



## Research summary 17: Project guidance for managers of natural tourism projects

‘Tourism that is based on enjoyment of the natural environment can bring huge advantages to a region, but in order to attract funding, managers must learn how to demonstrate the economic benefits of their projects.’

### Key messages

- As well as attracting visitors, natural tourism projects must be sustainable, investing in the natural assets of the Northwest so visitors and residents can enjoy them into the future.
- Any funding application must clearly demonstrate how a tourism project fits with wider strategic objectives for the region.
- The clearer an application can be about potential economic benefits from the project, the more likely it is to attract funding.

### The context

Funders and practitioners are increasingly aware that the natural environment has a key role in delivering sustainable economic development and regeneration. It may seem obvious that tourism based on the natural environment will bring increased prosperity to a region, but project managers still need to demonstrate the **economic value** of their schemes to funding bodies, investors and planners. Guidance commissioned by Natural Economy Northwest<sup>1</sup> explains what can be achieved.

**Natural tourism** is tourism that is based on, and motivated by, experiencing the natural environment. It covers a range of popular activities, such as walking, rock climbing, bird watching or simply enjoying the scenery.

Natural tourism relies on green infrastructure such as lakes and forests being in excellent condition (see Research Summary 1 for more about green infrastructure). To function well, it also needs other forms of infrastructure, such as footpaths, picnic areas and car parking.

Crucially, natural tourism must be sustainable, founded on the Government’s five principles of **sustainable development**:

1. **Living within environmental limits:** tourism which respects the limits of the planet’s environment,

resources and biodiversity and ensures natural resources are improved and conserved for current and future generations to enjoy;

2. **Achieving a sustainable economy:** building a strong, stable and sustainable visitor economy which provides prosperity and opportunities;
3. **Using sound science responsibly:** making sure visitor economy strategy and policy is evidence based and takes public attitudes and values into account;
4. **Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society:** making sure tourism contributes positively to meeting the diverse needs of those in existing and future communities;
5. **Promoting good governance:** ensuring the visitor economy promotes effective and participative government which engages people’s creativity, energy and diversity.

### The advice

Most socio-economic funding bodies seek evidence of two things in a funding application – the strategic fit and the economic benefits.

In strategic terms, natural tourism can help attain many socio-economic goals. To demonstrate this to potential funders, project developers need to familiarise themselves with a number of key **strategy documents**.

These include:

- *Natural Tourism strategic review working papers.* Available to download from the resources section of [www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk](http://www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk)
- *The Strategy for Tourism in England’s Northwest 2003 - 2010*, Revised March 2007. Available to download from [www.nwda.co.uk](http://www.nwda.co.uk)
- Tourism strategies and destination management plans produced by each of the five sub-regional tourist boards: Cumbria; Lancashire and Blackpool; Manchester; Merseyside; Chester and Cheshire
- *The Regional Economic Strategy.* Available at [www.nwda.co.uk](http://www.nwda.co.uk)
- *The Regional Spatial Strategy.* Available from Government Office North West ([www.go-nw.gov.uk](http://www.go-nw.gov.uk))

The regional economic and spatial strategies are due to be integrated and replaced by the Single Regional Strategy in 2010.

Project planners then need to take some clear steps to come up with a strong **funding application**. These are as follows:

### 1. Identify the need or opportunity

The key question to ask is: What do we want to do and why?

### 2. Develop the project idea

Planners need to ask themselves what the project will deliver for visitors. It will be important to do market research, to establish who the project is likely to attract and how much they might spend. It is also vital to work out what infrastructure and visitor management will be required.

### 3. Check the strategic fit

Key strategic references will strengthen a project proposal, and this is where the documents mentioned above come in. The questions planners need to ask themselves include:

- Which strategies are most relevant to the project?
- What objectives can the project clearly contribute to?
- How will the project contribute to the 'quality of life' and 'quality of place' agendas of development agencies, local authorities and others?

### 4. Check the economic case

The guide includes a useful checklist of potential economic benefits from a natural tourism project. NENW is also working on a toolkit that will help managers quantify some of the more subjective types of benefit a project may deliver.

### 5. Identify partners and funding sources

A project may benefit from collaboration with other natural tourism providers, or with local businesses. Funding issues can be complex. The guide includes two detailed appendices that outline some of the potential sources of, and routes to, funding.

### 6. Refine the project

By this stage, a lot of information will have been gathered and the potential and opportunities will be clearer. It may be necessary to revise the project and revisit some of the earlier steps.

### 7. Plan for monitoring and evaluation

Funders will expect to see a plan for the monitoring and evaluation of the project and this should be included in the budget.

### 8. Develop an exit strategy

Most projects will need a plan for what will happen when the funding comes to an end. Crucially, the project must identify whether its strategic direction is financially viable.

## In practice

NENW facilitated and funded **five projects** to demonstrate the very best in natural tourism. In the guide, each project is assessed in detail in terms of progress made and lessons learned.

The projects are:

- The Wild Zone – wildlife watching in Cumbria
- Playdays in the Woods – fun activities for families in Cumbria
- Naturally Farming – stay on a farm in Cheshire
- Appreciating the natural environment – in the Forest of Bowland
- Burscough Bridge to Martin Mere Wetland Centre Trail in Lancashire – an alternative to the car

## Find out more

Natural Economy Northwest  
[www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk](http://www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk)

The Wild Zone  
[www.golakes.co.uk/wildzone](http://www.golakes.co.uk/wildzone)

Playdays in the Woods  
[www.playdaysinthewoods.com](http://www.playdaysinthewoods.com)

Naturally Farming  
[www.cheshirefarmstay.co.uk](http://www.cheshirefarmstay.co.uk)

Forest of Bowland  
[www.forestofbowland.com](http://www.forestofbowland.com)

Martin Mere  
[www.wwt.org.uk/visit-us/martin-mere/news/ecotourism-innovation-at-martin-mere](http://www.wwt.org.uk/visit-us/martin-mere/news/ecotourism-innovation-at-martin-mere)

<sup>1</sup> Project Guidance for Managers of Natural Tourism Projects  
[www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk/resources+reports.php](http://www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk/resources+reports.php)

