

## YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

31 January 2006

**ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL PARK CENTRES, PARTNERSHIP CENTRES AND PARK INFORMATION POINTS****Purpose of report**

To provide members with an overview of National Park Centres, Partnership Centres and Park Information Points, and an assessment of how well each is contributing to the National Park purposes.

**Strategic Planning Framework**

The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's approved and adopted strategic planning framework:

**Statutory Purposes**

Primarily this contributes to the second purpose although information provision extends across the first purpose too.

**National Park Management Plan**

Make education and information about the National Park more accessible to a wide range of people

Influence visitors to use local services

Support village services and shops so that the infrastructure that supports economic development is available.

**Background**

Following the Best Value review in 2000/01 the Authority decided to improve information provision by developing four flagship National Park Centres (NPC) and, if possible, establish Partnership Centres in Settle, Sedbergh and Reeth. It also decided to establish a new network of Park Information Points (PIP) both inside and outside the NP boundary.

The four flagship NPC are located at Aysgarth Falls, Grassington, Hawes (within Dales Countryside Museum) and Malham. These are all operated and managed solely by NPA.

The three current Partnership Centres are located at Settle at the Tourist Information Centre, Sedbergh at the Tourist Information Centre and at Reeth at Hudson House Enterprise Centre. These each have a different operational and management system in place which involves the NPA as a partner with others.

There are 28 PIPs within the NP and a small network of PIPs outside the NP boundary situated within TIC and Youth Hostel Association sites.

Tables 1-5 show comparisons which can be made between all the flagship National Park Centres and Partnership Centres. In all cases 2005/06 figures are shown as the latest information up to the end of December 2005.

Table 1 **Visitor Numbers**

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 (part)</b>
<b>Aysgarth Falls</b>	151,342	133,909	149,656	120,577
<b>Grassington</b>	105,796	99,230	105,751	78,863
<b>Hawes</b>	127,319	127,007	137,247	99,786
<b>Malham</b>	109,257	110,764	116,063	103,870
<b>Reeth/HH</b>	51,327	49,115	48,266	38,220
<b>Sedbergh</b>	39,348	36,816	32,253*	43,858
<b>Settle</b>		36,000^	50,000^	67,367
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>584,389</b>	<b>592,841</b>	<b>639,236</b>	<b>552,541</b>

For comparison the total visitor numbers for Clapham NPC were 30,693 in 2001/02 and 30,310 in 2002/03 when it closed.

Sedbergh NPC closed to the public 1 November 2004 and reopened again as a Partnership Centre in time for the 2005 season.

2003/04 and 2004/05 visitor numbers for Settle are estimates based on their previous recording methods. 2005/06 is an actual visitor figure based on automatic people counters.

All visitor numbers (unless otherwise specified) are actual figures based on automatic people counters installed in the doors.

Table 2 **Net Costs**

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 (part)</b>
	£	£	£	£
<b>Aysgarth Falls</b>	6,577	12,439	18,070	7,882
<b>Grassington</b>	3,726	5,011	6,123	5,711
<b>Hawes</b>	586	3,354	2,183	1,305
<b>Malham</b>	6,143	8,865	9,442	6,856
<b>Reeth/HH</b>	6,639	14,116	13,230	9,833
<b>Sedbergh</b>	3,484	2,186	4,292	1,481
<b>Settle</b>	-	-	4,000	Full yr 4,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,155</b>	<b>45,971</b>	<b>57,340</b>	<b>32,068</b>

This is a summary based on expenditure minus direct income from bed-bookings, rent and licences. Retail income is considered separately.

Aysgarth Falls NPC figures appear to fluctuate more than the others, however, this is slightly spurious since it is due to service charges falling unevenly between years. There was a rates increase of £2,500 in 2003/04 plus some minor capital improvements amounting to £4,000 in 2004/05.

Hawes NPC figures relate only to specific costs for the national park centres and do not include Dales Countryside Museum costs. The increases following 2002/3 relate to installation of ISDN lines, for Till's. PDQ (Credit Card processing units) and public access computers.

Reeth NPC cost more in 2003/04 due to a one-off £5,000 cost of relocation to the new site in Hudson House, and 2004/05 includes £3,000 associated with the disposal of the old NPC building.

