7 Stanes Phase 2 Evaluation

Report

for

Forestry Commission Scotland

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Executive Summary

Background

Forestry Commission has been at the forefront of the provision of mountain bike trails and infrastructure for over a decade. The 7stanes project was initiated in the winter of 2001 as part of FCS's on-going commitment to this provision.

Phase 2 of the project was intended to take the project and the related economic impacts to a new level with the overall Vision altered to:

> "Maintain and develop the South of Scotland as a world-class mtb destination; supporting tourism and rural-based business and bringing health, wealth and enjoyment into the natural environment."

Method

The study method included a mix of desk-based analysis and survey work with partners, visitors, local businesses and community groups.

Conclusions

Project Delivery

The partnership approach was a key part of the project's success and will be important to maintain in the future. This will ensure the right mix of skills and support is available to take the development forward.

Performance Against Targets

Analysis of performance against the ERDF targets for Phase 2 shows:

- 222,000 visitors (131% of target);
- 139 gross jobs (204% of target); and
- gross cost per job £6,900 (target £14,000).

The project has performed very well against its ERDF targets.

Net Additional Impacts

However, to assess the ultimate impact on the local (South of Scotland) and national (Scottish) economies it is necessary to calculate the net economic impact. The analysis shows that the impacts for the project (including Phase 1 and 2) are:

- just under 400,000 visitors (394,626, which would put it within the top twenty most popular visitor attractions in Scotland with similar visitor numbers to Stirling Castle);
- a large non-local market at 80%;
- increase in quality ratings of the trails at 75% very good (up from 68% in 2004)
- net additional impacts of:
  - £9.29m expenditure, 204.6 FTE jobs and £3.72m GVA in the South of Scotland
  - £7.58m expenditure, 227.5 FTE jobs and £4.14m GVA in Scotland; and
- an ERDF cost per net job of £8,396 (at the South of Scotland level) which is actually lower than the gross cost per job target.

Whilst the increase in visitor numbers has generated additional impacts this is not the only reason. The increase in the proportion staying overnight, average length of stay and daily expenditure have also contributed to this. Therefore, all four factors have been key achievements of Phase 2. The project has performed very well in terms of net additional impacts and cost effectiveness.

Local Business Engagement

Phase 2 has seen more proactive engagement with local businesses by the project team and partners. The two business groups (Tweeddale Consortium and a subgroup of the Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce) are also developing a number of activities and initiatives which will link to the opportunities generated by 7stanes.

The project has been helping to contribute to new business formation and providing benefits to existing businesses (both onsite and offsite).

A number of businesses, in recognising the opportunities offered by the sector, have been investing in facilities designed to meet the needs of the mountain bike market.

Achieving the Phase 2 Vision

There was a clear vision for Phase 2 and the extent to which it has been achieved includes:

- **achieving sustainable economic growth**: the project has performed well in economic impact terms. Continuing this in the future will be dependent on adequate maintenance, refreshment of the product and marketing & promotion;

- **building on the quality reputation**: there has been very positive feedback on the quality of trails from media, partners, businesses and the mountain bikers. The ratings of the trails by mountain bikers have increased since 2004;

- **working with more business**: as discussed earlier there has been much greater engagement with businesses in Phase 2, although there is still further room for development in this area;

- **promoting Scotland internationally**: awareness of the 7stanes brand and the trails has increased, as has the number of visitors from elsewhere in the UK and overseas. However, the level of awareness in the UK is much higher than overseas so the latter may be more of a focus for future promotional activity; and

- **working with schools, communities and improving the nation's health**: Phase 2 has seen an increase in the number and range of groups using the 7stanes, including schools and community groups. The increased use by schools is particularly encouraging given their increasing focus on health and wellbeing. There are opportunities to develop this further but this would be dependent on collaboration with other organisations.

Future Direction

A key issue for the project is the sustainability of what has been achieved to date. This is particularly important in the face of increasing competition, both within and outwith Scotland. Whilst maintaining the product will be important in the future this will not be sufficient to increase the market size, rather refreshing and promotion of the product will also be required.

Indeed, support beyond simply maintaining the trails will be required to maintain the present market scale. The risk of limiting support to maintenance only is that the market size begins to decline over time.

The project team are considering some different options for taking the project forward in the future. However, whichever option is selected it will need to be able to deliver against a key set of objectives for the future which will include:

– a partnership approach to ensure that the right skills and forms of support can be provided;

– ongoing maintenance of the trails to ensure that the quality reputation is maintained;

– refreshing the product to ensure continued interest from the market;

– product ‘tweaks’ at certain sites, there are still some local issues to be addressed at some of the sites;

– establishing links offsite through partnership with other organisations such as Sustrans, Local councils etc;

– further marketing and developing the brand;

– developing further business opportunities;

– broadening the scale of social/community use;

– identifying the potential for sponsorship opportunities and other potential sources of income (i.e. merchandising, car park fees etc).

Ultimately it is about having a transitional phase to develop a model that can deliver long term management and sustainability of the facilities and reduce the public sector funding required over time.

A study is currently underway to develop a national tourism strategy for mountain biking. 7stanes is a key asset within the mountain biking sector in Scotland and therefore it and its future development will have a key role in helping to support the national strategy.

1. Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of the 7stanes Mountain Bike Trails Phase 2 which are based in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. The main purposes of the report were to assess the project's performance to date and inform future delivery.

1.1 Background

Forestry Commission is the largest single provider of outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities in Scotland and has been at the forefront of the provision of mountain bike trails and infrastructure for over a decade. The 7stanes project was initiated in the winter of 2001 as part of FCS's on-going commitment to the latter provision, but more importantly, as a stimulant to the recovery of the economy of the South of Scotland as a top class mountain biking (mtb) destination and, thereby, help rebuild local tourism.

Phase 2 of the project is intended to take the project and the related economic impacts to a new level with the overall Vision altered to:

> "Maintain and develop the South of Scotland as a world-class mtb destination; supporting tourism and rural-based business and bringing health, wealth and enjoyment into the natural environment."

1.2 Study Objectives

The study covered the operation and constituent activities of the 7stanes Phase 2 project from July 2005 to the present and issues addressed in the evaluation included the following:

- an assessment of the success of the 7stanes project in meeting its main objectives and targets (in qualitative and quantitative terms) and the extent to which the 7stanes project objectives are still valid;

- the measurement of the contribution the 7stanes project has made to the GVA of the South of Scotland;

- calculations of the net additional employment at both the South of Scotland and Scottish levels taking account of the baseline achieved from Phase 1 and all displacement, multiplier and additionality factors;

- an estimate of the direct impact of the 7stanes on local business engagement including the economic benefits that can be attributed to new business formation, increased collaboration and new product and/or service development;

- the impact of the marketing strategy for the project against the targets and objectives set out in March 2006, including directly increasing visitor numbers as well as related visitor expenditure and length of stay;

- an assessment of how Phase 2 has built on the achievements in Phase 1 and whether the revised Vision, and related strategic objectives have been achieved; and

- recommendations for the future direction and priorities for the 7stanes project (and appropriate performance measures) assuming there is partner interest in funding activity beyond Phase 2.

1.3 Method

The study was undertaken in four stages.

- Stage 1: Study Set Up;

- Stage 2: Partner Consultations and Desk-Based Review;

- Stage 3: Fieldwork, comprising surveys of:
  - Visitors;
  - Companies; and
  - Community groups; and

- Stage 4: Reporting and Analysis.

1.4 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: 7stanes Phase 2 Project (and details of project development to date);

- Chapter 3: Partner Consultations;

- Chapter 4: Visitor Survey;
- Chapter 5: Business Survey;
- Chapter 6: Community Groups;
- Chapter 7: Economic Impact;
- Chapter 8: Marketing, Branding and Promotion
- Chapter 9: Project Management and Physical Delivery; and
- Chapter 10: Conclusions and Future Direction.
- Appendix A: Estimated use of 7stanes sites.

2. 7stanes Phase 2 Project

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief description of the project and its progress to date.

2.2 Project Description

2.2.1 The Sites

The 7stanes are seven mountain biking centres spanning the south of Scotland, from the heart of the Scottish Borders to Dumfries and Galloway. The seven sites are:

- Glentrool;
- Kirroughtree;
- Dalbeattie;
- Mabie;
- Ae;
- Glentress and Innerleithen (Tweed Valley); and
- Newcastleton.

The location of the 7stanes is shown in Map 1, over.

Map 1: Location of Sites

Source: Forestry Commission Scotland website (www.7stanes.gov.uk)

2.2.2 Grade of 7stanes Trails

There are varying grades of difficulty associated with the trails and the grading system for the trails is shown in **Table 2.1** below:

Table 2.1: Grades of difficulty	
Grade	**Symbol**
Green - easy	●
Blue - moderate	■
Red - difficult	▲
Black - severe	◆
Orange Bike park - extreme	▮
Forest road or similar	Routes may or may not be waymarked

Source: Forestry Commission Scotland website (www.7stanes.gov.uk)

The grades are explained in the following way:

Table 2.2: Grades Explained	
Grade	**Suitable for**
Green grade	beginners/novice cyclists
Blue grade	intermediate cyclists or mountain bikers with basic off-road riding skills.
Red grade	proficient mountain bikers with good off-roading skills.
Black grade	expert mountain bike users, used to physically demanding routes.
Bike park	riders aspiring to an elite level of technical ability, incorporating everything from full on downhill riding to 'big air' jumps.
Forest road or similar	a wide range of cyclists

Source: Forestry Commission Scotland website (www.7stanes.gov.uk)

2.3 Project Partners and Vision

The 7stanes continues to be a multi-agency project with FCS as lead partner employing a small, dedicated 7stanes team based in Dumfries. A three-year funding package of support from several public and private sector partners has been matched through ERDF Objective 2 and Transitional Programme applications with the intention of taking the overall investment in 7stanes between 2005-2008 to £1.78m and £3.6m over the two phases. The partners include:

- Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway;

- Scottish Enterprise Borders;
- Dumfries and Galloway Council;
- Scottish Borders Council;
- Scottish Natural Heritage;
- VisitScotland;
- Solway Heritage; and
- Scottish Power Renewables.

There have been two phases in the development of the 7stanes. Phase 1 was evaluated by EKOS and the Tourism Resources Company in 2004.

The strategic priorities within the Vision for Phase 2 include:

- Achieving sustainable economic growth;
- Building on the 7stanes reputation for the quality of experience and product;
- Working with more businesses;
- Promoting Scotland internationally;
- Working with schools, youth groups and communities; and
- Improving the nation's health.

2.4 Progress to Date

Table 2.3, below provides details of the spend profile for the project.

Table 2.3: Expenditure Profile

	Approved Application	Claimed to Date
ERDF (O2)	726,970	452,520

ERDF (T)	133,515	76,903
Expenditure	1,747,562	962,823

The total approved spend for ERDF (Objective 2) is £726,970. As of the end of September 2007, the total amount claimed was £452,520 which is 62% of the total, leaving £274,450 still to be spent over the remaining six months of the project. For the ERDF (Transitional) the total approved spend is £133,515. As of the end of September the total amount claimed was £76,903 which is 58% of the total, leaving £56,612 still to be spent over the remainder of the project.

The total approved spend for the project is £1,747,562. As of the end of September 2007 the total spent is £962,823 which is 55% of the total, leaving 45% (£784,739) still to be spent over the next six months until the project finishes in March 2008.

Table 2.4 below provides details of the physical outputs for the project and progress to date.

Table 2.4: Outputs

	02		Transitional	
	Target	Achieved to date	Target	Achieved to date
Hectares of environmental improvements	37	40.20	14.00	4.3
No. of visitor attractions enhanced	6	5	2	1
Total km of foot or cycle paths created	25.45	28.21	7	4.33
Total km of foot or cycle paths enhanced	14	20	-	-

The table shows that currently the Objective 2 area is already ahead of its' targets despite the fact that the programme still has another six months to run. The only exception to this is the number of visitor attractions enhanced which was only ever intended to be five within the Objective 2 area.

Conversely, the transitional area is currently behind target. The reasons for this are that there has been a build up of expenditure which has still to take place over the next six months, and

Newcastleton and Innerleithen have been the last two sites to get support.

After discussions with the client it has been agreed that they will spend all of what is forecast so that the physical outputs of the project will be reached.

3. Partner Consultations

3.1 Introduction

This section analyses the views of the public sector partners involved in the development and support of the 7stanes project.

The 7stanes is a multi-agency project, led by Forestry Commission Scotland. However, a number of other partners were involved in the project, namely:

- Scottish Enterprise Dumfries & Galloway (SED&G);
- Scottish Enterprise Borders (SEB);
- VisitScotland Dumfries & Galloway;
- VisitScotland Borders;
- Dumfries & Galloway Council (DGC);
- Scottish Borders Council (SBC);
- Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF);

– Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH);

– Solway Heritage.

