

**Developing Bright Sparks/
Community Champions in the Rural Area
2011 – 2013**

Internal evaluation report

BRIC-work



Bright Sparks Network

championing the peak district



Rural Development Programme for England Business Support is part of Solutions for Business, the Government's package of publicly funded business support designed to help companies start and grow.





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|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
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| Project Reference | L/M321/DSH/11/5056 |
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1. Overview

1.1 Introduction to the Evaluation

LEADER is an area-based and bottom-up approach, acknowledging that local people are the main assets upon which to build rural community resilience.

LEADER has been widely recognized as an attempt to substitute hierarchical intervention with a system characterised by endogenous territorial approaches (locally grown approaches) to rural development based on network relationships (Kovach¹)

In 2008 Derbyshire Economic Partnership (DEP) was awarded EU and Defra funding through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) for project activity up until the end of 2013. The rural areas to be covered centred on the Districts of Staffordshire Moorlands, High Peak and Derbyshire Dales (see map on p4). In 2010, DEP created an invitation to tender for a new Peak District LEADER initiative. The project vision was stated as:

“to deliver a programme of capacity building to stimulate and inspire communities to respond and implement solutions to the difficulties they face within their own communities”.

The idea was to identify and mentor a number of ‘local champions’ or ‘bright sparks’ within communities covered by the LEADER area, in order to:

- develop home-grown solutions to local challenges;
- ensure targeted and effective use of a pot of ring fenced funding made available through the Local Action Group;
- develop lasting solutions based on established good practice;
- develop a set of integrated and networked activities specifically designed to address issues of sustainability of rural enterprise and rural communities.

The BRIC-work consortium was appointed to develop the Bright Sparks project and began work in March 2011. The consortium consists of a team of 6 independent consultants led by Project Manager, David Gluck of Ruralis, who acted as the lead and accountable body for the contract and the primary point of contact for the LEADER executive and Local Action Group.

The project began against the backdrop of forthcoming austerity measures, particularly with regard to public/publicly funded services, a continuing decline in rural services and challenges to rural business, and within a newly emerging national

¹ Kovách, I. (2000) LEADER, a new social order, and the Central- and East-European Countries. *Sociologia Ruralis* 40(2), 181-189. Cited in University of Lincoln (2013) A Review of the Leader Approach for Delivering the Rural Development Programme for England

policy context around growing the 'big society' with an emphasis on localism. The Bright Sparks project was a product of this context, e.g. the aim for communities to take greater control of their own destinies, and subject to the opportunities and the challenges it posed.



1.2 Methodology

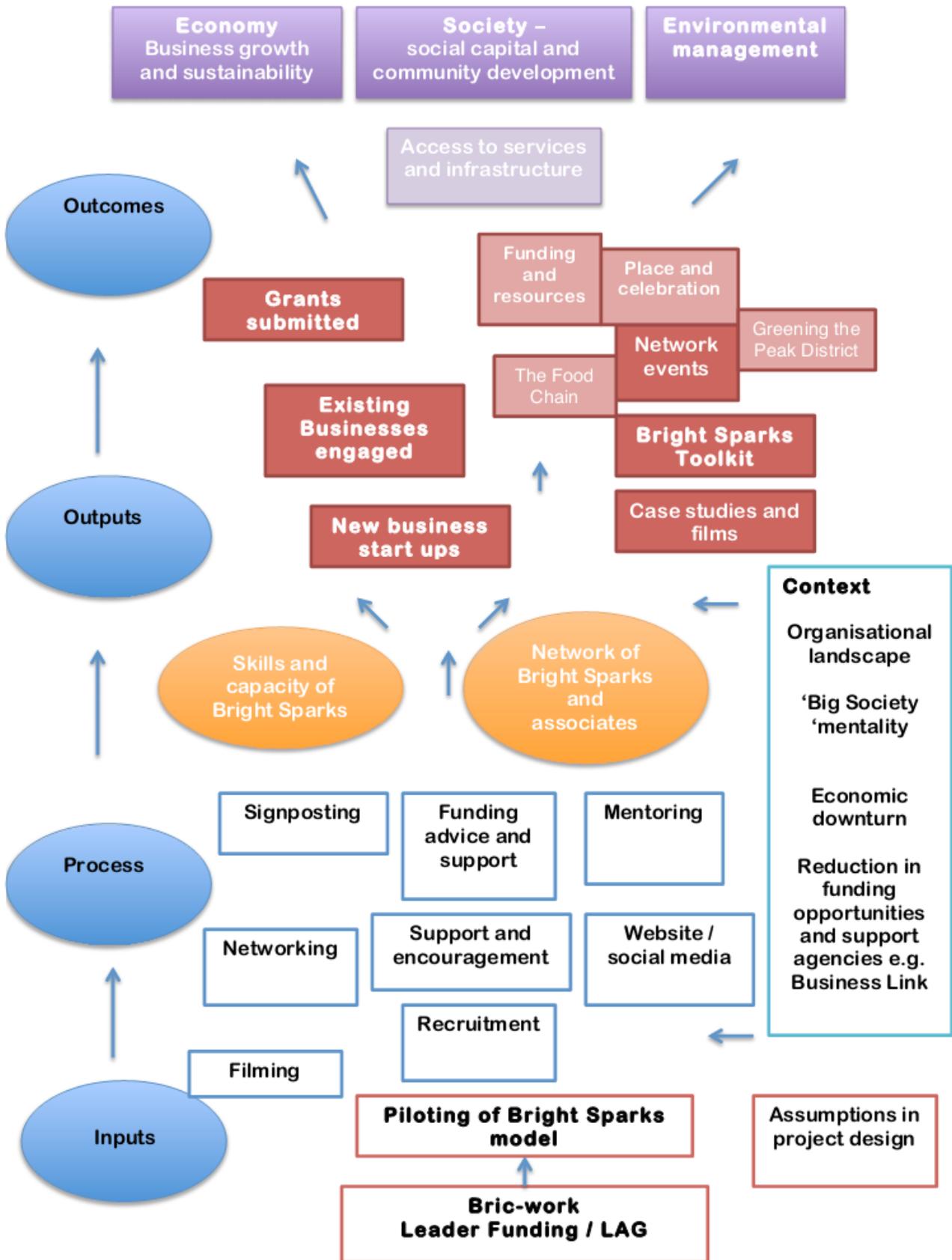
This report is an internal BRIC-work qualitative process evaluation that aims to feedback learning. It sits alongside the progress reports of monitored activity produced over the lifetime of the project. However, for completeness, the results of this monitored activity against the original proposed outputs and outcomes are also summarised in this report.

At the start of the contract, BRIC-work drafted an evaluation framework model. This is shown in Appendix 3. As part of this 'end of project' report, we have reviewed activity and contribution towards outcomes and this is represented in the evidence framework set out overleaf.

This evaluation had a number of related strands of activity, listed below:

- Investigation of Bright Sparks understanding of the project, their expectations and what they hoped to achieve (Autumn 2011).
- Sample testing of evaluation framework and topic guide, and gathering of formative information (Autumn / Winter 2012).
- Design of outcomes and evidencing framework and topic guides for individual interviews and case studies (Spring 2013).
- 11 in depth interviews carried out (Spring 2013).
- 5 case studies researched and written up (Spring/Summer 2013)
- Desk based review of relevant documentation regarding LEADER and RDPE. (Summer 2013)
- Interviews with BRIC-work team members (Summer 2013).
- Survey Monkey Business Survey sent to 100 businesses (Summer 2013).

Bright Sparks - evidencing framework / collection of evidence



2. Activity summary

2.1 Starting out

The project began in February 2011 with the LEADER team at an Inception meeting in Matlock. The BRIC-work team spent the next month organising tools for the work ahead, including:

- Logo design and branding materials.
- Developing draft role descriptions and project scoping documents.
- Designing the project Website and other on-line tools.
- Designing a pop-up banner for use in promoting Bright Sparks at events.
- Undertaking early meetings with stakeholders in the Peak area.
- Organising a stakeholder workshop to firm up on the project design and seek nominations for the first set of Bright Sparks recruits.

This early work culminated in the Stakeholder workshop run at the Agricultural Business Centre in Bakewell which brought together key partners to help develop the project.

2.2 Stakeholder Workshop

BRIC-work hosted a stakeholder's workshop in May 2011 to introduce the Bright Sparks project and to inform its development. Themes arising included the points below and will be picked up in the concluding section of this review.

Networking

- Effective networking facilitates sharing of knowledge and empowering people who have not traditionally been involved for a range of reasons.
- Bright Sparks is not operating in isolation or entering a vacuum.
- Online networking has a growing relevance, and a number of such resources are in place. It will be vital to complement these and collaborate with existing online resources.

Volunteering

- Bright Sparks will help to strengthen 'personal' networks, offering opportunities for developing new friendships and alliances, volunteering, formalising existing but informal 'Bright Sparks' systems.
- The role of volunteers will need to be clearly articulated and Bright Sparks will need to be realistic, open-ended commitment is impossible for many.
- Many Bright Sparks will be doing this sort of work already – will Bright Sparks pick off these or nurture new people?

Operational Considerations

Many questions were raised including:

- How to deal effectively with the wide geographical spread of the scheme.
- How to run the programme without a local base.

- How to ensure the right mix of skills and people is recruited quickly.
- There were also concerns to ensure that the scheme should dovetail with existing systems. Diminishing resources to signpost to.
- The need for a good training and support package for Bright Sparks.
- Possible duplication of existing services or activity.

New Approaches, New Perceptions

- Bright Sparks offers an opportunity to develop flexible support e.g. support drawn from a range of 'Bright Sparks' rather than one mentor per person.
- The Bright Sparks Network offers the potential to enhance life in rural communities and protect or develop local services to build resilience to cuts.

Business development

- Bright Sparks offers an opportunity for businesses to make a non-financial contribution through encouraging staff to share skills with communities.
- The scheme would possibly facilitate greater collaboration between businesses, and signpost small enterprises towards grants and finance.

Communications and Marketing

- Bright Sparks will need to be clearly differentiated – a distinct identity.
- The target area is diverse so different marketing strategies are necessary
- Ongoing issues re broadband, mobile phone connectivity etc.

Strategic Direction and Prioritisation

- Bright Sparks could seek to maximise impact by focusing on those areas lacking support. In practice this is very hard to do. Live and Work Rural tried to identify such locations and experienced difficulties.

Sustainability and Exit Strategy

- Any success gained through the scheme should be continued at the end of the two years' funding. It will be important to plan for carrying it on through some local structure.

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP

24 May 2011

Agricultural Business Centre,
Bakewell



Over 20 local agencies and organisations get together to help design a new project to champion rural communities and enterprise in the Peak District

Bright Sparks Network

championing the peak district

A summary of the key points and questions arising from the Focus Group:

The scheme need to get the terminology right. For example it should consistently refer to the volunteers on the scheme as Bright Sparks rather than mentors. And the geographical location and targeting of the scheme needs to be accurately described as not all the Peak District is included. 'Rural enterprise' needs to refer to all businesses running in a rural setting and not just those associated with agriculture or tourism/leisure.

The concept, needs to be made clearer, specifically:

What is the role of a Bright Spark and how is this best described? What is the purpose and process of the scheme itself? And what will be

the role and input of different stakeholders such as the business sector, voluntary and community groups, infrastructure organisations, etc?

What training and other support will be offered to help Bright Sparks do their job well—both in content and scope?

What is the best way of marketing the scheme and attracting interest, both from Bright Sparks wanting to volunteer as well as potential clients?

Need to ensure Bright Sparks is well networked and connected to existing agencies.



[Read on for more detail from the workshops](#)

New Approaches, New Perceptions

BSN offers an opportunity to develop flexible and bespoke support for clients. For example support could be drawn from a range of 'bright sparks' rather than being limited to one mentor per client/project. Quality of service delivery will be vital and the careful balance of supply and demand between the needs of clients/communities and the skills offered by BSN will be a key factor. Similarly, it will be important to carefully match Bright Sparks to clients in order to ensure compatibility and the right mix of skills.

BSN offers the potential to enhance life in rural communities and protect or develop local services to build resilience to cuts. This could include enabling communities to better link together and combine their efforts, for example in lobbying for services. The scheme could help to reinvigorate action groups, encouraging them to re-engage with public bodies or services to advocate for change.

