

**The Forest of Dean
Integrated Rural Development
Pilot Programme**

Final Evaluation Report

**Prepared for
The South West Regional
Development Agency
by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the final evaluation of the Forest of Dean Integrated Rural Development Programme which took place between April 2000 and June 2006.

The Programme, initiated by the Countryside Agency and completed by the South West Regional Development Agency, sought to test how the concept of Integrated Rural Development could be translated into a series of concerted actions to address the social, economic and environmental needs of an area that has high landscape value but is not covered by a statutory landscape designation.

The Programme should be seen in the context of the long standing debate about whether the Forest of Dean should receive statutory protection or another form of special recognition of its landscape quality.

The Programme took place in two Phases. The first Phase, which concluded in March 2003 was subject to a separate evaluation¹). The second Phase (entitled 'Building On What's Special' or BOWS) ran from September 2003 to June 2006. It sought to translate the baseline studies and other outputs of Phase 1 into policy and practical action to foster the protection, management and enhancement of what is special and distinctive about the District.

Inputs to the Programme

The way in which the Programme was managed, steered and staffed changed significantly between the two Phases. In Phase 1, the direction of the Programme was largely determined by the Countryside Agency, while in Phase 2 this role was taken by a broader BOWS Management Group.

During Phase 1 the Programme was run by staff from the Countryside Agency's regional office in Bristol, with relatively little direct involvement from District Council. During the BOWS phase, the District Council became much more closely involved, both in

the management of the project officer and in the delivery of key outputs.

The Programme has spent around £1.5M of funding provided by the Countryside Agency (transferring to the RDA from April 2005). Excluding expenditure in the District from the Agency's mainstream national programmes and the cost of the evaluation, the Programme allocated just over £1M, split between the baseline studies and their translation into policy (26%), local regeneration work (49%) and staffing and communication (25%).

Outputs from the Programme

The principle outputs from Phase 1 were four baseline studies on the landscape, biodiversity, archaeology and cultural identity of the District. These added significantly to knowledge of the Forest of Dean's special qualities. The baseline studies were conducted to a high standard and included innovative methodologies and outputs, particularly the Dean by Definition study which can be regarded as a national exemplar of approaches to define cultural character.

A Local Grants Scheme took place in both Phase 1 and BOWS. During Phase 1 grants tended to be small (less than £2,000) and involved work with community groups and building community capacity. Relatively few projects addressed economic, environmental or heritage objectives, but many sought to promote the distinctive cultural identity of the Forest, particularly in the BOWS phase.

The relatively 'light touch' application requirements of the scheme ensure it was accessible to community groups and small businesses. However, lack of experience in preparing business plans (where this was required) appears to have been a limiting factor for some applicants.

Other significant outputs of Phase 1 included the Environment and Rural Skills Programme, Dean Oak project and Future for Tourism study in Phase 1. Outputs during the BOWS phase included identification of Key Wildlife

¹ CCRU, 2003a

Sites and production of Parish Biodiversity Plans (both delivered with additional funding) and the production of the Landscape Supplementary Planning Document which have ensured that the Biodiversity Survey and Landscape Character Assessment completed in Phase 1 have been converted into planning policy.

It is notable that few of the direct outputs of the Programme have addressed the economy of the District (the Future of Tourism Study and some of the projects funded from the BOWS Local Grant Scheme being exceptions).

Comparison with other programmes

The IRD Programme took place during a period when there was a range of other similar programmes involving the Countryside Agency that sought to provide integrated environmental, social and economic solutions to rural areas in England.

Many of the IRD initiatives have struggled to express the concept of IRD in a way that local stakeholders have understood. The Forest of Dean Programme's 'Building On What's Special' title and BOWS Digest publication did this better than many other programmes (even if local engagement with the objectives of the Programme proved difficult to achieve).

Common to these initiatives is a need to base local activity around an understanding of the character of the locality. The Dean by Definition study went a significant way to defining the cultural character of the Forest but fell short of the achievements of some other initiatives such as the Norfolk Arable Land Management Initiative in identifying the actions needed to address social issues.

In many rural areas of England there are local initiatives to help land-based businesses add value to their products on the basis of their origins and their means of production. Although the Forest of Dean Programme sought to address this area of work by supporting farmers markets and local food and timber producer groups, it was unable to fully realise this support in the BOWS phase.

The IRD Programme's Local Grant's Scheme compares well with other similar schemes such as the Local Heritage Initiative, with a lower average value of grant aid but good penetration into local communities and a breadth of different public benefits.

Key evaluation findings

This evaluation has addressed nine key criteria, as follows.

A. Interpretation of Integrated Rural Development

The Forest of Dean Programme took place at the same time as the Countryside Agency was developing its definition of IRD. Nevertheless, the key attributes of IRD – that it **integrates** different policy areas; **identifies** the area's special qualities, problems and opportunities; **involves** local communities; and **invests** in the social, economic and environmental capital of the area are all evident in the Programme.

However, it would appear that the contribution that the Programme has made to the economic development of the District is weaker than to environmental and community development, both in terms of spending (baseline studies and local grants) and on outcomes. There represents a missed opportunity to link the programme to the challenges of economic renewal facing the District.

Perhaps more significantly, the Programme has not successfully advocated a unifying vision of how the information gathered from the baseline studies can help deliver sustainable development. This is indicative of a more deep-seated limitation found throughout the Programme of an apparent lack of clarity and confidence about how the overall vision of IRD as a force for positive social and economic change should be communicated.

B. Clarification of special qualities

The baseline studies conducted in Phase 1 will be the most significant lasting outputs of the Programme. The low level of knowledge about the landscape, biodiversity and historic environment that existed before the

Programme has now been rectified with the baseline studies providing a level of knowledge that is equal or superior to other equivalent areas.

The Dean by Definition study used genuinely innovative and inclusive techniques to describe the wide variety of perceptions that residents and visitors have about the Forest, but it was less successful at presenting an overall image of the Forest's cultural identity and did not advance a vision for the future.

The lack of an economic profile within the Programme has meant that it has had little influence on the District Council's Economic Development Strategy or on the ongoing debate over levels of economic deprivation and coalfields regeneration.

C. Protection and enhancement of the special qualities through local planning policies

It has inevitably taken time for information from the baseline studies to find its way into adopted policy and for this policy to be demonstrably delivered on the ground. As a result it is still too early to make a conclusive judgement on the 'influencing' impacts of the Programme in relation to local planning policy.

In addition, a number of unforeseen events disrupted the continuity of the Programme and undoubtedly delayed many of the delivery activities. These included the turnover of different project staff (a problem faced by many programmes of this kind), the hiatus caused by the Foot and Mouth crisis in 2000 and the change in the management of the Programme between Phases 1 and 2.

Nonetheless, by the end of the Programme there was clear evidence that it had changed local policy in certain key areas, particularly in relation to development control and planning. There has yet to be a high profile planning application that will test the effectiveness of the Supplementary Planning Document. However, it represents a more detailed consideration of planning policy in respect of landscape protection than is currently present in most equivalent local authorities. There has been a similar process of incorporating the Programme's biodiversity and archaeology

baseline surveys into planning policy and practice. By the end of the Programme, planning applications in the District were being routinely screened for their impact on Key Wildlife Sites and the Sites and Monuments Record.

The connections between other Programme outputs and District policy are less evident. The opportunity for the strong cultural character explored in the Dean by Definition study to be highlighted and acted upon in the Community Plan was missed (but may now be addressed in the revision in 2006). Given the lack of a strategic focus on economic development it is not surprising that the Programme had little influence on the District's Economic Development Strategy drawn up in 2004.

D. Influencing other policies and programmes

While the Programme's impact on uptake of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) has probably been relatively limited (the scheme closed to new entrants in 2003), the information available from the baseline studies should have a major positive impact on the quality of applications to the Higher Level of Environmental Stewardship (the scheme that replaced CSS in 2005). It will be important that applicants and their agents have access to these studies (through mediums such as the county biological records centre and the County Archaeologists Sites and Monuments Record).

Similarly, the baseline studies are providing a valuable information resource to Forest Enterprise which is the largest landowner and manager in the District. The landscape, biodiversity and archaeological records will enable Forest Enterprise to safeguard and enhance the environment in its forest management activities.

The Programme contributed directly to parts of the Regional Development Agency's Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) 6 programme and the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative. But other RDA-sponsored initiatives, such as the Rural Enterprise Gateway and the Coalfields Programme appear to have been outside the Programme's sphere of influence.

The Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) will have an important role in co-ordinating delivery of public policy across a broad spectrum of areas through the Local Area Agreement. The BOWS Management Group established a direct line of reporting to the LSP's environmental working group. However, the LSP's work in community planning and development could benefit more from Programme's IRD approach and input than has been the case.

E. Value of the programme's projects

The Local Grant Scheme funded 80 separate projects with a total of £225,000 grant aid. The large majority of funding went to projects representing community interests, with the grant usually addressing a social objective. There were fewer projects addressing the natural environment (although the proportion increased in Phase 2).

Analysis of the geographical location of the projects awarded funding shows a diverse spread of funding throughout the District. In Phase 1 63% of the District's parishes received a grant and a majority of projects (56%) benefited the community across the District as a whole as opposed to providing a narrower sectoral benefit.

There appeared to be relatively few direct links between the baseline studies that defined the special qualities of the Forest and projects that received funding from the Programme (as evidenced by the emphasis on environmental and archaeological work in the baseline studies compared to the emphasis on community-related projects in the Local Grant Scheme). Nevertheless, the projects appear to have met real needs in the community and the benefits were widely spread. Furthermore, there was little duplication with other grant schemes or initiatives.

F. Community involvement

The level of direct involvement by the wider community in the development of the Programme was less than was anticipated at the start of the Programme. It was perhaps naïve to expect that the general public would show an active interest in Integrated Rural

Development as a concept and, while conventional forms of consultation, such as attendance at open meetings, drew people with special interests, they did not attract 'ordinary' members of the public.

In addition the history of debate about the Forest's special status led to a significant level of cynicism amongst interest groups and opinion formers and there was a perception that the Countryside Agency was seeking to impose the Programme from outside the area (despite significant attempts by the project manager to engage locally).

Finally, the way in which the Programme was steered sometimes seemed not to encourage community engagement. The External Management Group in Phase 1 lacked strong community representation and this was not adequately addressed by its successor, the BOWS Management Group.

As noted above, there was a higher level of community involvement in the outputs of the programme such as the Dean by Definition study and many of the Local Grant Scheme projects, with projects such as the Coleford Music Festival and Forest of Dean Community Radio taking this community engagement a stage further into the wider community.

G. Capacity building

As noted above, the Programme made a definite and positive impact on the engagement of people in local community activities. There is good evidence that the Programme acted as a catalyst, empowering key groups and individuals to involve others who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to contribute. But at the higher District-wide level, the Programme has been less successful at building the institutional enthusiasm for IRD that will be needed if the principles this espouses are to be embedded in local policy making and delivery.

Perhaps because of the way in which the Programme was initially perceived by some as being imposed from outside and frustrating a local desire for special status for the Forest, many local organisations who needed to be involved at an institutional level, such as the

District Council, were 'semi-detached' from the concept of the Programme (although the central involvement of some District Council staff needs to be acknowledged).

There remains a real need for a 'champion' who will take forward the philosophy of IRD and the outputs of the baseline studies. Unless one of the bodies with a cross-sectoral interest in the District's economic and social development and environmental protection takes this role, many of the achievements of the IRD Programme risk being lost. The multi-agency approach of the LSP and its cross-cutting agenda make it well suited to delivering an integrated IRD approach. However, the LSP's agenda is likely to be strongly dictated by the Local Area Agreement adopted at a County level and this may constrain its ability to champion a locally-derived IRD agenda.

H. Leadership and management

The Programme had two contrasting purposes and these required different forms of leadership and management. On the one hand addressing the needs of the Forest needed to be based around a process of 'bottom up' local engagement with the Programme's objectives by bringing local stakeholders into the process. On the other hand, developing national thinking on IRD required a more 'top down' direction of the outputs to ensure that this national objective was maintained and that the lessons learned could be applied elsewhere.

Combining these two approaches presented a challenge to the Countryside Agency, and latterly the Regional Development Agency. From the outset, the Countryside Agency chose to take a high profile in the management of the Programme in contrast to most other equivalent projects where project officers are more locally embedded. This gave the impression to some people in the Forest that the Countryside Agency was 'parachuting in' senior staff to 'impose' an untried approach on the Forest. It is significant that the Programme started without securing a high level of commitment from the District Council and that the Council declined a suggestion

that it should chair the BOWS Management Group, leaving the Countryside Agency to continue in this role, replaced by the RDA in April 2005.

It would appear that the on-going debate (some might say rancour) surrounding the Forest's special status contributed to the Countryside Agency's gradual disengagement from the Programme. In the absence of a strong level of local ownership of the Programme's objectives, other members of the BOWS Management Group felt somewhat exposed, even threatened, by the criticisms of the Programme from certain interest groups and from parts of the local media.

The RDA's strategic interest in the Programme, when it took it over from the Countryside Agency, focussed on the Programme's purpose as a local delivery mechanism rather than as a pilot of national thinking on IRD. After April 2005, the Countryside Agency, which could have maintained the focus on the 'test-bedding' purpose of the Programme, had virtually no involvement in the management of the Programme.

I. Implications for Special Status

The Programme arose directly from debate, re-ignited prior to the 1997 General Election, about the special status of the Forest. Views over the nature of the Forest's special status were already polarised before the Programme began, and this sharp division of views was not resolved by the Programme. Many people regarded the Programme as a distraction to the main debate, and such was the strength of feeling that, in some people's eyes, the Programme was doomed to failure from the outset precisely because it sought alternatives to special status as a means of delivering environmental protection.

Nevertheless, the question needs to be addressed of whether the IRD Programme provided an effective alternative to the more formal statutory procedures that would be established through a designation such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Programme was successful in providing some of the outputs of AONB status. It established a partnership of stakeholders, latterly in the form of the BOWS Management Group, although as noted above, this was not fully effective in leading the project. The Programme received funding to undertake studies such as the Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy, to employ a project manager whose role has been broadly similar to that of an AONB manager, and to run a Local Grant Scheme similar in size and purpose to the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund.

In contrast to AONBs, the Programme did not draw up a Management Plan which binds statutory partners to a shared vision, set of objectives and an agreed programme of work. This lack of a management planning process reduced engagement by statutory partners but allowed the Programme to concentrate on delivery rather than getting tied down into what might have become a lengthy and bureaucratic planning process.

The Programme also had no powers to introduce new statutory planning controls but has, instead, provided the District Council with the means to develop the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that has the same broad objectives. As already noted, the effectiveness of the SPD has yet to be fully tested, but it will provide a level of fine-grained detail to the Local Development Framework that is not currently found in many AONBs.

This evaluation is not required to pass judgement on whether the Forest of Dean should seek a statutory designation or other form of special status. However, it is clear that, in so far as the Programme has sought to deliver many of the activities pursued in AONBs, it has been largely successful to date. What it has lacked is the gravitas of a statutory designation, binding in local and national bodies into an effective strategic partnership focussed on maintaining landscape quality, and providing a nationally recognised 'brand' of its landscape quality.

If, in the future, the Forest does not receive a formal recognition of special status, it remains

to be seen whether the area can continue to attract extra funding for integrated rural development (of the kind received by AONBs through their Sustainable Development Fund), or whether it will simply be regarded by national agencies as another part of the wider 'undesigned' English countryside.

Similarly, it remains to be seen whether the commitment of local and national bodies to 'build on what's special' about the Forest is maintained, or whether the information now available about the special qualities of the area are forgotten or ignored, and the opportunities they provide are missed.

Lessons learned

The following key lessons for other IRD programmes in England emerge from this evaluation.

Agreement on what IRD is

1. Integrated Rural Development should be seen as a sequential process starting with the engagement of local stakeholders in the objectives of sustainable development, followed by the definition of local character (across the domains of environment, economy and community), the development of policies for protecting and enhancing this character and then the co-ordinated delivery of these policies.

Timeframes

2. New IRD programmes that involve work to define local character and engage with local communities before developing and delivering policies are likely to require an initial funding commitment of least four years to be effective.

Staffing

3. Programmes need to plan sufficient staff capacity to cope with staff changes and a loss of 'corporate memory' and community identity - a core staff of at least two and ideally three people is desirable.

Clear vision and objectives

4. Where IRD programmes have been established to deal with particular local issues, there needs to be overt acknowledgement of these issues in the objectives of the programme.

Local influencing and engagement with partners

5. The process of embedding a programme with local partners must start at the early planning stage. The programme should not be started unless there is clear enthusiasm and commitment by key locally-based organisations.

Recommendations

This evaluation makes seven recommendations to take forward the experience and outputs of the Programme in the Forest of Dean.

Environmental protection and enhancement

1. The District Council should continue to monitor the screening of planning applications against the environmental data now held and, in due course, should establish a method for monitoring landscape change using the detailed indicators suggested in the Landscape Strategy.

2. The District Council should use the website it has created to give easy access to landowners and their agents to all the information gathered by the baseline studies.

3. Natural England should make sure that this information is taken into account in the way that the high level of ES is targeted in the District.

Economic and social development

4. The District Council should make this resource widely available through its website and should ensure that reference is made to it in the current review of the Community Plan.

Implications for special status

5. Natural England should announce its policy towards the creation of new AONBs and the recognition of other forms of special status.

6. In the light of this announcement, the District Council is invited to convene a special committee to take evidence from interested parties and make a formal recommendation to the Council on whether to seek a new designation for the Forest.

The future of the BOWS concept

7. The Local Strategic Partnership is invited to examine whether it has the scope to use Integrated Rural Development as a cross-cutting theme to its work, ensuring that the concept of building future economic and social development and environmental protection, on the basis of the District's special qualities, is maintained.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This is the final evaluation of the Forest of Dean Integrated Rural Development Programme, a five and a half year initiative established in 2000 by the Countryside Agency in partnership with the Forest of Dean District Council and completed in 2006 under the chairmanship of the South West Regional Development Agency.
- 1.2. The Programme has sought to test and demonstrate how the concept of Integrated Rural Development can be translated into a series of concerted actions to address the social, economic and environmental needs of an area that has high landscape value but is not covered by a statutory landscape designation. The Programme covered the Forest of Dean District in Gloucestershire.
- 1.3. The Programme has taken place in two Phases. The first Phase, which concluded in March 2003 (and was subject to a separate evaluation²), sought to define the special biodiversity, landscape, historical and cultural character of the Forest of Dean through a series of 'baseline studies'. It also sought to engage the local community and businesses in delivering sustainable development and to enhance the special character of the District through a Local Grants Scheme.
- 1.4. The second Phase (entitled 'Building On What's Special') ran from September 2003 to June 2006. It sought to translate the baseline studies and other outputs of Phase 1 into policy and practical action to foster the protection, management and enhancement of what is special and distinctive about the District. This was to be achieved through influence with partners, particularly with the District Council which became much more involved in this Phase, and through a second Local Grants Scheme.

The framework for this evaluation

- 1.5. The revised project document for the Programme, produced in October 2002, prepared by the Countryside Agency, makes clear that the programme had two overarching purposes:
 - (a) to explore and test ways in which the protection, management and enhancement of the Dean's special landscape, cultural heritage and environment can be achieved alongside the sustainable regeneration of the local economy and communities, without statutory designation as an AONB; and
 - (b) to provide lessons for policy change – enabling the Agency's vision of IRD to evolve so that needs for national and/or EU rural development policy change can be identified.
- 1.6. This Evaluation provides a key means of achieving the second purpose of the Programme. A large amount has already been written about the Programme, including the original and revised strategic frameworks from both Phases, the evaluation of Phase 1, an interim evaluation of BOWS (Phase 2)³, baseline studies

² CCRU, 2003a

³ LUC, 2005

arising from the Programme and reports of individual projects funded by the Programme. The Programme was also one of ten Countryside Agency funded initiatives to be covered by a cross-cutting evaluation of the Agency's socio-economic programme in March 2005⁴. This report draws on this material, new consultations and evidence of recent outputs of the Programme. It seeks to provide a concise overview of the Programme, its achievements and the policy lessons that should be learned and transferred.

- 1.7. This study has focussed on a set of evaluation 'criteria' or questions that were established for the BOWS Phase of the Programme:
 1. Has the Programme clarified the special qualities of the Forest Core and the wider district – with 'qualities' embracing landscape, environment, culture, economy, heritage and biodiversity?
 2. Have these qualities been adequately protected / managed /enhanced by the 'influencing work' undertaken?
 3. With regard to the 'influencing work', has the programme demonstrably influenced the policies and programmes of a range of agencies?
 4. Has the programme showed that a concerted programme of 'local influencing' is an adequate substitute for affording some kind of 'special status' to the area?
 5. Have the area's special qualities been protected and/or used sustainably in the various discrete 'projects' undertaken?
 6. Has the programme contributed to the area's economic and social regeneration by adding value to the special qualities of the area?
 7. Has the programme respected 'integrated rural development principles' - treating the various objectives, measures and actors / agencies in an integrated manner?
 8. Has the local 'Forest of Dean community' been substantially involved in the programme, to the extent of feeling ownership of it?
 9. Has the programme built capacity in the area such that much of the work may be expected to proceed after the expiry of the programme itself?
 10. Do the methodology of the programme and its outcomes provide wider lessons for policy and practice elsewhere in rural England and beyond?
- 1.8. To address these questions, the evaluation has been undertaken from both a local perspective (identifying what has been delivered for the programme area) and a national perspective (what can be learned for wider application). It has looked at what has been achieved in relation to sustainable development criteria – environment and natural resources, economy and community, and for integration within these spheres. Finally, the evaluation has assessed the extent to which the aims and objectives originally established for the Programme, and revised for Phase 2, have been achieved.

⁴ Countryside Agency, 2005b

- 1.9. The evaluation has been conducted by a small team from Land Use Consultants, answering to the Countryside Agency and South West Regional Development Agency and reporting to the BOWS Management Group. The assistance provided by the members of this Group, and by the Project Officers, Ben Ward and Lena Maller, in terms of providing information and correcting inaccuracies is gratefully acknowledged. However, the purpose of this report is to provide an objective and independent evaluation, and the authors take full responsibility for the views expressed in the report.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROGRAMME

- 2.1. This Chapter introduces the Programme and the area in which it took place. It describes the location and key demographic features of the Forest of Dean, the key events leading up to and during the Programme, and it summaries the findings of the earlier evaluation of Phase 1 of the Programme.