It is important to consider the extent to which the 7stanes development is contributing towards the strategic objectives of the individual partners.

As part of the study approach, the consultants interviewed each of the 7stanes partners individually and below an overview of their comments regarding the delivery, success and future development of the 7stanes are noted.

3.1.1 Rationale for Support

Factors that provided the rationale for the support from the various partners for Phase 2 of the 7stanes project included:

– Market: increasing the size of the market and widening the market base through engaging / attracting a wider variety of users i.e. new markets;

– Economic: generating additional economic activity and harnessing business development / private sector 'buy-in' to the project; and

– Social: promoting responsible cycling, linking to community / education initiatives, attracting new users / markets currently under-represented.

There has been a change of emphasis from the partners in respect of the rationale for support and objectives they sought from Phase 2 in comparison to Phase 1. In Phase 1 the emphasis was more on product / trail building, evolution and infrastructure development etc, while the focus and rationale for investment by stakeholders in Phase 2 was on widening the market base of the 7stanes, attracting new groups into the sport and making it more accessible to a larger / more diverse number of people.

Partners felt that Phase 2 of the project was about expanding and building on the existing mountain bike market. They were unable to comment on the extent to which this has been achieved rather they are expecting this current study to provide details on this. That said the partners did feel that there was still a mass / active market out there that are still not using the trails. Partners also felt that the 7stanes was an invaluable tool for education purposes re active schools, as well as community, social and health reasons.

3.1.2 Role in the Project

The 7stanes project management team, in close working association with FCS, took the lead on the management and delivery of the project. The other partners have provided support in the form of funding and advice re project meetings. Partners were satisfied that they had been engaged by the management team throughout the project. Overall the partners were very positive about the 7stanes management structure and delivery of the project which has delivered a high quality end product.

Partners are conscious that Phase 2 of the project is nearing completion. While partners recognise the success of the 7stanes project to date, they stressed that a management and delivery vehicle to take the project forward in the future is a fundamental requirement. Individual partner's involvement / input to future phases will vary depending on individual organisation's objectives i.e. some partners felt that their targets / objectives had been met and that no further input was required from them.

3.1.3 Strengths and Weaknesses

The partners identified a number of strengths and weaknesses of the project. The consultants have briefly summarised the key points under the following bullets:

Strengths

- world-class trail product;
- established international acclaim and reputation;
- it has developed iconic / number one status across the UK;
- it has put Scotland on the map re mountain biking;
- it is close to local communities allowing opportunity for community use;
- central facilities are now or will be available at all but one of the sites – Newcastleton;
- success of the 7stanes management and delivery of the project;
- 7stanes has helped to enhance the profile of Southern Scotland re adventure sports destination credentials;

- 7stanes has helped to draw visitors into rural areas of Scotland;
- it has helped to create employment; and
- it has helped the development of mountain biking events in the area.

Weaknesses

- as yet, the 7stanes has not fully widened its market base re social and health opportunities i.e. it needs to target social excluded / lower income families more in the future;
- generally speaking, poor access – the sites are not located near any major population centres (with the possible exception of Glentress and Innerleithen). Although arguably that is also a strength in that it is helping to contribute to rural / economic regeneration;
- communication channels re when trails are closed – obligation to communicate message to the private sector;
- the design of the product, by its very nature, requires to be maintained and to be continually refreshed and updated indefinitely (although this is more an obligation rather than a weakness);
- limited commercial revenues generated as a direct result of the trail centres i.e. limited car parking revenue collection;
- limited private sector buy-in to the project; and
- lack of confidence in trail counters.

There was a resounding acknowledgement from all partners that the 7stanes trails have evolved into a good quality, world-renowned product. In doing so, they have put Scotland and, in particular, the South of Scotland on the map, as one of the best places to mountain bike in the World. The main weaknesses of the project reside around the cost of maintaining and sustaining the 7stanes trails long-term and widening the market base of users.

3.1.4 Suggested Improvements / Issues

The suggested improvements to the 7stanes in many ways derive from the weaknesses as identified above:

- the need to refresh / upgrade and sustain the trails indefinitely – minimum 10 year period;

- harness business engagement, selling the 7stanes to the private sector;

- further widening of the market base – continue to develop initiatives around schools and education programmes, as well as social / community and active / wellbeing initiatives;

- install (credible) trail counters which the private sector are fully in support of i.e. help to build confidence / realistic targets.

3.1.5 Other Developments

The 7stanes must consider all forms of commercial development. This is clearly a key issue for the 7stanes project team as this has to be balanced with the Access Code which permits free and full use of the Country's forests. Private businesses are concerned about investment because of the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the 7stanes future development / maintenance / refreshment strategies etc. The commercialisation of the 7stanes product is something that still needs to be addressed.

While the 7stanes may at the minute have an international reputation, a number of developments in the UK (particularly in the North of England) are playing 'catch up'. It is important that the 7stanes continues to refresh the product and maintain its position as market leader.

3.1.6 Future Role

In terms of future role, while some of the partners would be in a position to support future phases of development, others do not envisage having a (direct) long-term role.

The partners felt that a Phase 3 would need to see the emphasis of the project change. The partners felt that the key players in future phases would need to be FCS (re sustainability), Scottish Enterprise (re business support) and VisitScotland (re national and international profile). Other partners said they would support associated developments / individual initiatives such as interpretation / heritage, signage etc however, they would not be main partners in the future evolution of the project.

The future marketing of the 7stanes is an important role for the project team. VisitScotland are fully aware of the success of the product. Scotland's mountain biking reputation makes a significant contribution to Scotland's adventure tourism destination credentials. However, VisitScotland's relevant regions do not have the budget or resources to fully market what is only a niche product for the area. VisitScotland National via national, UK and international promotional activity have the greatest opportunity to build 7stanes brand awareness. Events such as the World Championships and 10 at Kirroughtree also help to build brand awareness re penetrate untapped markets.

There is a need to coordinate the 7stanes product to the social, active and education market. As of yet the 7stanes has not fully developed under-represented markets in the forest. This must be a key priority for the future.

3.2 Summary

All of the partners were positive about the way that the project had been delivered and the quality of the end product. They all felt that it met with their own individual organisation remits in terms of the economic, environmental and social development of the area.

All partners recognised that the 7stanes project, i.e. the brand cannot suddenly be disbanded. There is a local, regional and national requirement re economic and social reasons to continue the evolution of the product and to continue to widen its market appeal to the widest number of visitors.

4. Visitor Survey

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of surveys undertaken with mountain bikers at the seven operational sites within the 7stanes project. Some of the data collected through the surveys has been used to assess the economic impact of the project and has been reported later in **Chapter 7.**

4.2 Survey Results

4.2.1 Method

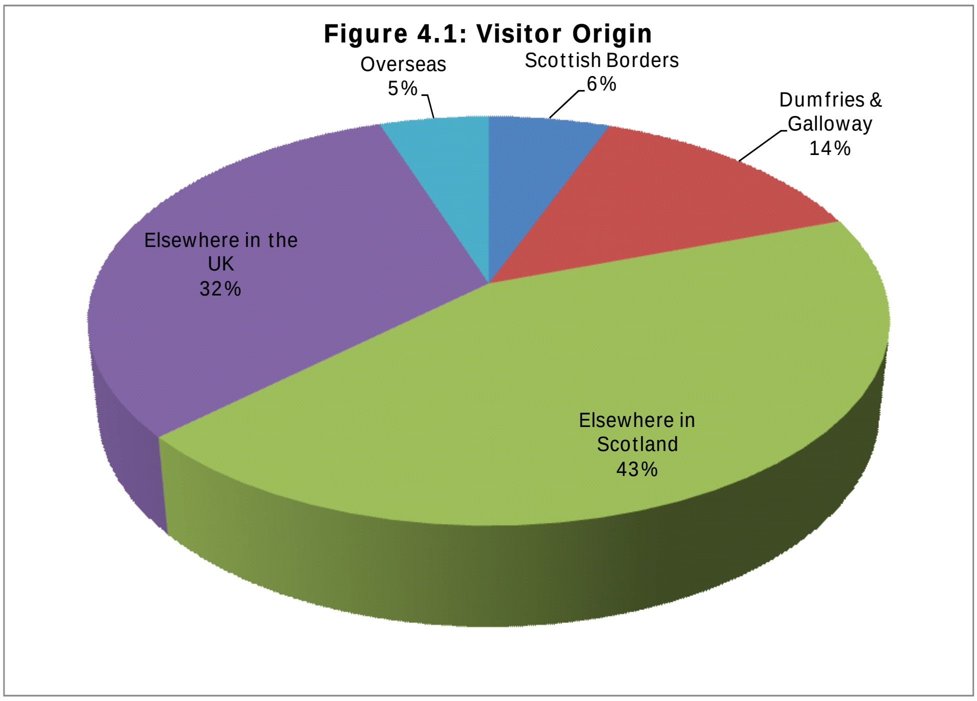
Face to face surveys were undertaken with a total of 531 mountain bikers during September and October 2007. The surveys were conducted across the seven sites – Ae, Dalbeattie, Glentress, Glentrool, Kirroughtree, Mabie and Newcastleton. **Table 4.1** below, details the proportion of mountain bikers interviewed at each site.

Table 4.1: Location of interviews

Location	Number	%
Ae	39	7
Dalbeattie	101	19
Glentress	143	27
Glentrool	17	3
Kirroughtree	79	15
Mabie	112	21
Newcastleton	40	8

4.2.2 Visitor Origin

Figure 4.1, over shows the origin of the visitors.



Some 80% of visitors are from outwith the South of Scotland (i.e. Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway), with the majority of visitors coming from elsewhere in Scotland. Some 32% of visitors were from elsewhere in the UK with 5% from overseas. The majority of non-UK resident visitors were from countries such as Germany, Ireland, USA, and Denmark.

Excluding residents of the South of Scotland, only 12% of visitors were visiting the South of Scotland for the first time.

It is quite useful to compare these results with the survey undertaken in 2004 for Phase 1 of the project[1]. There seems to be more visitors from the Dumfries and Galloway area (14%) compared to 2004 (10%), which may be due to the fact that more trails have opened up in that area over the intervening period. There also appears to have been some shift in the balance from elsewhere in Scotland to elsewhere in the UK and overseas. In 2004, 60% of visitors were from elsewhere in Scotland, 23% of visitors were from elsewhere in the UK, and there were no visitors from outwith the UK.

This shift in the balance perhaps indicates that the appeal of 7stanes is broadening out to a wider geographic area.

4.2.3 Visitor Profile

As **Figure 4.2** below shows, the mountain biking trails are most popular with two age groups. Just over half of the visitors (54%) were aged between 31 and 45 years, while 34% belonged to the 18-30 age group. The majority of visitors (84%) are male. The average party size had 3 persons. An interesting finding is that 15% of respondents came with children, which is higher than the 2004 level of 10%.

[1] EKOS and TRC (2004) *The 7stanes MTB Project Evaluation*.

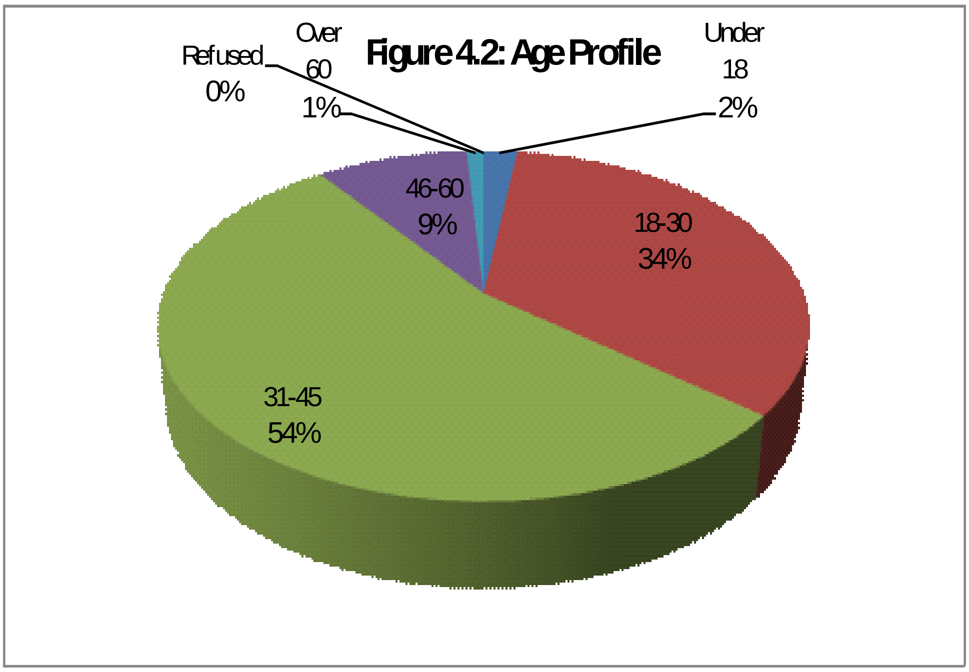


Table 4.2, below details the working status of the visitors.

