) on improvements to selection procedures.</p> <p>Annual report to be prepared by NPA Chairs on strategic work of Park Authority members</p> <p><u>To date</u> – all NPAs have reviewed procedures and are taking steps to ‘take meetings to the people’. <u>Next step</u> – to keep issue under review</p> <p>For further consideration with key interests – consultation paper to issue</p>	<p>Subject to outcome of consultation.</p>

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<p>Corporate governance (continued) (c) New strategic guidance - Recommendations. 24, 25, 26 and 28*</p> <p>Rec. 24 - WAG should prepare an updated Policy Statement for the National Parks in Wales. This should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote a clear vision for the Parks collectively • clearly lay out the expected roles of the National Parks in Wales and the expected tasks of all those involved in delivering them, including the roles and powers of the NPAs. In particular, it should provide clarification of the roles of WAG and CCW in respect of National Parks and their authorities • formally recognise the expertise provided by PCNPA and SNPA to other statutory authorities working in the marine environment beyond their boundaries . • give clear guidance on the nature of partnership working needed to enhance the economic and social well-being of communities in the Parks • give clear guidance on the pursuit of sustainable development within the National Parks – its value as a guiding principles and the close relationship between pursuit of the first purpose and the well-being of local 	<p>WAG</p>	<p>in New Year 2005. New primary legislation would be needed to implement</p> <p><u>To date</u> – latest policy statement issued in 1999</p> <p><u>Next step</u> – updated statement to be produced reflecting Assembly Government vision and priorities for National Parks</p>	<p>Aim to issue for consultation in autumn 2004</p>

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<p>economies and communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for Section 62(2): - explain the purpose and workings of the duty - lay out the bodies to whom the duty applies - give positive guidance on how relevant authorities should work in pursuit of the duty, and particularly the role of the NPAs, including the use of Accords and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), both locally and nationally, and identification of other examples of best practice. • clarify the interface between statutory development plans, community strategies and National Park Management Plans. <p>Having published such guidance the Welsh Assembly Government will need to give detailed attention to its dissemination and ongoing support</p> <p>Rec. 25 - WAG should ensure that all relevant national guidance stresses the importance of the National Parks of Wales. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All relevant aspects of national policy should clearly reflect the national vision for the Parks of Wales • Planning Policy Wales and the TANs should 	<p>WAG</p>		<p>Over next 2-3 years</p>

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<p>stress the importance of planning for sustainable development in the Parks and the role of the NPAs and their partners in pursuing exemplary and innovative planning work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Policy Wales and other future updates of relevant national planning guidance should clearly identify that the National Parks are not suitable locations for the development of energy, waste or water projects meeting conflict with the first purpose. At the same time, an emphasis on self-sufficient communities as part of the sustainable development agenda for the National Parks, should be an important goal • The role of the National Parks as test beds and exemplars in sustainable development should be clearly recognised in the revised version of the Wales Sustainable Development Scheme. <p>Rec. 26 – A suite of statements / guidance is required to underpin the delivery of the Park purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCW should produce a statement on the full scope of ‘natural beauty’ in the first purpose including the protection of natural resources, important perceptual qualities of landscape 	<p>CCW with NPAs,</p>	<p>Aim to build on existing key references in guidance such as Planning Policy Wales as strategic guidance/policy statements are updated/ revised.</p>	<p>Initial work to be done in 2004/5</p>

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		<p><u>To date</u> – BBNP has produced draft guide. <u>Next step</u> – other two Parks to action</p> <p><u>To date</u> – local advisory forums set up in BBNP and other similar arrangements in other Parks. <u>Next step</u> – continue to build on existing arrangements, operating through and with local fora. Customer focus groups and surveys to be initiated in next 12 months</p>	

* Resource implications of recommendations to be more fully assessed.