



END OF PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT: DYFODOL CAMBRIAN FUTURES

March 2022



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Resources
FOR CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

The Dyfodol Cambrian Futures project seeks to unlock the potential of the Cambrian Mountains area through an integrated approach to sustainable development based upon recognising the landscape, natural and cultural value of the Cambrian Mountains. The project builds on the work of the Cambrian Mountains Initiative (CMI) and will explore innovative approaches to sustainable development that may have wider implications for the National Landscapes of Wales and other high value landscape areas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to thank all the individuals, organisation, and local businesses who have kindly contributed their time to inform this evaluation process over the last five years.

The steering group and project officers would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all the individual funders who have contributed to this project, and all the groups, organisations and businesses who have supported, engaged, and participated. And we hope to have the opportunity continue to work with you in the future.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

In December 2018, Steve Evison & Alison Davies of R4C worked with the project team to develop an Evaluation Plan for the project. Due to the exploratory nature of the project, it was always envisaged that it would be an iterative process, with each evaluative session informing the next stage of the project.

However this approach has been tested to the limits due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic impacting the delivery of the second half of the project. Specifically with COVID-19 restrictions limiting engagement and collaborative working, and the disruption to the tourism industry making any attempt at measuring the direct economic impact of the project an impossible task.

Therefore the decision was taken to adapt the evaluation objectives to ensure it provided the most useful learning and information to inform the delivery of long-term impacts and steer future developments. These adaptations will be referenced in each section to provide clarity to the process.

The purpose of the Evaluation Plan and adopted methodology was to:

- Assess the outcomes and impact of the ‘Dyfodol Cambrian Futures’ project, understanding the difference it has made.
- Facilitate an ongoing reflective learning process; identifying strengths and weaknesses so that lessons can be learned, and changes implemented to improve and refine the project as it progresses.
- Celebrate the project’s achievements and provides an honest and open assessment of what happened.
- Enable the project to demonstrate accountability to both the public, by showing that the money is being spent well and the project is being delivered effectively.
- Build up a body of evidence to demonstrate to partners, funders, and others what works, to inform future work.
- Meet the evaluation requirements of the funder.

To this end we developed a series of **Key Evaluation Topics** that would provide valuable information not only on the impact of the scheme but also to inform developments moving forward:

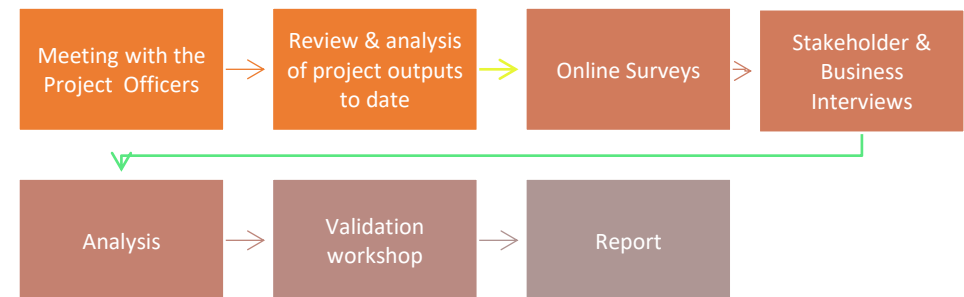
- Have we achieved the identified outputs and outcomes?
- How efficient have the project systems and governance been?
- What have been the main impacts of the project?
- What is the key legacy?
- What lessons have been learnt to inform future development within the Cambrian Mountain region.

Addressing these Key Evaluation Topics will provide the framework for analysing and reporting the results of the Evaluation.

The evaluation process included:

- an initial evaluation in February 2019,
- a mid-term evaluation in December 2019,
- and this Final Evaluation in early 2022 (delayed to account for the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent short project extension).

This Final Evaluation was undertaken using the following methodology.



INTERIM EVALUATION SUMMARY

In this section we have included the conclusion from the interim evaluation report to give some context to this final evaluation. It was compiled following a similar process to this final report, drawing on semi-structured interviews and an online survey to support the reporting of project outputs and outcomes. The original evaluation plan and methodology was modified in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on movement and personal interactions.

INTERIM EVALUATION: DECEMBER 2019

The interim evaluation report concluded that the project had so far been wide-ranging both geographically and in the diversity of tasks and topics covered. The two part-time Project Managers were hard working and their commitment and belief in the project shined through; indeed, several of the interviewees and online respondents made comments supporting this.