Table 4.2: Working Status		
	Number	**%**
Full-time	465	88
Part-time	10	2
Housewife/House-husband	1	0

Retired	3	<1
Unemployed	3	<1
Full-time education	45	8
Other	4	<1

Of those surveyed the majority were employed full-time (88%). A total of 45 visitors were in full-time education and 10 visitors were employed part-time. Less than 1% of visitors belonged to the following categories: retired, unemployed, and other, respectively. The most common occupations of the chief wage earners were managers, teachers, engineers and doctors.

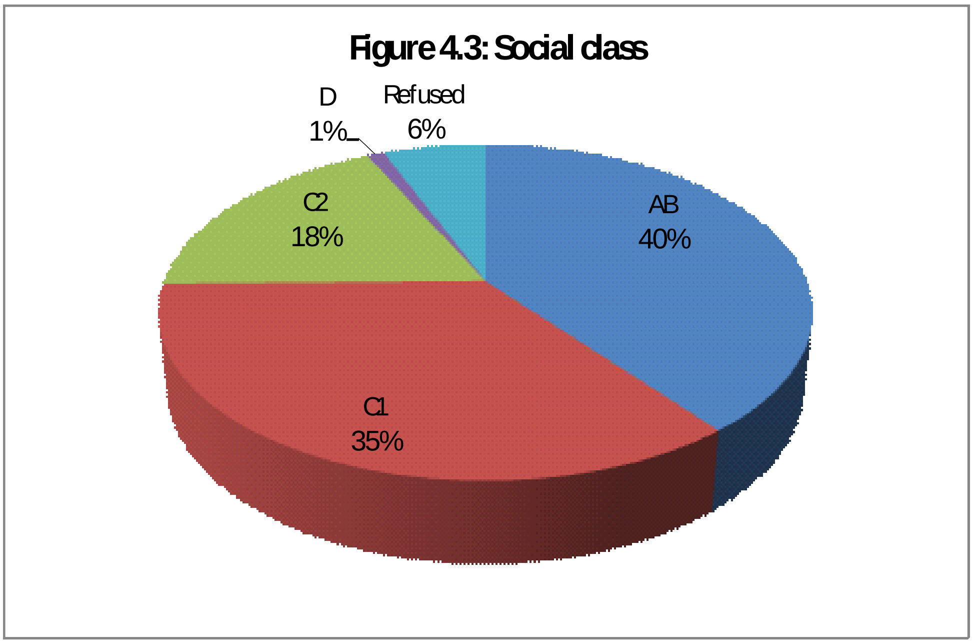
Table 4.3, below details the household composition of the mountain bikers interviewed. The most common were living with partner no children and live with partner with children, with a similar proportion of each.

Table 4.3: Household Composition

	Number	**%**
Live with partner, no children	161	30
Live with partner with children	150	28
Live on your own	130	24
Stay with parents	65	12
Lone parent	4	1
Other	19	4
Refused	2	0

Figure 4.3, over details the social class of the visitors. A large proportion of visitors were from the AB social class (39%), with 35% of visitors in C1 and 18% of visitors in C2. Only 1% of visitors were in class D, whilst 6% refused to comment on their social class[2].

[2] AB is defined as upper middle/middle class (higher managerial, administrative or professional/intermediate managerial, administrative or professional)
C1 is defined as lower middle class (supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional)
C2 is defined as skilled working class (skilled manual workers)
D is defined as working class (semi and unskilled manual workers)

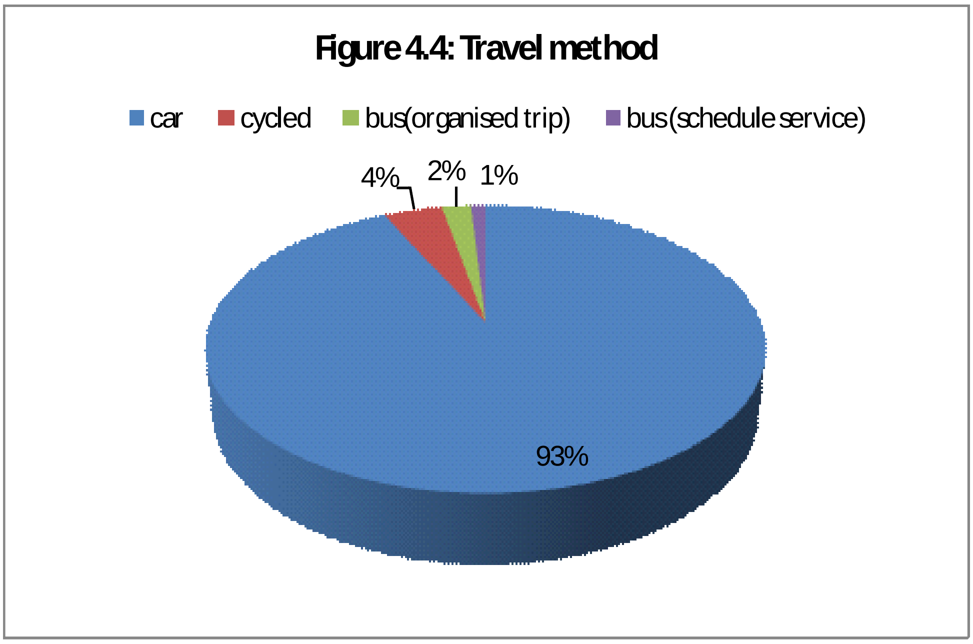


Visitors to the trails tend to participate in a number of other sports, the most popular being:

- Walking/hillwalking 40%;
- Snowboarding 12%;
- Climbing 8%;
- Skiing 7%;

- Running 5%;
- Football 4%; and
- Fishing 3%.

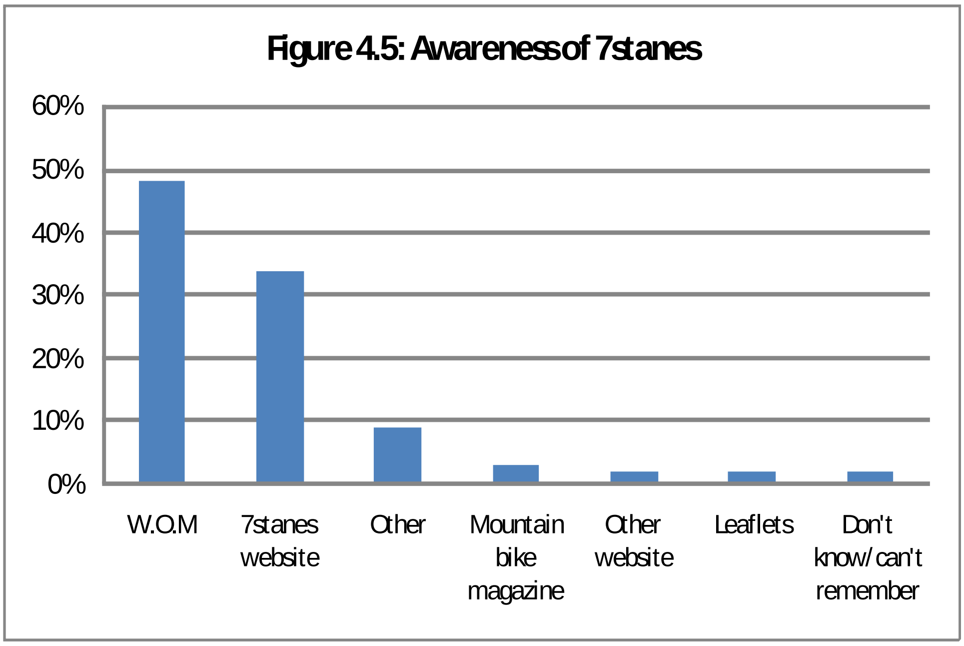
The visitors were asked how they travelled to the mountain bike sites and the results are shown by **Figure 4.4**, over.



By far the most popular mode of transport was car with 93% of the visitors travelling by this means. Only 4% of visitors travelled by bike and 3% by bus. Of those visitors who travelled by car, the average number of people in each car was 2.4.

4.2.4 Awareness and Use of Trails

Figure 4.5 shows that almost one half of visitors (48%) became aware of the Mountain Bike Trails by word of mouth.



The next most common way to find out was through the 7stanes website (34%), followed by 'other reasons'. The most common responses under the 'other' category were live local/local knowledge, NEC outdoor shows and visited before. Some 3% identified mountain bike magazines as their source of awareness with the most commonly cited being Mountain Bike Rider, Mountain Bike UK, and What Mountain Bike. Some 2% identified other websites as their main source of information, with VisitScotland being the most popular.

Comparing these results with 2004, word of mouth is still the most common way of finding out about the 7stanes (59% of visitors became aware through WOM in 2004). Interestingly, those finding out about the trail centres through the 7stanes website has more than doubled since 2004 from 16% to 34%.

The majority of visitors (96%) were aware of the 7stanes, all of whom were aware that the trail centre they were visiting was part of the 7stanes. This is much higher than in 2004 when only three quarters of the visitors were aware of the 7stanes. The brand awareness has, therefore, increased significantly in the intervening period.

The visitors were asked what routes they have/planned to use on their visit, and the results are shown by **Table 4.4**.

Table 4.4: Routes visitors have/plan to use (%)

	Ae	Dalbeattie	Glentress	Glentrool	Kirroughtree	Mabie	Newcastleton
Green	5	8	13	29	30	9	8
Blue	5	26	33	65	24	-	25
Red	69	74	70	12	42	84	68
Black	31	29	46	-	29	38	33
Freeride park (Glentress only)	-	-	4	-	-	3	3
Skills area	-	-	1	-	1	-	5
Downhill (Ae only)	21	-	-	-	1	2	-
Base No.	39	101	143	17	79	112	40

The table shows that the red routes are the most popular at all of the sites, with the exception of Glentrool where it is the blue route. In terms of other routes, nearly half are using the black route at Glentress and 40% at Mabie. At Ae, Dalbeattie and Kirroughtree it is around 30% using the black route. Use of the blue routes is between 20-33% across the routes with the exception of Ae (5%), Glentrool (65%) and Mabie (where the blue route is due to open in January 2008).

Those visitors that are making use of each route were then asked how many times they have/will use each route today. The average number of times that they have used each route is shown **Table 4.5**, below. For instance, for all the people that have used the green route the average number of times that it has/will be used was 1.2. The freeride park at Glentress has a higher number of uses at 5.

Table 4.5: Average number of visits

Route	Number
Green	1.2
Blue	1.2
Red	1.2
Black	1.3
Freeride Park (Glentress only)	5
Skills area (Glentress, Kirroughtree, Newcastleton only)	1
Downhill (Ae only)	1.5

Table 4.6 shows visitor awareness of the other operational trail centres within the 7stanes in 2007. For example, 95% of people visiting Ae were aware of Dalbeattie. The level of awareness is very high ranging from 78-100%.

Table 4.6: Awareness of other operational trail centres 2007 (%)

		Awareness of other locations						
		Ae	Dalbeattie	Glentress	Glentrool	Kirroughtree	Mabie	Newcastleton
Location currently at	Ae	-	95	97	92	97	92	92
	Dalbeattie	96	-	95	96	95	95	95
	Glentress	81	85	-	78	87	79	79
	Glentrool	100	94	100	-	94	94	94
	Innerleithen	97	95	87	94	91	95	90
	Kirroughtree	90	90	90	92	91	-	84
	Mabie	96	96	98	93	95	-	94
	Newcastleton	90	90	93	90	90	90	-

At the time of the evaluation in 2004 there were only three trail centres open: Glentress, Dalbeattie and Mabie. It is useful to look at the analysis of these three trail centres in 2004 compared to 2007. **Table 4.7**, below details visitor awareness of the other operational trail centres within the 7stanes in 2004. It is apparent that since 2004 general awareness of these trail centres has increased. For instance, 85% of people visiting Glentress are now aware of Dalbeattie, whereas in 2004 only 68% were. Similarly those at Dalbeattie that are aware of Mabie is 95% compared with 68% in 2004.