As well as practical support offered to local communities and enterprises the BSN provides a platform and vehicle for considering other key issues affecting community or rural life, for example the impact of the Localism Bill or Big Society as these are rolled out, bringing these to life in rural areas.

Who was here?

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | Ian Sterritt | Helen Pakpahan | Andy Williams |
| | Lindsay Allen | Dan Yates | David Brown |
| Anne Sherriff | Pat Lunn | Liz Oldfield | Tim Polkinghorne |
| Gerry Andrews | David Walker | Victoria Moore | Hugh Wilson |
| Mandy Wilson | Adele Metcalfe | Michelle Reynolds | David Boddy |
| Amanda Brown | Gordon Stewart | Sue Scholes | Andy Perkin |

2.2 Recruitment of Bright Sparks Champions

We approached recruitment in a number of ways and so there have been a number of entry points for Bright Sparks, including through a recruitment day held at Taste Tideswell, through local knowledge, through DEP signposting, and through word of mouth, press releases, leaflets and posters, stalls and presentations at local events, e.g. those organised by the 'Live and Work Rural' project.

Despite this, the project was never inundated with applications to become Bright Sparks and it became clear that there was a lack of nominations forthcoming from Peak District partners and stakeholders. Rather, Bright Sparks were identified through publicity and word of mouth primarily.

Each Bright Spark was offered an induction meeting, given a toolkit to work with, provided with a job description, certificate of appointment, business cards, email account and access to social media tools, provided with PR materials and ongoing support, and a BRIC-work team member who acted as a mentor/contact point.

The Bright Spark Community and Business Champions were drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds and located across the Peak. Those attracted to Bright Sparks have been an eclectic mix of the self employed, entrepreneurial, independent traders and community activists. The project aimed to recruit 20 Champions over the life of the project and was successful in doing this, with a further 10 individuals who were strongly supportive of the approach but did not feel they could commit the time to the project and hence became part of a wider network of supporters who attended events and on occasion were brought into support individual projects or actions.

It is a fundamental fact of the Bright Sparks approach that all those attracted to the project did so on a wholly voluntary basis: all time given was free and only occasionally were expenses incurred by Bright Sparks charged to the project. The BRIC-work team were continually mindful of this fact and were careful not to overburden any one Bright Spark.

One result of the voluntary nature of the project is that some Bright Sparks were very active participants who proactively developed ideas, attended events and networked with each other, while others were content to be 'badged' as a Bright Spark and await a call to assist. This is no criticism of any Bright Spark, simply a fact that we recognized as necessary and fair to all who were willing to give any amount of time they could spare to the project.

The Peak District Bright Sparks Programme Voluntary Positions available NOW!



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A Bright Spark will be a champion for rural enterprise and small businesses, and seek to inspire local communities to respond to threats to local rural services. Our network of Bright Sparks will help to develop a set of integrated and networked activities across the LEADER area specifically designed to address issues of sustainability of rural enterprise and rural communities.

Bright Sparks is a brand new programme designed by the Derbyshire Economic Partnership and being delivered by the *BRiC*-work consortium.

It is funded through LEADER, and covers the areas within the Peak District LEADER rural action zone in Derbyshire Dales, High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands. The Bright Sparks programme runs from April 2011 – September 2013.

Bright Sparks is a flexible approach (i.e. not a 'one size fits all') and activities led by a Bright Spark could include:

- Providing assistance in response to negative situations such as village shop closure, reduction in centrally provided services or transport services.
- Providing guidance and assistance to businesses and communities to access new opportunities as they arise e.g. accessing new funding streams; signposting to expertise available; lobbying for broadband provision etc.
- Helping to develop new solutions through support to develop multi functional community facilities such as pubs/village halls acting as 'one stop shops'
- Encouraging communities and businesses to make better use of services they have access to, through awareness raising events. This could involve leading events which not only showcase community facilities but act as a place of meeting for sole traders/micro enterprises to showcase their services.

Becoming a Bright Spark : Bright Sparks will be volunteers who come from all walks of life. If you are passionate about your rural community, want to see positive action take place to improve the quality of life of local people and are prepared to give up a small amount of your time to learn more about the programme and to assist others then this could be a great opportunity for you.

Would you like to be a Bright Spark? If so, contact: Gerry Andrews mob: 07794 366227
gerryandrews@live.co.uk or visit: www.peakbrightsparks.org.uk



Rural Development Programme for England Business Support is part of Solutions for Business, the Government's package of publicly funded business support designed to help companies start and grow.



Funded by
The European
Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development:
Europe investing in
rural areas

2.3 The Bright Sparks Network and networking

There have been a number of events that have brought people together as a network. At the first network gathering held in December 2011, the Bright Sparks defined the project as:

“A network of volunteers who run our own small businesses and network to share skills”

During 2012/13, five themed gatherings were held in different parts of the LEADER Peak area. They focused on:

- Funding and Resources – Hope Valley.
- The Food Chain – Upper Hulme.
- Place and Celebration – Ashbourne.
- Greening the Peak District – Over Haddon & Beechenhill Farm (2 events organised jointly with Business Peak District and the Peak District National Park Authority).
- Great Networking, Great Places – Upper Hulme.

Each one featured presentations from those involved in the Bright Sparks network, sharing their knowledge and experience with others. The gatherings offered an opportunity to attract new Bright Sparks, and to create new collaborative activities. Participants included those signed up as Bright Sparks and other wider network members.

All these network gatherings have been filmed so that those unable to attend could access the information provided at a later date. A number of the flyers produced to advertise the events are illustrated on the following page.

In addition to the face to face events, BRICwork established a set of social media tools in order to enable Bright Sparks and others to access information:

1. LinkedIn page – @ Bright Sparks Peak District
2. Twitter account – @ PeakBSN
3. Website – www.peakbrightsparks.org

Networking has been further facilitated by the BRICwork team by organising for the Bright Sparks message to be taken out to stakeholder and partner events throughout the lifetime of the project. These included several events at the University of Derby's Buxton campus, Big Breakfast events at Hope Valley College, Business Peak District events and Live and Work Rural seminars.

In October 2012, Bright Sparks was one of a handful of projects selected to present to the final Peak District LEADER conference held at Bakewell Town Hall.



Bright Sparks Gathering
Tuesday 19 June, 6.30—8.30
 The Winking Man, Buxton Road, Upper Hulme,
 Staffordshire, ST13 8UH
 (on the A53 between Leek and Buxton)

Bright Sparks Network

FOCUS ON FOOD

Whether you grow it, produce it, cook it, serve it, sell it, or just plain love eating it Peak District traditional food is one of the finest features of this lovely part of the country. The next Bright Sparks Gathering will be a chance to hear from Bright Sparks involved in keeping us all fed and watered, and find out how initiatives can connect together in creative ways.

Join us and place yourself on the Bright Sparks Food Chain. Be inspired by creative approaches to producing, promoting or distributing local produce

Claire Millner runs a day nursery and childrens' play centre, and has converted a few flats. Then in 2009 the opportunity came up to buy the Old Cheese Shop in Hartington at auction, and cheese-making in the Peak District was reborn.

Cheese-making is set to re-start in Hartington in May 2012 following the setting up of the Hartington Creamery by a dynamic group of entrepreneurs who started a small scale cheese factory there. Claire and her colleagues are passionate about cheese-making and reinstating cheese production in Derbyshire

Paul Morgans produces Strongman Chili Sauces, a company he set up to find out what happens when you bring a product to market. He was also involved with a Portas pilot scheme aimed at setting up the Bakewell Baking Festival, a major branding opportunity for the town

Tim Sidaway runs Garden Farm, a 'new model' mixed farm which is certified organic. The farm uses traditional and rare breeds to provide high quality food to the community at realistic prices. Community engagement is key to the Garden Farm business model, which is working on lots of levels to bring people closer to how their food is produced

Plus ...the chance to meet and network with other Bright Sparks, share ideas and find out what others are up to

RSVP : Please let us know if you are coming, no later than Tuesday 12 June 2012, by emailing anne.sherriff@gmail.com.

BRIGHT SPARKS TRAINING PROGRAMME 2013



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Great Networking, Great Places: 25 April 2013

The Winking Man Inn, Buxton Road, Upper Hulme, Staffs, ST13 8UH

Join us for these two FREE workshops to help you make the best of online networking, and build even greater places here in the Peak. All welcome, come along to either or both.

1.30pm to 5.00pm

How to get what YOU want out of social networks and online trading

Facilitator : Emily Whitehead, Simply Staffordshire

An opportunity to consider how you can use ICT and on-line resources to best effect, how to get what YOU want out of social networking or on-line trading opportunities. Rural businesses can be isolated; travel costs eat into operating budgets, your customers and clients may not be able to reach you. So how do you keep in touch with suppliers and customers? On-line marketing is crucial, but how do you get results without spending too much time on it?

There are plenty of social networking training opportunities out there – most of us have been on lots already – but still many of us struggle to get our heads round all the new opportunities. In this session we will be drawing on the real experience and sharing the expertise of Bright Sparks who have used social media successfully.

6.00pm to 8.00pm

Making Great Places

Facilitators : Emily Whitehead, Simply Staffordshire, Anne Sherriff, BRIC-work

What's our long-term plan for the Peak District? How do we see this area in ten years' time? In twenty? If the future is intrinsically linked to tourism how should local entrepreneurs and organisations respond, to secure quality as well as quantity? How do we attract visitors in in the first place, then disperse them throughout the rest of the region? And what about those who live here as well as those who visit? The Peak District is a great place, but why? What makes a great place? What do locals and visitors alike think about the Peak, what do they want, what's important to them? How do we build and maintain a sense of place to attract new people and businesses? And even more tourists?

To book a place

email : anne.sherriff@gmail.com no later than Monday 15 April 2013, stating which workshop you'd like to come to, or if you'll be coming to both.





Bright Sparks Network
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"Bog-snorking and Plum Tarts!"
The secrets of marketing your place

Thursday 18th October 2012 6pm—9pm
 The Horns Inn, Victoria Square, Ashbourne DE6 1GG

- ◊ How marketing can put your community or event on the map
- ◊ What impact is your event having on your local economy? And how do you know?
- ◊ What makes an event a success?
- ◊ The Do's - and Don'ts – of marketing your place through successful events
- ◊ Need some help?

Come and share your own experiences, get some 'B2B' time together and pick up some useful contacts!

You never know what it might lead to?!!

And it's FREE!!!

Plus—good food and drink at The Horns Inn
www.peakbrightsparks.org

To book, please email anne.sherriff@gmail.com no later than Friday 12 October 2012

We look forward to seeing you there

Funded by  The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas
 **defra**
 Defining the New Rural
 **Subsidies for Business**
 Rural Development Programme for England Business Support is part of Subsidies for Business, the Government's package of publicly funded business support designed to help companies start and grow

2.4 Mentoring, support and encouragement

BRIC-work has linked Bright Sparks to other Bright Sparks and to people outside the formal Bright Sparks network for the purposes of encouragement, sharing of practice and business support. In addition, joint working with the Buxton campus of the University of Derby has led to three presentations by BRIC-work and Bright Sparks to teachers and students and opportunities for the mentoring of young entrepreneurs by wiser and experienced Bright Sparks.

Several Bright Sparks also point to the connections they have made through the network which have led to continued networking on a more informal basis.