It was believed appropriate at this stage that the Steering Group support the Project Managers in prioritising sub-projects and therefore dropping others, or handing them over to partners, other agencies, or upskilling/ coaching /training/ supporting residents to take on roles of Ambassadors / Champions. This was to be completed by the end of January (2020) so that the workplan for the final year of the project was focussed on achieving the objectives and adding value to aspects of current work that have demonstrated the greatest potential for delivering the outcomes identified in the EAFRD funding application.

The project as a whole had a great vision but turning that vision into reality was going to take much longer than this project period. However, with strong guidance and discipline so that the work remains focussed on priorities it was believed that it would be on track to achieve demonstrable strides by the end of the funding period.

END OF PROJECT EVALUATION

In this section we set out the findings from the final End of Project evaluation report, largely following the methodology process set out above. The original evaluation plan was modified in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on movement and personal interactions.

THE PROJECT OUTPUTS

The 'Dyfodol Cambrian Futures' project was required to set quantitative targets upon which ongoing performance could be judged by the funder. The following table outlines these targets and notes the reported progress and achievements. They're based on project records which are summarised in Appendix A, and collaborated through the interviews with Steering Group members and Powys County Council as Lead Partner managing the Arwain LEADER project. These targets differ from the original evaluation framework as more were added when the project was extended.

RAG Key:

Red = Significant Issue / In danger of missing target and requires immediate action to rectify. Potentially, target needs re-defining in context of Covid disruption.

Amber = Some issues / behind schedule.

Green = On track / completed, no real issues.

Output Target	Outputs Achieved	RAG
No of Feasibility Studies: 6	The project has commissioned and published six feasibility studies over its lifetime, which are: The Initial 'Key Recommendations Paper,' A Landscape Feasibility Study, Local Produce Feasibility Study, Access & Recreation Feasibility, Place Brand Guidelines, and the 'Summit to Sea' feasibility study. It has also contributed to a seventh at Bwlch Nant yr Arian.	G
No. of Networks Established: 7	Over the past 5 years the project has directly set up at least nine new networks within the Cambrian Mountains (CM). These include; CM Visitor Guide network; CM Local Producer Network; CM Dark Skies network; CM Heritage Network; CM Nature Network; CM Tails Network; Devils Bridge / Rhyader Intercommunity Network CM Accommodation Network; along with the CM Covid Discussion Group. It's also apparent that informal networks have been nurtured between businesses working together under the CM brand, and on the social media channels.	G

No. of Stakeholders engaged: 95	Communications and engagement have been a major strength of this project, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions. The business stakeholders engaged (see below) exceeded this target on their own. And another 40 have been engaged through the Local Produce Champions initiative. Other varied stakeholders engaged on local, regional and national level through studies and initiatives include NRW, Local Authorities, 'Summit to Sea,' Visit Wales, Welsh Government and various film & TV companies.	G
No. of Participants engaged: 420	Through a series of roadshows, open days, drop in events, conferences, and attendance at regional fairs and festivals, the project has recorded 460 individuals engaged via attendance sheets and registers. These are in addition to the online events which includes 50 engaged via zoom for a series of Dark Skies presentations, with a further 514 views on YouTube and 92,768 listeners on Astro Radio.	G
No. of communities benefitting: 25	Individuals from 18 different communities have responded to an online survey in February 2022 to testify that their community has benefited from the DCF project. It's our impression that other communities have also benefited but that the Covid-19 restrictions has restricted the outreach and engagement work meaning some of this wasn't recorded (no direct contact), and local awareness of some benefits wasn't as strong as hoped.	A
No. of businesses benefitting: 75	86 attractions, activity providers and eat/drink outlets were engaged and included on the CM Visitor Map.85 accommodation providers signed up for space on the website, and 36 local producers signed up to local activities. An online survey of businesses undertaken during early 2022 (Appendix B) received 104 individual responses. When asked how much they value the work of the DCF project over the past five years they were all positive, with 91 saying they valued it 'a lot' and 13 valued it 'a little.' All have benefited in some way. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, and by the nature of response rates to online questionnaires this is likely to be an underestimate of the number of businesses that actually benefited.	G

THE PROJECT OUTCOMES

The following outcomes were identified for the project in the funding application. It was recognised by the participants of the initial evaluation workshop that many of these are long term goals and unlikely to be achieved within the period of the funding. The evaluation was therefore initially designed to gather any evidence of trends in the direction of the anticipated outcome.

It's also worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic, a *force majeure* that could not possibly have been predicted, has disrupted and distorted the visitor economy so much over the past 2 years that any attempt to quantify the effect of the project on income generation and increased markets share across the sector would be impossible to calculate. However individual testimonies from businesses (see Appendix D) do provide evidence that progress has been achieved.