Table 4.7: Awareness of other operational trail centres 2004 (%)

		Awareness of other locations		
Location Currently at		Glentress	Dalbeattie	Mabie
	Glentress	-	68	68
	Dalbeattie	80	-	68
	Mabie	77	79	-

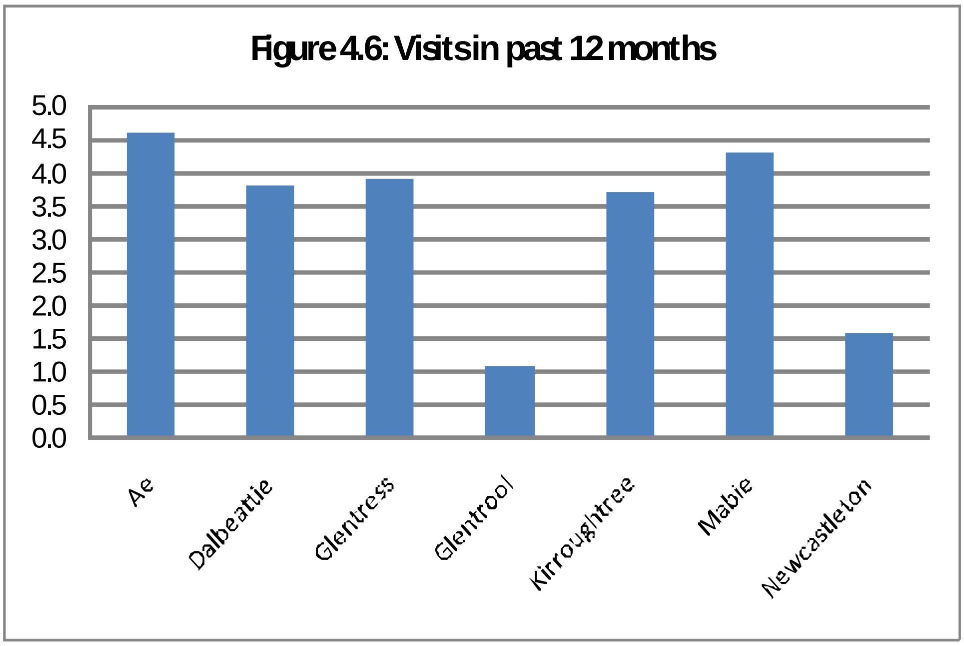
Table 4.8 shows the proportion of visitors that have visited one of the other operational trail centres within the 7stanes.

Table 4.8: Have visited other operational trail centres (%)

		Location currently at						
Visited other locations		Ae	Dalbeattie	Glentress	Glentrool	Kirroughtree	Mabie	Newcastleton
	Ae	-	50	45	35	41	70	40
	Dalbeattie	49	-	50	18	43	54	33
	Glentress	69	58	-	18	47	54	68
	Glentrool	23	38	24	-	41	26	33
	Innerleithen	62	38	54	18	34	39	48
	Kirroughtree	41	62	29	35	-	48	25
	Mabie	82	71	45	18	37	-	55
	Newcastleton	33	24	28	18	20	38	-

The table suggests that there is some interaction taking place between all of the sites within 7stanes to varying degrees. It suggests that there are some sites with a stronger interaction than others for example, Ae, Mabie and Dalbeattie. These sites are located relatively close together and as such seem to have higher proportions of people moving between them. However, some of the sites have lower levels of interaction with the others, most notably Glentrool.

The average number of visits in the past 12 months per visitor at each site is shown in **Figure 4.6** over.



The figure shows that those people at Ae had visited the site the most over the past 12 months (4.6 times per person). This is closely followed by Mabie, Glentress, Dalbeattie and Kirroughtree. Glentrool and Newcastleton appear to be the sites which have had the fewest visits over the past 12 months with 1.1 and 1.6, respectively.

The visitors were asked which other 7stanes sites they have/plan to visit during this trip and the results are shown in **Table 4.9**, over.

Table 4.9: Sites visitors have/plan to visit during this trip (%)									
		Location currently at							
		Ae	Dalbeattie	Glentress	Glentrool	Innerleithen	Kirroughtree	Mabie	Newcastleton
Visited/plan to visit other locations	Ae	-	13	13	3	8	10	44	5
	Dalbeattie	6	-	5	-	-	9	25	-
	Glentress	2	2	-	3	3	2	5	3
	Glentrool	6	-	-	-	-	18	6	-
	Innerleithen	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Kirroughtree	3	6	5	14	3	-	5	1
	Mabie	19	13	11	4	4	15	-	2
	Newcastleton	15	15	38	15	23	15	35	-

The table shows that for a lot of people, the focus of their trip seems to be the site they are at. However, there are some exceptions with people planning to visit other sites as part of this current trip.

4.2.5 Awareness and Use (Survey at World Championships)

EKOS and TRC are undertaking another study regarding the development of an uplift service at Innerleithen. This enabled us to insert a couple of questions into the visitor survey undertaken at the mountain biking world championships at Fort William in September 2007 to gather people's awareness and use of the 7stanes. This section deals with the responses from this survey. In **section 4.2.6** we return to the visitor's survey undertaken at the 7stanes.

Table 4.10, below details visitor awareness of the 7stanes.

Table 4.10: Awareness of 7stanes		
Country of residence	**Number**	**%**
Scotland	212	90
Rest of UK and Republic of Ireland	164	78
Overseas	4	8

The table shows that people who live in Scotland have a very high awareness of the 7stanes with 90%. The Republic of Ireland has been included with the rest of the UK because those living there have the same high level of awareness as those living in other parts of the UK at 78%. However, for those visitors that live outwith the UK their awareness of the 7stanes is very low at 8%.

The visitors at the mountain biking championships were also asked if they had visited the operational sites within the 7stanes. Some 78% of visitors from Scotland had visited at least one of the sites. Some 60% of visitors from the rest of the UK and Republic of Ireland had visited at least one of the sites[3].

4.2.6 Accommodation

The visitors were asked how many days they planned to spend on the 7stanes mountain bike trails during this trip and the results are shown in **Figure 4.7,** over. The majority of visitors (69%) were planning to spend one day on the trails. Only 16% of visitors were planning to spend two days on the trails, and 14% three or more days. Of those visitors that were planning to spend more than five days on the trails, the responses ranged from seven to nine days. Overall the average number of days on the trails is 1.5.

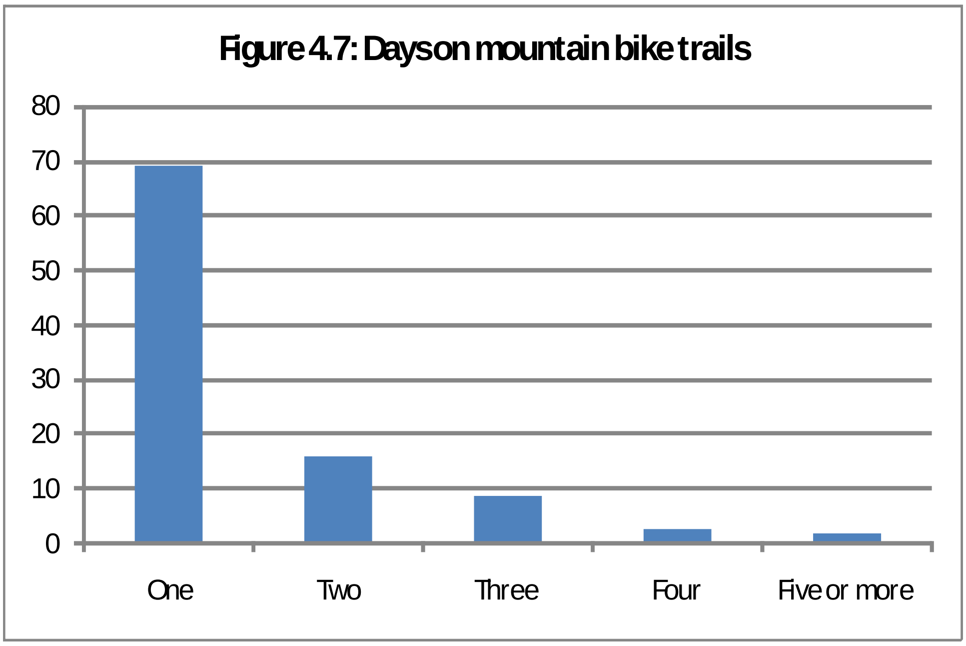


Table 4.11 details the visitor responses regarding how important the mountain bike trail centre was in their decision to visit the South of Scotland.

[3] There has been too few responses from visitors outwith the UK to provide a robust analysis of their use of the trails.

Table 4.11: Importance of Mountain Bike Trails (excludes residents of the South of Scotland)		
	Number	**%**
Only reason for visiting South of Scotland	330	78
One of the main reasons for visiting South of Scotland	62	15
One of several reasons for visiting South of Scotland	17	4
Not a factor in decision to visit South of Scotland	16	4

The table shows that for 78% of visitors, the only reasons for visiting the South of Scotland was the mountain bike trails. Some 15% of visitors viewed the mountain bike trails as one of the main reasons for visiting. Only 4% of visitors said that the mountain bike trails was not a factor in their decision to visit the South of Scotland.

More than one-third of visitors were spending at least one night away from home (which is higher than in 2004 when it was one quarter). As shown in **Figure 4.8**, the most popular type of accommodation for visitors, with 20%, was a hotel.

Some 19% of visitors were staying with friends or relatives, and 16% were staying at a youth hostel/backpackers accommodation or campsite. Staying in 'other' accommodation accounted for 7%, with the most common responses being wild camping, staying in a cottage or camper van.

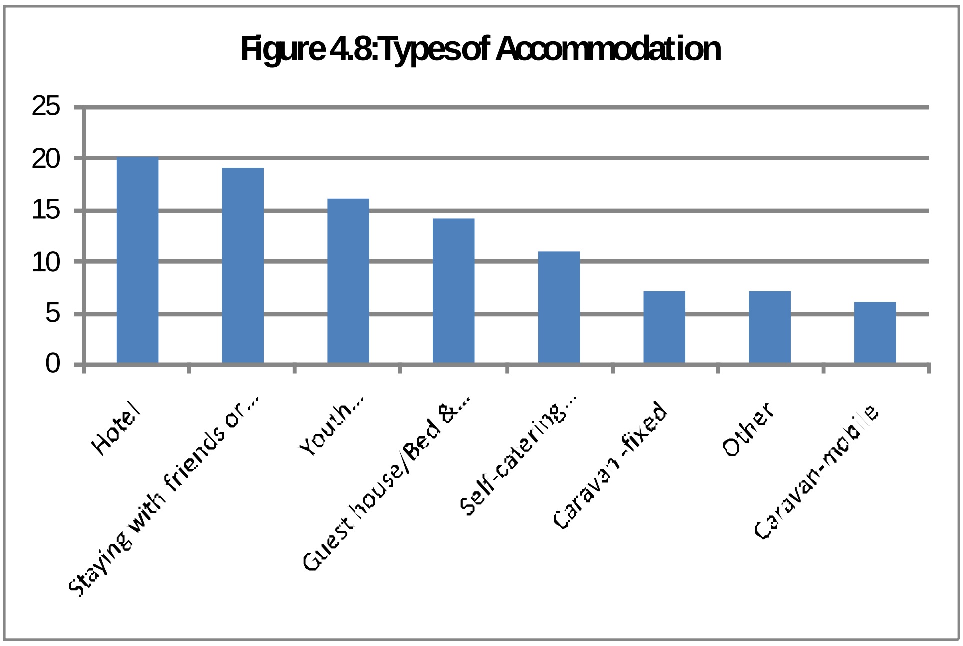


Figure 4.8: Types of Accommodation

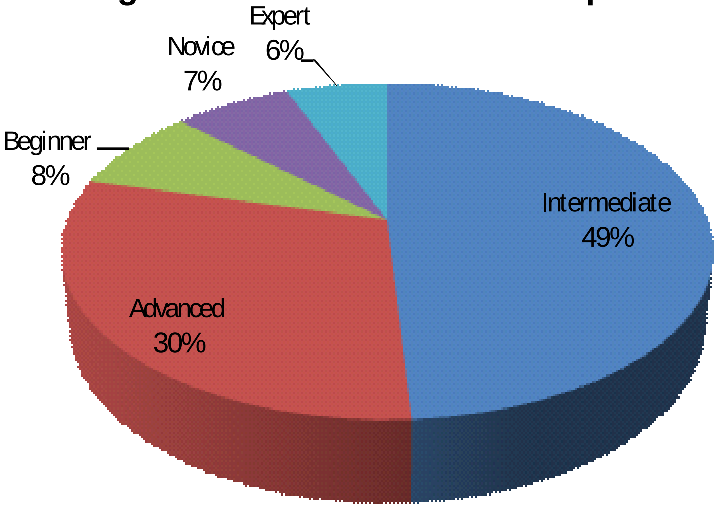
Comparing the above results with 2004, the proportion of visitors staying in fixed caravans has gone up from 1% to 7%, and those staying in mobile caravans has also increased from 4% to 6%. This may be a reflection of the strong caravan market within Dumfries and Galloway. Conversely, the number of visitors staying with friends or family and youth hostels/backpackers accommodation has decreased since 2004. The proportion of visitors staying in a hotel has increased since 2004 (where 12% of visitors chose to stay in a hotel) and is currently the most popular type of accommodation. This is different from 2004 when staying with friends or family was the most popular type of accommodation, with 24% of visitors staying in this type of accommodation, it is now 19%. However as the number of visitors to the 7stanes increases you would expect the proportion staying with friends and relatives to decrease as the appeal spreads to a wider audience.

