

PEAK DISTRICT RURAL DELIVERY PATHFINDER
EVALUATION OF THE PEAK DISTRICT RURAL ACTION ZONE (RAZ)
RURAL DELIVERY PATHFINDER
(PHASE 2)

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

This document reports the findings of an evaluation commissioned by the Rural Action Zone Pathfinder Officer Group (YF, or 'the client'), and undertaken by Meridien pure in January 2008, into the *Peak District Rural Action Zone (RAZ) Rural Delivery Pathfinder*.

This evaluation is 'Phase 2' of a two-phase evaluation, and the overall aim of this evaluation was to focus on the delivery of activities supported by the Pathfinder, identify any good practice and look at how the experience of delivering the Pathfinder could be carried forward by local partners once the funding draws to a close

ABOUT THE PATHFINDER, THE PARTNERSHIP & ACTIVITIES

The vision for the Peak District Rural Action Zone Pathfinder is: *"To enhance access to services that support business and community enterprise in rural areas"*. The Business Plan for the initiative identifies a number of potential initiatives to improve delivery of services. These are:

- To explore the benefits and resource implications of a single point of access (such as a web-based information portal) to make service delivery more streamlined and effective.
- To develop opportunities for co-location / tandem service delivery (based on the recommendations of research commissioned by the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak Local Strategic Partnership and funded by the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership).
- To simplify the advice and the grant giving "maze" for businesses and the community (either through remote access points across the area and/or streamlining existing organisational structures to make them fit for Pathfinder purposes).

To this end specific projects the pathfinder has supported include:

- A web portal offering links to business support providers, local authorities and support providers;
- The development of a protocol agreement to continue partnership working beyond the lifetime of the Pathfinder;
- The development of a Pathfinder Enterprise Fund – to add value to existing grants through the promotion of networking and joint working;
- The hosting of a number of public events, including 'rural careers fairs', and advice for small firms seeking public-contracts;
- A range of multi-agency projects serving to improve service access by making co-location easier.

The Pathfinder is overseen by the Peak District Rural Action Zone Pathfinder Officer Group, which is commonly referred to as the Pathfinder Partnership – a group which reports to the Peak District Rural Action Zone. The partnership has a wide membership with both private and third sector representation.

In April 2006, the Pathfinder Partnership agreed a revised strategy and Action Plan for the programme. Framing the review of that plan was an already completed consultant's study examining the options around a Call Centre-based approach to delivering business support in the light of then-anticipated changes in business support through the regionalisation of Business Links and a strengthening of the Business Link brand, policy changes which have had significant impacts for the delivery of the Pathfinder.

PATHFINDER PROJECTS

The evaluation focuses on four key projects supported by the Pathfinder:

- Partnership protocol agreement;
- Single entry point website;
- Pathfinder Rural Hub in Bakewell;
- Pathfinder Enterprise Fund.

Each of the projects has been designed around the changes to business support services. Thus none of these key projects has been precisely as envisaged at the outset of the Pathfinder but *have* developed in line with its broad objectives. With this drastically altered policy framework in mind, the evaluation is positive about these projects:

- There is clear evidence they have advanced the simplification agenda;
- On-going self evaluation has been an important component in their design;
- Where relevant forward strategies have been carefully worked through
- The projects generate Strategic Added Value (SAV) for the Regional Development Agencies

Though projects have not yet developed to show meaningful impact, several projects have great potential to make a meaningful impact on the local economy well beyond the lifetime of the Pathfinder itself. One key issue for the evaluators is that the forward strategies developed need to be monitored to ensure the potential of these projects are maximised.

VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF THE PATHFINDER

Stakeholders we spoke to were very positive about the impact of the Pathfinder both in terms of projects and rural strategy. The development of the Peak Directions web site was the single project most likely to be held up as a demonstration of achievement. Partners were:

- Excited about the web-site's content and how the site could develop in the future;
- Impressed by the growing user base;
- Quick to point out the development of the Peak Direction's concept, its logo and identity was also a key outcome of the Pathfinder process;
- Through the Protocol, Peak Directions would remain a focal point for promoting business support in the Peak;

The Pathfinder had initially tried to deploy existing staff to oversee the work, but stakeholders felt made that the project successes were due to the employment of a dedicated Project Officer to oversee the work, together with:

- The close relationship between the POG and the Project Officer;
- The ability of the Project Officer to develop projects as a self-starter;
- That the project officer has remained with the programme right until the programme end;

On a broader strategic level, stakeholders felt:

- The Pathfinder had developed meaningful projects through a consensus approach between partners;
- There was evidence of aligning corporate policies to address Peak District issues;
- Engagement of key agencies who were in danger of drifting away from the area;
- The Protocol would ensure joint working in business support will continue and by so doing avoid duplication and ensure access to services.
- Whilst the partners, and supported activities in the Rural Action Zone were said to have tended to be focused on individual local authority areas, the Pathfinder had enabled a Peak-wide perspective;
- In this respect the Pathfinder has created the partnership infrastructure for close agency working to continue;
- The influence of the Pathfinder beyond its project brief can also be seen through examples of its involvement in regional partnerships.

Though many still saw some role for the Pathfinder Partnership, of greater concern is how the 'Peak District area' will continue to be seen as such by future funders. Partners clearly see the need to retain some form of vehicle to represent the concept of a Peak District Area, particularly given a number of anticipated changes to local and sub-regional governance which will impact on the Peak District:

- Future rural structures may be County-wide, leading to concerns that resources will drift away from the Peak;
- The Sub-National Review which proposes a further extension to the role of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) to achieve a wider range of economic development-based targets, at a time when existing LAAs are not felt to fully reflect the needs of the Peak District, which straddles two LAAs;
- A reluctance to consider a Multi-Area Agreement to reflect the cross-boundary nature of the Peak District

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions in the report reflect on the Pathfinder initiative from the perspective of, in turn, the Haskins Review which was the pre-cursor for the initiative, and related DEFRA objectives and local ambition. Our overall conclusion is that the Peak District Pathfinder has made tremendous strides toward meeting some of the challenges raised by Haskins. As an initiative:

- The Pathfinder for the Peak District has delivered a small programme of activities that has the potential to have a significant impact upon the way the unique challenges, opportunities and wonderful natural environment of the Peak are developed on economic, social and environmental terms.
- It is clear from stakeholder feedback that a dedicated officer and management/policy/admin support has made a positive difference to Pathfinder work and achievements.

- The Pathfinder has emphasised that the Peak District as a sub-region is unique: Though it is administratively complex, it is recognisably a 'single area' with an identity which resonates among its stakeholders
- We are confident that there is a Pathfinder legacy; but less assured that the cross boundary and administrative issues will not suffocate or dilute this.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

As a result of the Pathfinder, two RDAs and two Business Link partners now have a better understanding, focus and commitment to the rurality issues of the Peak and a "peer" challenge and agreement that maintains their attention. Thus, the Pathfinder can point to strategic and operational achievements against the challenges it set itself. However a challenge remains which includes:

- Long term work with micro and small firms;
- Access to affordable workspace (and relevant managed services should there be proven demand);
- Access to training for management, staff and would-be-entrepreneurs;
- Establishment of further service and agency co-location where feasible within the Peak.

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2008, **Meridien***pure* were invited to undertake a short, focused final evaluation of the Peak District Pathfinder (hereafter 'The Pathfinder'). This report sets out the findings of the evaluation¹.

1.1 Evaluation Brief

This report represents 'Phase 2' of a two-stage evaluation. Among the core issues to be examined are:

- How the Pathfinder vision was translated into a set of working proposals;
- An examination of the projects supported and their respective paths in fulfilling the Pathfinder objectives;
- Consideration of how the Pathfinder is being delivered at the moment and the implications for future business support delivery;
- Discussion around the 'next steps' for the Peak District area in the light of the Pathfinder experience;
- The legacy or legacies of the Pathfinder programme.

1.2 About the Pathfinder

The role of the pathfinders is to test practical ways of improving local delivery, tackling disadvantage and social exclusion, helping underperforming rural economies to begin to catch up with the levels of growth experienced elsewhere in Britain, without jeopardising natural heritage - all within locally agreed outcomes.

The Pathfinders are a key component of DEFRA's response to the Haskins Report, which outlined how rural delivery arrangements should evolve, taking account of wider developments in government, in particular the commitment to devolution and moves to make public services more accountable and locally responsive. The introduction to the Phase 1 evaluation contains more detail on the national policy framework and the Haskins Review.

In its prospectus DEFRA identifies the main priorities for the Pathfinders:

- 1) How to make delivery more effective (that is, that delivery activities and outcomes match agreed policies and resources match need);
- 2) How to make delivery more efficient (that is, that proportionately more resources are available to delivery);
- 3) How to ensure that delivery is customer-focused (that is, the needs of customers are met rather than those of the delivery organisations); and
- 4) How to achieve greater local accountability for public investment in rural areas.

The following key points can be made about the Pathfinder initiative:

- The initiative aims to support sustainable development;
- There is a need to ensure genuine community involvement;
- The goal is to improve the delivery of services and;
- Enhance market towns and their links with their rural 'hinterlands.'

¹ It should be noted that this evaluation took place within a very narrow time frame. The structure of the evaluation, particularly the consultation process was essentially governed by this timetable

Perhaps most significant is the fact that whilst project outputs and impact on the beneficiary *are* important, the success of the Pathfinder will in large part be based on a value judgement of whether and how the Pathfinder has successfully brought together an appropriate range of agencies.

1.3 The RAZ's Pathfinder Programme

The business plan's Executive Summary identifies the Pathfinder area as:

"[Comprising] the districts of Derbyshire Dales and High Peak (East Midlands), significant parts of Staffordshire Moorlands and the Weaver ward of East Staffordshire (West Midlands). Together these districts house 93% of the population of the Peak District National Park. The area has a population of 175,000 and covers 1,750 km². There are tracts of open countryside, many small and medium sized villages, and market towns, which serve the whole area."

The vision for the Peak District Rural Action Zone Pathfinder is:

"To enhance access to services that support business and community enterprise in rural areas."

The Business Plan for the initiative identifies a number of potential initiatives to improve delivery of services. These are:

- To explore the benefits and resource implications of a single point of access (such as a web-based information portal) to make service delivery more streamlined and effective.
- To develop opportunities for co-location / tandem service delivery (based on the recommendations of research commissioned by the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak Local Strategic Partnership and funded by the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership).
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To this end specific projects the pathfinder has supported include:

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- The development of a Pathfinder Enterprise Fund – to add value to existing grants through the promotion of networking and joint working;
- The hosting of a number of public events, including 'rural careers fairs', and advice for small firms seeking public-contracts;
- A range of multi-agency projects serving to improve service access by making co-location easier.

1.4 Phase 1 Evaluation

In 2007, Meridien Pure undertook a Phase 1 evaluation. At the time the delivery of activities and interventions with the client group was still developing, thus the study focused on the work of the Pathfinder's Officer Group (POG) and the relevance of the Pathfinder experience up to that point. The study's overall conclusion was that the Pathfinder:

"has been a dedicated and committed partnership, which has pursued the objectives and spirit of the Pathfinder initiative and in doing so has clearly brought partners closer together and addressed a service access issue of real concern among stakeholders. The Pathfinder has clearly made a positive contribution to partnership working."

This evaluation will enquire how the successful Partnership in place last year has maintained its momentum through the delivery phase of the Programme

1.5 Approach

This is an end of programme evaluation, and as such, there will be certain core requirements to the work demanded by funders. In addition a core purpose of this evaluation is to extract key lessons in its existence for funders (DEFRA, emda) and for those whose interest in rural development extends way beyond the Pathfinder alone.

The evaluation is based on:

- A set of in depth qualitative interviews with members of the Pathfinder Officer Group ('POG', also referred to as the 'Pathfinder Partnership');
- These interviews are reinforced by a questionnaire survey to members of the POG;
- Production of a series of Case studies, looking at the major projects supported by the Pathfinder in greater detail;
- Two short focus groups with key stakeholders.

2. PROJECT FACTS & ACTIVITIES

This section sets out the project's rationale, activities and the planned and actual delivery schedules. This section also briefly reviews the programme's finances.

Note that this section draws upon secondary information provided by the client.

2.1 Programme Profile and Basic Project Facts

Project name: Peak District Rural Action Zone Rural Pathfinder

Location: See Appendix 1 for map.
Area covers 93% of the Peak District National Park's population

Delivery agency: Through a Peak District Rural Action Zone Pathfinder Officer Group (referred to as the Pathfinder Partnership in this report) – a group which reports to the Peak District Rural Action Zone.

