



Natural Economy Northwest

Natural Tourism summary report

Prepared for Natural Economy Northwest
by Blue Sail and TEAM



Funded by



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 the Team and Blue Sail consultants to summarise the outcome of a number of Natural Tourism reports undertaken in the period January to March 2007. The subject areas are listed on the contents page.

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 Development Agency, Natural England and the SITA Trust.

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1 INTRODUCTION

TEAM and Blue Sail were appointed by Natural Economy Northwest to help develop the work programme and priorities of the Natural Tourism project.

The brief was to:

- ▶ Undertake a review of regional and sub-regional strategies to identify where Natural Tourism fits and can contribute
- ▶ Produce a contact database of natural asset site owners and managers and businesses involved in natural tourism
- ▶ Run a series of five workshops, one in each sub-region, to start local dialogue and to identify local priorities
- ▶ Produce an action plan and work programme for the Natural Tourism Project and Development Manager
- ▶ Identify criteria for a potential Development Fund for natural tourism

DEFINITIONS

It is useful to know what we mean by natural tourism. We take it to be:

“Tourism that is based on and motivated by experiencing the natural environment, involving either passive enjoyment or active participation.”

Most of natural tourism will involve the passive enjoyment of the natural environment and it is the aim of Natural Economy Northwest to get more people out and appreciating it. It is also their aim to increase the economic benefits the natural environment brings and the greatest contribution can be gained from those inspired and motivated by the natural environment to make a visit. And of course it is fundamental to natural tourism that the environment is conserved and managed for future generations. Visitor management in sensitive sites is vital.

Another dimension of natural tourism is activity based in and motivated by the natural environment. By active participation in the natural environment we mean:

- ▶ ‘Soft’ Activities – walking, cycling etc
- ▶ Adventure activities – rock climbing, water sports
- ▶ Wildlife watching – bird watching, marine life etc
- ▶ Leisure learning – photography, painting, skills
- ▶ Conservation breaks – offered by BTCV, Wildlife Trusts etc
- ▶ Events & festivals – with a natural environment theme

REPORTING

This document provides a summary of our work and recommendations, and is supported by a number of more detailed reports:

- ▶ Strategic Review Working Papers: a report on the fit of natural tourism within the strategic framework
- ▶ Workshops Report: a report of discussion and ideas covered at the workshops
- ▶ Business Survey: a report of consultation with a small sample of natural tourism businesses The Contact Database of businesses, attractions and asset managers/owners
- ▶ Web scoping: a report of the opportunities for promoting natural tourism on the web
- ▶ Work Programme: detailed work programme for the Natural Tourism Product Development Manager with targets and measures.

2 STRATEGIC REVIEW

We were asked to review the strategic framework of the region and its sub-regions to see where natural tourism sits in terms of priorities and where it could contribute to these wider priorities.

It is evident that significant progress has been made since our original work in late 2005. Natural Tourism has both a good fit with the strategic approaches in the region as well as having the potential to make a significant contribution:

- ▶ It is embedded in the marketing activity of Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) and the Tourist Board marketing and development priorities
- ▶ Contributes to the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Tourism Strategy priorities of promoting the image of the region and realising & nurturing the region's natural heritage assets
- ▶ Contributes to the Regional Spatial Strategy goal for tourism development which enhances and conserves the environment
- ▶ Provides excellent content for visitor information on the web and at strategic Tourist Information Centres

We reviewed:

- ▶ The Regional Economic Strategy
- ▶ The Regional Spatial Strategy
- ▶ The Regional Tourism Strategy
- ▶ The Regional Visitor Information Strategy
- ▶ The Regional Forestry Framework
- ▶ Destination Management Plans for each sub-region
- ▶ NWDA Marketing Plan
- ▶ Tourist Board Marketing Plans

REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Regional Economic Strategy (RES) sets the economic development priorities for the North West.

Natural Tourism contributes towards the RES' key driver "*creating & maintaining conditions for sustainable growth*".

It makes a major contribution to:

- ▶ Promoting the image of the region
- ▶ Realising & nurturing natural & built heritage assets

But also has the potential to contribute to:

- ▶ Maximising cultural and major event opportunities
- ▶ Developing the quality of the visitor experience
- ▶ Supporting cleaner, safer, greener communities
- ▶ Developing community cohesion
- ▶ Improving the physical environment

REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) sets the framework for physical development of the North West over next 15 yrs.