The most common ways in which the visitors found out about the accommodation they were staying in was through word of mouth, the VisitScotland website, family/friends, and the internet.

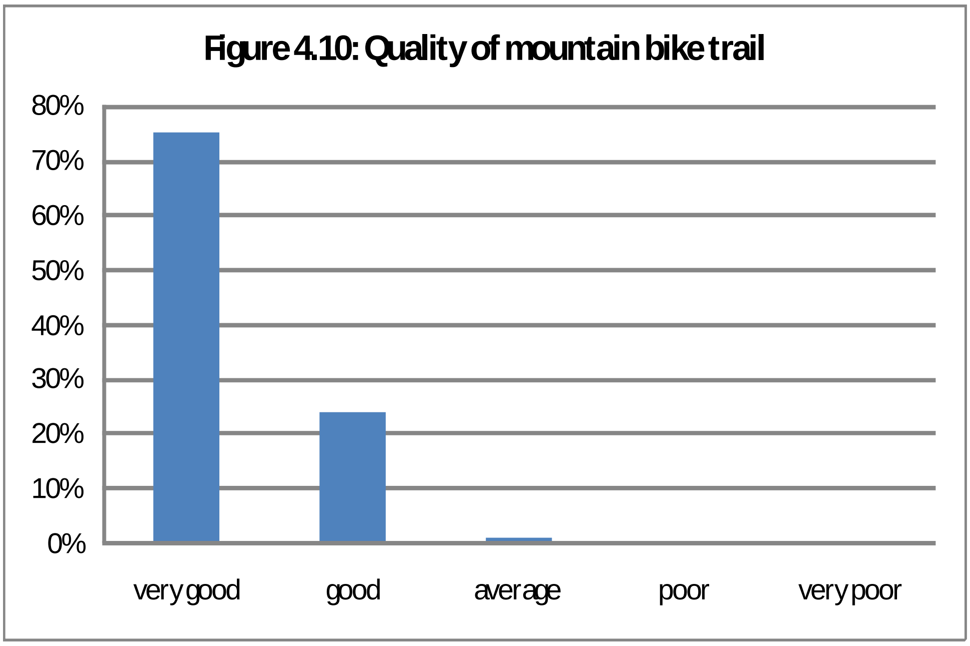
4.2.7 Skill Levels and Ratings

Figure 4.9, over shows the level of mountain biking proficiency that visitors considered themselves to have. Almost half of visitors (49%) considered themselves to be intermediates. Nearly a third of visitors believed themselves to be at an advanced level, and 6% expert. Only 7% of visitors were novices and 8% were beginners in Mountain Biking.

Figure 4.9: Level of Mountain Bike Expertise



Some 10% of visitors asked did not provide a rating of the trails because they didn't know as they had just arrived. Of the 90% of visitors who gave a response, the majority rated the Mountain Bike trails as very good (75%) as shown in **Figure 4.10**, with 24% stating that they were "good".



Compared with 2004 the quality ratings have increased with very good up from 68% to 75%, and good up from 21% to 24%.

There were a number of different reasons cited for rating the trail very good. The most often quoted related to the:

- fact that the trails are well maintained 20%;
- quality of the trails 8%;

– range and suitability of the trails 5%; and

– flows well 4%.

Some of the positive comments included:

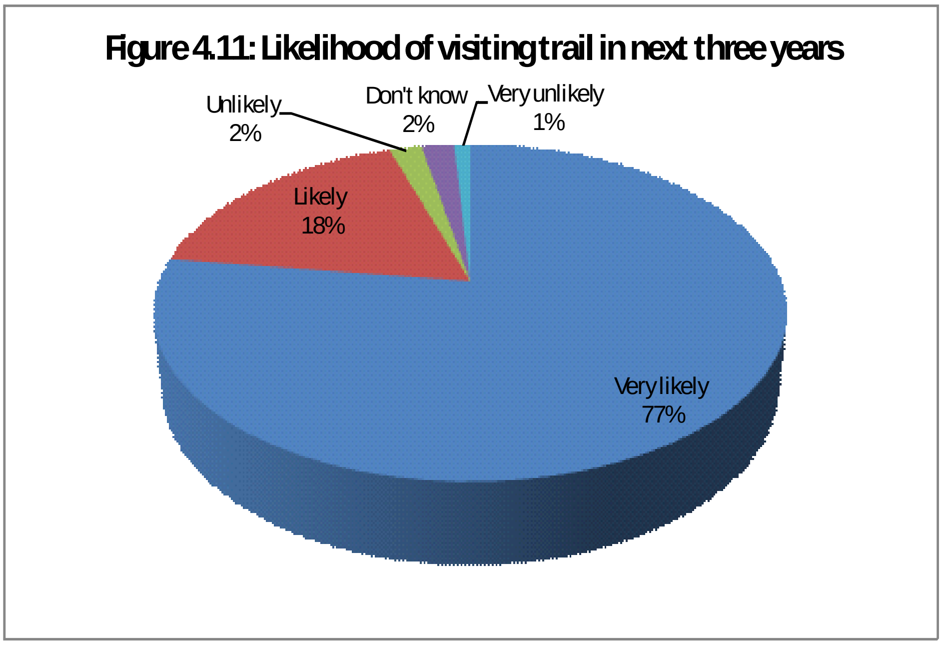
– "Well signposted and marked. Very well graded";

– "I had a most enjoyable day on the trails";

– "Excellent trails, would like to use more often";

– "Out of all the trails that I have been to, this is the best"; and

– "World class trails".



Nearly 80% of visitors are very likely to use the trail centre they were visiting again in the next three years, with 18% likely to visit again. Only 2% of visitors said that they would be unlikely or don't know if they would visit the trail centre again.

4.2.8 Suggestions for Improvement

Suggestions for improvement were related to the technical aspects of the mountain bike trails, supporting infrastructure, and marketing and information on the trails.

Technical and Operational

Some 29% of visitors gave responses on what improvements could be made to the trails.

The most common suggestions included:

- ensure ongoing maintenance 33%;
- longer trails and loops 11%;
- more jumps 6%;
- lifts to the top 6%;
- technically harder trails 5%;
- more trails 3%; and
- better signage 3%.

Comparing these results to 2004, ongoing maintenance is still the most commonly cited suggested improvement. There are now less visitors asking for more trails compared to 2004, when 26% of visitors suggested this improvement.

Improvements to Supporting Infrastructure

Some 42% of visitors gave responses on what improvements could be made to supporting infrastructure at the trails, and the most common suggestions included:

- more toilets 32%;
- cafe 19%;
- better signage 19%;
- cafe open longer hours 9%;
- better quality toilets 8%;
- showers/changing facilities 7%; and

– opening of a bike hire shop 4%.

Some 32% of visitors have suggested the need for more toilets which is more than the 2004 level of 20%. Opening more cafes is also an issue which has been ongoing since 2004 although a lower proportion of visitors suggest it in 2007. Showers/changing facilities is also an ongoing issue but the proportion of visitors suggesting this has decreased since 2004 when 21% of visitors suggested this improvement. There are now less visitors asking for a bike hire shop compared to 2004, when 8% of visitors suggested this improvement.

Improvements to Marketing and Information

Some 22% of visitors gave responses on what improvements could be made to marketing and information of the trails.

The most common suggestions included:

– more/better advertising 41%;

– better signposting 10%;

– more information about what is available 6%;

– better maps 5%; and

– weekend packages with local hotels 2%.

Comparing these results to 2004, more/better advertising is still the most common element which visitors feel needs improved. There are now less visitors asking for better signposting compared to the 2004 level when 15% of visitors suggested this improvement. A much smaller proportion of visitors are now asking for more information about what is available on the trails compared to 2004 when 21% of visitors suggested this improvement.

4.3 Summary

Slightly more visitors now come from the Dumfries and Galloway area (14%) compared to 2004 (10%) which may be due to the fact that more trails have opened up in that area in the intervening period. However, overall visitors are characterised by a relatively large non-local market, with 80% from outwith the South of Scotland. Compared with 2004 there has been a shift in the balance from elsewhere in Scotland to elsewhere in the UK and overseas. This suggests a broadening in the geographic appeal of the 7stanes.

The visitor profile is dominated by males in full-time employment who are aged between the ages of 18-45. The most common social class was AB followed by C1 and C2.

There has been an increase in the number of visitors with children up to 15% from 10% in 2004.

Visitors tend to participate in a number of other sports including hill walking/walking, running, rock climbing, snowboarding, skiing, and fishing. Some of these activities, particularly walking (the most commonly cited), offer good opportunities for linkages between the 7stanes and other facilities in the area.

A total of 96% of visitors were aware of the 7stanes which is much higher than the 2004 level of 75%, indicating that the brand awareness has increased significantly in the intervening period.

The most common way of finding out about the trails was by word of mouth, which augurs well for the future given the high level of rating for the trails-75% considering them to be very good. Indeed the quality ratings for the trails have gone up since 2004 when 68% of visitors gave the trails this rating.

The next most common source of information was the 7stanes website and interestingly those finding out about the trails this way has more than doubled since 2004 from 16% to 34%.

The trails are a key attractor for these visitors. For the majority of visitors the mountain bike trails were the only reason for visiting the South of Scotland.

There has been an increase in the number of visitors staying overnight with more than one-third of visitors were spending at least one night away from home compared with one quarter in 2004.

Compared to 2004, there has been a shift in the balance in the types of accommodation towards hotels and caravans/camping sites (with less in backpackers/youth hostel accommodation). The later may reflect the large caravan market in Dumfries and Galloway. There is a lower proportion staying with friends and relatives but this is to be expected as the appeal of the trails widen.

There was a relatively high awareness of the other operational trails, and compared to 2004 general awareness of the trails has increased. For many visitors they were only planning to visit the site they were at but some were planning visits to other sites as part of this trip.

However, much higher proportions had visited the other trail centres as part of previous trips. So there is interaction taking place between the trail centres but to a greater extent for some, for example Ae, Dalbeattie and Mabie.

Analysis of the results at the mountain biking championships shows that whilst there is a relatively high awareness of the 7stanes amongst people from Scotland, the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, the level of awareness amongst overseas visitors is very low.

A high proportion said that they were very likely (77%) to visit the trails again within the next three years.

Comparing the suggested improvements with those reported in 2004 there are some common themes emerging. The issue of ongoing maintenance is still high with 33% of visitors suggesting this improvement. There are now less visitors suggesting more trails at 14% compared to 26% in 2004.

Visitors are still asking for more toilets and cafes although fewer than in 2004. The issue of more advertising is still high, as was the case in 2004.

5. Business Survey

This chapter provides analysis of the results of a survey undertaken with businesses in the area surrounding the 7stanes trail centres. Responses have been separated into the following categories:

- On-site (those located at the trail centres); and

- Off-site (those located in the surrounding area).

5.1 On-Site Businesses

5.1.1 Introduction

Seven businesses were interviewed across the trail centres and asked for their views on the impact of the trails, marketing and facilities, strengths and weaknesses and suggested improvements.

5.1.2 Impact

With regards to the impact that the trails have had on their businesses it needs to be borne in mind that there is a mix of those that:

- were developed as a direct result of the trails;

- have developed their business in ways not solely aimed at the mountain bikers but did have that target market in mind; and

- existed prior to development the mountain bike trails

All of the businesses stated that they were benefitting from the 7stanes trails and several would not be in business if the trails did not exist.

Respondents reported that visit groups tended to be varied with both family groups and specialist mountain bikers attending the trail centres due to the varied degrees of difficulty that the 7stanes trails offered.

5.1.3 Marketing and Facilities

Three of the respondents reported promoting the 7stanes trail centres on their websites as well as advertising in MTB specific magazines and the national press. These three businesses also reported being involved in a range of adventure days, open days and the Scottish Cross Country Series.

Several of these businesses are very focused on the mountain biking market and have developed their businesses to meet the needs of this specific market (although some will also be benefitting from other markets such as walkers).

5.1.4 Strengths and Weaknesses

Respondents were then asked what they considered to be the main strengths and weaknesses of the 7stanes project.

Strengths

The quality and variety of the trails combined with the 7stanes brand and collective identity were noted as the key strengths of the 7stanes development. The continued support of Forestry Commission Scotland was also identified as a strength.

Weaknesses

A small number of weaknesses were noted by respondents. One highlighted a conflict between mountain bikers and walkers with the focus increasing on the former at the expense of the latter, more traditional market. At the same time, another respondent mentioned that the walking trails were off putting to the mountain bikers.

One respondent felt that there were too many trails and that without rationalisation the sustainability of the trails may suffer in the long run due to the need for continued trail maintenance.