Key Dates: *Project's Scheduled Commencement Date:*
December 2005
Project's Scheduled Completion Date:
31 March 2008 (extended twelve months from 2007)

Anticipated Income:	DEFRA:	£100,000
	Emda:	£100,000
	AWM:	£100,000
	In-kind:	£100,000
Actual Income:	DEFRA:	£150,000
	Emda:	£100,000
	In kind:	To be calculated

In addition, AWM awarded Staffordshire Moorlands District Council £100,000 funding under the Rural Innovation Initiative to support enterprise projects under a capital-based grant. The Rural Innovation Initiative was managed by Staffordshire Moorlands on behalf of AWM, and was approved by the RAZ.

The RAZ Management Group sifted and appraise applications with successful projects, approved by the RAZ and handed back to Staffordshire Moorlands to manage and administer on behalf of AWM. Thus the funding was not formally part of the Pathfinder programme and so has not been considered in this evaluation. An Expression of Interest by the Pathfinder for funding for co-location under the Rural Innovation Initiative was not approved by AWM.

Also note that in addition this Pathfinder, like the others, received an additional £65k funding from DEFRA in April 2007. This funding is not part of the Pathfinder programme and was not scheduled to be spent in the Pathfinder's lifetime. The funding will however support the projects established by the Pathfinder as a 'legacy fund'.

2.2 Programme Outputs and Spend Profile

Programme evaluations usually contain a detailed review of outputs and expenditure. However this 'programme' is in effect treated by funders as a multi-strand project. As such the information requirements and presentation of a programme's finances are not needed; the programme has instead to respond to the reporting requirements of individual funders. Furthermore, the objectives and design of the Pathfinder mean the programme has not had to achieve any formal output targets for DEFRA.

This is not to say the funders have not required regular reporting and scrutiny. Nor would it be true to say the actions of the Pathfinder have not been steered (in a positive sense) by the funding agencies. Finances have been carefully monitored and audited in line with standard practice and procedure. These are available from the Accountable Body (Derbyshire Dales District Council) for inspection on request

What we can say about the programme is that all emda funding has been spent or allocated, and all but approximately £8,000 of DEFRA funding has also been defrayed.²

2.3 Delivery of the Pathfinder: Management

The partnership has a wide membership; private sector representation is via the NFU and what was Derbyshire Enterprise Agency but became East Midlands Business Link and subsequently evolved into East Midlands Business Ltd). Both are regular attendees at relevant meetings. As a sub-group of the RAZ, the following organisations have supported the Pathfinder Business Plan – these are also members of the RAZ:

Derbyshire Dales and High Peak Local Strategic Partnership	Derbyshire Rural Community Council
Moorlands Together LSP	Peak Partners for Rural Action
Derbyshire Dales District Council	East Midlands Development Agency
Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership	Derbyshire Chamber & Business Link (now Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce and East Midlands Business Ltd)
High Peak Borough Council	Advantage West Midlands
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Natural England Confederation (now Natural England)
East Staffordshire Borough Council	Peak District National Park Authority
Derbyshire County Council	NFU

In addition the partnership has brought in some significant additional partners:

- Government Office East Midlands
- Government Office West Midlands
- Staffordshire Moorlands CVS
- Derbyshire Dales CVS
- Environment Agency

² See the Enterprise Grant Case study for more information on this underspend

As the partnership is essentially a sub-group of the Rural Action Zone, the administrative systems, processes and written policies are also in line with those of the RAZ. There is greater detail on the management structures and process of the Partnership in Section 2 of the Phase 1 evaluation. The point should be made that the positive review given to the operation of, and support given to, the partnership in the Phase 1 evaluation still applies.

2.4 Delivery of the Pathfinder: Activities

In April 2006, the Pathfinder Partnership agreed a revised strategy and Action Plan for the programme. In the introduction we outlined the Business Plan's broad, three-pronged approach to meeting the objectives of simplifying Business Support in the Peak.

Framing the review of that plan was an already completed consultant's study examining the options around a Call Centre-based approach to delivering business support. This study had itself led to an extensive review of activities, in which the Pathfinder consulted widely with partners.

The revised strategy had four key themes:

Theme 1: To develop a single point of entry for access to services for businesses and enterprise within the Peak District Rural Action Zone

There were two key projects which addressed this issue:

- The Partnership Protocol
- An internet Based gateway

The first of these, the Partnership Protocol, was a non-binding agreement between the RAZ partners. Its aim was "[To] concentrate on building better communication and promotional links for the partners involved in the Pathfinder, as well as promote the development of better and more simplified linkages within funding streams."

The Internet Gateway or Portal looked to combine existing web based services relevant to business and enterprise within the RAZ. The internet service was seen as providing:

- A single point of entry for information;
- Additionality to the developing regional knowledge bank and new IDB³ model;
- A heavily promoted tool in which agencies could promote activities and themselves.

The web site would be populated with information provided by partners who have signed up to the Partnership Protocol agreement.

³ Information, Diagnostic, Brokerage – the model for the future Business Link service to businesses

Theme 2: To develop an enhanced co-located service for the Peak District RAZ area

Quite simply, this was to put in place a simple co-located facility(s) within the RAZ area that allowed for tandem delivery of two or more services to businesses and enterprise in a cost effective way.

There was recognition that the facilities would be framed to some extent by the then-new IDB model of business support. Nonetheless, the Pathfinder sought to create opportunities within the RAZ that will cut down the cost and development needs of rural service delivery. This included looking at fixed office locations, mobile resource centres and enhancing existing services.

Theme 3: To bring simplification to the 'grant giving maze' through out the RAZ.

The initial aim of this project was to see how the process of finding and applying for funding could be simplified. Moreover, and once funding was obtained, how could it be made easier for projects to be run successfully and within budget?

Core to this theme, at this stage, was to develop a single expression of interest application form through which a range of grants could be applied for. It was felt that the availability of this single-form system would allow for "a more accurate dissemination of grant applications, and allow for a more accurate recourse to funding."

Other activities included:

- Promotion of existing grant support services such as the CVS funder finder package;
- Developments of a funding toolkit;
- Ongoing work with the simplification of funding group.

Theme 4: To deliver projects that fit with one or more of the above

This was a "catch-all" objective to ensure emerging opportunities were not ignored and the programme itself remains entrepreneurial.

The Action Plan put forward a list of possible projects including:

- Development of the Peak District 'Pocket Guides' to services for business and enterprise.
- Development of events to promote services for business and Enterprise within the RAZ.
- Promotional work to support projects and products such as directories and web portals that benefit business and enterprise within the RAZ.
- Networking with the National Parks Authority to assist in rural land-based development and progression.
- Support for Community / Voluntary sector in enterprise based projects.

Section 3 presents Case Studies for the four major projects (Protocol, Web Portal, Co-location and Enterprise Fund). There is no Case Study for Theme 4, so here we list some of the achievements of activities supported under this theme.

- The production of a series of 'Pocket Guides' to business support. These are high quality, full colour fold out guides with a sector specific focus, as well as social enterprise. The guides contain a list of contact numbers for local authorities and relevant grants.
- The hosting of a series of events to stimulate enterprise and overcome barriers to growth and survival in both land based business and the wider local economy. These events have included:
 - Engineering and Manufacturing Support Events (in association with High Peak Borough Council);
 - Pathfinder – NFU Young Persons Event (in association with the NFU);
 - Pathfinder business and enterprise event (in association with Business Link);
 - Pathfinder main conference – 19th Sept 2007.

3. CASE STUDIES

This section of the report highlights four key projects which have been delivered over the Pathfinder's lifetime:

- Partnership protocol agreement;
- Single entry point website;
- Pathfinder Rural Hub in Bakewell;
- Pathfinder Enterprise Fund.

We have undertaken short reviews of these projects based on conversations with stakeholders, beneficiaries and the Pathfinder's Officer Group and its Project Officer.

It is important to note this is NOT a full evaluation of these projects. The aim is to highlight their achievements and reflect on the role of the Pathfinder in instigating and shaping project delivery. At the same time, through the Case Studies, common issues and barriers the Pathfinder has had to overcome are identified.

3.1 Key Issues

Adjusting to Changing Delivery Requirements

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, each of the projects has been designed (and are often the results of redesigning) around the changes (i.e. regionalisation) to business support services.

None of the key projects has been precisely as envisaged at the outset of the Pathfinder but have developed in line with the objectives of the Pathfinder. For example:

- The Web Portal and Partnership Protocol emerged from the need to find an alternative route from the initially proposed 'call centre' model for support services in the Peak;
- The Enterprise Fund came in response to (i) requests from local businesses, volcom groups and agencies, and (ii) a wish to trail a single application form (iii) give a broader range of organisations a chance to contribute to Pathfinder objectives;
- The co-location project has also had to respond to the regionalisation of Business Link (as well as the need to be complementary to existing services). This led to the development of a working model in Bakewell.

Addressing Simplification

Three of the four projects have clearly advanced the simplification agenda:

- The web portal provides a simple 'first-stop-shop' for sector-based information services;
- The Partnership Protocol, in placing Business Link at the heart of business support, makes it easier for those agencies currently or intending to develop business support products to ensure their proposals are additional to the local business offer and are needed among the intended client group;

- For Co-location, though as with the Partnership Protocol, it is too soon to see discernable impact, the establishment of a multi-agency presence at the ABC centre should facilitate closer working and cross-agency referrals;
- The Enterprise Fund project emerged in response to opportunities to test innovative sustainable delivery solutions at a more local level

Feedback & Impact Measures

In addition to other activities such as the events hosted through the Pathfinder, the Pathfinder has tried to undertake some form of on-going beneficiary based evaluation:

- The Enterprise Fund grants for example, require self-evaluation;
- The Partnership Protocol is in effect evaluated through this (and the Phase 1) report;
- Peak Directions traffic to the site is monitored and reported on

The next step for those taking these projects forward will be to look at how the actual **impact** of these services can be measured, now and in the future. These impacts are fourfold:

1. Impact on the client group;
2. Outcomes for the Peak economy and wider economic development – this includes any impacts on the Peak's environment;
3. Impact for the agencies (for example sharing databases, working with new partners across boundaries);
4. Impacts on Partnership working itself more generally – both within the Peak District and beyond.

In addition, the concept of Strategic Added Value (SAV), which RDAs now have to demonstrate to Whitehall, could be adopted. The Pathfinder projects score highly in this regard – one of the case studies is summarised using an SAV framework by way of example.

Future Activity and Forward Arrangements

Two projects in particular – the Web Portal and the co-location project – have great potential through developing the Pathfinder activity to date still further.

In addition, several of the projects funded under the Enterprise Fund show the potential to make a significant impact on the local economy, for example the successful 'Taste the Peak' events the Pathfinder has supported. Meanwhile one of the messages from consultees is that the Partnership Protocol is a starting point for, not a culmination of, deeper partnership working.

Further to these are the strategic links the Pathfinder has made in both the East and West Midlands, as well as the smaller projects funded under Theme 4 (see Section 2).

Thus the Pathfinder has created a series of projects and engendered activities with the potential to impact long after the dissolution of the Partnership and the Programme.

Partners are comfortable with the delivery arrangements arranged for the dissolution of the Pathfinder. Though concerns inevitably remain, these concerns are based on the monitoring and enforceability of the actions of agencies taking projects forward.

CASE STUDIES

Project Name: Partnership Protocol
Key Partners: Pathfinder Officer Group, numerous individual agencies

Project Description

An independent consultancy report early on in the Pathfinder lifespan recommended, that rather than establish a call centre approach to a single entry point for Business Services, a Service Level Agreement be drawn up between RAZ partners and the two Business Links for the provision of Contact Centre management services. These services were a mechanism to enable the provision of an integrated businesses/enterprise support service for the area.

For this approach to be successful, clarity is needed in 'who delivers what and why' as well as streamlining access to projects, promotional work and funding streams.

The two routes to achieve this were (i) The Partnership Protocol and (ii) The Web Portal. Because of the existence of the Pathfinder, and the composition of its Partnership, more effective communication lines between partners have developed and projects, such as the Protocol and Peak Directions, have been effectively linked to individual partners' own aims and objectives. This has demonstrated the beneficial impact of Pathfinder.

Aims and Objectives of the Protocol

The objective of this Pathfinder project centred on the premise that the Peak District Area was in need of a Single Point of Entry for Information and, that a way of achieving this was to 'pool' together local resources. The first stage of the solution was felt to be the setting up and implementation of a Partnership Protocol Agreement. The Protocol would form the foundation for the main Single Entry Point – The Peak District Web Portal.