The Forest of Dean

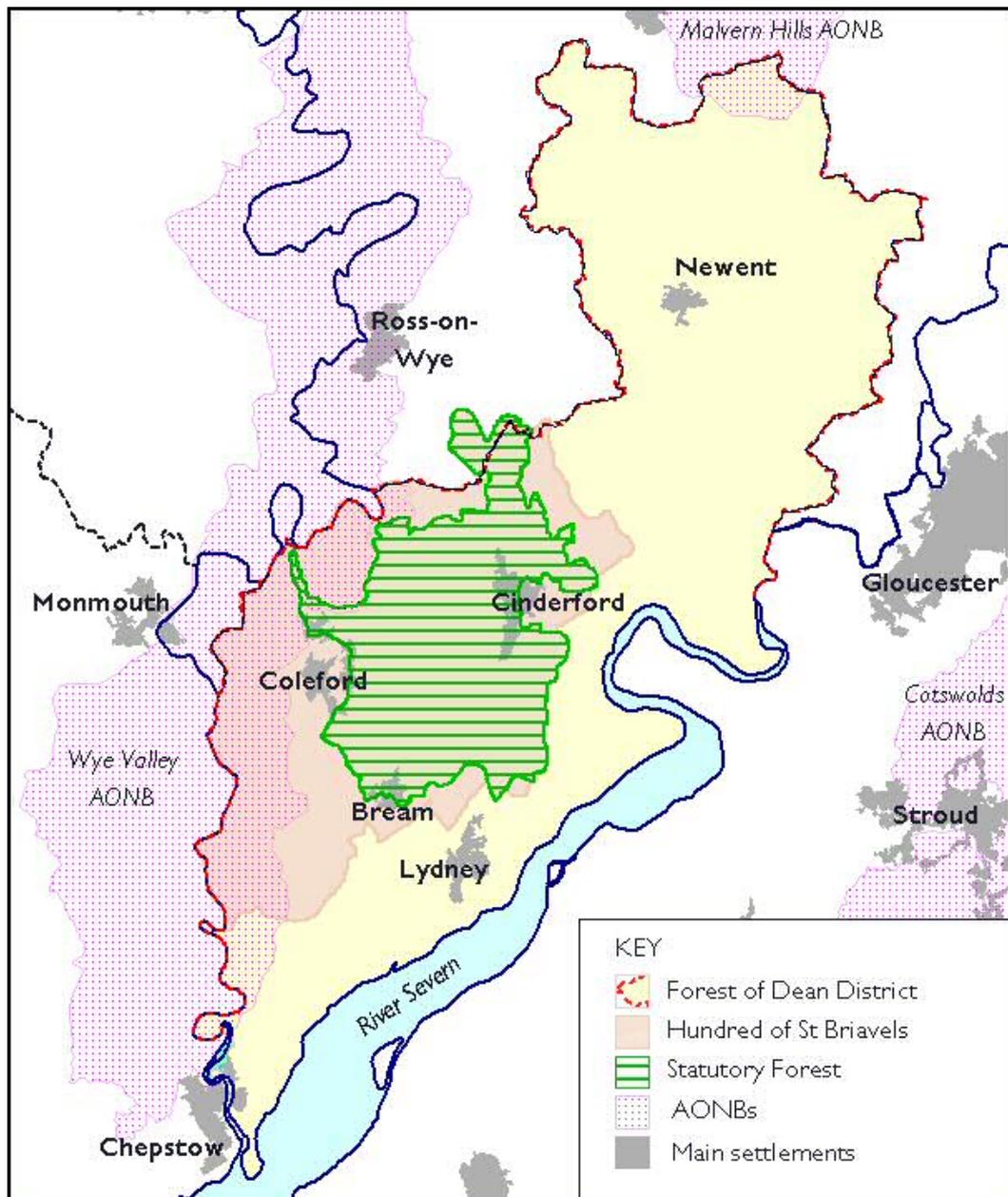
- 2.2. The Forest of Dean lies on the western edge of Gloucestershire between the rivers Severn and Wye. The IRD Programme operated across the Forest of Dean District, which has an area of 52,643 ha and a population of around 80,000 people. The main settlements in the District are Coleford (10,145), Cinderford (10,069), Lydney (8,960) and Newent (4,247)⁵.
- 2.3. The southern part of the Forest of Dean has an industrial past which is relatively unusual in such a rural area. Open cast coal mining was a major employer until the 1960s, and this has left a legacy in relatively high levels of deprivation (compared to other rural areas of England) in the population. The District is identified by Defra as amongst the bottom quartile of rural Districts in England in terms of their economic performance (it ranked as the 34th worst performing District in 2003/04 out of the 44 rural Districts in the bottom quartile)⁶. However, the performance of the District has been improving in recent years and the Forest of Dean suffers lower levels of deprivation than some other rural areas of the South West such as Cornwall and parts of Devon⁷.
- 2.4. The landscape of the District is highly distinctive and, at the level of the national 'Joint Character Areas', is split into three areas. The majority of the District, and the heart of the Forest itself, is covered by the Forest of Dean and Lower Wye Character Area, the eastern edge of the District, lying on the edge of the Severn Estuary and River Severn is covered by the Severn and Avon Vales Character Area, while the north western part of the District is in the South Herefordshire and Over Severn Character Area.
- 2.5. Within the core area of the Forest itself there are two different areas which have historical roots but are still considered important in defining its geographic and cultural heart. These are the Statutory Forest, which is the area in which commoners have rights of grazing, pannage and estovers; and the Hundred of St Briavels, which is the area where the Dean Freemaners (by tradition, this is any person born in the Hundred who has worked for a year and a day in a mine) have rights to mine coal, iron ore and ochre. The location of these areas is shown in **Figure 2.1**.

⁵ Populations from the 2001 Census

⁶ These districts are highlighted in Defra's Public Service Agreement with Government to increase their economic performance

⁷ See data on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation in the South West Observatory www.swo.org.uk/imd2004/index.asp

Figure 2.1. Location of Forest of Dean District and other key areas



Recognition of the Forest of Dean's special landscape character

- 2.6. Interest in the special character of the Forest of Dean dates back many years. In 1931 the first report of the newly formed National Park Committee (the Addison Report) proposed that the ancient Royal Forest of Dean should be converted into a National Park. No action was taken by Government at that stage, but in 1938 the Forestry Commission, as the major landowner, established the first National Forest Park (the 'Dean Forest and Wye Valley Forest Park') covering the statutory Forest and adjoining land that it owned.
- 2.7. The Forest of Dean was one of the conservation areas that was listed in the Hobhouse Report on National Parks in 1947. These conservation areas went on to be considered for designation as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) by

the National Parks Commission in the 1960s. During the 1960s proposals were considered for creating a Forest of Dean and Wye Valley AONB. The local authorities prepared a preliminary map that excluded the Forest of Dean. This exclusion was based on the belief that the Forest had a distinct identity separate from the Wye Valley, and that the predominant ownership of the Forestry Commission (with the FC then taking on new powers for meeting amenity and recreation needs under the Countryside Act 1968) made AONB designation unnecessary. These arguments were accepted by the National Parks Commission, who submitted their proposal for a Wye Valley AONB in 1971, confirmed by the Secretary of State in December of that year.

- 2.8. During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the Countryside Commission received sporadic correspondence about the potential extension of the Wye Valley AONB to cover the Forest of Dean, or the creation of a new AONB. The same arguments originally put forward by the local authorities were cited as reasons for maintaining the status quo⁸.
- 2.9. The issue of the Forest's status came to a head again in the late 1990s when potential areas of future mineral working (limestone quarrying) were identified during the preparation of the Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan. In the run up to the general election in 1997, the Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment visited the areas and gave a commitment to offer the Forest of Dean "*a new custom built special status appropriate to its unique history and character*"⁹.
- 2.10. The new Labour Government subsequently asked the Countryside Commission (soon to become the Countryside Agency) to look again at the area and make recommendations on how the broad aims behind special status might be best achieved. In 1998 the Countryside Commission commissioned a technical review of the relevant issues¹⁰ and the potential management structures that could deliver the appropriate level of protection. In April 1999 the review concluded that AONB status provided the most suitable basis for the area's designation, but that this status "*should be interpreted in a new and imaginative way to enhance social, cultural and economic as well as environmental objectives*".
- 2.11. The Countryside Agency Board decided in late 1999 to defer the decision on special status in favour of trialling an Integrated Rural Development (IRD) approach in the area, run through the Agency's South West Region team. This was at a time when the Agency was developing its ideas on IRD.

Chronology of the Programme

- 2.12. The programme was established by the Countryside Agency in early 2000 staffed by a full-time project manager and part-time officer, initially intended as a three year programme running until March 2003. During this period these staff were based in the Countryside Agency's regional office in Bristol, but often used the Forestry Enterprise office in Coleford as a 'local base'.

⁸ Countryside Agency, 1999

⁹ Statement by Frank Dobson quoted in LUC, 1999

¹⁰ LUC, 1999

- 2.13. In March 2001, the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak effectively closed down the practical work of the Programme (field work, community meetings and visits to rural businesses) until restrictions were lifted six months later (August 2001).
- 2.14. The evaluation of what became Phase 1 of the Programme recommended that the programme be continued but with changes of emphasis (see following section on 'Purpose of the Programme'), and in April 2003 the Countryside Agency Board committed funding to the second Phase, which became known as 'Building On What's Special' (BOWS). This Phase was initially funded to run until March 2005.
- 2.15. In May 2003 a BOWS Management Group was established with representatives from national agencies and local bodies, chaired by the Countryside Agency and reporting to the Forest of Dean Local Strategic Partnership.
- 2.16. A strategy document to guide the BOWS Phase was produced in June 2003. Over this period (early in 2003) both of the initial Programme staff moved to new positions. A full staff complement, including local programme officer, this time based in the District Council offices, was in place from February 2004.
- 2.17. Delays in replacing staff resulted in a decision by the Countryside Agency Board in 2004 to extend the Programme until March 2006.
- 2.18. Following the Government's 'Modernising Rural Delivery' review, the responsibility for funding and leading the Programme switched from the Countryside Agency to the South West Regional Development Agency in April 2005.
- 2.19. The Final Event of the Programme was held in March 2006. Money held in the Programme budget meant that the employment of the project officer was continued until June 2006.
- 2.20. Figure 2.2 provides a summary of the main activities of the programme.

Figure 2.2 Chronology of IRD/BOWS Programme

1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Review of Special Status' report (April) • CA Board decision to proceed with IRD Programme (Nov)
	PHASE 1 – FoD IRD Programme
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRD Programme established with full time programme officer plus assistants (April) • CA Board decision (Sep) confirming the IRD approach and allocating £1m over 3 years to March 2003
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foot and mouth disease outbreak
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation for 2000-2003 period commenced (December)
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Advisory Group formed to advise Countryside Agency internal steering group • Evaluation for 2000-2003 completed (March) • CA Board decision (April) to continue with IRD Programme and extend to March 2005
	PHASE 2 – BOWS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BOWS Management Group established, reporting to Local Strategic Partnership • Draft 'Building On What's Special' Strategy (June) • BOWS Strategy confirmed by CA Board • Communications Strategy adopted by BOWS Management Group (Nov)
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local programme officer in post (Feb) • Formal monitoring process commenced (April) • Exit Strategy prepared • CA Board decision approving exit strategy and Programme extension to March 2006
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 2 (BOWS) evaluation commenced (January) • Programme passed to South West RDA at restructuring of Countryside Agency (April)
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final BOWS Event held (March) • Programme concluded (June)

External policy developments and other pressures on the Programme

2.21. Although many initiatives of this kind have to adapt to changing circumstances, the IRD Programme has been subject to more external pressures than most. These have included:

- Foot and Mouth Disease broke out in England in February 2001. Between 10 and 29 March there were confirmed cases of the disease on 24 farms in the Forest of Dean District, leading to the slaughter of around 8,000 cattle and 45,000 sheep for disease control purposes and many more on animal welfare grounds. The greatest economic impact from the disease was to the tourism sector, as a result of the reduction in the number of visitors to the countryside during the spring and summer seasons. Progress of the Programme was effectively halted during the period March to September, as community meetings were called off and visits to many rural businesses postponed.
- Throughout the period of the Programme, debate has continued locally over the desirability of the Forest receiving some form of formal designation recognising its high landscape value. Although the Programme was intended to buy 'breathing space' during which this debate could be suspended, in reality the debate continued to influence the way the Programme related to different interest groups and was managed.

- At a national level, the concept of Integrated Rural Development has continued to be developed by the Countryside Agency¹¹, and a number of research studies have been conducted into how it is best achieved¹² (although the origins of the concept in England lie in the early 1990s¹³).
- Finally, there have been significant changes in the responsibilities of the Countryside Agency, as principal sponsor of the project. Following Lord Haskins' report to Defra in 2003 on 'Modernising rural delivery', the socio-economic aspects of the Agency's work, of which this Programme was considered to be a part, were transferred to the Regional Development Agencies in April 2005. From this date, the South West Regional Development Agency took over responsibility for funding and leading the Programme.

2.22. The impacts of these changes on the outputs and impacts of the Programme are considered later in this report.

Purpose of the Programme

2.23. The success of any publicly funded programme or project must ultimately be assessed against the purpose it was established for. The purpose of the IRD programme (Phase 1) was articulated as 'Aims', 'Intended Outcomes' and a series of more detailed 'Objectives'. These were subsequently revised in the BOWS Strategy to create 'Themes' and 'Goals'.

Purpose of Phase 1

2.24. As noted in the first Chapter, the originally stated aims for the Programme¹⁴ were:

- *To explore and test ways in which the protection, management and enhancement of the Dean's special landscape, cultural heritage and environment can be achieved alongside the sustainable regeneration of the local economy and communities, without statutory designation as an AONB; and*
- *To provide lessons for policy change – enabling the Agency's vision of IRD to evolve so that needs for national and/or EU rural development policy change can be identified.*

2.25. The intended outcomes were:

- *That communities in the Forest of Dean benefit through exploring and defining ways of integrating landscape protection and sustainable regeneration, linked to measures for tackling social exclusion and supporting community development.*
- *Community ownership, wherever appropriate, of any new measures and programmes.*

¹¹ Countryside Agency, 2005a

¹² Countryside Agency, 2003

¹³ Peak Park Joint Planning Board 1990

¹⁴ As set out in Revised Project Document, October 2002

- *A clear vision of IRD for the Countryside Agency allowing appropriate changes to rural development policy at a national and/or EU level to be identified.*

Findings of Phase 1 Evaluation

2.26. To summarise the **conclusions** of the Evaluation of Phase 1 (2000-2003)¹⁵:

- The programme was launched in a difficult climate, including local disappointment over the lack of resolution of the Special Status/AONB issue, and subsequently was hampered by the foot and mouth crisis.
- Early difficulties had largely been resolved and much good collaborative work had been done.
- The £1.1m disbursed over the three years in the delivery of the IRD programme (including contributions through national Countryside Agency programmes) had been well spent. The programme had:
 - made a significant contribution to the social and economic regeneration of the area;
 - provided a platform for significant progress in landscape and environmental conservation; and
 - made a substantial contribution to development of human and social capital.
- Although elements of the programme had clearly been successful, including the baseline studies and support provided to local economic and community projects, overall it had not been notably innovative.
- With its largely 'project focus', the programme had made only limited progress in 'influencing other agencies' to modify their own programmes.
- The programme had made a significant contribution to the 'special status debate' without in any sense resolving it.

2.27. The **recommendations** from the evaluation can be summarised as follows.

1. Continue the programme, but with changes of emphasis.
2. Bring the baseline studies to a conclusion and ensure that the results are embedded in local policy and practice.
3. Continue support for at least a local grant scheme, the Dean Oak initiative, the farmers' markets and the SRB6 programme (until its conclusion).
4. Build Phase 2 around a philosophy which emphasises learning lessons for wider application, in addition to promoting sustainable development and conservation locally. There should also be a more unified set of projects and initiatives centred around the special characteristics of the area.

¹⁵ CCRU (2003a), Chapter 7

5. Keep under review the issue of Special Status for the area, as the FODIRD programme has provided further useful information but has not provided a clear answer.

Purpose of Phase 2 (BOWS)

- 2.28. Following the Evaluation of Phase 1 and the consideration of the evaluation report by the Countryside Agency Board in April 2003, the following 'themes' were agreed for Phase 2 at the CA Board meeting in May 2003.¹⁶
 - ***Looking after what's special: showing how statutory planning processes, partnership working, community plans and voluntary agreements can effectively protect, enhance and manage the Forest of Dean's distinctive landscape, cultural heritage, natural heritage and biodiversity.***
 - ***Using what's special: showing how local distinctiveness can be an important driver of social and economic regeneration.***
 - ***Learning lessons from the programme for possible application elsewhere.***
- 2.29. These were carried through into the following more detailed goals:
 - I *By identifying and articulating what is special, through an analysis of the completed or continuing 'baseline studies', to establish a firm basis for future decision making in the Forest of Dean.*
 - II *By Building On What's Special, to foster the sustainable development of the Forest of Dean's economy and communities.*
 - III *By exerting appropriate influence on the area's planning authorities, to foster the better conservation and enhancement of what is special about the Forest of Dean's landscape and environment.*
 - IV *By exerting appropriate influence on a wide range of agencies, to foster the better protection, management and enhancement of what is special about the Forest of Dean's culture, economy, heritage and biodiversity.*
 - V *To establish whether a programme of this nature can effectively deliver the conservation objectives espoused by many of those advocating 'special status' for the Forest of Dean.*
 - VI *To derive lessons for possible wider applicability in rural England, including advice on the value of this approach/methodology for managing protecting and enhancing special landscapes and, more generally, the management of 'local special-ness'.*
- 2.30. These aims, goals and objectives reflect that the Programme was established with two somewhat different purposes in mind. The first was how to address the needs of the Forest of Dean itself, establishing a programme to deliver many of the benefits that go with a special landscape status, without actually formally making a designation. The second purpose was to provide evidence and experience to the development of

¹⁶ BOWS Strategy June 2003

national thinking about IRD and the practical tools needed to deliver it, using the FoD as a pilot area.

- 2.31. This begs the question of whether the 'top down' experimental approach implied by the second aim is best suited to delivering the first 'bottom up' aim, at least as far as the perceptions of local groups is concerned. The extent to which the programme was experimental and ground breaking also needs to be critically assessed.
- 2.32. It needs to be accepted that the experimental nature of the Programme means that there is as much value in demonstrating that certain innovative approaches do not work, as in proving that tried and tested approaches do work. A degree of 'trial and error' was expected during the Programme, and this should be borne in mind in relation to judgements about value for money and effectiveness.

3. REVIEW OF INPUTS TO THE PROGRAMME

- 3.1. This Chapter describes the resources that we used to deliver the Programme. It does so under the headings of:
- Management of the Programme
 - Staffing
 - Funding

Management of the Programme

- 3.2. During the initial stages of Phase 1 the Programme was led by an internal group of Countryside Agency staff chaired by the Regional Director. The Executive Committee of the existing Forest Regeneration Partnership was invited to act as a local steering group to advise on local delivery, but the overall objectives and direction (in relation to IRD) of the Programme was determined by the Countryside Agency.
- 3.3. Towards the end of the first Phase, Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael, suggested that an external group should be set up to steer future objectives and direction. This would oversee the evaluation contract of Phase 1 and go on to inform future delivery.
- 3.4. An External Advisory Group (EAG) was developed in January 2003, with terms of reference being agreed by the Forest Regeneration Partnership at the end of this month. These terms of reference indicated that the EAG served to inform the Countryside Agency's internal steering group. Once the EAG was established the Countryside Agency indicated that, while continuing to Chair the EAG, it would take more of a supporting role, allowing the EAG to collectively determine the direction of the Programme. Membership of the EAG is shown in **Figure 3.1**.

Figure 3.1. Membership of the External Advisory Group

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Countryside Agency (chair)• Defra• English Heritage• English Nature• Environment Agency• Forest Enterprise• Forest of Dean District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils• Gloucestershire County Council• Gloucestershire Rural Community Council• Government Office South West• SWERDA
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- 3.5. Although the evaluation of Phase 1 made no reference to the efficacy of the Countryside Agency's management of the Programme and the influence of the EAG, consultations conducted as part of this review suggest that engagement with local stakeholders was not particularly successful in relation to communicating and developing the overall objectives of the Programme. There was criticism that the Programme started as a 'top down' initiative of the Countryside Agency, and that the concept of IRD itself was not up for debate. There was praise by some people of the activities of the Agency's project officers in working with some local interests, but

this tended to focus on the delivery of particular outputs (such as Dean by Definition) rather than the purpose of the Programme as a whole.

- 3.6. During Phase 1 of the Programme there was relatively little direct involvement from District Council councillors or officers in the management of the Programme, other than through the administration of the Local Grant Scheme and representation on the Forest Regeneration Partnership (although officers were involved in several of the baseline studies and other project outputs).
- 3.7. The Strategy for the BOWS Phase of the Programme specified that the External Advisory Group should be replaced by "*a widely based Management Group which should be able to secure the positive involvement of a loosely structured wider partnership of agencies and organisations committed to the future of the Forest*". The EAG continued to meet throughout 2003 and discussed the role and membership of the Management Group on a number of occasions. In particular, there was considerable discussion about community representation. Interest had been shown from two groups, Friends of the Forest and Dean Forest Voice, to join the Management Group. Both tended to take a campaigning approach to the issue of special status for the Forest, and there was concern from members of the EAG that these organisations might polarise the Management Group on the issue of AONB status, which would not be helpful to aims of the IRD Programme.
- 3.8. Eventually a constitution and way of working were produced in September 2003. Community representation was to be provided by the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (which had been on the EAG) and by the Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF). Significantly, FVAF exists to assist voluntary sector groups in the Forest of Dean, but, in its role on the Management Group, did not claim to represent their views. The District Council was represented by officers in a technical capacity rather than by members. It was suggested that the District Council should chair the Management Group but it chose not to do so, leaving the Countryside Agency to continue in this role. **Figure 3.2** lists the membership of the Management Group.

Figure 3.2. Membership of the BOWS Management Group

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countryside Agency (chair to 30/3/05) • SWERDA (chair from 1/4/05) • Defra • Forest Enterprise • Forest of Dean District Council • Forest Voluntary Action Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils • Gloucestershire County Council • Gloucestershire Rural Community Council • Government Office South West
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- 3.9. Prior to taking the chair of the Group in April 2005, the Regional Development Agency rarely attended meetings. Defra received agendas and minutes, but its representative did not often attend meetings. Other organisations such as English Heritage and English Nature (which had both been on the EAG) and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust were involved in the Programme but did not attend the Management Group.

- 3.10. The Management Group formally reported to the Environment subgroup of the Local Strategic Partnership through the Project Officer and through the Forest Enterprise representative (who chaired the LSP), although it would appear that this relationship declined in the latter stages of the Programme. To start with the Management Group met monthly, but meetings became less frequent in the last year of the Programme. The Group received reports from the Programme Officer, agreed the work programme, acted as a steering group for external contracts including the ongoing baseline studies and considered grant applications.
- 3.11. Despite the efforts made in the BOWS Phase to increase representation of local interests, there was ongoing criticism of the lack of communication of progress with the BOWS strategy. Although consultees praised the publication of BOWS Guide in 2004 (summarising the evidence from the baseline studies on 'What's Special') and the Final Event in March 2006 (to present examples of work conducted under the Programme), many consultees felt that there was inadequate ongoing communication, particularly from the BOWS Management Group. There appear to be three reasons for this.
- Firstly delays to the appointment of new Project officers meant that staff were not in place for a total of 12 months during the BOWS Phase to ensure good communication (covered further below).
 - Secondly, contractual disagreements with the business that had hosted a website during Phase 1 led to the hosting being transferred to the District Council. This did not become available publicly until the closing months of the Programme (from January 2006).
 - Finally, several consultees felt that the Countryside Agency became increasingly disengaged with the Programme during the second half of 2004 and first quarter of 2005 (perhaps due to the national re-organisation when the Agency's socio-economic responsibilities transferred to the Regional Development Agencies, and to a desire for local bodies to take more responsibility for overseeing the Programme).

Staffing

- 3.12. During Phase 1 the Programme met the costs of employing a project manager (staff grade S) supported by a part time project officer (grade H) from the Countryside Agency's regional office in Bristol. During much of Phase 1 the project manager was effectively full-time on the Programme.
- 3.13. During the first part of the BOWS Phase (to April 2005), the project was overseen by a project manager from the Countryside Agency's regional office, again supported by another member of Agency staff. From April 2005 to the end of the programme was managed by the Regional Development Agency.
- 3.14. It was intended that there should be a locally based full-time project officer in place throughout the BOWS phase, but in the event, the project officer was not appointed until February 2004. This person left to take a different post in August 2005. A replacement was appointed in October 2005 and stayed in post until the end of the

Programme. These project officers were based in the District Council office in Coleford, with the Council providing office accommodation and office expenses in contribution to the Programme. The project officer was managed on a day-to-day basis by the Council's community regeneration officer and worked closely with staff in the Council's Planning Department. These staff oversaw the delivery of the Landscape Strategy and Supplementary Planning Document, which were major outputs of the BOWS phase.