Natural Tourism has the potential to contribute to many of the principles identified in the RSS, in particular:

- ▶ Supporting the provision of distinct tourism resources that harness the potential of sites and their natural attributes
- ▶ Encouraging and facilitating regeneration
- ▶ Harnessing the potential of sport and recreation, particularly the role of major sporting events
- ▶ Helping to relieve pressure on locations vulnerable to the impacts of climate change
- ▶ Respecting the environmental sensitivity of the coast, particularly the undeveloped coast
- ▶ Promoting eco-tourism in areas of high natural value in a way that minimises any adverse effect on the natural assets that visitors seek to experience.

REGIONAL TOURISM STRATEGY

The Regional Tourism Strategy identifies the priorities for the development of the visitor economy until 2010. The natural environment is fundamental to tourism in the North West and this is reflected in the RTS at the level of strategic goals and individual programmes. The contribution towards the strategic goals is summarised in the table below.

Strategic Goals in the Tourism Strategy	Natural Tourism Contribution
Enhancing the region's communication with visitors	Developing the proposition that NW is England's best natural environment
Boosting business productivity and performance	Business advice and development support for natural tourism businesses
Improving products and experiences	Product development of natural assets of the region
Maximising the skills and potential of visitor economy workers	Providing advice and training to natural tourism businesses
Improving the infrastructure	Investing in infrastructure at key sites – interpretation, access and services
Supporting sustainable development and strengthening social inclusion	Ensuring that the natural resources are properly managed and access is available for all

REGIONAL VISITOR INFORMATION STRATEGY

Regional Visitor Information Strategy (VIS) was published in 2006 and its implementation involves major investment in visitor information provision - £5.5M over 4 years for regional sub-regional investment in visitor information. Particular focus is likely to be on the web and strategic TICs. Natural tourism can contribute by providing appealing content and strong 'sense of place'

Undoubtedly the funding available through the VIS could provide the opportunity to improve visitor information, in particular web content of natural tourism product and assets. It could in theory also support interpretation and signposting. Tourist Boards are preparing Action Plans for their vision for visitor information provision in their areas.

REGIONAL FORESTRY FRAMEWORK

The Agenda for Growth, the Forestry Framework for England's North West, was published by the North West Forestry Framework Partnership in 2005 and is designed to help shape the regional woodland and forestry sector for the next 20 years.

The Framework contains six action areas, two of which are particularly relevant to natural tourism, each of which has a number of specific actions:

- ▶ Action Area 2: Regional Image
 - Developing Links to the Liverpool Capital of Culture 2008
 - Inputting into green infrastructure improvements
 - Making more of the existing Forest Parks for tourism (Natural Economy Northwest is mentioned specifically as a partner). The Forest Parks in the region are at Delamere in Cheshire and Grizedale and Whinlatter in Cumbria.
 - Developing new Forest Parks (the links to the community forests is potentially important here).

- ▶ Action Area 4: Health, Well-being and Quality of Life
 - Develop health, sport and activity schemes in existing woodlands
 - Developing Forest Schools through pilots and training

There is a basis within the Framework for stronger links between forestry and natural tourism development, but there is little detail on how this can be made to happen. The most specific recommendations relate to the development of existing and new Forest Parks. There may be an opportunity for Natural Tourism Northwest to support a Forest Park initiative in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and others.

REGIONAL MARKETING

Natural Tourism is one of NWDA's key themes for promoting the North West:

- ▶ It has recently launched www.naturalnorthwest.com to profile the superb natural assets of the region and have plans for further investment to improved interactivity and e-marketing

- ▶ Natural tourism is a core part of the brief to NWDA's PR agency
- ▶ 2007 is the second year that NWDA has produced a supplement with a Sunday newspaper featuring natural tourism in the North West

CHESTER & CHESHIRE

The two relevant priorities in Chester & Cheshire's Destination Management Plan are:

- ▶ Increase awareness of Cheshire's Appeals
- ▶ Increase appeal as a family fun destination

Areas of opportunity for natural tourism development are:

- ▶ The Peak District Fringe
- ▶ The Cheshire Meres and Mosses
- ▶ The East Cheshire sandstone ridge
- ▶ The proposed Weaver Valley Regional Park
- ▶ The canal network

