



Evaluation of Walking with Offa Project

2015 Final Evaluation Report to
adventa

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1 Executive Summary

“Walking with Offa” Axis 4 Cooperation project was a cross border partnership project between English and Welsh LEADER Local Action Groups, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), a National Park and local authorities whose territories include the border area along the Offa’s Dyke Path National Trail¹. The overarching aim of the project was to improve the economy and sustainability of the communities along the English-Welsh border by developing and in turn promoting the natural and cultural assets of the region as a high quality sustainable tourism offer. The project formally commenced on 1st September 2011 and was originally due to be completed in December 2013; however, following the submission of a Project Variation Form the project was extended until October 2014.

The specific objectives of the project were:

- To improve the quality of the sustainable visitor experience across Offa’s Country, with improved access and information, interesting interpretation, a range of outdoor activity opportunities and good quality facilities;
- To encourage more repeat visits, recommendations and longer stays throughout the year in Offa’s Country, motivated by its natural and cultural assets;
- To increase the average expenditure of visitors on sustainable local products and services, supporting new and existing isolated rural businesses along the border;
- To ensure that the management of key natural tourism assets is more sustainable in future;
- To increase the proportion of visitors who use public or sustainable transport during their visits to Offa’s Country; and
- To raise the strategic profile of Offa’s Country as a destination for sustainable tourism.

In December 2011 Miller Research was contracted to carry out an independent evaluation of the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project on behalf of adventa. The approach included a formative, process evaluation, monitoring progress and providing guidance on improvements to delivery and monitoring arrangements; as well as a summative, or outcome evaluation.

This final evaluation assesses the extent to which the project has delivered against its aims and objectives and examines emerging outcomes and impacts from the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project.

The fieldwork for this final evaluation has involved:

- Review and analysis of:
 - Recent quarterly claim reports to Welsh Government;
 - Marketing materials and other outputs to date.

¹ Partners include: Adventa (lead partner); Brecon Beacons National Park Authority; Cadwyn Clwyd; Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Partnership; Denbighshire County Council; Monmouthshire County Council; Northern Marches LEADER Programme; Powys County Council; Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership; Visit Herefordshire, and; Wye Valley AONB Partnership

- An on-line survey of beneficiaries of the Walking with Offa programme (volunteers, community group representatives, local businesses and business groups), yielding 26 responses;
- Qualitative interviews (face-to-face and telephone) with representatives from each of the project partner organisations;
- Qualitative interviews (face-to-face and telephone) with a sample of other stakeholders, including beneficiaries of the business engagement events, members of Walkers are Welcome groups, representatives from Welsh Government and Capital Region Tourism and consultants appointed to deliver project activities.

This report collates and analyses the main findings from these various elements of fieldwork. In summary;

- Partners have maintained and strengthened a multi-sector, cross-border partnership that is fit-for-purpose and ready to deliver future collaboration initiatives.
- There is a recognised awareness of the Irresistible Offa brand that has been developed without undermining local distinctiveness of individual destination management areas.
- Without exception, the partnership has well exceeded all targets, in some cases by as much as 400% (for example Number of interpretative materials produced).
- The acquisition of the P4G grant funding from Visit Wales demonstrates the regard and track record that Welsh Government and other stakeholders have for the partnership and its ability to further develop the work achieved through the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration project.
- Whilst many of the physical projects have, necessarily, been locality based (for example the development of bus services or circular walks) there is a wide range of examples of cross-border working and collaboration (e.g.: the Interpretation Strategy and the production of the Irresistible Offa map).
- The considerable emphasis on capacity building and providing opportunities for volunteering has built sustainability and local ownership of the community-based activities developed through the project, for example the establishment of new Walkers are Welcome towns and the Community Access Management Programme in the Brecon Beacons National Park. Furthermore there is qualitative evidence of the outcomes and impacts that these initiatives have had on local people (for example, building confidence and self-esteem, providing a route to employment).
- Individual partners have piloted very different initiatives (for example the Remote Interpretation app) that have been disseminated across the partnership. The future challenge for the partnership will be to roll out successful approaches to other areas.

2 Introduction

2.1 Overview of the Walking with Offa Project

“Walking with Offa” Axis 4 Cooperation project was a cross border partnership project between English and Welsh LEADER Local Action Groups, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), a National Park and local authorities whose territories include the border area along the Offa’s Dyke Path National Trail. Whilst multi-agency cross-border collaboration has been taking place for some time² in this area, this is the first project involving both English and Welsh partners that has received Axis 4 Cooperation Funding from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD³).

2.1 Funding Arrangements

The Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project was supported with funding from both the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and the Rural Development Plan for Wales (RDPW); however the process of applying for and receiving the funding was not the same in England and Wales. For English LEADER groups the Axis 4 Cooperation money was part of their core budget whereas the Welsh groups needed to make a collective bid to a separate central pot for Cooperation money. Therefore in Wales a single bid for RDPW Cooperation funding was submitted; in England separate bids (which collectively represented a comparatively smaller total than the RDPW Axis 4 bid, and related only to certain activities⁴) were submitted to individual LEADER Local Action Groups. Furthermore, the timescales for receiving the funding did not align; whilst on the English side the Walking with Offa cooperation funding was approved in February 2011, it was not approved in Wales until July 2011.

In England, prior to the start of the Axis 4 Cooperation Project, a joint application between Wye Valley AONB and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnerships was made to Natural England for Natural Assets funding supplied by Advantage West Midlands to deliver a series of activities detailed in the 2010 Phase One Business Plan⁵. The bid was successful and funding was approved in July 2010 for what was originally a three year project. However, the dissolution of the Regional Development Agencies in March 2012 resulted in the timescales for the project being halved and although work started in August 2010 it needed to have been completed by January 2012. Although this inevitably made it more challenging to deliver the project as intended (particularly given that there was no funding for staff time, programme management or transport) the project was an invaluable precursor the Walking

² In particular the signing of the Mid Wales and West Midlands Memorandum of Understanding which was an agreement between the government offices of the West Midlands (Shropshire, Herefordshire and Powys) to collaborate on health, economic development and other public services.

³ The EAFRD aims to improve: the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry; the environment and the countryside; and the quality of life and the management of economic activity in rural areas.

⁴ Specifically, this included the communication and marketing plan; public transport study; sustainable transport literature and the external monitoring and evaluation contract.

⁵ *Offa’s Country Sustainable Tourism Programme Business Plan: Phase One – Walking with Offa*, prepared by Alison Caffyn and Sula Rayska on behalf of the Offa’s Country Sustainable Tourism Partnership.

with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation project⁶. Furthermore, the activity following on from the Natural Assets project directly supported much of the work subsequently undertaken through the Axis 4 Cooperation project, and is therefore reported as complementary activity within the relevant sections of this document.

The overall Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project formally commenced on 1st September 2011 and was originally due to be completed in December 2013; however, following the submission of a Project Variation Form the project was extended until October 2014.

2.2 Project Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of the project was to improve the economy and sustainability of the communities along the English-Welsh border by developing and in turn promoting the natural and cultural assets of Offa's Country as a high quality sustainable tourism offer. The term 'Offa's Country' refers to the English-Welsh border area surrounded by a "fuzzy border"⁷ that stretches "about 12-20 miles"⁸ either side of the Offa's Dyke Path.

More specifically, the project intended to improve access for visitors, facilitate a more enjoyable and informative visitor experience whilst helping local accommodation providers, shops, pubs and restaurants to benefit from an increased tourism market.

The specific objectives of the project were:

- To improve the quality of the sustainable visitor experience across Offa's Country, with improved access and information, interesting interpretation, a range of outdoor activity opportunities and good quality facilities;
- To encourage more repeat visits, recommendations and longer stays throughout the year in Offa's Country, motivated by its natural and cultural assets;
- To increase the average expenditure of visitors on sustainable local products and services, supporting new and existing isolated rural businesses along the border;
- To ensure that the management of key natural tourism assets is more sustainable in future;
- To increase the proportion of visitors who use public or sustainable transport during their visits to Offa's Country; and
- To raise the strategic profile of Offa's Country as a destination for sustainable tourism.

Activity delivered within the project fell into five main areas of work:

1. Improving the Walking Offer:
 - Circular walks;

⁶ Please see Appendix 2 for details on the Walking with Offa Natural Assets Project delivered by the Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley AONBs

⁷ *Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme Business Plan, Phase One – Walking with Offa*, Alison Caffyn and Sula Rayska, 2010, p. 3

⁸ *Ibid.*

- Long Distance Paths development;
 - Walkers are Welcome;
 - Community access management programme.
2. Offa's Country Information and Interpretation:
- A Communication and Marketing Plan;
 - Interpretation material and promotional events;
 - A sustainable walking guide;
 - Interactive interpretational material;
 - Interpretive planning and media development.
3. Joint Business and Community Engagement Training:
- Business and community engagement.
4. Joint Walking Promotion:
- Uploading PDFs of local walking routes onto the Wye Valley AONB web-site;
 - Enhancing the Brecon Beacons National Park walking website and linking it to Park Explorer;
 - Development of the Offa's Dyke Passport/Hall of Fame.
5. Joint Sustainable Transport Development and Promotion:
- Sustainable bus tours/services;
 - Green Transport Nodes;
 - Public transport study;
 - Sustainable Transport literature.

Each project partner was involved in delivering activities in different areas of work although all contributed to the targets of the overall project. Some activities (for example particular Walkers are Welcome initiatives or the Path Maintenance Programme) were based in specific geographic areas; others were more strategic (such as the Media and Communications Campaign) or focused on particular theme (for example Public transport).

The focus and scope of the project clearly reflected the remit and objectives of the various partners; it was concerned with supporting local economic and community development, increasing market demand for walking whilst broadening the existing walking offer in the area and ensuring the preservation of local natural and cultural assets, and the environment generally.

2.2.1 Project variation

In July 2013 on behalf of the partnership, adventa (lead body for the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project) submitted a project amendment form, specifically in relation to a request for changes to budget and some project related activities. Table 1 outlines the original budget approval and revised budget figures. The request also sought a project

extension from the original December 2013 completion date to October 2014, which was agreed by Welsh Government in July 2013.

Key project variances included:

- Reduction of £8,700 from Improving the Walking Offer (capital);
- Reduction of £13,000 from networking events;
- Reduction of £3707.25 from the Sustainable Transport Development & Promotion activity due to the deletion of the Chepstow sustainable transport information point; this amount has been added to the public transport study activity to facilitate more research and mapping;
- Reduction of £4,000 from Sustainable Transport Literature;
- Additional £35,791 for Management, Staff and Evaluation Costs, in order to meet project extension from December 2013 to September 2014.

Table 1 - Approved Project Variation - July 2013

	Approved Budget (£)	Variance +/- (£)	Revised Budget (£)
Improving the Walking Offer (capital)	77,000	-8,700	68,300.00
Information and Interpretation	86014	0	86,014.00
Communications Study & Action Plan	25000	0	25,000.00
Business and Community Engagement & Training	19300	0	19,300.00
Networking Events	18000	-13000	5,000.00
Best Practice Training Courses	7800	0	7,800.00
Walking Promotion	23000	0	23,000.00
Sustainable Transport Development & Promotion	52004	-3707.25	48,296.75
Public Transport Study	7500	3707.25	11,207.25
Sustainable Transport Literature	15000	-4000	11,000.00
Management and Monitoring	67656.59	0	67,656.59
Management, Staff and Evaluation Costs	107105.2	35791	142,896.20
TOTAL REVENUE	547,467.79	8,700.00	556,167.79
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS	624,467.79	-	624,467.79

Source: Adventa, July 2013 Project Amendment

The changes reflected the need to discontinue a minority of activities that were no longer

viable or in demand. For example, the transport hub that was intended to be developed in Chepstow cannot be achieved, due to local transportation planning issues within Monmouthshire County Council. Furthermore, it was recognised that more time was required to deliver the project activities and therefore a project extension was required, generating additional staff costs.

2.3 History of Partnership Working in the English-Welsh border area

The English-Welsh border area has been the focus of collaborative activity for several years. In 2007 the (then) Welsh Assembly Government and the West Midlands Regional Assembly signed the Central Wales-West Midlands Cross Border Memorandum of Understanding (MOU); more than 60 local authorities and organisations from England and Wales have subsequently signed up to the MOU and have committed to working collaboratively in various public service areas.

Tourism was one of these areas and resulted in the development of the Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme following research by Resources for Change in 2009⁹ into the opportunities for developing a more sustainable rural economy along the English-Welsh border area. In 2010 a transport and tourism project undertaken by Professor Les Lumsdon also helped maintain momentum and focus on the border area.

The Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme is overseen by the Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Partnership¹⁰ and is intended to support sustainable tourism and economic regeneration within the border region. In March 2010 a detailed business plan (*Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme Business Plan: Phase One – Walking with Offa*) was prepared by Alison Caffyn and Sula Rayska for the Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Partnership.

'Walking with Offa' was the name given to the first phase of activity under the Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme. The expectation is that whilst subsequent projects may focus on other activities (for example cycling or horse-riding) the emphasis of the first phase has been upon walking given that it is the area's principal offer.