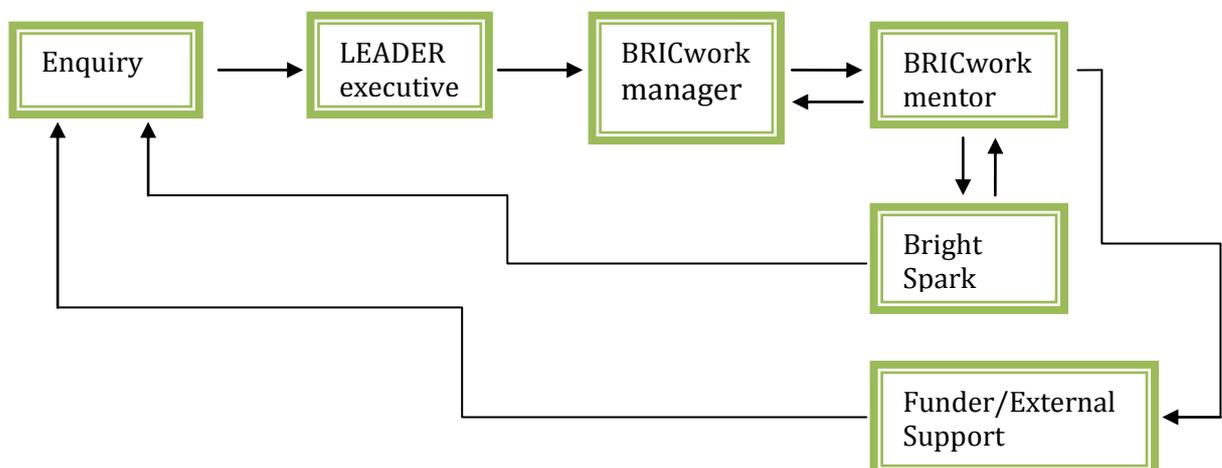
“(My) expectations about Bright Sparks was the opportunity to network – this has definitely happened though going to the meetings and getting involved. If someone has the desire to help others then come across similar people” (Bright Spark).

In practice, the BRIC-work team have provided much more direct mentoring support than anticipated, particularly to those starting new businesses.

2.5 Signposting

As well as some mentoring support, BRIC-work has acted as a signposter – to related local organisations such as Business Peak District, to voluntary organisations such as the CVS’, to other networks such as the Hope Valley Business Breakfasts, as well as some resources outside the Peak District such as national funders and support organisations e.g. Plunkett Foundation, the Post Office, BIG Lottery, UnLtd, Key Fund, Pub is the Hub and Defra.

In many ways, signposting has been a key role played by the Bright Sparks project: often the first contact with a person seeking assistance came through to the BRIC-work project manager, either directly or as a result of contact with the LEADER executive, who then initiated a process of signposting designed to be the most direct route to assistance. As each approach to the project was unique in its requirements and the level of support given, an example of the signposting that took place is illustrated below:



2.6 Funding advice and support

One of the BRIC-work functions was to support applications to a LAG administered funding pot – match fund grants for Basic Rural Services. 11 individuals and organisations were supported and nine grant applications were submitted.

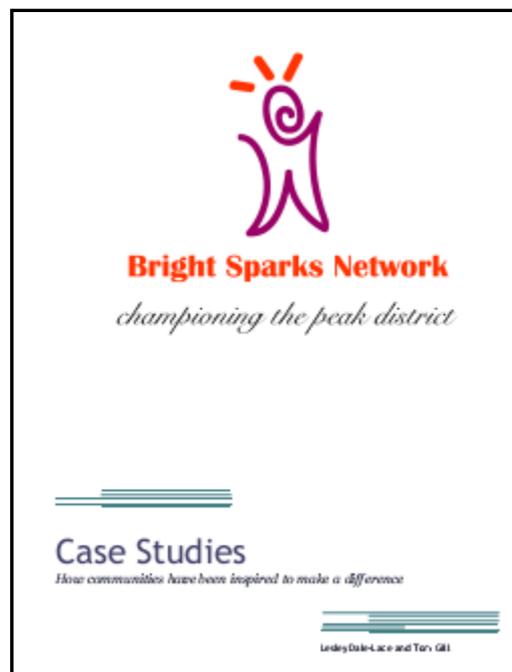
A small number of applications to the Basic Rural Services fund were made without reference to the BRIC-work team.

BRIC-work has also supported individuals and community ventures to submit funding applications elsewhere e.g. Big Lottery, ERDF, Unltd and Peak District National Park Authority.

In total, 20 grant applications to all sources were directly supported by the project

2.7 Case Studies

There are 22 short case studies of rural community action and business development on the website. These are drawn from the Peak District and further afield to provide some inspiration and share good practice. This report has also formed a part of the Toolkit given to all Bright Sparks for reference purposes.



We also began developing case studies in video form in Spring 2012. These Videos were produced by Bright Sparks, Paul Morgans, Currently there are six video case studies based on Bright Sparks and projects they are involved in, hosted on our website via YouTube links:

| BRIGHT SPARKS VIDEO CASE STUDIES |
|---|
| 1. Chris Bastin |
| 2. Bright Sparks overview |
| 3. Jo-Anne Jewett |
| 4. Mat Look |
| 5. Simply Staffordshire |
| 6. Wirksworth Swimming Pool |

Finally, this Evaluation report includes 5 additional Case Studies of projects assisted through Bright Sparks:

| BRIGHT SPARKS EVALUATION REPORT CASE STUDIES |
|--|
| 1. Emily Whitehead – What has Bright Sparks meant to me? |
| 2. Grindleford Village Shop and Post Office |
| 3. Fresh Food Vending |
| 4. Peak Hydroelectric Ltd |
| 5. Bakewell Baking Festival |

3. Output Summary

At the outset of the project, the BRIC-work team were given a set of targets to meet in developing and implementing the Bright Sparks project. These and the outputs attained against each are explained below:

| Activity | Outputs to be delivered | Delivered? |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Recruitment of Bright Sparks | 20 Bright Sparks | ✓ |
| <p>Recruitment was undertaken through a variety of methods following on from the initial Stakeholder meeting at Bakewell in May 2011 where attendees were asked to nominate potential Bright Sparks. Over the life of the project a total of 26 people were invited to formally join the network as Bright Sparks. However, not all were able to commit fully to this and have become part of the wider network with whom the Network regularly communicates and invites to events, or who become involved in projects as informal advisors. At the conclusion of the project there are 20 Bright Sparks in place.</p> | | |
| Bright Sparks Network | 1 Network | ✓ |
| <p>The Network was established as described in 2 ways: first, as a formal network of Bright Sparks with whom there is regular communication and contact and second as a wider network of supporters and stakeholders who are invited to participate in activities such as training events, networking evenings and in support of actions where appropriate.</p> | | |
| Supported Actions | 10 Actions | ✓ |
| <p>The following actions were directly supported by the Bright Sparks project through mentoring and associated support. There is inevitably some overlap here with later outputs related to Signposting and Support for Grant making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bakewell Baking Festival – project development, funding and evaluation. - Care Farming Social Enterprise – project development. - Creative Peaks – project development and funding. - Farm Gate Vending – funding and mentoring. - Grindleford Village Shop and Post Office – project development, funding and mentoring. - Mimosa, Bradwell – business growth. - Northern Lights – funding support, signposting and mentoring. - Simply Staffordshire – business growth. - Supporting Students: University of Derby – partnership development. - Sustainable Youlgreave – partnership development. - Tunstead Milton Hydro Electric – funding and mentoring, business growth. - Wirksworth Swimming Pool – funding support. | | |

| Activity | Outputs to be delivered | Delivered? |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Benefit to Rural Population | 2000 benefiting | ✓ |
| <p>Bright Sparks has engaged with a wide range of projects, businesses and stakeholder partnerships through its lifetime. Through monitoring reports and returns the following outputs were delivered:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact with individuals at Network events – 200 2. Contact with individuals at partners events – 1900 3. People benefiting from supported actions – 325 4. People benefiting indirectly from supported actions – 2100 | | |
| Engagement with businesses | 80 businesses engaged | ✓ |
| <p>108 businesses and social enterprises were engaged with by the project over its lifetime. These were businesses where a substantive contact was made by a team member, rather than those who may have had contact with the project indirectly e.g. by attending a partner events attended by Bright Sparks.</p> | | |
| New start businesses created | 6 new starts | ✓ |
| <p>Bright Sparks cannot lay claim to creating new businesses. This is the responsibility of the individual involved. However, the project did directly support the creation of 12 new starts through mentoring, signposting and funding support.</p> | | |
| Signposting individuals | 40 signposted | ✓ |
| <p>Bright Sparks actively signposted 45 businesses and individuals to partner organisations. Signposting was undertaken where the Network was unable to provide the support requested, or where an additional service was required to complement the support being offered through Bright Sparks. Generally signposting fell into one of 4 categories: business advice, finance, planning advice and partner support.</p> | | |
| Grants submitted to LEADER | 10 applications | ✓ |
| <p>The BRIC-work team were responsible for bringing forward applications for grant assistance from the Basic Services funding stream. The team enhanced this by working with businesses and individuals to bring forward grant applications to other sources such as ERDF, POCA, UnLtd and the BIG Lottery. In total, 11 grant applications to LEADER were supported and a further 9 applications to other sources were directly supported.</p> <p>The number of grants submitted to the Basic Service fund was curtailed by the fund closing for business in 2012.</p> | | |

| Activity | Outputs to be delivered | Delivered? |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Existing businesses reporting increase in turnover | 40 businesses | * |
| <p>We undertook a survey of businesses who had direct support from Bright Sparks through an email questionnaire using Survey Monkey. The response rate was poor with just 17 companies responding. Of these, 11 reported an increase in turnover of the past 2 years (64.7%). A further question asked if the support received from Bright Sparks had been of value to them, to which 14 responded positively (87.5%).</p> | | |
| Case Studies produced | 12 | ✓ |
| <p>6 Video Case studies were produced. 5 Evaluation Case Studies were produced. 22 Case Studies were produced for the Best Practice Guide.</p> | | |
| Final evaluation | 1 evaluation report | ✓ |
| <p>This final report has been submitted to the LEADER Action Group on 10th September 2013 and presented to stakeholders on 18th September 2013.</p> | | |
| Community meetings | 10 meetings | ✓ |
| <p>In promoting Bright Sparks and its services, a wide range of community meetings were attended and organised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bright Sparks Network events: 8 - Partner events/meetings attended: 19 - LEADER Action Group meetings: 3 | | |
| Database of good practice | | ✓ |
| <p>Our database of good practice has been developed by considering projects from existing databases nationwide and first-hand knowledge of projects we considered to be of value to rural development in the Peak District. The Database is hosted on the Bright Sparks website and currently contains 22 good practices drawn from across the EU.</p> | | |
| Toolkit produced | 1 Toolkit | ✓ |
| <p>The Toolkit produced was primarily for use by the Bright Sparks themselves. It was provided by bringing together a wide range of Tools on a Databastick provided to all Bright Sparks for use in dealing with project seeking assistance.</p> | | |

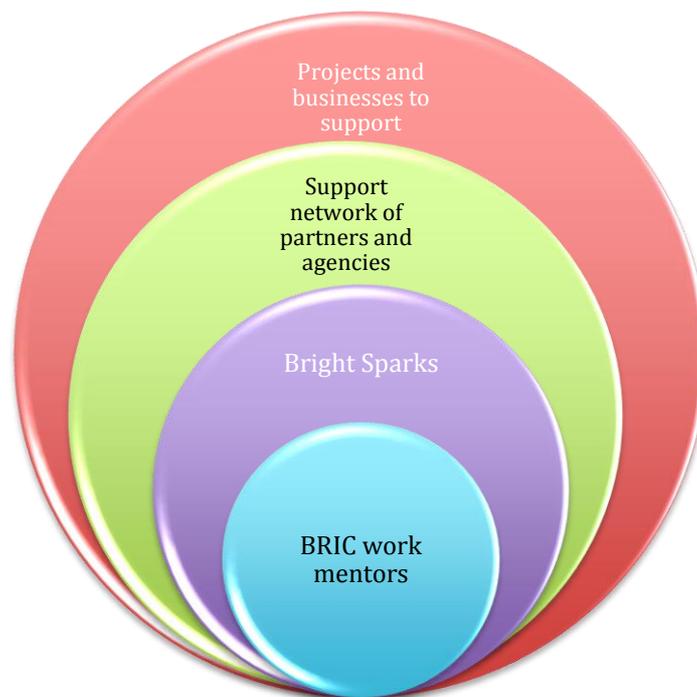
4. Reflections and Learning

4.1 The Bright Sparks Model

At its most basic, the project aimed to identify a set of successful business and community leaders who are able to share their experience and provide guidance on addressing key service delivery and growth for business.

BRIC-work team members therefore set out to put in place a group of people who would be able to work with small micro-businesses and community groups to address key service provision e.g. retail, transport, community services. The idea was to create a sustainable network which could continue without BRICwork's support.

