



Natural Economy Northwest

Natural Benefits for Business Pilot: Evaluation

Executive summary

Commissioned from Creative Concern by Natural Economy Northwest in partnership with the Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership and Northwest Biodiversity Forum for a project delivered through the Cumbria Business Environment Network

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Contents

Preface	page 1
Overview of Natural Benefits for Business Pilot	page 2
Method used and response rates	page 3
Summary report on findings (in question order)	page 4
Summary of findings	page 6
Recommendations	page 7
Sector analysis	page 9

1. Preface

This is one in a series of reports produced between 2007 and 2009 within the Natural Economy Northwest (NENW) Programme. NENW is a regional partnership programme led by Natural England, the North West Development Agency and the SITA Trust on behalf of a wide range of economic and environmental partners. The main focus is to deliver priority action 113 in the Regional Economic Strategy, to optimise the natural environment's contribution to the regional economy and quality of life.

The programme also includes the Enriching Nature SITA Trust biodiversity programme and the aspirations of Natural England and other environmental and economic partners to mainstream the natural environment within sustainable economic development. Key work areas within the programme are to:

- increase awareness of the value of the natural economy,
- commission and disseminate research to promote and facilitate delivery,
- provide direction to promote effective use of limited financial resources,
- contribute to the development and delivery of regional and sub-regional strategies,
- facilitate natural economy project development and encourage project delivery,
- promote and facilitate Green Infrastructure and Natural Tourism especially through the Sub-Regional Economic Partnerships and the Tourist Boards,
- encourage strategic investment in natural economy projects, and
- to facilitate training, skills innovation and advice to business.

This particular report was commissioned from Creative Concern, on behalf of the Natural Benefits for Business Cumbria Pilot Steering Group, with representatives of Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership, NW Biodiversity Forum, Natural England and Natural Economy Northwest. Advice received from Todd Holden, Programme Director and Melanie Hart of Enworks was gratefully appreciated. Finally, our thanks to Andrew Forsyth, Chair of the Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership, for chairing the Steering Group.

This work along with other NENW information and publications is on our website – www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk. You can contact us through our website. We are interested in the ways that this report has been of use to you so that we can take into account in the further development of the programme.

This report has been commissioned by Natural Economy Northwest in the delivery of its aims, outputs and outcomes and it should not be assumed that it represents the policy of the funders – Northwest Regional Development Agency, Natural England and the SITA Trust.

Dr Will Williams

Programme Director
Natural Economy Northwest

2. Overview of Natural Benefits for Business Pilot

This evaluation is for the Natural Benefits for Business (NB4B) Pilot. The Pilot was initiated by the NW Biodiversity Forum and the Natural Economy Northwest Programme working directly with the Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership and the Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency (CREA).

The aim of the Cumbria NB4B pilot was to look for ways in which biodiversity, the conservation of biological resources, can be made relevant for commercial organisations. The pilot has attempted to enable businesses to understand how a simple change in site management or working practices can have lasting benefits for the surrounding wildlife while at the same time showing how this wildlife-friendly approach makes business sense.

The NB4B Pilot started in April 2006, running for two years as part of the wider CBEN (Cumbria Business Environment Network) scheme in which member organisations are offered environmental management advice and support. This advice ranges from resource efficiency to recycling to energy conservation and is delivered through a network of business advisors who work with individual companies. CBEN also delivers an environmental awards scheme, helping business identify and address its environmental impact. It is through the CBEN programme advisors that the NB4B pilot was delivered.

There is a separate report already completed for the NB4B Pilot and a best practice report is in preparation.

3. Method used and response rates

The report evaluates the findings from the Natural Benefits for Business (NB4B) telephone survey, which was carried out in July 2008.

There were 64 companies that were available to be interviewed, and 27 interviews were completed (an average of 42%). Of these companies, 17 were tourism companies, 2 were retail, 4 were manufacturing, 3 were classified as 'other' and 1 was service. The telephone survey consisted of 14 questions in total.