Priorities for action are:

- ▶ Rural Escapes' marketing theme
- ▶ 'Greening' the product to take advantage of consumer interest in natural tourism.
- ▶ Walking, cycling and equestrian activities
- ▶ Gardens – Year of Gardens 2008
- ▶ Product development in support of natural tourism

MERSEYSIDE

Within Merseyside's Destination Management Plan:

- ▶ The focus in Merseyside is on the coastline – the Sefton and Wirral coastlines and Mersey Waterfront
- ▶ The Mersey Partnership is developing a new web site bringing together the natural assets of the area with a launch planned late summer 2007
- ▶ A cluster group of site owners/managers and businesses has been formed to take natural tourism forward

Specific opportunities have been identified around:

- ▶ Developments on the Wirral coastline, country parks and coastal brand
- ▶ The sustainable tourism potential of the Sefton coastline
- ▶ The development of the marine lake Southport
- ▶ The Mersey Waterfront developments
- ▶ The role of the Clore Natural History section of National Museums Liverpool
- ▶ The Sefton Park enhancements
- ▶ A possible major Rainforest Project

GREATER MANCHESTER

- ▶ Manchester has less natural tourism product than other areas but they have developed 'Manchester's Countryside' as a marketing theme
- ▶ There is a clear relationship with Industrial heritage as many sites are in water or woodland setting
- ▶ The major features are parks, woodland and wildlife while walking and cycling are themes identified for development

LANCASHIRE

- ▶ The marketing themes for promoting Lancashire are 'Country Escapes', 'Coastal Contrasts' and 'Living Legends' - all have natural tourism opportunities.
- ▶ Wildlife watching – especially bird watching - and activities all feature strongly
- ▶ Product development work is underway to support private sector development and collaboration

Capital projects identified in the Destination Management Plan are:

- ▶ East Lancashire and Ribble Coast and Wetlands Regional Parks
- ▶ Brockholes Wetland
- ▶ Slackwood Farm Visitor and Education Centre – Arnside-Silverdale AONB
- ▶ West Pennine Moors
- ▶ Forest of Bowland Bridleway
- ▶ As well as investment in cycling, walking and equestrian routes and facilities

CUMBRIA

The Natural Environment is core to the Lake District brand and runs through everything. The core marketing proposition is 'Wilderness Refined' combining the stunning environment with comfort and indulgence. There is also dedicated promotion of adrenalin activities – Cumbria Adventure Capital is a 2008 theme.

Priority capital projects identified in the Destination Management Plan include:

- ▶ Grizedale Forest
- ▶ Derwent Forest
- ▶ Lowther Castle and gardens
- ▶ Hadrian's Wall
- ▶ The South Solway Peatlands

And there are many, many actions relating to developments of natural tourism from equine tourism to festivals and events to site specific investment.

3 THE WORKSHOPS

We held five workshops, one in each sub-region organised with the help of the tourist boards. In total over 80 people attended bringing together tourism interests from tourist boards and local authorities, natural asset owners and managers from the public and voluntary sector, and a few business people running natural tourism businesses. The aim of the workshops was to start local dialogue and to explore some of the constraints to natural tourism as well as some of the opportunities. The workshops were also intended to inform the work programme of the Natural Tourism Project. It makes sense to view the workshops in the context of the Regional Tourism Strategy and sub-regional Destination Management Plans. The dialogue started in the workshops, as well as some of the ideas discussed, should help in the delivery of these plans. Equally as ideas are developed further they should be fed into the annual review of the Destination Management Plans in order to become established as priority actions for the development of tourism in the sub-region.

A report of the workshops has been produced and below is a summary of the conclusions.

The workshops followed broadly the same format:

- ▶ Presentations on our original 'Marketing the Natural Environment' report for NWDA and English Nature, on the natural tourism project and on what the tourist board in the area was doing. These presentations were to brief everyone on what has been and is happening
- ▶ Clarification of the scope of Natural Tourism
- ▶ Group sessions identifying the barriers to developing natural tourism and potential ways of tackling these
- ▶ Identification of business opportunities within the sector
- ▶ Identification of one thing within participant's organisation that was holding back attracting visitors and their spend (not asked in Cumbria)

There was a large degree of agreement across the groups around constraints and solutions, and indeed business opportunities (with a few interesting original ideas). There was however a difference in the mind set among the groups of what they perceived their area's main challenge to be. This coloured the way they approached the discussion.