As the project has developed, the model that has emerged is illustrated below.



4.2 Strengths and successes

4.2.1 The network and networking

The Bright Sparks are a diverse group of socially minded entrepreneurs pursuing a number of very different business projects, juggling often two or three enterprises, which are outside the mainstream. For some, the traditional commercial drivers are not the main consideration. They are doing something interesting and creative and have found their home in the Bright Sparks network. The Bright Sparks project may

look slightly different from the vision of two and a half years ago, but clearly there was a gap to fill. These are people 'in it together', who are not only about selling to each other as some other business networks might be.

Bright Sparks describe their expectations of the Bright Sparks project:

Initially, had ideas to do things but then realised how big these ideas were and that Bright Sparks couldn't help deliver such big projects..... so, saw Bright Sparks as a resource that might help deliver on smaller things and changed expectations it has delivered around these.

The opportunity to network – this has definitely happened through going to the meetings and getting involved.

There is a commitment to giving something back to the Peak community, and those recruited to the project have sought ways of working together as a mutual network, supporting each other and collaborating on projects.

As such, Bright Sparks aren't just individuals offering support to a range of others in need but also a group who want to support each other. The demand that has developed for support from Bright Sparks then has increasingly come from within the network itself – for social and personal gain, and for current Bright Sparks, this is its primary purpose.

"I like the fact that the BS network is an opportunity to meet like minded people".

"... have made lots of good contacts through Bright Sparks and it's been really stimulating".

"Building contacts and support networks As a result of working with Paul on the films, have done other things together which could have business outcomes for both of us. Good to access different types of people".

"It's been good I think, from a business point of view. ..have joined other groups as a result".

One Bright Spark felt the strength of the network lies in its collaborative culture and the fact that people aren't directly competing. It's good to be able to say 'I know someone who does that' and to promote others.

Case Study 1: What Bright Sparks has meant to me – Emily Whitehead

How did you first get involved?

Went along to the Bright Sparks event in Tideswell with a friend.

How do you understand the Bright Sparks network?

See it as a mentoring network – good for networking me and finding out what's going on, especially over the border in Derbyshire.

Bright Sparks is about everything I love. It's about small independent businesses, and rural economies needing support and growth, and businesses working together in the absence of structures and funding of the past.

How has Bright Sparks contributed to your business?

Contacts: My business is about Staffordshire – got more contacts across the Peak District, and given me confidence that I have skills to share. This has helped me build my business. I have made a number of contacts – met Peter Dewhurst at a Bright Sparks event and we have talked about me playing a role with students, and getting more information about tourism from them. I get in touch with Paul sometimes to talk through ideas – we have lots in common / similar ideas. I met the Weekend Shopping Company through a Bright Sparks event and am working with them to have a Staffordshire space at their Buxton show.

Confidence: BRICwork asked me to present at a Bright Sparks event and this has helped me realize I have something to offer. I now offer workshops around business help and support as part of my business.

Mentoring support: As a result of one to one support from BRICwork, Emily has been able to think through her businesses plans and value the fact that she has two separate businesses. One is the Simply Staffordshire website which is a hand picked guide to less popular / known attractions and a means of providing small tourist businesses with a platform. The other is focused on the environment and the delivery of environmentally friendly cleaning services. Emily realized that there is a market in providing training around this. She has already taken someone on to help and is developing her expertise in putting together tender proposals.

(BRIC-work team member) *has been brilliant – helped me to reflect back on the abilities I have.*

Future networking: I have made contact with people and won't lose this. But there is so little support out there re facilitation and networking – would like lots more support projects like Bright Sparks.

Bright Sparks has built a network identity and is seen favourably as evidenced, for example, by applications to achieve the Environmental Quality Mark (EQM). EQM encourages mentoring and applicants are scored against this. Several Bright Sparks mentioned their involvement in the network when applying and this has been seen positively and enhanced their EQM scores vis-a-vis supporting the local economy, and involvement in the community, categories.

4.2.2 Encouragement, support and mentoring

There are many examples of this happening within and through the network. E.g. one Bright Spark mentoring another around business ideas and website development:

(He's) been a great inspiration – just talking to him. He is artistic and his flair and input has been great.

I know quite a bit about LEADER I wouldn't have known otherwise – it's raised my awareness. I can see the bigger picture

There has been practical support 'on tap' too. For example P has made 26 films for J – the whole of the training course modules! Although this was a week's unpaid work, P in turn, has received advice from B regarding LEADER funding forms and mentoring support from S:

I mentioned that after the food event I'd met S who has been of great help and is what I suddenly realise as a mentor. Not only has she been supportive, but she has passed on various forms using her experience and put us in contact with some really good people and made the festival possible.

Some Bright Sparks have proactively offered to share their skills and expertise with younger people. Derby University have set up two sessions for students where Bright Sparks have given presentations and answered questions and then offered follow up mentoring support with individuals

The other main offer of mentoring support has come from the BRICwork team. Whilst not originally envisaged as a key role, this has nevertheless been greatly valued, particularly because of the loss of support services such as Business Link. Roles described by the BRICwork team and the Bright Sparks include:

- Providing inspiration
- Reflecting back and suggesting contacts.
- Acting as a sounding board – *this has been the most useful* – helping people to develop their own ideas.
- Help with identifying potential funding sources and reviewing funding applications e.g. for ERDF, Unltd, Big Lottery, PDNP, a commercial tender.

As one Bright Spark commented, the difficulty with mentoring is that you don't know what you don't know:

It is good to have someone outside asking “what do you actually want to do, what motivates you’ etc. I wouldn’t have got into this without (BRIC-work team member) inspiring me on the first visit and providing support and (BRIC-work team member) has been a critical friend / signposted / chased me – exactly what I needed”.

“(BRIC-work team member) has contributed a lot to the fact that I got a sharper defined product to sell. It’s great to have new ideas. In a rural setting especially, you can get quite stone walled and it’s good to get fresh vision from people with your interests at heart”.

Case Study 2: Grindleford Village Shop

Three years ago, both the shop and the Post Office in Grindleford closed within 6 weeks of each other. The day after Sophie Hunter and her family moved into Grindleford, they received a leaflet promoting a public meeting to discuss the village shop. Sophie attended along with well over 100 others and people signed up to participate in working parties. Activities settled down for a while when a new tenant took over the shop but he didn't last long and by the end of the year, there was nothing again.

Sophie and Sarah Battarbee (now co-chairs) and a few others looked at what they could do, and realised it wouldn't be straightforward. They got in touch with Plunkett Foundation, who signposted them to Litton Village Shop as an example of a community run service and they provided some support and advice. They then organised another public meeting which Sophie and others ran as a community consultation event, and again people stepped forward to help. At this point however, it had become obvious that the shop owner was asking for a very high rent and not being very accommodating, and so there was a question about where the shop would be based.

It became clear that they needed a business advisor and eventually they were signposted to Bright Sparks. The mentoring support they received gave them the confidence to think they could do it – that it was really possible. They were supported to apply for a LEADER basic rural services grant for a feasibility study and they fundraised for the 25% match.

The feasibility study began in Sept 2012. Thanks to the support from the Bright Sparks advisor, Sophie felt she knew what she was talking about, and the feasibility process illustrated to people that this was a serious proposition. BRIC-work helped identify three potential tenderers and Plunkett was appointed to carry out the feasibility work.

“David did a rousing address at the AGM and gave some examples of getting the service right – working as you mean to go on. This has stayed in people's minds. He has been continuously encouraging.”

The Village Shop committee and numbers of volunteers have grown, and they have registered with the Industrial and Provident Society (IPS). Grindleford Community Shop Ltd now has 365 members (there are 320 households in Grindleford), each buying a £10 membership share. At a meeting in April they raised **£36,500 worth of pledges towards their fundraising target of £200,000.**

After a successful Member's Meeting, they have decided to open a temporary shop in the Vestry at St Helen's Church (Oct 2013). They are also hoping for a post office local counter. The vestry will be small but it's a start and is a clear intention that residents of Grindleford will never again *“be held to ransom by commercial landlords.”*

Community benefits:

As Sophie says, *“People are voting for control over their local services – they don't want to be left to the vagaries of the market”*. In addition to bringing back a local service, there will be a retail outlet for local food producers e.g. artisan bread, meat, honey and wine are all locally produced.

As a result of this project, residents have realised that there is a desperate shortage of community space e.g. for older people. They recognise that a larger shop space would allow for community space as well and so bigger ideas are emerging such as joint space with the playgroup, and possibly a youth space.

4.2.3 Funding Advice and Support

BRICwork has acted as an intermediary for access to the LEADER Basic Rural Services grant funding. The role was to promote the funding available, target it to relevant organisations and businesses and provide advice to applicants.

Case Study 3: Fresh Food Vending

The Business Idea: A local farmer wanted to see some of his fresh milk directly to the public and installed a fridge and an honesty box on the roadside. It wasn't making a lot of money but a customer base was building.

Chris Bastin, a vending machine supplier, suggested he could design a vending machine to sell fresh produce.

Keen to test this idea in more than one site, Chris looked around for some funding and was signposted to the Bright Sparks project for funding support. In 2011, with support from BRICwork, Chris successfully applied to the basic rural services fund and received £4,000 just less than 50% of the cost of creating and installing two fresh produce machines.

The impact of the funding: Chris now has a tested business of vending machines holding a range of local produce such as milk, bread, eggs, and potatoes. As the idea has taken off, the business model varies - in some cases the farmer takes 60% of the profit, site rent costs around 25 %, and Chris takes 15%, whilst in other places, the farmer rents the machine from Chris, and takes all the vending profit.

This start up has '*led to greater pastures*'. Chris has reflected on the costs of producing fresh produce vending machines and how he might be able to save money on production costs. He has identified a machine that will cost a lot less to convert for fresh and bulky items. He has 4 more sites lined up and 6 machines on their way to conversion.

The benefit to Chris: *"really, really useful to get the idea floated and minimize some of the risk in the first instance"*.

The benefit to the farmer(s): it makes a big difference to the farmer as the profit is a lot more than selling through the dairies (and the supermarkets). The original farmer now has six machines and is taking at least £300-400 per week.

The benefits to the community: Locally produced and extremely fresh dairy and other foods, *"People think its brilliant – fantastic and saves going to the supermarket"*

BRIC-work has also signposted to other sources of funding – both within and outside LEADER resources, and advised on applications. As spending cuts bite, this has been a necessity but also a challenge, and it was for this reason that one of the Bright Sparks gatherings focused on funding and resources. The workshop was not

only about giving information but also provided Bright Sparks with the opportunity to meet funders face to face. This has made applying for funds seem more possible. Two Bright Sparks put in successful funding applications after this event – Mat Look’s Tunstead Milton Hydro Project received £18,000 from PDNPA, and Paul Morgans received £5,000 from Unltd to develop his baking festival idea.

Case Study 4: Creation of a new enterprise – Peak Hydroelectric Ltd

Mat Look typifies the kind of people who have engaged with Bright Sparks. He is full of ideas and has a number of small enterprises on the go and in development, including website support for creative industries (www.peakdistrictcreations.co.uk), production and sale of Stove Top Fans for multifuel stoves (www.stovetopfan.co.uk), bespoke furniture design and making, along with photography. Mat is experienced in delivering large successful capital projects for a range of manufacturing sectors and has particular expertise in engineering and energy efficiency. Applying these skills to small scale domestic projects and moving on to larger community based schemes is the aim of Peak Hydroelectric.

With the support of the Bright Sparks project, Mat has attracted £18,000 from the Peak District National Park Sustainable Development Fund to scope, research and create a pilot installation of a small hydroelectric scheme and develop a working business model from the investment. He is currently developing a linked website - www.peakhydroelectric.co.uk.

“Bright Sparks has enabled me to get to know others in and around the Peak District with a similar attitude toward 'getting things done' developing new contacts and leveraging these links to gain the best solution for my projects. This networking has resulted in a small level of trading but more importantly it opened up another set of avenues to develop ideas for the hydro project and created the opportunity to investigate a number of funding possibilities at a time when funding is scarce - selection of the most appropriate has been key. This helped me to refocus my project”.