The survey was designed to obtain feedback on the NB4B pilot. It was written to help participants be clear that they were meant to only comment on the NB4B pilot, rather than the wider CBEN scheme through which the biodiversity advice was delivered. The full evaluation report also disregards any information that clearly refers to CBEN rather than NB4B.

Below is a table that details the response rate for each individual question.

Question	Response number	Percentage response	Confidence interval <i>(with a confidence level set at 95%) The amount + or – for the extrapolated figures</i>
One a	27	42	14.27
One b	27	42	14.27
One c	27	42	14.27
One d	27	42	14.27
One e	22	34	16.16
One f	27	42	14.27
Two	27	42	14.27
Three	27	42	14.27
Four	27	42	14.27
Five	26	41	14.68
Six	26	41	14.68
Seven	27	42	14.27
Eight	27	42	14.27
Nine a	27	42	14.27
Nine b	27	42	14.27
Nine c	27	42	14.27
Nine d	25	39	15.04
Nine e	27	42	14.27
Nine f	26	41	14.68
Nine g	27	42	14.27
Ten	27	42	14.27
Eleven	17	27	18.01
Twelve a	25	39	15.04
Twelve b	26	41	14.68
Twelve c	26	41	14.68
Twelve d	23	36	15.83
Twelve e	0	/	/
Thirteen	18	28	17.72
Fourteen	17	27	18.01

4. Summary report on findings (in question order)

Question one

This question was designed to ascertain the motivation of the participants to take up the offer of biodiversity advice from CBEN. The most popular reason for taking part in the biodiversity pilot was the business case for being involved; 85% of businesses thought this was extremely important. 78% of businesses stated that the assistance to deliver CSR commitment was extremely important, and 59% stated the chance to win a CBEN award was an extremely important.

Question two

This question was designed to explore any additional reasons for receiving the biodiversity advice. Responses were fairly diverse, but broke into three clear groups: The CBEN link – 22% of respondents took up this advice because they already trusted and acknowledged CBEN's reputation
The 'altruists' response – 26% stated altruistic reasons for taking part
Specific advice – 22% of businesses responding that gaining new advice was a driver to them taking part in NB4B.

Question three

This question was intended to assess the perceived stand-alone value of the NB4B pilot and asked if businesses would have been open to biodiversity advice if it had not been offered as part of CBEN's package. 20 businesses responded 'yes', however 11 of these then went on to qualify their answer by saying that they still placed a high value on CBEN being the delivery agent, so only a third of the companies in total would have been completely receptive to receiving biodiversity advice from any other company or as a stand alone scheme.

Question four

This question was designed to explore the reasoning behind the businesses' selection of individual modules. Eight businesses fully expanded on why they chose specific modules, and the most popular response was that they were the ones that seemed most appropriate for the business or of most interest. The majority of businesses could not give a full reason, implying that the modules factor less importantly in the decision making process of the businesses that take part.

Question five

This question was intended to obtain information about some of the biodiversity gains achieved through the pilot. There was a range of responses to this question, detailed in the full report. 14 responses contained information that suggested confusion between CBEN and NB4B activity. These responses suggest that even when businesses were very specifically asked to respond on biodiversity, they still blurred the lines between the two programmes; 21% of all businesses find it hard to distinguish between the CBEN and NB4B advice.

Question six

This question was intended to inform future schemes, to better target advice and information, and asked how the advice was implemented by the business. 52% of respondents stated that a member of the senior management team led the project, with 36% of businesses stating that one person, or a small group of champions drove delivery. Only 8% delivered through a 'full team' approach.

Question seven

This was a question to assess the quantity and satisfaction of follow up support, to inform future schemes, and asked if they were satisfied with the level of follow up. 99% of businesses responded yes to this question.