One of the key findings of the above mentioned report was that the Service Level Agreement [SLA] should be negotiated with Business Links to strengthen the level of business support within the local rural area, with initial investment from the RAZ. Partners to the RAZ should then use these resources to both promote the RAZ and relevant Business Links and CVS entry points.

Thus the Protocol has been set up as a non-legally binding agreement to bring together all the relevant public sector business and enterprise support organisations to establish joint working arrangements, and better align the promotion of services for businesses and communities.

Key Barriers & Project Achievements

The initial Pathfinder Strategy recognised some of the key issues in local business support which hampered service quality, experience and access:

Firstly, a key issue has been the **limited networking** between providers and the lack of co-ordination in the promotion of the services available. Consequently fewer 'service users' than expected are aware of the service on offer. Unfortunately, there have been some instances of duplication or a mismatch between locations.

A second issue centred on how **projected changes to support delivery** through East Midlands Business (EMB) or its future equivalent would affect the local area.

Finally, another potential issue for effective development of the Protocol was how a single point of entry could be squared with a desire to ensure that **continued face to face contact** remains in the local area when delivering business support.

In order to address these issues, a Service Level Agreement workshop [7th September 2006] was convened at which a 1st draft of the Protocol was presented. This was then backed up by a meeting of Chief Executive Officers. The aim was to examine the potential implementation of a SLA between the Peak District Rural Action Zone RAZ partners and Business Links East and West Midlands for the provision of Contact Centre Management services required to enable the integrated business / enterprise support services covering the RAZ.

Subsequent meetings led to refinement of the Protocol and the final Pathfinder Partnership Protocol agreement between RAZ partners has now been agreed. Early implementation of an SLA was potentially problematic because of a lack of understanding of existing services both within the RAZ and those to be provided by EMB and the equivalent in the West Midlands.

Furthermore, there is a level of ownership that needs to be factored into any agreement as well as recognition that the current Business Link services will be changing. This meant flexibility had to be built into the Protocol so it could retain cautious signatories' confidence.

The Protocol agreement forms the 'umbrella' for joint working between East and West Midlands partners to secure more efficient delivery of services to business and enterprise within the Peak District. The Protocol Agreement was signed by 12 partners in February 2007 and now has 17 signatories. Commencement of the Protocol was 1st March 2007.

It could be said that the Partnership Protocol, developed between the RAZ partners, has provided a pathway to implementation of an SLA and to join up existing services with a common purpose.

Development of Strategic Linkages

The Peak District Rural Delivery Pathfinder has successfully negotiated a Partnership Protocol Agreement with partners and associated networks and organisations within the Peak District Rural Action Zone. The protocol has 17 signatories.

By signing, they agree to share economic information, and to jointly promote and deliver services that support enterprise across the Peak District. The protocol forms the 'umbrella' for joint working between East and West Midlands partners and an interest in further initiatives once the Pathfinder has

come to a close. Thus, through active partnership working, the Pathfinder has helped to strengthen engagement with Advantage West Midlands.

This is important because it recognises that the Peak District RAZ, whilst not a major component of the wider West Midlands economy, is still of fundamental importance to parts of its rural economy. And perhaps more importantly, it provides a vehicle for structured and targeted engagement by West Midlands agencies.

Business Link West Midlands has also drafted a Protocol based on Pathfinder learning and methodology to improve communication and ways of working between Business Link and its partners across the West Midlands. In addition, the Protocol has already attracted interest from parties outside the Peak District. The agreement is currently being adapted and modified to become applicable for Business Link in South Shropshire.

What has been learned about Businesses and Business Support?

The Rural Pathfinder has found that the RAZ already had a knowledge base in place to deliver supportive and wide ranging services to businesses and enterprising communities. That support has however been uncoordinated and complex to access.

The Partnership Protocol Agreement and its associated web site, Peak Directions, have concentrated on:

- Building better communication and promotional links between the partners involved in the provision of business and enterprise advice;
- Building better communication and promotional links with potential service recipients;
- Promoting the development of better and more simplified linkages within funding streams.

As an example of how joint working is now operating, the Partnership has generated a series of Pathfinder Pocket Guides that provide local communities and businesses with information and contact details on different sectors. These Pocket Guides cover construction, tourism, engineering and manufacturing, creative industries, training, land based businesses and social enterprise. Providing this information in hard copy format (as well as online) has improved access to information for businesses which lack fast broadband connections.

Next Steps & Ensuring Sustainability of Activities

Beyond Pathfinder, the Protocol becomes the primary link, and so sustaining its relevance becomes crucial. This recognises that sustaining the Pathfinder beyond its current incarnation may well only add to the confusion among the target client groups over which agencies are responsible or involved in business support.

It is proposed that the Protocol Agreement be incorporated in future work involving the promotion of rural services that have not been included in the Pathfinder project, such as transport and health.

The Protocol Agreement has been formed to improve rural delivery and its promotion, and is designed to enhance the work of the RAZ by using a joined up, single approach. A key issue now is to ensure that the lessons to be learned from the Protocol model are put into the wider rural regeneration arena.

However, for the Peak's own Protocol, partners felt a number of issues need to be addressed to ensure its future effectiveness:

- A lead agency needs to be identified as soon as practicable with overall responsibility for developing and sustaining the essential administrative framework. We understand that EMB Ltd has been invited to take this role.
- Consideration should also be given to engaging a dedicated officer with responsibility for servicing the Protocol and its projects.
- There needs to be a mechanism put in place which has the capacity to review and redefine partners' engagement.
- Future work should be centred on action programmes rather than policy and procedure.
- Performance measurement and evaluation tools will be one of the most important aspects of the agreement.
- A database needs to be established that can be accessed by all partners to allow them to see how effective the work is.
- Early action should be taken to determine how the work of the partners can be better embedded in the work of LSPs and Local Area Agreements.

Summary of Project Strengths & Weaknesses

The table below summarises *consultees' perceptions* of this project, and its merits in concept and delivery against the objectives of the Pathfinder. The table emphasises partner's own concerns that the Protocol, though potentially powerful, will only remain valid given the ongoing commitment of partners to it.

Perceived Strengths	Perceived Weaknesses
Clarified the range of support	Long term structural sustainability is not fully addressed
Built a platform for sustainable relationships between partners	Too much dependence on individual relationships and not sufficiently addressed how to embed the concept in organisations
Impetus generated by a dedicated officer	The protocol has not addressed issues of parochialism among partners
Project officer's work through the Protocol has contributed to regional engagement	Sometimes too arms length from implementation of specific projects
Development of an honest approach to networking	Uncertainty over future regional delivery frameworks inhibits the commitment to the Protocol
Broad knowledge base of partners	
Specific local knowledge	

Project Name: Peak Directions Web Portal
Key Partners: Pathfinder Officer Group, numerous individual agencies incl. East Midlands Business (EMB)

Project Description & Background

This project is linked with the Partnership Protocol in the development of a single entry point for businesses seeking the services of support agencies.

Following on from the Partnership Protocol, a Peak District Rural Portal [Peak Directions] was developed to provide the area with fully accessible information on funding and service provision. It was designed to support the work of Business Link and other groups by simplifying access to information. It was proposed that the web site would:

- Link directly with the new Business Links Knowledge Banks.
- Provide a single point of entry for information.
- Include a funding database and provide networking support service for various business sectors.
- Give additionality to the regional knowledge bank and new IDB model.
- Be heavily promoted and act to raise the profile of all partners involved.

The development of the gateway was put out to tender with High Peak CVS appointed after the tender process. A 'test' site was constructed to give partners a 'real life' view of what the proposed project could look like. This was approved as a basis for progress in February 2007.

Although the portal highlights and promotes existing services, it is not meant to duplicate or replace those services. The 'core' element will allow users of the service to look for details on support structures, existing networks, links to relevant internet based information & databases and also to find funding streams relevant to their work, all at the same time. In essence it is a website of "web-links" to further information available from different agencies.

The portal itself is jointly owned by all members of the Peak District Partnership Protocol but is based on the tendered provider's web server. The provider maintains and updates the site via a Service Level Agreement between the RAZ Protocol Partnership and the Tendered Provider.

Key Barriers and Achievements

Some members of the partnership were themselves sceptical about the use of web-based tools to meet Pathfinder objectives. However Peak Directions has been developed during a time when Broadband projects have been extended, and the land based sector has been starting to use the internet with increasing regularity. As such, its timing has been prescient.

Ironically for a project which was designed as a local response to the regionalisation of Business Links, it will soon face competition from, and will need to justify its existence against, a regional 'Knowledge Bank', designed to provide a one stop source of 'knowledge' for the region, which are being developed in both the East and West Midlands.

Knowledge Bank will collect all data and information on the main public sector services, as well as build in existing business databases currently run by the existing Business Links providers. All this will be run at an RDA level. The main users of the Knowledge Bank in both regions will be Business Links staff and associated brokers, who will use the information to assist in signposting clients to the relevant services, and advise on how to get in touch with those services best suited to their needs.

This service is not initially open to the public (this may happen in late 2008). They will be open to recognised partners and brokers of Business Links who will be able to register and 'log on' to the Knowledge Bank and use the facilities.

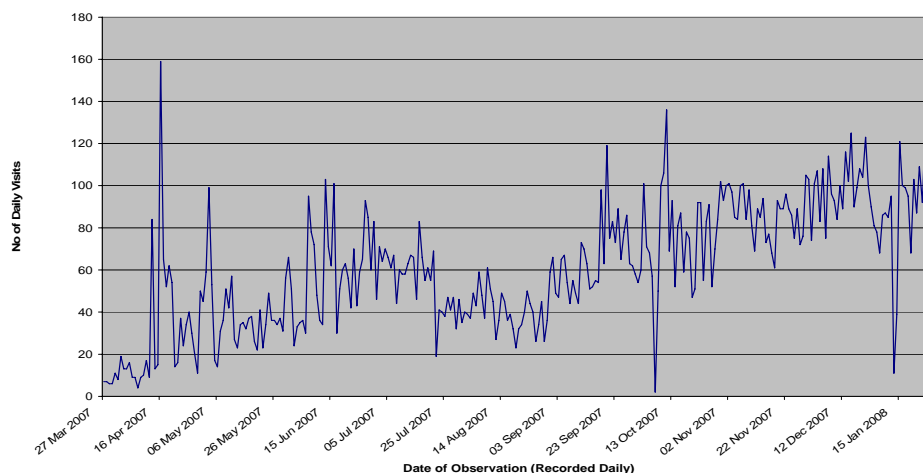
Crucial to the credibility of the Peak Directions gateway is the ability to demonstrate additionality to the Knowledge Bank's area of work. It can be argued that the value added of the Peak Directions approach compared with the regional offer is that it is a fully accessible public service, offering a direct signposting resource to business, enterprise and the general community.

Peak Directions 'joins up' all locally led services to business and enterprise under one access point to be used by the public. It also pursues a strong promotional direction heavily promoting that access within the local Peak District area.

Peak Directions targets services to those businesses, enterprises, community initiatives, projects, creative industries events, strategic reports and developments that are common place in the local area. In essence its additionality stems from its capacity to tailor wider initiatives to local need. It effectively accesses a target audience that the regional networks are not necessarily fine tuned enough to access, particularly in rural areas.

In addition, Peak Directions is showing that there is growing demand for a local service – the graph below shows the daily number of unique visitors to the site.

Graph 3.1: Peak Directions: Unique Visitors March '07-January '08



Though there are fluctuations (many of the 'dips' being due to web server problems), there is no doubt the underlying trend in visitors is up: Peak

Directions had some 6000 hits on the website in the first 3 months of operation. Of this figure 3000 were individuals spending significant time using the website. In 6 months the total figure was 15500 hits. Following an advertising campaign on Peak FM, it now stands at 1000 hits per week from repeat users.

Views on the Delivery of the Project

Initially the level of engagement by potential beneficiaries in Peak Directions was low. This was addressed by active marketing, including a successful local radio campaign. However it is recognised this is an area which needs further work: Phase 1 of the evaluation pointed out that the site was not as visible on Internet Search Engines such as Google™, under certain search criteria as perhaps it should be. In this specific case, it does not seem as if the web site has become more prominent than last year.

Liaison with Pathfinder was almost exclusively through the Project Officer. That collaboration was beneficial in the web site's development. The input of the PO gave clear direction and perspective which was highly valued by the web developer, High Peak CVS. The project has been very much scoped out by the vision of the Project Officer and the technical assistance of High Peak CVS (HPCVS, trading as Digital Umbrella).