4.2.4 Film making

Whilst not envisaged in BRIC-work’s proposal to develop the Bright Sparks Network, the films and the process of making them, has proved to be extremely valuable. Paul, an independent film director, photographer and production company owner based in Bakewell, has worked in the advertising and film industries for 30 years and was keen to use his knowledge to enable small rural businesses to grow in the Peak. He filmed all the 2012 network gatherings and has made some films for others providing

both case studies of Bright Sparks and the projects they support, as well as providing PR material for use by projects themselves. The films include profiles of the work of Mat Look, Emily Whitehead, Jo-Anne Jewett (plus Paul made all her website films), Wirksworth Community Swimming Pool, Chris Bastin's fresh food vending and an overview of Bright Sparks in addition to the networking events.

The connection with Paul is the biggest thing that has helped.

(J was signposted to Paul by BRICwork to help her improve and edit some films. J hopes that if her business takes off she can help him too – his names will be on the videos.)

The films have helped others too, e.g. Wirksworth Swimming Pool who have used the film on their website and in the process of making the film, were able to think about what they were trying to do as a social enterprise, and how important the swimming pool is in the locality.

As a result of working with Paul on the films, have done other things together which could have business outcomes for both of them. Good to access different types of people. (Bright Spark)

4.3 Challenges

4.3.1 The policy context

Bright Sparks was a project with two principles at its core: voluntary action as epitomized in 2011 by the government's rhetoric of the Big Society and localism – people doing it for themselves, and rural business growth.

However, people are coping with hard realities. Stuart Etherington, the Chief Executive of NCVO has pronounced that public spending cuts are "knocking out the voluntary sector capacity"² needed to support the government's big society agenda, and Wavehill Consulting stated in their interim evaluation of the Peak LEADER approach³

The Peak District LEADER programme has been operating during a time of reducing employment and rising unemployment and benefit receipt. In addition to this, the number of businesses 'dying' has risen whilst the numbers being 'born' has fallen to a rate below that of deaths, leading to a reduction in the number of businesses overall. The situation in terms of the overall labour market and business population is weaker than it was at the beginning of the programme. This does not suggest the programme has not had an impact; rather that it has been working against the wider trends in the labour market and business sector.

² Third Sector Online, March 2012

³ Wavehill; (2012) Mid-term evaluation of the Peak District LEADER Approach 2008 - 2013

4.3.2 The operating context

On the one hand, there are perceptions that Bright Sparks has been operating in a crowded market – alongside for example Live and Work Rural, Business Peak District, Peak Business for Community Action Project, the varied business forums, and Derbyshire Retail Help - and on the other hand, perceptions of a reducing support infrastructure e.g. the demise of Business Link.

Bright Sparks has tried to find its way and be explicit about its role to the outside world, and to some extent with partner organisations. But this hasn't always proved easy and assigning attribution of Bright Sparks achievements is difficult (several respondents in this review cited examples which mixed their involvement with Bright Sparks with other initiatives). As one active Bright Spark member noted:

SDF might claim me as an output but I got a lot from BS and L&WR too.

The short term nature of Bright Sparks and the national policy context described above, have meant that the creation and development of a process leading to target outputs and substantial outcomes, has been a tall order.

Whole focus in last year has been on doing something which I never thought I was meant to be doing – a kind of Business Link, achieving business outcomes. Won't see Bright Sparks achieving these outcomes for at least another 2/3 years- as they are small and fledgling. Too short term. (BRICwork team member).

4.3.3 The network and networking

Supported networking has been proven to reduce the isolation of people active and working in a rural area. And in the case of Bright Sparks some strong relationships are emerging from it:

If you are in a city, businesses tend to group together whereas in rural areas you never really get to meet up and share knowledge, hear what people have to say. (Bright Spark).

But this hasn't happened on the scale that BRIC-work anticipated and the network has been much more business focused than anticipated - with less community based activity. It has been a continual challenge to secure more numbers of business leaders / SME champions in the project. Considerable effort has been made to achieve this. Feedback gained has suggested that lack of time, no cost recovery and commitment to other initiatives (e.g. internal company CSR) has restricted this greater participation.

Bright Sparks has to some extent become a 'dating agency' between entrepreneurs but even this has been problematic in the context of other established networks and organisations that include people paid to carry out business mentoring and support.

The desire to avoid treading on others' toes may be one reason why we have never really managed to position the network alongside some other networks.

Those who are familiar with networking have shown some empathy:

It's a difficult concept to sell and something that the farming community would be typically sceptical about. (Stakeholder organisation)

There are pressures on people's time and capacity to volunteer – some of the people we really hoped would play a part were already too busy. What has been unfathomable though, are the instances where there has been a lack of follow through on the part of those seeking support. One member of the network who has offered her time to others with regard to funding and business planning support, is disappointed that people haven't followed through and feels she has had little return – even when a date and time has been mutually agreed:

You can't make people take up the opportunities but why don't they grab them? (Bright Spark)

She surmises that:

"As you build a network, it expands on its own if people want to make it happen, and maybe they didn't".

4.3.4 Networking through social media

BRIC-work has used social media tools to try and reach people – primarily its website, Twitter and LinkedIn. All three have been maintained by the BRIC-work team and used to promote activities of the Network and partner events too. The website has also been used to host materials, in particular the Toolkit and Database of Good Practice. These have not been particularly well used by network members – and only a handful of organizations, surprisingly, responded to requests for permission for website links. However, as a means of regular communications, they have proved their worth.

Perhaps a simple blog would have sufficed, distributed to the contact list that has developed as the project has evolved. Most of the Bright Sparks have said they valued the face to face and informal networking opportunities – this is what has attracted them to Bright Sparks, they weren't particularly looking for online connection.

In many ways, this is surprising if one considers the geography of the Peak which does work to restrict face to face contact on a regular basis with others who may be many miles away and little by way of direct public transport. On the other hand, it was clear from interviews that individuals valued face to face contact highly, even if this was not more than on a quarterly basis.

4.3.5 Mentoring, support and encouragement

The hope was to create a network of people who would offer direct mentoring support to community organisations and businesses, with BRICwork providing the background co-ordination and support. It hasn't happened in this way, and the network as it stands, is in part, a result of how BRIC-work approached the task, and how partners and stakeholders have related to Bright Sparks.

When the project started, BRIC-work assumed that there was an already tested demand for the idea. In fact, people didn't readily come forward, and few people were referred by partner organisations. The Bright Sparks themselves have not been the main generators of new business, reflecting the fact that they are volunteers and busy people. There was an early expectation that, within their own communities (geographic and of interest), Bright Sparks would identify activities for support. However, this was perhaps an overly ambitious expectation.

In hindsight, whilst BRIC-work did spend time marketing the concept, we could have done more to work through the Parish Councils and build upon their membership. Whilst leafleting was done, alongside direct marketing to umbrella bodies, and where possible leaflets placed on Parish Council noticeboards this did not prove enough to attract Parish Councils to the concept/project. A more direct approach may have opened more doors – some Parish Council members would have been entrepreneurs and community activists with an interest in Bright Sparks and we would have had a more direct presence in the villages. Where Parish Councils were attracted to or referred to Bright Sparks, a good relationship was established with the Network and local Bright Sparks – for example in Bradwell.

4.3.6 Funding support

BRIC-work had a role to promote and support access to the Basic Services grants fund. At the start, £100,000 was available in total. However, this diminished quite quickly, particularly when some of it was diverted to projects such as the County Council-led broadband roll out and a Soil Association led project to promote local produce and farmers markets. Whilst these other projects may have been valuable, the Bright Sparks project lost a tangible lever for engaging people, a carrot, when the money ran out well before the end of the project. There have been a number of instances where new business ideas required a small amount of seedcorn funding which was no longer available.

The loss of the Basic Services fund led to a significant tail off of direct enquiries to the project. This indicates what might be obvious – that start ups and microenterprises value access to funds more highly than access to mentoring support. In fact, what the Fund gave the project was the ability to engage with those whose primary aim was capital and offer them 'added value' through mentoring and attract them into the network.

A prime example of this was the Grindleford Community Shop project which was first referred to Bright Sparks as a result of a need for grant support. However, when

contact was made with the group, it was clear that a much wider package of support was required, resulting in considerable support from the Network – mentoring from Bright Sparks, contact with members of the wider network, drafting of feasibility study requirements, addressing public meetings, referral to other support agencies and of course, support in making grant applications.

4.3.7 The BRIC-work commission

BRIC-work successfully responded to an open invitation to tender. In reality, this was a commissioned grant, rather than a straight forward business contract.

The commissioning of a consortium like BRIC-work has had its pros and cons. On the plus side, Bright Sparks has benefited from a broad based team – six people with different skills, specialisms and experience. With many links outside the Peak District, the team has been able to bring a fresh approach.

The set-up has also had its challenges. The large size of the team has reduced the amount of time any one person has been able to commit to the project, team members haven't had a consistent presence on the ground and haven't been able to make use of the 'water cooler' moments that organisations embedded in the area take for granted. BRIC-work is also not seen as part of the fabric of the place and has been disconnected from the wider network / partnership of organisations.

This disconnect might have been overcome by establishing a base in the Peak area, for example embedding the project with a partner organization. However, this was not considered to be a cost effective action at the start of the project and the revenue stream neither anticipated this prospect nor was it sufficient to be able to implement such an approach.

5. Concluding thoughts

Before addressing future options for Bright Sparks, we return to the themes identified in May 2011.

5.1 Networking

It is important to be aware that “added value” can be realised through the Leader process in terms of networking and capacity-building as well as through specific outcomes resulting from funded projects. The building of human and social capital among beneficiaries and added value generated through local multiplier effects must also be assessed. For the purpose of this report, social capital is defined as: “the networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and co-operative quality of a society’s social interactions” (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002, p5). By contrast, human capital refers to the skills, confidence and capabilities of individuals that can generate improved working or social opportunities (Abercrombie et al., 2006).⁴

There has been a lot of formally organised and informal networking generated by the Bright Sparks project. People have been very positive about the value of the get togethers, that they feel less isolated (most of those engaged work alone) and have got ideas and feedback. Bright Sparks has brought people together who wouldn’t necessarily have met otherwise, for example, connections between the Simply Staffordshire project and Derby University. And people have sparked actions and ideas in others, e.g. two Bright Sparks are now working jointly on their marketing base.

There is plenty of evidence here to suggest that the Bright Sparks project has contributed greatly to the development of bonding, bridging and linking social capital – individuals working together to be more effective players.

Bright Sparks has not evolved in exactly the way anticipated – but it has survived – unlike some other network developments in the same period. For example, the CPRE/NALC Community Champions programme aimed to recruit volunteer champions to support people in neighbourhood planning. Despite the £1million behind the project, there has been little support to champions and it appears to have faded away.

Online networking has not proved to be a fruitful investment and something very basic would have suited Bright Sparks just as well.

⁴ University of Lincoln / Rose Regeneration 2013: A Review of the Leader Approach for Delivering the Rural Development Programme for England

5.2 Volunteering

Some of the Bright Sparks were already informally offering their help to others, but the need for this is perceived to have grown and Bright Sparks has contributed to who knows who:

I had spoken with people setting up businesses following redundancy, trying to develop an idea. Many of these were 'plodders' before and now need to become initiators and leaders. It's a gap left by closure of Business Link. (Bright Spark)

If Bright Sparks had progressed as a paid role – similar to the Community Champions project – the outcome would have been significantly different. No doubt there would have been more outcomes in terms of engagement with businesses/start-ups but that would have most likely been to the detriment of the networking outcomes which have proved so valuable and generated a wealth of new activity from within the network itself.

5.3 Operational considerations

The Bright Sparks and projects supported have been spread across the Peak District. In part this has been helped by the lack of a local base for the project e.g. it hasn't been associated with one District or the other, or a particular location. On the other hand, a local base would have helped to 'ground' the project and perhaps supported greater partnership working.

The time required to recruit Bright Sparks was longer than expected and this has had a knock on effect on outputs produced. Though as one Bright Spark put it:

Usually when something gets set up, it starts big and falls off re numbers of people. Bright Sparks is the other way round. It takes time for this idea (Bright Sparks) to get going.

Bright Sparks have looked for support but been reticent about formal training. Both at the start and towards the end of the project, BRIC-work has attempted to facilitate training but with little response. This was despite consulting with the broader network around training needs and wants – where several said they would like specific training provision.