Another stated that there was a need for greater co-ordination between FCS and private businesses.

5.1.5 Improvements

Three respondents suggested that the trails need improved with two highlighting, in particular, the need for more green trails in the area. In terms of supporting infrastructure it was felt by two respondents that not enough was being done to fully optimise the opportunity available at the sites, with the need to increase footfall from other groups.

5.2 Off-Site Businesses

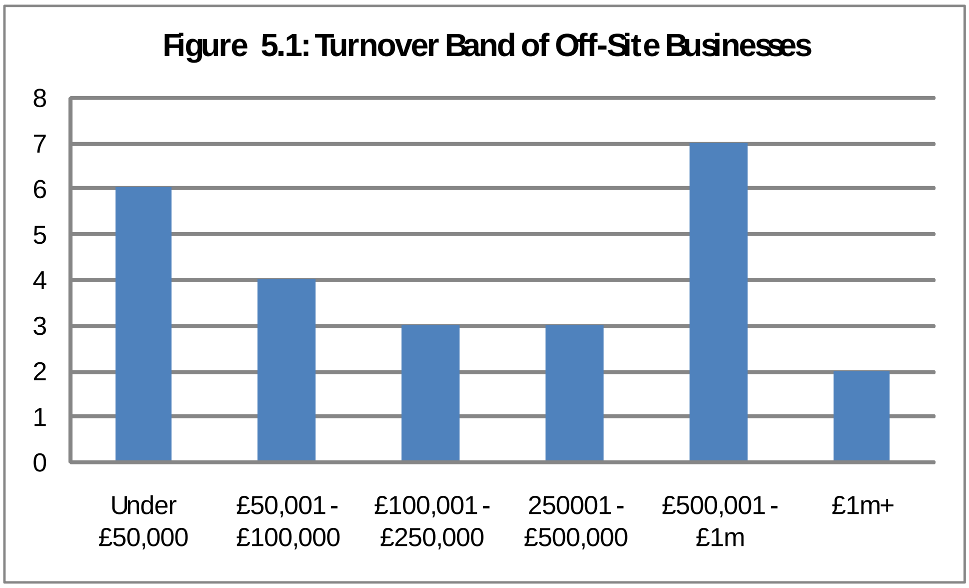
5.2.1 Introduction

A survey of 30 off-site businesses was also carried out with 29 being accommodation providers and one local bike shop. The accommodation providers included a mix of:

- hotels;
- caravan sites;
- bed and breakfast / guest houses; and
- self catering.

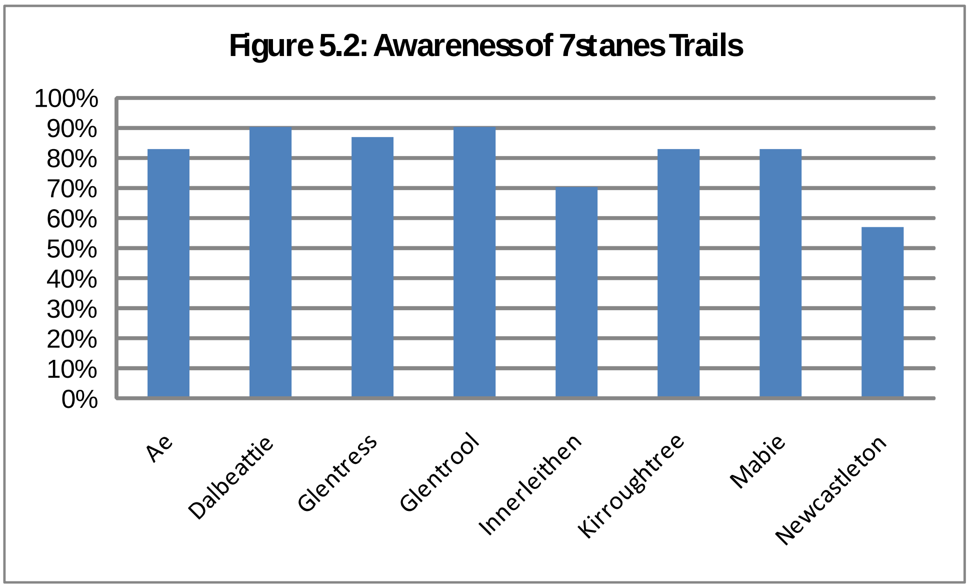
5.2.2 Profile

The businesses employed a total of 293 full-time staff, 83 part-time staff and 66 seasonal staff through the summer months. The turnover of respondent businesses was varied as **Figure 5.1** highlights.



5.2.3 Awareness

Awareness of the various 7stanes trail centres was relatively high as **Figure 5.2** shows.



Innerleithen and Newcastleton were the only trail centres where awareness was less than 80%, with the latter only just over 50%. Thirteen respondents (43%) reported being aware of all eight trail centres.

A total of 26 (87%) stated that they were aware that the trail centres were part of the 7stanes project. Awareness came from a variety of sources including:

– through mountain bikers staying at their accommodation;

– promotional activity by the Forestry Commission;

- the internet; and

- local press releases.

In addition, seven respondents reported that the 7stanes mountain bike trails were one of the reasons for establishing/purchasing their business.

5.2.4 Impact

The businesses were asked if the development of the 7stanes mountain bike trails had had any impact on their business in terms of increased sales/occupancy.

A total of 20 (67%) respondents reported sales/occupancy increasing as a result of the trails. Of these, six reported that had risen in excess of 40% as a result of the trails and ten reported an increase of up to 5%. The remaining four, although unable to quantify the level of increase, felt that that the trails had had a positive impact on their business.

In addition, one newly opened accommodation provider stated that they expected mountain bikers to become a significant part of their business due to their close proximity to the 7stanes trail centres.

One business did report that they suffered a decline in occupancy and had to release three members of staff as a result of the closure of the uplift facility at Innerleithen. However, the reinstatement of this facility may result in the business recovering their losses.

Of those that reported an increase, 14 commented on the time of year the increases had occurred. 11 said that it was all year round, with particular focus on the weekends while a further three respondents said they had noticed an increase during the spring and autumn.

When asked what type of groups visited their businesses:

- 17 respondents said it was male only groups;

- seven responded families;

- four responded couples;

- three said mixed groups; and

- three said female groups.

The average group size varied with some respondents saying that it was usually 2-6 while others has as many as 20 at a time. Two respondents stated that they got repeat custom from mountain bike visitors. The most common age bracket appeared to be 25-40.

5.2.5 Marketing and Facilities

Eighteen of the thirty respondents reported undertaking some form of promotional activity directly targeted at mountain bikers, with another two planning to do so in the future. Activities included:

- advertising on mountain biking websites and/or mentioning the trails on their own website (13 respondents);
- advertisement in mountain biking magazines (four respondents); and
- VisitScotland and Forestry Commission activities (three respondents).

Ten respondents also reported developing new facilities for mountain bikers including the introduction of bike stores, jet washes for bikes and washing and laundry facilities as well as providing packed lunches for them. Other respondents had developments planned for the future.

While 26 respondents stated that they had their own website, the number using 7stanes specific items was relatively low:

- seven respondents had text regarding 7stanes;
- four respondents had images of 7stanes; and
- only two had the 7stanes logo.

One business did mention that although they didn't have any of these on their website they would like to in the future but are currently unsure of the legal complexities of this.

5.2.6 Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

The most common responses from businesses when asked to identify the strengths of the 7stanes development were:

- the trails ability to continually attract visitors to the area who wouldn't normally have visited (seven responses);

- the fantastic variety and quality of the trails themselves (six responses), (with one business stating they were "The best trails in the world"); and

- the ability of the trails to attract visitors during the quieter shoulder months of the year (three responses).

Other strengths noted included the beautiful location the trails were set in, the close proximity of the trail centres to each other which made them attractive as a multi day visit and also the fact that they were attracting visitors that wouldn't normally have come to the area.

Weaknesses

A number of weaknesses were also identified by respondents in relation to the 7stanes development.

The first was the perceived lack of facilities at certain trail centres (7 responses), namely Dalbeattie and Newcastleton, with showers in particular seen as a necessity.

Six respondents also felt that the advertising and promotional activities were disjointed and inadequate to achieve the full benefit that the trails could bring. Also the lack of appropriate signage was seen by some as a further weakness (three respondents).

5.2.7 Improvements

When asked what improvements could be made to the trails, seven respondents said that they weren't in a position to suggest improvements and five stated there was either no need to improve them. Those that did provide comments mainly suggested improving the difficulty of the trails to keep visitors challenged (three responses) and improving maintenance (two responses).

In terms of improvements to the support infrastructure, these focused on the need for permanent facilities at all the trail centres, offering shower and changing facilities (10 responses). The need for better signage both on the approach to the trail centres and also on the trails themselves, to link with map information about the trails themselves was also highlighted (three respondents).

The marketing side was where most respondents agreed that improvements were needed with 11 respondents suggesting the need for more information readily available about all the trail centres in the 7stanes development as some visitors appeared to be unaware of them all.

5.3 Summary

Awareness of the trail centres was relatively high among off-site businesses (83%-90%) with the exception of the Newcastleton trail centre and, to a lesser extent the Innerleithen trail centre which had awareness ratings of 57% and 70% respectively.

While the majority of on-site businesses are dependent on the trails for their business, two thirds of off-site also reported increases in sales as a result of the trails development. This ranged from small increases of 5% and under to increases in excess of 40%. A number of on-site and off-site businesses noted that these increases were not restricted to the high season, with increases reported in the shoulder months by some and all year round by others. Only one business reported any detrimental effect on sales and employment as a result of the 7stanes development and this was directly linked to discontinuation of the uplift facility at Innerleithen. This has now been reinstated so they are likely to recover the losses.

The most common type of visitor were identified as male groups, but there were also to a lesser extent families, couples, mixed groups and female groups.

With regards to marketing, 16 of the 37 respondents highlight their businesses' proximity to the 7stanes trail centres on their website and/or mountain biking and tourism websites. Others also reported advertising in mountain biking magazines and the national press.

Many of the onsite businesses developed all or part of their business as a direct response to the trails. However twelve off-site have/or plan to introduce new facilities specifically to meet the needs of mountain bikers. These included shower and changing facilities, bike storage and laundry facilities.

Only a small number of the off-site businesses with their own websites reported using 7stanes specific items such as images and logos on their website. One respondent said that they hadn't done this due to their uncertainty regarding the legal complexities of it.

The common strength of the 7stanes development reported by respondents was the quality and variety of the trails on offer. This was noted by both on-site and off-site businesses. Weaknesses reported by on-site businesses were minimal and focused on the conflict between walkers and mountain bikers. Off-site businesses cited the lack of facilities at a number of the trail centres, a lack of signage and a disjointed and insufficient marketing as the main weaknesses.

Improvements focused on increasing the amount of supporting infrastructure at the trail centres, particularly showering facilities along with a need to improve marketing. Two on-site businesses highlighted the need for more green trails to encourage children/beginners to the trails, while off-site businesses also highlighted the need to continually improve the difficulty of the trails to keep visitors challenged.

6. Community Groups

6.1 Introduction

In addition to day trippers and tourists there are a number of groups using the 7stanes facilities for community/social purposes. Telephone consultations were undertaken with some of these groups/organisations in order to understand more about the different groups utilising the sites and their objectives in using them. Discussions were undertaken with;

- The Stakeford Group;
- The Dalbeattie Community Initiative.
- Dalbeattie Hard Rock Cycle Club;
- Break for the Borders Mountain Biking Club;
- Dumfries and Galloway Council;
- Dalbeattie High School; and

We were also given contact details for the Moffat Initiative but discussions with them identified that they did not make use of the 7stanes trails.

6.2 Examples of groups using the trails

6.2.1 Stakeford Group

The NHS Health Improvement team set up a youth project with anti-social funding called the Stakeford Group in one of the most deprived areas of Dumfries. The project was designed to respond to what the young people in the group were interested in and enthusiastic about. They were asked what they wanted to do within the group and they choose cycling. The 7stanes cycle routes meant that it was possible to deliver the project in a way that the young people wanted to engage with.

The project involved eight young people from disadvantaged areas in Dumfries. The young people were first given the opportunity to take part in taster sessions and then went along to take part in mountain biking at the cycle track for a few hours each week for 2-3 weeks, with a cycle leader that was provided by the Council.

The primary aim of the project was to reduce youth anti-social behaviour but also to build the confidence of the young people, encourage them to take part in activities outside of a normal environment and positively impact upon their fitness and wellbeing.

The trail centres in Mabie and Dalbeattie were used. The young people were impressed with the quality of the trails and the project leaders received very positive feedback.

The project manager felt that they would not have achieved what they did without the trails being there. It gave them an interesting opportunity to use as a basis for engaging with the young people. The project resulted in more interest and enthusiasm for mountain biking and keeping fit in general. The young people enjoyed themselves and the project has introduced them to activities that they would not usually take part in, giving them a real sense of well being.