- 3.15. During the 'interregnum' at the start of BOWS, the Countryside Agency provided part-time cover from its regional office, supported by a part-time administrator, but this proved inadequate to maintain the momentum of the Programme during this ten month period and delayed some of the outputs of the BOWS phase.

Funding

- 3.16. The initial commitment of funding from the Countryside Agency to the first three years of the programme was £1 million. This was increased slightly during the period so that by the end of Phase 1, £1.1 million had been dispersed. A breakdown of this funding into the main outputs of Phase 1 is shown in **Figure 3.1**. Around a quarter of the total cost was spent on research defining the special qualities of the area (the Baseline Studies and the Future of Tourism study). 40% of the cost was spent on local regeneration work (the majority of this being the Local Grants Scheme) and almost 20% on administration (staffing and communication). The remaining 18% paid for local work by the Countryside Agency in one its national programmes, principally the Rural Transport Programme and Market Towns Initiative.

Figure 3.1. Breakdown of Programme costs in Phase 1

<i>Out-turn cost to Countryside Agency April 2000 to March 2003</i>	<i>£' Thousand</i>
Baseline studies	240
Landscape Character Assessment	56
Dean by Definition	55
Historic Landscape Assessment	20
Archaeological Survey	45
Biodiversity Survey	60
Preparation for Local Plan Enquiry etc	4
Local Regeneration Work	475
Local Grants Scheme	170
Environment and Rural Skills	57
Dean Oak	28
SRB 6	69
Support for Farmers Markets	25
'Future for Tourism' Study	25
Others	101
Mainstream Agency Programmes	200
Rural Transport Programme	64
Vital Villages (Including Parish Plans and Community Service Grants)	33
Local Heritage Initiative	10
Millennium Greens	38
Market Towns Initiative	55
Staff and communication	197
Total	1,112

- 3.17. The Countryside Agency committed a further £400,000 to BOWS, spread evenly between the years 2003/4 and 2004/5. Because of the delay in recruiting and appointing staff, this funding was carried over to cover the extension of the project to June 2006.
- 3.18. Final out-turn figures were not available at the time of writing but a summary of expenditure to date provided by the District Council and Regional Development Agency is listed in **Figure 3.2**. These figures do not include expenditure on mainstream programmes in the District (such as the Single Regeneration Budget and Market Towns Initiative).

Figure 3.2. Breakdown of Programme costs during BOWS

<i>Out-turn cost September 2003 to June 2006</i>	<i>£' Thousand</i>
BOWS officer	63
Local Grants Scheme	60
Landscape Supplementary Planning Document	30
Key Wildlife Sites Survey	7
Parish Biodiversity Summaries	13
Additional support and promotional costs	14
Evaluation	16
Total	203

- 3.19. The figures also do not include in-kind contributions by the District Council towards BOWS officer costs (£6,434 in 2004/05 and 2005/06), the time put in by Management Group members, other in-kind contributions from partners and communities.

CONCLUSIONS

- The way in which the Programme was managed, steered and staffed changed significantly between the two Phases.
- **Management:** At the outset, the overall direction of the Programme was determined by the Countryside Agency, with the Forest Regeneration Partnership providing advice on local delivery.
- Towards the end of Phase 1 an External Advisory Group was established. This became the BOWS Management Group which assumed a more direct role in determining the direction of the Programme, with the Countryside Agency gradually withdrawing from this commanding role.
- The Countryside Agency continued to chair meetings of the Management Group until April 2005 when this responsibility transferred to the Regional Development Agency (in line with the changed national remits of these bodies). The Countryside Agency played no further part in the Programme.
- Local representation on the Management Group was increased, but this issue was never fully resolved. Communication of the work of the Management Group to wider stakeholders was extremely limited, at least until the final months of the Programme.

- The Management Group reported formally to the Environment subgroup of the Local Strategic Partnership, but the strength of this link declined during the later stages of the Programme.
- **Staffing:** During Phase 1 the Programme was run by staff from the Countryside Agency's regional office in Bristol, who often used the Forest Enterprise office in Coleford as a local base. There was relatively little direct involvement from District Council councillors or officers in the running of the Programme, other than through representation on the Forest Regeneration Partnership (although officers were involved in several of the baseline studies and other project outputs).
- During the BOWS phase, the District Council became much more closely involved in the delivery of the Programme. The Council line managed and serviced the Project Officer and staff, particularly in the Planning Department, and took responsibility for delivering key outputs of the Programme.
- Delays in the appointment of the BOWS Project Officer, and their departure and replacement half way through this phase, meant that momentum was lost and activities delayed.
- **Funding:** The Programme has spent around £1.5M of funding provided by the Countryside Agency (latterly transferring to the RDA). Excluding expenditure in the District from the Agency's mainstream national programmes and the cost of the evaluation, the Programme allocated just over £1M, split between the baseline studies and their translation into policy (26%), local regeneration work (49%) and staffing and communication (25%).

4. REVIEW OF COMPONENT PROJECTS

- 4.1. This Chapter reviews the outputs of the Programme in terms of the studies, projects and other activities that it funded. Where relevant, this Chapter draws from the descriptions and conclusions in the Evaluation report of Phase 1 of the Programme.
- 4.2. **Figure 4.1** summarises the main programme activities in the two Phases of the Programme. Broadly speaking, most of the activity in Phase 1 centred around the baseline studies which sought to define what was special about the Forest of Dean, with an important role for the Local Grant Scheme to deliver the objectives of the Programme through local community groups and businesses. In contrast, Phase 2 involved more of a concerted effort to see the baseline studies translated into local policy (particularly planning policy), and a more focussed Local Grant Scheme to assist a smaller number of priority projects.

Figure 4.1. Summary of projects and activities

<p>PHASE 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historic Landscape Assessment - commenced prior to IRD programme• Landscape Character Assessment• Dean By Definition• Archaeology survey• Biodiversity Survey• Local Grant Scheme• Environment and Rural Skills Project• SRB6 Programme – young people’s projects• Future for Tourism study• Dean Oak project• Other individual projects supported, e.g. Dean Community Radio• Mainstream CA programme activities - Market town Partnerships, Millennium Greens, Local Heritage Initiative, Vital Villages, Rural Transport Programme• Communications and programme management
<p>PHASE 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forest of Dean Landscape Strategy development• Continuation and extension of other programme activities, e.g. Archaeology and Biodiversity Surveys• Digest of the baseline studies (presenting summary of results) and promotion of their uptake• Report on Indicators• Use of baseline studies in parish planning• Identification of Key Wildlife Sites from Biodiversity Survey• Landscape Strategy seminar and development of proposals for Supplementary Planning Document• Local grants programme• Communications and programme management, including new website proposals

THE BASELINE STUDIES

- 4.3. Before the Programme commenced there was relatively little recently published information about the environmental and cultural character of the Forest of Dean. What information there was had not been collected in the systematic and objective way that is now accepted as necessary for policy development. The purpose of the baseline studies was to develop this sound evidence base, using established national methodologies where they were available, to put the District on a par with, or ahead of, other areas of similarly high landscape quality in England.

The Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.4. This piece of research was contracted to Landscape Design Associates, supported by staff from the District and County Councils, to provide a 'district-wide record of existing landscape character'. The work followed the developing national methodology for landscape characterisation¹⁷ to create a 'landscape typology' using GIS (Geographical Information Systems) backed up by a field survey. It drew on earlier work, notably a Historic Landscape Assessment¹⁸.
- 4.5. The Character Assessment was completed in November 2002 and was to be of use in two principal ways – to produce further rigorous evidence to help the then impending (2003) reconsideration of the Special Status issue; and to feed into the existing land-use planning process, via a District-wide strategy and eventual adoption as 'Supplementary Planning Guidance' (reviewed separately below).
- 4.6. The LCA report comprises an authoritative and detailed description and assessment of the district's landscape character, and is highly regarded both locally and at a wider county level. However, as noted below, it has taken some time for it to be translated into revised policy and practice.

'Dean by Definition'

- 4.7. This was an innovative project, run to a parallel timetable with the Landscape Character Assessment (it was also completed in November 2002). It was undertaken by a consortium of local organisations led by the Forest Business Education Partnership. Its aim was to identify the cultural and social character of the Forest of Dean, as perceived by its residents and visitors.
- 4.8. It employed a variety of tools, including questionnaire surveys (over 1,200 people interviewed on a one-to-one basis), photography and video, artistic and writing projects, a presence at some 50 local events and meetings, a web-site, and the (celebrated!) persuasion of pub-goers to record their views on beer-mats. The project tried hard, and with some success, to reach out to those social groups which are usually underrepresented in such research.

¹⁷ Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002.

¹⁸ The County-wide Historic Landscape Assessment began in 1999 (before the FODIRD programme was conceived) and was completed in 2001. It was undertaken by the County Council's Archaeological Service. Funding from the IRD Programme contributed to field work in the Forest of Dean on the condition that the result fed into the Landscape Character Assessment.

- 4.9. Although initially met with some scepticism, the report is now widely admired as a valuable collation of local perceptions and concerns about the local culture and environment, and as a brave attempt to crystallise the essence of the area's 'specialness'.
- 4.10. In retrospect, while the report presents a range of authentic representations of perceptions of the Forest, it does not provide overall conclusions that can be acted upon, such as identifying the threats to the qualities of the Forest, or the opportunities that could be taken up through policies and delivery programmes to build on these qualities.
- 4.11. It is perhaps as a result of this lack of conclusions that the follow-up action that was envisaged in the Evaluation of Phase 1 (particularly the use of Dean by Definition in the District's Community Strategy and in the Local Development Framework) does not appear to have taken place. Several consultees regretted that the Dean by Definition report seems to have 'lain on a shelf gathering dust' during the BOWS Phase, when it could have contributed positively to community and planning policy.

The Archaeological Survey of the Forest of Dean

- 4.12. This survey was started in January 2002 and came to a main conclusion in 2005, although further work (not funded by the Programme) is ongoing. The Programme contributed funding to a much larger budget backed by English Heritage and the County Council. The survey work has been overseen by the Archaeological Service of the County Council.
- 4.13. The work contributed valuable information to the Landscape Character Assessment and subsequent Landscape Strategy. It developed a strong 'community outreach' component seeking both to encourage and embrace the work of independent field researchers and local organisations, notably the Dean Archaeology Group, and (though the publication of a newsletter) to raise the interest and awareness of local people without specialist knowledge.

The Biodiversity Survey

- 4.14. This survey was begun in 2001 and completed in March 2004, and was undertaken by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust with support from the Programme, the District Council and English Nature (with the Forest Enterprise providing information and logistical support). The work sought to assimilate and collate habitat and species data for the District to provide an accurate information base for the agencies and organisations with planning or resource management responsibilities.
- 4.15. Data has been collated as GIS layers and added to the Gloucestershire Environmental Data Unit, which is now used by the District Council Planning Department for all planning applications. Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) have been identified which, though they have no statutory protection (being effectively below Sites of Special Scientific Interest) are nevertheless recognised in planning terms. As with the other surveys, the biodiversity survey has contributed directly to the Landscape Character Assessment and the final report, published in March 2004, produced a matrix cross-referencing each of the Landscape Character Areas with the

presence of key habitats and species. The final report also identified 'priority areas for action' by each of the main statutory agencies and organisations in the District.

- 4.16. After the main report was produced there was an initial intention to provide an outreach service to local communities, using field ecologists, to improve local understanding and conservation of biodiversity within parishes. This was to be funded by English Nature. Although the scope of this activity had to be scaled back considerably because of the limited funding available, work continued between April 2004 and June 2006 on the production of Parish Biodiversity Summaries for all the parishes in the District. These short (4 page) documents provide a clear synopsis of the key habitats and species known in the parish in a form that is accessible to an interested 'lay person'. There is potential to use these innovative documents (no other District in England has them) in a variety of ways such as part of the Parish Plan process and as a resource for schools. It will be important that this is taken forward.

THE LOCAL GRANT SCHEME

- 4.17. The Local Grant Scheme took place in both Phase 1 and the BOWS phase. It was wholly funded by the Countryside Agency and administered by the District Council, with assessment of applications undertaken in Phase 1 by a small steering group of the Agency itself, the Rural Community Council, Forest Voluntary Action Forum and the Forest Regeneration Partnership. In the BOWS Phase applications were assessed by the BOWS Management Group.
- 4.18. The scheme's aim has been '*to promote the quality of life in the Forest of Dean, through improving facilities and services, increasing access for all and encouraging participation in community life*'. In Phase 1 it provided grants of up to £5,000 and up to 75% of total cost, to local voluntary organisations and parish councils, for community and environmental projects. It was launched in November 2001, and by the end of Phase 1 had dispersed some £166,500 to 69 projects. In the BOWS Phase £60,000 was available overall in grants of up to £10,000 (again up to 75% of total costs). Applications were submitted by 12 projects and grant aid to 11 was approved. A summary of key figures on the two phases of the scheme are given in **Figure 4.1**.

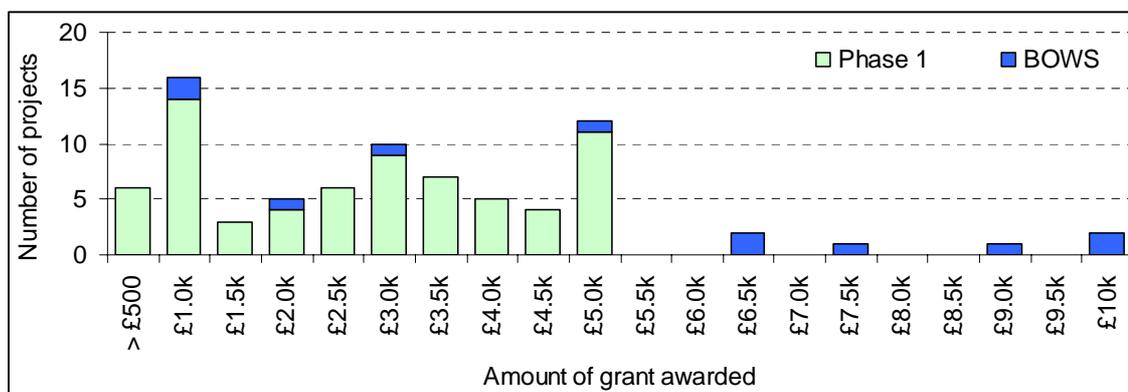
Figure 4.1. Summary statistics for the Local Grants Scheme

	Phase 1	BOWS Phase
Number of awards	69	11
Number of applications withdrawn or unclaimed	4	1
Total grant awarded	£166,475	£58,562
Average grant awarded	£2,413	£5,324
Number of projects claiming less than awarded	8	1

- 4.19. In Phase 1 targeting of funding was based around seven priorities (maximising existing facilities; community pride and participation; start-up funds; the natural environment; energy efficiency and environmental good practice; improving accessibility priority; and transport initiatives). In Phase 2 applications were assessed against the BOWS funding priorities which were promoting local distinctiveness; contributing to local economy; development and promotion of local skills and products and integration with other initiatives in the Forest.

- 4.20. In Phase 1 nearly half of the awards were of less than £2,500, and the greatest number fell into the £500 to £1,000 bracket (Figure 4.2). During the BOWS phase awards spanned a wider variety of amounts, with two projects being allocated the maximum award of £10,000 (although one of these has been unable to claim the full amount).

Figure 4.2. Sizes of grant awards made



- 4.21. Based on the summary information on the objectives and outputs of the awards that was available to this evaluation, it is possible to categorise the projects into the different kinds of public benefit they addressed. This is, in part, based on an assessment of Phase 1 awards made by the Project Officer.
- 4.22. Summary information from this assessment is shown in **Figure 4.3**. This shows that most money was spent on projects that promoted the identity of the Forest (accounting for the large majority of money spent in the BOWS phase, in line with the overall objective of this part of the Programme). Projects supporting businesses and employment (i.e. delivering economic objectives) accounted for a high proportion of grant allocated in the BOWS phase, but relatively little in Phase 1.
- 4.23. Conversely, a high proportion of projects in Phase 1 addressed social benefits, whereas relatively few did in the BOWS phase. Community focussed projects in Phase 1 include those working with specific groups in the community (mothers and toddlers, the elderly and people with mental health issues), increasing community capacity (for instance by purchasing a computer for community use or fitting out the kitchen in a village hall) and by enabling public recreation (such as through the improvement of riverside walks).
- 4.24. Relatively few projects addressed the environment (i.e. biodiversity, landscape or natural resources) or the historic environment in either Phase 1 or in BOWS, which is perhaps surprising given the strong natural and historic environment focus of most of the baseline studies. However, it may be that other schemes, such as the agri-environment schemes and initiatives from national bodies were regarded as sufficient to address these needs from communities and local groups.
- 4.25. In terms of the value of projects, those addressing business needs and employment had the highest average grant of nearly £5,000 (although this is likely to reflect the higher amounts available in the BOWS phase when more economic projects were

funded). Conversely, projects working with specific community groups received the lowest average grant of a little over £1,500.

Figure 4.3. Summary statistics based on assessments of public benefit

Type of public benefit addressed	Total value of grants	No of grants		Average value of grants
		Phase 1	BOWS	
Promoting the identity of the Forest	£84,596	14	8	£3,845
Support to businesses and direct employment	£59,751	5	7	£4,979
Public recreation	£46,714	11	2	£3,593
General community capacity other than buildings	£40,853	16	0	£2,553
Conservation or enhancement of the environment	£40,238	8	3	£3,658
Working with specific community groups	£31,864	18	1	£1,677
Investment in community buildings	£27,649	10	0	£2,765
Celebrating arts and living culture	£26,200	7	3	£2,620
Protection of built heritage and archaeology	£23,946	7	1	£2,993

Note: Totals of columns exceed the totals for all projects because 35 of the 80 projects are considered to have addressed more than one public benefit.

- 4.26. In terms of the geographical spread of awards, the Project Officer's own summary of the Phase 1 awards states that 26 of the 41 parishes in the District received at least one award during Phase 1, and that 23 of the projects produced benefits for the community as a whole across the District.
- 4.27. The Evaluation of Phase 1 looked in more detail at five projects. These were:
- Forest Big Art Web (a website to showcase and market Forest of Dean artists);
 - Forest of Dean community radio (a project to promote the regeneration of the Forest through the medium of radio);
 - Support for the Newent Beekeepers (to help keep alive and promote what might otherwise be a dying tradition /expertise);
 - The Quackers project (an after-school care scheme); and
 - Cinderford Art Space project (support for a community art space centre) .
- 4.28. As part of this evaluation a further six projects were selected for review. A summary of these projects is included in Appendix 2. They were:
- Brockweir and Hewelsfield village shop (the provision of professional fees to set up a community based enterprise);
 - The Forest Food Producers (to set up a distribution system for food produced in the Forest and promote the area as a fine foods region);
 - Forest Mobility (towards the purchase of electric, rough terrain scooters to enable disabled people to access renovated cycle tracks in the Forest);
 - The Forest Sound Factory (to produce a recorded information source and guide around the Forest of Dean in CD format);
 - Newent Local History Society (the publication of a book on Newent's History); and
 - Switched On (a community arts project that organised a free, two day festival of music and arts in Coleford).

- 4.29. Although this evaluation has not undertaken a rigorous assessment of the outcomes against the target objectives of grant aided projects, the case study analysis and the comments provided by consultees allow overall conclusions to be made.
- 4.30. The Local Grant Scheme was generally well regarded by the groups that were awarded funding. Many commented that they knew of no other source of grant aid that would have assisted them (particularly the small community-related projects), and would have struggled to raise the funds from their own or charitable sources. While it is likely that some of the projects would have gone ahead without the grant, most of these would have taken longer to do so and the value of investment and benefits achieved would have been less.
- 4.31. Most of the more innovative projects, and those involving the appointment of staff or the provision of a service, rather than the purchase of capital equipment, were more reliant on the grant aid and would almost certainly not have gone ahead without the funding. Not surprisingly, these projects seem to have had a greater risk attached to them and to have relied for on-going funding to have maintained their impacts. A small number of these projects either failed to claim any funds after being given approval (two projects, both in Phase 1) or failed to complete their project after making an initial claim (five projects). However, given the 'test-bedding' objectives of the Programme as a whole, this level of failure seems acceptable and there is no suggestion that funds were misappropriated.
- 4.32. Although the larger projects, and those run by public sector bodies, were aware of, and were engaged with, the overall objectives of the IRD Programme, many of the smaller and community or business run projects saw the project as a helpful source for funding but were less conscious of being part of a larger integrated programme. This need not be regarded as a criticism of the Programme – indeed one of the notable elements of the Local Grant Scheme is the extent to which it provided relatively small sums of money to groups who have little engagement with public sector initiatives.
- 4.33. A key feature for the community groups who applied to the scheme was the simplicity of the guidelines and administrative procedures. Applicants who had experience of other schemes commented that the 'light touch' requirements of the Local Grant Scheme made applying for small sums of grant worthwhile (implying that the onerous requirements of some schemes did not). Another advantage was that up to 25% of matched funding could take the form of help in kind, such as labour provided by volunteers. Again, this made the scheme more suitable for community groups.
- 4.34. Nevertheless, several applicants or potential applicants who sought funding for business development proposals clearly found the requirements for a costed business plan difficult – and resulted in at least one applicant not progressing with the application. In retrospect, there would have been advantages in the Programme providing more support, perhaps through bodies like Business Link, for business development work.

OTHER PROGRAMME OUTPUTS

- 4.35. In addition to the high profile activities described above, the Programme has involved a range of other outputs, described below.

The Environment and Rural Skills Project

- 4.36. This project was conceived and managed by the Dean Heritage Centre and ran from April 2000 to March 2003. The Centre recognised the declining number of local people with the wood working skills needed to sustain the economic and environmental management of the Forest. The project sought to help local people better appreciate the forest and its traditions and to keep alive the practice of such traditional wood working skills as coppicing, pole lathe turning and charcoal burning.
- 4.37. The objectives of the project were defined at the outset to include the undertaking of research into sustainable woodland management practices and woodland skills in the Forest; the increasing of awareness locally of those practices and skills; and an assessment of the viability of increasing the practice of those skills. After year one, those objectives were modified to place more emphasis on providing practical training in such skills, particularly for local secondary school children but also for the community more widely.
- 4.38. The funding provided by the Programme was used to employ one full and one part-time member of staff for most of the three years of the project, to create and equip workshop facilities and to run a number of courses and events.
- 4.39. Early in the project a directory of local wood and craft workers was produced, and this fed into the 'Dean Oak' project (see below). The major output of the project was the delivery of practical training on a range of rural skills including hurdle making, pole lathe turning, dry stone walling, hedge laying and stone carving. Courses were generally well attended, and trainees included young people with relatively few educational qualifications. Some of these courses have continued during 2006 following a period of restructuring at the Centre, although at a much smaller scale and without external funding (although the Centre acknowledges that this could have been sought). The project found a difficulty in sourcing local timber in the small quantities required by craft workers, but this was largely overcome once links were made with suitable timber contractors.
- 4.40. The second major output of the project was work with local schools (both primary and secondary) to incorporate rural skills and awareness of the Forest's wood-working heritage into the national curriculum. Again this work has continued, albeit at a smaller scale and mainly limited to demonstrations of charcoal burning. The Heritage Centre found an initial reluctance from some schools to get involved, where teachers felt the material and trips offered by the Centre did not fit easily in to the national curriculum (to a large degree overcome by further development work by the Centre) and by the practical difficulties and cost of transporting children to the sites. The second issue of the cost of transport appears not to be a significant constraint at the current time.

- 4.41. A final and more indirect output of the project has been improved management of woodlands leased or owned by the Centre as a result of craft courses (particularly coppicing taking place in these woods).