So, individual needs have been on a one-to one basis from BRICwork mentors working with Bright Sparks and providing information, for example through the development of the Toolkit. This clearly had time/cost implications which were greater than if activity had developed for group work.

5.4 New approaches, new perceptions

The project has been able to reach a wide range of individuals and micro businesses - people doing things on their own, and connected them together where they wouldn't have had those connections otherwise, or at least so soon. People have been able to put something back into their sphere of activity.

Several Bright Sparks have fed-back that their confidence has grown as a result of being part of the network. The model of support has been flexible and consequently those Bright Sparks who have been most active have helped to shape the project, either directly through their proactive involvement, or more passively, through non-involvement in some activities.

As a new approach and very much a new concept, the perception of the project has been at times confused and also difficult to effectively communicate without direct contact. In particular, the perceptions that Bright Sparks was a replacement for Business Link and a successor to the Live and Work Rural project were both necessary to overcome. The need to stress the fact that Bright Sparks were not Business Advisors was necessary time and again.

5.5 Business development

There has been little engagement with larger businesses in this project. Those engaged with the project tend to be entrepreneurs and artisans often with several business ideas on the go at once. Small enterprises have benefited from funding – both through LEADER and from elsewhere.

Contact with the wider community sector has been limited too, despite a clear cross over between 'socially minded entrepreneurs' and new approaches to local service delivery. Again, a crowded market place has been the key reason for this and non-referrals from the public sector to Bright Sparks has been a fact of the project which has restricted growth and impact in this sector.

5.6 Communications and marketing

This has been a real challenge – despite different approaches to marketing the concept, there haven't been hoards of people knocking on the door. The most successful way of recruiting and keeping people has been face to face contact at Bright Sparks and other organisations' events, and regular follow up by members of the BRICwork team.

Press releases to the local media were regular at the outset of the project and did attract some attention, for example interviews with High Peak radio when the recruitment process was ongoing. However, generally the local media did not respond with enthusiasm to PR.

A criticism of the project which was leveled on several occasions by stakeholders was the lack public awareness of the project and its work. Greater resources directed at this would no doubt have paid dividends in terms of profile raising but this would have meant a loss of direct support to the project which was considered to be the priority by the BRIC-work team.

5.7 Strategic direction and prioritisation

The BRIC-work team has always had an eye to areas where there is less involvement of people in the Bright Sparks network, but has not been able to identify locations most in need. Considerable effort was made to engage with stakeholders in the Staffordshire part of the LEADER area as a means of reducing the perception that the project was wholly Derbyshire focused. The project was also keen to ensure that the Bright Sparks were recruited from across the whole of the LEADER area with no one District overly dominating.

In demand terms, whilst inquiries for assistance were spread across the area, it is clear that ultimately much of the more pressing economic needs were focused on the market towns, not all of which are eligible for LEADER funding e.g. Buxton. Nonetheless a renewed focus on the needs of key service centres such as Bakewell may well have yielded higher dividends, as evidenced by the success of the Baking Festival.

Case Study 5: Bakewell Baking Festival

Background

Concerns about Bakewell losing its identity, local shop closures and a tourist economy not meeting its potential, were the triggers for the festival founders, Paul Morgans and Janet Reeder, to look for ways to regain local identity and pride and to promote Bakewell nationally and internationally.

Project aims

- Celebrate the rich heritage of baking as the focus for a festival that will also include vintage, the arts and family fun.
- To support local independent shops and producers who continue to uphold traditions with their quality produce in a festival that is full of fun too.

Initial support was sought from BRICwork and the Bright Sparks network, and from friends and acquaintances with specialist knowledge. They made contact with food and festival experts as well as local entrepreneurs, who gave valuable advice.

Getting the project underway

The marketing began in summer 2012 and online publicity brought a locally based graphic design company on board. Realising this could be 'big', a colleague with production experience was brought in and the Bakewell Baking Festival community interest company was formed. Soon, there were a whole range of people signing up to be part of the world's first baking festival. Edwina Curry lent her support, as did the local church, the Rutland Hotel, Storybag Theatre, Tideswell School of Food and local traders. Belief in the project carried the team through and the two day festival held in June 2013 saw 40 different events and 40 exhibitors, culminating in a 'Pies and Prejudice' custard pie fight.

Planning has already started for BBF 2014, where the organisers hope they can include some of the activities they just didn't have time for first time around.

How was it funded?

In addition to ticket sales, the festival budget was based on a mix of financial and in kind contributions. E.g.

- £7,500 from the government sponsored Mary Portas pilot.
- Unltd, a support body for social entrepreneurs, provided £5,000
- Some local businesses gave donations and sponsorship
- Tideswell School of Food contributed to the festival and gave a donation
- Many of the activities and events were offered at vastly reduced cost
- Accommodation for some of the 'stars' was provided free of charge
- The publicity generated in national and local press was worth thousands of pounds.

The turnover was around £50,000. All the organisers worked for nothing, and there is likely to be a shortfall. As a company in its first trading year, this is seen as part and parcel of investing in the growth of this social business.

Outcomes and Spin offs

- The Tourist Information Centre doubled its figures
- Some local shops state they were much busier
- Those donating in kind contributions made new contacts and showcased their work
- The festival stallholders all reported record takings – one made three times as much money in Bakewell as they did at Chatsworth the same day
- The organisers have lots of new networks that will be useful for next year's festival
- A film and photo archive has been made to showcase Bakewell and its festival

- Paul and Janet are now much more confident, enterprising and more connected. *"We had the idea, and we have done it (no one else no one else doing it for us)."*

The quotes below illustrate a range of benefits to the town, its residents and traders:

"We've made a weekend of it ... It's such a lovely town, we are booking for next year"
(Visitor from Liverpool)

"I was amazed by the incredible success of the bakefest in it's first year. The crowds began to filter in before I had even finished laying out my stall, around 9am. This continued throughout the whole weekend and I struggled to keep up with the speed of trade. I have since had orders ...and have forged contacts with several people from abroad. (Stallholder)

"Brought a tear to my eye to think I live and work in the town on that video!" (Local resident)

"We had an excellent weekendThe customer spend per average item was higher as was the enthusiasm for our shop and what we do. (Local trader)

"I really enjoyed the festival. The town seemed to be buzzing, ..." (local trader)

"I was particularly impressed by the degree of support you got from many local businesses and organisations.... a great event that benefitted Bakewell. (Jim Dixon, PDNPA)

"The feedback from customers in the cafe was extremely positive. This festival brought LOTS of new people into the Bakewell, and really showcased our lovely town. (Local traders)

"We have had people in all the time saying how excellent they thought it was. And two lots who were booking their hotel/ B&B for next year." (Resident / Parish Church)

The Bright Sparks Connection

Paul has been active within the Bright Sparks network since 2011. *"I have made lots of good contacts through BS and it's been really stimulating'. 'It's raised my awareness. I can see the bigger picture'.* He has found the opportunity to meet people face to face and to share what you know really useful. He has had support from other network members re LEADER funding for example, and has shared his photography and film skills to help others promote their businesses.

Paul is enthusiastic about the support he has received from BRICwork and from the network of Bright Sparks. As a result of attending the Bright Sparks gathering around funding, he followed up two funders and one, Unltd, provided £5,000 start up money to try the festival idea out.

He particularly cites the support he has had around his idea and the business development, *"This has been invaluable".... it's a vote of confidence and that's what a lot of people from Bright Sparks have given me over the last 12 months".* Through the BS network, he met someone at the Bright Sparks gathering around food *"who has been of great help and is what I suddenly realise as a mentor. Not only has she been supportive, but she has passed on various forms using her experience and put us in contact with some really good people and made the Baking Festival possible."*

In addition, Paul made contact with Tideswell School of Food which supported the festival and with Peter Dewhurst who took the festival idea to heart and organised his own family and friends bake-off at his wedding reception which took place in Bakewell during the festival.

6. Sustainability and legacy

Could Bright Sparks have done more within the economic context and with the resources and timeframe available? As stated above, the model that has developed is one that has worked for those involved. It has been difficult to badge the Bright Sparks project and put in a box because people have wanted very different things from the project.

For many of those involved, the face to face and gatherings have been the strongest part of the work and opportunities to gather every two to three months is all that's needed. There is however, a continuing need to bring forward and work with individuals who are evolving young businesses to develop a new market or a new approach - often diversifying away from what they were originally doing.

Both the National Impact Assessment of Leader, 2011⁵, and the Review of the LEADER approach, 2013⁶, reiterate that there is significant value in LEADER “building capacity and triggering a ‘mind shift’ among local actors which, in turn, can help to improve the economic performance and sustainability of rural areas over time”, but that this takes a long time. The same report talks of the importance of strengthening supply chain linkages to generate economic impact. Bright Sparks now needs to be integrated alongside other business networks such as Business Peak District, in order that the network can continue and provide the kinds of support required by entrepreneurs, community leaders and micro-businesses.

It's always difficult to meet people and Bright Sparks brings opportunities to meet people of a similar ilk, it's very relaxed. It's getting there – people understand it now.

I am now more sure than ever that it has legs and will do all I can to support it as I think it would be crazy to stop its funding and to replace it with something that will again need time to find its feet and will have wasted so much start up time. (Bright Spark)

There is a suggestion that Bright Sparks might benefit from a split focus – a set of champions interested in individual business development and another set with a community interest. As part of our final evaluation of the project, the BRiC-work team has been considering the options for the future of Bright Sparks. The main options that have been considered are:

- The project concludes and no succession strategy is put in place.
- The project continues as an informal affiliation of network members.
- The project develops a new structure that enables it to continue and seek new funding to allow for Bright Sparks to grow.

⁵ Ekosgen (2011) *National Impact Assessment of Leader* report for DEFRA

⁶ University of Lincoln / Rose Regeneration 2013: A Review of the Leader Approach for Delivering the Rural Development Programme for England

It is the view of the BRiC-work team, following consultation with members of the network, that the 3rd option is the one which is most sustainable, in terms of ensuring the established network is able to grow both in terms of its current objectives and also in terms of it being able to pursue new opportunities.

6.1 The Succession Plan

It is proposed that from October 2013, Bright Sparks evolves into a Community Interest Company (CIC), managed and run by a core group of the current network who would become Directors of the company.

As a CIC, Peak Bright Sparks Ltd⁷ would have the following core objectives:

1. To operate a network of entrepreneurs drawn from across the Peak District area who are committed to working collaboratively for the social, environmental and economic benefit of the Peak District.
2. To provide network members with the opportunity for collaborative learning.
3. To enable new start ups and existing micro enterprises to benefit from access to mentoring from the network of established entrepreneurs.
4. To seek to extend the Bright Sparks model to new areas outside the LEADER area, while maintaining a key focus upon rural communities and their particular challenges.