As mentioned above, an extensive range of organisations have been involved in the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project, including:

- Adventa (lead partner);
- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority;
- Cadwyn Clwyd;

⁹ Funded by the (former) Welsh Assembly Government, Advantage West Midlands and Natural England

¹⁰ The Partnership is comprised of local authorities and Local Action Groups on both sides of the border, four AONBs, CCW, Natural England, Visit Wales (through the Mid Wales Tourism Partnership), British Waterways and Offa's Dyke Tourism Association.

- Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Partnership;
- Denbighshire County Council;
- Monmouthshire County Council;
- Northern Marches LEADER Programme;
- Powys County Council;
- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership;
- Visit Herefordshire;
- Wye Valley AONB Partnership;

2.4 Future activity

Although the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project formally came to an end in October 2014,¹¹ partners secured a £45K P4G Protected Landscapes grant for January to March 2015 to continue some elements for the project (specifically Walkers are Welcome training and support, interpretation activity and networking and best practice events). In addition, the funding was for the installation of walker lockers in Prestatyn and an externally commissioned feasibility study into developing a long-distance cycle route.

Partners are hopeful that a “Phase 2” Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project will be approved in due course, although at the time of reporting, it is unclear when this might happen or how it might be funded. Potential funding sources include Heritage Lottery Fund and the next round of European funding.

2.5 Background to the Evaluation

In December 2011 Miller Research (UK) Ltd was contracted to carry out an independent evaluation of the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project on behalf of adventa. The approach included a formative, process evaluation, monitoring progress and providing guidance on improvements to delivery and monitoring arrangements; as well as a summative, or outcome evaluation.

This final evaluation assesses the extent to which the project has delivered against its aims and objectives and examines emerging outcomes and impacts from the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project.

2.5.1 Final Evaluation Approach

The fieldwork for this final evaluation has involved:

- Review and analysis of:
 - Recent quarterly claim reports to Welsh Government;

¹¹ Please note, the Walking with Offa Coordinator remained in post until December 2014.

- Marketing materials and other outputs to date.
- An on-line survey of beneficiaries of the Walking with Offa programme (volunteers, community group representatives, local businesses and business groups), yielding 26 responses;
- Qualitative interviews (face-to-face and telephone) with representatives from each of the project partner organisations, namely:
 - Adventa;
 - Brecon Beacons National Park Authority;
 - Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Partnership;
 - Monmouthshire County Council;
 - National Trail Officer, based at Powys County Council;
 - Powys County Council;
 - Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership; and
 - Wye Valley AONB Partnership.
- Qualitative interviews (face-to-face and telephone) with a sample of other stakeholders, including beneficiaries of the business engagement events, members of Walkers are Welcome groups, representatives from Welsh Government and Capital Region Tourism and consultants appointed to deliver project activities.

2.6 Structure of the Report

This report collates and analyses the main findings from these various elements of fieldwork. It is not intended to duplicate previously reported information or evidence; therefore for more detail on the funding and contextual background to the project, please refer to the baseline and interim evaluation reports¹². The first chapter presents a strategic overview of progress made by the project, focusing particularly on project management and governance, marketing and communication and stakeholder awareness. The following chapters evaluate each individual strand of the project, with a general overview of the intended scope of the activities in the strand and an overall summary of progress at this stage.

The final sections of this document draw conclusions from all chapters, identifying particular issues and common themes across different areas of activity and setting out a series of recommendations for the remaining period of the project.

¹² Miller Research *Evaluation of Walking with Offa Project Baseline Report*, July 2012; Miller Research *Evaluation of Walking with Offa Project Interim Evaluation Report*, January 2014

3 Strategic Overview

3.1 Project Management

For the duration of the project (September 2011 to September 2014) the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation Project has been managed by the Walking with Offa Co-ordinator, employed through lead project partner, adventa.

Her role has been wide-ranging and has included scheduling, chairing and (initially) minuting partnership meetings, sending out email bulletins and updates to delivery partners, being the external ‘face’ of the project, undertaking some elements of programme delivery, managing the evaluation contract, collating monitoring data from partners and reporting progress and submitting quarterly claims to Welsh Government and ensuring the project meets its outputs and outcomes on completion.

The coordinator’s role is widely recognised by partners as challenging, given the variety and number of partners involved, the range of the activities included in the project, financial cuts, the virtual¹³ absence of statutory cross-border remits, onerous reporting requirements and the competing priorities of the partners: *“It’s a big complicated project all about relationship and it’s outside everyone’s day-job.”* (Project partner)

In earlier stages of the evaluation, a minority of partners criticised the reporting demands of the project – for which the programme coordinator is a conduit; however this was recognised as being driven by Welsh Government monitoring requirements and therefore unavoidable. Furthermore, on completion of the project, partners have commended her commitment, encouragement and increased capabilities and confidence as a strategic manager:

“It has been challenging for Lucinda in terms of geography and cross sectoral working but she has done extremely well.” (Project partner)

“She has helped the partnership with the bigger picture and has been the oil and glue to the project and kept to the strategic project management.” (Project partner)

A small number of partners have suggested that the role of the coordinator should have been split between two people; into a more hands-on administrative and delivery role, and more strategic leader, who would steer the direction of the partnership and provide a governance function.

3.2 Engagement and awareness of the project

Through the various project activities, partners have engaged with a variety of organisations; awareness of Walking with Offa has undoubtedly grown over the three years. Stakeholders include Walkers are Welcome groups, tourism groups, local business and representative organisations (e.g.: Chambers of Commerce).

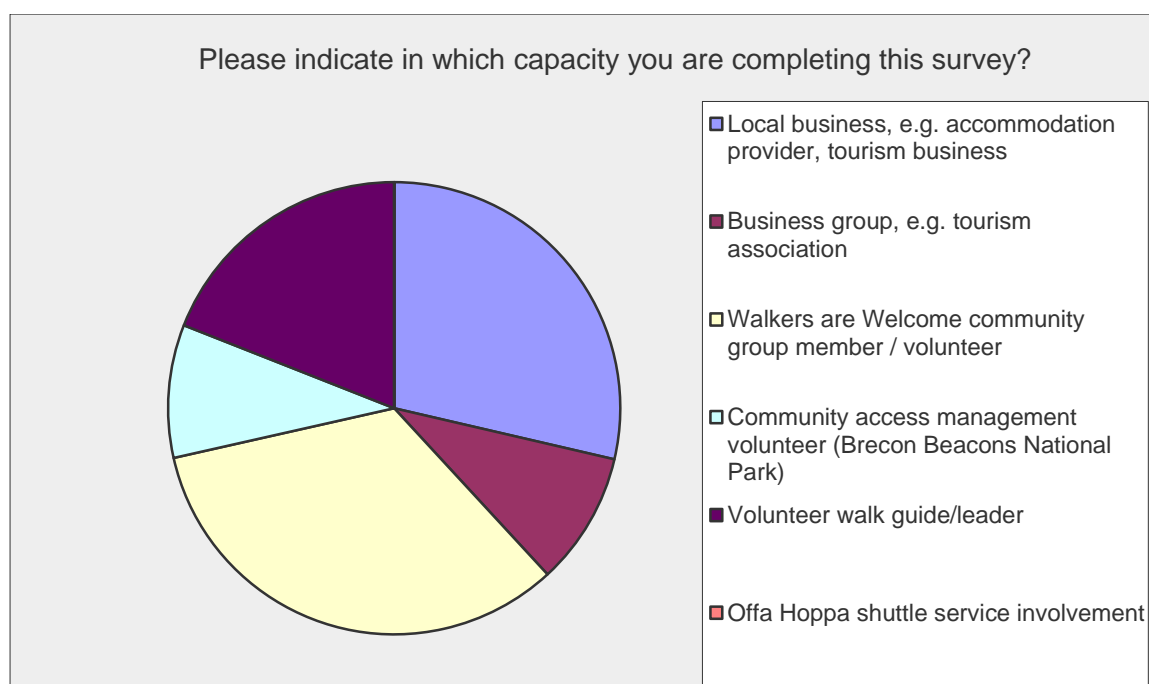
The final evaluation of the Walking with Offa Project has included an on-line survey of project beneficiaries which includes all those who have engaged with the project in some capacity (other than partners). Given that the survey was only sent to those for whom

¹³ Of all project partners, only the Wye Valley AONB and the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail have official cross-border remits.

project partners had an email address, the results cannot be taken as truly representative of the project's engagement with external stakeholders; however, it provides a valuable indication of how the project is perceived amongst those who have engaged with one or more project activity.

The survey obtained feedback from a variety of perspectives including Walkers are Welcome community group members / volunteers (33% of respondents), local businesses such as accommodation providers and tourism businesses (29%), volunteer walk guide/leaders (19%), business groups, such as tourism associations (10%) or from volunteers involved in the Community Access Management programme (10%).

Figure 1: Survey respondents' background



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.1

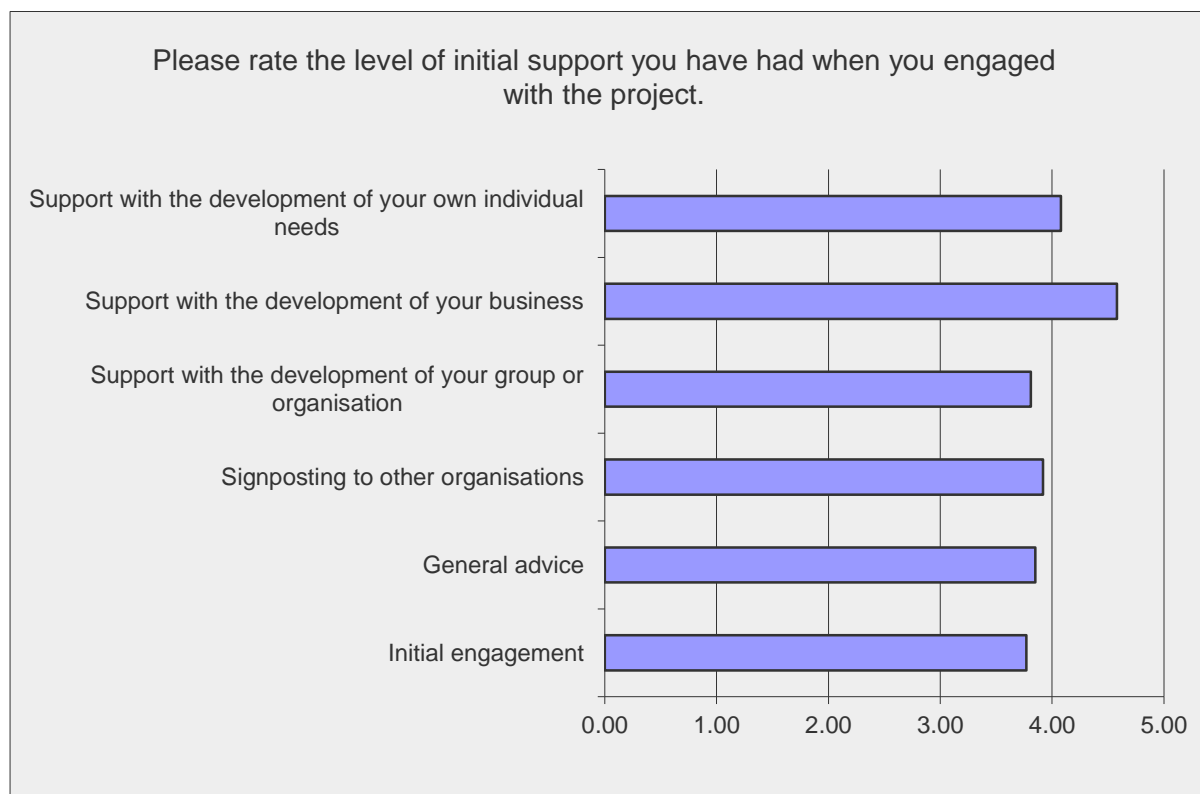
The conduit for this engagement and awareness raising has very much been the project partners themselves. A significant majority (64%) of stakeholders initially became aware of the project through direct contact with someone in one of the partner organisations, whilst almost a third found out about the project through the voluntary or community group in which they were involved. Only 4% of respondents became aware through promotional material such as a flier or leaflet and not one respondent cited a press article as the way they found out about the project.

Nonetheless, this is not a negative finding. Although a key element of the Walking with Offa project has been the development of a Communication and Marketing Plan (see Section 4.2.2 below), throughout the course of the project, partners have emphasised the lack of any objective to raise awareness of the project in its own right: *"It has not been a public facing project but has been a vehicle for effective delivery."* (Project partner)

Furthermore, survey respondents reported positively on the support they initially received through the project, as illustrated in figure 2 below. Recipients of business support provided

the highest level of praise, although across each area of support respondents gave an average rating of at least 3.8 out of 5.