Dean Oak

- 4.42. In mid 2000 the Dean Oak project was set up to test the market for small diameter oak thinning timber within the Forest of Dean. The project aimed to demonstrate the feasibility of using the timber to generate wider economic, environmental and social benefits for the Forest of Dean community. Funding from the IRD Programme was approved for three years, and Forest Enterprise agreed to donate the thinnings from a stand of oak, to supervise harvesting and processing, and to assess the resources longer term potential.
- 4.43. The principle outputs from the project were:
- Production of a supply of kiln dried material for use by local wood (furniture, craft, etc) workers;
 - A supply of green wood (used predominantly in the conversion of farm barns to houses);
 - The identification of around 25 businesses and individuals who might source small diameter oak timber from the Forest;
 - The production and promotion (through a travelling exhibition) of a sample of hand crafted 'Dean Oak' products; and
 - The creation of a business plan for a Dean Oak Company and Dean Oak Co-operative that would work together to develop the concept.
- 4.44. An independent evaluation of the project was carried out in 2004¹⁹. This judged the project on the basis of its environmental, economic and social sustainability. It concluded that the environmental benefits of the project were modest, although there was significant potential for Dean Oak to celebrate and promote the local character and distinctiveness of the Forest. The economic benefits were judged to be considerable, with the potential for further development. The report estimated that the uplift in the value of 334 cubic metres of small diameter oak thinnings, previously sold out of the area as pulp wood, could be in the region of £48,000. The social benefits were also judged to be significant in terms of membership of the Dean Oak Co-operative that was formed as a result of the project (with a current membership of around 170 people), and in terms of the interest that the travelling exhibition demonstrated in locally produced products.
- 4.45. Following the end of the three year feasibility study there was a clear expectation, both from the individuals who had been involved in the project and the Countryside Agency, that the Dean Oak Project would receive further funding in the BOWS Phase of the programme, probably for the purchase of capital equipment (the lack of kiln drying facilities suitable for small diameter wood had been identified). However, this failed to materialise because the Co-operative felt they were unable to take on

¹⁹ Arkenford, 2004. Dean Oak Project Evaluation

the expected level of bureaucracy in the application process and subsequent monitoring. They calculated that it would have cost them around £2,500 in time to gain £8,000 in capital funding.

- 4.46. The Co-operative has subsequently obtained funding from the County Council's Alliance of Communities and Enterprise programme and the District Council to develop the Dean Oak brand and put towards the purchase of a small wood drying kiln. They have applied for funding for a co-ordinator post from the Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance Scheme.

SRB 6

- 4.47. This SRB programme in the Forest was effectively a Forest Regeneration Partnership initiative to which the Countryside Agency, through the IRD Programme, made a contribution (the Regional Development Agency being the major funder). In the Forest of Dean the programme was wholly based around the needs of young people. The IRD Programme provided match funding for selected individual mini-projects up to a £5,000 ceiling. In addition some officer time and administrative costs were allocated to the SRB management group. Over the two years 2001 - 2003 the Agency contributed some £69,000 to the SRB programme. No contributions were made by the IRD Programme to the SRB programme during the BOWS phase.
- 4.48. The mini-projects which attracted Countryside Agency co-funding through the Programme were as follows: the Cinderford and Neighbourhood Dance Initiative (CANDI), the Forest of Dean Young People's Forum, Coleford Churches Together, Young People's Support, Parkend Youth Project, Rural Club Support, Cinderford Skate Park, 'Lydney State Circus', Gloucestershire Dance, Action for Youth Coordination, 'SHARE' and Mercury-Cinderford Artspace'.
- 4.49. The Evaluation of Phase 1 looked at the Cinderford Skate Park and CANDI in a little more detail. It found that in both projects young people were actively involved in their design and management.

The Future for Tourism study

- 4.50. In September 2001 the District Council, supported financially by the Programme (Countryside Agency) and the Regional Development Agency, commissioned a research study the District's potential for an expansion of sustainable tourism. The consultants' report, which was completed in June 2002²⁰, was clearly based on the principles of IRD and of the sustainable development of the area. It was generally well received as a rigorous and far-sighted piece of work.
- 4.51. The report found that the tourism sector was underperforming in terms of the yield received from visitors compared to other rural areas, and that some aspects of the sector (such as employment) were in decline. This underperformance was due to a lack of investment, lack of coherent marketing, the dominance of day visitors and the generally low price (quality) of accommodation and attractions. However, the report

²⁰ RPS Planning Transport and Environment, 2002

found great potential for tourism, particularly in relation to short leisure breaks from people with an interest in the countryside, heritage and culture.

- 4.52. The report suggested a Vision for the sector that "*The Royal Forest of Dean should be developed as THE outstanding Forest Destination in the United Kingdom*". It established 12 'strategic sustainable development principles' to ensure that the tourism sector develops in a way that improves the quality of the visitor experience based on the area's strengths and in a way that respects the needs of local people. These principles included that new tourism development within the Statutory Forest should be minimised, and that outside this area they should take place in or close to key settlements. The tourism 'offer' should be based around the sense of place and ethos of the Forest, and local people and stakeholders should be involved in all stages of the development of the strategy and action plan for the sector.
- 4.53. The report identified 16 key development projects that should be taken forward to help deliver the vision and principles (the development of ten named attractions, four key accommodation centres and the provision of interpretation and business development training to tourism providers). The total capital investment for these 16 projects was estimated at between £33m and £50m, yielding an estimated additional £36.5m annual expenditure in the local economy and 1,000 new jobs.
- 4.54. The findings and recommendations were subsequently examined by a working group including the District Council, the Countryside Agency, the Regional Development Agency and Forest Enterprise, with a view to developing a Tourism Strategy. The resulting Strategy was adopted by the District Council in 2003²¹.
- 4.55. There is good evidence of a more positive and strategic approach being taken towards the development of the tourism sector in the District. However, as the Strategy acknowledges, a large part of this increased profile is due to the impact of the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) epidemic in 2001. As a result of the effective closure to visitors of large areas of the countryside for six months to contain the disease, it became clear that the tourism sector was far more important to the local economy than many local people had appreciated. While there is still a deep-seated scepticism amongst some opinion formers in the Forest about the economic and social value of tourism (concerns being that tourism employment is often part-time and low wage and 'not a proper job'), FMD is probably more responsible for the resurgence of interest in the sector than the Future for Tourism Study. However, the focus on sustainable development and on a tourism offer based on local distinctiveness, quality of provision and the environment, that are both clearly evident in the current strategy and its action plan, owe much to the principles and recommendations established in the Future of Tourism Study.
- 4.56. It is significant that the study was the only one of the pieces of primary research commissioned by the Programme to address an aspect of the economic development of the special qualities of the Forest. The study was not formally one of the Baseline Studies, but was commissioned separately (though it was part funded by the Programme).

²¹ Forest of Dean District Council, 2003

Landscape Strategy

- 4.57. The development of the Landscape Strategy followed directly from (and overlapped with) the Landscape Character Assessment that was completed in Phase 1. It was written by Landscape Design Associates, reporting to a steering group of local stakeholders and national agencies, and involved a workshop with a wider group of stakeholders in November 2002. The final report was completed in June 2004²².
- 4.58. The Landscape Strategy sought to provide an evidence base and recommendations for policy makers that would allow them to take account of, conserve, and enhance the landscape character of the District. It had five main objectives which can be summarised as:
- To identify the past and future forces for change in the landscape;
 - To consider the implications of these forces for change on landscape character, within the 15 landscape character types (the main part of the strategy document);
 - To develop broad landscape and land use strategy ideas to inform future policy;
 - To develop ideas for local landscape indicators to monitor future landscape change; and
 - To provide advice to partners on how the Strategy and Landscape Character Assessment could inform future policy and decision making.
- 4.59. Chapter 2 of the document explored the forces for change in some detail under the headings of built development, infrastructure, mineral extraction and landfill, agriculture and land management, forestry and woodland, tourism and recreation and climate change. Chapter 3, which occupies the bulk of the document, assesses the impact of these forces for change in each of the 15 landscape character types, listing potential indicators for change and opportunities for community involvement.
- 4.60. The final chapter examines the 'next steps'. It suggests that the Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy should be used by a wide range of local, regional and national bodies to guide their work in the District. Key projects that can take forward the principles covered in the Strategy are the IRD Programme itself, The Forest of Dean Partnership (now the Local Strategic Partnership), the Coalfields Regeneration Programme, Town Partnerships in Lyndey, Coleford, Cinderford and Newent and the Countryside Agency's Market and Coastal Towns Initiative. However, it recommends that overall ownership of the strategy should lie with the County and District Councils and that, following a period of review and consultation, the strategy should be formally adopted by the District Council in the form of a Supplementary Planning Document.
- 4.61. Since the publication of the Strategy, this process of review, consultation and formal adoption has taken place (see below). There remain opportunities for further consolidation and development of the ideas presented in the Strategy. The indicators of landscape change suggested in the document could be used by the District Council to monitor progress and feed into revised planning policy (local planning authorities are expected to adopt a monitoring framework for plans against objectives and

²² LDA, 2004

targets). There remains the challenge of ensuring that the principles developed in the strategy are appreciated and used by other bodies and programmes such as the Coalfields Regeneration Programme. It is suggested that responsibility for this should lie with the District Council's Forward Planning Section, supported by the County Council Environment Department (landscape architect).

Supplementary Planning Document

- 4.62. As noted above, the development of a Landscape Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the District arose directly from the Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy funded by the Programme. It was developed by the District Council Planning Department during 2005 and 2006 and involved three stages of consultation. These were an initial workshop with invited stakeholders in July 2005, a formal consultation in relation to the required Sustainability Appraisal in December 2005 and a period of formal public consultation in April and May 2006 before final adoption by the District Council.
- 4.63. The SPD comprises practical guidance to people preparing a planning application. It sets out a series of steps that applicants may be required to undertake to demonstrate that the development proposal will not have a significant negative impact on the landscape and environment. Which of these steps will be required is determined by the Planning Officer following pre-application discussions with the applicant. It acknowledges that the full procedures in the SPD are only likely to be required for major developments (which will also require an Environmental Impact Assessment in line with national policy).
- 4.64. The SPD makes direct reference to the 15 Landscape Character Areas and, for major developments, states that applications should include a landscape character assessment confirming the character of the application site and its relationship to the wider landscape. Minor development proposals require a landscape survey and appraisal to demonstrate that the character and visual context of the site have been considered and key issues taken account of. The SPD emphasises the importance of consultation, particularly with adjacent land owners, and all applicants are expected to provide evidence that this consultation has taken place.
- 4.65. The value of the SPD must be seen in context of the Local Development Framework for the District (of which it forms a part), as well as national planning policy for an area which is not subject to the additional protection afforded to designated landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks) through Planning Policy Statement 7 ('Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'). Many local planning authorities are in the process of preparing SPDs as part of their Local Development Framework, and the Forest of Dean's is therefore at the vanguard.
- 4.66. In comparison with the SPD's being developed by other planning authorities, particularly those that are not covered by a statutory landscape designation (AONB or National Park), the evidence and principles available to support the Forest of Dean SPD from the Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy should ensure that planning applications are subject to a high level of scrutiny in relation to their landscape impacts.

4.67. However, the ultimate success of the SPD (and much of the work put into the Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy) will only become clear once it has been put into practice and its effect on the quality and type of development approved by the District Council can be assessed. In this respect, the recommendation from the Landscape Strategy that the suggested indicators of landscape change and quality should be measured deserves attention, and should form part of the required monitoring framework that will be developed by the District Council.

CONCLUSIONS

- The principle outputs from Phase 1 were the four baseline studies which added significantly to knowledge of the Forest of Dean's special qualities. The baseline studies were conducted to a high standard and have included innovative methodologies and outputs, particularly the Dean by Definition study which can be regarded as a national exemplar of approaches to define cultural character.
- The Local Grants Scheme took place in both Phase 1 and BOWS, although the type of projects assisted in the two phases were somewhat different. Whereas the main focus of projects funded in Phase 1 was work with community groups and building community capacity (with a high proportion of projects receiving less than £2,000), projects during BOWS phase were more likely to address economic objectives and received generally higher levels of grant funding. Relatively few projects addressed environmental or heritage objectives, but many sought to promote the distinctive cultural identity of the Forest, particularly in the BOWS phase.
- The relatively 'light touch' application requirements of the scheme made it more accessible to community groups and small businesses. However, lack of experience in preparing business plans (where this was required) appears to have been a limiting factor for some applicants.
- Other significant outputs of Phase 1 included the Environment and Rural Skills Programme, Dean Oak project and Future for Tourism study in Phase 1. Although the benefits of these projects are still evident, there was perhaps a failure to build on earlier successes during BOWS.
- The loss of momentum between Phase 1 and BOWS, resulting mainly from the delay in appointing project staff, is probably responsible for a lack of connectedness, and failure to follow-up on earlier work, between the two Phases. The successful foundations established in Phase 1 by projects such as Dean by Definition, Dean Oak and the Environment and Rural Skills Project were not built on during BOWS.
- Notable exceptions to this are the identification of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and production of Parish Biodiversity Plans (both delivered with other funding) and the production of the Landscape Supplementary Planning Document. These took place during the BOWS phase and have effectively ensured that the Biodiversity Survey and Landscape Character Assessment funding in Phase 1 have been converted into planning policy which should deliver lasting protection to the special environmental quality of the Forest.

- Finally, it is notable that few of the direct outputs of the Programme have addressed the economy of the District (the Future of Tourism Study being a notable exception) and relatively few of the awards from the Local Grant Scheme, at least in Phase 1, sought direct economic benefits. This is disappointing given that the Programme sought to take an integrating approach to environmental, social and economic development, and given the fact that the economic development of the District has been, and continues to be, the focus of much local attention.

5. COMPARISON WITH OTHER IRD PROGRAMMES

5.1. The brief for this evaluation calls for a “benchmarking of the results of the Programme against comparable activities elsewhere”. This Chapter seeks to provide this comparison and judgement under five headings:

- Interpretation of IRD
- Building social capital
- Working with local communities
- Adding value to local products
- Delivering small grants

INTERPRETATION OF IRD – THE LAND MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

5.2. The nine Land Management Initiatives (LMIs) were a family of demonstration projects established in 1999 to run for five years to improve the Countryside Agency’s understanding of the measures needed to promote and support IRD in rural landscapes, and particularly to test the concept of Sustainable Land Management (SLM). Although established for different reasons, the LMIs took place over a similar period to the IRD project, and had the same focus on the delivery of sustainable development principles in a local and highly rural area.

5.3. A report for the Countryside Agency in 2004 sought to ‘learn lessons’ from the LMI Programme²³, and came to the following conclusions about the way they had interpreted IRD and the related but more specific concept of Sustainable Land Management.

- IRD is a process or direction of travel for achieving more sustainable outcomes in the rural areas of England, accepting that the achievement of true sustainability is some way off.
- It requires a coming together of views and broad ownership of ‘the direction of travel’. The processes of community and stakeholder engagement and movement towards consensus take time, yet are central to the achievement of a more sustainable future.
- It needs to be led by clear objectives that articulate what the ambitions are for sustainability within the area in question.

5.4. The report found that, at the time the LMIs (and the IRD Programme) started, the development of policy and action based on a clear understanding of locality was not (and is still not) widely appreciated or practiced. The multi-agency, cross-sectoral and integrating nature of IRD as a concept is one that has not fitted the institutional ways of working of many bodies involved in rural delivery (an issue that may be resolved, in part, with the advent of Natural England in 2006). This means that concept of IRD is often a difficult one to get across to local stakeholders.

5.5. From the LMIs, it was clear that every locality has its own specific characteristics, needs and wants as expressed by local people, and that these should form the foundations for the future of the area. The more successful LMIs were clearly based on a well-evidenced

²³ LUC, 2004

understanding of the landscape character of their area. While many of the LMIs commissioned research into the nature of the agricultural economy and community (as befits a programme addressing land management), they were less good at defining the state of the wider rural economy or the socio-economic character of the rural area more generally. The report concluded that, in the context of IRD, a greater breadth of socio-economic understanding is required if policies and actions are to be truly integrated and based on fact rather than surmise.

- 5.6. In comparison with many of the LMIs, the IRD Programme was clearly built on a need to understand the environmental and cultural character of the Forest, and this has been very largely achieved through the baseline studies. The BOWS concept and the BOWS Digest publication produced at the start of Phase 2 of the Programme demonstrated the need to integrate the separate strands of IRD to establish the overall identity of the area. Although the IRD Programme has also struggled to communicate the vision of IRD to local stakeholders, the name 'Building On What's Special' communicates the concept more effectively than phrases used in some of the LMIs (such as 'Value in Wetness' used in the Humberhead Levels LMI).
- 5.7. While many of the LMIs failed to define their social character sufficiently, the IRD Programme did little to research the economic nature of the District (The Future of Tourism Study, which was not one of the Baseline Studies, being the exception). As the LMI report points out, economic information can be a valuable commodity and that providing access to this information can bring 'buy-in' from businesses and the wider community. In several of the LMIs, farmers became more engaged in the Initiative because it provided them with valuable information about public grants, their soils or market intelligence about their products. The IRD Programme missed this opportunity because it did not collect or disseminate this kind of information.

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL – THE NORFOLK ARABLE LMI

- 5.8. In many of the LMI's (and particularly the Norfolk Arable LMI, or NALMI), there was a realisation that farmers often regarded themselves, or were regarded by others, as a 'community apart'. The long working hours on the holding and financial indebtedness of many small farming businesses meant that they suffered from both a physical and social isolation from the rest of the community. The impact of this isolation was that many farmers felt hostile to, or did not understand, the public expectations placed on them in terms of their environmental management and wide contributions to society. This lack of social capital was a significant barrier to the achievement of IRD.
- 5.9. The NALMI sought to identify the nature of this isolation and to build bridges in the social capital of the rural community by holding community meetings at which residents could explain their understanding of farming issues and farmers, and by holding one-to-one sessions with farmers to identify their social needs (the latter as part of a Whole Farm Planning Service). The NALMI was less well equipped to deal with the issues it identified, although it did work with the local Health Trust where relevant.
- 5.10. Apart from the Dean by Definition project (which sought to describe how communities saw the Forest but not to influence the way they related to it or to each other) the IRD Programme did not attempt to identify the needs of different communities in the Forest. The success of the Programme in embedding an appreciation of the special character of the Forest is covered later in this report, but it is likely that a better understanding of how communities relate to one another might have helped this. In the circumstances of the often heated debate that has surrounded the issue of special status and the Programme and

the apparently fractured nature of different interest groups, it is perhaps understandable why the Programme chose not to do this.

WORKING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES – THE COMMUNITY FORESTS

- 5.11. The Community Forest Programme was introduced in 1989, funded jointly by the Forestry Commission and Countryside Commission with a vision "*to transform the landscapes closest to where most people live and work, assisting urban and rural regeneration and enhancing the health, well-being and quality of life of local communities*". There are 12 Community Forests, each of which has a Forest Plan which guide the activities of the national and local partners in the Forest Partnership. Since 1994 the Community Forest Programme has been working to deliver seven priority targets. One of the five first order priorities is "*Securing involvement in the Community Forest by a wide range of local communities, especially those socially excluded from their environment*", a priority which was also evident in the IRD Programme.
- 5.12. The recent evaluation of the Community Forest Programme²⁴ found that Forest Partnerships delivered this priority in two ways. Firstly, they focus on the educational contribution that the Programme makes in local schools and in life-long learning. Many of the Forest Partnerships employ an education officer and develop educational packs that enable teachers to incorporate learning material about woodland management and recreation into the National Curriculum. Limiting factors include overlap with other organisations undertaking similar work, and difficulties in securing funding for long term education officer posts.
- 5.13. Secondly the Forest Partnerships seek a high level of commitment from local communities to the Programme through volunteering and celebration of the Community Forest's identity. The establishment and support for volunteer groups who help plant or manage woodland and the use of out-reach workers to create links with minority or specialist groups in the community are used to do this. The evaluation found that the Forest Partnerships have been less successful at this work and that the purposes of the Community Forest are still relatively unknown in many of the areas.
- 5.14. There are clear differences of approach between the IRD Programme and Community Forests. The latter have a very clear focus on woodland creation, management and recreation (including the green space within woodlands) which provides a tighter focal point for the activities of the Community Forest. But this is also probably of less immediate relevance to the lives of local people than the wider objectives of the IRD Programme, making it harder for the Community Forests to gain a high level of community engagement. The educational focus in the Community Forests is present in the IRD Programme only in the activities of some of the projects (such as the Rural Skills Programme in Phase 1).
- 5.15. The IRD Programme has sought to engage with local people in a variety of ways. The Dean by Definition was valuable, both in terms of generating a process of involvement (simply by contributing to the project, people became more aware of their own views towards the Forest and its special qualities) and in the report that is produced. However, as noted earlier, it has been disappointing that the achievement of Dean by Definition has not been made more use of subsequently – it remains an under-used community resource.

²⁴ LUC and SQW, 2005

- 5.16. The IRD Programme also had the advantage of a substantial local grants programme which, as noted earlier, was used with good effect to increase capacity within local communities (a resource not available to Community Forests). The relatively simple application and reporting procedure and the ability of projects to use their own labour as a matching cost helped local communities take advantage of the grant scheme.
- 5.17. As in Community Forests, the IRD Programme has found it difficult to establish a high public profile for its work, although it should be said that the delays to establishing a website and in appointing staff in the BOWS Phase have not helped. The often heated debate surrounding the special status of the Forest that has continued throughout the IRD Programme has also probably drawn attention from, or tarnished, the public perception of the Programme.
- 5.18. Overall, the comparison between the way the Community Forests and the IRD Programme have sought to engage with communities shows that, while both have approached the issue in different ways, both have had some success and some weaknesses in their effectiveness.

ADDING VALUE TO LOCAL PRODUCTS – DIRECT FROM DORSET

- 5.19. A means of 'doing' IRD that is found in many areas is the promotion of products that are judged to reflect and enhance the environmental or cultural qualities of the area. Many local authorities and protected landscape areas (AONBs and National Parks) support a local branding scheme that encourages local businesses to adopt high standards of production in line with these qualities. The Direct from Dorset scheme is one such scheme, and is notable because it has more challenging entry criteria than many schemes in relation to the origin of products and the quantity of processing or creativity applied in the county (though it is not as challenging as schemes such as the Peak District Environmental Quality Mark in relation to environmental standards).
- 5.20. Direct from Dorset is run by Dorset County Council and has around 50 member businesses (22 in the food and drink category, 6 in the wood products category, 2 in the craft category and 27 associate members). The County Council promotes the brand at trade fairs and public events (holding a highly successful Dorset Food Week every year) and undertakes accreditation visits to members through its Trading Standards Department.
- 5.21. This means of delivering IRD has been less evident in the IRD Programme. That is not to downplay the financial assistance provided by the Programme for the Farmers Markets held in Lydney, Coleford, Cinderford and Newent (as one of a number of other funders including the Regional Development Agency, the District and Town Councils and Chambers of Trade). In terms of more direct support, the Programme has found it difficult to support the two groups of businesses that have aspirations to raise the profile of the District through sales of branded products. The Programme helped establish the Dean Oak Company and Co-operative in Phase 1, but has not been able to assist them in the BOWS Phase. Despite receiving an application for funding for the Forest Food Producers in Phase 2, the Programme has again found it difficult to assist this group of producers.