Outcome Target	Progress Toward Outcomes	RAG
Increased income generation and more sustainable tourism businesses through an integrated strategy for CM tourism and destination development between private sector and public sector	The project has managed to develop strong relationships between the private and public sector, and established a number of new collaborative working partnerships across the region. Testimonies from participating businesses refer to increased sales, improved product awareness, and new retail opportunities as a direct result of the project activities.	G
Increased market share and value of CM products through business partnerships and relationships developed within, between and across	The exact impact on market share is impossible to calculate or even estimate due to the disruption to the relevant sectors. However increased sales of existing products and the development of brand new specific CM products (e.g .Dark Skies Rum) does indicate that progress has been achieved. What is clear is that new business partnerships and relationships have been developed across a number	G

the tourism, food and ecosystems sectors	of different sectors, for example, two businesses collaborating to produce a special edition 'Dark Skies Bacon' using local rum. Through the support offered to businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic, the role and profile of the CMI as a trusted partner has been greatly enhanced.	
Increased market share and value of CM products through common approach to marketing and promoting the CM: CM Quality Mark; wellbeing as a unifying theme; brand values. Greater cohesion of the communities of the CM enabling the benefits of integrated working to be exploited	Again, the increased market share is impossible to calculate given the Covid situation. What has become clear is that the common approach to collective marketing, especially through social media, is considered a major success across the board. Local outlets are now selling local CM branded products. The newly established networks facilitate integrated collaborative working at scale across community and Local Authority boundaries for the first time, all under the commonly understood and valued identity and brand of the Cambrian Mountains. More businesses are also indicating an interest in using the branding on existing and new products.	G
Greater recognition of the value of the CM for nature, landscape and culture.	The increased recognition of the value of the Cambrian Mountains over the past 5 years among businesses, communities and stakeholders alike has been clear through this evaluation.	G
Better outcomes for nature, landscape and cultural distinctiveness secured through support for the people of the CM who maintain these.	It's fair to say that the support and appreciation of the value of the Cambrian Mountain's distinct landscape and cultural heritage has been greatly increased by the project. Especially amongst local businesses. The improved outcomes for nature, landscape and cultural distinctiveness will only become clear in the long term. The foundations have been laid but there needs to be a continued effort to maintain the good work and give it time to bring about lasting change.	G

THE WIDER PROJECT OBJECTIVES

These wider project objectives were identified during the initial evaluation workshop with stakeholders:

Wider Project Objective	Progress Made	RAG
Cambrian Mountains as a destination, the tourism network and developing a Cambrian Mountains brand	As can be seen in the following pages, one of the major successes of the project has been to raise awareness of the Cambrian Mountains as a destination in its own right and the fact that businesses are now promoting under the new brand. The challenge now will be to maintain and grow the brand, supporting businesses once the projects has finished.	G
Local Communities and businesses working together for an improved, sustainable economy that supports the cultural, natural and landscape value of the Cambrian Mountains	The newly established networks (see outputs) are only half the story, as it is apparent that informal networks and partnerships have been established as businesses have been linked up and promote each other on social media. There is also documented evidence of new collaboration to produce new products (Appendix D). The project also brought businesses together to provide support during the COVID-19 pandemic and these new relationships are one of the benefits that is anticipated to endure for the foreseeable future.	G
Investigation into the potential establishment of the Parc Naturel concept	The potential for establishing a specific designation has been investigated, from <i>Parc Naturel</i> to an AONB. Although this work was undoubtedly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and those strongly in favour of a designation would have preferred it to have been developed further. Although there is general support for the concept, it is not	G

	universal. Many are of the opinion that the additional capacity such a designation could provide (funding, project officers etc) is what is needed rather than the actual designation which would introduce new restrictions on development.	
Promoting integrated working and brand building	<p>The project has definitely promoted integrated working between businesses and stakeholder organisations in the public and third sectors. The Cambrian Mountains hashtag has been used over 20,000 times (it was in double figures at the beginning of the project) and over 3k follow the Instagram account.</p> <p>The brand building has also been successful, although it's unfortunate that the actual brand guidelines have been published so late in the project. The support of the project officers for a couple more years would undoubtedly provide a stronger foundation to help businesses adopt and benefit from the brand going forward. The local producers charter has been popular, and internal research in early 2022 shows that 60-65% of local producers use at least one of either Cambrian Mountains name or Logo on their products, up from 27% in July 2017.</p>	G

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

Stakeholder perceptions were gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews. These included project officers, steering group members, Local Authorities (including Powys County Council as the LEADER lead), and businesses & beneficiaries.