Figure 2: Survey respondents' views on initial support received through Walking with Offa



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.3

Qualitative feedback from external stakeholders reveals considerable familiarity with the purpose of the Walking with Offa project. This is somewhat in contrast to the evidence obtained during the baseline and, to a lesser extent the interim evaluations, when awareness of the aims and objectives was very limited beyond the project partners:

“[The project aim] is to promote walking opportunities and the tourism offer down the English and Welsh border, but not just along the path ... to create circular walks linking the [Offa’s Dyke] path to other local areas.” (Business supported through the Walking with Offa project)

“In most areas, people have ‘got’ the overall picture – i.e.: that it is a pan-English/Welsh border project that is not just about Walkers are Welcome.” (Project partner)

Nonetheless, some partners felt that awareness was still variable; one stakeholder, for example, who had been heavily involved in one activity within the Walking with Offa project claimed to know very little about the rest of the project.

It was also suggested there remained some confusion over the umbrella project¹⁴, the individual project activities and, to a lesser extent, complementary activities: *“Walkers are Welcome accreditation gets confused with the Walking with Offa project.”* (Project partner)

¹⁴ I.e: the Axis 4 Walking with Offa Collaboration Project.

Nonetheless, it is clear that individually, the activities within the Walking with Offa project have had commendable levels of engagement with local businesses and communities: *“There have been good examples of direct community involvement with the circular walks that have involved tourism businesses. Tourism businesses are aware of business workshops and training, for example.”* (Project partner)

Moreover, whilst awareness of the Walking with Offa project amongst the general public is likely to remain minimal, this should not be interpreted as a failing of the project in any way, given that there was never an intention to promote the project itself as an overall brand: *“members of the public will use the walks ... they just won’t know it’s [Walking with Offa].”* (Project partner)

3.3 Partnership Arrangements

One of the key, and to a large extent unforeseen, successes of the Walking with Offa project has been the evolution of a robust partnership. Without exception, partners have commended the individual and collective commitment and endurance of each member, despite notable geographic, regional/national and organisational differences between them:

“Partnership working is challenging and given the geography it’s been really impressive.”
(Project partner)

“It’s been really good. The enthusiasm from all partners has been really good, especially as this is all outside their day job.” (Project partner)

External stakeholders who have worked with the partnership at various stages of the projects have also commended their collective strength: *“They’ve got better at it and have rated themselves better at it. They have learnt more about each other and each other’s motivations.”* (External stakeholder)

The Walking with Offa activities that have had a pan-region focus – for example the Interpretation Plan developed by Nigel McDonald¹⁵ and the Sustainable Transport study prepared by Alison Caffyn and Les Lumsden¹⁶ - have been particularly important catalysts for joint working and consistent practice. Both these exercises were commissioned by the partnership and have provided a strategic framework for implementation in addition to being a conduit for sharing, mapping and promoting information (for example on public transport) across the border region, now and in the future.

The way in which partners dealt with the first consultants contracted to deliver the marketing and communication plan¹⁷ was a critical turning point for the project and (somewhat inadvertently) served to strengthen buy-in to and the confidence of the partnership. It was seen to be an example of the partnership working well as a collective and dealing with complex issues through consensus.

Even activities that have been led by individual partners (for example the Sustainable Walking Guide¹⁸) or have had a distinct geographic focus (for example the Augmented

¹⁵ See section 4.2.2 for further details.

¹⁶ See section 4.5.2 for further details.

¹⁷ See section 4.2.2 below for further details.

¹⁸ See section 4.1.2 below for further details.

Reality apps developed in North Wales) have been important for best practice and knowledge sharing: *“We have become experts in different areas and then shared these across the project.”* (Project partner)

One or two partners have suggested that although the partnership has worked well strategically, physical activity has in the main – albeit to some extent necessarily - been conducted at a local level: *“It’s been a project where people have gone away and done their projects and then reported back ... as the project progressed we did more exchange of experiences ... we could’ve done more of this from the start, although we needed the experience before they could do so.”* (Project partner)

Nonetheless, the general consensus, even amongst those who felt activity could have been more ‘joined-up’ throughout the three-year project, was that they now had an established and experienced partnership that is well prepared to deliver future projects as a collective: *“It has been a mature and strong partnership that has dealt with complex issues and challenges. It has set us up well for phase two as we have a depth of understanding and experience ... the partnership has grown into a good strategic organisation.”* (Project partner)

4 Activities and Progress

4.1 Improving the walking offer



4.1.1 Rationale

The focus of this first strand was on enhancing the range and quality of walks across Offa's Country¹⁹. The object was to create a more diverse offer in order to cater for walkers of different ages, interests and fitness levels, and with different time-scales. Specific activity in this strand included:

- The development of circular walks involving varying levels of work in different areas, and potentially including researching entirely new routes on the ground, providing infrastructural improvements (for example new way-markers or route improvements) to existing routes or developing maps and other guidance information in PDF form to be downloaded from websites;
- Improving less well-known long distance footpaths²⁰ that intersect Offa's Dyke Path National Trail; this may include upgrading infrastructure, facilitating business development along the routes²¹, marketing and improving on-line maps and information;
- Providing support to existing Walkers are Welcome (WaW) towns²², in terms of developing and promoting their WaW status whilst encouraging at least another five towns to join the scheme and subsequently supporting them to implement necessary small scale improvements²³;
- Introducing a Community Access Management Programme in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

¹⁹ All activity in this strand that contributes to project targets is funded by Welsh partners/RDPW and entirely based in Wales.

²⁰ These paths include: The Wye Valley Walk, The Beacons Way, Glyndwr's Way (National Trail), the Jack Mytton Way, Shropshire Way, Blue Remembered Hills Bridleway, Kerry Ridgeway, Maelor Way, Dee Valley Way, North Berwyn Way, Mynydd Hiraethog, North Wales Path and Wales Coastal Path.

²¹ For example encouraging farm diversification

²² Namely Prestatyn, Llangollen, Bishops Castle, Church Stretton and Ross on Wye

²³ For example way marking for new routes and map based notice-boards.

4.1.2 Summative achievements

Circular walks and footpath development

Partners have been highly creative in their delivery of this activity. In the Clwydian Range, in addition to developing the intended five circular walks²⁴, the AONB officer has installed furniture and produced maps and leaflets to support the various routes. Moreover, the AONB have adopted a community based approach to the planning for and delivery of these routes that is grounded in their existing 'Community Mile' model²⁵, in the interests of creating local ownership, linking to local services and ensuring sustainability.

The six circular walks developed in Powys have been themed²⁶ and have incorporated smartphone virtual applications, inlay panels and use of Quick Response (QR) codes that provide access to downloadable routes, maps and "i" books, relating to the walks. This innovative approach was initially piloted for one circular walk, before being rolled out to the remaining routes. An additional nine circular maps have been produced in pdf format. Infrastructural developments in Powys included the installation of two picnic benches (in Knighton and Llanymynech), nine benches, 20 giant concrete footprints and 20 branded plaques.

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) had originally planned to develop circular walks starting from each of the three WaW towns in their area (see discussion on WaW schemes below). Through their own research however, the National Park ascertained that circa three-quarters of their current visitors are day visitors and therefore their priority was to increase overnight stays. Thus the original objective was subsequently revised and instead the decision was taken to develop a single and longer circular walk that connected all three WaW towns in the National Park, in addition to Abergavenny,²⁷ in the interests of encouraging walkers to spend the night in each town.

In Monmouthshire, the intended circular route involved Hendre Bridge, which required major infrastructural developments to restore functionality. Following ecological, hydrological and topographical surveys, significant delays to the physical work were compounded by inclement weather and capacity issues within Monmouthshire County Council's structural team. Nonetheless, the required bridge structures were purchased with Walking with Offa budget and at the time of reporting, the work has been substantially completed.

In addition a feasibility study into the potential renovation of the former railway bridge at Redbrook, Monmouthshire on the River Wye was also undertaken. The results subsequently formed the basis of a circa £800,000 Heritage Lottery Fund bid, to upgrade the bridge decking and structure and to repaint the bridge to the original black colour.

²⁴ Specifically, Tremeirchion (X 3 routes), Graig Fechan and Llangynhafel

²⁵ Community Miles are short day walks that links Denbighshire's communities and special places.

²⁶ Llanymynech (Nature & Industry theme), Montgomery (King Offa theme), Knighton (Orrible Offa Ghost Tales), Presteigne (Arts theme) and Llandrindod Wells (Children and nature theme)

²⁷ Abergavenny has become a Walkers are Welcome town, independently of the Walking with Offa project. It has a railway station and therefore is well placed as a 'gateway' to the other three towns and the National Park.

In the Wye Valley AONB, five walks²⁸ have been developed along with a variety of walking infrastructural developments which have included a way-maker, three interpretation panels and four walk counters. In collaboration with Walkers are Welcome groups in Chepstow and Monmouth, the AONB has also upgraded the Wye Valley Walk, a long-distance footpath which forms a linear section of the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail.

In addition to these routes developed under the remit of the Axis 4 Collaboration project, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership produced 12 circular walk routes ranging from 4 to approximately 10 miles as part of the Walking with Offa project originally funded by Natural Assets. Leaflets and Viewranger apps for each walk are available to download from the Shropshire Walking website and the AONB team monitors usage of the footpaths through download figures and style-counters. In addition, the majority of the Shropshire Way has been upgraded and new circular routes have been included. It is now one of the main long distance routes connecting to the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail in Shropshire.

Walkers are Welcome schemes

A key element of the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration project has related to the UK-wide Walkers are Welcome (WaW) scheme which was launched in 2007 to encourage towns and villages to be 'welcoming to walkers'²⁹. The ethos of WaW is to build local capacity and create ownership of the initiative in the form of a local steering group.

Initially, the focus was in the BBNPA area, where National Park officers supported the recruitment of steering groups in Hay-on-Wye, Crickhowell and Talgarth, all located in Powys. In the early stages of the project these three towns were granted WaW status and were allocated a grant of £10,000 each. In Hay and Talgarth this money was used to subsidize walking festivals and to print free leaflets on walks in the local area. Crickhowell already had a walking festival and so used the money to enhance the existing event and to produce a book of popular local walks.

The Hay WaW group have been particularly proactive. In May 2014 it was announced that from October, the "Hay Ho!" Sunday bus service that ran between Hereford, Hay and Brecon was being axed by the Council. Following a feasibility study on the bus service funded through Rural Alliances³⁰ the decision was taken by the group to take on the running of the scheme³¹, albeit on a smaller scale³². Walking with Offa had been the catalyst for this achievement, by building local capacity and confidence and funding the production on leaflets on various walking bus routes: *"it [the Walking with Offa project] helped to market the service and will certainly help us make it a success."* (External stakeholder)

In addition to these three towns, a further 16 WaW groups³³ have been supported through the Walking with Offa project. In the Wye Valley AONB, local WaW groups have supported

²⁸ Specifically Chepstow Town, Piercefield, Tintern-Angiddy, Monmouth Town and Monmouth-Biblins

²⁹ <http://www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk/>

³⁰ Rural Alliances is an Interreg-supported scheme involving the BBNPA.

³¹ Whilst responsibility for running the service lies with the Hay WaW group, it is underwritten by Hay Tourism Group.

³² The bus now runs between Hereford and Hay only.

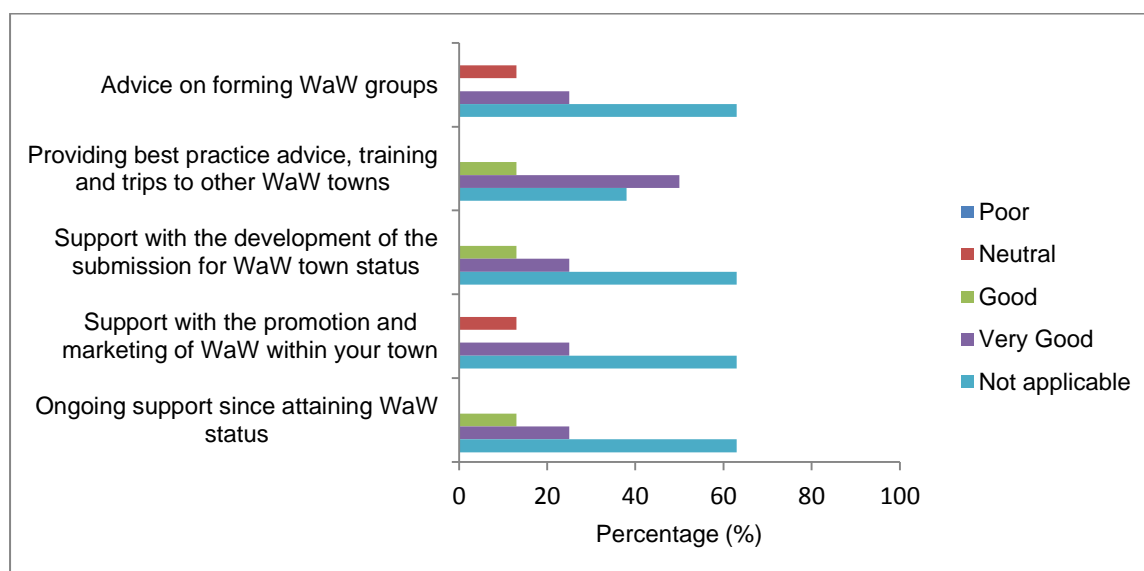
³³ Including Abergavenny, Bishops Castle, Corwen, Chepstow, Cleobury Mortimer, Church Stretton, Kington, Knighton, Leominster, Llangollen, Ludlow, Monmouth, Much Wenlock, Ross-on-Wye, Wellington and Winchcombe.

the “Wye So Special” campaign, that has been focused on ‘telling the story’ around local walks and landscape.