Table 3 **Gross Retail Income**

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 (part)</b>
	£	£	£	£
<b>Aysgarth Falls</b>	50,101	50,247	57,643	43,898
<b>Grassington</b>	57,798	54,790	55,733	40,608
<b>Hawes</b>	49,086	54,413	58,894	42,900
<b>Malham</b>	45,451	52,353	56,203	48,589
<b>Reeth/ HH</b>	25,152	18,006	17,408	13,483
<b>Sedbergh</b>	14,917	16,880	16,235 (part)	-
<b>Settle</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>242,505</b>	<b>246,689</b>	<b>262,116</b>	<b>189,478</b>

All flagship NPC sell a range of retail products which reflect the ethos of the NPA and the NP area. This aids our work in promoting understanding and provides valuable income for the Authority. The figures above are gross: retail services made £42,000 net contribution in 2002/03, £38,400 in 2003/04, £30,500 in 2004/05.

This year gross retail income is predicted to fall compared to 2004/05 levels. Discussions around the NP with other traders show this is happening across the whole area and is not discrete to ourselves. Consideration is being given to ways of minimising or reversing this trend next year within our outlets.

Table 4 **Independent Assessment Scores**

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>
	%	%	%	%
<b>Aysgarth Falls</b>	81.28	90.15	86.8	88.68
<b>Grassington</b>	76.43	90.68	88.0	95.23
<b>Hawes</b>	83.76	89.44	90.2	94.96
<b>Malham</b>	92.11	84.39	80.2	93.88
<b>Reeth/HH</b>	85.83	87.88	85.8	91.95
<b>Sedbergh</b>	84.59	86.27	-	-
<b>Settle</b>		-	83.4	-

This is the annual national assessment for all NPA. Each assessed NPC is measured against a set of nationally agreed standards and scored accordingly.

This assessment covers the Centre, the staff, the information given, aspects of NP activity, telephone response, email response and contribution towards promoting understanding.

The assessors give a detailed report on each aspect of the Centre which, budget permitting, the staff use to improve each NPC and which guide any necessary training requirements.

Each NPA chooses which NPC it puts through the assessment, minimum three. As each NPA has different reasons for selection (best three, worst three, all etc) the scores between NPA are, therefore, not directly comparable.

We choose to evaluate all of our NPC to give trend data and specific locational details. We have also evaluated Hudson House as this is staffed by NPA staff. Sedbergh was not assessed in 2004/05 as it was closed to the public in November 2004, and not assessed this year as they are still completing necessary training. We will be assessing all NPC and Partnership Centres in 2006/07.

Table 5 **Best Value Assessment Scores**

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 draft</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Aysgarth Falls</b>	57.60	81.33	79.0	71.53
<b>Grassington</b>	48.39	70.89	80.5	72.21
<b>Hawes</b>	62.79	83.11	86.5	76.64
<b>Malham</b>	77.69	64.82	70.5	71.26
<b>Reeth/HH</b>	66.58	87.28	79.0	74.53
<b>Sedbergh</b>	66.49	66.58	-	-
<b>Settle</b>	-	-	76.0	-

This is nationally agreed score which is extracted from the overall score for each NPC. It reflects the ethos of Best Value and focuses on the way a NPC interprets the area and helps to promote understanding and enjoyment.

Interpretation plays a large part in this score and each NPC has been redeveloped in turn. Aysgarth Falls NPC was redeveloped in 1997 and again this winter 2005/06, Sedbergh NPC in winter 1997/1998, Grassington NPC in winter 1998/1999, Malham NPC in winter 1999/2000 with mini-refits again in 2003/04 and 2004/05, Hawes NPC within DCM in 1998/99 and the reception area was refurbished in winter 2004/2005.

Of the new Partnership Centres, Hudson House was fitted out following relocation from Reeth NPC in winter 2002/03 using existing interpretation with some revamp, Settle TIC rehoused interpretation from Clapham NPC in 2003/04 and Sedbergh NPC has been redeveloped as book centre and the NPC interpretation has been dispersed with some being placed in DCM in due course.

Currently we aim to refurbish a NPC every seven years, although this is dependent on budget. Experience from other attractions plus our own NPCs shows that five to eight years is the optimum, dependent on original specification, usage, positioning and the amount of new information which needs to be incorporated e.g. information on CRoW, information on sustainable transport. The next NPC to be redeveloped will be Malham in winter 2006/07 followed by Grassington in 2007/08. This is a variation to the expected order as the evidence suggests Malham NPC is in more need of redevelopment than Grassington NPC.