In this way we gathered information on the following broad topics:

- Governance and project systems
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Perceptions and experience of progress to date of outputs & outcomes
- The impact of the project
- Long term legacy and next steps
- Lessons Learnt that would benefit future projects

In the section that follows, we have summarised the key themes that emerged from the discussions around each of these broad topics:

HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE THE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS BEEN? WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENT NEXT TIME?

The consensus was that the governance arrangements were very effective and worked efficiently, aided by good management from the Chair and good support from the Powys County Council lead. It was considered a relatively diverse steering group that further developed over time, although there is always room for improvement and some commented that it would have been good to have an increased representation from sectors such as agriculture and the community side. Some thought that the perceived successes of the current project could help to recruit new members in the future (if the group can be maintained) as they have more credibility and status than they had before.

Overall, the governance framework including the steering group and LAG monitoring worked well, especially considering the difficult situation during the

COVID-19 pandemic. As the group had to adapt and change their working practices to move everything online.

HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS BEEN? WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENT NEXT TIME?

Despite early hiccups, which included the original project manager leaving early and being unable to do face-to-face meetings because of COVID-19. Dafydd and Esther joined, everyone met over Zoom, and the project continued. The way the team has adapted both the management and delivery of project has been noted and applauded throughout this evaluation exercise.

Overall, everyone felt that Dafydd and Esther were excellent project managers, and their different skill sets complimented each other well. Esther managing the financial and project office side, with Dafydd driving the engagement work. The consensus was that this combination worked really well for the project, and that they did a great job despite all the difficulties caused by the pandemic.

If they repeated the project, there was a feeling that additional staff should be included, especially to deal with the administrative side and some more specialist areas. There also could have been slightly better management on staff workload, considering the size of the area they were covering.

HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE THE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS BEEN? WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENT NEXT TIME?

The financial management and reporting arrangements were effective and worked well, and this is collaborated by both the steering group and the Local Authority Officers. Esther's work and the support provided by Louise at Powys County Council is repeatedly referenced as being key to this element.

Esther kept a good strong relationship with the lead body staff Powys, receiving good advice. They were given the flexibility to extend the project and managed it well, and everyone was kept informed and updated regularly.

HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE THE PROJECT COMMUNICATION ARRANGEMENTS BEEN? WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENT NEXT TIME?

Despite the effect of COVID-19 which completely altered the intended engagement elements of the project and the furloughing of one project manager, there was good communication throughout the project. Again the successful adaptation to a completely new online style of engagement is to be applauded, both internally and externally engaging with businesses and communities.

Dafydd's enthusiasm and passion is repeatedly mentioned as a positive driving force for engaging stakeholders and beneficiaries alike, both through social media and face-to-face engagement (when it was allowed). On reflection, some felt that having a social media 'expert' to give both professional advice to the businesses on digital marketing would have also been beneficial and could be an element to explore in any future project.

It also needs to be noted that during the worse of the COVID-19 pandemic, the priority was to communicate and share relevant information with local businesses. While not part of the original aims, this service was valuable and provided businesses with support they weren't getting from other places. This undoubtedly helped establish the Cambrian Mountains Initiative as a valued service and raised the profile and appreciation of their wider work.

HOW HAS COVID AFFECTED THE PROJECT DELIVERY?

Covid-19 had a huge influence on project delivery. Esther was placed on furlough, leaving Dafydd to work on his own. The core work of the project had to be set aside as it was not possible to engage the communities as intended. The new priority during the pandemic was to get out messages from Powys and the Welsh Government. Despite this everyone adapted well, and work was carried out effectively as everyone was kept informed and involved in the decision-making

process. This meant people didn't feel as isolated. An extension also allowed funding to be redeployed which was managed well.

Overall the project was disrupted but carried on by adapting to circumstances, delivering valuable support to local businesses.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE PROJECT – THE IMPACT? WHAT'S CHANGED OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS?

Strategically, the biggest change brought about from this project is that the Cambrian Mountains is now being recognised as a defined destination. From being promoted by Visit Wales to being referenced in Estate Agent listings and television weather forecast. This just wasn't the case 5 years ago. The project was perceived as giving a voice to the Mid-Wales region and 'forced' Visit Wales to think about it as a new destination.

Businesses also applaud the fact that the Cambrian Mountains have been literally 'put on the map.' increasing awareness with more people realising that this 'green desert' has a wealth of heritage and is a good place to visit. Dark Skies in particular has been repeatedly referenced as a real pull for the area.

The cohesive brand of the Cambrian Mountains allowed businesses to raise awareness of themselves and their products, often using the newly established social media channels.

Local businesses and communities have also taken to it, and it is part creating a stronger 'sense of place'. This has made it much easier to promote the area and has had a great effect on local communities and business, strengthening the credibility of and relationship between CMI and partners and stakeholders.

