


FINAL EVALUATION REPORT		
Project Name: Hidden Somerset		
Project Number: SAT15		
Start Date: 1 November 2006	Finish Date: 30 June 2008	

Introduction and Scope

1. This Final Evaluation Report requires Community Council for Somerset to provide a report on the success or otherwise of Hidden Somerset in achieving its stated aims and objectives. It moves beyond the scope of the Quarterly Progress Reports already completed for each claim, by reviewing the wider impact of the project. Please refer to the guidance notes

Project Aims and Objectives

2. Please provide a brief narrative summary of the project's success or otherwise in achieving its broad aims and objectives as given in your original application and your M&E plans as appropriate. Describe how you achieved them, and if you didn't achieve some of them please explain why.

1. To bring together small businesses and community attractions to co-operate about promoting their tourist-related services on the internet

- Hidden Somerset promotes rural tourism businesses and supports the collaboration of tourism businesses.
- The Hidden Somerset map facility allows visitors to view tourism businesses in their location and find other attractions in the near by area. This helps encourage better exploration of a landscape increasing the multiplier effect (Please see attachment 1 for preview of the site).
- An e-news bulletin was sent in February to Hidden Somerset businesses, (please see attachment 2). This bulletin promoted the developments on the website and the relevant training which was available to the businesses.

2. To increase the use of web-based promotion of these businesses and communities

- Hidden Somerset offers tourism businesses who do not have a website to advertise online and at minimal cost.
- The Hidden Somerset project worker has sign posted many tourism businesses without websites to the Connecting Somerset grant scheme (now closed) which offered subsidised grants for local businesses to create websites.
- The network and training event was held at Ilton (26th February). The agenda for this event included an informative talk from Connecting Somerset offering advice on creating and maintaining effective websites (see attachment 3).
- Businesses that have their own websites are able to have a free web link from

their Hidden Somerset page. This helps forward traffic to the local businesses websites.

- Hidden Somerset is linked with key websites such as Visit Somerset, Hidden Britain and BBC Somerset. These links forward interest to the businesses on the Hidden Somerset (Please see attachment 4 of Visit Somerset link).
- The site displays flyers in all Tourism Information Centres in Somerset, Bristol International Airport and in the local Hidden Somerset businesses. These flyers promote the use of the website and of web based promotion (Please see attachment 5 for an example of a Hidden Somerset flyer).
- Hidden Somerset has attended many regional events including the Bath and West Agricultural Show promotion the use of Hidden Somerset and the advantages of using websites.

3. To highlight clusters of businesses / attractions / areas or communities of interest to further develop the tourism potential of these areas together and highlight the ‘hidden’ gems within them

- Cluster areas have been developed in Muchelney and Shapwick and are continuing to be developed across the county. Areas in West Somerset and Taunton will be targeted after March.
- The new map facility has identified areas which have cluster sites and areas in which cluster businesses need to be developed.
- The new homepage highlights the unique landscapes of Somerset (Exmoor and West Somerset, The Quantock Hills, Taunton area and The Blackdown Hills, Mendip and the Mendip Hills, Levels and Moors and South Somerset) allowing visitors to plan a stay based on a landscape and activity preference. This is a unique selling point of the Hidden Somerset site. (Please see attachment 1).
- The Hidden Gems page is proving a popular aspect of the site with visitors submitting their favourite places to visit. This area will be developed in the future to further complement the unique landscape feature (Please see attachment 6 for a view of the Hidden gems page).

Project Outputs

3. The agreed Outputs for Hidden Somerset are set out below. Please report on the progress the project has made in achieving these Outputs, including, if relevant, detail of how the project overcame unforeseen difficulties in relation to delivering on the Output targets. Where possible outline the tools you used to measure them

4. Outputs Summary Table.

Output Type	Target total All years	Total achieved to date (31 March 08)	Future years (08-09)
4. Business Support	200	150	50
6. Assisted in Skills Development	120	0	0
Additional outputs			
13. Usage	0	9068 visits	0

5. Report on Outputs Progress:

4. Business Support

150+ businesses have been assisted to improve their performance through joining Hidden Somerset. These businesses have received the equivalent of over £250 support through joining the project. (Please see Regional Webs supporting letter, attachment 7).

The website has not met its agreed targets of 200 businesses; this is due to less sign ups being achieved over the year. The sign up figure is linked to the number of businesses who have joined the site.

The project worker has experienced difficulties meeting sign up targets due to high proportion of time involved in the sign up procedure which was not anticipated on the outset of the project. A larger amount of work is required in the creation of a database, achieving the mail outs and doing follow up phone calls and signing up the businesses. The project worker has not had regular admin support in achieving these tasks.