- ▶ Cumbria - collaboration among the various players
- ▶ Lancashire – image and awareness of the county and what it offers
- ▶ Cheshire – opportunity around soft activities within their more gentle landscape
- ▶ Merseyside - need for investment in site infrastructure
- ▶ Greater Manchester – natural environment (or more accurately 'green space') and its relationship to the city offer of Manchester

The definition of natural tourism was offered and debated. It became clear that we need both a broad definition to encompass the motivating role that the natural environment has in attracting visits as well as a more specific definition focusing on those activities which take place within the natural environment and where new business development should be focused. The former is by and large being addressed by the Tourist Boards; the latter requires more attention and is where the greatest effort of the Natural Tourism Project should be devoted.

The main areas where the Natural Tourism Project or Natural Economy Northwest Programme could best contribute were identified as:

Funding for capital works, physical product improvements and maintenance, facilities, access and quality, large scale projects

- ▶ Identify sources – public and private
- ▶ Make the business case for investment in infrastructure enhancement and maintenance
- ▶ Extend the Tourism & Conservation Partnership Visitor Payback Model to help fund infrastructure improvements
- ▶ Enhanced interpretation at key sites

Image, marketing and branding

- ▶ Image and copy bank
- ▶ Use of 'tourism miles' concept in promotion
- ▶ Identify and focus on icons (old and potential)

Taking the product to market

- ▶ Packaging – themes, trails etc
- ▶ Packaging – natural environment activities with accommodation and other tourism product
- ▶ Web-enabled information and planning tools

Collaboration, partnership and linkages

- ▶ Clusters
 - bringing asset owners together with businesses and marketing organisations in specific geographical areas, and
 - bringing businesses together in particular market sectors
- ▶ Tourist board enabling role
- ▶ Working conferences
- ▶ Networks
- ▶ Information sources and advice
- ▶ Developing capacity and knowledge

The session on business opportunities produced a great many ideas for commercial activity and income generation (some clearly with more commercial scope than others). Most of them are more appropriate for the asset owners or the private sector to take forward. There are some however where the intervention or support of the Natural Tourism project could facilitate.

Themed packages – linking accommodation providers and activity operators

- ▶ Guided activity trails
- ▶ Cycling packages
- ▶ Wildlife watching
- ▶ Craft courses
- ▶ Working (conservation) holidays

Marketing

- ▶ Web tools (downloadable itineraries, suggestions, planning tools, pod casts)
- ▶ Package brokers

Events

- ▶ The natural environment as a venue
- ▶ Events based on the natural environment (new/developing existing/better marketing) eg Bird Watching Festival; The 'Big Walk' around Cumbria

- ▶ Green weddings

Food

Linking Northwest Fine Foods with asset owners and appropriate businesses

4 THE CONTACT DATABASE

The original 'Marketing the Natural Environment Report' undertook an audit of regionally significant natural assets with tourism potential. For this project we need to know who are the organisations and the people that own and manage natural assets and run businesses based on the natural environment.

This organisational database is in effect the 'client group' for the Natural Tourism project. They will form the basis of those organisations with whom the Natural Project will work. Some will be interested in working with the project to develop their business others less so; some will be interested in collaborating with other businesses, others may be content to work on their own but value information and contact. Over time the database will develop, it will become clear who wants what and different categories can emerge. And of course new businesses will be added.

The database can also be used to add to the Destination Management Systems of the Tourist Boards (although note that many of the entries are drawn from that source).

At this point the database contains 637 entries.