Businesses also noted that they were able to feel a sense of belonging to something as they were enabled to collaborate and build relationships. It brought businesses together under the Cambrian Mountains banner, forming a community between these participating businesses. This was particularly

important during the COVID-19 pandemic as the businesses supported each other.

WHO HAS IT IMPACTED THE MOST?

The overwhelming perception is that it's local businesses, especially microbusinesses, who have benefited the most. Specifically those related to tourism and local products. This is mainly through raising the profile and promoting both the area (the destination) and the individual businesses and providing support and developing new collaborative networks.

There has also been benefits to visitors through improved experiences and a better awareness of activities and products

Local communities have felt the benefit to, although the evidence here is more anecdotal. This was the element most impacted by COVID-19 as it was impossible to undertake a lot of the planned engagement activities at community events.

WHAT CHANGES WILL BE FELT FOR YEARS TO COME?

A major change has been the recognition of the Cambrian Mountains as a destination, and there is genuine belief that this will last. The brand, vision and tagline have enabled the promotion of the Cambrian Mountains, but it will require a coordinated effort to sustain and continue to develop going forward, especially given the lack of official landscape designation.

The belief in the longevity of the Cambrian Mountains as a recognised destination stems from the development of a strong and distinct 'sense of place,' and the way that newly established networks have brought people together under a common 'Cambrian Mountains' brand that people can relate to and feel proud of. This new collaborative culture amongst businesses is also an element people see as a permanent change, but again there is a recognition that some capacity is required to coordinate it all.

Regenerative tourism has also emerged as a concept that will be key to the strategic development of the sector going forward. The success of 'Dark Skies' activities in the area have also made people aware of the potential for transformative but sustainable progress.

WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN (OR SHOULD) BE SUSTAINED IN THE LONG TERM?

It's quite clear that the element of the project seen as a priority for maintaining the impact of the project is to provide staff capacity to coordinate and drive things forward, especially given the lack of a 'Landscape Designation' staff enjoyed by other National Parks and AONB's. This is seen as key to continuing the promotion of the area as well as maintaining the momentum and activities of the newly established collaborative networks of businesses.

The continued development of the regenerative tourism element is highlighted as important, providing a cohesive management of the environment and local economy to benefit local communities.

Finally, the continued exploration of the potential for a formal 'Designated Landscape' status, or at least an arrangement that delivers some of the same benefits through resources, capacity, and profile.

WHAT OTHER DEVELOPMENTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN (OR HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED) THAT WOULD BENEFIT THE REGION GOING FORWARD?

The sustainable management of the destination and development of infrastructure will be key as the increased profile and improved offer attracts new visitors, to ensure the change delivers local benefits and doesn't overwhelm the landscape and its communities.

The concept of regenerative tourism should be further developed, and the Cambrian Mountains could represent a pilot area for this concept. Community engagement should be continued to unite the groups, so that they work collectively, and the networks continue. A headquarters combined with a visitor centre, would be useful in order to provide a base and also an income to cover the cost of future activities.

There needs to be pressure on Welsh Government & Visit Wales to recognise the area and continue to promote it as a distinct destination. This could also take the pressure off 'honeypot' sites, such as Brecon Beacons & Snowdonia, and lead to wider appreciation of the area as a destination. There should also be continued support for local business, with local events and markets encouraged.

HOW COULD THESE DEVELOPMENTS BE REALISTICALLY RESOURCED, SUPPORTED & DELIVERED GOING FORWARD?

The overall impression across the board is that a combination of public and private (as well as third sector) funding is required. While on one hand most agree that businesses should contribute, potentially through a membership or contribution scheme with local businesses directing spend, there is also a recognition that the majority in the area are microbusinesses with very little fiscal headroom. This means that some public funding is always likely to be required.

The ultimate goal would be for a future project or organisation to generate its own income, and this should be fully explored. This would also enable the initiative to maintain its independence and be free of the conditions associated

with grants. However, again it's accepted that there will be a limit on this income generating potential which brings us back again to the likely need of further public funding support.

WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS FROM THE DCF PROJECT TO INFORM FUTURE SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENTS?

One of the key lessons from this project is having the right people in place to deliver. Not only regarding skills and knowledge, but also passion for the work and local knowledge. It has been mentioned that this project has delivered more than other similar ones because of this very reason. The public engagement, although slow at first, has been key to the successes and achievements. So has developing relationships with key stakeholders and partners such as Visit Wales.