To date the web site is showing itself to be a highly flexible tool, with regular changes to freshen content and format. This includes the emergence of the Peak Directions 'trademark' and logo, which it was said, has given the whole Pathfinder some form of corporate, public identity.

Development of the Web Site

In order to encourage greater use of the site, and develop new initiatives based on improving the service, the Pathfinder have sought partners based on a contractual relationship who can lead on:

- The development and delivery of an effective marketing and public relations strategy;
- Supplying the Peak District RAZ with suitable promotional literature, posters and flyers supporting the peak directions services;
- Promoting enterprise within the Peak District by formulating and delivering a marketing strategy for the Peak Directions Enterprise Initiative to include the promotion of the Peak Directions Enterprise Fund, Peak District Protocol Agreement, Events and the Pathfinder Pocket Guide series;
- Use in the local and national press, poster campaigns, leaflet drops and other promotional activities including a launch event.

In order to support the new Business Link delivery system, and that of the East and West Midlands Knowledge Banks, it is proposed that Peak Directions is linked into the Knowledge Bank in such a way that each complements the other. Peak Directions has been and will be used to help the new Business Links inform the wider public of the changes in their operations. An easy to use overview will be provided which explains why these changes have

happened, and which will help to accelerate take up of the new service within the Peak.

Ensuring Sustainability of Activities

There is a clear need now to ensure that Peak Directions is brought into partnership management. To this end EMB has formally been approached with a plan to become the 'lead' organisation on Peak Directions. EMB have already agreed to act as advisors on the site's content and it is felt, this organisation is the natural home for the site's management. This would mean EMB (or other 'host' organisation) would direct the operation of the site with HPCVS hosting, editing and running its day to day operation. The sustainability plan will be the responsibility of HPCVS under the guidance of [here] EMB.

The Peak Directions website portal requires a modest amount of resources to maintain. Several mechanisms are under consideration for the sustainability of the project. These include subscriptions by businesses registered with the directory and franchising the website model to other areas of the country. It is quite realistic that once fully established the website can be sustained in this way.

The set up costs were channelled through the Pathfinder. It is estimated that the full service will cost between £15,000 - £20,000 with additional costs of £3,500 - £4,000 for two years web hosting and technical support, and up to £1,000 for training of up to five staff to be system administrators should the need arise. Peak Directions has been 'pump primed' by the Pathfinder for the next two years.

There is a need to be able to demonstrate clear additionality. It has been proposed that this can be obtained by using the first two years to run a continued evaluation of the effectiveness of the service within the Peak District. The partners can then utilise this information to 'fill in' the gaps, hence making it far easier to identify when and where to deliver their services. We would endorse this position as it would demonstrate VFM amongst potential subscribers to the service.

Project Name: Enterprise Fund
Key Partners: Pathfinder Officer Group, emda, RAZ

Project Description

This fund was essentially a grants programme for local businesses, agencies and voluntary, community and faith sector (VCF) groups to access through the Pathfinder Officer. The fund was aligned to the Pathfinder objectives through its eligibility criteria. To qualify for the fund, a project had to meet one of the following criteria:

- Networking events for businesses and enterprise;
- New projects that enhance access to enterprising services and support networks;
- Publications that encourage enterprising activities;
- Projects that encourage young people to develop enterprising business ideas.

The costs of the fund were met by emda and Defra – this mix of funding ensured applications from the Staffordshire part of the Pathfinder area would be eligible.

The total value of the Fund was £50,000; the minimum project size was £2,500 and the maximum £10,000. The fund ran for three months in which there were three rounds of bidding. There was no requirement to show any matched funds to contribute to applicant project costs.

Aims and Objectives

The principal aims of the project were to support activities which met the above criteria. Note that the Enterprise Fund was not specifically discussed in the Pathfinder Business Plan. However the project is aligned to the third strand of the Pathfinder: *"To bring simplification to the 'grant giving maze' through out the RAZ"*

As outlined elsewhere in this report, simplification includes the evaluation of funding application forms, and development – with partner buy-in – to a single expression of interest form.

These objectives were seen as fundamental to encouraging businesses to identify and apply for grant funding and business support - the complexity of the application process being seen as a deterrent to applications.

Supported Activities & Projects

Strategically the project supported:

- The Pathfinder Officer to audit grant funds and their application procedure;
- Consult and lobby funders around redesigning and streamlining their application processes;
- Developing a scheme and application process which met the objectives of the Pathfinder and for which there was demand.

In total eight projects were supported by the fund, examples of which include:

- Supporting *Young Enterprise* develop learning modules and events in seven primary schools across the Peak;
- An event to encourage food and drink businesses to source local produce;
- Development of a festivals toolkit to support businesses and encourage tourism.

Note that ten Expressions of Interests were rejected – nine of these were in the first round after which an EOI form was introduced to verify eligibility at an early stage.

Role of Pathfinder

At first glance the Enterprise Fund appears to be a standard grants project, albeit one with an innovative set of objectives and rationale. However getting to this point has been a journey which has lasted the entire duration of the programme. This journey is broken down below:

Stage 1: Partner Buy-in

The first stage of the project was to test whether the proposed route to simplification of funding streams was actually viable. The project officer researched available grants and met with funders. In time it became clear that agencies, whether a member of the Pathfinder group or not, were simply not willing to yield any ground at all on retaining their own standard application form, even across projects. The two reasons cited were:

1. Ensuring information requirements were met;
2. The loss of branding and marketing on a common application form.

Stage 2: Recognition of Stakeholder Demands

Whilst discussions with funding bodies were taking place, the Pathfinder officer as handling enquiries from groups and businesses who, becoming increasingly aware of the programme, were seeking direct grant support.

At the same time, Business Link reorganisation was starting to elongate the timescales across the Pathfinder objectives. At this time it was looking as though there would be a very limited Business Link presence in the Peak District area, leaving a hole in not only business counselling but also in supporting start-ups and micro-businesses through grants.

Consultations with potential applicants identified the need for the type of grant support the Enterprise Fund became – in particular the need to develop a fund which could support projects 100% rather than be a source of matched funding.

Stage 3: Design and [Simplified] Delivery

Having scoped the outline of a grant-based product, the detailed mechanics and process had to be developed which met the needs of funders whilst also furthering the objectives of the Pathfinder.

Support for the grant came from emda, who wished to see *their application form* being used for grant applications in line with their standard approach. Therefore the Pathfinder was unable to produce a simplified form. What it did instead was to retain the emda form, but rewrite the form's wording and guidance, especially on output requirements and definitions, thus making it simpler for the applicant organisation to complete.

Following the experience from the first round of applications which attracted a high number of 'random' and speculative enquiries, the application process was refined to the following model:

1. Groups submit to the Pathfinder Officer an Expression of Interest form that verifies their eligibility against the funding criteria and the following tests;
 - a. fit totally with the aims of the Pathfinder
 - b. could prove that they would not happen without the aid of the Pathfinder
 - c. Would have a lasting impact on the area or be a sustainable idea.
2. The applications are sifted by the Rural Action Zone Management Group, with those successful at this stage invited to submit a full application. The application form is in fact identical to the Expression of Interest form (taking on board revisions), but requires more information on finance.
3. The projects are then appraised and presented back to the management group with a recommendation from the RAZ's Appraisal Officer.
4. The RAZ board will then approve projects.

The time from application to approval is around eight weeks. This is said by some to compare favourably with other available grant packages, particularly those where there is a requirement to part-fund the project from another source.

There is a requirement for projects to complete an evaluation form on completion of the project.

Views of Beneficiaries

We spoke to beneficiaries about the fund, the application process and its impact. Commonly held views included:

- The application process was straight forward with clear guidance notes;
- The Pathfinder Officer was very supportive of individual applications;
- Applications were dealt with quickly;
- The fund was unique and much needed among the applicants.

Though projects have not all yet been formally [self] evaluated, early indications are that the projects are, in the main, on their way to proving successful in achieving their objectives. For a number of projects, for example 'Taste the Peak' and the 'Young Enterprise Primary Programme' it is hoped the success of the pilots funded by the scheme will lead to further development of activities.

Impact of the Project

Firstly, the fund was very popular among target groups with high levels of take-up. £42k will be spent by the scheme – the residual being due to the very final project earmarked for funds being rejected at the last stage of application. Comments from beneficiaries underline the process.

The sustainability of the project is therefore *not* through sustaining the Fund in its own right: The Fund has always been envisaged as a one-off hit, to test the demand and kick start relevant activities. That said there is a hope that either a regional partner or the RAZ itself will see the demand for such a targeted approach and develop a similar programme in the future. Instead the sustainable impacts of the fund will come from the results of sustaining project activity and supporting those projects to develop further funding streams.

Strategically, this project has tested the goodwill which organisations show in participating in partnerships of this kind against the boundaries of flexibility and process. There is no doubt that a single, simplified, application form across a range of agencies and funding pots is a better system than at present:

- The data is more easily stored and accessed for future use;
- It is easier to refer clients (applicants) on to other agencies and support opportunities.
- Above all it is simpler for the applicant business.

That said, this project has underlined the practical complexities in taking what seems like a relatively simple action. What the project has shown is that such simplification is not easy. Nonetheless, the project has led to the adoption of the simplified application form used here among a number of partners for their own grant awards (for example Staffordshire Moorlands' Redundant Building Grants Scheme).

What has become clear is that 'simplification' (at least at the local level), rightly or wrongly, is more about service design and delivery rather than process and administrative change. It is easier, and more effective, to align partner strategies than to try and 'customise' the same partners' administrative systems. Thus the Pathfinder's Enterprise Fund has been about finding (i) a unified approach and (ii) a simplified approach to service delivery.

The pathfinder experience in this regard has been prescient with the national review of the simplification of Business Support currently taking place, led by the Department of Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR). Recent documentation suggests that the review will examine common management information systems – this may make it easier to develop an initiative such as a common application form in the future.

Project Name: Rural Hub
Key Agencies: Derbyshire Dales District Council; Derbyshire Dales CVS; East Midlands Business (Business Link)

Project Rationale

This project was central to the Pathfinder's stated objective to effectively and efficiently join up and deliver quality services. More specifically, to develop and support within the area, co-location/tandem service delivery and to [develop] a network of one-stop information shops.

Project Description & History

A report commissioned by the Peak District Rural Action Zone in 2003, prior to the start of the Pathfinder initiative, had already recommended co-location as an effective and economical means of service delivery in the Peak District.

A number of different approaches to co-locating services have been discussed by the Pathfinder. These have included the development of shared mobile services enabling temporary stands, access to counsellors and even IT training to go to the most remote parts of the Peak District. A less ambitious model discussed would have seen business support providers 'travelling', and undertaking outreach and signposting, within existing mobile services such as mobile libraries. Environmental concerns were among the reasons why an all-partner agreement could not be reached on these approaches.

The Pathfinder then set out to scope out the needs for one-stop information shops and identify service needs, locations and associated demand analysis for these access points.

Potential sites were scoped out in High Peak, Derbyshire Dales and Staffordshire Moorlands. In Staffordshire however two potential locations already had one stop shops; in the High Peak no acceptable or suitable site could be found.

In Bakewell however, a range of funding strands has supported the development of the Agricultural Business Centre (ABC) in Bakewell Town Centre. At the heart of this facility is a working livestock market – which itself serves a vital economic and community purpose. The market is extended to incorporate a public farmers' market, office space for local business, meeting and conference facilities and, most recently, an NHS drop-in clinic for farmers.

Most significantly for this project, the ABC also housed an East Midlands Business Link and local Chamber of Commerce office. Reorganisation of Business Link meant there was no call for the reformed agency to use the full office. However East Midlands Business Ltd and Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Chamber still required space for:

- Advisors to 'hotdesk' and access convenient office support;
- Meeting space;
- To administer and deliver the new business start-up contract.

At the same time, Derbyshire Dales District Council was in the process of relocating its then current Bakewell office which also housed the Derbyshire Dales CVS (DDCVS). The case for co-locating these services was a natural fit with the objectives of the Pathfinder. The three agencies completed the move in January 2008.

As a result of the move, the ABC now houses no fewer than eight public agencies delivering and marketing public and third sector activities and services across the full range of such interventions –health, training, business support, community empowerment and so on, with the Pathfinder co-located agencies placed at the heart of the collaboration.

Future Activity

The project has incorporated considerations for agencies to locate in the ABC suite at a future date – it is easy to see the potential for labour market and training agencies to have a base at the centre with its high, local and regional footfall.