6.2.2 Dalbeattie Community Initiative

The 7stanes trails have influenced the activities of a local initiative called the Dalbeattie Community Initiative. This organisation undertakes a wide range of activities with a focus on economic development within the local community including various types of events, festivals, restoration work and music and sporting events.

This group does not directly make use of the trails, rather they aim to maximise the opportunities that arise from the existence of the trails for local businesses.

The group has 26 community members representing companies and other groups within the town. They are involved in promoting the Hard Rock Mountain Bike Challenge (a duathlon). They also assist with the organisation and management of the event.

Their activities include encouraging local businesses to gear themselves up for the competition and advising them on how they can benefit from the event. For example by pointing out potential opportunities to accommodation providers and other businesses who could benefit from providing showers, bike facilities and other services, repairs and sale of bikes.

The main objective of the initiative is economic development. They help promote the trails in order to bring people into the area and also assist businesses in benefitting from the competition with larger volumes of cyclists visiting the area during the event. Therefore, the competition and the trails are directly contributing towards their objectives as an organisation.

The trails have resulted in increased numbers of cyclists and visitors coming into the area. The trails and the competition has a good reputation with nationwide appeal so has therefore attracted individuals in from Scotland, Wales, North England and abroad with is good for local trade.

6.2.3 Dalbeattie Hard Rock Cycle Club

This is a mountain biking group with 30 adult members which grew out of the Hard Rock Challenge (a decathlon that has taken place on the trails for the last 4 years, with the most recent involving 190 adults and 95 children).

The group was formed so that individuals can train for the challenge in a group setting and its activities include on-road and off-road cycling.

The aim of the group is to provide a social but also competitive club and to increase the number of cycling races that take place in the area.

Training takes place in the summer weekly but members also use the trails outwith the club 2-3 times weekly. The trails have had a large impact upon interest in mountain biking as the number of cyclists in and around Dalbeattie increased significantly, and the challenge attracts people from all over the country year after year.

6.2.4 Break for the Borders Mountain Biking Club

Break for the Borders is a mountain biking club with twenty members aged between 18 and 35, most of which are male. The group was formed with the aim of doing as much mountain biking as possible on good trails. The accessibility of the 7stanes provided them with the opportunity to do this. Many members were involved in mountain biking before joining but the group was formed after the 7stanes trails were developed and all of the trail centres (other than Glentrool) have been used by the group.

The trails are used by the 20 members that ride once or twice a week, the group also organise a monthly trip where non-riders are encouraged to join and they are helped with bike hire and travel.

Break for the Borders use the trails for social purposes, to build up riders' skills and abilities and also to encourage people to take up mountain biking. The trails have influenced the riders in that it has increased their fitness, helped them progress as riders so they are now able to take on more difficult routes.

The trails have also generated a greater interest in mountain biking evidenced by the fact that ten new members have joined the club and started riding with them.

6.2.5 Dumfries and Galloway Council

Stepping Stanes

Stepping Stanes is a cycle development project that has been specifically developed around 7stanes. Its aim is to develop mountain bike leaders across the breadth of the region who can go out into the field and potentially volunteer to run Thursday night and Saturday morning clubs. Developing these leaders is seen as fundamental to young people who need support, building up their skills and in widening the market place in terms of introducing new markets to the sport.

School Curriculum

Mountain biking has been introduced into the higher grade PE courses in Dumfries schools in Ae, Mabie and Dalbeattie and will be introduced in Newton Stewart soon. This has resulted in 2,000 students being introduced to mountain biking in the last year. A fleet of 45 bikes at Stronord are provided for use by the school initiative. The course involves six week blocks, with the young people being exposed to mountain biking at least once a week.

The aim of introducing mountain biking into the curriculum in Dumfries schools was to build up awareness and to promote the key lifestyle/environmental and health benefits associated with mountain biking. We also consulted with Dalbeattie High school as an example of a specific school that has introduced mountain biking into the curriculum.

6.2.6 Dalbeattie High School

Mountain biking was introduced as part of the PE curriculum for the seniors and the second year students at Dalbeattie High School. Some 40 second year students are taking part in mountain biking four days a year and 12 seniors (aged 16-17) do a block for 5-6 weeks where they cycle on the trails for a few hours on a weekly basis.

The aim of introducing mountain biking into the curriculum was to show the young people what was available locally and to teach them about wellbeing, fitness and generate an interest in a healthy lifestyle and mountain biking. It was hoped that the course would encourage young people to partake in active activities after school. It also aimed to challenge the young people and build their confidence.

Mountain biking has been part of the curriculum in the past but the students were usually taken on forest routes. The accessibility of the 7stanes trails and the fact that they offer designated routes mean that they are of higher quality and better suited to the students.

The trails have contributed towards ensuring this part of the curriculum is a success. Mountain biking as part of the curriculum has offered the young people something different and they have really enjoyed it. It has offered an alternative to team sports and allowed the young people to take part in individual exercise.

The course has been successful because of the quality, flexibility of the trails and the fact that they are suitable for all ages and levels of experience. They challenge the young people but at the same time they are safe. The course has generated greater interest in mountain biking and has resulted in more enthusiasm for the activity amongst the students.

6.3 Specific Views on the 7stanes

6.3.1 Strengths and weaknesses

The quality of the mountain bike trails were rated as very good by all of those that were consulted. The mountain bike trails were viewed as offering a wide variety of trails, from easy to difficult making them accessible for individuals of varying experience and abilities. Other comments received included;

- the trails are of high quality and have a good reputation locally and abroad;
- the 7stanes website is very good and is promoted well and therefore attracts people into the area;
- they are safe for people of all ages to use;
- the trails take in a wide range of scenery and terrain; and
- they have great tracks which allow riders to progress in riding ability and try other disciplines of riding.

Only two of the respondents considered there to be any weaknesses with the 7stanes development which were as follows:

- a lack of transport available to take cyclists to the start of the routes; and

- a lack of changing facilities at the routes (which may pose more of a problem for visitors coming from outside the area to use the trails).

6.3.2 Infrastructure, Information and Guidance

Those consulted were asked to make suggestions about potential improvements that could be made to the trails and their supporting infrastructure. Areas where improvements in the infrastructure were suggested included;

- improved information and signage at the site, with signposting to local services, facilities and businesses in the town of Dalbeattie. Providing an improved link between the trail centre and the town and its services. This would result in mountain bikers having a better understanding of the local area and give local trades the opportunity to benefit from mountain bikers visiting the town;

- trail guides are a bit out of date and the maps need updated;

- better signage is needed at Kirroughtree;

- Dalbeattie, Newcastleton and Innerleithen were identified as needing better facilities; and

- the trails in Dalbeattie are worn in places which makes it a bit more difficult for the less experienced riders.

6.4 Summary

Discussions with social/community groups has identified that the 7stanes site is providing a very important social function. This is evidenced by the fact that a wide range of groups with a social remit are making use of the facilities. The trails have supported these organisations in achieving a wide variety of aims such as tackling anti-social behaviour, promoting healthy living, building confidence, generating an interest in mountain biking and fitness in general and further developing the abilities and skills of already experienced riders. Mountain biking has also been introduced into the curriculum in several schools throughout Dumfries due to the associated benefits (health and wellbeing) and the suitability and accessibility of the trails.

The quality of the trails was rated highly by all of those using them and several of those consulted commented that they were suitable for individuals of varying ages and experience.

Issues with regards to transport and facilities at the some trail centres were raised by some individuals and it was commented that better signage was required at some of the sites.

7. Economic Impact

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter we present estimates of the economic impact of the 7stanes project at the following geographic levels:

- South of Scotland; and

- Scotland.

The data we have used in estimating the impact has been drawn from:

- the survey of visitors, which was reported in Chapter 3;

- data from FCS on employment generated through project management and delivery; and

- visitor count data estimated by FCS and TRC.

7.2 On-site

7.2.1 Direct Employment

Table 5.1 shows the number of people employed directly in the management and delivery of Phase 2 of the 7stanes project.

Table 5.1: Direct Employment	
Project Manager	1
Lead Co-ordinator	1
Technical Officer	1
Trailbuilders/suppliers	7
Co-ordinator (P/T)	0.5
Administrator (P/T)	0.5
Total	11.0

In total there are five full time employees and two part time employees of the project. There were also the equivalent of another five full time employees[4] that supplied trailbuilding and other infrastructure services to the project.

However, these positions were for various lengths throughout the Phase 2 period of the project. It is necessary to covert these into full time equivalents (FTE) jobs, on the basis of an FTE lasting for a period of 10 years. This gives employment of 2.8 FTEs.

7.2.2 Multipliers

The increase in economic activity as a result of the project will also have two types of wider impact on the economy:

– **supplier effect**: an increase in sales in a business will require it to purchase more supplies than it would have otherwise. A proportion of this 'knock-on' effect will benefit suppliers in the local and Scottish economies; and

– **income effect**: an increase in sales in a business will usually lead to either an increase in employment or an increase in incomes for those already employed. A proportion of these increased incomes will be re-spent in the local and Scottish economies.

The Scottish Tourism Mulitplier Study (STMS)[5] provides standard supplier and income multipliers for the tourism sector. This estimates that the combined on-site supplier and income mulitplier for a rural location are as follows:

– South of Scotland 1.35; and

– Scotland 1.6.

Applying these multipliers gives net additional employment of at the South of Scotland level and 4.4 at the Scottish level.

[4] There were more than five that were working varying amount of time on the project but these have been converted into annual full time employment equivalents.
[5] STMS provides estimates of local (South of Scotland) and Scottish multipliers.

7.3 Off-site

7.3.1 Visitor Numbers

Visitor numbers have been based on estimates provided by Forestry Commission Scotland in conjunction with TRC (a detailed explanation of how these estimates were derived is provided in Appendix A). The visitor numbers are given in **Table 5.2**, over.

Table 5.2: Annual Visitor Numbers	
Ae	26,007
Dalbeattie	41,260
Glentress	186,918
Glentrool	4,983
Innerleithen	16,960
Kirroughtree	39,612
Mabie	72,828
Newcastleton	6,058
Total	394,626

To set this within context, **Table 5.2a** gives the top twenty visitor attractions in Scotland. This shows that 7stanes would rank as the 16th most popular tourist attraction in Scotland.

Table 5.2a: Top 20 Visitor Attractions in Scotland in 2006 (Paid and Free)

Rank	**Attraction**	**Number of visits**	**Paid or Free**
1	Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum, Glasgow	1,880,956	Free
2	Edinburgh Castle, Edinburgh	1,211,036	Paid
3	National Gallery of Scotland Complex, Edinburgh	942,788	Free
4	National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh	830,670	Free
5	Blacksmith's Shop Centre, Gretna Green	717,442	Free
6	Edinburgh Zoo, Edinburgh	655,203	Paid
7	Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh	622,452	Free
8	Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow	554,152	Free
9	Museum of Transport, Glasgow	506,339	Free
10	Edinburgh Bus Tours, Edinburgh	501,445	Paid
11	Falkirk Wheel, Falkirk	437,388	Free
12	National War Museum, Edinburgh	421,568	Free
13	Glasgow Science Centre, Glasgow	410,513	Paid
14	Blair Drummond Safari Park, Stirling	402,701	Paid
15	St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh	401,405	Free
16	**7Stanes**	**394,626**	**Free**
17	Stirling Castle, Stirling	385,755	Paid
18	Glasgow Botanic Gardens, Glasgow	375,000	Free
19	New Lanark Village and Visitor Centre, Lanark	354,425	Free
20	People's Palace, Glasgow	339,976	Free

7.3.2 Visitor Profile

Table 5.3 shows the breakdown of visitors by origin. A total of 44% were from elsewhere in Scotland and 37% from outwith Scotland. Only 20% of visitors reside within the South of Scotland.

Table 5.3: Visitor Origin (%)	
Dumfries and Galloway	14
Scottish Borders	6
Elsewhere in Scotland	44
Elsewhere in UK	32
Overseas	5

Overnight accommodation is a significant item of expenditure, therefore, it is important to distinguish between day visitors and those staying overnight. **Table 5.4** gives a breakdown of type of visit by origin.

Table 5.4: Type of Visit by Origin (%)

Origin	Day Visitors	Overnight
Dumfries and Galloway	13.6	0.2
Scottish Borders	5.6	0.2
Elsewhere in Scotland	34.1	9.4
Elsewhere in UK	9.6	22.0
Overseas	0.0	5.3
Total	62.9	37.1

The total number of visitors to the 7stanes over the last year has been estimated at 394,626. The survey identified that 63% of visitors were day visitors – suggesting 248,220 in total. The remaining 37% were overnight visitors – 146,406 in total.