	Key sites (Private, public, voluntary)	Natural tourism experiences (mainly businesses)	Asset managers	Other stakeholders
Cheshire	32	18	14	17
Manchester	7	27	12	13
Merseyside	19	10	12	20
Lancashire	35	44	33	41
Cumbria	34	128	30	21
North West wide	0		24	46
Total	126	228	125	158

The categories for key sites with numbers of entries are:

Bird Watching: 2 entries
Canals: 3
Coast: 11
Cycle hire: 16
Cycling (general): 1
Fishing: 14
Garden: 28

Green infrastructure: 1
Guided walks: 14
Local produce: 28
Miscellaneous: 12
Outdoor activity (general): 1
Wildlife: 11
Woodland/forestry: 9

The categories for natural tourism experiences with numbers of entries are:

Bird Watching: 6 entries

Canals: 15

Climbing: 8

Coast: 12

Cycle hire: 16

Cycling (general): 4

Cycling holidays: 7

Diving: 12

Environmental education: 2

Equestrian: 34

Green infrastructure: 2

Guided walks: 15

Miscellaneous: 5

Outdoor activity (general): 21

Outdoor activity centres: 22

Walking holidays: 27

Water based activity: 33

5 THE DEVELOPMENT FUND

To ensure that natural tourism realises its potential in supporting the delivery of the various strategies, contributing to economic growth and improving the image of the North West, a new Natural Tourism Development Fund is proposed. The scale of the proposed Fund will be important if it is to have a significant regional impact and we recommend that the fund should be substantial if it is to have a lasting impact on the growth of natural tourism in the Region. It is likely that the bulk of the funding will need to come from existing partners.

We suggest below a broad indication of the scale of funding that we consider could have some regional impact in three areas.

The three areas are:

- ▶ **Infrastructure for natural tourism (£5 to £10million)**
- ▶ **Site based environmental interpretation (£2 to £4 million)**
- ▶ **Collaborative marketing (£0.25 to £0.5million)**

We propose that the fund should operate for a 5 year period commencing in April 2009. It could be launched in the final year of the Natural Tourism Project and be seen as one of the major outputs of the work of the Natural Economy North West Programme.

Funding applications could be submitted on a rolling twice per year competitive basis, and should be matched at 25% - 50% by applicants. Applications could be received for one of the three areas described or better still for combinations of them. The structure of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnerships Programme is an interesting model where a number of related objectives have to be satisfied to make a successful bid.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR NATURAL TOURISM

Natural Tourism related infrastructure projects could be supported where there is significant tourism and visitor spending potential at, or related to, a site. It would be targeted at sites (or groups of smaller sites in a defined geographical area) which attract significant numbers of visitors and where the attraction is based on important natural environmental assets.

Funding would be available for the following

- ▶ **car park creation and improvement** and related road and on-site signing
- ▶ new and improved **toilet facilities**
- ▶ **footpath** creation, repair and upgrading (to DDAAct requirements where appropriate)

- ▶ the capital costs of establishing **bus or boat services** that give new access to important natural environmental sites
- ▶ **visitor management measures** such as fences, boardwalks, hides and signs where these are required to protect the natural resources and manage visitor pressure

The fund should be available to public sector, voluntary bodies, trusts, private businesses and consortia, who can demonstrate their competence and commitment to the maintenance of high quality visitor management services at sites with regional natural tourism significance. It should be limited to sites (or groups of sites) of regional significance where visitor numbers are likely to exceed 50,000 p.a. and where significant direct economic, environmental and educational benefits can be demonstrated. This would require income generation opportunities either at the site itself or through a direct link between the site and spending opportunities in the vicinity.

Sites which serve only local residents would not be appropriate for the support of this fund. We suggest that only sites that have at least 50% of their visitors travelling from more than 45mins to the site, or who are overnight visitors staying locally could qualify (or the potential to meet such a target). This is designed to concentrate the limited funding available on those sites with natural tourism significance, rather than local parks and open spaces provided for community use and of largely local recreation value.

Applicants would have to demonstrate that market research had taken place and that there was significant direct and indirect job creation and/or job protection potential in the project. The increased visitors and their spending could be on the site itself or at nearby businesses.

ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is the term used to cover all types of communication with visitors at sites and is designed to improve their enjoyment and understanding of the place they are visiting. Enhancing the way that the natural environment is interpreted at key sites will enhance visitor stay time and spending as well as raise the profile of the natural environment.