The job share arrangement, although not planned, enabled the project to benefit from two completely different skillsets which worked well. However in future a similar project should have more staff capacity to engage people, deliver projects, and also to manage the increasing administrative burden of public grant schemes.

With hindsight the steering group agree that more thought should have been given to continued 'post-project' funding earlier on. *"We should have thought about the last day on day one"*. Some businesses also wished that the Branding Guidelines and Website had been done earlier, so they could have benefited from Dafydd and Esther's support to develop their use over time.

Having been forced to adopt new methods of engagement and communication, it's become clear that online engagement can engage a wider audience, but the depth of that engagement isn't as good and it's more difficult to develop trusted relationships.

A little bit of funding used correctly can go a very long way. Having said this, some respondents warned of a danger of losing focus by trying to tackle too many issues at once. Finally, any project should be embedded in and respond to the needs of the local community, working with them and for them.

ONLINE SURVEYS

Two separate online surveys were undertaken during February 2022. The first targeting local businesses (Appendix B) and the second gathering information from local communities (Appendix C).

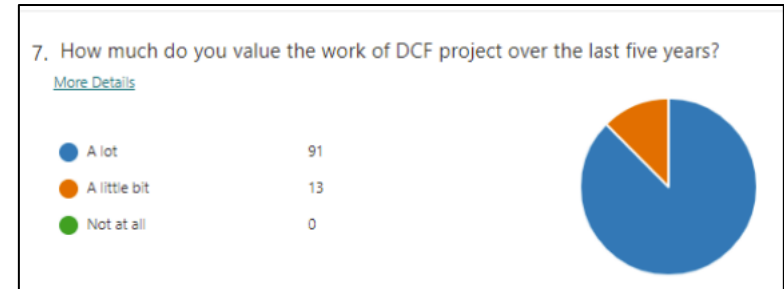
SUMMARY OF BUSINESS RESPONSES

In total 104 businesses responded to the survey that was circulated around the project networks. Nearly half (45) we're accommodation providers, with the majority of the others made up of local producers (13), hospitality (12), and attractions (11).

Between them they identified having benefited in 22 different ways, with the most popular responses noting *'Introduced to/made aware of other Cambrian Mountains businesses e.g. activity providers/local produce'* (84); *'Received updates regarding local, regional and national developments'* (80); *'Inspired by Cambrian Mountains social media content e.g. Facebook, Instagram or Twitter'* (80); *'Made use of marketing materials such as the Visitor Map, Dark Sky Guide or Pocket Guide booklet'* (75); and *'Feeling part of a Cambrian Mountains community of businesses'* (75).

Every single respondent believed that the project had achieved its aim of raising the profile of the Cambrian Mountains, while 99% believed that the project had increased the understanding of what the Cambrian Mountains have to offer; and developed the position of the Cambrian Mountains as a destination in Wales.

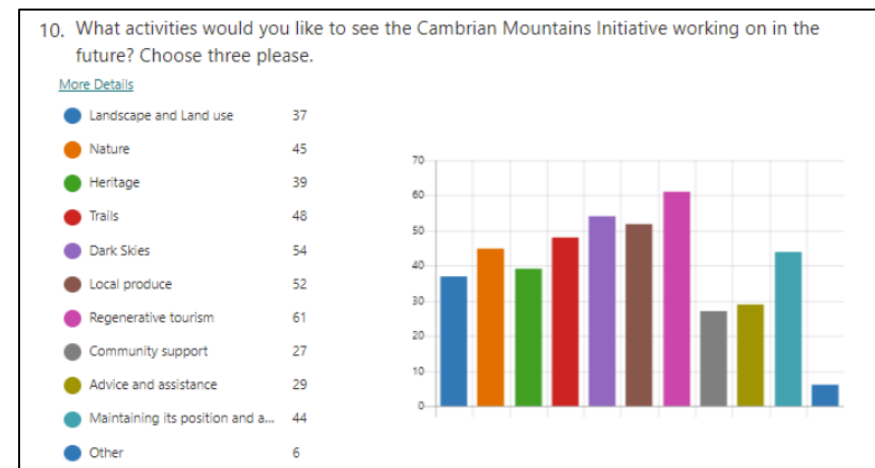
Only 3/104 disagreed that the project had investigated the potential for a landscape designation for the Cambrian Mountains.



The chart above shows the project was universally valued by all respondents, and every single one also thought that the work of the Cambrian Mountains initiative should continue after the DCF project closes.

The majority believed that future work should be funded through either Government or Local Authorities. Not a single one noted that businesses should contribute!!

Finally, a raft of suggestions were offered about the preferred future focus for the Cambrian Mountains Initiative as illustrated below.