8 businesses had to leave the site in Q3 to resolve issues relating to a necessary change of accreditation policy – this has impacted on sign up figures.

It has also been necessary for the project worker to allocate time for networking, marketing, website updating, event organising and reporting and evaluation. These necessary tasks have taken up valuable time away from achieving sign ups.

6. Assisted in skills Development

The project has not met its targets in supporting 120 people to be assisted in 6 hours of skills development.

The project has supported all its members through the sign up process, providing site visits to those nervous about using the internet, or providing phone support to those who create pages independently. This level of free support is a unique feature of the site.

The project worker has offered ongoing support to businesses when needed and has sign posted businesses to relevant organisations (i.e. tourism officers) where applicable. Members have had the opportunity to attend Levels Best Events in April-May 2007 and the network and training event in February 2008.

Unfortunately although support has been given, no individuals have been assisted to the 6 hour figure required for this output.

There was a low interest in the planned events held on 26th February, originally planned for 5th December. Two sessions were planned to target the availability of different businesses through an afternoon and evening session. A lack of response resulted in only the evening session running with only 4 of the 10 expected businesses attending (Please see attachment 3).

An invitation letter, phone calls and an email news bulletin was sent to businesses to encourage individuals to attend (Please see attachment 2).

The difficulties in achieving this target were due to several reasons.

1) Lack of time to attend events

Feedback from many businesses suggested they would be interested in the network event, however the busy nature of running a small business, combined with a lack of available staff to cover the business has resulted in many businesses being unable to attend.

2) Lack of interest

Follow up phone calls for the December network event suggested that a proportion on the Hidden Somerset businesses were not interested in attending a network or training event. These businesses had joined Hidden Somerset purely for the cost effective advertising and did not want to be any further involved in the project.

3) Too much training available

Research has shown that there is a wide range of training already available for tourism providers in Somerset. Organisations such as Visit Somerset, Tourism Skills Network and South West Tourism are already offering regular training seminars on topics such as The Green Tourism Business Scheme, E-marketing, being a good host etc.

With such a range of training available, this has made it difficult to arrange training which is new and appealing.

Consultation with training providers Bridgwater College, CoVE (Centre of Vocational Excellence) who organised 'Go Green for Profit' and Business Link, (SusBiz) who organised 'Cut the Carbon, Pocket the Profit' confirmed that they also experienced difficulties in attracting the expected interest in the events. The SusBiz event was cancelled due to low interest.

The project worker also experienced similar difficulties when organising the Levels Best Workshops April-July 2007. A lower interest in these workshops resulted in only 8 of the 21 planned sessions being held.

Additional Outputs

13. Usage

The project worker has recorded the usage of the website since April 2007 and can confirm that the site has received 9068 visitors since this time. This shows good usage of the facility. In March 2008 the site received over 2000 visits alone.

Project Outcomes

6. The agreed Outcomes for Hidden Somerset are set out below. Please report on the progress the project has made in achieving these Outcomes, including, if relevant, detail of how the project overcame unforeseen difficulties in relation to delivering these Outcomes:

7. Outcomes.

Outcomes Summary Table:	
Outcome	Progress on Achievement
Increased economic activity in rural areas	Hidden Somerset is encouraging visitors and locals to utilise tourism businesses in Somerset thus increasing economic activity in the area. Where possible Hidden Somerset highlights other tourism businesses near by to stimulate the multiplier effect.
Jobs safeguarded, including those of the agricultural sector and tourism sector – 60 jobs	Base measurements were not taken at the start of the project which has made this outcome difficult to quantify.
Increased business co-operation and mutual support – 60 businesses	Business clusters have been identified and are highlighted on the website via the map facility. Many communities are already co-operating to develop tourism initiatives including Avalon Marshes Tourism group. Cannot confirm quantity. The e-newsletters emailed to businesses will act as a mechanism for businesses to share information.
Increased usage of IT – monitored through training sessions – 30 people	Those with little or no experience of IT have been assisted with the development of their web pages through 1-1 support from the project worker. The worker provides free site visits and ongoing phone support to help businesses create and maintain their web pages. This is a unique aspect of the website. The project has assisted 30+ in doing this.

Wider Impact

8. Please comment on the wider impact of the project across the region/area. Please also report on any evidence that you may not already have used.

9. Commentary on the Project's Wider Impact:

Hidden Dorset

Hidden Dorset (www.hiddendorset.org) is a similar project to Hidden Somerset promoting Dorset's hidden gems to visitors. Phone conversations between the project workers and the Hidden Somerset worker have been achieved and learnings have been shared.