The following types of site based interpretation projects could be supported:

- ▶ The preparation of **interpretation plans** for sites of regional significance for their natural assets and where visitors could be attracted in significant numbers. Such plans should detail the capital and revenue budgets required to enhance the interpretation and presentation of sites. They should include outline designs of buildings, displays and events and how they would be promoted. The sustainability of facilities and services should be addressed.
- ▶ The production and installation of **interpretation and communications materials** such as on-site boards, trails, artworks, guidebooks etc.
- ▶ **Enhanced physical access and visitor infrastructure** which assists visitors to appreciate and understand the natural assets at key sites - such as trails, boardwalks, hides, viewpoints, rides etc. Provision of facilities that provide

access for all should be included. (There is clearly a close relationship here with the green infrastructure funding stream described above)

- ▶ The development of new **displays and audio visual materials** for existing centres.
- ▶ The use of **radio, telephone and camera technology** to bring images of the natural environment into buildings, to mobile phones and MP3 players.
- ▶ The detailed design and planning of **modern visitor centres** (the capital cost of the buildings and tourist infrastructure would be funded from other sources).
- ▶ The training of **site guides and tour leaders**
- ▶ The development of **major events** which promote the natural assets of the North West and attract visitor spend, as well as encourage greater understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.

COLLABORATIVE MARKETING

Funding would be available for well researched, new collaborative marketing activities from groups of tourism businesses (including voluntary and public sector) operating at a local, sub-regional or regional level. Support would not be available to a single business unless it was in partnership with a natural asset owner or manager. Marketing activities would have to contribute to the following objectives:

- ▶ Increasing the number of visitors to the North West using the natural attractions of the region
- ▶ Encouraging visitors to spend longer in the region appreciating and using its natural assets
- ▶ Encouraging visitors to visit or take day trips through the whole year

The types of initiatives that could be supported could include:

- ▶ **Collaborative marketing** initiatives by groups of businesses (tourism clusters) involving at least 4 businesses.
- ▶ Establishing and marketing **new packages** bringing together at least two of the following types of operator - natural tourism businesses, accommodation providers, natural asset managers, local food producers
- ▶ Marketing new, or the expansion of existing, **special events and festivals** based on the natural environmental

6 WEB SCOPING

In parallel with the main project Blue Sail undertook a web scoping exercise to assess how natural tourism was currently presented on partners web sites, the gaps and opportunities, and how the Natural Tourism Project should engage with this. A full report has been produced and this section provides a summary of the findings and conclusions.

It is apparent that the promotion of natural tourism generally and via the web is in transition. Northwest Development Agency and the Tourist Boards are all giving the development of their web presence on natural tourism a much higher priority in line with their greater emphasis on its promotion. There are certainly gaps and limitations in the current provision but this is acknowledged, and in most instances work is underway to address it. Equally Natural England is investigating ambitious plans for its web presence. In addition there are a range of partner organisations promoting their particular part of natural tourism be it national parks, wildlife trusts or the ramblers association.

The ideal web site from a visitor perspective would provide a comprehensive, searchable database of all elements of the natural environment and the tourism activity taking place within it. It would use strong images, give ideas of the best things to see and do, be easy to navigate and provide all the associated information needed to plan a trip including accommodation, places to eat, maps etc. We are not at this point yet. While one site providing all of this for the Northwest is unlikely this need not be a problem as long as the links and connections are made among regional and sub-regional promotional and partner organisations.

The role of the Natural Tourism Project should be to help NWDA, the Tourist Boards and Natural England have the best possible information on which to develop their sites. This will involve:

- ▶ Advocacy
- ▶ The supply of content
- ▶ The input of ideas and good practice.

However the Natural Tourism project also needs to engage with NWDA and the Tourist Boards on the Visitor Information Strategy programme to ensure that the requirements in developing natural tourism are recognised and prioritised in the funding flowing from that programme.

Finally, the Natural Tourism Project also has a role to play in encouraging the linking up of the natural tourism partners operating on the web (among themselves and with Tourist Board sites) and providing them with ideas and good practice to help develop and make best use of their web sites for the benefit of visitors.

7 THE WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for the Natural Tourism Product Development Manager has been developed on the basis of the strategic review, discussions with NWDA and the Tourist Boards, and the discussion within the workshops.

The Marketing the Natural Environment Report recommended the appointment of: *“A Natural Tourism Product Development Manager to support practical business-focused collaboration among tourism and environmental interests; to promote and disseminate new ideas; encourage collaboration on marketing and new product development; and to support business development”*. This remit still holds good.

The Natural Tourism Product Development Manager has in effect between July 2007 and December 2009 to deliver. In terms of time – once holidays and corporate responsibilities have been deducted – this leaves 88 weeks or 440 days.