From its new base DDCVS will support the Bakewell Town Hall Trust to convert the vacant Town Hall into a community space, this will create further community infrastructure which will be complementary to the agency-based activity in the ABC centre.

ABC is also home to the Peak District Land Management Advisory Service, whilst both the NFU and the Pathfinder have hosted many agricultural events and activities at the ABC. It is hoped that the events which have been developed through the Pathfinder and which have proved highly successful can continue beyond the Pathfinder.

Co-location and the provision of Pathfinder as a partner forum have also led to consideration of, and development of responses to, agricultural crises which are becoming a too-regular occurrence. The partners have considered how Foot-and-Mouth and before that BSE and the possibility of bird flu have had a real impact on the agricultural economy and how that economy works – for example restrictions on moving livestock and wider transport issues.

This has led to discussions with the NFU and the Advisory Service about using the Peak Directions web site as a tool to establish a 'virtual market' to enable sheep and cattle sales to take place when there are restrictions on bringing livestock to market.

Perhaps most innovatively the co-location could lead to an investigation into the possibility of locating a hot-desk based 'seedbed' managed workspace in the ABC. This facility will be single or hotdesk based, with PC access points for micro-business owners to use and take advantage of shared services, including 'virtual office' support.

The management of the ABC will also be reviewed as a result of the continued success of co-location. The livestock market is a self sustaining facility: It may be that the shops, offices and other accommodation spaces can come under the umbrella of a dedicated social enterprise, possibly under the CVS for whom this would represent a form of income to aid its

sustainability. Under a separate management a dedicated manager could look to further expand the facilities and agencies using ABC as a base and for one-off events.

Role of the Pathfinder

At a practical level Pathfinder funding facilitated the move. This involved extensive office refurbishments – the creation of space for further agency relocations on a hot-desk basis, space for meetings and tuition, and IT equipment. The total cost of the refurbishment was approximately £40,000, of which half was met by the Pathfinder, two-thirds of the outstanding costs from DDDC and the remainder from DDCVS.

Of course the impact of the Pathfinder has not been simply the provision of funding. The existence of the Pathfinder itself has (i) placed co-location uppermost in the minds of agencies (ii) provided a forum in which East Midlands Business Ltd, the CVS and the local authority have met regularly. Without the Pathfinder there is no doubt the business support providers would have simply pulled out of the ABC and sought what may have been less suitable, temporary premises elsewhere. Meanwhile DDCVS might also have sought alternative accommodation elsewhere, as might the other agencies and organisations which have now co-located.

It has been the Pathfinder which provided a forum, a focus and a rationale for encouraging individual agencies to buy into the benefits of co-location. Could this have been achieved through the RAZ? This is highly doubtful, actual outputs from co-location are long term and difficult to identify. Therefore activity would not necessarily have been aligned to RAZ objectives, making it difficult for them to approve any project application.

Key Project Impacts and Achievements

The Pathfinder has long seen ABC as being the local hub of activity for Bakewell and the Peak District. It is now recognised that the services offered within the ABC are complementary to the Town Centre offer.

The ABC is now a vital part of the Peak economy as well as a much needed location for events and services. Co-location and the development of ABC as a rural hub which encompasses economically vital provision (the livestock market) have given ABC national status, maintained Bakewell's status as a 'working market town' and actually brought more business visitors to the town from across the Peak and beyond.

The co-location project has also been an important flagship for the programme, and its achievements have been in line with the objectives of the Pathfinder, though it will be some time before the benefits of co-location on business support service design and delivery, as well as agency referrals will be fully realised.

Furthermore, if one uses a Strategic Added Value (SAV) framework, now incorporated into evaluations and performance frameworks of RDAs, a series of clear impacts emerge:

Flagship partnership project as a result of aligning agendas:

How partners respond to the opportunities of the co-location, and investigate the future activities discussed here will determine the success of co-location, additional to the success of the ABC. It is clear that by co-locating, agencies are aligning their tactical approach to delivering rural services.

A delivery framework to reflect partner structures and integrate local agendas:

The Pathfinder has offered local flexibility, tested alternative approaches against the objectives of partners and found a suitable, agreeable method of delivery.

A client group engagement strategy and structure for the target area:

Co-location is intended to increase cross-referrals and benefit from being close to the client group 'market' (no pun intended). Access to the Peak District Land Management Advisory Service provides an ideal starting point for setting up more formal contact.

Ability of project to lever in additional resource:

The project has attracted matched funding from the partners. The possible creation of a social enterprise to further the co-location agenda and what should hopefully be an environment conducive to producing imaginative funding bids should lever in resource in the future.

More effective use of market intelligence in the delivery of business support and product development:

The project will have its ears very much close to the ground as agricultural businesses use the ABC every week. Services will be designed around their needs (including diversification). The CVS-BL-Chamber link up should provide a range of services to stimulate community and social enterprise.

Ability of project/partnership to influence policies and actions of funders:

With East Midland Business now retaining a presence in the area through the project, this should ensure rural needs are reflected in the strategy of the regional Business Link.

Improved service to business – greater integration providing a simpler customer journey with responsive and flexible solution delivery:

These benchmarks are at the very heart of the project and Pathfinder aims.

+

Greater links between policy areas:

4. VIEWS OF THE PATHFINDER OFFICER GROUP

We used several mechanisms to collect the views of members of the Pathfinder Officer Group (POG):

1. A number of face-to-face and telephone consultations;
2. Two e-mailed questionnaires to members of the POG:
 - Firstly reflecting the face-to-face consultations;
 - A repeat of the Partnership audit undertaken during the first phase of the evaluation
3. A round table discussion held with the POG during their scheduled January meeting.

4.1 One-to-One Interviews and Questionnaire

Members of the Pathfinder Officer Group (hereafter 'the Partnership, or POG) were contacted, be that as a delivery agent, a beneficiary (a few members of the POG also benefited through for example the Enterprise Fund, support for events, or because their organisation has contracted to deliver activity), or simply as a member of the POG.

Interviews were typically of 45-60 minute duration, in line with a semi-structured interview pro-forma (see Appendix 2), where an appointment could not be made in the time frame, comments were sought via either telephone or e-mail. During the Phase I evaluation, the focus was very much on the Partnership and its progress since the Pathfinder was launched. For this evaluation the focus has been to gather views on projects, obviously individuals will have a better working knowledge of some projects than others.

The issues discussed are set out below:

Perspectives on Key Achievements

Consultees outlined what they had considered as being the key achievements of the programme. In terms of project activity consultees typically described each of the four key projects as being a success, even though each of these projects didn't develop over the lifetime of the Pathfinder as expected: Most notably the planned centrepiece of the project – the Business Support 'hotline' – was significantly revised from the original vision.

The development of the Peak Directions web site was the single project most likely to be held up as a demonstration of achievement. Partners were excited about the web-site's content, impressed by the growing user base and how the site could develop in the future.

As well as the site's functionality, the development of the Peak Direction's concept, its logo and identity was also a key outcome of the process set in train by the Pathfinder.

The ongoing success of partnership protocol was also said to be one of the key achievements of the programme. It was felt that through the protocol:

- Peak Directions would remain a focal point for promoting business support in the Peak;
- Communication between Derbyshire and Staffordshire authorities and agencies will continue (subject to Staffs. Agencies signing up to the protocol);
- Joint working in business support will continue and by so doing avoid duplication and ensure access to services.

Note that some felt the Protocol should have been a starting point for the Pathfinder and not an end goal. However, others felt this view ignored the effort that had to be made in securing partner buy-in – which is still an on-going issue.

Partners agreed that, although the organising of activities such as the careers events for young people and various sector focused and more general business and enterprise events didn't seem very radical; without the Pathfinder the relevant agencies probably wouldn't have an opportunity to meet, identify need, and arrange funding. Therefore these events would have been unlikely to happen.

In terms of Partnership working and strategy, many of the achievements have already been reported by the first phase evaluation. These included:

- Development of meaningful projects through a consensus;
- Evidence of aligning corporate policies;
- Engagement of key agencies who were in danger of drifting away from the area;
- Development of an enthusiastic, influential decision taking body.

These achievements remain much the same twelve months on. However this year partners cited a number of specific instances where the Pathfinder projects have had important strategic and tactical spin-offs. This is most obvious with the retention of a Business Link presence in the area through the co-location project.

The influence of the Pathfinder beyond its project brief can also be seen through two examples of its involvement in regional partnerships, one in the East Midlands and one in the West Midlands: Firstly, the *West Midlands Rural Business Advisory Group* – the Pathfinder's participation in that group has communicated the Partnership Protocol among partners and led to the production of a West Midlands protocol.

The stated objective now is to similarly use equivalent East Midlands strategic groups to develop an emda-wide protocol among its business support and enterprise partners too. In time there is the possibility that the protocols could be brought together meaning the entire East-West Midlands boundary could be covered by a protocol agreement, facilitating greater communication in areas such as the NW-Leicestershire and South Derbyshire coalfield, or along the developing A50 corridor.

The Pathfinder has also been active in the *East Midlands Women and Enterprise Network* – set up by emda - it supports women in, or thinking of

going into, business. Pathfinder has been an active member of the group. The women's group has held a number of events which the Pathfinder has actively supported. It is hoped that Peak Directions will soon have a 'women in business' section built into it.

Key Barriers the Pathfinder Projects (and Partnership) has Overcome

The projects have had to overcome a number of barriers and obstacles in their development, and many of these are flagged up in the individual case studies - partners emphasised their importance in shaping the pathfinder activity.

However it is worth emphasising national policy created a new challenge for the Pathfinder almost immediately upon receipt of funding: The reorganisation and restructuring of Business Link services, their move to a regional IDB model, and, most significantly, the switch to a single number gateway for business support in each region, almost immediately halted the core elements of the planned strategy for the Pathfinder.

The Business Links single entry point placed the Peak Pathfinder's ambition completely at odds with the new Business Link corporate strategy. At the same time the changes to Business Link emphasised and significantly strengthened their role in delivering support, placing the Business Link brand at the heart of enterprise development and support.

This was then a whole new policy framework from that envisaged when the Pathfinder proposals were drawn up and has been an obvious obstacle the Pathfinder has had to address and negotiate around at every turn. This was achieved primarily through recognition of the need to engage East and West Midlands Business Links much more closely than had been the case at the outset of the Pathfinder.

Views on the Delivery of the Pathfinder

There is clear agreement that the day-to-day management of the Programme has been excellent.

A few consultees reflected on the Phase 1 conclusion that a clear learning point for DEFRA is that a modest 'programme' such as the Pathfinder requires a dedicated resource to deliver activities. The Pathfinder had initially tried to deploy existing staff to oversee the work, but it had become obvious early on in the programme's lifespan that this was insufficient. The point was made that what has been key has been:

- The close relationship between the POG and the Project Officer;
- The ability of the Project Officer to develop projects as a self-starter;
- That the project officer has remained with the programme right until the programme end;
- Whilst the partners, and supported activities in the Rural Action Zone were said to have tended to be focused on individual local authority areas, the Pathfinder had enabled a Peak-wide perspective.

The Partnership, and the project officer, were said to have continued to pursue the Pathfinder's objectives right through to the end of the programme, with no noticeable 'wind down' of activities – e.g. the Enterprise Fund has continued and the Partnership has been lobbying agencies to sign up to the Protocol Agreement.

In the previous evaluation there are references to a minority view of the Pathfinder experience as one of frustration and a lack of radicalism. This uncertainty continues amongst some POG members, in contrast to the majority of the Partnership (at least among those to whom we spoke) who continue to be positive about its achievements. Note that an observation was made that one or two agencies had dropped away from active participation over the last year.

Development of Linkages to Individual Agencies

Firstly consultees stated the Partnership itself developed into an effective, well run forum, with high attendance and the development of projects extensively discussed with clear guidance for the Project Officer who has also supported the Partnership with regular discussion and policy papers.

Project activity, and the links made through strategy groups such as those described above, have extended and strengthened links through the hosting of a series of events across the Peak District, which have been well received.

A number of events in particular stood out: The Pathfinder/NFU 'Young Person's Event' to stimulate interest in agricultural careers, attracted over 20 agencies, companies and organisations as well as over sixty young people interested in developing a land-based career. Over the period of the Pathfinder a relationship developed between the programme, High Peak Borough Council and the High Peak Engineering and Manufacturing Task Force – this led to the hosting of a number of successful events.