DELIVERING SMALL GRANTS – THE LOCAL HERITAGE INITIATIVE

- 5.22. The Local Heritage Initiative was established as a partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Countryside Agency in February 2000 to help communities investigate, explain and care for their local landmarks, landscapes, heritage and culture. The scheme closed in 2006 and dispersed £22.5 million to 1,418 projects. It operated across England and was administered by the Countryside Agency, with additional support provided by the Nationwide Building Society. Grants of between £3,000 and £25,000 were provided, many being at the lower end of this scale.
- 5.23. The Local Heritage Initiative was aimed primarily at community groups and particularly those that had not previously had access to project-based grant funding. The Initiative provided help to non-professional applicants through the pre-application and application stages from regionally-based LHI advisers. The Initiative aimed to fit the grant around the needs of communities rather than having a fixed structure that applicants were expected to adapt to.
- 5.24. The scope of what was considered to constitute heritage was broad. The Initiative had five key themes. These were natural heritage (which could include environmental projects); built heritage; archaeological heritage; industrial heritage; and customs and traditions. Although the Initiative did not have overt economic objectives, an evaluation of 40 sample LHI projects²⁵ found that direct economic benefits can be substantial through the purchase of skills or materials from local businesses to deliver the project. Indirect economic benefits were more difficult to identify, but were considered “very high” in 10% of the projects studied.
- 5.25. The final evaluation report conducted for the Initiative partners²⁶ identified a number of areas of good practice from the LHI projects studied. These included:
- The direct economic impact of small grants can be maximised by spending locally. Projects should be helped to identify local suppliers of skills and materials.
 - Small, community managed grants sitting within larger institutionally managed programmes can be invaluable in terms of relationship building.
 - A wide economic impact can be achieved through the cumulative effect of a number of activities occurring in an area, particularly where they represent a critical mass large enough to attract visitors. For this to occur there needs to be more structured and joint promotion and marketing.
 - Small sums of grant money can have a significant impact in terms of delivering environmental improvements, building community capacity and ensuring their ownership of the project.
 - High levels of professional support, flexibility and a realistic, practical approach from the Initiative’s advisers and support staff are key aspects needed to help many community groups access and make best use of a small grant scheme. The earlier in the application process that this capacity building takes place, the more embedded the project is likely to be in the community.

²⁵ Countryside Agency, 2005(c)

²⁶ LHI, 2006

- 5.26. The Local Grants Scheme which operated in both phases of the IRD Programme shares many of the characteristics of the Local Heritage Initiative, and the same success factors are evident in both schemes. The Local Grant Scheme was successful in supporting local community groups, helping to build their capacity through early support from the IRD or BOWS project officer. Funding provided by the Local Grant Scheme seems to have involved, on average, smaller sums of money than the Local Heritage Initiative, but the social and environmental impacts seem significant.
- 5.27. It has not been possible to measure the cumulative impact of the Local Grant Scheme, nor the direct and indirect economic benefits derived from the way the grant has been spent. However, there is no reason to believe that the same positive impacts have arisen as were identified in the Local Heritage Initiative.

CONCLUSIONS

- The Forest of Dean IRD Programme took place during a period when there was a range of other similar programmes involving the Countryside Agency that sought to provide integrated environmental, social and economic solutions to rural areas in England.
- Many of the IRD initiatives have struggled to express the concept of IRD in a way that local stakeholders have understood. The IRD Programme's 'Building On What's Special' title and BOWS Digest publication did this better than many other programmes (even if, as noted elsewhere in this report, local engagement with the objectives of the Programme proved difficult to achieve – a difficulty experienced in other initiatives such as Community Forests).
- Common to these initiatives is a need to base local activity around an understanding of the character of the locality. While all initiatives sought to define the special qualities of the landscape, some were less good at defining cultural or economic character and needs. The FoD IRD Programme, through the Dean by Definition project, went a significant way to defining the cultural character of the Forest, but fell short of the achievements of some other initiatives such as the NALMI, in identifying the actions needed to address social issues.
- In many rural areas of England there are local initiatives to help land-based businesses add value to their products on the basis of their origins and their means of production. Although the FoD IRD Programme sought to address this area of work by supporting farmers markets, Forest Food Producers and Dean Oak, it was unable to fully realise this support in the BOWS phase.
- Having access to a locally administered small grants programme provides IRD initiatives with a good way of meeting local needs, particularly those of communities. The FoD IRD Programme's Local Grant's Scheme compares well with other similar programmes such as the Local Heritage Initiative, with a lower average value of grant aid but good penetration into local communities and a breadth of different public benefits.

6. KEY FINDINGS

- 6.1. This Chapter draws together the overall conclusions of the evaluation. The paper addresses nine questions which have been set for this evaluation, re-ordering and making minor changes to the evaluation criteria that were established for the BOWS Phase (paragraph 1.7) :
- A. What is Integrated Rural Development and how has it been interpreted in the Forest of Dean?
 - B. Has the Programme clarified the special qualities of the Forest Core and the wider district?
 - C. Have these qualities been adequately protected, managed or enhanced by the 'influencing work' undertaken?
 - D. With regard to the 'influencing work', has the programme demonstrably influenced the policies and programmes of a range of agencies?
 - E. Have the area's special qualities been protected and/or used sustainably in the various discrete 'projects' undertaken?
 - F. Has the Forest of Dean community been substantially involved in the Programme, to the extent of feeling ownership of it?
 - G. Has the Programme built capacity in the area such that much of the work may be expected to proceed after the expiry of the programme itself?
 - H. How has the leadership and management of the Programme influenced its outcomes?
 - I. Has the Programme showed that a concerted programme of 'local influencing' is an adequate substitute for affording some kind of 'special status' to the area?

A. What is Integrated Rural Development and how has it been interpreted in the Forest of Dean?

- 6.2. Integrated Rural Development has been one of the key concepts pursued by the Countryside Agency, on behalf of Defra, in recent years. IRD has direct connections to the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy²⁷ published in 2005, and to the process of modernising rural delivery set out in Defra's Rural Strategy in 2004.
- 6.3. The Forest of Dean Programme is one of a relatively small number of national pilots into IRD in practice funded by the Countryside Agency. Others include the Land Management Initiatives (nine projects in England that ran between 1999 and 2005)

²⁷ HMSO, 2005

and the Woodland Initiatives (a variety of programmes funded with the Forestry Commission).

- 6.4. IRD can best be defined as "*a process of 'joined-up thinking', incorporating environmental, economic and social concerns in rural areas and integrating them in an objective and balanced way*"²⁸. It can be thought of as a way of 'doing' sustainable development in rural areas. It involves a direction of travel rather than an end state, and therefore focuses on the interactions between different groups of people in rural areas (particularly between public bodies, communities and businesses).
- 6.5. The Countryside Agency's guidance on IRD²⁹, published towards the end of the Forest of Dean programme, suggests that IRD is underpinned by four guiding principles that must be active for it to work:
- **Integration / Interdependence:** Integrating policies to harmonise different interests.
 - **Individuality:** Acknowledging and reflecting an area's distinctive priorities, problems and opportunities.
 - **Involvement:** Emphasising the active involvement of local communities and drawing upon self-help.
 - **Investment:** Raising the social, economic and environmental 'capital' of a rural area to equitable and sustainable standards.
- 6.6. These guiding principles were not expressed in this way when the Programme started. However, all of these criteria are evident in Programme documents, although different sets of words have been used. The Programme has certainly not been short of strategic documents and evaluations, and a large number of different measures of sustainability have been used to define the objectives of the Programme, again most of them addressing the concepts of interdependence and inclusivity outlined above.

Emphasis: Community / Economy / Environment

- 6.7. All definitions of IRD distinguish between the three essential 'capitals' of community, economy and environment (some add a fourth of human capital to cover the skills and potential of individuals). Cultural heritage, which has been an important focus of the Programme, exists in both the community capital (with respect to the living culture and sense of identity) and the environmental capital (in relation to the archaeology and signs of past human activity in the landscape).
- 6.8. The evaluation of Phase 1 of the Programme briefly considered how well these three aspects of IRD were being addressed. Community development and involvement were given the highest score ('substantial achievement'), while environmental conservation and economic development were given a score of 'significant achievement'. This suggests a relatively even emphasis between the three 'legs of the sustainability stool'.

²⁸ Countryside Agency, 2005

²⁹ Countryside Agency, 2005.

- 6.9. However, when the outputs of the baseline studies are considered, there is a clear emphasis on the environment (75% of the budget for the baseline studies was spent on the landscape character assessment, historic landscape assessment, archaeological survey and biodiversity survey). Dean by Definition explored the cultural character of the Forest (23% of the overall cost of baseline studies), but there was virtually no assessment of the economic structure of the District and how this contributed to its special qualities and to the opportunities for future sustainable economic development (the Tourism Study being the principal exception, although this was not commissioned as a baseline study).
- 6.10. When the outputs of the Local Grant Scheme are considered, there is a strong emphasis on community projects. As noted in Chapter 5, this is particularly the case in Phase 1. This is covered further under Question E below.
- 6.11. Amongst the Phase 2 grants there is a greater emphasis on economic development (with several of the 11 projects, such as the Forest Model Village and Forest Sound Factory, seeking to benefit the tourism sector and the Forest Foods Producers Group helping farming and food businesses). Dean Oak, from Phase 1, is another example of a project with clear economic benefits, although it is disappointing that the Programme has been unable to provide further support to this project during BOWS.
- 6.12. It would appear that the contribution that the Programme has sought to make to the economic development of the District is weaker than towards the environment and community development. As a case in point, the impact of the Programme to the content and general approach of the District's Economic Development Strategy appears to be small. There is an ongoing debate taking place, involving interest groups and public bodies, over the nature of the District's economic development needs and the level of economic deprivation it faces. The allocation of funding from the Coalfields Programme in the Forest still has to be resolved. However, the environmental and social focus of most of the outputs of the Programme mean that it has little experience to provide to these debates.

Integration and advocacy

- 6.13. The extent to which the Programme has drawn together the different themes of sustainable development to provide an overarching vision is important and requires scrutiny.
- 6.14. The BOWS Digest publication, 'What's Special', produced at the start of Phase 2, brings all the baseline studies together in one publication. The booklet is largely descriptive, summarising how the baseline studies have shed light on the District's special qualities. However, it does not advocate a unifying vision of how this information can help deliver sustainable development (with the exception of the final page which describes the role of the planning system).
- 6.15. This is indicative of a more deep-seated limitation found throughout the Programme of an apparent lack of clarity and confidence about how the overall vision of IRD as a force for positive social and economic change should be communicated. The need for the Programme to communicate this vision was particularly acute because of the

tensions that have existed in the District between the perceived needs of economic development on the one hand and of environmental protection on the other. The lack of confidence shown by the Programme is partly due to shortcomings in the way it was led (covered in more detail under Question H). Another factor was the discontinuity in Programme delivery caused by the change in administration at the end of Phase 1, the departure of project managers and the hiatus caused by Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001.

- 6.16. The individual projects supported through the Programme's Local Grant Schemes, provide plenty of evidence of this vision of IRD being delivered in practice. The selection processes used (which were different in Phases 1 and 2 but seemed to achieve the same overall end), ensured that most projects demonstrated multiple benefits and a strong level of integration (covered in more detail under Question E). It was only at the Programme's Final Event, held in March 2006, that the breadth and depth of this integrated delivery by grant-funded projects was publicised in the posters and presentations at the event. This suggests that the Programme has been successful in delivering IRD at a local level, but has lacked the ability or confidence to demonstrate this success to the wider community.
- 6.17. The extent to which the Programme has demonstrated involvement and investment in the capacity of the community are considered below (Questions F and G respectively).

B. Has the Programme clarified the special qualities of the Forest Core and the wider district?
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- 6.18. The baseline studies conducted in Phase 1 will, collectively, be the most significant lasting outputs identified with the Programme (both in terms of their cost and visible outputs). Before the Programme, the level of knowledge about the landscape, biodiversity and historic environment of the District was poor in comparison with the rest of Gloucestershire. This lack of knowledge undoubtedly constrained the extent to which statutory and other bodies could influence the sustainable development of the District. This situation has now been addressed, with the landscape character assessment and strategy, and the biodiversity and archaeology surveys now providing a level of knowledge that is equal or superior to other equivalent areas.
- 6.19. Given the strong local culture and sense of identity, Dean by Definition was a vital part of the overall description of the special qualities of the Forest. Dean by Definition used genuinely innovative and inclusive techniques to discover the wide variety of perceptions that people, both residents and visitors, have about the Forest. Arguably it was less relevant to the wider District (although this is not necessarily a criticism since the wider District, particularly the northern area towards Newent, has a cultural character which is shared to a greater extent with the surrounding areas of the Severn Vale, southern Malverns or South East Herefordshire). The process of community engagement was rightly regarded as a key objective of the Dean by Definition project, but this may have meant that the need to come to conclusions about the cultural character of the area received less priority (i.e. the process was

seen as an end in itself, with some justification). While Dean by Definition presented a series of pictures of how the community saw itself, it was less successful at presenting an overall image of the Forest's living cultural identity, and did not advance a vision for the future.

- 6.20. Efforts to clarify the special economic character of the District have been more limited, with the exception of supporting the Future for Tourism Study which fed into the District Council's strategy and action plan. This lack of emphasis on the distinctive economic constraints and opportunities within the Programme probably reflects the policy priorities of the Countryside Agency and its partners at the beginning of the Programme, with IRD at that time focussing on raising the profile of the environment and community in relation to economic development, rather than the other way round. The last few years have seen an increasing number of local studies in England focussing on the character of the rural economy in these areas, and particularly the 'environmental' or land-based economy. The lack of such an economic profile within the Programme has probably meant that the Programme has been less well able to influence the District Council's Economic Development Strategy and the ongoing debate over levels of economic deprivation and coalfields regeneration.
- 6.21. As noted above, the 'What's Special' Digest publication provided a user-friendly summary of the baseline work and stated how this would be used in relation to the planning system, but was less effective at communicating an overall vision of how this information could be used positively to encourage sustainable development.

C. Have these qualities been adequately protected, managed or enhanced by the 'influencing work' undertaken?

- 6.22. This section considers how the Programme has influenced the policies of the District Council in relation to the protection and enhancement of the special qualities. The impacts on other agencies are addressed in the following question.
- 6.23. It is important not to under-estimate the length of time it takes for new information to find its way into adopted policy, and then for this policy to be demonstrably delivered on the ground. The cycle of preparation, consultation and publication of documents such as the Local Development Framework takes several years, and the results of changes are often not clear for a further period of years. As a result it is still too early to make a conclusive judgement on the 'influencing' impacts of the Programme in relation to local planning policy.
- 6.24. The Programme has also had to cope with a number of events that were unforeseen at the beginning. These were:
- the turnover of different project staff (which is a problem faced by many programmes of this kind);
 - the hiatus caused by the Foot and Mouth crisis in 2000 which saw significant disruption to the rural economy of the Forest;
 - the change in the management of the Programme between Phases 1 and 2 and the formation of the BOWS Management Group; and

- the replacement of the Countryside Agency with the Regional Development Agency as the lead body in April 2005.
- 6.25. All these factors disrupted the continuity of the Programme as a whole and undoubtedly delayed particular tasks.
- 6.26. Nonetheless, by the end of the Programme there was clear evidence that the Programme had changed local policy in certain key areas, particularly in relation to development control and planning.
- 6.27. Nowhere is the inevitably slow and incremental process of policy development more evident than in the translation of the Landscape Character Assessment undertaken early in the Programme to the Landscape Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that was adopted just as the Programme finished. The Landscape Character Assessment, which relied on extensive field work, had to be agreed (including a process of consultation) before the Strategy could be prepared. This then led to the drafting of the SPD, which was then subjected to a Strategic Environmental Assessment before going through further consultation.
- 6.28. There has yet to be a high profile planning application that will test the effectiveness of the SPD. However, it represents a more detailed consideration of planning policy in respect of landscape protection than is currently present in most equivalent local authorities, including many AONBs. Many other local authorities, including those with formally designated landscapes, are now looking to develop their own Landscape SPDs, and would do well to look at the Forest of Dean's before doing so.
- 6.29. There has been a similar, though perhaps less complex, process of incorporating the biodiversity and archaeology surveys undertaken during the first phase of the Programme into planning policy and practice. However, by the end of the Programme, planning applications in the District were being routinely screened for their impact on Key Wildlife Sites (outside Gloucestershire often referred to as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance) and the Sites and Monuments Record. The effectiveness of the system in identifying impacts was being monitored and, provided this commitment is maintained, the Programme will have increased the protection afforded to biodiversity and the historic environment from built development. The link between the Future for Tourism Study undertaken in Phase 1 and the District's subsequent Tourism Strategy is another of the contributions made by the Programme to local policy.
- 6.30. It is also worth noting that the Programme was represented on the Local Development Framework (LDF) Task Group by the BOWS project officer. This involvement ensured that officers drawing up the LDF were aware of the baseline studies, which are listed in the evidence base for the LDF. However, there appears to be little direct indication from the LDF itself that it uses IRD as a core approach. However, with the exception of the SPD, the impacts of this involvement in the LDF are less clear.
- 6.31. The connections between the Programme and other areas of District policy are also less evident. It is disappointing that, having initiated the innovative and successful Dean by Definition study into the cultural identity of the Forest, this has not been

made more use of. The Community Plan³⁰ provided an opportunity for the Forest's strong and distinctive cultural character to be highlighted and acted upon. However, there is little evidence of this in the Plan. This may now be addressed in the revision of the Plan taking place in 2006.

- 6.32. As noted above, the Programme has generally lacked a strategic focus on economic development (but not necessarily at the level of projects assisted through the grants schemes). It is thus not surprising that the influence of the Programme is not evident in the Economic Development Strategy drawn up in 2004.

D. With regard to the 'influencing work', has the programme demonstrably influenced the policies and programmes of a range of agencies?

- 6.33. It is easiest to address this question by looking at how the Programme has influenced the work of particular agencies.
- 6.34. The work of the District Council in relation to development control and planning and economic development has already been covered. In summary, it is clear that while the baseline studies and subsequent technical work funded by the Programme have provided valuable information to the Council, the incorporation of this information into Council policies and procedures has been relatively slow and is ongoing. Continued progress will depend on the outputs of the Programme continuing to be regarded as relevant to the work of the Council and its staff.
- 6.35. Defra's Rural Development Service (RDS) is responsible for delivering the England Rural Development Scheme's agri-environment schemes, which are the primary means of directly influencing the environmental management of the District's farmed countryside. During most of the Programme period, the main agri-environment scheme operating in the District was the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS). This scheme closed to new applicants in 2003 and has been replaced by Environmental Stewardship. Across the District a little over 4,000 ha of land is entered into CSS, amounting to 7% of the land area.
- 6.36. However, it seems unlikely that the Programme has had a significant impact on the uptake of this scheme. A third of the 4,000 ha had been entered into the scheme before the Programme started. Information from the baseline studies is unlikely to have fed into the scheme's targeting before the last new application was accepted in the District in 2003.
- 6.37. Turning to the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme, there is as yet no data available on uptake into the two tiers of this scheme. Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) started in 2004 and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) in 2005. It is unlikely that the Programme has been able to influence the uptake of ELS since the decision over which land management measures are adopted is left to individual farmers based on a simple map of the farm provided by the RDS. Applications to the HLS are prioritised on the basis of a Targeting Statement for the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Joint

³⁰ Our Forest's Future. The Community Plan for the Forest of Dean District 2004-2009

Character Area. The content of this Targeting Statement is relatively generic and has not relied on the baseline studies to identify the high level priorities.

- 6.38. However, it is at the level of individual applications to the Higher Level tier, which must include a detailed Farm Environment Plan prepared by or on behalf of the applicant, that the Programme's baseline studies will be most valuable. Providing applicants and their agents have access to these studies (through mediums such as the county biological records centre and the County Archaeologists Sites and Monuments Record), the biodiversity and archaeological surveys should significantly improve the targeting of this scheme.
- 6.39. As the largest landowner and manager in the District, Forest Enterprise has a key role to play in delivering IRD, particularly in relation to the management of the forest environment. The national policy documents that Forest Enterprise works to (such as the UK Forestry Strategy and UK Woodland Assurance Scheme) are already based on the principles of sustainable development. The procedures by which Forest Enterprise draws up the Forest Plans for managing its woodland already involve public consultation, and should take account of local environmental priorities. The greatest influence that the Programme has had on the work of Forest Enterprise is in providing it with the information, particularly from the biodiversity and archaeology surveys, but also from the landscape strategy, to better deliver its existing policies on forest management. The Programme has thus had a significant impact on the environmental management of this large portion of the Forest area.
- 6.40. The Regional Development Agency took over responsibility for overseeing the Programme in April 2005 and has steered its final year. The RDA has been a significant contributor to economic regeneration work in the District, through initiatives such as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). The RDA oversees the Small Business Service that has been involved in several initiatives in the District such as funding a Forest of Dean Business Breakfast Club. The RDA, together with other partners, has established the Rural Enterprise Gateway in the region through which funding has been directed to projects such as Gloucestershire County Council's Rural Renaissance Scheme.
- 6.41. It is difficult to discern the overall impact that the Programme has had on these various RDA-sponsored initiatives. The Programme contributed directly to parts of the SRB6 programme, helping to deliver training and support to young people in the District and to support the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (which funded work in the District's four market towns). Other initiatives, such as the Rural Enterprise Gateway, are administered at a regional or county level, and appear to have been outside the relatively local sphere of influence of the Programme.
- 6.42. The Forest of Dean Coalfields Programme is an ongoing initiative to regenerate several of the six pithead sites affected by the closure of large scale mining in the 1960s. Work is taking place at two sites (Princess Royal and Cannop) but making progress over the most suitable developments in Cinderford has proved difficult. Compared to the value of the IRD Programme, very large sums of money are involved, directed through the RDA. Although several members of the BOWS Management Group are involved in the Coalfields Programme working groups, there

is little evidence of the IRD Programme itself having had an influence on the Coalfields Programme.

- 6.43. Turning to other agencies involved in economic and community development, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) are being given a new role by Government in this regard, particularly to deliver Local Area Agreements under the four themes of:
- Safer and stronger communities
 - Healthier communities and older people
 - Children and young people
 - Economic development and enterprise
- 6.44. The BOWS Management Group has established a direct line of reporting to the Forest of Dean LSP, with the LSP's environmental working group (which is one of many) seen as its principle interface. Given the overarching nature of IRD, this assumption needs to be challenged. It is likely that work undertaken through the LSP in community planning and development (for instance work with young people or the long term unemployed), or in economic development (for instance in the tourism sector), could benefit more from Programme's IRD approach and input than has been the case.
- 6.45. LSPs are likely to be required to subject their projects to Sustainability Appraisal. Adopting IRD and use of the Programmes' outputs (the various surveys and strategies) as a cross-cutting theme in the Forest of Dean Local Area Agreement (LAA) would be likely to encourage a positive Appraisal. Against this suggestion is the fact that the Forest of Dean LAA will be part of the larger LAA agreed between Gloucestershire County Council and Government, and will be tightly constrained by the national and County targets which Government expects to be addressed. Thus, while it would be desirable that the LSP should adopt the principles and outputs of the Programme as a cross-cutting part of its work in future, it remains to be seen whether this is a practical and achievable option.
- 6.46. It would appear that the Programme has not had a high profile at a regional level. A review of rural delivery programmes in the South West by GOSW and the Regional Development Agency published in February 2006 does not refer to the Programme, and consultations with regional staff from non-governmental bodies in the environment and economic sectors revealed a low level of awareness of the Programme. The Forest's physical remoteness at the edge of England and its historic isolation are perhaps partly the reason for this.

E. Have the area's special qualities been protected and/or used sustainably in the various discrete 'projects' undertaken?

- 6.47. Over the six years of the Programme, a total of £409,000 funding from the Countryside Agency was directed at 'delivery projects' (as opposed to the baseline studies, project administration and communication). The majority of this funding (£350,000) was spent in Phase 1 on a variety of different projects, while all the spending in Phase 2 went to the second part of the Local Grants Scheme.