One of the challenges for the WaW activity has been a lack of local volunteer capacity and in particular the difficulty of filling responsible roles: *“It’s been difficult to get a local volunteer to take on the role of [WaW] chair and all the leadership responsibility that goes with it ... you’re very reliant on key individuals, which has meant that some [WaW] towns are more advanced than others.”* (External stakeholder) This therefore makes the achievements described above are additionally commendable.

Figure 3 below shows that of those who completed the beneficiary survey as WaW volunteers the feedback was very positive; all deemed the support with the development of the submission for WaW town status and the on-going support since attaining WaW status as either good (33%) or very good (66%). Views on the support with promotion and marketing were more polarised, given that whilst two thirds rated this ‘very good’, the remaining third responded neutrally. This may reflect the varying timescales that the partnerships have been running and the fact that some may have been established only recently and therefore have not yet received such support.

Figure 3: Survey respondent views on WaW support



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.5

Partners have described the WaW activity as “phenomenally successful”, given that it has helped to increase the number of WaW towns in the region from 10 to 30, to develop better systems and protocols within these groups and therefore to enhance the overall WaW scheme into a much more matured network. One of the original Walking with Offa partners has since been appointed to the national Walkers are Welcome Board and the Walking with Offa Coordinator has organised a number of WaW exchange visits and a National WaW conference. Crucially, all respondents to the on-line survey rated the provision of best practice advice, training and trips to other WaW towns as very good (80%) or good (20%).

It has been suggested by partners and external stakeholders that the focus on developing walking festivals within WaW towns may have resulted in a surfeit of these events, which in time could undermine the viability of some of the less successful festivals. It is therefore recommended that future activity focuses upon enhancing existing events, rather than creating additional ones.

The community access management programme

The community access management programme was based on a model started in the Lake District called “Fix the Fells”. It is one of the key successes of the Walking with Offa project in terms of sustainable investment and long term benefit. Volunteers are trained to carry out maintenance and upgrade work on footpaths and then carry out such work, with supervision from a National Park officer.

The volunteers were initially recruited through local papers, the BBNPA website and social media. The Walking with Offa funding was used to pay for training the volunteers in carrying out the path maintenance work, for accredited 1st Aid training and



Day into Night Navigation courses, plus the tools, GPS units (for navigation and reporting purposes) and other equipment. Work undertaken by volunteers in the Black Mountains area of the National Park has included surveying, path resurfacing, water bar construction and cobbling. As the group gained confidence and experience, they were trained to carry out heather condition survey and to survey path conditions. The intention is to train them next in other types of flora condition surveys, grouse counts and heather burning techniques: *“It has helped [the volunteers] to understand upland ecosystems.”* (Project partner)

The skills and experience that the volunteers have acquired is evident in their increased independence from the National Park staff; in year 1, volunteers gifted over 1,000 hours of time whilst the BBNPA conservation officer contributed 5,000 hours. A similar number of volunteer hours were gifted in year 2; however, only 200 hours of officer time were required. Although the funding has finished the group has continued, providing the National Park with an invaluable resource that they did not have before: *“the WWO volunteers have filled a void and allowed us to carry out activities that we could not do in-house.”* (Project partner)

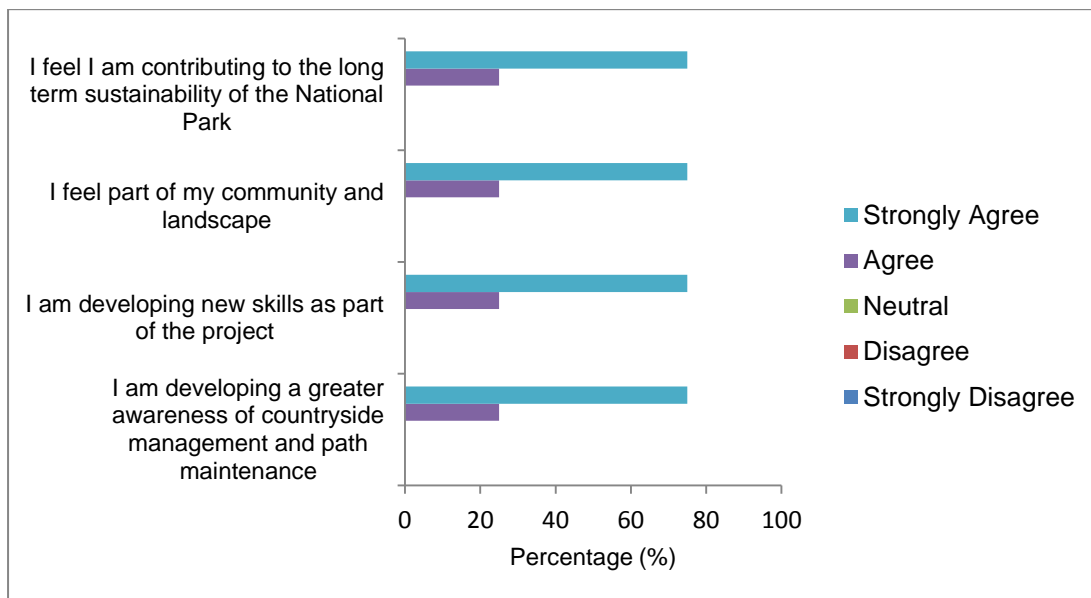
The outcomes and impacts from the scheme are significant. The work itself has helped to maintain footpaths in good condition, which in turn prevents erosion as walkers stick to the better defined paths.

The programme has also had an important cultural impact on the BBNPA itself: *“It’s also given the National Park the confidence to rely on volunteer support – it’s broken the ice in terms of using volunteers.”* (Project partner)

Economically it should help to safeguard the local economy: *“the Brecon Beacons area is a huge tourism honey pot in Wales but if the paths aren’t in condition then people won’t come so much.”* (Project partner)

There have also been positive outcomes for the volunteers themselves. In addition to the health benefits of doing physical work outdoors, they have benefitted socially and many have kept in touch outside the group. Notably the scheme has brought together volunteers from all over the UK including Swindon, Powys and Ceredigion and from varied demographic groups, including university students, graduates, someone with ADHD and a former Secret Service recruiter. Some have also become park wardens and two volunteers recently applied for jobs with the BBNPA and reached the interview stage. Figure 4 below show that all on-line survey respondents who were volunteers in this activity agreed or agreed strongly with the various outcomes suggested.

Figure 4: Survey respondents’ views on the outcomes of the community access management programme



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.10

The success of the programme resulted in the National Park securing additional funding (outside of the Walking with Offa Axis 4 project) to develop a second scheme in the central Brecon Beacons area.

4.2 Offa's Country information and interpretation

4.2.1 Rationale

This element of the project was concerned with developing a coherent approach to promoting the Offa's Country region. It was about adopting a partnership approach to the provision of new interpretation along Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and at key locations, supplemented by media development throughout the region.



More specifically this element included:

- An externally delivered Communication and Marketing Plan and associated activities, that concentrates on developing coherency and consistency in terms of promotional information and message, and not on the creation of a new brand;
- Development of three interpretation sites and interpretation boards in the Wye Valley AONB³⁴, supported by three promotional events;
- Production of a sustainable walking guide by the BBNPA;
- Development of four interpretation sites and associated infrastructure for themed trails (2 finger post and 1 interpretation board per trail);
- Interactive interpretation for the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB section of the National Trail;
- Interpretative planning between Pandy and Knighton and Chick and Prestatyn;
- Media development along the whole of the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail.

4.2.2 Summative Achievements

Marketing and Communication Plan

This has arguably been the most difficult element of the project. The intention was to establish a communications strategy that would give the border region with a clearer identity and a refreshed approach to marketing as well as a structured plan of activity to help raise awareness of the project and get its key messages across the UK. Conceptually however, this was always going to be a challenge to achieve, without compromising the identity and brand of each individual geographic area. Gwynn Angell Jones and associates were originally appointed in late 2011 to produce the Marketing and Communication Plan. Following consultation with partners and stakeholders the consultants hosted a conference³⁵ in June 2012 focused on identifying opportunities for collaboration, considering current and future visitor needs and ensuring the project is leading to sustainable benefits for all parties. Following this event, it became evident that the consultants would not be able to deliver the required brief and so in early November 2012 their contract was brought to a close. Whilst

³⁴ Specifically in Chepstow, Monmouth and Tintern

³⁵ "Making Offa's Country Work for You", 20th June 2012, Newtown

this inevitably created setbacks for the project, with hindsight, it is clear that that the process of reaching that decision as a collective had its advantages: *“the challenges of dealing with the marketing failure have strengthened the partnership.”* (Project partner)

In February 2013, Quadrant Media and Communications Ltd (hereafter termed ‘Quadrant’) was appointed to take forward this activity. The idea was not that the consultants would develop a new ‘brand’ for the Axis 4 Walking with Offa project or the Offa’s Dyke Path National Trail ‘corridor’. Rather they were commissioned to develop brand values and brand elements that reflect current marketing activities being undertaken by project partners, in order to subsequently produce some consistent marketing slogans and key messages to be used by all partners.

Quadrant completed a Marketing and Communications Strategy in April 2013 along with identified key messages and target audiences. Under the overarching ‘Irresistible Offa’ campaign, four, seasonally-aligned campaigns were planned for the course of 2013, targeting local and national audiences via media releases, digital media activities and advertorials. The campaign integrated the series of ‘King Offa’ cartoons, developed as part of the Natural Assets-funded Walking with Offa project, demonstrating another example of continuity between the latter project and the Axis 4 Cooperation project.

Prior to the start of these campaigns, Quadrant produced a toolkit on the ‘Irresistible Offa’ campaign and associated seasonal themes. They also ran a workshop with partners to discuss how the messages could be used locally.

The ‘Offa Hoppa’ (spring) campaign was to mark the launch³⁶ of the “Offa Hoppas” and would involve branding new and existing bus routes as ‘Offa Hoppa’ buses for people to use to access walking trails in the area.



The intention for the summer ‘Undiscovered Offa’ campaign was promoting less well-known attractions in the border region, or “Offa’s hidden gems” by promoting the Top 10 ‘off the beaten track’ attractions in July and August via social media and local and national press.

Offa-ly Scary Halloween theme (autumn), was to be an opportunity to highlight local ghosts, myths, legends and horrible happenings and to compile a list of ‘terrible tales’ from the borderlands history. The intention was that local walking groups would run midnight walks and that local hotels and attractions would arrange appropriate promotions such as games in the dark, ghostly storytelling and ghost hunting evenings.

The ‘Offa Shopper’ winter campaign was intended to take place during the run-up to Christmas, where consumers would be encouraged to support independent regional shops. In addition the campaign was to bring together local walking groups and retailers to promote opportunities for winter walks in the locality prior to shopping and a meal at local retailers and restaurants.

As part of the spring campaign, new and existing bus routes within the area were promoted as Offa Hoppas, under the ‘Irresistible Offa’ campaign. The existing Number 41 bus

³⁶ With press coverage of a particular launch day

between Kingston and Knighton which is jointly funded by Herefordshire and Powys Councils was also brought under the Offa Hoppa brand with a new Offa Hoppa Bus Walks booklet developed by Les Lumsdon who produced the Walking with Offa transport work (see section 4.5 below). The Kingston and Knighton 'Offa Hoppa' was launched with press coverage of the Offa Dyke Path Trail Officer dressed as King Offa and boarding the bus along with local walk leaders. The intention was to encourage more walkers to use the service in spring and summer which in turn should help to maintain the service over the winter.

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership launched a new Shuttle Bus (funded by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and other partners) but which was marketed as an Offa Hoppa route, and therefore added value to the Axis 4 Cooperation Project in a thoroughly integrated way.

The summer, autumn and winter campaigns went ahead but did not follow the intended approach as set down in the toolkit. Several partners recognised that part of the reason for this was that the success of the campaigns depended on information and support from partners. Unfortunately there was not enough input from local stakeholders – retailers, restaurants etc who were intended to be actively involved – and ultimately the campaigns lacked substance: “[Quadrant] needed support from partners to put [the campaigns] into action ... they possibly didn't get it.” (Project partner)



In addition to these campaigns, Quadrant has also promoted the area through social media and press coverage. Some partners and other stakeholders have suggested that it took time to establish the Irresistible Offa brand and to market it through social media and that more use could have been made of Facebook and Twitter, in terms of disseminating the brand to the general public: “There are a disappointing number of followers and likes of the brand, particularly as 80% of them are likely to be involved in the WWO project in some way.” (Project partner)

On conclusion of the project, key results from the PR project included the following³⁷:

Month-long, half page weekly feature in The Daily Post³⁸ creating the opportunity for over 118,228 readers to read about Walking with Offa and generating an AVE of £13,648 and a PR Value of £40,944.