COMMENTS FROM BUSINESSES

“Having a dedicated organisation to promote the Cambrian mountain area is a very valuable asset to the economy of the area.”

Some of the additional comments received from businesses are summarised below:

- The initiative has successfully promoted the area as a destination in its own right.
- The sharing and promotion of information was valued by the businesses.
- Having a dedicated organisation representing the Cambrian Mountains area where people knew they could turn to was one of the strengths.
- There is a recognition that the good work must be built on and expanded going forward.
- The need sustainable tourism, and supporting local business as opposed to attracting others to relocate here.
- The support and advice will be missed if it ceases to exist, there’s widespread enthusiasm for the service to continue.
- The hard work of the project officers has been recognised over and over again and is clearly valued.

“Thank you to you all at the Cambrian Mountains Initiative for working so hard for the whole area on promoting, maintaining, informing, and raising the profile of this rural part of Mid Wales which is the Cambrian Mountains which has now established itself as one of the "must go" destinations in Wales. Your work has brought people and businesses together as working as a whole has given a stronger image. The passion and fun side of your work is fantastic! Thank you.”

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY RESPONSES

In total there were 24 responses to this survey, however with some not referring to a specific community and with some duplication, a total of 18 individual communities are represented.

All the respondents have noted that their communities have benefited in some way, with the most popular examples being; *‘Awareness raising of your community via the Dark Sky Guide’ (22); ‘Awareness raising of your community via the Visitor Map’ (18); ‘Promotion of local businesses include attraction, activity providers, places to eat and drink and accommodation’ (18); ‘Promotion of local produce in your community’ (16); and ‘Official status for Dark Skies for your community’ (15).*

Some of the other benefits noted include ‘promotion of community events, project visits, and roadshows, and the inter community meetings.

Looking forward, the respondents identified other ways in which the Cambrian Mountains Initiative could do more for the community:

- Identify funding opportunities for local projects and initiatives.
- Continue to promote and publicise the Cambrian Mountains as a Destination
- Coordinate and the marketing of hospitality & local products.
- Broker collaboration between local partners and stakeholders for the benefit of the whole area.
- More of the same!!

“Very impressed with the Cambrian Mountains Initiative - more of the same please!”

ANALYSIS

The framework used for the analysis is the Key Evaluation Topics identified by the project's stakeholders during the development of the Evaluation methodology.

These are:

- Have we achieved the identified outputs and outcomes?
- How efficient have the project systems and governance been?
- What have been the main impacts of the project?
- What is the key legacy?
- What lessons have been learnt to inform future development within the Cambrian Mountain region.

HAVE WE ACHIEVED THE IDENTIFIED OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES?

It's to be applauded that despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the original project outputs have been achieved, along with the additional outcomes of the project extension.

There has been some expressed disappointment about the perceived lack of progress towards achieving a designated landscape status. However it must be recognised that the objective was to 'explore this possibility' rather than deliver it within the life of the project, and this has been done. The 'communities supported' target was also missed (on paper at least). However given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the originally proposed engagement activities there are significant mitigating factors that this.

The project outcomes are long term goals that are difficult to quantify, partly because of the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted both project delivery and monitoring of progress. What is clear is that the actions intended to deliver these outcomes have on the whole been delivered, and with some ongoing support we are optimistic that they will be realised with time.

The wider project objectives have been identified independently of the outcomes. And we are confident that these have been achieved and will continue to have a positive impact for years to come.

HOW EFFICIENT HAVE THE PROJECT SYSTEMS AND GOVERNANCE BEEN?

It's apparent that the governance, project management, and financial management of the project has been tight and effective. This is corroborated at all levels and by Powys County Council as the lead organisation.

This efficiency is down to the diligent back-office work of the project managers, the management of the steering group, and the support from the Local Authorities, specifically Powys. All this should be applauded especially considering the disruption COVID-19 caused to the usual ways of working. And the way they adapted to cope with the everchanging situation was impressive.

Special mention should go to the project communication aspect, which was good within the project and considered a great strength in engaging with outside stakeholders and beneficiaries. The community engagement side understandably suffered due to the restrictions on face-to-face engagement, but it was more than compensated for through the additional support and engagement provided for businesses at what was an extremely difficult period for the different sectors.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MAIN IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT?

The main impact of the project has been **to establish the Cambrian Mountains as a recognised destination in its own right**. It's gained national recognition within the tourism industry and in the public conscious through media and cultural exposure.

Perhaps more importantly in terms of long-term impact, it's **established the Cambrian Mountain brand and identity amongst local businesses and communities**, with a shared understanding of what it is and the benefit it brings.