- 6.48. The Local Grant Scheme (Phases 1 and 2) accounted for £225,000 and funded 80 separate projects (69 in Phase 1 and 11 in Phase 2). Analysis of the objectives and benefits sought by these projects reveals that the large majority of funding went to projects representing community interests, with the grant usually addressing a social objective. Examples include projects developing a community café, providing room rental and volunteer transport, running a monthly Lunch Club, purchasing new equipment for a Kids Club and several helping to develop Village Halls. In contrast, there were fewer projects addressing the natural environment priority (which included the historic environment). In Phase 2 a greater proportion addressed environmental issues (two focussing on the historic/cultural landscape and one on renewable energy). In addition, the environment and rural skills project received significant funding (outside the Local Grants Scheme) in Phase 1.
- 6.49. It would appear that there was perceived to be a greater need to use funding from Phase 1 of the Scheme to engage with community groups, as a way of demonstrating the Programmes relevance to local concerns. That is not to underplay the value of the natural environment projects, but there is a sense that these grants went to special interest organisations (such as the Hartpury Historic Buildings Trust, Dean Archaeological Group and RSPB) rather than the more broadly-based bodies that received funding for community projects. Even amongst these environmental and cultural heritage projects, most funding was allocated for improving public understanding and skills, rather than direct environmental protection or enhancement. This means that there was little danger of the Local Grants Scheme duplicating the activities of national or county-based schemes such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme or County Council environmental grants.
- 6.50. There were few, if any, projects in Phase 1 of the Scheme whose primary focus was economic (although many of the projects had indirect economic benefits such as providing work for local builders, printers, or increasing skills through training). However, amongst the 11 projects that received funding in Phase 2, there was a greater emphasis on helping businesses innovate and test out new markets (albeit with a social emphasis to several of these projects). Several of these projects have run into unexpected difficulties which have threatened the viability of the project. Dean Oak, who received assistance in Phase 1, commented that it had decided not to pursue an application to the project for capital funding in Phase 2 because the extra 'hoops' it would have had to 'jump through' made the application unviable. This situation may have applied to other businesses who could have applied to the Scheme. It is clear that there has been a greater risk that economically-based projects will not achieve their objectives because of difficulties achieving profitable trading, than those in the social or environmental sphere.
- 6.51. Analysis of the geographical location of the projects awarded funding shows a diverse spread of funding throughout the District. In Phase 1 26 of the 41 parishes (63%) in the Forest received a Local Grant Scheme grant through applications made by either the Parish Council or a community group operating in the parish. A significant proportion of projects (23 or 56%) benefited the community across the District as a whole while, relatively few had a very narrow geographical or demographic benefit.

- 6.52. The question at the start of this section implied that there should be a direct link between the projects that received funding from the Programme and the baseline studies that defined the special qualities of the Forest. This is clearly not the case. Whereas as the major part of the baseline studies addressed the natural and historic environment, relative few grant-aided projects covered this area. Furthermore, few of the socially oriented projects seem to derive their objectives from only one of the baseline studies to focus on the community, Dean by Definition (grants to the Forest of Dean Community Radio) being an exception.
- 6.53. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to criticise the Local Grant Scheme and other delivery projects of the Programme on the grounds that they did not connect directly to the baseline studies. The projects appear to have met real needs in the community and the benefits were widely spread. Furthermore, there was little duplication with other grant schemes or initiatives.

F. Has the Forest of Dean community been substantially involved in the Programme, to the extent of feeling ownership of it?

- 6.54. Despite a few notable exceptions, the level of direct involvement of the wider community in the IRD Programme has been less than was anticipated at the start of the Programme. The level of wider community participation in open meetings organised in both Phase 1 and 2 (with the exception of a few meetings at the very start of the Programme) was considered low by representatives of both the community and Management Group.
- 6.55. There are likely to be several reasons for this.
- Firstly it was perhaps naïve to expect that the wider community (as opposed to those belonging to special interest groups) would show an active interest in the Programme. Terms such as Integrated Rural Development and acronyms like BOWS hardly lend themselves to everyday conversation (although it must be said that 'Building On What's Special' does capture the purpose of Phase 2 neatly).
 - Secondly, it became clear that conventional forms of involvement, such as attendance at open meetings, were likely to draw people with special interests, often representing local groups, but unlikely to attract 'ordinary' members of the public.
 - Thirdly, the history of debate about the Forest's special status, which might be described as having dashed public expectations, led to a significant level of cynicism amongst interest groups and opinion formers, particularly amongst people who had taken an active interest in the debate to that point.
 - Fourthly, arising from the history of special status in the Forest, there was a perception that the Countryside Agency was seeking to impose the Programme from outside the area. This was despite significant attempts by the project manager at the outset to engage with members of the community on particular outputs of the Programme. However, this negative perception was probably

fuelled by an editorial stance in one of the local papers that was often perceived as hostile to the project.

- Finally, the way in which the Programme was steered sometimes seemed not to encourage community engagement. The External Management Group in Phase 1 lacked strong community representation and this was not adequately addressed by its successor, the BOWS Management Group. For much of Phase 2, minutes of BOWS Management Group meetings were not easily accessible to the public. Following the contractual problem with the Programme's website, it took too long for a replacement to go on-line (finally occurring only three months before the end of the project).
- 6.56. However, there are a few significant exceptions to this lack of engagement with the community. Principal amongst these is Dean by Definition. Its success lay in its innovative and inclusive means of connecting with the public (for instance through beer mats placed in pubs) and with the energy and enthusiasm of the group that ran the project. As noted above, many of the Local Grant Scheme beneficiaries were community groups who became actively involved in forms of IRD with the assistance of funding from the Programme. Projects such as 'Switched on' (the Coleford Music Festival) and Forest of Dean Community Radio took this community engagement a stage further into the wider community.
- 6.57. The important thing about these more positive examples of community engagement is that, although they pursued the overall objectives of the Programme, they were not directly associated with the Programme by the public. In other words, while few people in the District might have heard of the IRD Programme or BOWS to the extent of 'having taken ownership' of them (and many of those who have heard of them may have negative associations due to the poor publicity), a much larger number have taken part unwittingly in the Programme and have helped deliver its objectives.

<p>G. Has the Programme built capacity in the area such that much of the work may be expected to proceed after the expiry of the Programme itself?</p>

- 6.58. This question needs to be answered in two ways. Firstly there is the building of capacity at the level of individual communities (whether it be groups of people across the District such as farmers, or within individual parishes). Secondly there is the building of a larger scale capacity across the public and voluntary sector in relation to the aims of the IRD programme as a whole.
- 6.59. The Programme has made a definite and positive impact on the engagement of people in local community activities. As noted above and in the review of the Local Grants Scheme, many of the awards, particularly in Phase 1, invested small sums in increasing the ability of local communities to help themselves, in terms of the physical infrastructure (such as village halls) and in skills and administration. There is good evidence that the Programme acted as a catalyst, empowering key groups and individuals to involve others who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to contribute. For these projects, the Programme has helped them develop 'a head of

steam' to create a sense of shared and lasting purpose towards the grant aided activity.

- 6.60. Two examples illustrate this. Firstly, the Programme provided the impetus for the formation of Dean Forest Voice which was closely involved in delivering the Dean by Definition Study and has sought to represent the views of residents, particularly of the core Forest area, on local issues such as the Coalfields Programme. Secondly, the BOWS Local Grants Scheme assisted residents of Mireystock to identify and restore features of historic and environmental importance. Other examples include the Environment and Rural Skills Programme, Dean Oak, Forest Community Radio and other projects funded by small grants.
- 6.61. At the higher District-wide level, the Programme has been less successful at building the institutional enthusiasm for IRD that will be needed if the principles this espouses are to be embedded in local policy making and delivery. Perhaps because of the way in which the Programme was initially perceived by some as being imposed from outside the District, frustrating a desire for designation of special status and because of the lack of effective communication at stages (paragraph 3.10), many organisations, particularly the District Council at councillor and senior officer level, have seemed to be 'semi-detached' from the concept of the Programme (that is not to undermine the considerable and successful work undertaken by Council staff on the technical outputs of the Programme).
- 6.62. There remains a real need for a 'champion' to be found who will take forward the philosophy of IRD and the outputs of the baseline studies. As noted earlier in this Chapter (under Issue D), the best clue as to who, or what, this champion might be comes from the fact that, from its inception, the BOWS management group has answered to the Environment Sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership. As noted earlier, the multi-agency approach of the LSP and its cross-cutting agenda make it well suited to delivering an integrated IRD approach which maximises the institutional capacity amongst the relevant delivery agencies. Rather than sitting within the Environment sub-group, there is merit in the whole Forest of Dean LSP adopting IRD as one of its guiding principles and using the baseline studies as a core evidence base for much of its work. However, again as noted earlier, the Partnership's agenda is likely to be strongly dictated by the Gloucestershire Partnership and the Local Area Agreement that it agrees with Government.
- 6.63. Whether or not the LSP is able or willing to take on the mantle of the IRD and BOWS approach, one thing is certain. Unless one of the key agencies or bodies with a cross-sectoral interest in the District's economic and social development and environmental protection takes this role, many of the achievements of the IRD Programme risk being lost.

H. How has the leadership and management of the Programme influenced its outcomes?

- 6.64. This question is addressed primarily at the role of the Countryside Agency which initiated the Programme and led it during Phase 1 and half of the BOWS phase. The Programme is unusual in that this leadership transferred to the Regional Development Agency a year from its end, so the question also needs to examine the RDA's role during the final stages of the Programme.
- 6.65. At the end of Chapter 2 in this report it was noted that the Programme had two contrasting purposes. These were firstly to address the needs of the Forest and the local desire for policy tools and resources to recognise and protect the area's special landscape, and secondly to trial and develop national thinking about IRD, using the Forest as a pilot area.
- 6.66. These two purposes required very different forms of leadership and management.
- On the one hand addressing the needs of the Forest needed to be based around a process of 'bottom up' local engagement with the Programme's objectives. Local stakeholders had to be brought into the process and encouraged to take ownership of the Programme and to steer its outputs.
 - On the other hand, developing national thinking on IRD required a more 'top down' direction of the outputs to ensure that this national objective was maintained and that the lessons learned in the Forest would be applicable elsewhere.
- 6.67. Combining these two approaches was clearly not easy. Local stakeholders needed to be convinced that the national objectives set for the Programme best met local needs. At the beginning of the Programme there was good evidence that the Countryside Agency set about to achieve this goal. The project manager held a series of well publicised public meetings and met with large numbers of local interests to explain how IRD could address the distinctive needs of the Forest. To a certain extent these meetings succeeded in generating local interest, providing a catalyst for the creation of new locally based groups that sought to promote the interests of the Forest based around its special qualities (two examples being Dean Forest Voice and Dean Oak).
- 6.68. However, it soon became clear that some interest groups, such as Friends of the Forest, saw the Programme not as a solution to the Forest's needs but as contributing to its problems. They were disappointed at the decision not to provide the Forest with a national designation that would protect its landscape quality and they saw the Programme as giving too much credibility to local interests who rejected the need for national protection. These groups expected to see more 'top down' leadership from the Countryside Agency. These divisions came to dominate aspects of the Programme, effectively limiting the extent of the debate about IRD as an approach for addressing the Forest's needs and creating a dilemma for the Management Group when, in the BOWS phase, it sought to seek greater local community representation.

- 6.69. It is interesting that from the outset, the Countryside Agency chose to take a high profile in the management of the Programme in contrast to most other equivalent projects (such as the Land Management Initiatives) where project officers are more locally embedded. During Phase 1 the project manager and her supporting officer were strongly identified as representing national Countryside Agency interests. This would appear to reflect a confidence from the Countryside Agency's Board that the IRD approach that was being developed in its headquarters could provide the solutions the Forest needed. However, this gave the impression to some people in the Forest that the Countryside Agency was 'parachuting in' senior staff to 'impose' an untried approach on the Forest. Part of the Forest's cultural character is to mistrust outside influences, and this may have played into the hands of those who saw the IRD Programme as part of the Forest's problems rather than a solution.
- 6.70. It is significant that the Programme started without securing a high level of commitment from the District Council. Although the Programme came to work closely with District Council staff, there is a sense in which Council members and senior staff have never been fully involved in, or committed to, the Programme's objectives. Instead, the Programme had stronger links, at the outset at least, with Forest Enterprise and the County Council.
- 6.71. The limited extent to which the Programme was guided by the existing Forest Regeneration Partnership during Phase 1 is indicative of the top-down approach led by the Countryside Agency, with the job of ensuring bottom-up involvement being left to the project manager (The External Advisory Group – and the name is significant – was only introduced at the end of Phase 1).
- 6.72. This does not mean that the programme did not achieve levels of local engagement in its outputs during Phase 1. As noted elsewhere in this report, the Local Grants Scheme and projects such as Dean by Definition and the Environment and Rural Skills scheme represent successes in this regard. Some bodies, particularly Forest Enterprise, developed and maintained a strong commitment to the Programme. However, the way in which the Programme was managed failed to build the broad level of local ownership that was required if the IRD (or 'Building On What's Special') approach to policy development and delivery was to be seen as central to addressing the Forest's needs.
- 6.73. The weaknesses in the local ownership of the programme were acknowledged at the end of Phase 1. The BOWS Management Group took over from the External Advisory Group and the Countryside Agency took a more supporting, rather than directing, role in the way it chaired the Group. The BOWS project officers were located and line managed from the District Council's office in Coleford and District Council staff, particularly in the planning and communities departments, became much more involved in contributing to the outputs of the Programme.
- 6.74. These changes demonstrate an attempt by the Countryside Agency to devolve more of the leadership and management of the project to local stakeholders, while continuing to fund the Programme. To a certain extent these changes had the desired effect. However, as noted in Chapter 2 (paragraph 2.21) a number of external factors conspired to frustrate these efforts. The delay in the appointment of the BOWS project officer and their departure and replacement in 2005 meant that

progress with many of the BOWS outputs was delayed. The contractual disagreements with the business hosting the website and the delays to creating a new site hosted by the District Council significantly reduced the access that local groups had to the Baseline studies and the decisions taken by the BOWS Management Group. It is also significant that a proposal was made at the Management Group that it should be chaired by the District Council, but the Council declined to do so, leaving the Countryside Agency to continue in this role.

- 6.75. It would also seem that the on-going debate (one might say rancour) surrounding the Forest's need for special status contributed to the Countryside Agency's gradual disengagement from the Programme. Stakeholders commented that during 2004 and 2005 the Agency's involvement appeared to be limited to chairing the BOWS Management Group meetings. Rather than being seen as a welcome devolution of the direction to local bodies, many perceived this as the Countryside Agency losing interest in the Programme. In the absence of a strong level of local ownership of the Programme's objectives, it seems that the other members of the BOWS Management Group felt somewhat exposed, even threatened, by the criticisms of the Programme from certain groups and in some of the local media.
- 6.76. The Regional Development Agency took over the funding and management of the Programme in April 2005 following the transfer of the Countryside Agency's socio-economic delivery programmes to the Regional Development Agencies. It continued a similar level of engagement to that adopted by the Countryside Agency, limited primarily to the chairing of the BOWS Management Group meetings.
- 6.77. It is significant that the RDA's strategic interest in the Programme focussed on its purpose as a local delivery mechanism (and in this respect the RDA was significantly more involved in other regeneration programmes than the Countryside Agency had been). The RDA had little strategic interest in the Programme's other purpose as a pilot of national thinking on IRD. This led it to be less interested in the more innovative aspects of the Programme, although it should be said that by the time the RDA took over responsibility for the Programme it was entering the final completion stages. It is regrettable that once the paperwork and funds were transferred to the RDA, the Countryside Agency, which could have maintained the focus on the 'test-bedding' purpose of the Programme, had virtually no involvement in the management of the Programme.

I. Has the Programme showed that a concerted programme of 'local influencing' is an adequate substitute for affording some kind of 'special status' to the area?

- 6.78. The Programme arose directly from debate, re-ignited prior to the 1997 General Election, about the special status of the Forest. There is no disagreement that the Forest is special – all groups involved in the debate agree that the Forest is unique in an English context. But there is strong disagreement over how this special status should be recognised, whether through a national statutory designation such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or whether through a new and locally developed form of recognition.

- 6.79. Views over the nature of the Forest's special status were already polarised before the Programme began, and this sharp division of views shows no sign of being resolved by the Programme. Many people have regarded the Programme as a distraction to the main debate, and it has almost certainly suffered from the perception that it was an attempt by the Countryside Agency to buy breathing space. Such has been the strength of feeling that, in some people's eyes, the Programme was doomed to failure from the outset precisely because it avoided the issue of special status. For these people, no level of achievement could have overcome this.
- 6.80. It must be asked whether the Programme could ever be a substitute for special status. The reason that adopting a special status for the Forest is attractive to some people is because it provides a 'badge' or formal recognition of the area's special qualities. This badge can be used as a justification for tighter restrictions over development, as a tool for marketing the area (such as for inward investment or tourism), or as a source of local pride to build community identity.
- 6.81. Special status, and particularly a statutory designation such as AONB, is opposed by some people because it is perceived as imposing external and unwanted restrictions in an area whose unique qualities, and problems, require locally-derived solutions.
- 6.82. The IRD Programme has been unable to engage directly in this debate precisely because it avoided using a national recognised 'badge' and statutory protection. As noted earlier, it involved a process of engagement and decision making rather than achieving an 'end state' such as special status. Nevertheless, there is a valid question to be asked about whether the 'local influencing' involved in the Programme provided an effective alternative to the more formal statutory procedures that would be established through AONB designation.
- 6.83. AONBs have a single statutory purpose "*to conserve and enhance natural beauty*" to which the Countryside Commission's 1991 Policy Statement added three related purposes, covering:
- recreation ("*the demand for recreation should be met insofar as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty*");
 - the economy and community ("*account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries, and the economic and social needs of local communities*"); and
 - sustainable development ("*particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment*").
- 6.84. In addition, AONB status invokes several different statutory and semi-statutory procedures:
- The Local Authority(s) (in this case the District Council) form a Joint Advisory Committee to oversee the delivery of the purposes, above. The composition of this Committee is not prescribed as a condition of the AONB core funding provided by the Countryside Agency (Natural England), although in most AONBs membership is drawn from Councillors, national statutory agencies and local stakeholders (including community representatives and environmental bodies).

- Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the Local Authority is required to draw up a Management Plan, which sets out the Partnership's policies for managing the AONB and for carrying out statutory functions that relate to these policies.
 - Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a duty on all statutory bodies, "*in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB*".
 - Planning Policy Statement 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) imposes a strong presumption against 'major developments' in AONBs.
- 6.85. AONB status currently attracts significant national funding to employ staff within the Local Authority (usually an AONB manager, AONB officer and other staff as required to deliver the purposes). In the past, funding has been available from the Countryside Agency to help pay for research and strategy development such as Landscape Character Assessments and Strategies. In addition, during the period 2005 to 2008, AONBs in England are to receive a 'Sustainable Development Fund' from Defra (worth upto £100,000 for each AONB in 2005/06) to allocate to projects that help deliver the purposes of AONB designation and wider sustainable development objectives.
- 6.86. It is for other bodies to expound the wider implications of AONB status. Friends of the Forest have produced a paper that refers to the benefits to the environmental and tourism economies received by AONBs and National Parks. Others have suggested that these designations lead to higher house prices disadvantaging local first time buyers, and that they have no direct impact on issues such as training and public health which are of concern in the Forest. The IRD Programme provides no evidence on these issues.
- 6.87. There are many similarities between the activities that have been achieved by the Programme and those that occur in many, if not all, AONBs.
- The Programme has established a partnership of stakeholders, latterly in the form of the BOWS Management Group (a difference being that the BOWS Management Group has not included Councillors, which is normally the case with AONBs).
 - The Programme has received funding to undertake studies such as the Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy (if anything, this funding is larger than that received by AONBs, although it could be argued that there was some 'catching up' to be done in the Forest).
 - The Programme has received funding to employ a project manager, whose role has been broadly similar to that of an AONB manager
 - The Programme has received a budget to fund local projects that can contribute to sustainable development, similar in amount and direction to the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund.

- 6.88. Apart from the absence of a formal 'badge of recognition', discussed above, there are two significant differences between the Programme and AONB status.
- Firstly, the Programme has not been required to draw up a Management Plan. Management Plans can be regarded as something of a mixed blessing. On the one hand they bind in statutory partners and others to deliver an agreed programme of work, ensuring that there is a shared vision and set of objectives and policies to enhance the special qualities of the area. On the other hand, most AONBs have found that drawing up their statutory Management Plan has been a lengthy process, tying down the work of staff for at least a year. To the extent that the BOWS Management Group has often found it difficult to get the IRD Programme recognised fully by other partners, the lack of a management planning process (and the absence of Section 85 duties to tie in statutory partners) has been a hindrance to the Programme. However, this has also allowed the Programme to concentrate on delivery rather than getting tied down into a bureaucratic process.
 - Secondly, the Programme has not introduced new statutory planning controls but has, instead, enabled the District Council, as the planning authority, to develop the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that has the same broad objectives. As noted above, the effectiveness of the SPD has yet to be fully tested, but it provides a level of fine-grained detail to the Local Development Framework that is not currently found in many AONBs (accepting that planning authorities in some AONBs use other mechanisms such as Area Action Plans for high profile sites and that many planning authorities are developing SPDs).
- 6.89. This evaluation is not required to pass judgement on whether the Forest of Dean should seek a statutory designation or other form of special status. **However, it is clear that, in so far as the Programme has sought to deliver many of the activities pursued in AONBs, such as planning controls that preserve the natural beauty of the area and grants to community groups and businesses to encourage sustainable development, it has been largely successful to date (accepting that the full impacts of the new planning controls have yet to be seen). What it has lacked is the gravitas of a statutory designation, binding in local and national bodies into an effective strategic partnership focussed on maintaining landscape quality, and providing a nationally recognised mark of its landscape quality.**
- 6.90. If, in the future, the Forest does not receive a formal recognition of special status, it remains to be seen whether the area can continue to attract extra funding for integrated rural development (of the kind received by AONBs through their Sustainable Development Fund), or whether it will simply be regarded by national agencies as another part of the wider 'undesignated' English countryside.
- 6.91. Similarly, it remains to be seen whether the commitment of local and national bodies to 'build on what's special' about the Forest is maintained, or whether the information now available about the special qualities of the area are forgotten or ignored, and the opportunities they provide are missed. Opinions on which of these alternative futures will take place seem to be divided between those who have always favoured AONB designation for the Forest and those who have always opposed it.

7. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1. This final Chapter summarises the overall findings of this evaluation, highlighting the lessons that can be applied, both to the Forest of Dean and to other rural development programmes in England.
- 7.2. The Chapter is structured around two headings which reflect the two primary purposes of the Programme: action to address the local needs of the Forest; and the piloting of an IRD approach for a national audience.