A double page spread in The Southern Daily Echo published just before Halloween to encourage families to visit the region during half-term that generated an OTS figure of nearly 29,648, an AVE of £6,824 and a PR Value of £20,472.

A full page feature in The Devon Journal just before October half-term and Halloween that had an OTS of around 26,000 an AVE of £1,675 and a PR value of £5,025.

³⁷ As reported in the Quadrant Walking with Offa End of project PR report March – December 2013.

³⁸ The Daily Post has an average readership of 29,557 across North and Mid Wales.

A four and a half minute long interview was carried out with Richard Tyler on behalf of Walking with Offa on BBC Radio Shropshire that created 102,000 opportunities to hear about the project.

Coverage across Hereford, Brecon and Mid Wales was also estimated to have an OTS of around 31,000.

On completion³⁹ of the overall Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration project, the Irresistible Offa Facebook page had 141 likes, whilst the Twitter account had 272 followers⁴⁰.

Reflecting back on the success of the marketing, partners are somewhat divided. There is a general consensus that more time was needed to establish a media presence of any substance: *“The seasonable marketing campaign could have been better – this was because partners didn’t contribute and businesses didn’t come forward with stories ... the issue was timing ... the stories weren’t there.”* (Project partner)

It was suggested that this stemmed from a lack of understanding about what was needed from partners, an issue that at least in part was due to the need for a fuller briefing from Quadrant: *“Quadrant wanted products to market but didn’t really explain how the process needs to work amongst partners in terms of developing the content.”* (Project partner)

Others suggested that limited success was to some extent an inevitability, given the complex remit that Quadrant have inherited, namely to deliver a campaign, without creating a new brand or undermining distinct local identities: *“I don’t think the Irresistible Offa concept is very well known ... it’s been difficult to market the project as we all have our own brands.”* (Project partner)

The challenge was intensified by an existing plethora of different marketing messages and terminology being used to describe to English-Welsh border area, and the need to ensure public understanding and awareness.

Other partners are more positive about the outcomes and the establishment of a brand that can be taken forward by the partnership in the future:

“On marketing we have learnt through the process and reached an identity that allows us individually to promote within our own distinct areas through the Irresistible Offa umbrella.”
(Project partner)

“The brand is also sustainable and has a shelf life as it can move seamlessly onto phase 2 of WWO and can be applied to everything.” (Project partner)



Interpretation Sites in the Wye Valley and Powys

³⁹ Figures are from January 2015.

⁴⁰ The Walking with Offa’s social media accounts were set up and initially managed by Quadrant. On completion of their contract, management of these accounts were taken up by the project coordinator.

The installation of interpretation materials in the Wye Valley AONB was informed by an interpretation audit undertaken in 2013. The audit identified a range of possible sites including Chepstow Leisure Centre, Lower Wyndcliff, Tintern Wireworks, Redbrook FoDDC⁴¹, Ross on Wye Riverside car park, Caplor and the Hole-in-the-Wall. Installation work began in spring 2014 and a total of three no. interpretation sites and three no. interpretation boards were developed supported by three promotional events.

In Powys, interpretation developments were both physical and virtual, and involved the installation of plaques and benches with engraved maps on the top and interpretative panels attached to existing fingerposts. This was complemented by the production of four audio books and 'i' books, relating to specific walks and an interpretative leaflet.

Sustainable Walking Guide

BBNPA produced a Code of Conduct for walking in unenclosed upland areas that was intended to supplement rather than duplicate the Countryside Code. It includes guidance on where and how to park vehicles, protocols for dog behaviour⁴², walking on mudstone and erosion implications. The document is available to all partners to upload to their websites. At the time of reporting however, the Code of Conduct was not available on any of these websites.

Interactive Interpretation Project

The purpose of this element of the project had been to use digital application to enable walkers to access interpretative information about sites of historical interest. An Augmented Reality (AR) app platform was developed by Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB. The app focused on historical reconstruction triggered by QR codes at eight different locations in the area. Due to poor signal strength and WIFI coverage, the project was adapted so that the app was also available as a download to smartphones and other devices, prior to visiting the physical location. Walkers could also download image files, audio and film.

There was an important knowledge transfer component to the work, as the AONB officer ran some best practice events on AR application with Axis 4 Walking with Offa partners. Moreover, as stated above in section 4.1.2, partners in Powys also developed AR and digital products (specifically walking routes and 'i' books).

Interpretation Plan/Media Development

As with the marketing and communications plan, the purpose of this activity was to develop a framework that would allow for coherency in any interpretation material developed by partners and other stakeholders. Nigel McDonald from No-nonsense-interpretation Ltd was commissioned early on in the project to produce three interpretation plans; one covering Chirk to Prestatyn, a second covering Monmouth to Knighton in addition to an overarching plan for the entire border region. The interpretation manuals have helped to influence and set out design principles for community groups and are intended to help ensure consistency in any interpretative developments along the national trail – for example interpretation panels, inlay panels, leaflets, apps and QR codes.

⁴¹ Forest of Dean District Council

⁴² For example the effect that they can have on ground nesting birds, and flocks of sheep.

Following the development of the plans, Nigel McDonald ran interpretation workshops for local tourism businesses and other stakeholders, which were commended by participants: “[the workshop] *empowered local businesses and helped us to visualise our Unique Selling Points ... Nigel really opened the doors to thinking about the visitors and how we can present the right offer and experience*”. (Stakeholder)

4.3 Business and community engagement and training

4.3.1 Rationale

The focus of this activity was on building capacity amongst local communities within the Offa’s Country area, and the remit was primarily shared between the Axis 4 Walking with Offa Project coordinator and project delivery officers in each of the partner organisations. This activity included the provision of 12 engagement events targeting certain key groups (particularly local business networks and community groups), training three new walking guides in the Wye Valley AONB and a programme of WaW exchange visits, networking events, conferences and best practice visits.



The rationale resembled the LEADER ‘hands on’ bottom-up approach, in this case boosting businesses’ and walk leaders’ knowledge of their local area, and developing their skills to share this information with visitors. Training topics was expected to include local walks, the natural and cultural assets of the local area and Offa’s Country (including wildlife, archaeology, history, and folklore), land management and visitor information about regular local events, food and drink and local attractions.

4.3.2 Summative Achievements

Business engagement activity

The business engagement workshops were delivered by consultant, Alison Caffyn, in conjunction with the Offa’s Dyke Path National Trail Officer and relevant local partners. The events were largely informed by the ‘Sense of Place’ workshops that Alison Caffyn hosted for walk leaders and local tourism businesses with Natural Assets funding, ensuring synergy between the approach in England and Wales, despite the different funding timescales.

Six one-day business engagement workshops were held in Welshpool, Llangollen, Kington, Abergavenny, Monmouth and Oswestry, with an average of between 20 and 25 people in attendance⁴³. Topics covered in the sessions included natural and cultural assets in the local area, such as wildlife, archaeology, history, folklore, land management, local events, food and drink, attractions, places to visit, presenting and organising guided walks, health and safety and Duty of Care. In addition a set of mobile pop-up panels were produced, along with audio visual equipment to support officers in presenting at business engagement sessions.

⁴³ None of the workshops had fewer than 10 participants.

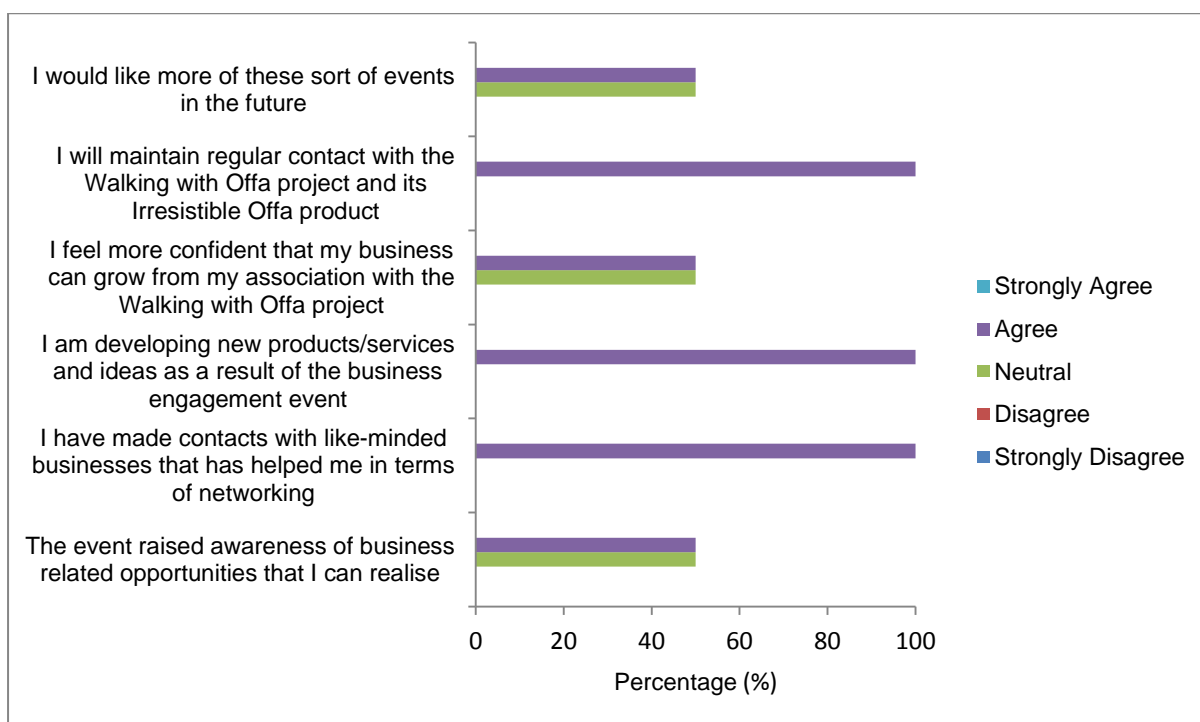
In Corwen, the business engagement event was attended by a local business owner who has since established Corwen Walking Festival which has strengthened the local business community.

The reaction from businesses who attended the business engagement activity and who completed the final on-line survey of Walking with Offa beneficiaries was generally positive. Half of respondents commenting on their experience of the business engagement support rated the management of the event as ‘very good’ whilst the other half rated it as ‘good’. Similarly, the information and resources provided at the event, and the opportunities to network were both rather as ‘very good’ by 50% of respondents and ‘good’ by the other 50%.

Business owners who completed the survey were also asked to comment on their awareness of the overall project and the way it has affected their business and their local area. All respondents agreed that they were developing new products/services and ideas as a result of the business engagement event and that they had made contacts with like-minded businesses that has helped them in terms of networking.

Figure 5 below shows that half of respondents claimed to feel more confident that their business can grow from their association with the Walking with Offa project (the other half gave a ‘neutral’ response); however all respondents who commented on the business engagement events stated that they would maintain regular contact with the Walking with Offa project and its Irresistible Offa product. In terms of this element of the project in particular, half of respondents would like more of these sorts of events in the future (the other half gave a ‘neutral’ response).

Figure 5: Survey respondent views on the outcomes from business engagement events



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.8

The survey responses cited above can be interpreted as evidence of the relative success of the business engagement activities. It should be noted that respondents were completing the survey up to year *after* having attended the event, and therefore their response may have been tempered over time.

Volunteer walking guide training

Wye Valley AONB undertook two walk leaders' courses in areas such as public speaking, leadership, first aid, local history and sense of place. Powys Council also undertook a guided walk for volunteer leaders on their proposed Montgomery circular walk route. Other guided walk training included one Golden guided walk for leaders and two walk leaders' visually impaired courses. No-nonsense-interpretation Ltd also ran workshops on how to lead guided walks.

In addition two walks leader training sessions took place in Shropshire in 2013. The first held in May, at Bishops Castle had nine participants was aimed to provide practical advice for walking leader. The second, held in June in Ludlow attracted 13 participants and focused on themed walks and Sense of Place. The latter was deemed more successful and more targeted to the needs of participants than the former.



Walkers are Welcome exchange visits

As discussed above, a key achievement of the Walking with Offa project was the way it has helped to grow the WaW network within the region. A critical element of this was a series of exchange visits to existing WaW towns, for stakeholders who are interested in seeking WaW accreditation for their own town. Over the course of the project, exchange visits were made to towns both outside and, to a greater extent, within the border region, including Chepstow, Church Stretton, Crickhowell, Norfolk, Ross-on-Wye and Winchcombe.

Networking and best practice events and conferences

Over the course of the project a wide variety of capacity building workshops, networking and best practice events, exchange visits and conferences were held by various project partners with support from other stakeholders – for example WaW groups. In addition to the aforementioned business engagement workshops and WaW exchange visits, activities under this theme included a sustainable transport best practice event, an ambassador best practice event, a “walking and eco-minds” best practice event, a marketing workshop, a “Boots ‘n’ Beds” conference, several walking festival best practice events, ten media and interpretation events, two WaW conferences (one of which was the WaW National

Conference), an interpretation workshop, a marketing and sponsorship workshop, a ‘talking-walking’ event, an RDP European Commission Visit and an end of project conference.