Supporting businesses to become accredited

The project worker has sign-posted several accommodation businesses who are not accredited to tourism officers and to the National Quality in Assurance Scheme (NQAS) so that they can consider the options of accreditation.

Helping promote businesses who are unable to advertise elsewhere

Hidden Somerset has been able to help market some more obscure tourism related businesses that have difficulty advertising on other sites. E.g. Well Being Breaks which offers holistic therapies to accommodation providers. Currently the business has difficulties advertising in Tourism Information Centres and on other directories. Hidden Somerset was able to create a special category for their business so they could be included on Hidden Somerset.

Getting local people to explore further

Hidden Somerset is targeted at local Somerset residents as well as tourists with the aim of getting local people to explore their county better. The site is helping residents to realise the potential of Somerset as an excellent place for day visits.

Press releases and flyers across Somerset are helping to raise the local profile of the site as well as attendance at events such as the Bath and West Agricultural Show and encouraging businesses who have signed up to promote Hidden Somerset.

Landscapes of Somerset

The new homepage on Hidden Somerset allows visitors to search places to visit via 6 distinctive landscapes in the county. This is a unique feature to Hidden Somerset, which highlights the diversity of the Somerset landscape and the businesses within the areas.

Hidden Gems

The hidden gems page is a unique and exciting feature of Hidden Somerset. It encourages feedback and participation from local people and visitors to recommend favourite hidden gems.

The information collected on this page is very valuable and useful to visitors who can view impartial feedback on places to visit. Many people have contributed to this page including visitors from as far away as Blackburn.

Consultation with Visit Somerset and South West Tourism have identified that both organisations value this part of the website as the most valuable.

Ongoing Sustainability

10. Where relevant, please report on the ongoing sustainability of the facility/service delivered by this project. Where project completion also represents the termination of a service delivered by the project funding, this section is not applicable.

11. Review of Ongoing Sustainability.

Hidden Somerset is funded until June 2008 via LEADER+ grants. The project is unable to support itself through sign up fees at present and will need to identify other

sources of funding to continue beyond June.

The project is currently looking to apply to relevant grants programmes.

The timescales of targeting and recruiting businesses to the site far exceeds the value of the money paid from the tourism businesses.

It will be necessary for the project to raise its joining fee in the future and will need to assess if site visits are viable.

Publicity

12. Please report on any key publicity undertaken. You should make specific reference to any SWRDA/Somerset Rural Renaissance inclusion in any publicity. Please include copies of any publicity materials or indicate if already provided.

13. Report on Publicity Undertaken.

Hidden Somerset publicity to date:

Press releases

- Putting Somerset on the map (see attachment 8)
- Supporting local businesses this Christmas (see attachment 9)
- Don't Delay, Join Today (see attachment 10)
- Discover what's on your doorstep (see attachment 11)

Local Radio

- BBC Somerset Sound
 - Wednesday 8th August & Friday 31st August
- Farm Radio – pre recorded
- Apple FM (Musgrove hospital) 11th September

Thatch

- Winter 2006
- Spring 2007 (see attachment 12)
- Summer 2007 (see attachment 13)

- Autumn 2007 (see attachment 14)
- Spring 2008

Articles

- Young Farmers
- Somerset Arts Week
- Tourism Telegraph
- Mary Ostler News bulletins
- David McCubbin news bulletin
- Tourism Telegraph (see attachment 15)

Weblinks

- Visit Somerset (see attachment 4)
- Hidden Britain
- BBC Somerset
- Heart of Somerset
- Visit South Somerset
- Mendip Council
- Hidden Somerset sign ups

Events

- The Royal Bath and West Agricultural Show
- Langport International Walking Festival
- Community Council for Somerset AGM
- Haynes Motor Museum Licensing Event (see attachment 16)
- Community Council for Somerset Conference (see attachment 17)
- Levels Best Joint Events
- Levels Best Market at Montacute
- Network Event 26th February
- Press Luncheon 12th March

14. Please report on the project experience overall. Please indicate what you would do differently in future and in addition include anything else you think will help to show how you spent Rural Renaissance funding eg letters of support from beneficiaries, businesses or users, other reports etc. You should consider including lessons learned that could be disseminated to other Organisations delivering related projects or those using a similar delivery model. Please also include suggestions as to how relationships between your organisation and the beneficiaries of the project and also your organisation and Somerset Rural Renaissance could be improved/ revised. This will help inform our thinking on future funding programmes.

15. Review of Project Experience.

Positive Outcomes

1) Usage of the site

Hidden Somerset is increasing its usage every month. In March, 2000 visits were made to the website alone. A full analysis of the effects of the website will be made at the end of the project in June.