ADDRESSING THE SPECIAL QUALITIES AND NEEDS OF THE FOREST OF DEAN

- 7.3. **Environmental protection and enhancement:** The IRD Programme has provided the Forest of Dean with the evidence and policy tools needed to protect the key features of the natural and historic environment from unsuitable development, albeit without the level of statutory protection that would accompany AONB designation. The effectiveness of these policies and the way they are implemented can only be judged once they have been operational for a period of time. *1. The District Council should continue to monitor the screening of planning applications against the environmental data now held and, in due course, should establish a method for monitoring landscape change using the detailed indicators suggested in the Landscape Strategy.*
- 7.4. The planning system provides little scope for enhancing the environment. Instead the higher level of the Environmental Stewardship (ES) scheme provides the best means of doing this. *2. The District Council should use the website it has created to give easy access to landowners and their agents to all the information gathered by the baseline studies. 3. Natural England should make sure that this information is taken into account in the way that the high level of ES is targeted in the District.*
- 7.5. **Economic and social development:** The Programme has been less successful at influencing policy for economic and social development. Nevertheless, the material collected by the Dean by Definition study provides an authentic resource on the views of local people and visitors about the area. *4. The District Council should make this resource widely available through its website and should ensure that reference is made to it in the current review of the Community Plan.*
- 7.6. **Implications for special status:** The Programme has been successful at putting in place many of the policy tools, such as planning policy and small grants, that are used by AONBs to pursue their statutory purpose. The Programme has been less effective at gaining commitments from the main delivery agencies to ensure that these tools are made best use of after the Programme has formally ended.
- 7.7. The Programme has not resolved the local debate over the need for special status, nor are the findings of this evaluation likely to do so. There may well be calls for further research into the economic and social implications resulting from AONB status, but it is doubtful whether such research would resolve the issue to the

satisfaction of interested parties. Ultimately, it will be for the District Council to decide whether it is in the best interests of the District to receive the statutory purposes and duties, sources of funding and national recognition that AONB status would confer, assuming that designation is on offer from Natural England. **5. *Natural England should announce its policy towards the creation of new AONBs and the recognition of other forms of special status.*** **6. *In the light of this announcement, the District Council is invited to convene a special committee to take evidence from interested parties and make a formal recommendation to the Council on whether to seek a new designation for the Forest.***

- 7.8. **The future of the BOWS concept:** In the long term much will depend on whether AONB status is available from Natural England and is sought by the District Council. Since this is unlikely to be resolved quickly, there is a need to maintain the momentum and expertise developed in the Programme so that its outputs and approach continue to be used. As suggested, above, the District Council is in a position to make much of the written material available through its website. The BOWS Management Committee formally reported to the Environment Working Group of the Local Strategic Partnership, suggesting that this Working Group or the main LSP might take on the role of championing the BOWS concept. Whether the LSP has the scope to do this will depend on how closely it fits to the objectives established by the County Local Area Agreement. **7. *The Local Strategic Partnership is invited to examine whether it has the scope to use Integrated Rural Development as a cross-cutting theme to its work, ensuring that the concept of building future economic and social development and environmental protection, on the basis of the District's special qualities, is maintained.***

THE DELIVERY OF IRD PROGRAMMES

- 7.9. The Programme provides a number of wider lessons that should be of interest throughout rural England and beyond. These lessons are presented as statements of best practice rather than as recommendations for action by specific bodies. These are identified with letters (rather than the numbered recommendations, above).
- 7.10. **Agreement on what IRD is:** The concept of IRD, led by the Countryside Agency, has developed during the life of the IRD programme, and is now covered within the remit of the Commission for Rural Communities and the Regional Development Agencies. It is therefore not surprising that the way in which the concept was interpreted at the start of Phase 1 now seems somewhat out of date.
- 7.11. In retrospect, the lack of appreciation of the economic dimension to IRD weakened the influence that the Programme had. Nevertheless, the phrase 'Building On What's Special' and the BOWS Digest publication neatly encapsulated what the Programme had achieved in Phase 1 and what it sought to do in its second phase.
- 7.12. The IRD Programme reinforces the findings of earlier work into IRD that it should be seen as a process rather than an end state to be reached. The process developed by the IRD Programme has much to recommend it to other initiatives. **A: *Integrated Rural Development should be seen as a sequential process starting with the***

engagement of local stakeholders in the objectives of sustainable development, followed by the definition of local character (across the domains of environment, economy and community), the development of policies for protecting and enhancing this character and then the co-ordinated delivery of these policies.

- 7.13. **Timeframes:** It is clear from this Programme that rural development initiatives need a significant time to develop, even on a pilot basis. The original IRD Programme ran for three years but, although evidence had been collected through the baseline studies and grants had been distributed, there was little to show at the end of these three years in terms of lasting policy development. The Programme was subsequently extended for 18 months, and then another 18 months, and it has only been in this final period that these policies have been put in place.
- 7.14. Short and uncertain timeframes do not give the certainty required to plan activities over the longer term, retain staff and have the programme as an accepted part of the local administrative structures. When the duration of a programme is not clear, there is little incentive for local organisations and the wider community to commit to it. *B. New IRD programmes that involve work to define local character and engage with local communities before developing and delivering policies are likely to require an initial funding commitment of least four years to be effective.*
- 7.15. **Staffing:** The IRD Programme suffered from changes in the project managers and officers. Expertise was lost when staff left to take other posts and there were lengthy delays while replacements were appointed. Community groups and project beneficiaries tend to form relationships with individual staff, and these had to be rebuilt from scratch. *C. Programmes need to plan sufficient staff capacity to cope with staff changes and a loss of 'corporate memory' and community identity - a core staff of at least two and ideally three people is desirable.*
- 7.16. **Clear vision and objectives:** The IRD Programme was established within a clear strategic framework which was reviewed and renewed in the BOWS phase. This gave the Programme clear objectives (accepting that these were not always taken on board by others – see below). However, the Programme was complicated by the debate over special status that preceded it. In retrospect it was probably naïve to assume that the Programme would be allowed to run its course without this debate taking place on the sidelines. With this issue unresolved there were disagreements among local interest groups over what the Programme was able to achieve. This was probably unavoidable, but it highlights the need for clear strategic goals. *D. Where IRD programmes have been established to deal with particular local issues, there needs to be overt acknowledgement of these issues in the objectives of the programme.*
- 7.17. **Local influencing and engagement with partners:** An ambitious, multi-focus initiative such as the IRD Programme needs the capacity to influence a wide range of local and national organisations. From the outset, it was perceived by some local organisations in the Forest that the Countryside Agency was imposing the programme with little opportunity for these organisations to participate in its steering. Although progress was made on bringing key organisations such as the

District Council into the process, the Programme suffered throughout its life from a level of mistrust by bodies who had felt excluded at the outset. ***E. The process of embedding a programme with local partners must start at the early planning stage. The programme should not be started unless there is clear enthusiasm and commitment by key locally-based organisations.***

8. REFERENCED SOURCES

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APPENDIX 1. REPORT OF CONSULTATIONS CONDUCTED DURING THE EVALUATION

This appendix summarises the findings of the consultation meetings conducted as part of this evaluation.

Rationale for involvement

The most common reasons for involvement by statutory agencies, who comprise the majority of Management Group membership, was that they have responsibilities for matters with which the programme was concerned e.g. protection of landscape, environment and heritage and regeneration of communities. Forest Enterprise has a particular interest as the main landowner within the statutory Forest area. Many respondents, from both statutory agencies and community organisations (GAPTC, GRCC and FVAF) mentioned an interest in the debate over Special Status (AONB or similar) for the area and a desire to influence this or at least to ensure that an answer was found. Community organisations also wished to ensure that their constituency had a voice in determining the programme's direction.

Inputs to the programme

The degree of input by respondent organisations varied greatly, depending on the extent of their responsibilities and resources. The District Council, which has responsibilities that overlap with most or all programme activities, had staff involved from several departments and an ongoing role in many programme activities. GCC was also strongly involved, mainly in the baseline study work, and Forest Enterprise has had a strong involvement in many programme activities. As well as participating in Management Group meetings and in individual projects, the community organisations also have had a role in updating their membership on programme activities and encouraging their involvement in these. An example is the GRCC encouraging parish councils to use the information from the baseline surveys in developing parish plans.

In terms of financial input the Countryside Agency is clearly the major contributor, while the District Council contributes to the costs of the Programme Officer.

Synergies and conflicts

Of the respondent partners (9 in full), most (5) believed there were high synergies between the programme and their core work. Those who considered there were low synergies were generally community groups, with one commenting that it is "*very centrally driven – we thought it would have been more flexible and community driven*".

In terms of conflicts, almost all (8) considered there were no or low conflicts with their core work. One commented that some Management Group decisions are at odds with what they would like to see, citing grant allocation decisions going against projects that seem locally desirable but do not fit the grant criteria.

Outputs

The programme activities that most respondents reported an involvement in were:

- The Landscape Survey and subsequent Landscape Strategy development
- The Biodiversity Survey and the dissemination of its results
- The Archaeology Survey
- The Dean By Definition project
- The grants programmes (there was a larger programme in Phase 1 and a smaller one in BOWS).

Respondents generally felt that the baseline studies had been worthwhile and that to a large extent they would not have happened otherwise, or at least not as soon or to the same level of detail. A minority disagreed and thought that much of the work would have happened. Some concern was expressed about the time taken to bring them to completion and the uncertainty over how they would eventually be implemented. Recent

developments have been positive, with the Biodiversity Survey results now being made available for use in parish planning (with the number of parishes assisted limited by funding constraints), the District Council identifying key wildlife sites from it, and the Archaeology Survey adding over 3000 sites to the County Council's Sites and Monuments Record. There was also concern, particularly among community groups, that the Dean by Definition project had energised the local community in defining what they perceive as special about the area but this has not led to further actions to ensure the information is used in planning and regeneration. It has fed to an extent into the LSP's Community Plan and there may be opportunities for further use in developing the community planning vision.

The grants programmes were seen as a positive contribution to local businesses and the community, and have raised the profile of the programme. As noted above, some decisions were controversial. The main reason appears to be that the criteria for BOWS grants require proposals to 'build on what's special' about the Forest of Dean, so proposals that were perceived by some as beneficial to the local community have been turned down because they are not based on the unique characteristics and landscape of the area.

The proposed website for the programme was mentioned as a disappointment. This had been a recommendation in the BOWS Strategy, and a high quality website was developed. Unforeseen contractual problems with the provider over intellectual property rights meant that it has never gone online, although the District Council has assisted by placing some key documents on a section of its own website.

Outcomes

Respondents were asked to comment on the extent of outcomes so far (low, medium or high) under the three main BOWS objectives: (1) looking after what's special (landscape, cultural heritage, environment and biodiversity), (2) using what's special (sustainable regeneration of local economy and communities), and (3) learning lessons (adding to understanding of IRD).

In terms of **looking after what's special**, most (5) said it was too early to say whether results had been achieved on the ground. Those who were prepared to commit themselves rated the outcomes to date as low or medium (in one case medium-high). Comments included:

"There is a clearer and more widespread understanding of the distinctiveness of the Forest of Dean – this needed to be formalised so that it could be used in decision making"

"There has been a change in mindset... Dean By Definition helped this by defining what the less vocal local people feel is important, which could be quarrying, coal mining, community and local language"

"The building blocks are there [information from the baseline studies]... but we probably won't know for another 10 years"

In terms of **using what's special**, again the most common response was 'too early to say' (4), with the remainder rating the outcomes as low or medium. The specific contributions cited by respondents included the local grants programme and the Dean Oak project, which assisted local businesses, support for farmers' markets and local foods, and the SRB6 funding (with assistance from Phase 1 of the IRD programme) that supported activities for young people. This is probably the most difficult aspect to measure of the three programme objectives, as the benefits to the local community and economy are likely to be diffuse and, if they can be measured, hard to attribute directly to the programme. One respondent commented that the Phase 1 grants programme provided a large number of smaller grants, while the Phase 2 grants were fewer and larger. The respondent believed that the latter were easier to monitor and could provide 'lessons' for the Countryside Agency, but the former were probably better for the community.

In terms of **learning lessons** from the programme, three respondents said it was too early to say, while the remainder rated the outcomes as low or medium. There were, however, many comments expressed on this subject.

"Partner buy-in needs to be at a really high level"

"Community engagement on landscape has not been hard to get – it's more a problem of managing an excess of community involvement. But it is hard to reach those who are not vocal, though Dean by Definition did help"

"It's difficult to integrate in practice the different workstreams, agencies, strategies and policies. There's a lot of people doing a lot of stuff, they are all focused on their own priorities"

"What is IRD? Part of the problem is that there is no clear agreement on what it is, so that makes a difference to what you try to do".

"If you're going to do something and then leave it, you need to invest the time to get local ownership – this wasn't done"

These comments are generally phrased in a negative sense, pointing out aspects of the programme that were not as successful as hoped, but they provide valuable lessons nevertheless. Dean by Definition (in Phase 1) was the one programme activity consistently held to be both ground-breaking and successful, and thus a candidate for wider application. This enthusiasm was tempered by the disappointment that it had not been taken further.

Other activities were generally seen as worthwhile (e.g. baseline studies and grants programmes) but not innovative. One respondent commented that the idea of designing a programme and then giving it to a Management Group to run was new, but it had not worked because there was no clear local champion and so the Countryside Agency had not been able to step back from the programme and let it run.

Engagement

Respondents were asked three questions about engagement: whether they believed their own organisation had been influenced by the programme, whether other organisations had been influenced and whether local engagement and ownership had been achieved. The results are presented in Figures A to C.

Most believed that **their own organisation** had been influenced only to a low extent, one to a medium extent (this was a community organisation) and one to a high extent, with two unable to answer.

In terms of **influence on other organisations**, two suggested there had been a medium influence while the remainder said the influence was low or it was too early to say.

In terms of **local engagement and ownership**, most believed this was low, while two thought it was medium.

These responses are honest assessments, but somewhat disappointing for a programme which was intended to deliver results in large part through influencing local organisations and engaging the local community.

Figure A. To what extent has your organisation been influenced by the programme?

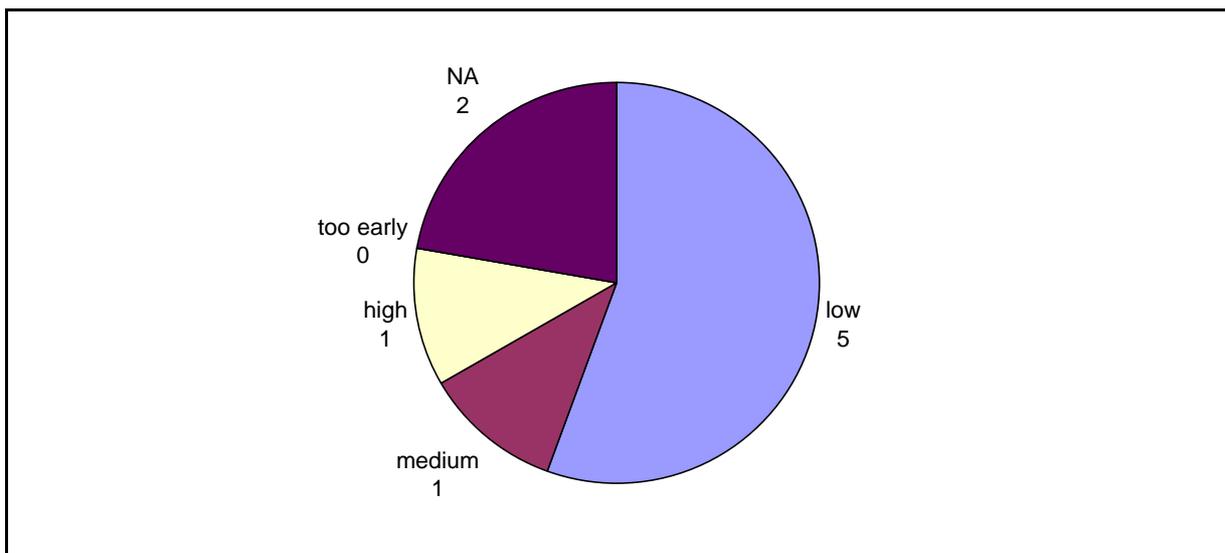


Figure B. To what extent have other organisations been influenced by the programme?

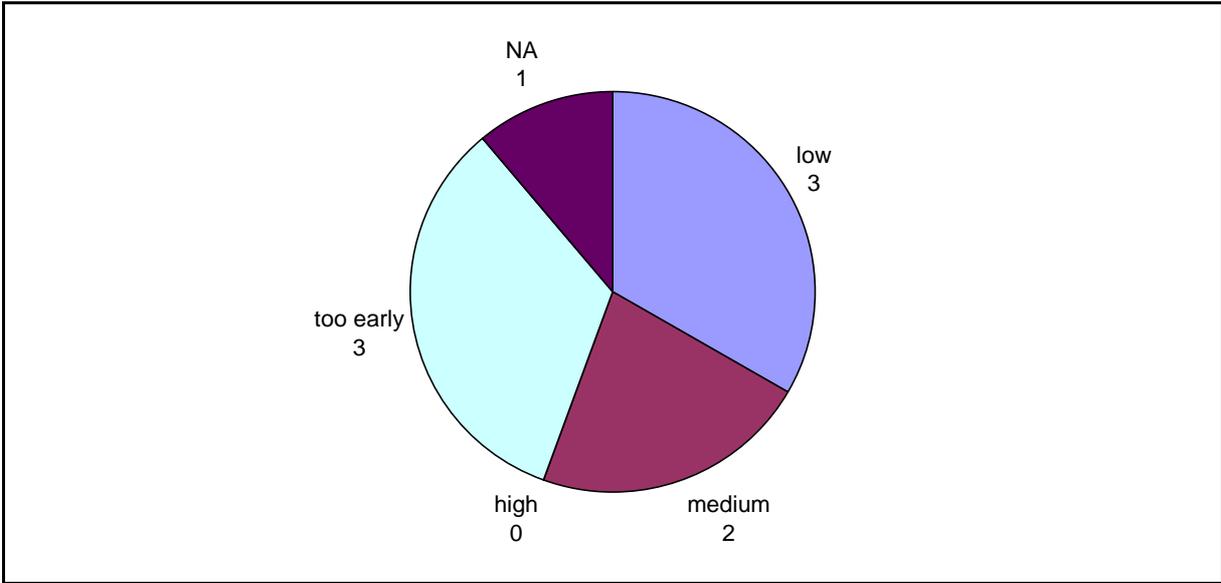
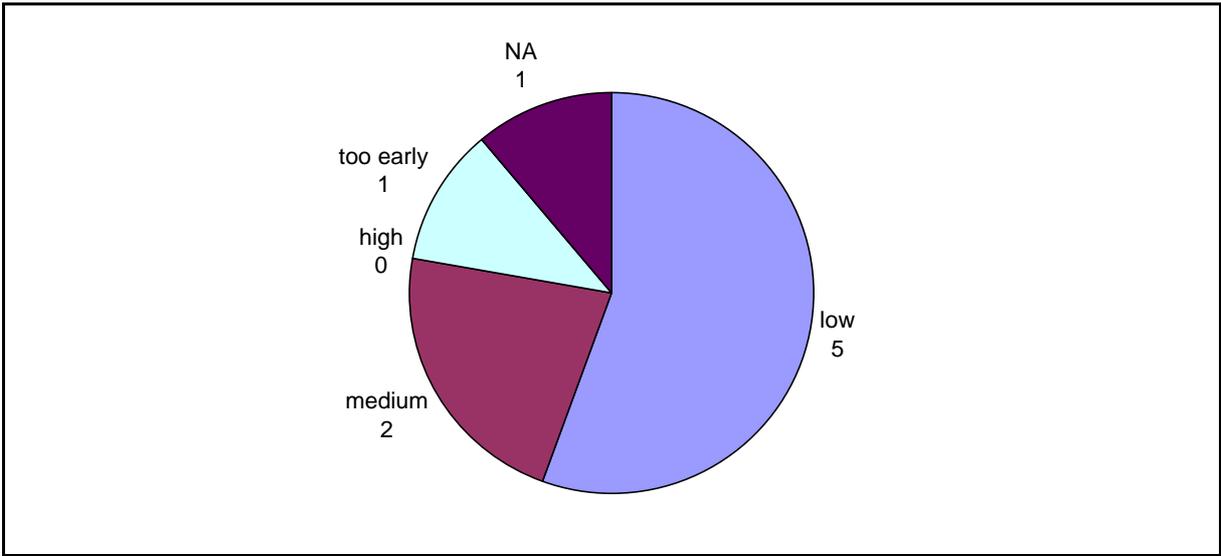


Figure C. To what extent has local engagement and ownership been achieved?



Additionality

Respondents were more positive about the additionality of programme outputs, being the extent to which they might have occurred in the absence of the programme. A third believed that few of the outputs (activities) would have occurred in its absence, a third believed that some would have occurred and another third were unable to answer. The baseline surveys were cited by several as work that was made possible by the programme.

In terms of programme outcomes, a third said it was too early to say whether they might have otherwise occurred and a third felt unable to answer, which reflects the fact that most believed it was still too early to say what the ultimate outcomes of the programme have been. The remaining third said that some or most/all of the outcomes would have occurred regardless.

Success factors and barriers

The reasons cited for the successes of the programme, and the barriers to success, are summarised in Figure D. The most commonly cited reasons for success were the availability of funding, which encouraged people to work together, and the co-operation and partnership approach which the programme enabled.

The most commonly cited barriers to success were all to do with issues of gaining participation and consensus among local organisations and local people. There was a perception among several respondents that the Forest of Dean is a difficult place to run a co-operative programme, arguing that there is a history of seeking independence from outside authorities and strongly diverging opinions among the community, although not all offered this viewpoint. The failure to engage support from the local press, much press coverage being negative, and the low involvement to date by the RDA were also noted. The other barriers cited were more practical constraints such as staff resources and interruptions from staff changes and the foot and mouth disease crisis. One believed the programme was too ambitious from the start.

Some of the specific comments included:

"The relatively high profile, even controversy, meant that people wanted to be involved"

"It has created a critical mass of attention on the issues, as the pieces of work were progressed all in parallel"

"The independence [of the programme] was a good thing, but it also needed to be locally accepted... it needed to persuade people that it was a good thing for the community"

"There was suspicion due to the background of the programme in the AONB debate"

"It has been a bit too big to handle with the staff resources available"

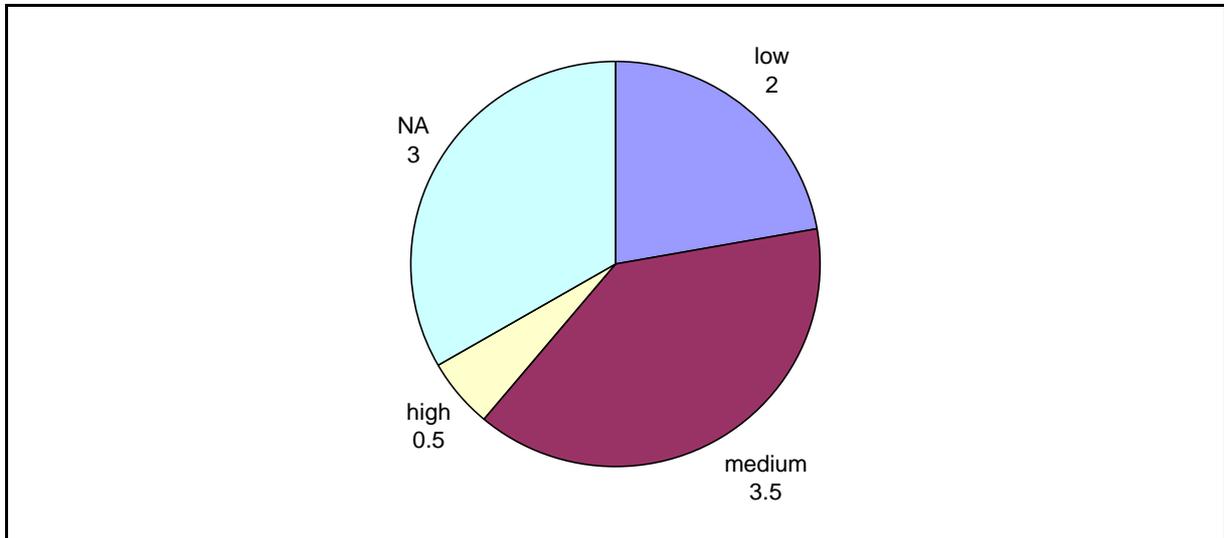
Figure D.: Reasons for success and barriers to success

Perceived reasons for success	Number of respondents
Availability of funding	2
Co-operation/partnership	2
Determination of individuals	1
High profile encouraged involvement	1
Has focused attention on the issues	1
Perceived barriers to success	Number of respondents
Difficulty getting consensus	3
Lack of broad participation/ownership	2
Lack of buy-in from some key organisations	2
Public inertia/insularity/suspicion of programme	2
Foot and mouth disease	1
Lack of staff resource	1
Staff changes in programme	1
Programme was too ambitious	1
Budget uncertainties	1
Management Group were feeling their way	1
Accidents of circumstance/timing	1

Overall assessment

When asked the extent that their own expectations had been met so far, the most common response was 'medium' (three respondents), one responded as medium-high³¹, while two said they had only been met to a low extent (Figure E). Three were unable to answer.

Figure E. To what extent have your own expectations for the programme been met so far?