Breaking these draft objectives down a little further:

| Core Objective | Detail |
|---|---|
| 1. Operating a network of entrepreneurs | <p>There are currently 20 individuals involved in the Bright Sparks team. It would be an objective of the new company to expand this membership, focused on the self employed and micro businesses, including social enterprises.</p> <p>The purpose of the network would be to share experiences, provide self help to its members and to develop collaborative projects that could be grown and managed through the new Company.</p> <p>Opportunity: The Enterprise Rockers network⁸ is keen to expand activity in rural areas and collaboration would be one way of enabling this to happen.</p> |

⁷ Proposed name based on current availability at Companies House

⁸ Enterprise Rockers support trading micro business owners (0-9) employees and encourage them to collaborate with each other to create opportunities. They have a member in the Peak District who will support a mastermind programme – a get together every 6-8 weeks which acts as a collective surgery opportunity.

| Sub Objectives | |
|--|--|
| <p>2. Collaborative working and learning</p> | <p>Further to the above, the Company would undertake regular events which would bring members together and provide key training/learning opportunities identified from within the network. A key part of this objective could link into and build upon the established relationship with University of Derby, particularly in mentoring young people and providing opportunities for placements and apprenticeships.</p> <p>Opportunity: BRICwork is already in discussion with UnLtd about utilising the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme to enable partnership work with the University.</p> |
| <p>3. Enabling growth of new and existing business</p> | <p>As has happened with the current project, Peak Bright Sparks would offer assistance on a pro bono basis wherever possible to businesses with challenges in their growth and development.</p> <p>This could be delivered through, for example, the current Peak Business for Community Action project, as well as other organisations that Peak Bright Sparks would have a key relationship with.</p> <p>Opportunity: BRICwork has established contact with Business in the Community Pro Help and Business Peak District who are both positive about working with Bright Sparks in future.</p> |
| <p>4. Taking Bright Sparks beyond LEADER</p> | <p>Bright Sparks is currently tied to the LEADER area as stipulated by the funding agreement. A new independent company would be able to broaden its scope across the wider Peak area (for example taking in that part of the National Park in Yorkshire and include excluded settlements such as Buxton).</p> <p>In addition, with marketing and awareness raising, it could be possible to sell the model onto other rural areas.</p> <p>Opportunity: There is already a Bright Sparks approach being considered in North Yorkshire which could be brought under the wing of the new Company.</p> |

6.1.1 Funding the new Company

Due to the nature of the business, dispersed and involving networking primarily via social media, and the potential for an ongoing revenue stream from its members, the new Company would initially have limited funding requirements. However, there are a number of obvious sources of start up funding which could be explored to enable the Company to develop:

1. Key Fund – grants/loans for social enterprise growth
2. Awards for All – capital available for specific project based work
3. Social Incubator Fund
4. UnLtd

6.1.2 Resourcing the new Company

The current project has developed a set of tools, methodologies and assets such as the Website (www.peakbrightsparks.org), Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. On conclusion of the LEADER funding, the ownership of these reverts to the LEADER team. However, it is likely that transferring ownership to the new Company would not be problematic.

6.1.3 Managing the set up and development phase

The BRiC-work team will no longer be involved in Bright Sparks post October 2013. However, there is commitment from members of the team to continue working with a core of committed individuals drawn from the Network, alongside other stakeholders, to develop the new approach. This commitment is open ended at present.

6.1.4 Next Steps

A meeting between committed Bright Sparks, BRiC-work team members and other stakeholders will be organized late September/early October to map the way forward and develop an outline Business Plan for the new Company with a view to the Company launching before the end of 2013.

With an eye to the future and the potential for linkages with other networks across the European Union, BRiC-work has secured a seat for the Bright Sparks Network at the inaugural European Rural Parliament in November 2013 where the Bright Sparks approach to rural entrepreneurship will be debated alongside other motions from activists in rural development from across the Union.

APPENDIX ONE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BRIGHT SPARKS PROJECT

Opportunities of the Bright Sparks project

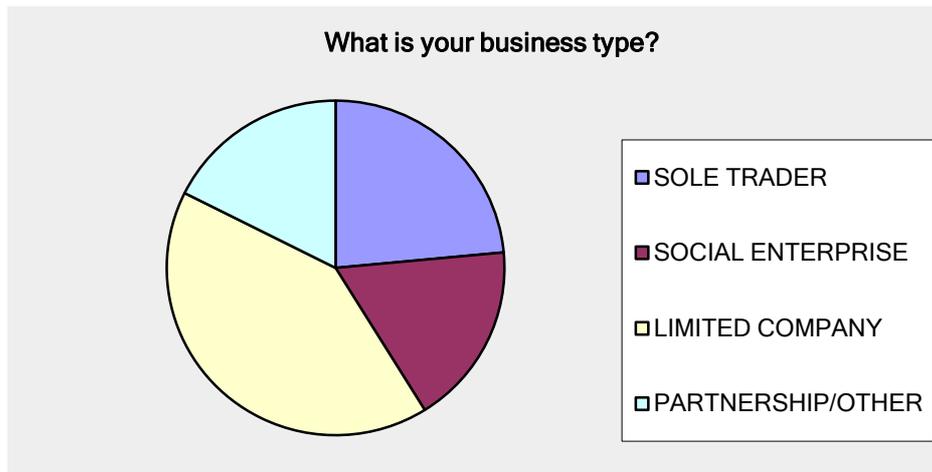
- Link with community organisers
- Benchmarking volunteers scheme through Bright Sparks
- More than one mentor for one project!
- Balance supply and demand of mentors skills
- It will expand and co-ordinate the 'network' of useful contacts
- Work with SMCVS who know the right people in the project areas from past experience / relationships – and grass roots involvement
- Develop staff from larger businesses
- More business ventures / opportunities
- Possible business collaborations
- Link with Business Peak District
- Opportunity for larger businesses in the area to make a contribution to the community through staff giving time to share their skills
- Protect existing services
- Could bring Localism Bill and Big Society to life?
- Grant available to hook people in and help those who have not so far succeeded to get grant support
- Knowledge share to empower other people who fear involvement
- Will broaden the existing informal network of support
- Share best practice
- Good to extend voluntary action away from 'traditional' areas like sports clubs and village halls and into the business sector
- To network / share knowledge – develop 'areas' of specific knowledge / expertise
- Put life back into action groups to re-engage
- Will formalise an 'informal' bright Sparks system!

Challenges of Bright Sparks project

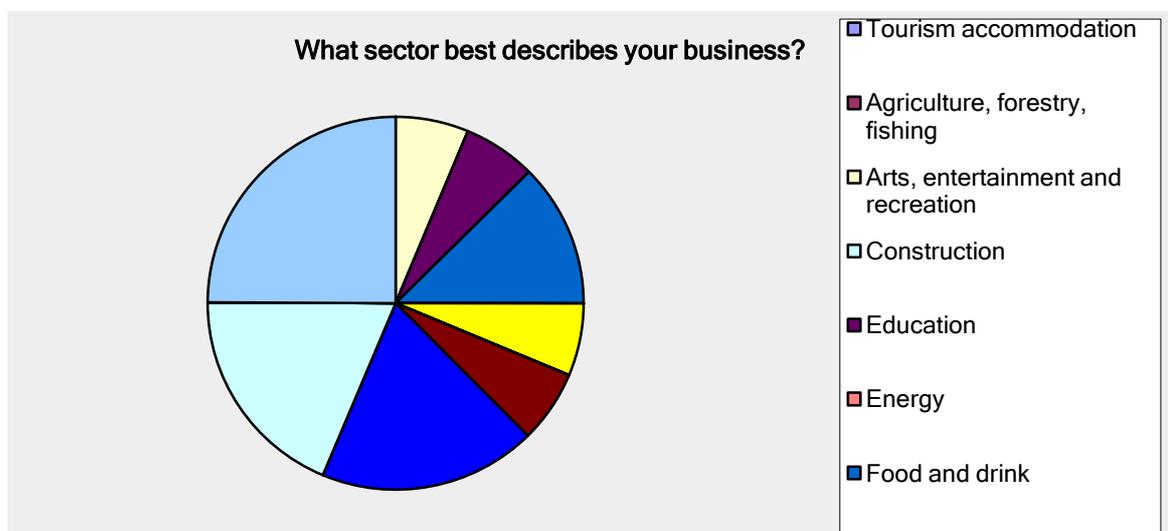
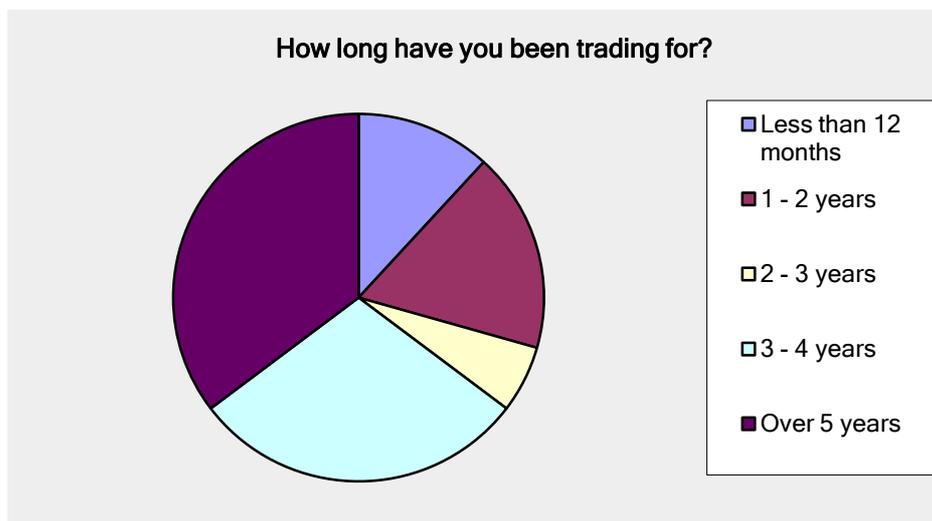
- Give / get relationship
- Geographical spread
- Match the mentor to the mentee
- Getting the right mix of skills and people
- Learn from pro help and systems that are in place
- Initial screening of requirements
- How to get enough clients
- Maximise impact by focusing on areas which lack support
- Need to have different strategies to market the scheme in High peak and Staffs Moorlands
- Lack of broadband and infrastructure, mobile connectivity

- Why should they give up their time for free
- Many rural villages are already close-knit, it may happen anyway
- Recruiting the right people
- Mapping gaps in support
- Avoiding duplication
- Fuzzy what the scheme actually is
- Limited business support to signpost to in the future – no Business Link
- Links to volunteering awards Getting the big businesses involved
- Ensuring that any success at the end of 2 years is continued Knowing when the mentor / mentee relationship closes – what happens then?
- Volunteer expenses

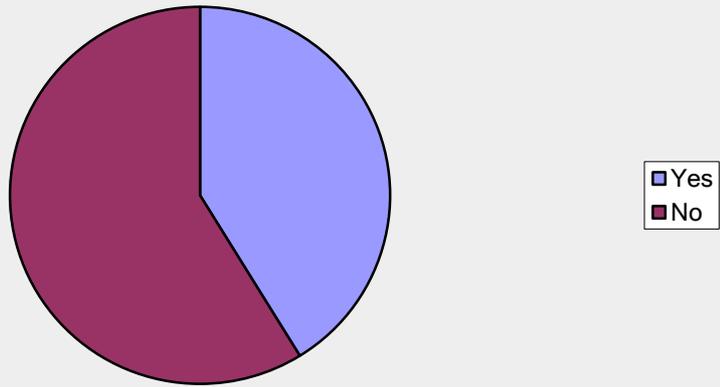
APPENDIX TWO: SURVEY OF BUSINESSES



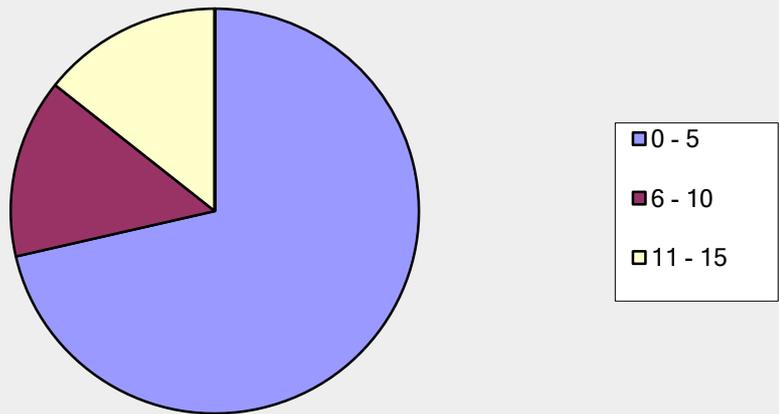
The Survey was undertaken via Survey Monkey during August 2013. There were 17 responses to the Survey from a mail out to over 100 small firms and sole traders across the Peak District.