2) Increased recognition of a great county

Hidden Somerset celebrates the highways and byways in Somerset, promoting traditions, supporting rural life. The site promotes the hidden places to visitors and local people helping everyone to explore further.

3) Supporting local businesses

Hidden Somerset supports local tourism businesses by providing an affordable means of web promotion. The site is particularly useful to new businesses by providing affordable advertising.

The site provides a place to like minded people who are seeking the more unique and special places to visit and escape from it all.

4) Assistance with registration

The project worker supports businesses joining the site and will make a site visit to assist with registration for those who are not comfortable with ICT. This visit is free to those who choose this option. For those who are more ICT proficient, businesses are able to upload their pages independently and maintain their information remotely.

Over 60% of all sign ups are carried out through site visits. This is a very important part of the sign process and helps include individuals who are less confident with ICT to try out using websites and the internet.

Difficulties

1) Limited availability of funding

The short funding available from SRRP and LEADER+ has been of great value to support the creation of the Hidden Somerset website.

However, the project is still developing its reputation and is still establishing a good list of local businesses.

Longer term funding (3-5 years) is required to continue to build up on the work achieved in the past 14 months and to continue to develop the Hidden Somerset brand. Once a large number of businesses have joined the site then less work will need to be achieved in sign up businesses which will reduce costs.

Future funding should consider employing a full time worker which would help achieve the work load involved in the project.

2) A need for regular admin support

The Hidden Somerset worker has experienced difficulties in achieving targets for sign ups due to a lack of regular admin support.

The wide variety of tasks and the high level of work involved in promotion and marketing, website updating and in the mail outs, follow up phone calls and registering businesses has impacted on sign up figures.

Any future bids to continue the project should consider budgeting for a small amount of weekly admin support.

3) Accreditation problems

The project initially experienced difficulties with promotion and struggled to raise the profile of the site. Reasons for this difficulty were due to its policy of accepting non-accredited accommodation providers as this conflicted with national tourism policies upheld by the Somerset Tourism Partnership.

Due to the necessity to advertise, the project changed its policies only accepting accredited providers. This decision has resulted better promotion although at a cost to some smaller tourism businesses who are unable to be supported by the project.

A large amount of time was involved in changing this policy which involved consultation with the steering group and at a Rural Renaissance Review day, checking all accommodation businesses with the accreditation bodies, and amending the website and informing accommodation businesses that had to leave.

Future Direction

1) Build on partnerships with Visit Somerset and the Somerset Tourism Partnership

The project has developed successful links with the Somerset Tourism Partnership since its change in accreditation policy. This move has been vital to the promotion of the website.

The site is now linked with key tourism sites such as www.visitsomerset.co.uk , and the District Council tourism websites. In March the site has had 73 visits through the Visit Somerset site alone.

Hidden Somerset is now able to distribute its flyers in the 33 Tourism Information Centres and at Bristol International Airport.

The project should continue to build on and develop links with the Somerset Tourism Partnership and focus on linking with the Partnerships Destination Management Organisation (DMO) at present the site is linked to Visit Somerset under the 'Escape From It All'.

2) Expand and encourage more businesses to join

The website needs to continue to increase the number of businesses and communities joining the site. Areas such as West Somerset and Exmoor, The Quantock, The Blackdowns should be targeted to improve the information available in these areas. The new project worker starting in April will be targeting businesses in Exmoor and West Somerset and the Blackdown Hills.

3) Explore and develop the Hidden Gems page

The Hidden Gems page has been identified by Visit Somerset, South West Tourism as an area which should be developed if continued funding is secured.

Developments to this page could include adding photos, maps and podcasts to make the area more visually exciting and interactive. The development of this area would ensure the site maintains its unique edge, clearly differentiating the site from other tourism directories.

4) Seek longer term funding

The project requires long term funding (3-5 years) to develop and build on the success of existing site. The project income generated from sign ups is not enough to sustain the project alone at present.

5) Develop the 'Hidden.com' Brand

There is the potential to develop the 'Hidden' brand to other counties (as has occurred in Dorset) to increase awareness of Hidden places to visit nationally.

'Hidden Britain' (www.hiddenbritain.co.uk) promotes some parts of the county to visitors via promoting hidden communities but does not support individual businesses such as Hidden Somerset.

The 'Hidden' brand has the potential to work in a similar way to the 'Visit' brand (Visit Britain, Visit Somerset, Visit South Somerset). This would increase the viewings of Hidden Somerset through a nationally recognised brand name.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information contained in this claim and supporting document/s is true and accurate.

Signed		Date	
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