RESULTS OF COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Two, two-hour workshops for local organisations and community groups were held on Thursday 17 March. In the afternoon there were five participants and in the evening there were eleven. This only gives a small snapshot of the community experiences with and views about the programme, but a wide range of views were expressed.³²

Participants were asked to:

1. Say what projects or activities they had been involved with
2. Say what they thought had been successful about the programme, what had been less successful, and why.
3. Discuss the lessons from the programme and provide suggestions for the future.

Awareness and involvement

There was a high level of awareness of the programme activities among participants, including the baseline studies and current landscape strategy development, the grants programme, the tourism strategy, the SRB6 grants programme and other individual projects such as Dean Oak. This was not surprising as invitations were sent to people with a known involvement in the BOWS programme.

Successful aspects

In terms of successful projects and activities, the following were the most commonly highlighted, most of which were largely completed during Phase 1 rather than in BOWS:

- Baseline studies – landscape, biodiversity, archaeology, Dean by Definition
- Dean Oak – assistance to local producers and the travelling exhibition (Phase 1)
- Local grants schemes (Phase 1 and BOWS)

³¹ Hence 'high' is allocated a half mark in Figure 3.3

³² A full record of the workshop, which can only be summarised here, is available.

- SRB6 young people's activities (assisted in Phase 1)
- Forest Community Radio (assisted in Phase 1 and BOWS)
- One participant cited BOWS overall.

In addition to mentioning specific successful projects, some commented more generally on wider benefits, e.g.:

"A better understanding of the District's landscapes and the risks/challenges to them"

"The richness of the District's biodiversity has been confirmed"

"Dean by Definition was excellent in that it was the only project which actively involved all sections of the community"

Less successful aspects

A few participants highlighted individual projects and activities as being unsuccessful, including the Future for Tourism Study, Dean by Definition, the biodiversity survey and the grants programme (i.e. some of the same projects that others thought were successful). Some felt that the digest of baseline studies, 'What's Special', was a poor use of programme resources. However, most concerns about programme success were to do with either the processes employed or the perceived lack of outcomes, particularly a lack of statutory landscape protection. A cross section of these comments follows:

"Communicating to everyone what's going on"

"Little feedback to community apart from Dean by Definition. No real attempt to engage the wider community"

"Failure to adequately consult"

"No identifiable presence on the ground – what about an "IRD Office" in the forest?"

"A local community person not appointed to BOWS Management Group."

"No real recognition of employment needs in the Forest, eg knowledge economy"

"Nothing within BOWS gives statutory protection of landscape or can influence the planning system"

"Nothing has resulted in any long-term protection for the future of the Forest"

Other comments that emerged from the discussion, but not necessarily shared by all, were that:

- BOWS should be independent of the District Council
- The Forest of Dean is so unique that it cannot be used as a test ground for developing ideas for wider use
- The Management Group is not truly representative.
- The local grants programme is not transparent and there is no right of appeal.
- BOWS funds have been "hijacked" into fulfilling statutory obligations of agencies.
- The programme has claimed credit for some projects that were happening anyway or that it made a relatively small contribution to (this appeared to refer to SRB6 and Dean Oak).

Clearly the above are a sample of views, provided by a small group, but they do give some indication of people's perceptions. It remains to be seen whether these views are representative of the wider Forest of Dean community.

Lessons and suggestions

In terms of lessons from the programme and suggestions for the future, ideas put forward variously included:

- BOWS needs to communicate more at grassroots level.
- Focus down to what is achievable
- Have transparent funding procedures (grants) with feedback, minutes of decisions and presentations allowed.
- The (IRD) remit requires major support from District. Less “infighting” between District and Government officers.
- An AONB is needed as it will afford statutory protection.

APPENDIX 2. SUMMARIES OF SELECTED PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE LOCAL GRANT SCHEME

This appendix provides a summary of the activities and lessons learned from six projects selected for review as part of this review. These projects are:

- Brockweir and Hewelsfield village shop;
- The Forest Food Producers;
- Forest Mobility;
- The Forest Sound Factory;
- Newent Local History Society; and
- Switched On.

The Evaluation of Phase 1³³ looked in more detail at five projects. These were:

- Forest Big Art Web (a website to showcase and market Forest of Dean artists);
- Forest of Dean community radio (a project to promote the regeneration of the Forest through the medium of radio);
- Support for the Newent Beekeepers (to help keep alive and promote what might otherwise be a dying tradition /expertise);
- The Quackers project (an after-school care scheme); and
- Cinderford Art Space project (support for a community art space centre).

³³ CCRU (2003a)

BROCKWEIR AND HEWELSFIELD VILLAGE SHOP



Overview

When the villages of Brockweir and Hewelsfield lost their last village shop, the community came together to create a new social enterprise, incorporating a shop, meeting space, library and IT facility in a purpose built building. Grant aid from the ORD project helped the community draw up professional plans for the building. The resulting enterprise has received national publicity and has become an inspiration to other rural communities.

History and background

The villages of Brockweir and Hewelsfield (population: 500), which lie in the heart of the Forest, had lost their school and local shops and there was concern from residents that the community lacked a physical focal point, as well as somewhere to access vital services. A poll was taken to see what residents wanted, and it came out that there was desire for not only a village shop but a meeting space, an IT space and a library in a building constructed and maintained to high environmental standards.

Interested residents came together to form the Brockweir and Hewelsfield Village Shop Association. The Association applied to the Local Grant Scheme during Phase 1 of the IRD Programme and received £4,950 to contribute towards professional fees for the initial survey, planning and acquisition of construction cost estimates for the new building.

The venture has three objectives: to provide a social heart to the community; to provide local access to services; and to enhance the local and wider environment. Financial support and assistance was provided by a large number of organisations including Defra, the Village Retail Services Association, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, the Charity Bank and Severn Wye Energy Agency. Matched funding from the local community was provided from the sale of 'community shop bonds' (which raised £20,000), and from in-kind contributions of labour and skills.

The building was constructed of green oak by local craftsman, using timber sources from the Forest. High standards of design were used, particularly in terms of energy conservation and generation from renewable sources. The shop was formally opened by Prince Charles in December 2004, which brought the shop to national attention. The shop is now run by a full-time employed manager and up to 40 volunteers from the community.

Issues overcome and lessons learned

Retaining and motivating the 40 volunteers needed to make the shop viable was a major task. Working families that work away from the area do not have the time to commit to volunteering, and many older residents may not have the energy to do so. Nevertheless, the shop has attracted a

strong sense of community spirit which helps involve people. Volunteering is encouraged by offering discounts in the café, by holding social events and by maintaining a friendly and inclusive atmosphere.

Finding suppliers has proved to be another problem. Being a small shop, they do not have the buying power of larger chains and their costs have to reflect this. This makes it hard to compete on price. The shops has therefore developed a range of speciality and locally sourced products and a high level of service to make it distinctive from other shops.

The inaccessible rural location has also been a problem. Suppliers will sometimes only commit to one delivery a month, and this can cause difficulties with stock control. This makes it important to plan ahead and form relationships with suppliers that can accommodate their needs.

A further problem that was unforeseen was that bills have been higher than anticipated. The costs for running fridges and chillers are high. This cost is especially where the focus is on fresh local produce of meat, fruit, vegetables and dairy products.

Impacts of the project

The project has achieved its objectives in that it has become established, is economically viable and provides a vital social centre for the community. It is a warm and comfortable meeting environment with a café, a shop, a postal service, a library kiosk and an IT suite. A positive outcome has been that the local population feel a real sense of ownership towards the shop. Many people are involved, and the shop is run by the community for the community. It is particularly beneficial to the more elderly members of the population who now have an accessible meeting place.

A further benefit has been that the shop acts as a forum for small businesses who have an outlet to sell their produce. The high public profile of the shop has also helped promote local products and producers.

The initiative has also added to people's employability by training people in the IT suite. Between 25/30 people have completed beginner IT courses, digital photo course, web design etc.

Finally, the building has a low environmental footprint, reducing residents' need to travel to other shops, generating electricity from photovoltaic cells on the roof and heat from a ground source heat pump, using high levels of energy conservation, and encouraging the use of locally sourced environmentally-friendly products.

Future of the project

The Shop Association are looking to expand the use of the first floor space for business and IT courses. The Association hopes to finance this venture through the course fees, or perhaps look to grants available for training people. They are also looking at possibly accrediting courses in the future.

FOREST FOOD PRODUCERS



Overview

The Forest Food Producers (FFP) group are setting up a distribution system for food produced locally in the Forest of Dean, to be sold in local outlets, and promote the area as a source of fine foods.

History and background

FFP grew out of the Council picking up the Forest Showcase in an effort to counteract the devastation of foot and mouth in the Forest of Dean. Producers got together and started trying to come up with a system to match available producers with outlets and aid distribution.

Many local outlets within the Forest of Dean have failed to realise the local producers that are there, and if they are aware of them they find it difficult getting hold of the produce. The objective of this initiative is to raise the profile of locally produced food with local outlets (and increasing awareness amongst local businesses) and eliminate any problems or negative perceptions related to acquiring local produce, by facilitating its delivery and supply.

The IRD Programme's Local Grant Scheme was a primary source of funding with £10,000 awarded during the BOWS phase to contribute towards the setting up and piloting of a Forest Food distribution system in the Forest of Dean. At the end of the Programme the group had not drawn down all the money because of difficulties in developing a business plan. They have also received a small sum from the Gloucestershire Rural Regeneration fund to help develop the group.

Issues overcome and lessons learned

The project has come up against a number of unforeseen problems, including:

- Getting people involved who were capable of taking on a range of different jobs.
- A key difficulty was in transferring what you know to be true and trying to make it a workable system. Finding premises proved to be just such a problem. They often required the signing of lease within a short time span, before plans were finalised, and this was not feasible in terms of obtaining funding etc.
- An initial problem was also the difficulty in getting someone to commit to taking on liability for the project. This problem was resolved when one of the producers decided to take on the responsibility, and have his business as the focus of the group. As they no longer needed to hire vehicles and equipment they were able to free themselves of liability.
- Being able to commit to and decide what structure would be most appropriate was also problematic. A number of months were taken up with trying to establish this. A modified co-

operative structure was finally decided on. The Food Group is able to exist as a club. They bring in and promote producers, but liability does not lie with them

A lot of experience has also been gained from the negative outcomes, which could be applied to future projects.

- You need someone independent of the producers to come in to be a single guiding control, to take control and drive the project.
- You cannot always rely on busy and independent producers to help themselves and contribute.
- A group can find that there were too many people involved in the decision making process.
- A lot of co-ordination is needed with grant funded work.

Impacts of the project

At the end of the IRD Programme the project had still to demonstrate long lasting impacts and benefits. However, it has started to prove that there is local demand within the District for local produce and a good producer base. The group are working to towards connecting these two things and co-ordinating a supply network.

There has been very little branding in/of the Forest. There is a need to keep promoting the Forest as a Quality Food Destination (particularly as the District is often overshadowed by places like Abergavenny). Most tourism businesses currently source their food from national suppliers who import most of their products. FFP are gradually helping to change this behaviour and promote the quality of the Forest and its produce.

Future of the project

The project is broadly continuing along the lines it started out on. The group sees partnership with a private institution as a viable way to operate, and are in discussions with one of their members (who makes high-end deli products) about a contractual relationship, allowing other members to take advantage of his processing, storage and distribution services.

FFP are currently in talks with the Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance about the Group's future development and resource needs. The overall aim is to get a more empowered producer forum, encouraging small producers to promote their food more rigorously and understand the value of what they have.

FOREST MOBILITY



Overview

Forest Mobility seeks to provide electric, rough terrain, four wheel scooters for the disabled, those with walking difficulties and their families and friends (with training provided as part of the package), so they can access and make use of the newly renovated cycle tracks in the Royal Forest of Dean.

History and background

Forest mobility was initiated by Clifford Hudson who has walking difficulties. He recognised that people with disabilities have limited access to the Forest of Dean's woodland and farmed countryside. He has developed two rough terrain vehicles to enable access to the Forest.

The Forest Volunteer Action Forum (FVAF) suggested the IRD Programme as a source of funding to take the project forward. The modest level of funding received from the Local Grant Scheme during the BOWS phase (£860) has enabled the formation of the business and the drawing up of a business plan for its development.

Forest Mobility became a not-for-profit public limited company, and recently applied for charitable status. It hopes to use a Remploy building in a good location adjacent to a family cycle track to rent out the scooters. Support for the project has been voiced by the Forestry Commission, Remploy, the District and County Council, who have expressed a keen interest in helping once it is fully established.

Issues overcome and lessons learned

The project experienced a major set-back when a person who was brought into the project to act as the legal entity and deal with the business requirements withdrew, leaving a number of 'loose ends' in terms of funding applied for and advice received.

Finding a suitable building did pose a problem until the Remploy building became available. Space had been suggested in a bike shed used by the 'Pedal a Bike Away' business, but there were concerns over placing the buggies and the new (potentially nervous) users in a busy environment with a high volume of bicycle traffic.

Problems related to the difficulty of radio communication within the forest, and its impact on the emergency services and health and safety, were underestimated. Forest Mobility have tried to resolve this by stating that users must always be accompanied, and in the case that they are not, the cycle trail is so heavily used that anyone in need of any assistance would not be on their own for any extended period of time.

Impacts of the project

Once the business is fully functioning it is hoped that it will extend tourism, promoting physical access to the forest to people who would otherwise be excluded, and also connecting them with other users. This improved access to an area of natural beauty should benefit the physical and mental health of its users. There are also potential economic spin offs in terms of groups of visitors making use of the hotels in the area and generally increasing tourism in the forest.

Future of the project

The business is still in its infancy and will require substantial capital investment if it is to become operational. Investment needs include:

- £25,000 for four rough terrain vehicles and a trailer
- £12,000 for necessary modifications to their building
- £30,000 to employ a professional to co-ordinate the operation to the trustees and handle the marketing.

Forest Mobility has approached a charitable trust and Defra for a substantial proportion of these costs, but there are concerns about whether the project is eligible for Defra's Rural Enterprise Scheme. Forest Mobility may look to The Big Lottery fund in the future.

THE FOREST SOUND FACTORY



Overview

The Forest Sound Factory provides a recorded information source and guide around the Forest of Dean in CD format. It offers visitors to the area, as well as residents, a chance to learn about the forest and its heritage and history as they explore the area.

History and background

The idea for this project came from a local resident, Mike May, who whilst working as a tour guide at a local working mine, realised that there is a lot of history in the Forest that people are not aware of, such as old mine sites that had been levelled with no signs of their existence remaining. He could see that there was a need to highlight this history and make people aware of it.

The Forestry Commission's policy of avoiding a 'clutter' of signage and interpretation boards in the forest (because this would detract from the tranquillity of the Forest) encouraged Mike and Tom Cousins (a local artist and mural painter) to develop an information source in CD format. They led the project supported by staff from the Local Heritage Centre, District Council and Tourist Information Centre, who provided information and editorial assistance at a series of monthly meetings.

Funding was provided by BOWS (£13,400 was applied for with £8,550 awarded). Other sources of funding were considered but many of these placed conditions on the grant that would have altered the content on the CD in an unacceptable way. BOWS funding was chosen, despite not being offered the full amount requested, since it allowed the freedom to develop the CD without editorial constraints.

The whole project, from funding through to the production of CDs, took about seven months, with four main stages of:

- acquiring the funding (a two month period);
- researching and collecting information;
- scripting the content; and
- compiling the final product in a recording studio.

Issues overcome and lessons learned

The major issue has been condensing a mass of information about the 32 sites covered by the CD into one hour of listening time. This was addressed as a standard editing process, using the monthly supervision meetings, assistance from local museums and getting people together to see how the information could be synthesised without missing out crucial information or losing its impact on the listener.

Other than this there were no real problems. The monthly supervision meetings set a good foundation, and the involvement of the councils and tourist information insured the smooth running of the project.

Impacts of the project

The CD has provided a valuable educational resource (which local schools have shown interest in), enabling listeners to discover things about the Forest and its heritage that they were not previously aware of. Local residents have been particularly enthusiastic.

The project has also delivered benefits for tourism (giving information to tourists about the area). In addition, it has helped to maintain the character of the forest by reducing the need for signage, while still providing key information.

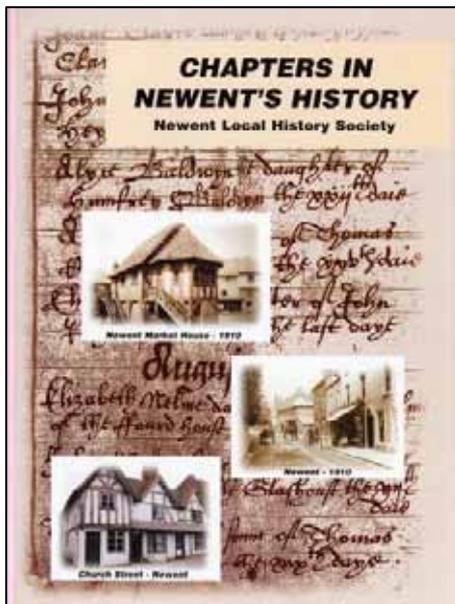
Statutory agencies such as the Forestry Commission have seen the benefits of this format of informing people, and are interested in developing similar initiatives for other sites.

The full impacts of the project will be clearer in the future, as the marketing and distribution of the CD is in its early stages, with sales due to be analysed shortly.

Future of the project

The Forest Sound Factory are approaching relevant bodies (such as the District and County Council and Forestry Commission) to develop similar CDs for other areas, and gearing them to different markets (such as young families) and for particular sites (such as cycle tracks and town centres). There are also plans to create a downloadable script that could be used with MP3 players.

NEWENT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY - CHAPTERS IN NEWENT'S HISTORY



Overview

'Chapters in Newent's History' is a 300 page hard-back book recording aspects of the history of the area, with topics ranging from transport to 20th century memories. It was produced by the Newent Local History Society and was published in 2003.

History and background

A group of eight authors within the Society researched and wrote the book, with the involvement of the community in collecting information, photos and documentation. 100 copies were published in 2003 and 80 have been sold to date (June 2006) at a price of £14.95. The aim was to bring together the wealth of information that existed about the area and make it accessible in one place.

The Society applied to the Local Grant Scheme in Phase 1 of the IRD Programme, receiving £3,000 towards publication

costs. This was matched by money raised from community activities (such as raffles) and by the authors' contribution of their own time.

Issues overcome and lessons learned

Finance and the project timescale were the major difficulty encountered. The project spanned three years, with the funding not actually needed till the final year when the printing and book launch were taking place. The issue was that funding could only be applied for in the year in which the money is to be used. The entire planning, research and preparation process had to go ahead with no guarantee of the funding materializing. The Society wished to underwrite the costs to reduce these risks, and was lucky to have a member who offered an interest free loan in case this should happen.

An application for £5,000 funding from the Local Grant was sought in 2002. The grant panel raised concerns about the suitability of the project to the broad objectives of the IRD Programme, and further information was requested from the Society about the impacts of the project. This information was provided, accompanied by lobbying through the local MP and an award of £3,000 of grant was made. Additional funding was subsequently acquired from the Countryside Agency's Local Heritage Initiative.

The involvement of someone on the project team who had previous experience of preparing grant applications would have been of benefit, as this was the first time the Society had tackled such a project and funding source. In retrospect, the Society would probably have looked for a source of funding that was not tied to an annual timescale and could have approved a grant three years in advance of when it was needed.

Although the Society has acknowledged the helpful guidance provided by the grant scheme administrator after their application was submitted, the project team felt that an earlier contact with the Programme about its IRD objectives would have helped overcome later confusion.

Impacts of the project

The book has brought a lot of information together in one place for easy reference, and is being widely used as a reference book, with copies available in locations such as libraries and the Market House amongst others. People have also discovered the Newent History Society as a result of the book, and they are receiving many requests for information for which the book is being used as an information source.

The Society have also compiled a names index (still to be published) from the book which is being used for reference to answer requests.

The book has also found use in planning and development issues. Some development queries, for example for the redevelopment of the old garage site in the centre, have referred to the book for the history of the site, so the information could be used for the planning application (to try and make the redevelopment sympathetic to the original plans). They were able to find old photographs of the site and provide this information. Estate agents in the area also have a copy for reference purposes.

The book is also being used by statutory agencies. The Mayor of Newent, as an example, wanted to move the town clock to a site where it was not obscured and referred to the Society for historical information regarding the clock, and they were able to gather this information from the book.

The book has also helped to identify Newent more firmly within the Forest of Dean in a historical context (there has been a popular perception that the town is outside the cultural area of the Royal Forest).

Future of the project

Although it was initially planned that there would be a reprint of the book, this won't be going ahead as storage of the books would prove difficult, particularly as there would be fewer sales a second time around. However there is interest from the Society in publishing another book. Many people have volunteered further information as a result of the first book, and the research process also uncovered a lot that could not be included in this book.

The production of this book has encouraged wider local interest in local history. For example there are currently people involved in translating all the transcripts of wills relating to Newent that are housed in London, and this in itself has revealed a wealth of information such as helping to date old buildings in the town.

There has been discussion within the Society about setting up a website to store and provide wide public access to information could not be included in a book (indexes of names and occupations for example). The website would tag on to an existing local website, keeping costs down. Any new costs should be met by profit from sales of the book.

SWITCHED ON: THE COLEFORD MUSIC FESTIVAL



Overview

The Coleford Music Festival is a two day celebration of music and arts with a strong emphasis on community involvement and promoting the culture and heritage of the Forest of Dean, staged in the historic town of Coleford.

History and background

The Switched On community arts project started as a volunteer organisation in 2000. The project organised a free, two day festival of music and arts, to promote young musicians and give them a platform to perform, and to promote local community groups in the town centre of Coleford in the Forest of Dean. The success of this even lead to the formation of the Coleford Festival Committee, and the festival has run annually since then (with the committee meeting weekly from September to June). The festival features four main performance areas based around the town centre as well as displays of high quality arts, and attracts over 20,000 visitors to the area.

The Switched On group leads the project, with the involvement of the community radio station, schools, college, the District Council, community groups, Dean Heritage and local dance groups.

The project has received funding from the Local Grants Scheme in both Phases of the IRD Programme. £5,000 was awarded from Phase 1 towards publicity and marketing and the cost of staging for the festival in June 2002. This enabled the organisers to expand the scope of the festival. An award of £1,700 from BOWS went towards the cost of a large screen to promote future events.

The project has received larger funding from the District Council, a lottery award, a local network fund, matched by business sponsorship, contributions in kind from volunteer stewards, the waiving of venue hire fees and the provision of professional services (such as electricians).

Issues overcome and lessons learned

The project has been established for over six years and has a 'tried and tested' formula which is developed further each year. Acquiring the necessary funding presents a challenge for each festival. The way in which they have tackled this is to train the volunteers, to raise skills in marketing and promotion (to market the festival better to local businesses), to help raise the profile of the festival and hence draw in more funding and increase sponsorship.

It has also been difficult on occasion to get people involved in the stewarding of the event on the day, as it would mean missing out on some of the events.

Impacts of the project

The festival has in general helped to raise the profile of the Forest and its heritage. It has increased tourism, encouraging visitors into the area, with economic benefits for the businesses and service providers in the town centre.

It has given the local community a sense of value and pride in its heritage, and brings the community together, promoting participation and helping to overcome a feeling of rural isolation. The festival has helped to create awareness of other cultures through visiting performers and artists. It has also increased the skills of the volunteers and participants and helped to raise the self esteem of the young people involved (workshops are organised in schools leading up to the two day event).

Developing a training scheme for marketing and fund raising has increased skills within the organisation.

Future of the project

Switched On hopes to come up with more income-generating ideas in the future, and would like more money so they can put a business plan in place. Sources of funding they may look to will be the Big Lottery Fund and perhaps the Arts Council grant.

They aim to continue developing organically (i.e. without major changes of direction), while working towards becoming financially self-sustaining in the future. The aim is to raise their income generating capacity by increasing their profile and the profile of the Coleford Music Festival.