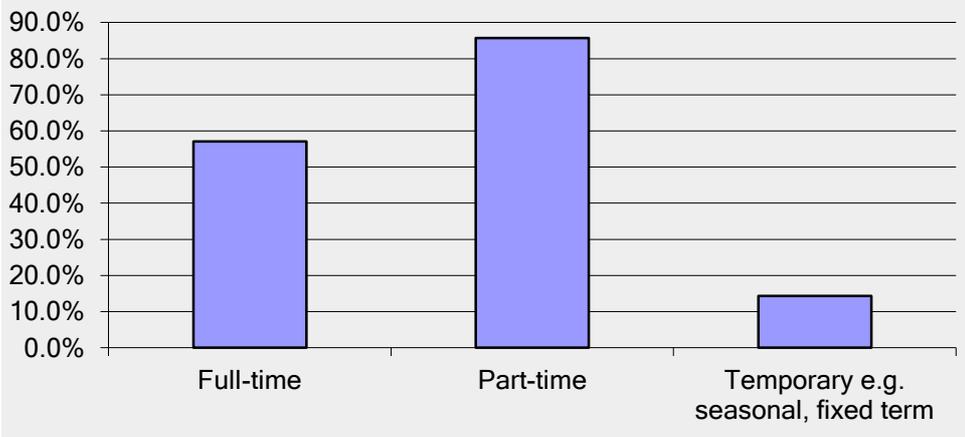
Does your business employ any staff?



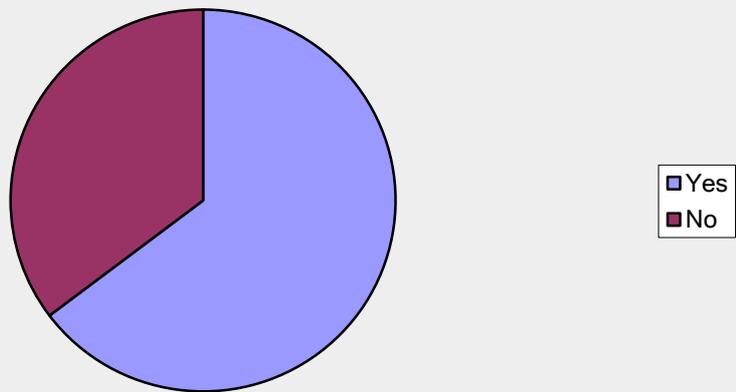
How many staff do you employ?



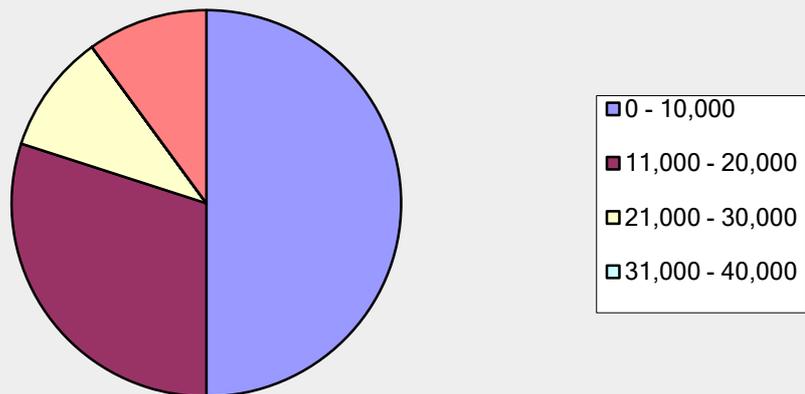
What is the contract arrangement with your staff



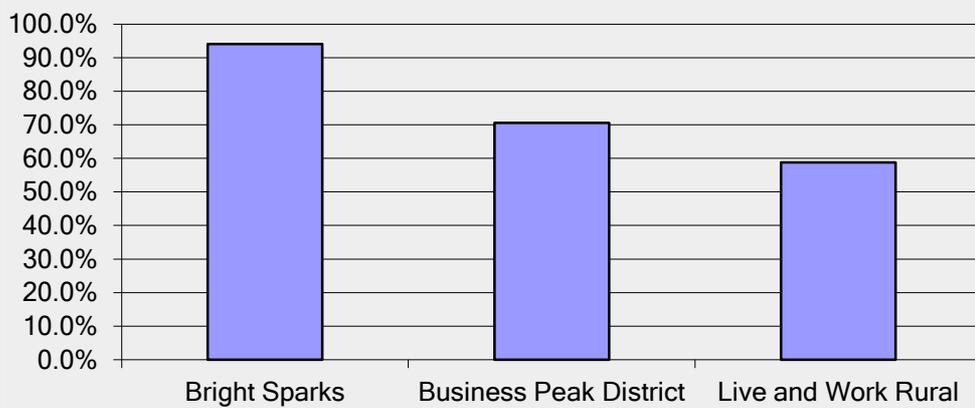
Has your business increased its turnover during the last two years



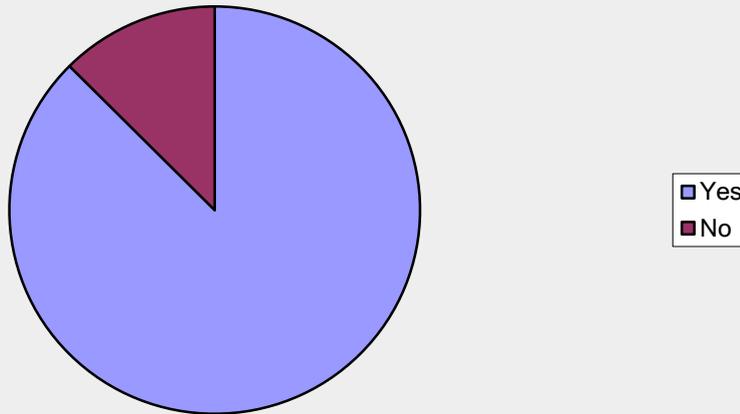
Please state approximately how much your business turnover has increased by over the last two years?



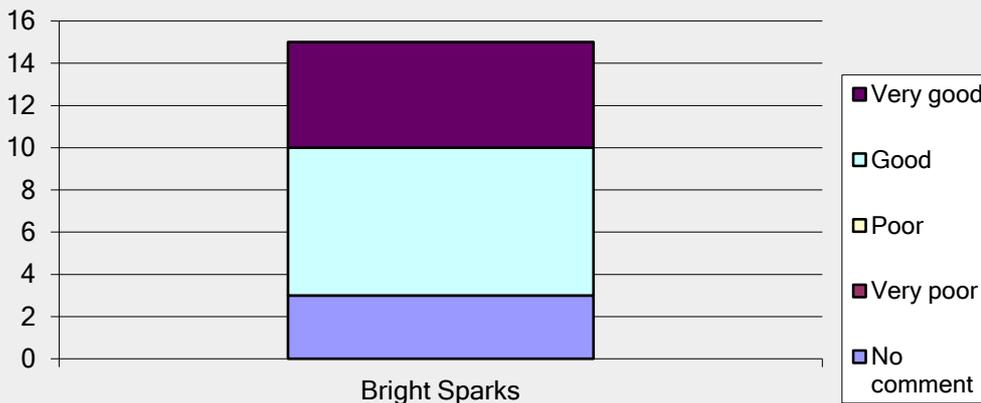
Which business networks have you had contact with over the last two years?



Has the support you received been of value to your business?



Please rank the value of the support you have received from the following network you have engaged in?

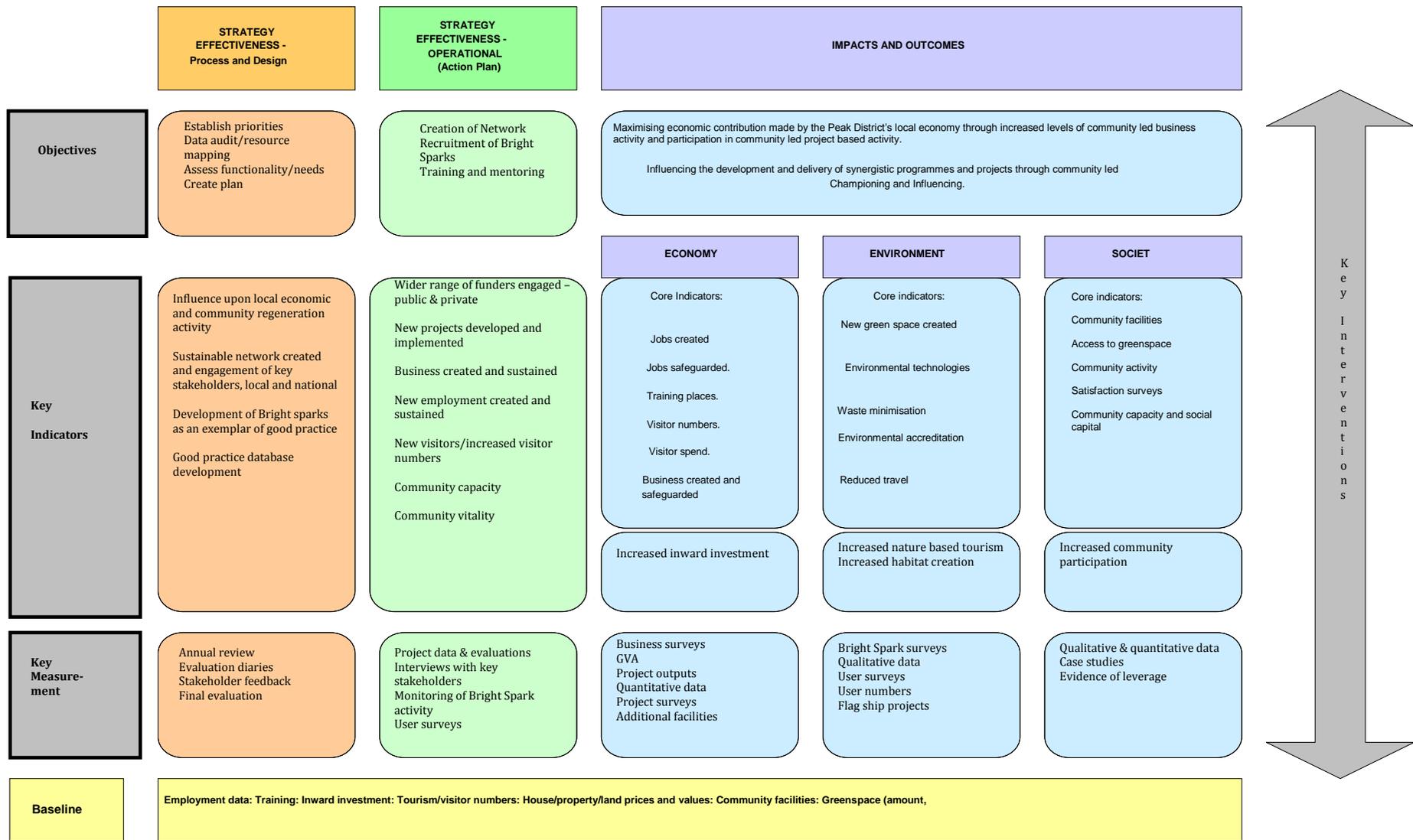


Do you think there is sufficient support for small businesses currently in the Peak District? Do you think there is a need for additional support and what would you like to see provided?

- ✓ Support with finding funding/grant sources for small charities. Ours in turn provides employment for local artists.
- ✓ Ongoing support of small businesses within the rural area of the Peak District would be a huge benefit.
- ✓ Networking and developing ongoing working relationships - it's tough enough as a sole trader to network - these organizations aid the process greatly.
- ✓ More support required. Mentoring, specifically for established, ambitious companies rather than for start ups.
- ✓ Continued small business support.

- ✓ Any additional support would be welcomed.
- ✓ Hard for me to say as most of my work is in Sheffield. I think part of the issue is that people don't know how to find out what help is available and accessing it is difficult. I think small businesses can always use extra support.
- ✓ Tourist brown signs on motorways More help from Banks More rural grants for business start-ups and expansions.
- ✓ Need more support and information on raising finance and marketing on a tight budget.
- ✓ There is a good initial support system in place at present with the Bright Sparks Network and Business Peak District. The problem we have is how we can expand business into employing people and paying more than a minimum wage. The area lacks a decent broad band speed which really needs addressing as IT businesses would thrive here.
- ✓ Generally yes, our main problem is access to funding support for building improvement not tied to running/developing specific community activities, e.g. a club for the elderly or a programme for the homeless.
- ✗ No not at all - the local help i was put in touch with was unhelpful.
- ✓ Yes - more more more!

APPENDIX THREE: EVALUATION MODEL





Bright Sparks Network

championing the peak district

The Bright Sparks initiative has been supported through LEADER in the Peak District Rural Action Zone, part of the Rural Development Programme for England, which is jointly funded by Defra and the European Union, and is delivered by Derbyshire Economic Partnership (DEP).