Table 6 **YTB Mystery Shopper 2005/06**

	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Aysgarth Falls</b>	70.5
<b>Grassington</b>	71.4
<b>Hawes</b>	71.4
<b>Malham</b>	66.7
<b>Reeth/HH</b>	71.4
<b>Sedbergh</b>	
<b>Settle</b>	76.2

This is part of a national assessment for all Tourist Information Centres (TIC). All of our NPC are networked TIC so are included in this survey. These results are directly comparable nationwide.

Hudson House and Settle are also networked TIC so are included; Sedbergh is not included this year as they are still the completing necessary training, in order to achieve networked status via the

Cumbria Tourist Board. These scores are good, indeed Yorkshire as a whole achieves favourable scores compared to the rest of the country.

This assessment covers aspects relating to the building, the staff and the information given.

### **Summary By Flagship National Park Centre**

#### 1. Aysgarth Falls NPC

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 (part year)</b>
<b>Visitor Numbers</b>	151,342	133,909	149,656	120,577
<b>Net Costs (£)</b>	6,577	12,439	18,070	7,882
<b>Retail Income (£)</b>	50,101	50,247	57,643	43,898
<b>Independent Assessment (%)</b>	81.28	90.15	86.8	88.68
<b>Best Value Assessment (%)</b>	57.60	81.33	79.0	83.03
<b>Mystery Shopper (%)</b>				70.5

#### 2. Grassington NPC

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 (part year)</b>
<b>Visitor Numbers</b>	105,796	99,230	105,751	78,863
<b>Net Costs (£)</b>	3,726	5,011	6,123	5,711
<b>Retail Income (£)</b>	57,798	54,790	55,733	40,608
<b>Independent Assessment (%)</b>	76.43	90.68	88.0	95.23
<b>Best Value Assessment (%)</b>	48.39	70.89	80.5	83.28
<b>Mystery Shopper (%)</b>				71.4

#### 3. Hawes NPC

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 (part year)</b>
<b>Visitor Numbers</b>	127,319	127,007	137,247	99,786
<b>Net Costs (£)</b>	586	3,354	2,183	1,305
<b>Retail Income (£)</b>	49,086	54,413	58,894	42,900
<b>Independent Assessment (%)</b>	83.76	89.44	90.2	94.96
<b>Best Value Assessment (%)</b>	62.79	83.11	86.5	85.99
<b>Mystery Shopper (%)</b>				71.4

#### 4. Malham NPC

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06 (part year)</b>
<b>Visitor Numbers</b>	109,257	110,764	116,063	103,870
<b>Net Costs (£)</b>	6,143	8,865	9,442	6,856
<b>Retail Income (£)</b>	45,451	52,353	56,203	48,589

<b>Independent Assessment (%)</b>	92.11	84.39	80.2	93.88
<b>Best Value Assessment (%)</b>	77.69	64.82	70.5	82.75
<b>Mystery Shopper (%)</b>				66.7

## Partnership Centres

### 1. Hudson House

In January 2003 the National Park Authority relocated its National Park Centre facility into Hudson House. This new facility offers the same core National Park services, provision of interpretation, retail services, visitor information, planning advice to the local community, and provides a base for the Park Management ranger service. Other major partners in this facility are Richmondshire District Council and North Yorkshire Police. A number of other bodies use Hudson House as a base. These include the Swaledale festival, Citizens Advice Bureau, and the Two Dales Partnership. Hudson House is managed by a part time manager and a board of trustees. The National Park Authority has member representation on this board.

## Review

The joint working arrangement has been in operation since January 2003 with frontline services provided by YDNPA and RDC staff. This arrangement enables the National Park Centre facility to open for an additional two days per week between April and October. Both organisations continue to provide reciprocal services for one another and message handling for North Yorkshire Police and reception and signposting services for visitors to Hudson House.

The staff have now settled into and enjoy their work when on duty in Hudson House. The Information staff are currently supporting the resource centre by attending ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) training courses in Hudson House.