We propose the tasks fall into two work streams **Marketing Infrastructure** and **Product Development**. Each task has been given an allocated amount of time which will be delivered across the 30 month remaining life of the project. We have also identified the budget which will be necessary for delivering the programme. This budget has yet to be sourced but there are opportunities, for example around the implementation of the Visitor Information Strategy, which should be explored.

MARKETING INFRASTRUCTURE:

Task	Days	Est. of budget required
The Web Advocacy to achieve ideal (cf Web Scoping Report); encouraging links and feeding content	15 days	None
Marketing Toolkit for natural tourism businesses Production outsourced Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Market profile ▶ How to reach visitors ▶ Using the web and e-marketing ▶ Image and copy ▶ Who to work with 	15 days	£20K
Image & copy bank Production outsourced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify what exists ▶ Commission images and copy ▶ Used in marketing toolkit and on naturaleconomynorthwest.com + Tourist Board business sites 	15 days	£20K
PR Contract management of dedicated PR resource <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Gather PR stories ▶ Encourage natural tourism operators to supply ▶ Feed to Tourist Boards and NWDA ▶ Use for promotional activity (eg Northern Exposure) 	30 days	£15K
Total	75 days	£55K

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT:

Task	Days	Est. of budget required
Clusters and networks 5 clusters @ 64 days each: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Events & Festivals ▶ Leisure learning ▶ Activities ▶ Wildlife watching ▶ An area specific cluster 	320 days	£35K
Ideas and inspiration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify good practice and ideas ▶ 3 events per year ▶ Dissemination by e-bulletins 	45 days	£15K
Total	365 days	£50K

Some of the tasks will require managing production and delivery, freeing up the time of the Natural Tourism Product Development Manager to focus on the time intensive requirement of developing and facilitating work with groups of businesses.

A budget is required to deliver on these tasks. We have identified a need for a modest £105K to deliver the programme and suggest that a contingency budget of £10K is added to this giving a **total requirement of £115K over the life of the project, or around £38K each year.**

More detail on the tasks, outputs and measures as well as a timeline is contained in the full Work Programme.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Returning to work on tourism and the natural environment in the North West after a year and a half it the progress that has already been made is apparent. The Natural Economy Northwest Programme is up and running and Natural Tourism a core stream within it. NWDA, Natural England and the Tourist Boards are all taking natural tourism and the opportunities it offers seriously. Within marketing and product development NWDA and the tourist boards are making good progress. There is an appetite to do more and there are natural resources in the North West that could support further growth in natural tourism to the benefit of the regional economy

This provides an excellent platform for the Natural Tourism Product Development Manager to build. And as one person it is important to identify where most value can be added to the efforts of others.

To make a real impact over the next 30 months will require both the dedication to delivering on a defined set of tasks and a small budget to facilitate it. We propose that the project tackles a few things well in order to leave a legacy which extends beyond the project.

To make sure that legacy is maintained will require longer term investment in the natural tourism infrastructure and efforts to establish a significant Natural Tourism Development Fund must be a priority of the Natural Economy Northwest Programme.

In addition to the task specific measures for the Natural Tourism Product Manager there are broader measures which should be used in the evaluation of the project as a whole. It may be difficult to directly attribute improvements in these measures to the specific actions of the Natural Tourism Project but it is important to try and do so.

These measures are:

- ▶ Image and perception levels of visitors and potential visitors of the North West as a destination for natural tourism and an outstanding natural environment. Measured through NWDA's bi-annual research survey.
- ▶ Improved business productivity
- ▶ Additional jobs created or sustained through the work of the project
- ▶ Increase in numbers of staying visitors and spend in rural parts of the region
- ▶ Increase in numbers of day visitors and spend in rural parts of the region.

In addition we suggest that it would be worthwhile undertaking a small number of illustrative case studies to measure the impact of the project. At this micro level it is easier to identify the causal relationships and impact through visitor and business surveys which seek specifically to measure the motivation and perceptions of visitors, increases in business turnover, the local retention of spend, new jobs created and so on. Case studies could be of a cluster or at a specific site which is developed as part of the natural tourism project. These case studies can then be used to demonstrate the economic – and indeed other – benefits across the activity of the natural tourism project.