Question eight

This question expanded on the previous question seven. The results showed that 11 businesses had follow up that took all different forms. Three received only email contact, and 13 companies had face to face follow up communication (answer C). Anecdotal responses demonstrated that support was considered very good quality and consistent.

Question nine

This question was designed to ascertain how the companies felt that they had benefited from the pilot. The opportunities to raise the profile of the business and improve customer perceptions were considered to be the most significant benefit – with 96% rating these very highly, or highly. 48% of businesses felt that they benefited highly from an increase in customers / business. There were no areas in which a business felt that they were of no benefit at all.

Question ten

This question expanded on the previous question and asked about additional benefits. There was some confusion in this question between NB4B and CBEN. 12 businesses gave answers that, for the purpose of this evaluation, are being classed as NB4B responses. However, 13 businesses have had their responses disregarded for this question, as they clearly were about the wider CBEN scheme. Of the valid answers, the key areas of additional benefits are increased knowledge and awareness of the key issues relating to biodiversity. However, due to the low return rate of valid answers, this question cannot be considered valuable as part of the wider evaluation.

Question eleven

This question aimed to find out if businesses felt that the biodiversity advice offered added value to the wider business advice that they were receiving from CBEN. This question was re-worded for 17 of the 27 surveys, due to a poor early response rate. Of the 17 companies who answered, 16 businesses stated that they would be more likely to sign up to a package of advice if it included biodiversity information. However, as the response rate to this question was only 27%, this result has to be read with some caution.

Question twelve

This question explored how the pilot could have been improved. 19 businesses said specifically they thought the quality of advertising was very good and five businesses felt that the advertising wasn't a strength. 26 of the 27 respondents said that they thought the level and quality of advice was excellent or good and 100% of businesses commended the pilot for its excellent support package. 20 businesses stated that all the information was relevant, and fitted with their business well. Although no response to this question gave us any reason to discount it due to confusion with the wider CBEN scheme, as NB4B or biodiversity wasn't specifically mentioned in the wording of question 12, these responses should be read with some caution.

Question thirteen

This question aimed to obtain recommendation rates. 64% of businesses that responded stated that they had recommended the pilot to other companies or colleagues.

Question fourteen

This question aimed to find out who would be interested in continuing with this pilot. 100% of businesses that answered this question stated that they would be interested in continuing their involvement, in some way.

5. Summary of findings

The following section highlights the main findings from the evaluation.

1.

Motivation for involvement

The most important factor for businesses getting involved is the 'business case' that was made for taking part. Anecdotal information given through the survey suggests that individuals within businesses do place some value on the more altruistic elements of receiving and acting on biodiversity advice. This factor appears to be driven by the individuals responding to the survey.

2.

Benefits of participation

The main benefit felt by those who took part was the opportunity to raise the profile of the business, and in turn improve customer reputation. For many businesses, this even translated into an increase in business or customers. The impact on staff was also noted as a close second in terms of value – staff morale was a highly recognised benefit, whilst a positive change in staff behaviour was also acknowledged.

The chance to network, or to obtain follow on advice was recognised as less of a benefit. However, some of the anecdotal responses suggested that recommendation levels for the pilot were high and that several companies were actually cited the ability to spread the advice and help other businesses as being an important driver for them.

3.

Long-term satisfaction and appeal of pilot

Over all, satisfaction with the pilot was high. 99% of businesses responded that they were satisfied with the quality and quantity of the following up communication, and it appeared that the relationships with the advisors themselves seems to have been a major contributor to this. In addition, 26 of 27 respondents stated that they thought the quality of advice was excellent or good, and 20 businesses stated that all information was relevant. Of the 17 companies who answered a question about the 'added value' of biodiversity advice to a wider business advice scheme, 16 businesses stated that they would be more likely to sign up to a package of advice if it included biodiversity information (however, as the response rate to this question was only 27%, this result has to be read with some caution). 100% of businesses who answered a question about continuing with the pilot said that they would be interested.

However, because there was clear confusion between the wider CBEN offer and the NB4B pilot, this level of satisfaction may have been influenced by the full service of CBEN.