Whilst these events differed in emphasis, the feedback from partners and other stakeholder has suggested that as a collective, they were highly valued, in terms of sharing best practice, raising awareness of the Walking with Offa project itself and engaging local volunteers: *“The conference gave us the opportunity to see what groups are doing in other areas that we could then replicate here. Plus it helped us appreciate the advantages of our own area – e.g.: local food and local shopping opportunities.”* (Stakeholder)

4.4 Walking promotion



4.4.1 Rationale

This element of the project was focussed on online promotion of the Offa’s Country area via enhancements to the Offa’s Dyke Path National Trail website, the Wye Valley AONB website and Brecon Beacons National Park Authority website. The objective was to give these existing websites a wider appeal, in terms of age and interest groups. For example, walks developed and/or promoted as part of the Axis 4 Walking with Offa project would be made available for download from the sites in both traditional PDF route maps and GPS equivalents and would be listed in a searchable index enabling interested walkers to identify appropriate routes by location, distance, degree of intensity etc.

This theme also included the development of the Offa’s Dyke Passport/Hall of Fame as a means of rewarding those who walk the entire length of the trail⁴⁴, as well as monitoring usage and gaining feedback on the visitor offer in the area⁴⁵.

4.4.2 Summative Achievements

Web Enhancements

⁴⁴ The mechanism would be a simple and flexible passport scheme whereby visitors would collect stamps from a range of services along the trail and receive a badge or certificate of completion and an invitation to submit a photo for the Trail Hall of Fame.

⁴⁵ In addition to submitting photos, walkers who complete the trail would be asked to give feedback on their experience and their views on the quality of the walking visitor offer.

The new Offa's Dyke Path website sits within the National Trail framework, and is structured around i) Be Inspired ii) Plan Your Visit iii) Trail Information and iv) Trail News. Functions within the site allow for leaflet and map downloads, uploading of photographs from trail users and downloadable postcards. The site is interactive and informative with a direct link to the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail Officer enabling walkers and prospective walkers to submit enquiries and report issues during their trail experience.



The site has links to transport pages, which includes an interactive map developed through the research undertaken by Alison Caffyn and Les Lumsden (see section 4.5.1 below). Prospective walkers can also find information about accommodation, baggage transfer and local events. Whilst not prominent, the 'Irresistible Offa' campaign described above is featured on the website and therefore is given a public-facing platform.

Walkers looking to complete the entire trail ("end-to-enders") have the opportunity to download a "Hall of Fame Completion Card" before they begin the walk. They then need to get the card stamped at the start and end of their journey, and at a minimum of three locations along the way⁴⁶. One completion, they return the card to the Trail Officer in order to appear on the Hall of Fame and receive a free key ring.

In addition, a new 'Irresistible Offa' website has been established, which includes panoramic photos of various key locations along the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and surrounding area and the names and altitude of the borderland mountains and hills. The website, branded as "An Irresistible Offa Wales/England borderlands" with the strapline "Explore, Discover, Enjoy", features a map of the border region, with links to websites of each of the project partners and Walkers are Welcome towns in the area. The download area of the website provides site visitors with the opportunity to download leaflets about linear and circular walks located at various stages of the National Trail. Some of the more strategic documents produced through the Walking with Offa project (for example the Transport and Tourism report and the various Interpretation Plans) are also available for download. This therefore gives the website a dual-facing role, in that it provides information and resources to prospective walkers and visitors to the area, as well as guidance to local and national partners with a role in enhancing the tourism appeal of the border region.

Some web enhancements were undertaken to the Wye Valley AONB website, including the introduction of downloadable maps to the walking pages; however progress was hindered by staff sickness.

The BBNPA had initially intended to develop a free-standing website just for walking, that would include Park Explorer mapping function software; however the work coincided with the development of a new site for the BBNPA overall and so it was decided that walking

⁴⁶ Walkers can get their card stamped at can be stamped at post offices, pubs, bed and breakfasts and other public venues.

information would be best placed within this larger website. At the time of reporting, the mapping function has still to be finalised.

4.5 Sustainable transport development and promotion



4.5.1 Rationale

The objective of this fifth and final theme of the project was to improve public transport facilities in the Offa's Country area; specifically to make services better connected and to run more frequently, to improve the information about and marketing of public transport services and ultimately to encourage ecologically sustainable tourism development. The originally intended work-plan included:

- Four bespoke mini bus tours in the Wye Valley AONB;
- Promotion of a seven-day network of bus services linking key points along the trail with major roads in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB;
- The development of two Green Transport Nodes in the Wye Valley AONB which will involve the production and installation of welcome signs, maps, transport information and walking guidance;
- Development at the two bus stations in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB that are near to the Trail in the interests of improving visitor awareness of the Trail and the local walking offer;
- A public transport study for the entire Offa's Country area, linking national and regional transport plans, identifying opportunities for integrating information and ticketing provision and leading to an action plan for cross border transport connections;

- Production of sustainable transport literature⁴⁷ to promote walking the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail using public transport.

4.5.2 Summative Achievements

Sustainable Bus Tours/Services

In the Wye Valley AONB the decision was taken to move away from bespoke minibus services and instead to explore opportunities for existing commercial suppliers to provide the service, with support in terms of sense of place training and marketing, etc provided by the AONB.

The existing No.34 bus service connecting Monmouth and Ross-on-Wye was promoted by the AONB through leaflets and timetable information. In addition, the service was extended to include Sunday and bank holiday Monday, in the interests of serving walkers. Records show that passenger numbers have increased since the promotional support, and anecdotal feedback from drivers suggests that walkers represent a sizable proportion of service users.



Alison Caffyn and Les Lumsdon were commissioned by the project partners to deliver a Sustainable Transport and Tourism in Offa's Country study. The study was intended to meet five key objectives, namely:

1. To better integrate transport and tourism across and up and down the Welsh-English border
2. To encourage more of those visiting Offa's Country to use alternative transport options
3. To improve the ease of finding out about and booking alternative transport options
4. To improve the experience of using alternative transport options
5. To improve access to and enhance the experience of walking in Offa's Country using alternatives transport options

The study involved a thorough review of transport and tourism provision along the border area and extensive consultation with Walking with Offa partners and various other relevant stakeholders, including transport, tourism and countryside officers and a sample of businesses already active in sustainable transport and tourism within the area.

The final report, produced in August 2012, set out the main findings from the study, including the many challenges to delivery and take-up of sustainable transport options, examples of good practice businesses and initiatives in the study area and elsewhere in the UK and actions which can be implemented by Walking with Offa partners. The report and accompanying action plan is therefore something that can be taken forward by project partners and other stakeholders to develop sustainable transport and tourism along the English-Welsh border area.

⁴⁷ In the form of web pages and leaflet, providing all the public transport options and timetables and enabling visitors to plan their routes.

In Denbighshire, the Llangollen Lift minibus ran as a pilot from June until early October in both 2012 and 2013. It provided transport between the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and Llangollen, so that walkers were able to use local shops and services in the town. Given the demand for the service, the decision has been taken to continue running the Llangollen Lift: *"the Llangollen Lift Bus Service has worked well. It came at the right time and ran longer than we anticipated. The role of the project in terms of market testing has been excellent in that the private company wants to take on the service permanently."* (Project partner)

The 'Clwydian Ranger' by contrast saw poor demand. It was run by Denbighshire Local Transport Unit and operated on weekends only between 10am to 4pm. It was also operational daily during the 2013 Eisteddfod. Unlike the Llangollen Lift however, it is not expected to continue as a viable service.

Green Transport Node

In the Wye Valley AONB this activity was relinquished early on in the project due to feasibility issues and the funding was vired towards the extension of the overall programme.

Public Transport Study

The Sustainable Transport and Tourism in Offa's Country study was completed in by Les Lumsdon and Alison Caffyn in August 2012. The study looked at usage of alternative forms of transport, barriers to the use of alternative transport, addressing the barriers to use, market trends, alongside objectives including i) integrating transport and tourism ii) alternative transport options iii) promotion, information and ticketing iv) improving the experience v) walking from public transport. The study also involved monitoring how different organisations (from tourism bodies to local B&Bs) promote and enable sustainable transport options.



The consultants carried out an audit of organisations' websites and other information and then produced an action and implementation plan for overcoming the various barriers to sustainable tourism development. Part of the implementation stage involved consultation with bus and taxi companies. Initially the brief had been to conduct a "broad brush" piece of research; however, following a recommendation from the consultants, the decision was taken to produce detailed case studies on bus companies and walking groups: *"by going into more detail it meant we got to the heart of the issues."* (Stakeholder)

Following consultation, a number of public transport companies agreed to put leaflets and posters in their buses and trains and in one area the local authority contributed funding for the publication of these leaflets.

The transport implementation stage also included the production of a leaflet showcasing the whole border region and the individual towns as well as public transport information. The leaflet has (somewhat inadvertently) become invaluable in a promotional capacity, and it has been reprinted as part of the P4G activity.

Sustainable Transport Literature

Key sustainable transport material that has been produced by project partners includes:

- Offa Hoppa bus leaflets;
- 34 bus leaflet for Wye Valley AONB;
- Llangollen Lift leaflets (produced annually) and poster;
- Clwydian Ranger leaflet;
- Sustainable Transport study report;
- “Irresistible Offa’ map (including public transport information).



5 Overall Summative Achievements

5.1 Overall Project Progress – Output and Results Targets

Figure 6 indicates the level of physical outputs and results from delivery partners for the whole project period up to March 2015. The charts show the “approved target” set in the baseline report position in March 2012 and the final claimed outputs in March 2015.

The charts show that in every case targets have been exceeded, in some cases to a significant degree.

5.1.1 Outputs

The output indicators have been exceeded as follows:

- Number of partnerships participated in (met 6 no. against a target of 4 (50% over));
- Number of community capacity building events held (met 55 no. against a target of 26 (112% over));
- No of pilot projects financially supported (met 10 no. against a target of 8 (25% over));
- No of local recreational infrastructure projects financially supported (met 26 no. against a target of 14 (86% over));
- Number of feasibility studies (met 6 no. against a target of 2 (200% over));
- Number of consultant exercises undertaken (met 9 no. against a target of 2 (350% over));
- No of awareness raising events (met 33. no. against a target of 29 (14% over));

- Number of interpretive materials produced (met 103 no. against a target of 26 (296% over));
- Number of marketing and promotional activities undertaken (met 103 no. against a target of 45 (128% over));
- Number of women participating in the project (met 113 no. against a target of 103 (10% over));
- Number of welsh speakers participating in the project (met 21 no. against a target of 13 (62% over));
- Number of elderly people participating in the project (met 45 no. against a target of 10 (350% over));
- Number of activities undertaken to raise awareness of the environmental consequences of the project (met 14 no. against a target of 6 (133% over));
- Number of projects aimed at environmental enhancement/sustainability (met 2 no. against a target of 1 (50% over));

5.1.2 Results⁴⁸

Met Target

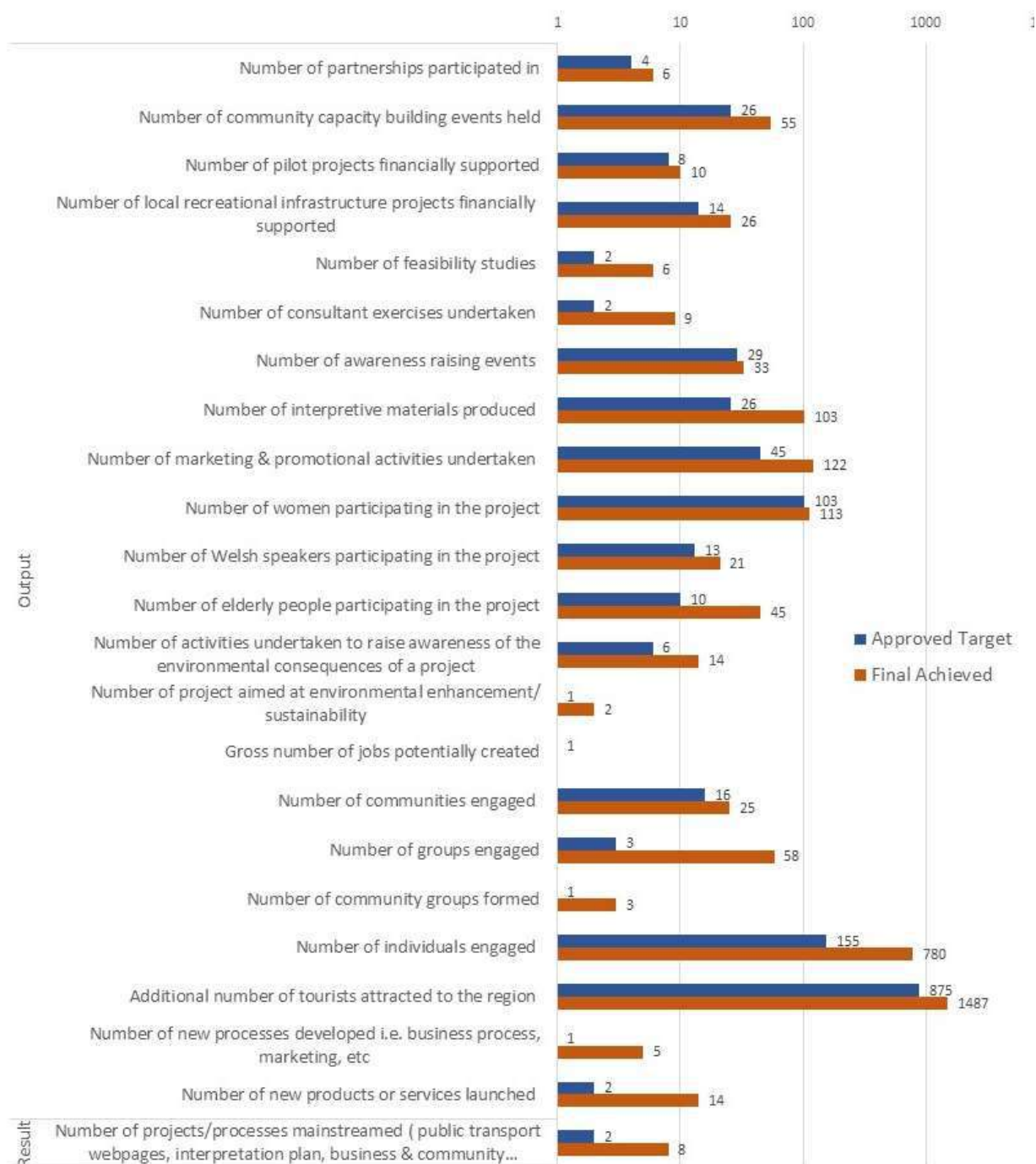
All results indicators have been exceeded as follows:

- Number of communities engaged (met 25⁴⁹ no. against a target of 16 (56% over));
- Number of groups engaged (met 58 no. against a target of 3 (1833% over));
- Number of community groups formed (met 3 no. against a target of 1 (200% over));
- Number of individuals engaged (met 780 no. against a target of 155 (403% over));
- Additional number of tourists attracted to the region (met 1487 no. against a target of 875 (70% over));
- Number of new processes developed (met 5 no. against a target of 1 (400% over));
- Number of new products or services launched (met 14 no. against a target of 2 (600% over));
- Number of projects/processes mainstreamed (met 8 no. against a target of 2 (300% over));

⁴⁸ Please note, "Gross number of jobs potentially created" was originally an approved target, following approval from Welsh Government it was deleted from the approved suite of outputs and results during the course of the project.

⁴⁹ This result indicators does not include Walkers are Welcome Towns that have been engaged outside the physical scope of the project area.

Figure 6 - Walking with Offa Project – Output/Result Indicators – March 2015 Situation



Source: Project delivery returns to adventa from respective project delivery partners; final claim March 2015.

5.2 Financial Progress

Figure 7 indicates the expenditure incurred as of March 2015 final claim. The chart shows the expenditure incurred at the baseline evaluation stage, expenditure incurred at the interim stage and the final expenditure incurred between September 2013 and March 2015.

Activities and cost descriptions are detailed below. It should be noted Rural Development Programme funded projects are allowed to vire up to 10% between activity headings with no approval required from Welsh Government. This was used where there have been specific projects came in under the original budgets (for example if procurement were lower than anticipated) and so resultant savings or under spends re-distributed across other project activity headings.

Theme 1 – Improving the Walking Offer

- Improving the Walking Offer – an additional £21,010 was allocated due to demand for additional circular walks in the Clwydian Range;
- Exchange Visits – Walkers and Welcome – met approved expenditure.

Theme 2 – Offa’s Country Information and Interpretation

- Information and Interpretation – small underspend due to value-for-money testing;
- Communications Study and Action Plan – small underspend due to value-for-money testing;

Theme 3 – Business and Community Engagement and Training

- Business & Community Engagement & Training - underspend due to value-for-money testing;
- Networking Events - met approved expenditure;
- Best Practice Training Courses - met approved expenditure.

Theme 4 – Walking Promotion

- Walking Promotion - met approved expenditure.

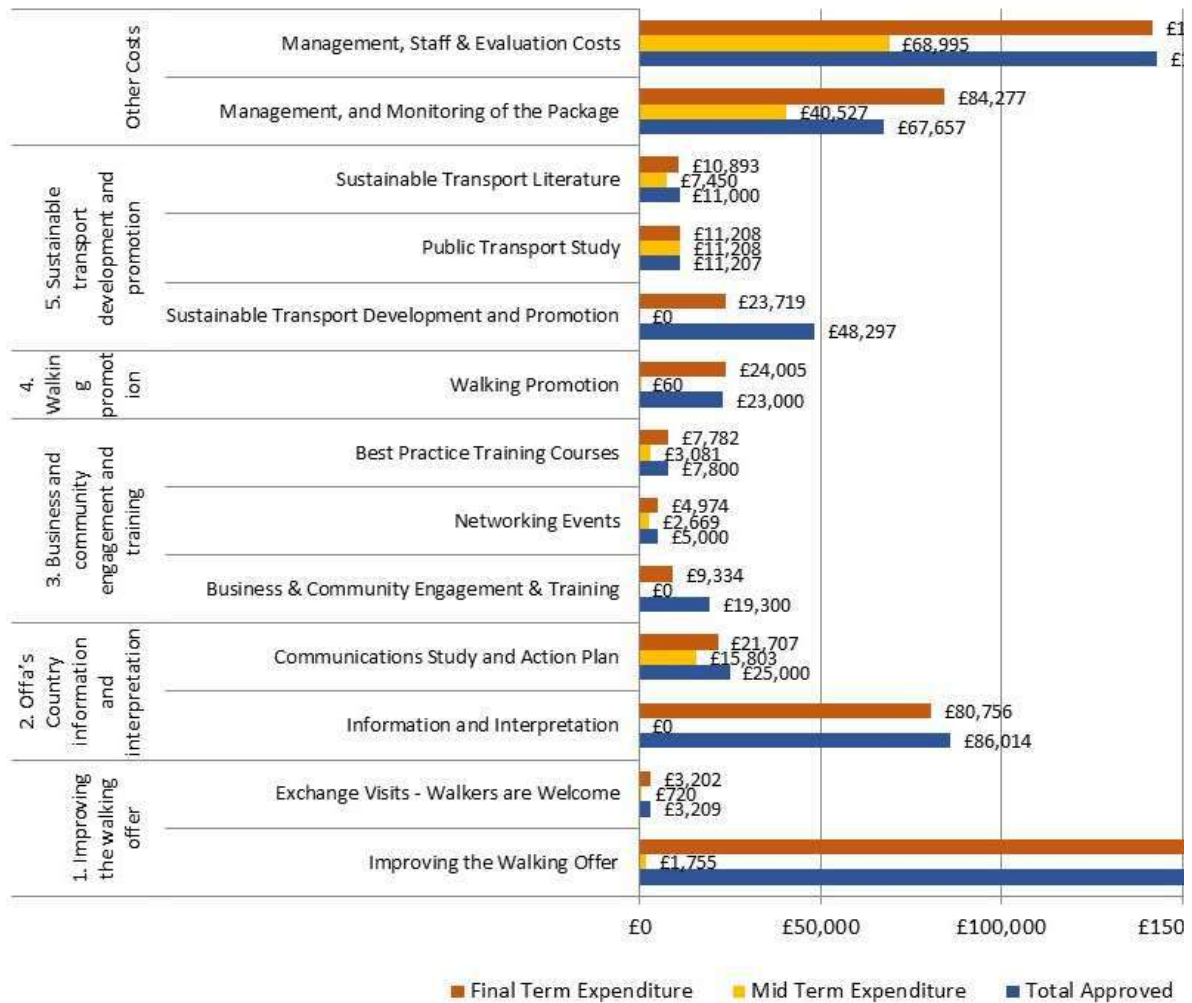
Theme 5 – Sustainable Transport and Development Promotion

- Sustainable Transport Development and Promotion – underspend due to removal of Chepstow transport nodes activity; redistributed of monies to Improving the Walking Offer infrastructure;
- Public Transport Study - met approved expenditure.
- Sustainable Transport Literature - met approved expenditure.

Other costs

- Management and Monitoring of the Package – additional management costs (£16,620) for 12 month project extension;
- Management, Staff and Evaluation Costs - met approved expenditure.

Figure 7 - Total Expenditure - Final Evaluation Stage; March 2015

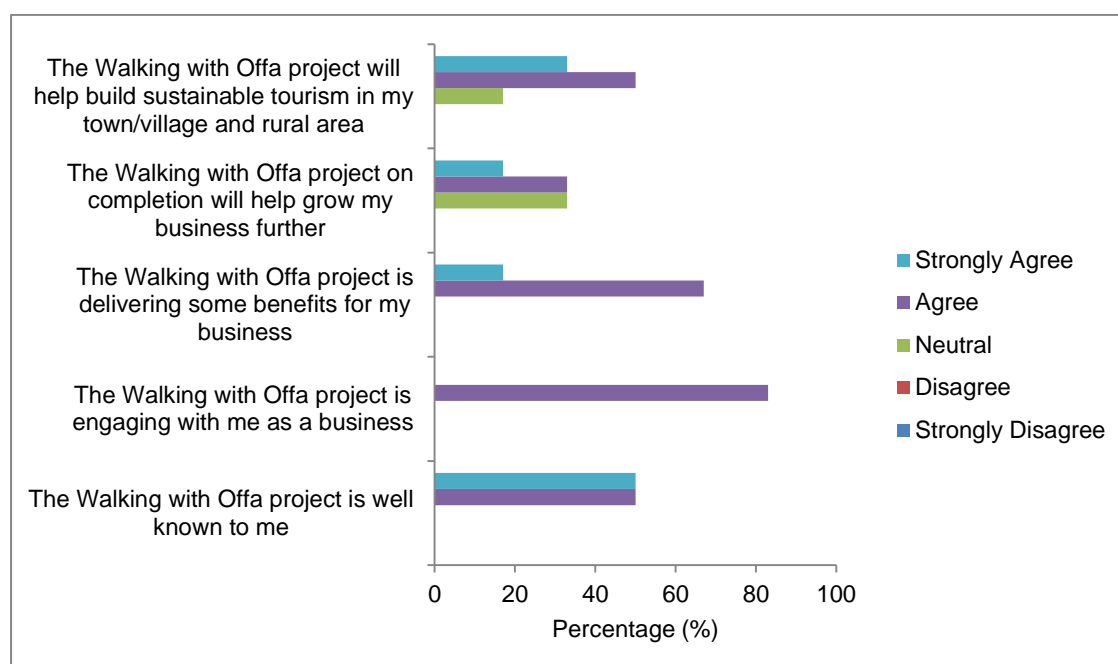


Source: Mon 59, March 2015; adventa

5.3 Feedback from beneficiaries

As part of the survey, business owners who had engaged with the Walking with Offa project in some way were asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements in relation to the outcomes and impacts of the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project. Figure 8 below shows that not one respondent disagreed with any of these statements. All respondents agreed or agreed strongly that the Walking with Offa project was well known to them, that it was engaging them as a business and, critically, that it was delivering some benefits to their business. Over four-fifths (83%) agreed or agreed strongly that the project would help build sustainable tourism in their town/village and rural area (the remaining 17% expressed a neutral response to this statement); whilst two-thirds agreed or agreed strongly that on completion, the project would help grow their business further (the other third were 'neutral').