The National Park Information Advisers are still managed locally by the Aysgarth Falls/Reeth Centre Manager, who liaises with the Hudson House Manager on operational matters and attends 'house' meetings which are organised when required by Hudson House for those who work in the facility. The Hudson House Manager has overall responsibility for the building and Hudson House volunteers. Whilst a volunteer policy has been developed, to date there are still no volunteers recruited by Hudson House to assist with the planned enhanced service to provide cover during lunchtime closures. This also applies to the Swaledale Festival which does not yet have a team of volunteers to assist with the sale of festival tickets. This can be difficult to manage in a single staffed centre.

There are still some outstanding issues to resolve in this facility. Whilst the day-to-day operations are running well, the resource centre is fast outgrowing the space it requires to provide services; this has meant there is still an impact on the use of the NPA Interpretation room. The main issues being the occasional use of the interpretation room as additional meeting space, and limited access to part of the National Park interpretation display due to the position of a public access computer which partially obstructs the interpretation display. The Hudson House trustees are still investigating sources of external funding to convert the old garage into additional office/meeting space. The conversion of this building should resolve the issue of limited meeting space.

The Authority's aspirations to connect Reeth National Park centre to the Wide Area Network also encountered difficulties this year. The Authority has resolved to link its main offices to its remote sites as part of the partnership with North Yorkshire County Council, (NYCC) utilising the NYCC Wide Area Network (WAN). However Hudson House was also investigating access to broadband and was not keen to have the Authority or indeed others partners make their own arrangements by

using the WAN. The trustees were concerned that the Authority was intending to breach its contract with Hudson House, by working independently and not paying for its equal share of IT running costs. Following a number of communications and meetings of partners and technical experts, NPA officers wrote to the Hudson House Board and outlined the technical requirements of the new system. However this request was not looked upon favourably so the National Park Centre facility and ranger office are currently excluded from the wide area network and the resources have been re-deployed to the ranger accommodation in Stainforth. Although it may be possible for NPA staff in Hudson House to have limited access to the network in the future, it is unlikely that resources will be made available to fully connect Hudson House to the WAN. This situation means that staff who work in Hudson House and Aysgarth NPC have to work with two different systems, and when working in Hudson House cannot access the information searches via the Intranet and the central X:drive. They will still continue to provide an excellent service, but without the enhanced features afforded by the WAN.

The revenue costs of operating the National Park Centre facility have increased when compared to previous years, when the Authority owned its own facility. The year 2003/04 shows a higher increase due to transition costs of approximately £5,000 associated with the relocation, the year 2004/05 includes approximately £3,000 associated with the disposal of the old NPC building.

When these one-off costs are removed from the figures, the operating costs are approximately £6,639 in 2002/03, £9,116 in 2003/04, £10,230 in 2004/05 and a projected year end cost of £11,500 for 2005/06. This gives a slight increase in actual operating costs each year. The operating costs include the £5,000 annual grant paid to Hudson House.

Another area which has been affected since the relocation is retail. There has been a distinct reduction in retail income. Due to the constraints of the layout of the building, the space available for retail is reduced in Hudson House; this has limited the range of products made available for sale in this facility and has resulted in reduced income for the Authority. Retail income continues to reduce year on year with a similar pattern emerging in 2005/06.

## **Conclusions**

The Hudson House facility remains a great success in terms of a community resource centre. Evidence shows that, local people are using this facility when they might not have used the national park centre. In terms of promoting understanding and awareness this should be seen as beneficial. The partnership approach means more officer time and commitment is required compared to management of Authority owned facilities. Partnership centres such as Hudson House will continue to require more support than other National Park Centres.

A repeated theme through the annual evaluation of National Park Centres is in relation to comments made by visitors completing the questionnaires. The reports for the last three years have stated that visitors did not find the facility easily recognisable as a National Park Centre, and that the building was an office rather than a visitor facility.

The project to date is deemed to be a success in terms of the increased contact with the local community but there is no doubt this facility is costing the Authority more in revenue costs and increased management time. However, the success of this venture should be measured in more than financial terms, taking into account the indirect benefits in local perceptions. Even with the increased revenue costs and higher proportion of management time, this project will still be cost effective for the 5-year pilot period which ends in March 2008. This is due to the capital receipts from the sale of the old National Park Centre. However it will not be sustainable in the longer term unless ways are found to reduce the Authority's contribution beyond the pilot period.