4.

CBEN award scheme

The CBEN award is an incentive – 59% of respondents stated it was extremely important in their decision making process, and a further 33% stating it was quite important. Anecdotally, it was also stated as important – it was referred to in responses to questions two, four, five and ten.

6. Recommendations

The following section provides some recommendations for the pilot going forward.

1.

Future pilots

This pilot focused very heavily on one sector – tourism – and therefore it is recommended that any future pilot schemes aim for a more equal balance of sectors (including manufacturing, service, retail, transport etc), so that a more thorough evaluation can be carried out on the impact and effects of these sectors.

It is also recommended that greater clarity is sought, from the beginning of the pilot as to the difference between the NB4B advice, and any wider package of environmental advice that was being offered, as there was confusion between the two with this sample, which in turn has affected the evaluation.

2.

Advertising of the NB4B pilot / maximising the appeal of the pilot's offer

Emphasising the direct business benefits of involvement in NB4B would be the most appropriate way to focus marketing of future rounds of the scheme, although care must be taken to not de-couple completely from the more altruistic elements of the pilot, which can be presented as a good way to build a company brand that suggests ethical and environmentally sound business (appealing to customers and staff).

In terms of advertising methods (as well as on going scheme communication), care should be taken to follow the sound environmental credentials of the pilot – reducing the amount the paper-based communication and a move to the on-line / virtual world.

3.

The appeal of face to face support

The relationship with the business advisor is critical to the success of the pilot, and this must be continued. Communication should be primarily with one individual with whom the business can build a relationship with. This should also inform how the scheme is advertised – emphasising the one to one nature of the support and the personal element of the scheme (rather than it being delivered through a more generic method).

4.

Maximising personal interest

One of the driving forces behind the companies who took part in this pilot was the motivation and interest of individuals – although not the primary reason for getting involved, having a very motivated or passionate individual within a company who felt strongly about sound environmental practices helped businesses to get the most out of the pilot. Therefore, NB4B should consider marketing their services to passionate individuals involved in business, through the many 'green professional networks' that exist.

5.

A NB4B network

The survey suggested that some participants would have liked to have had more opportunity to network, and use their involvement in the NB4B pilot as a way of growing their contacts and potential customer base as well as a chance to spread the word about their work with NB4B with other companies who aren't currently involved. More opportunities to link the different participating companies could enhance the overall offer to businesses.

6.

Delivery method

The findings from this survey suggest that businesses place a great deal of value of the delivery of advice through an agency or organisation that they have already heard of / dealt with in the past. It is therefore recommended that future phases of NB4B seek to team up with existing delivery agents of business advice.

7.

Sector-tailored advice and support

This current pilot did focus heavily on one sector – tourism – and therefore future rounds of NB4B should seek to offer more tailored advice to different sectors, recognising that the strength of NB4B is in the personal, and therefore more bespoke, nature of the service.

8.

Awards scheme

As the CBEN award was seen as such an incentive for this pilot, it is recommended that a link to a similar awards scheme is replicated for any future phases of NB4B.

7. Sector analysis

As detailed earlier in this report, the breakdown of different sectors included in this survey is as follows:

- 17 tourism companies (of 33 involved in NB4B pilot)
- 4 manufacturing companies (of 7 involved in NB4B pilot)
- 3 businesses classified as 'other' (of 11 involved in NB4B pilot)
- 2 retail companies (of 5 involved in NB4B pilot)
- 1 service company (of 5 involved in NB4B pilot)
- 0 art & design companies (of 3 involved in NB4B pilot)

A sector analysis has been hampered by the imbalance between the sectors represented in the survey. It is difficult to do a comparative survey between sectors for this reason. With such small representation, the results could be affected by a number of factors that a larger survey group would eradicate. We are unable to analyse the art & design sector at all, and the retail, service and manufacturing sectors are represented through too few surveys.