Obviously the most important linkages for this programme have been with what became the two regional Business Links. With the process of co-location, as the Case Studies reflect, partners are becoming more comfortable and confident in East Midlands Business Ltd's commitment to the area. In this respect the Pathfinder has created the infrastructure for the East Midlands Business Links to continue their commitment to the Derbyshire side of the Peak. Partners pointed to:

- East Midlands Business can maintain a base in the area through the co-location project;
- The Peak Directions web site provides an excellent marketing platform;
- Pocket Guides provide an introduction to relevant support services for residents and businesses;
- The successful hosting of sector focused events demonstrates how local businesses can be engaged;
- The Enterprise Fund's success shows the potential impact of a dedicated grants fund;

- The Protocol should ensure Business Link remain at the heart of the development of business support for both mainstream businesses and the emergence of Social Enterprise, where co-location with the CVS opens up a collaborative approach between Business Link and the third sector.

In addition, partners highlighted the potential role East Midlands Business Ltd could take in overseeing the Peak Direction web site's medium term development and in their role as 'Protocol Relationship Manager', championing the Protocol and ensuring its objectives are pursued.

However, partners were less certain about the strength of linkages with Derbyshire Enterprise Agency, who hold the contract to deliver start-up support in the county, and it was felt that a future priority should be to ensure their continued support for the Peak District.

The Future: Key Messages

The Case Studies highlighted the success in developing forward strategies for the three main projects (Peak Directions, Partnership Protocol and co-location of services) and partners underlined this achievement.

Though many still saw some role for the Pathfinder Partnership (expressed by some as a desire for a Pathfinder III!), its dissolution on completion of the programme is widely accepted. Of greater concern is how the 'Peak District area' will continue to be seen as such by future funders.

Underlying this concern are the following issues:

- Future rural structures may be Derbyshire-wide, leading to concerns that resources will drift away from the Peak;
- The Sub-National Review which proposes a further extension to the role of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) to achieve a wider range of economic development-based targets;
- There are concerns that the Derbyshire Local Area Agreement, the 'refresher' for which is now in its negotiation stage, may not recognise the need to retain a Peak District focus and structure;
- There are also concerns that the Staffordshire LAA does not reflect the needs of the Peak;
- At least one of the County Councils is reluctant to enter into a Multi-Area Agreement reflecting the cross-boundary nature of the Peak;

Thus partners saw the need to retain some form of vehicle to represent ("defend" as some consultees put it) the concept of a Peak District Area, and to at least make sure the learning points from the Pathfinder are not lost as future structures emerge.

Concluding Comments: Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses of the Peak District Pathfinder

As a concluding comment, consultees were asked to list in bullet point form what they considered to be the main strengths (successes) and weaknesses

(failures) of the Pathfinder Programme in the Peak. Responses are listed below:

Perceived Strengths of the Pathfinder	Perceived Weaknesses of the Pathfinder
Role of the Project Officer in pushing activity	Was its impact as intended?
Agencies wanted to take part in Pathfinder	Did the Pathfinder fail to engage with businesses?
Built on previous successes of cross-border working	Pathfinder did not address Social Enterprise agenda
Addressed identified needs with a focused agenda	Inability to influence the LAAs
Pathfinder has operated strategically and distinctly from the RAZ	Agencies have fallen away recently
Creation of projects with real potential	Slow start to the programme
Partnership has been well led	
People have recognised the achievements of the Pathfinder over time	
The development of transferable templates (Peak Directions) and models (Pathfinder Partnership)	
Partnership delivered activity – not just a talking shop	
Partnership unsullied by rivalries	
Has demonstrated a need for new mechanisms	
Partnership helped focus minds on business agenda	
Will [hopefully] influence future programmes	
Speed at which projects progressed	

Most of the points are considered in detail elsewhere in this report. However we can say that the evidence from the table suggests:

- Partners emphasised the successful appointment of a Project Officer as being fundamental to the Pathfinder's success;
- The activities supported have promoted rural business support and led agencies to look at the Partnership's achievements, not least for framing future activity;
- That said there remains a need to monitor the actual impact the programme has had, both on (i) local enterprise as a client group and (ii) on influencing emerging policy.

The weaknesses column perhaps presents a “debating column” rather than a precise overview of achievement. Certainly the for first three of these points a counter view can be put forward.

5. PARTNERSHIP REVIEW

For Phase one of the evaluation we sent members of the POG a survey to collect their views on a number of topics:

- Partnership Impacts
- Partnership Linkages & Delivery
- Delivering the Programme
- The Partnership's Future
- Views on Key Achievements

For Phase 2 we have repeated the questionnaire to see how the achievements of the programme are now viewed after one year of programme delivery. The questionnaire also provides a snapshot assessment of confidence in the forward arrangements for the programme and Pathfinder. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3

5.1 Method

A survey questionnaire was posted to 24 partnership representatives in January 2008, requiring 'tick box' responses on a five point Likert scale to 36 statements (reproduced in the tables below) about the partnership and its activities.

The 36 statements are statements with which partners in a successful programme and partnership should be able to agree, (i.e. to give a response of 5 or 4 on our Likert scale).

Disagreement with any statement, (responses of 1 or 2), even expressed by a minority of partners, is clearly a matter for concern; and even 'neither agree nor disagree' (response of 3) is disappointing. Although the precise figure is a matter of judgment, in our view and experience an average response below 3.5 is a cause for at least some concern, and such responses are highlighted in the tables. We also draw attention to cases where, within an average of 3.5 or higher, there were individual partners expressing disagreement. We also find respondents to surveys such as these tend to have a more positive view on the partnership

For each of the above issues we present the average score for Phase 2, followed by the score for Phase 1. We then indicate whether any changes in score might be significant

5.2 Partnership Impacts

The first set of questions looked at whether and how the Pathfinder Partnership was seen to have made an impact on the Peak District area.

Compared to last year, positive opinion of the partnership impacts seems to have increased: Compared to last year a higher proportion of respondents agreed that:

- The objectives and priorities of the Pathfinder Partnership more closely reflected those of their own organisation, suggesting some alignment of corporate strategies;

- The Partnership had a shared vision for the Action Zone's future.

Table 5.1: Partnership Impacts

	Phase 2 Average Score	Phase 1 Average Score	Change in Score
The Pathfinder Partnership has brought focus and commitment to business support activity in the area.	4.2	4.3	
The Pathfinder Partnership has provided increased confidence within the wider community about the long-term future of the area.	3.4	3.2	
The Partnership has provided increased confidence <i>among the partners</i> about the long-term future of the area (in the wider context)	3.2	4.0	-
The objectives and priorities of the Pathfinder Partnership reflect those of my own organisation	4.4	3.9	+
The Partnership has a shared vision for the Action Zone's future (i.e. beyond any natural time-life of the Zone itself or the specific task of the Pathfinder).	4.4	3.8	+
Having an Officers' Group dedicated to the Pathfinder additional to the wider Action Zone arrangements, has 'added value' to the programme	4.0	4.3	
The Partnership has focused solely on achievement of the Pathfinder objectives	3.4	3.9	-
The Partnership has an influence on the rural economy beyond its role in steering the Pathfinder	4.0	4.1	
The existence of the Pathfinder Partnership has increased resources (not necessarily cash) beyond that anticipated through the Pathfinder itself	4.2	3.7	+
All relevant organisations are represented in the Officer Group.	4.2	4.0	
All members of the partnership have played a constructive role, enabling a positive response to business support issues within the Action Zone.	3.6	3.8	
Participation in the Pathfinder has influenced my agency/department/organisation in how our own services are delivered beyond the specific issues of the Pathfinder itself	3.6	3.6	

Overall the scores reflect a partnership confident it has had a positive impact beyond the allocated resources it had at its disposal and that the projects it has supported has made a positive contribution.

Among the statements which now draw significantly less support, there is clearly agency concern about policy changes and initiatives (see elsewhere in this evaluation) which could impact negatively on the area in the future. The change in score on the focus of the Pathfinder Partnership reflects the body's willingness to discuss wider issues in Partnership meetings.

5.3 Partnership Linkages and Delivery

The key features of table 5.2 are that:

- Partners have become more positive about the level of involvement of the business community (and other Pathfinder-related client groups) in the design of services and products developed by the Pathfinder;
- No doubt because of the Peak Directions web-site and other activities, there was a much more positive view towards the profile and awareness

of the Pathfinder amongst the business community – though this is still not a clearly positive score.

Table 5.2: Partnership Linkages & Delivery

	Phase 2 Average Score	Phase 1 Average Score	Change in Score
The business community is effectively engaged in the plans of the Partnership	3.2	2.8	+
There is a clear consultation/dialogue with the intended beneficiary group(s) about the Pathfinder's work when designing specific interventions	4.2	3.6	+
The partnership has had the right level of engagement with the private sector for this programme	3.6	3.3	
The partnership has had the right level of engagement with the voluntary sector for this programme	3.6	3.9	
Overall, I would say the Pathfinder Partnership has been successful in bringing together agencies from two different regions	3.8	4.1	
I am confident the Pathfinder projects will represent an enhanced business support 'offer' to all eligible enterprises across the action zone area	4.2	4.6	
I consider my organisation as being 'active' in delivering Pathfinder objectives	4.2	4.3	
All members of the Partnership understand the issues around the practicalities of delivering business support	4.0	4.4	-
The relationship between the Partnership and the Accountable Body has been a positive one	4.6	4.2	+
The linkages between Partnership decision making and day-to-day operation have been strong	4.0	3.8	
The linkages between the Pathfinder Partnership (Officers' Group) and the RAZ have been strong	4.2	4.3	
The Pathfinder initiative has a high profile among the general public in the Action Zone area	3.0	2.8	
The Pathfinder initiative has a high profile among the business community in the Action Zone area	3.4	2.9	+

- As with the scores for partnership impacts, overall the scores are high. However, where the partnership has not scored well has reflected a view that the profile of the Pathfinder among the resident and, more pertinently, the business community remains low.

5.4 Programme Delivery

As with last year's review, views on delivery were overwhelmingly positive. They have improved on many of even last year's high scores.

Most significantly, the Pathfinder Partnership are confident, and have a growing confidence, in the programme's achievements both practically in delivering projects and strategically in aligning service delivery – echoing points made previously.

Table 5.3: Partnership and the Programme

	Phase 2 Average Score	Phase 1 Average Score	Change in Score
The Officers' Group has proved itself a capable body by successfully delivering the Pathfinder Initiative	4.4	4.2	
The Officers' Group has successfully aligned service delivery with the needs of businesses in the Action Zone	4.4	3.5	+

	Phase 2 Average Score	Phase 1 Average Score	Change in Score
area			
The Pathfinder approach has successfully pulled together agencies from different localities	4.4	4.6	
The Pathfinder approach has successfully pulled together agencies from different regions	3.8	4.1	
Partners understand their role and responsibilities in delivering a successful Pathfinder programme	4.4	4.1	

The success of the partnership in drawing together partners from different regions is the one statement where agreement has dropped somewhat, though not by an amount we would call significant. However this fall is important to note, as this is a benchmark for the Pathfinder.

5.5 The Future

Given the anticipated changes to the Rural Action Zone delivery structures (see elsewhere) the questions posed in this section are somewhat redundant, but are included (a) for completeness and (b) they are still a useful benchmark to reflect on the success of the Pathfinder, however we have not reproduced the tables.

The most important observation from the data is that partners are confident the actions funded by the Pathfinder will have a long term positive impact on the local area.

Secondly partners felt the skills learned through the Pathfinder process could and should continue to benefit the local area.

6. FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

The final piece of 'evidence gathering' was undertaken through the hosting of two mini-focus groups, the first with a group of stakeholders who have engaged in some way with the Pathfinder's activities and the second with the Pathfinder's Officer Group.

The two groups were invited to give their observations on the achievements or otherwise of the Pathfinder process. Because of the strictures of the timetable for the evaluation, this exercise was comparatively unsophisticated and simply asked of participants

- What had been the main successes and the key legacies of the Pathfinder?
- Had there been any issues that had not been adequately addressed?
- What were felt to be the next steps in the development of Business Support Projects?