New collaborative networks have been established, which has **improved relationships between businesses and with regional partners and stakeholders. And a common sense of belonging has brought people together.**

Although not an initial goal, the project had **a significant impact on the survival and viability of local businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic.** And this is recognised by both the businesses and Local Authority Partners.

WHAT IS THE KEY LEGACY?

The enduring legacy of the project will be the **emergence and establishment of the Cambrian Mountains as a recognised destination in its own right.**

The Cambrian Mountain **brand identity could be another significant legacy**, but it is dependent on being maintained and promoted by all parties going forward. This is likely to require additional investment to provide the capacity to coordinate this effort.

There has also been **a marked change in the approach to marketing** amongst local businesses, with the social-media and digital side emerging as a powerful tool to promote both the area and local products.

A new collaborative culture has been developed, with businesses seeing the benefits of being part of a wider collective rather than individual competitors. Again this will require nurturing and supporting going forward to fully capitalise on the good work undertaken over the last few years.

Finally, **the emergence of 'regenerative tourism' as a strategic concept** has the potential to shape the sustainable development of tourism in the area for generations to come. And if this 'bottom up' approach is successful across such a large area, it could potentially become an example that other rural areas can learn from and replicate in the future.

WHAT LESSONS HAVE BEEN LEARNT TO INFORM FUTURE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CAMBRIAN MOUNTAIN REGION.

Some of the key learning from this project are summarised below and should be considered in the context of any future development:

- Having the right people with the knowledge, skills, and passion to succeed is key to the success of any project
- Public engagement and fostering trusted relationships, both with local beneficiaries and strategic partners is all important.
- There is an increasing administrative burden in these projects, and together with the importance of personal engagement it's vital that enough resources are allocated for an adequately sized team, this is not a one-person job!
- The next stages and long-term legacy need to be considered early on, especially regarding securing funding to maintain key services that have been developed and maintain long term benefits.
- If possible, outputs and resources such as branding, new websites etc should be delivered earlier in the project to enable the project team to support their establishment and integration (although it's recognised in this case that this was partly down to the covid-19 pandemic disrupting the work schedule.
- Online engagement works and has the potential to reach a much wider audience. However its impact isn't as strong, and it's more difficult to establish meaningful relationships and commitment.
- Projects need to keep their focus in order to deliver the maximum benefit and avoid spreading resources too thinly.
- Any project should be embedded in and respond to the needs of the local community, working with them and for them.

CONCLUSIONS

The project has established the Cambrian Mountains Initiative as a representative organisation that provides valued support for local businesses and communities and delivers benefits across the Cambrian Mountains Area.

Despite the disruption and chaos caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the project has managed to deliver against all of the key outputs, and we can have a high degree of confidence in both the delivery of long-term outcomes and the wider project objectives.

The governance and management of the project has been especially strong, and this has been down to the good working relationships and mutual support from all involved. Special mention must also go to the way the project team and partners have adapted their working practices during difficult times to ensure the project was delivered successfully.

The project leaves a significant legacy, but the long-term impact will likely rely on sourcing additional funding to maintain key staff and activities going forward. There has undoubtedly been a change in working practices and perceptions of the area, as well as gaining wide recognition. But this must be coordinated going forward, and it's important that the current momentum isn't lost.

Finally, the success of this project boils down to the right people listening to and collaborating with local communities and businesses and delivering appropriate and workable solutions to local issues. Through this they have delivered significant value for a relatively modest investment.

We wish you all the best going forward and look forward to seeing the next chapter in the sustainable development of the Cambrian Mountains landscape.

NEXT STEPS

It's important that the good work doesn't fade away now that the initial funding is coming to an end, and that the momentum is maintained going forward. Some key steps have been identified through this evaluation that should give some steer to progress this work:

SHORT TERM

- The value of staff driving and coordinating the work and the personal relationships and trust they develop is key to the success of this work. And if officers leave, they take all this knowledge and social capital with them. Acquiring revenue funding to maintain and expand the current team should be a priority. Most likely grant funded with local match.
- With resources diminishing, you need to prioritise the activities that are key to maintaining the most valuable services, and which are key to the profile and reputation of the organisation in order to maintain momentum. These could be continuing to establish and grow the brand, promoting the destination, and maintaining the support and communication to businesses.

MEDIUM TERM

- Develop new projects with local stakeholders and acquire funding to undertake them. With the right management a relatively small amount of investment can go a long way and make a big difference.
- Explore the potential to generate your own income to make the organisation more resilient and independent.

LONG TERM

- Establish a permanent team with a sustainable long-term funding model.
- Explore the potential for a central base / headquarters.
- Explore Landscape Designations if it's still seen as a positive development.