## **2. Settle TIC**

Settle Tourist Information Centre became a National Park Partnership Centre following the closure of the Clapham NPC 2003. The TIC is based in the Town Hall in Settle and is staffed by a TIC Manager and a team of volunteers. The manager reports to a management board, which comprises of members from the various tourism sectors together with Craven District Council and Settle Town Council. The NPA has officer representation on the board, this role being an advisory one. In its enhanced role as NPA Partnership Centre, the TIC –

- Mails out copies of the Visitor newspaper with its enquiries,
- Provides information about the national park to visitors
- Issues National Park Authority Parking passes
- Displays National Park interpretation in the meeting/education room
- Is used as a start point for National Park events
- Offers education information to school groups
- Attends networking and training events with National Park staff
- Provides a notice board for national park information and events promotion

During the current year the working relationship has been enhanced further with joint working between the TIC Manager and NPA Information Advisers and Sustainable Tourism manager, working together on achievement of Tourism NVQ qualifications. In a report to the management board it was stated that Settle Tourist Information Centre feels that the joint working with the NPA is progressing well and they would like to see it continue and developed further. This view is also reinforced in this report.

### **3. Sedbergh Book Town**

In 2004, following the closure of the Sedbergh National Park Centre, agreement was reached that the Sedbergh Book Town group would rent the redundant National Park Centre with the intention of providing a tourist information facility via South Lakeland District Council and Cumbria Tourist Board. This group would also run the facility as a NPA Partnership Centre. The facility opened briefly in April 2005 and was fully opened to the public as a book town centre and TIC in June 2005. It has not achieved networked TIC status yet, but is working with the Cumbria Tourist Board to achieve this soon. Under this agreement the Sedbergh Book Town group -

- Mails out copies of the Visitor newspaper with its enquiries
- Provides information about the National Park to visitors
- Issues National Park Authority parking passes
- Attends networking and training events with National Park staff
- Provides a notice board for National Park information and events promotion
- Provides Accommodation for the NPA ranger

This partnership is still at a very early stage and the full detail of the partnership agreement is not yet fully agreed. Meetings will continue with SLDC and the Sedbergh Book Town group and Community Office to finalise this detail. The Book Town facility is already showing increased visitor numbers compared to the National Park Centre and is using its local contacts to improve relationships with tourism businesses. In November 2005 the Sedbergh Book Town group hosted a trade exhibition for tourism businesses, which was very well received. It is envisaged that this facility will be providing a full service by the 2006 tourist season.

## **Park Information Points**

### **1. Within the NP Boundary**

There are 28 Park Information Points (PIP) around the National Park. Twenty of these are businesses and eight are Youth Hostel Association sites.

These businesses each agree a contract with the NPA which sets out benefits and obligations for both the PIP and the NPA. Examples of this include: the PIP will display an external information board; provide space in a mutually agreed position for a specially prepared display or publication dispenser; provide assistance to the public by disseminating local information and general information about the National Park and the Authority, during the agreed business hours. For our part the NPA obligations include: to supply the PIP, free of charge, with an external identity sign or information board and appropriate internal display; to supply publications and other agreed merchandise from the range of National Park Authority merchandise at agreed trade discount; to promote the National Park Information Point and Scheme in appropriate publications and the National Park Authority web page.

Apart from set up costs of £250 per PIP and organising a training event each year, we do not pay any further costs, although the set up has been resource intensive in terms of staff time.

## **2. Outside the NP Boundary**

Park Information Points (PIP) outside the NP boundary are located in Youth Hostel Association sites and TIC. These are generally within one and a half hour's travel of the NP. The sites outside the boundary have a lower level of obligation than those within the NP boundary but must still have a display and pass on general information about the NP.

We are now working on Phase Two of this initiative, which is to expand the PIP network to other businesses including train stations, motorway service areas, Leeds/Bradford Airport and retail outlets.

The PIP network reaches those audiences which would not ordinarily come through a NPC so fits well with the ethos of reaching out to new audiences and promoting understanding in new ways. The sites outside of the NP boundary also reach those who may not visit. The Peer Review team commented favourably on this idea in their recent inspection visit.

Evaluation this year has been done by the Sustainable Tourism Officer who has visited each site in person on several occasions during the year. She has assessed each one and used the findings to improve each site individually. Next year we hope to carry out independent assessments based on the minimum service standards which are carried out in NPC. The meetings with PIP providers suggest the PIP network is working well and delivering as planned.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Members are asked to note the report.

JULIE BARKER  
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGER