



Case study 4: Forest of Bowland: Sense of Place



Summary of economic and environmental impact:

- The project has trained 60 businesses and 20 volunteers
- Increased awareness of Forest of Bowland and businesses promoting the Bowland identity
- Encouraged sustainable tourism and environmental understanding
- Raised awareness of local produce and importance of supporting the local economy

Overview

Originally a royal hunting forest dating back to medieval times, the 300 square miles of land in rural Lancashire and north Yorkshire known as the Forest of Bowland was designated an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) in 1964.

In 2005 the Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership involving the six district and two county councils, landowners, farmers, voluntary organisations, wildlife groups, recreation groups and government agencies, started work on a sustainable tourism strategy. The partnership's aim is to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area while ensuring it is socially sustainable and economically productive.

The Sense of Place project was identified as a priority within the resulting strategy and was developed as one strand of this work.

The need for a distinct identity was highlighted in a consultation in 2005 with business partners and tourism officers, which found the Forest of Bowland AONB was not very well known outside Lancashire. Even within the area itself tourism operators would promote themselves as being close to the Yorkshire Dales or the Lake District rather than highlighting what Bowland had to offer.



Project development

A consultation facilitated by Pathways Consultancy in 2005 involved over 200 people, from young mothers to rangers and retirees. This culminated in the Hodder Valley Show where participants were given their own 'sense of place bag' containing a series of question cards, photos and a map to get people to think about Bowland and what made it special for them.

The question cards ranged from 'where would you take your family for a typical day out in Bowland?' through 'do you have any fond memories of the area?' to 'where would you go to watch for wildlife?' The resulting answers, recommendations and stories were compiled into a resource pack.

Funding and partners

The project received £5,000 from the then Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and matched this with £5,000 of AONB funds to carry out consultation workshops and write up their findings.

A further £16,000 of sustainable tourism project funding came from Northwest Development Agency, Lancashire & Blackpool Tourist Board and Lancashire County Council's economic development company, LCDL. This money was used to produce a toolkit and to run seven free training courses for businesses.

Overall, the sustainable tourism project has accessed more than £700,000 over the past two years (some £450,000 of this being grant aid from NWDA and other partners, matched with private and community funds).

Environmental benefits

The Forest of Bowland's environment and landscape is what makes it special – whether it's the heritage-rich landscape, the wildlife, untamed open spaces or local food and drink.

In a nutshell, the project calls on local people and businesses to take the Bowland challenge: to know what's unique about their area, shout about it and pass their knowledge and enthusiasm to visitors.

Awareness and information are therefore parallel themes that run throughout the project. As a result, reducing environmental impact by promoting walking, cycling and quiet enjoyment, buying local food, and learning about wildlife are all part of the project's aims.

Economic benefits

• *Quality of place*

A Sense of Place toolkit has been developed to inspire businesses to learn about and sell the attractive and distinctive elements of Bowland. It aims to encourage visitors to keep coming back, explore more widely, stay longer and sample more of the local produce.





The partnership's motto says Bowland is 'a place to enjoy and keep special'. Keeping it special means promoting activities that are environmentally friendly, including walking, cycling, and horse riding.

The toolkit sets out Sense of Place themes and provides information on popular places to go and things to do as well as images, case studies and resources. It suggests action points businesses can implement to promote and enhance the Bowland identity. It also contains a CD of text and images from the toolkit for businesses to use free of charge.

The toolkit is supported by a one-day training course which starts with a quiz to find out what participants know about Bowland to encourage them to use their local knowledge as a resource for visitors. It explains the Sense of Place concept and encourages participants to think about how they could promote the Forest of Bowland AONB within their own businesses.

• *Products from the land*

One of the Sense of Place themes is local produce - mostly dairy, cheese and quality meat. Every opportunity is taken to encourage people to buy local produce.

When running training courses, caterers are told to use and label local food. A local produce directory of food and outlets is made available to businesses to encourage them to buy local and spread the word to their customers.

Because farmers in the area are struggling to survive, helping them promote their produce and sell it locally is seen as important economically as well as environmentally. As a result of the project many producers have also started using Bowland in their name.

Farmers are also encouraged by the AONB Partnership to look at stewardship options that help protect the environment.

It is estimated that every £10 spent on local food is worth £25 to the local area. Buying local also reduces food miles and therefore congestion and pollution.

• *Tourism*

If businesses appreciate the assets on their doorsteps they can promote them to visitors, enhancing the attraction to tourists and increasing demand for local food and activities that have a low impact on the environment. They can also boost their businesses and develop them in a more sustainable way. That ethos is at the heart of the Sense of Place project, shaping its efforts to encourage businesses to think Bowland, act Bowland and get visitors to follow suit.

The project is now trying to quantify the nature of visitors' experience – what visitors do, where they go, how much they spend – but anecdotal evidence suggests increased awareness of the Forest of Bowland's sense of place and a greater appreciation of its qualities.



Pictures

A: Heather moorland in the Forest of Bowland. Picture: Graham Cooper, www.forestofbowlandimages.com

B: Owner Peter Thurnham stands outside Hodgson's Barn, a holiday cottage in a converted barn on the Fourstones Estate just outside Bentham.

C: Cyclists outside the Priory Hotel in Scorton, near the Trough of Bowland. Hotel managers Julie and Jonti Collinson also host meetings of cycling clubs.

D: Cobble Hey farm, run by Edwina and David Miller, encourages visitors to find out more about their working farm and the wildlife around them. It operates a visitors' centre, a café and gift shop and a lapwing trail across the fields, established in conjunction with RSPB.

E: A chef at the Three Fishes pub at Mitton, which is well known for its high quality food using local produce.

Pictures A-D courtesy of Lancashire County Council.

Contact:

Cathy Hopley,
Communities and funding officer
Forest of Bowland AONB Unit
1st floor, Waterloo Mill
Waterloo Road
Clitheroe BB7 1LR
Tel: 01200 426433
Email: cathy.hopley@lancashire.gov.uk
Website: www.forestofbowland.com

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Tel: 0114 229 5726
<http://www.nsplus.co.uk>