The views of the two groups on these three issues are presented below:

Group 1: Beneficiaries

SUCCESSSES	OMISSIONS/FAILURES	ISSUES
Resources were devolved to the local level based on local need	Some lack of clarity on strategic fit	Initial decision to step into complex area of business support
Influence of dedicated Project Officer once appointed	Underfunded	Should have been more community development
Additional staff resource provided by Pathfinder to assist partner agencies	Poor direction from Defra	Protocol agreement has given a boost to the process, but concern over level of engagement from AWM
The Website	Ideas were not easily translated into action – Pathfinder is about 'new ways' of working	Geography plays an important role in the minds of people at the top of partner organisations, whereas at grass roots there is more pragmatism about working in different areas
Good employer/partnership engagement	Not enough flexibility given to the Project Officer to 'get on with it'	If events continue, there is a need to address transportation to ensure inclusivity
Positive comments from users of Peak Directions	Need to direct help though the maze of assistance schemes	Not a sufficiently long timescale to make step changes
Leaflets for which starting to get good feedback	Too project oriented towards the end	Project staff short-termism
Joint events – again very positive feedback	To develop a single point of entry	Physical issues over small rural enterprises accessing short term funding
Support of Project Officer for joint events	Protocol should have been dealt with very early in the process	There are real barriers to expansion in the area – work space for small businesses; skills shortages
Facilitated capacity to bring together resources	Tendency still to treat symptoms rather than causes	Need for an agreed strategic vision – i.e. what is the real problem
Got enterprise education into younger age groups [primary schools in particular] and isolated communities		Fall off in training provision for certain trades training especially engineering
Reinforced the long tradition of joint working in this area		How do SMEs and micro-businesses find out what assistance is available

SUCCESES	OMISSIONS/FAILURES	ISSUES
		to them – cross over referrals

Group 2: Pathfinder Officer Group

SUCCESES	OMISSIONS/FAILURES	ISSUES
Focus on the economy of the Peak District	Slow start to the process	Changing devolution agendas have caused progress problems
Peak Directions	Impasse caused by changes in various business support contracts	Regional business link changes in the middle of the Project
Engagement with young people	Ensuring strategic fit – alignment with LAAs, LSPs agendas	Group now considering mainstreaming
Specific focus on business has led to tangible legacies	Giving micro businesses the capacity to buy in to the agenda	Skills fit needs addressing
Useful in supporting local need	Trying to fit Pathfinder into too wide a range of activities	Specialist availability such as planning, marketing
Influenced cross boundary working	Not radical enough	Framework for interaction with microbusinesses needed
Benefits of the dedicated Project Officer	Decision making processes may have restricted innovation	need to embed what has been learnt
Business Link / CVS co-location		Potential loss of intellectual pool caused by out commuting – how can they be kept here?
Strong history of partnership working reinforced in this process		IT is opening up a different economy
Has helped to identify and define extent of microbusiness sector in the area		PO Group members need to take what has been generated into other audiences – LAAs for example
Number of high quality sustainable projects		Connectivity to the VCFS sector needs to be developed
It is a rural upland partnership with common purpose		Need to keep a focus on the Peak District – advocacy role
Relatively modest resource has achieved significant outcomes		Local government has something to offer Defra's agenda
Shown a capacity to make relatively small sums of money work		

These comments are summarised below in terms of the Programme's (i) Organisational strengths, weaknesses and impact (ii) Resources and (iii) Projects:

6.1 Organisational Strengths, Weaknesses & Impacts

Key observations included:

Key Successes

- The reinforcement of the tradition of co-operative working in the Peak District has been an important outcome of the Pathfinder.
- The capacity to further develop this tradition has been in no small measure due to the appointment of a dedicated project officer.
- Steered by a successful POG group

Key Omissions/Failures

- Concern over the pace at which the process started.
- The Protocol should have been set out at an earlier stage.

Issues for the Future

- A key issue for the future is how to mainstream/embed the lessons learnt in the activities of partner organisations.
- Also, it was felt there needed to be a greater understanding of how to fully engage the Voluntary, Community & Faith (VCF) Sector - as this sector has important networks at grass roots level, which could be a source of emerging Community and Social Enterprises.

6.2 Resources

Key Successes

- The Pathfinder was seen as having provided valuable additional resources particularly through the Enterprise Fund.
- In terms of financial input, the capacity of just small additional/primer sums to generate activity was noticeable. This was attributed to:
 - The commitment of partners to the partnership
 - The character of the communities in the area which were seen as resourceful.

Key Omissions/Failures

- There was also concern that micro-businesses did not have the resources to access available business support and this was an issue the Pathfinder failed to recognise.
- There was a general feeling that the Pathfinder timescale was too short to effectively test options for working.

Issues for the Future

- The focus of comments was on the need to meet the needs of micro-businesses:
 - Develop a framework for interaction with the micro-business sector in the Peak;
 - Provide this sector with access to specialist advice and services.

6.3 Projects

Successes

- Generally, the Projects were seen as successful with Peak Directions and the Events Programme being particularly so.
- The positive engagement with young people was also seen as a success.

Omissions/Failures

- The capacity to translate ideas into action was felt to have been inhibited by the decision making process.
- The projects which came forward were thought to be 'too safe'.

Issues for the Future

- There is a need to address a number of fundamental issues in the business and enterprise arena including:
 - The supply of workspace;
 - Relevant training.

- There was recognition of the value of events and a desire to keep a programme of events running beyond the life of the Pathfinder.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this section we present high level, general conclusions and specific comments/issues from the evaluation research.

7.1 General summation of performance and achievement

Our general conclusions are presented as a three dimensional review of the Pathfinder initiative seen from:

- 1) The Haskins review of rural and agricultural policy - essentially the formative stages of current rural policy (see 7.1);
- 2) DEFRA's Pathfinder prospectus;
 - o How to make delivery more effective (that is, that delivery activities and outcomes match agreed policies and resources match need);
 - o How to make delivery more efficient (that is, that proportionately more resources are available to delivery);
 - o How to ensure that delivery is customer-focused (that is, the needs of customers are met rather than those of the delivery organisations); and
 - o How to achieve greater local accountability for public investment in rural areas.
- 3) The Pathfinder's Business Plan.
 - o To explore the benefits and resource implications of a single point of access (such as a web-based information portal) to make service delivery more streamlined and effective.
 - o To develop opportunities for co-location / tandem service delivery (based on the recommendations of research commissioned by the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak Local Strategic Partnership and funded by the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership).
 - o To simplify the advice and the grant giving "maze" for businesses and the community (either through remote access points across the area and/or streamlining existing organisational structures to make them fit for Pathfinder purposes).

As Haskins is the earliest and broadest of these, i.e. it encompasses the other two, our high level conclusions are based on statements/issues from Haskins.

7.2 Haskins

Lord Haskins' review identified the following in rural areas:

- Poor accountability – policy was not understood, delivery functions were confused, customer needs were not recognised sufficiently well, and management information was poor.
- Failure to satisfy regional and local priorities - there was a lack of rigorous standard setting and accountability in the provision of business advice meaning that quality was variable.
- Too many players – leading to confusion about the roles of the many organisations involved in rural delivery.
- Lack of co-ordination - too many regional strategies, delivery was unduly complex, too many initiatives, schemes and services, many initiatives are insufficiently tied into the regional agenda and deliverers had a patchy understanding of the strategic objectives of their work.

- Confused customers - customers lacked clear information on relevant products and services, land managers and rural business owners complained about the bureaucratic approach to regulation and poor co-ordination between regulatory agencies, there was poor communication between agencies resulting in service delivery delays, including the processing of grants, and there was a lack of on-going help and support for projects once the initial grant/service is received.

Table 7.1 below comments on how the Pathfinder has performed against these background indicators.

Table 7.1: Peak District Pathfinder and Haskins

Haskins (selected) policy findings	Conclusion	Evidence/comments
Poor accountability	The Pathfinder has provided a mechanism both for accountability (i.e. for its own actions in the Peak) and as a means to hold others accountable.	1) Pathfinder has embodied the rural business and community support agenda for strategic and delivery partners. 2) Partnership protocol has focussed attention and ensured commitment of delivery and strategic partners.
Failure to satisfy regional and local priorities	There has been improved dialogue and local/regional agencies exchange opinion and a greater understanding is emergent. Access to services has been improved	1) Partnership questionnaire suggests growing understanding and momentum. 2) Protocol embodies subsidiarity. 3) Projects such as the Pocket Guides and the Web Portal ease access to business support 4) Pathfinder has delivered at least some cross boundary (local, county and region) collaboration on the rural agenda – the bi-regional collaboration is seen as a significant challenge.
Too many players – leading to confusion about the roles	Peak Directions and perhaps ABC has made access easier for customer and reduced confusion. POG has brought delivery partners together	1) Usage of Peak Directions. 2) Delivery of joint events through Enterprise Fund. 3) Stakeholder interest in similar approach for health services etc.
Lack of co-ordination - too many regional strategies etc	Major progress. Has not reduced number of initiatives but has increased co-ordination with limited resources and avoided trap of (re)creating a “new” service rather than bending mainstream to local needs.	1) Partnership survey shows greater understanding between partners 2) ABC co-location 3) Partnership protocol 4) Peak Directions
Confused customers	Can say indirectly that confusion has been reduced but need direct evidence from customer ⁴ – might be of interest to re-run business survey undertaken in 2006.	1) ABC co-location 2) Enterprise fund procedures 3) Peak Directions usage.

Perhaps not surprisingly given its policy origins, we can conclude that the Peak District Pathfinder has made tremendous strides toward meeting some of the challenges raised by Haskins.

7.3 Issues from the evaluation

In this section we present more specific achievements, challenges and conclusions/observations from the evaluation research.

⁴ Which was beyond the scope of this evaluation

7.3.1 Cross boundary achievement and legacy potential

Administrative boundaries for local, sub-regional, County and regional entities are usually just that – convenient for governance and management of service delivery but with perhaps limited relevance to customers.

Whilst acknowledging the heritage and hinterland associated with many of these large and small administrative boundaries, the Pathfinder for the Peak District has delivered a small programme of activities that has the potential to have a significant impact upon the way the unique challenges, opportunities and wonderful natural environment of the Peak are developed on economic, social and environmental terms.

The Pathfinder is just that: a demonstrator of what can be achieved with limited resources to make service delivery easier for strategists, operators and importantly customers. It is what happens with the results/lessons from the Pathfinder that will mark its legacy; we are confident that there is a legacy; but less assured that the cross boundary and administrative issues will not suffocate or dilute this.

The Pathfinder has emphasised that the Peak District as a sub-region is unique: Though it is administratively complex, it is recognisably a 'single area' with an identity which resonates among its stakeholders

The legacy is not limited to the Peak District however. Our evaluation interviews have suggested that Business Link West Midlands and AWM are (actively and/or considering) using the Partner Protocol as a model for development of their relationships in other parts of the region. It has also been suggested by some partners that the Protocol might be extended to other service areas including transport and health to better meet rural community needs. DEFRA will no doubt want to follow this up and capture any additional good practice and innovation.

7.3.2 Adding value

The Pathfinder has added value to the mainstream. It has not tried to compete with it or invent its own (duplicate) services; rather it has adopted a complementary, supportive and influencing role and has sought to provide a focal point for the Peak that:

- Provides a synthesis of policy from a variety of cross-boundary and thematic service delivery and strategic partners;
- Promotes understanding and co-ordination between these agents;
- Offers a forum for this dialogue and the associated design of demonstrator activities;
- And therefore provides customer focus and service rather than partner interest as a true measure of public service and accountability.

We are aware of some grumblings among one or two agencies within the partner group that might not fully concur with these statements. In some cases there is justification as the experience of certain partners and individuals therein have differed as the Pathfinder has challenged the status quo and grown in maturity and confidence.

However, the initial delays in appointing a full time resource and the difficulty in promoting a Peak District community of interest across such a complex policy and administrative landscape are not sufficient grounds to detract from the fact that Pathfinder's direction of travel is positive and progressive.

In adding value to the mainstream two Pathfinder decisions stand out. The first set the tone for the Peak and the second continues this.

In the first example, it would have been easy for the Pathfinder to conclude that lack of access to business support services in the area was the key issue and that this required a dedicated investment at the local level to promote and handle business support enquiries. Rather than invent a local solution, however, the Pathfinder recognised that its real job was to make existing solutions fit better with rural challenges and thus the Partner Protocol was developed and enhanced.

As a result, two RDAs and two Business Link partners now have a better understanding, focus and commitment to the rurality issues of the Peak and a "peer" challenge and agreement that maintains their attention. This is the tip of the iceberg and is not limited to these partners.

More recently, the approach to the development and long-term future of the Peak Directions website represents another example of adding value rather than reinventing the wheel. The relationship between this web portal and the on-line and real presence of delivery partners in the Peak is a positive one developed from a customer first perspective and a complementary, non-competitive approach to enquiries and referrals. To date comments on the relationship between Peak Directions and developing Business Link/RDA web presence appears to be in the spirit of the Partner Protocol and mirrors the approach of customer primacy.