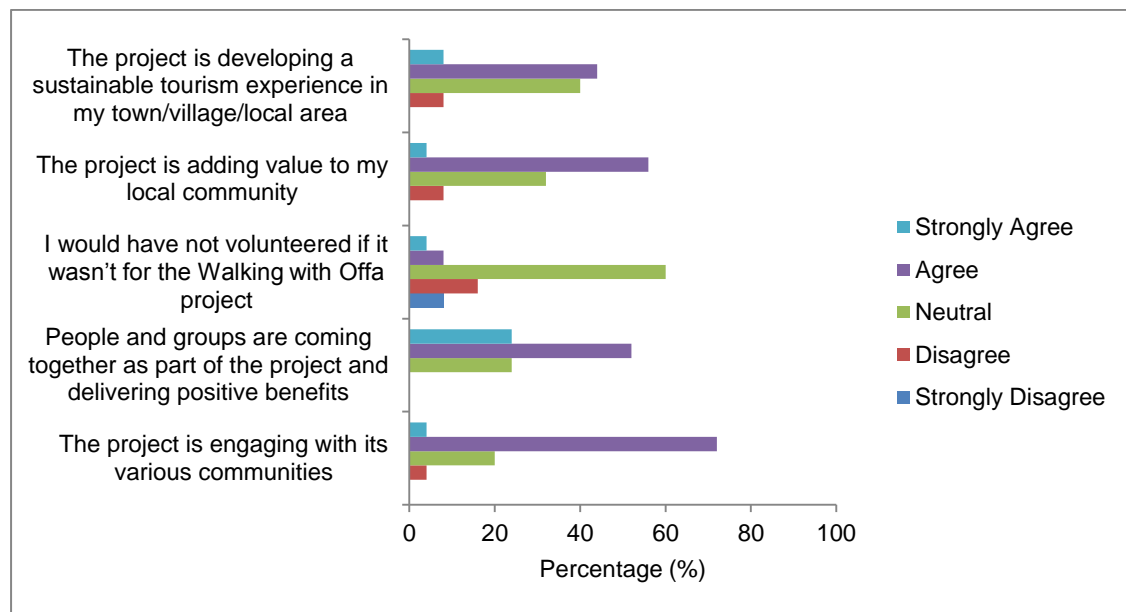
Figure 8: Survey respondents' views on outcomes of the Walking with Offa Project



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.16

All survey respondents were asked to comment on potential outcomes and impacts from the Walking with Offa project, and figure 9 below reveal a broader range of perspectives; however, overall, the feedback is very positive, with less than a third of respondents disagreeing with any of the statements. Over three-quarters (76%) of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that the project was engaging with its various communities. The same proportion agreed or agreed strongly that people and groups were coming together as part of the project and delivering positive benefits. Significantly over half (60%) of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that the project is adding value to their local community whilst just over half (52%) agreed (8% strongly) that the project was developing a sustainable tourism experience in their town/village/local area. The only statement with which any respondents disagreed strongly, was “I would have not volunteered if it wasn’t for the Walking with Offa project”; only 12% agreed with this statement (4% strongly) whilst the majority (60%) were neutral. Nonetheless, this does not reflect negatively on the project itself; rather it suggests that many of the people who engaged with the project were already undertaking voluntary work in some capacity – something that was endorsed by feedback from partners and external stakeholders who were interviewed as part of the qualitative research.

Figure 9: Survey respondents' views on impacts of the Walking with Offa Project



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.18

6 Future developments

Without exception, partners are keen to take forward a 'phase 2' of the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Cooperation project, which is a critical finding in itself. A second "Walking with Offa" business plan has been produced and ideas for potential funding sources are under consideration.

There was general agreement across the partnership of the value in building upon what has already been achieved, with particular widespread reference made to the Irresistible Offa brand; Walkers are Welcome developments and the business engagement events, albeit with some variation:

"[the partnership] needs to sustain and build on what's been done plus introduce a new twist and focus, like heritage ... ie: what you see when you go for a walk rather than just the logistics of doing the walk." (Project partner)

"The WaW network is a legacy that needs to spread to other towns." (Project partner)

"We need to build on the foundations we've constructed under the first phase and continue to engage with the same people we've invested in." (Project partner)

Several partners referred to ways in which a potential phase 2 could learn from the first project and to alter its focus and increase impact, particularly in terms of collaboration and capacity building:

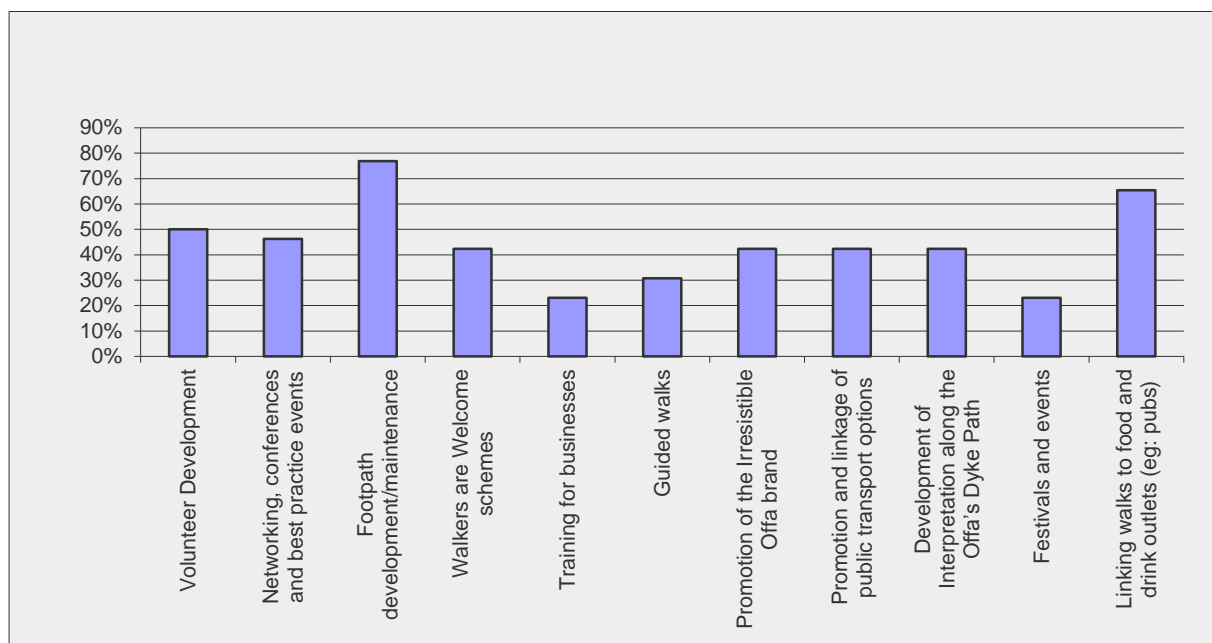
"For phase two it's important that all activity is truly cross-border – ie: practical cross border work." (Project partner)

"We need to be developing more ambassadors and champions [who] have a voice for Offa's Country ... otherwise there is a risk that people in the community burn out." (Project partner)

Whilst the consensus was that walking needed to remain a key focus for any follow-on project - "the priority is to publicise the existing routes" – partners expressed differing views on the appropriateness of introducing a new 'theme'; many were in favour of cycling or, to a lesser degree horse-riding, being developed alongside walking. Others however, felt the potential market for these activities was too limited and that the partnership would do best to continue concentrating on walking.

Interestingly, stakeholder views on potential future activities were notably different as the survey responses shown in figure 10 below shows. Footpath development and maintenance appears to be the biggest priority in their view, given that over three-quarters of respondents selected it as an appropriate activity for a potential phase 2. This was followed by activity linking walks to food and drink outlets, which was selected by 65% of the sample. Walkers are Welcome schemes and business training – both of which were deemed to be priorities by many partners – were both selected by less than half of respondents – less than a quarter in the case of business training. This may however reflect the different elements of the project that respondents engaged with, and the fact that 'walking' and the development/promotion of walks would be the common theme across all respondents.

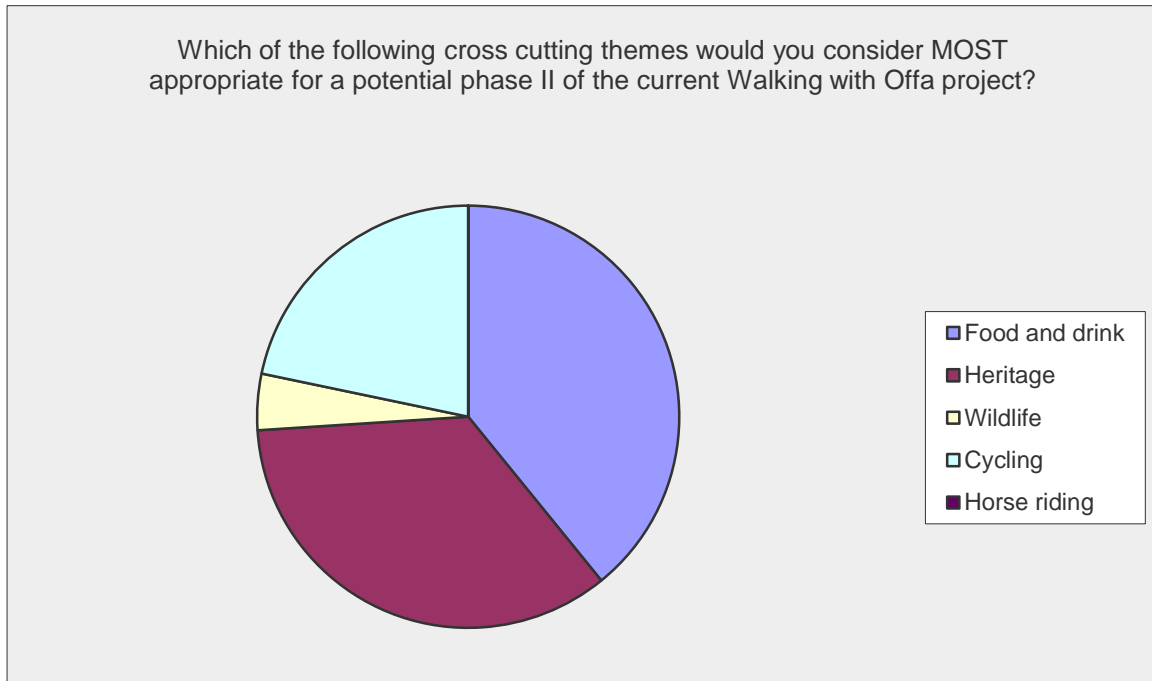
Figure 10: Survey respondents' views on appropriate activities for potential phase II Walking with Offa Project



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.20

Respondents were subsequently asked to select from a list of possible themes, the one that they deemed would be the most important in a potential phase 2. Food and Drink and Heritage, were the most common choices, cited by 39% and 35%, respectively. Just over a fifth thought that cycling should be the priority theme, 4% selected wildlife and not one respondent felt that horse-riding would be the most appropriate theme for a potential phase II of the Walking with Offa project.

Figure 11: Survey respondents' views on appropriate themes for potential phase II Walking with Offa Project



Source: Final evaluation of Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project Survey q.21

7 Conclusions

The Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project was both pioneering and ambitious, in terms of what it sought to do and how it intended doing it. The project required the maintenance of a multi-sector, cross-border partnership which in turn relied on the goodwill and commitment of partners to its operations. Not only has this requirement been met; the partnership has strengthened over the course of the three year project and is well-equipped to build on the work delivered through the project in the future.

In purely data terms, the project has, without exception exceeded all its outputs and results targets, in some cases to excess, suggesting that partners may have underestimated their potential achievements at the outset. Furthermore there is qualitative evidence of many outcomes and impacts that the project has had on local individuals and communities, socially, environmentally, and, to some extent, economically.

The project's strong focus on business engagement has created a community of sustainable and creative business champions of the various Walking with Offa activities and of the overall Irresistible Offa product.

The decision to apply for a project variation, resulting in an extension to the overall project timeline and changes to certain activities was appropriate and has enabled a more effective use of resources. Throughout the project, partners were able to recognise where intended activity was inappropriate and there are several examples of where the original work plan was modified to become more viable or more suited to local or regional need.

Arguable the biggest challenge that the project faced was to promote the border region, without detracting from local branding and identity. There were some inconsistencies in how partners promoted project identity and buy-in to certain promotional measures. For example, not all bus services were marketed under the 'Offa Hoppa' brand and the promotion of 'Irresistible Offa' varied across partner websites. Furthermore, whilst the work undertaken by Quadrant was a significant improvement on the former marketing consultant, the implementation of the Marketing and Communications Plan on the ground has lacked content. A large factor in this was the lack of buy-in from partners and local communities, which is still in its early days of becoming embedded. Nonetheless, Quadrant delivered some valuable media and press-related activity and produced a dynamic Marketing and Communications Strategy. Moreover, there is a growing awareness of the Irresistible Offa brand that has the potential to expand further.

In recognition of the limited timescales for funding, a number of the individual activities have aimed to build capacity and local ownership (for example via the Walkers are Welcome scheme and the establishment of the Community Access Management Programme) or will require little or no resource to be maintained (for example the various AR and web based apps). Both of these approaches are likely to maximise the opportunity for future sustainability. The technological emphasis of some of these activities has also helped to ensure currency, innovation and widened visitor appeal.

The acquisition of the P4G grant funding from Visit Wales demonstrates the regard that Welsh Government and other stakeholders have for the partnership and its ability to further develop the work achieved through the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration project.

Individual partners have piloted very different initiatives (for example the Remote Interpretation app) that have been disseminated across the partnership. The future challenge for the partnership will be to roll out successful approaches to other areas. Whilst many of the physical projects have, necessarily, been locality based (for example the development of bus services or circular walks) there is a wide range of examples of cross-border working and collaboration (eg: the Interpretation Strategy and the production of the Irresistible Offa map).

In summary, the Walking with Offa Axis 4 Collaboration Project has achieved an impressive amount, despite an increasingly difficult economic climate and numerous other practical challenges. There are a number of flagship activities undertaken through the project that have achieved wide-ranging outcomes and that have fostered the confidence of partners and other stakeholders. The fortification and evolution over the partnership itself has been a vital achievement of the project. It has created a firm foundation for subsequent activity in both similar and new areas. Moreover, the enthusiasm that partners have demonstrated for continuing collaboration validates the collective sense of achievement and the level of buy-in to sustaining and expanding the work that has been undertaken.