It is, of course, partner and partnership flexibility that has enabled these achievements. We should also acknowledge that some of the ways and means adopted under the Pathfinder could be usefully applied in the context of partnership development and rural area focus in the work of Local Strategic Partnerships, sub-regional partnerships and, local area agreements.

7.3.3 Simple, realistic, focussed

Whilst the policy and partner landscape for the Pathfinder is acknowledged as complex many of the responses to this have been simple. It is important that this evaluation acknowledges this simplicity and a focus upon the needs of rural communities. For example, in today's digital age it is easy to worship the World Wide Web and dedicate all promotional activities to this medium.

The Peak Directions initiative does allow access to information on rural services through a web portal and we have already commended this. However, the rural focus of the Pathfinder is such that it was acknowledged that PCs and broadband (slow or fast) has not penetrated all households, businesses and communities and therefore more traditional promotional methods remained valid. Thus the Pocket Guides were formulated, printed and distributed.

In many respects this simplicity and focus and the avoidance of customer confusion pre-dates and certainly complements the Government's Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP). In terms of the future agenda for business support in the Peak BSSP and IDB are the twin pillars upon which the Partner Protocol will need to mature and grow.

The question is whether this rural, Peak District focus, will be diluted or lost from future policy and service design deliberations in the absence of a Pathfinder group and dedicated officer resource? It is clear from stakeholder feedback that a dedicated officer and management/policy/admin support has made a positive difference to Pathfinder work and achievements.

It is all too easy for partnerships to meet and agree that actions x, y and z should be implemented. Our experience is that in the absence of a dedicated resource these good intentions are less likely to be realised as responsibility and accountability are lost. This is a key risk for the Pathfinder legacy, especially given the organisational uncertainty facing the Peak.

7.4 Continuity post-Pathfinder

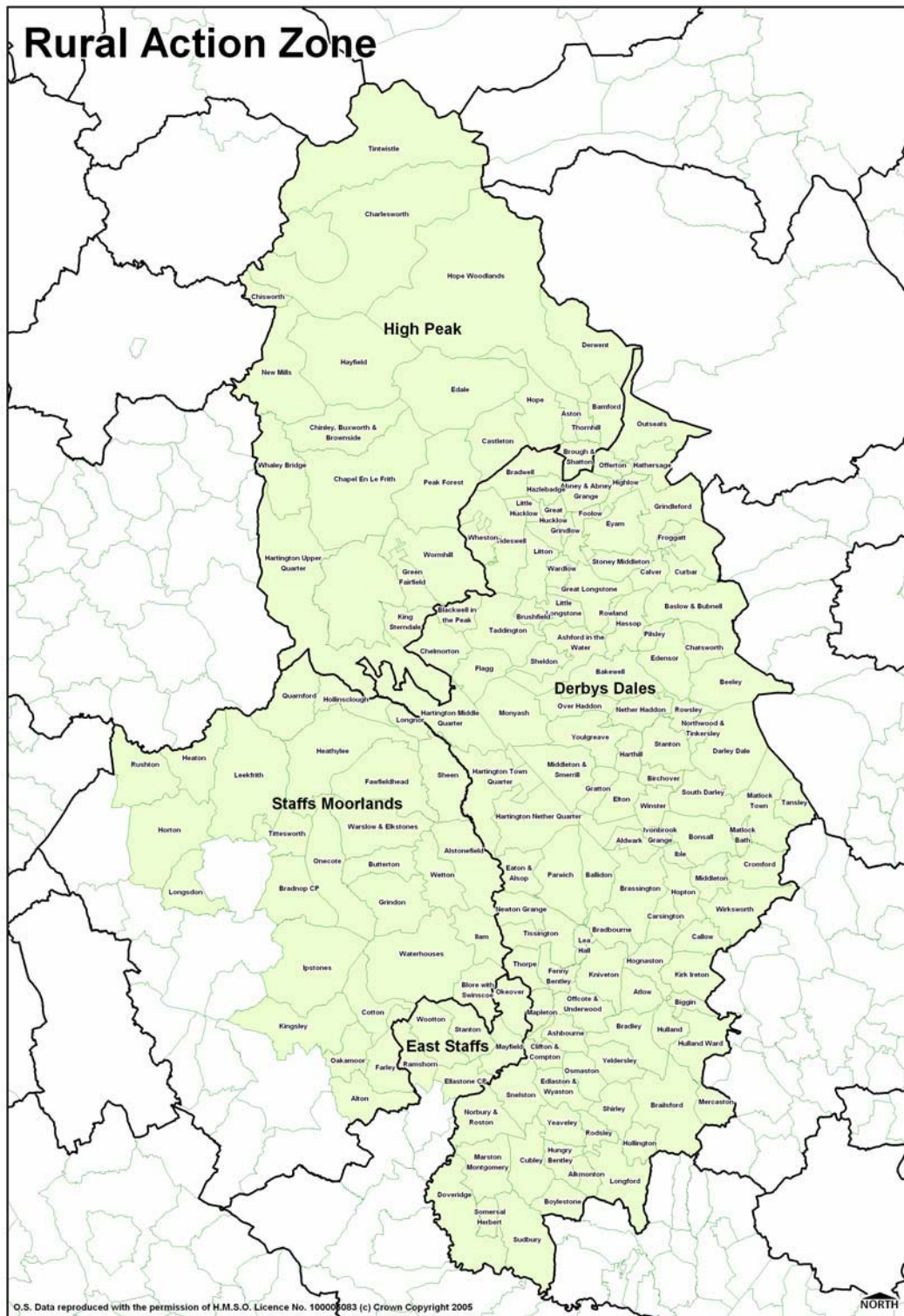
The management of the Pathfinder have been clear that the focus for the future should not be the continuation of the Pathfinder initiative but rather the lessons learned and services delivered and attention has been paid to forward strategy with this in mind. East Midlands Business has agreed to take on the role of Partner Protocol Champion. Other sustainability issues and the recognition that the future is about service delivery and not the Pathfinder Partnership as an entity is commendable. Again, this might appear simple but our experience is that regeneration is littered with partnerships that have survived their purpose and outlived their usefulness once issues have been resolved, policy changed and/or funds have been exhausted.

The Pathfinder can point to strategic and operational achievements. Yet it is important to note that there remains a job to be done in the rural Peak District. Agenda items for us include:

- Long term work with micro and small firms, including social enterprise, to build their business capacity – i.e. an awareness and pre-support befriending exercise;
- Access to affordable workspace (and relevant managed services should there be proven demand);
- Access to training for management, staff and would-be-entrepreneurs e.g. what penetration has the LSC's Train to Gain in the Peak?
- Establishment of ABC style co-location where feasible;
- Application of the partner protocol to education, health etc, etc.

Strategically, the reorganisation of the DDEP, as well as the expansion of rural delivery structures to cover all rural areas of the sub-region need to take into account the unique needs of the Peak District. As with the Phase 1 evaluation, we would suggest the opportunities for a Multi-Area Agreement be re-examined.

Appendix 1: Peak District Pathfinder Map



Appendix 2: Interview Pro-forma

**PEAK DISTRICT RURAL ACTION ZONE RURAL DELIVERY PATHFINDER
EVALUATION: PHASE 2
Pro-forma**

1. **What in your opinion have been the principal achievements of the Pathfinder programme?** Consider (i) Impact on client group/agencies (ii) Individual projects (iii) Development of a forward strategy (iv) The benefits of the Pathfinder Officers' Group
2. **Overall, in your view has the Pathfinder been effectively delivered?** Have day-to-day resources been sufficient to deliver the projects efficiently?
3. **What do you feel has been learned about local businesses and the support they need?** What lessons can business support agencies learn from the pathfinder experience? Are you confident the Pathfinder projects will be successful? What would be the 'next step' for the Pathfinder in Business Support were it to continue?
4. **How do you see projects (and the Pathfinder Partnership) carrying on beyond the lifetime of the Pathfinder?** What role do you feel the partnership played in securing this plan? Do you feel the Pathfinder is a 'time limited' activity
5. In the report we want to draw up two simple lists: **One list of "Strengths" of the Pathfinder approach and one list of "Weaknesses"**. Very simply – what issues would you place under these headings in response to the Pathfinder, be they specific to your project, the Partnership or general observation?
6. **Do you have any final comments or issues** that you have not had opportunity to raise over the last hour?

Appendix 3: Pathfinder Officer Group Questionnaire

**PEAK DISTRICT RURAL ACTION ZONE RURAL
DELIVERY PATHFINDER**

**EVALUATION
PHASE 2**

Questionnaire for Partners

Name:

Organisation:

SECTION 1: PARTNERSHIP IMPACTS

Please read the statement and tick the box that most closely matches your opinion.

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
The Pathfinder Partnership ⁵ has brought focus and commitment to business support activity in the area.					
The Pathfinder Partnership has provided increased confidence within the wider community about the long-term future of the area.					
The Partnership has provided increased confidence among the partners about the long-term future of the area (in the wider context)					
The objectives and priorities of the Pathfinder Partnership reflect those of my own organisation					
The Partnership has a shared vision for the Action Zone's future (i.e. beyond any natural time-life of the Zone itself or the specific task of the Pathfinder).					
Having an Officers' Group dedicated to the Pathfinder additional to the wider Action Zone arrangements, has 'added value' to the programme					
The Partnership has focused solely on achievement of the Pathfinder objectives					
The Partnership has an influence on the rural economy beyond its role in steering the Pathfinder					
The existence of the Pathfinder Partnership has increased resources (not necessarily cash) beyond that anticipated through the Pathfinder itself					
All relevant organisations are represented in the Officer Group.					
This group reviews its membership to ensure that it reflects local need.					
All members of the partnership have played a constructive role, enabling a positive response to business support issues within the Action Zone.					
Participation in the Pathfinder has influenced my agency/department/organisation in how our own services are delivered beyond the specific issues of the Pathfinder itself					

⁵ I.e. the **OFFICERS' GROUP** of the Pathfinder

SECTION 2: PARTNERSHIP LINKAGES & DELIVERY

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
The business community is effectively engaged in the plans of the Partnership					
There has a clear consultation/dialogue with the intended beneficiary group(s) about the Pathfinder's work when designing specific interventions					
The partnership has had the right level of engagement with the private sector for this programme					
The partnership has had the right level of engagement with the voluntary sector for this programme					
Overall, I would say the Pathfinder Partnership has been successful in bringing together agencies from two different regions					
I am confident the Pathfinder projects will represent an enhanced business support 'offer' to all eligible enterprises across the action zone area					
I consider my organisation as being 'active' in delivering Pathfinder objectives					
All members of the Partnership understand the issues around the practicalities of delivering business support					
The relationship between the Partnership and the Accountable Body has been a positive one					
The linkages between Partnership decision making and day-to-day operation have been strong					
The linkages between the Pathfinder Partnership (Officers' Group) and the RAZ have been strong					
The Pathfinder initiative has a high profile among the general public in the Action Zone area					
The Pathfinder initiative has a high profile among the business community in the Action Zone area					

SECTION 3: THE PARTNERSHIP AND THE PROGRAMME

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
The Officers' Group has proved itself a capable body by successfully delivering the Pathfinder Initiative					
The Officers' Group has successfully aligned service delivery with the needs of businesses in the Action Zone area					
The Pathfinder approach has successfully pulled together agencies from different localities					
The Pathfinder approach has successfully pulled together agencies from different regions					
Partners understand their role and responsibilities in delivering a successful Pathfinder programme					

SECTION 4: THE FUTURE

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
The Pathfinder Partnership could become the vehicle to engage partners in future initiatives					
The Pathfinder Partnership could assist with refining further business support initiatives which impact on businesses in the action zone area					
The Pathfinder Partnership could play a role in drawing attention to wider issues in creating sustainable communities within the action zone area.					
There is a role for the Pathfinder Partnership irrespective of what the forward strategy for the Action Zone partnership may be					
I am confident that the actions funded under the pathfinder will have a long term positive impact on the local area.					

SECTION 5: POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PRIORITIES

Please outline what you consider have been the three main achievements of the Pathfinder partnership – be they in terms of advancing the projects or the Partnership’s impact as a focus of activity:

Achievement

Achievement

Achievement

Please outline what you consider are the three main outstanding tasks that are required in the Action Zone area to further economic and social regeneration. Do you feel the Pathfinder Partnership could play a role in these?

Task

Role of Pathfinder Partnership:

Task

Role of Pathfinder Partnership:

Task

Role of Pathfinder Partnership:

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. PLEASE RETURN IT EITHER BY E-MAIL (Nick.Clay@meridienpure.co.uk or to Rob Jones) OR BY POST TO THE ADDRESS ON THE FRONT PAGE