7.3.3 Gross Expenditure

Average spend is given in the **Table 5.5**. The average daily expenditure of has been split by visitor origin. The average daily expenditure for day visitors is much higher now compared with 2004 when (even allowing for inflation to convert to 2007) it averaged £5.27. The spend of overnight visitors is also higher now (in 2004 Scottish visitors' average daily expenditure was £21.66 and non-Scottish visitors £38.46).

Table 5.5: Average daily spend per person by visitor type	
Day Visitors	
South of Scotland	£5.91
Elsewhere in Scotland	£10.61
Elsewhere in UK	£13.94
Overnight Visitors	
Scotland	£30.54
Elsewhere in UK	£44.08
Overseas	£42.46

The survey recorded the number of nights spent by overnight visitors. The average length of stay is given in **Table 5.6**.

Table 5.6: Average length of stay		
	South of Scotland	Scotland
South of Scotland	2	2
Elsewhere in Scotland	2	2.1
Elsewhere in UK	2.9	3.6
Overseas	4.8	7.5

The length of stay has increased since 2004 when average length of stay for Scottish visitors was 1.7 in the South of scotland and 1.8 in Scotland and for non-Scottish visitors was 1.8 in the south of Scotland and 2.3 in Scotland.

Gross expenditure is calculated as follows:

$$GE = dv.ndv + ov.l.nov$$

Where GE gross expenditure
- dv average daily expenditure of day visitors
- ndv number of day visitors
- ov average daily expenditure of overnight visitors
- l average length of stay
- nov number of overnight visitors

However, before applying the formula it is importnat to recognise that overnight visitors may be visiting the trails on more than one day during their trip. We need to take account of this before applying the formula so as to aviod doublecounting of the impacts[6]. The average number of days that each category of overnight visitor is using the trails is given in **Table 5.7**.

[6] This is because we are including the impact from all of their trip so do not want to count the same person twice.

Table 5.7: Average number of days using trails during current trip	
Scotland	1.8
Elsewhere in Scotland	2.9
Overseas	2.6

Applying the formula, whilst taking account of number of days used, gives gross expenditure figures[7] as detalied in the **Table 5.8**.

Table 5.8: Gross Expenditure		
Visitor Type	South of Scotland	Scotland
Day Visitors	£2,403,190	£2,403,190
Overnight Visitors	£6,775,990	£8,681,905
Total	£9,179,180	£11,085,095

Therefore, the total gross expenditure resulting from visitors to the 7stanes was approximately £9.18m in the South of Scotland and £11.08m in Scotland.

7.3.4 Gross to Net

To calculate the net impact of the 7stanes it is necessary to take account of:

- additionality;
- displacement; and
- multiplier effects.

7.3.5 Additionality

Additionality refers to the likelihood that the 7stanes would have been undertaken without public sector support.

The project does not create any direct on-site expenditure rather the benefit comes through off-site expenditure within the local economy. In these situations it is impossibe for the project to be fully funded by the private sector due the externalities market failure, rather it requires public sector intervention.

[7] Expenditure was broken down by visitor origin before applying the formula.

Without this public sector support the project would not take place, therefore the level of additionality is considered to be **100%**.

7.3.6 Displacement and Multipliers

There is also a need to discount any benefits from the project that will displace economic activity that would have taken place anyway.

Displacement is an assessment of the extent to which the project has caused spending to be shifted from one part of the local economy to another.

The survey was used to ascertain the importance of the project in a visitors decision to visit the area. Visitors were also asked where they would have been if they had not visited the project. Using the responses from these questions the level of displacement was estimated as set out in **Table 5.9**.

Table 5.9: Displacement Factors (%)

	South of Scotland	Scotland
Day Visitors		
South of Scotland	100	100
Elsewhere in Scotland	10	100
Elsewhere in UK	12	18
Overnight Visitors		
South of Scotland	100	100
Elsewhere in Scotland	33	98
Elsewhere in UK	16	29
Overseas	25	61

Taking account of additionality and displacement reduces spend at the South of Scotland level by £2.14m and at the Scottish level by £6.25m to give direct expenditure of £7.04m at the South of Scotland level and £4.83m at the Scottish level.

The increase in economic activity as a result of the project will also have two types of wider impact on the economy – supplier and income effects (as defined in Section 5.2.2 above).

The Scottish Tourism Mulitplier Study (STMS) provides standard supplier and income multipliers for the tourism sector. This estimates that the combined off-site supplier and income mulitplier for a rural location are as follows:

- South of Scotland 1.32;
- Scotland 1.57.

Applying these multipliers leads to a net expenditure resulting from the 7stanes of £9.29m at the South of Scotland level and £7.58m at the Scottish level.

Table 5.10: Net Additional Expenditure		
	South of Scotland	Scotland
Gross expenditure	£9,179,180	£11,085,095
Less non-additional expenditure	£0	£0
Less displacement	£2,141,864	£6,252,918
Net Direct expenditure	£7,037,316	£4,832,177
Plus multipliers	1.32	1.57
Net additional Expenditure	£9,289,257	£7,586,518

7.3.7 Net Employment Impact

The net employment impact is calculated by applying an appropriate output:employment factor. We have applied output:employment factors derived from the STMS[8]. These are:

- £45,400 for South of Scotland; and
- £33,350 for Scotland.

Applying these factors to the net additional expenditure figures gives an employment impact of:

- 204.6 FTEs jobs in the South of Scotland;
- 227.5 FTEs jobs in Scotland.

7.4 Net On-site and Off-site Employment Impact

Combining on-site (from both Phases 1 and 2) and off-site gives net additional employment estimates of:

- 211.6 FTEs jobs in the South of Scotland;
- 235.8 FTEs jobs in Scotland.

[8] An inflator has been applied to bring the figures up to 2007 values.

7.5 Gross Value Added

The net additional annual gross value added has been calculated on the basis of GVA per employee within the tourism industry (£18,200[9]) multiplied by the number of FTEs[10], giving:

– £3,723,887 at the South of Scotland level and

– £4,140,169 at the Scottish level.

7.6 Cost Effectiveness Indicators

Table 5.11 shows the cost per job, based on total project spend of £3,683,562 (total Phases 1 and 2) of which £1,776,485 was ERDF.

Table 5.11: Cost per job (Phases 1 and 2)		
	South of Scotland	Scotland
Total Project Spend	£17,409	£15,625
ERDF Spend	£8,396	£7,535

The cost per job has dropped substantially compared with Phase 1 which is shown in **Table 5.12**.

Table 5.12: Cost per job (Phase 1 only)		
	South of Scotland	Scotland
Total Project Spend	£26,986	£34,074
ERDF Spend	£12,768	£16,122

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[9] Scottish Executive (2005) *Scottish Annual Business Statistics*
[10] Has not been applied to the onsite jobs as these were temporary for the period of the project.

7.7 Progress Against Targets

Table 5.13 shows progress against the ERDF targets.

Table 5.13: Results (Gross)						
	Objective 2		Transitional		Total	
Results	Approved	Achieved to date	Approved	Achieved to date	Approved	Achieved to date
Increase in visitor expenditure (£m)	2.46	4.69	4.90 (0.49?)	1.50	7.36 (2.95?)	6.19
Increase in visitor numbers	142,000	168,134	28,000	53,878	170,000	222,012
Total no. of gross new jobs created	57	105.4	11.2	33.8	68.2	139.2

Table 5.13 shows that the project has already exceeded its targets with the increase in visitor numbers at 222,000 (131% of target) and total number of gross new jobs created at 139.2 (204% of target). The one slight anomaly is the increase in visitor spend target under transitional where it is £4.9m, as this does not seem to be in line with the increase in visitor numbers target. If a prorata approach similar to that for Objective 2 is used it would suggest a target of £0.49m (however, we are unclear as to whether the target of £4.9m is correct).

For Phase 2 the ERDF contribution will be £962,823, therefore the cost per gross jobs based on the targets would be £14,118. The actual level achieved has been £6,917, less than half the target level cost per job. Indeed, the cost per net job for ERDF spend at the South of Scotland is £8,396, so the project has performed very well in terms of value for money.

7.8 Summary

Gross expenditure resulting from the 7stanes was approximately £9.18m at the South of Scotland level and £11.08m at the Scottish level. Taking account of additionality, displacement and multiplier effects, the net expenditure that resulted from the 7stanes has been estimated at £9.29m at the South of Scotland level and £7.59m at the Scottish level. Net additional GVA is estimated at £3.72m at the South of Scotland level and £4.14m at the Scottish level.

Whilst the number of visitors has increased from 172,000 in 2004[11] to 394,000, this does not fully account for the increase in net additonal expenditure. Rather there has also been an increase in the average daily expenditure of visitors, length of stay and proportion staying overnight which has also boosted the level of net additional expenditure.

The net addtional employment impact is estimated at 211.6 FTE jobs at the South of Scotland level and 235.8 FTEs jobs at the Scottish level.

The total project cost (Phase 1 and 2) is estimated at £3,683,562 of which £1,776,485 is being funded through ERDF. The cost per job for total spend range is £17,409 for the South of Scotland and £15,625 for Scotland, while for ERDF spend it is £8,396 for the South of Scotland and £7,535 for Scotland. The level of cost per job has dropped significantly since 2004. The gross cost per job target for Phase 2 at the South of Scotland level was £14,118. So even the net cost per job is lower than the gross cost per job target.

[11] EKOS and TRC (2004) *The 7stanes MTB Project Evaluation*

8. Marketing, Branding and Promotion

8.1 General

A key recommendation of the 7stanes Phase 1 Evaluation report was that Phase 2 must have a strategic approach to marketing. This was achieved by preparing a three-year marketing strategy in March 2006. This strategy was prepared in association with the project steering group and marketing sub-group under the guidance of internal Forestry Commission marketing specialist Laura Stewart.

The aim of the strategy was to help target a wider market base to visit the trails in line with the product development programme proposed for Phase 2. The objective of the marketing approach, together with product development, was to increase the number of visitors to the 7stanes, widen the economic benefit and engage better with local businesses.

It is recognised that because of the delay in appointing a full-time lead coordinator for the 7stanes Phase 2 project, that marketing activity was delayed. Indeed, marketing spend on the strategy did not commence until July 2006. It is fair to say that by its nature, general marketing has a delayed impact of anything from six months to a year. This is very different from specific targeted marketing i.e. for a new product or a specific event which would be expected to have a more direct and quantifiable impact.

In order to help guide the marketing strategy, a market segmentation approach was adopted. This was based on the findings from the Phase 1 Evaluation and the report Towards a National Mountain Bike Strategy for Scotland prepared by TRC and EKOS in 2005.

Each of the 7stanes sites was positioned and individual market segments targeted. This has been successful in guiding both product development and future marketing activity in Phase 2.

The Phase 1 development was very much supply led and a key emphasis in Phase 2 was on establishing a more focused market led approach to further development.

8.2 Marketing Collateral and Spend

It is important to note that the 7stanes visitor survey carried out during 2006 identified that almost 40% of the existing market is not readily influenced by the existing 7stanes marketing i.e.:

- Word of mouth 16%

- Know area already 10%
- At home / their local area 10%
- By accident exploring 3%
- **Total 39%**

This survey also identified that the biggest source of visitor information amongst the main markets for the 7stanes were leaflets 20% followed by the official website 17% and cycle magazines 11%. Linked websites and the Tourist Information Centres were of some importance at 5%. All other sources were fairly insignificant. Therefore in order to continue to target the existing market: leaflets, the website and cycle magazines will be important.

As part of Phase 2, a generic 7stanes leaflet was prepared which replaced the individual site leaflets of Phase 1. However the result was the need for additional collateral in the form of 'tear off' trail maps for each site. The benefit of the individual Phase 1 leaflets for the visitor was the direct link to local accommodation who advertised in each leaflet (see previous Dalbeattie brochure for example). However the new collateral costs less to produce than the original approach and can be refreshed more easily.

Each 7stanes site has a full double page spread in the Scottish Mountain Biking Guide – VisitScotland.com/adventure which is a very effective marketing tool for the activity / adventure visitor to Scotland. The redesigned 7stanes logo is much simpler than previous and appears to be more recognisable and has a much higher impact.

Between July 2006 and December 2007 the 7stanes marketing budget was around £114,000, although in reality, this equated to an aggregated total in excess of £130,000 for 18 months of the Phase 1 project i.e. equivalent of £87,000 per annum.

In the visitor attraction sector in the UK, it is quite usual to spend between £0.50 and £1.00 per visitor on annual marketing activity (in paid visitor attractions).

The 7stanes project for 2006/2007 is estimated to have attracted in excess of 380,000 visitors. The annual marketing spend per visitor is therefore between £0.20 and £0.25 which appears reasonable (although this does not include the cost of the FCS marketing executive's time).

An examination of the key marketing spend items by the consultants is summarised in **Table 6.1**.

Table 6.1: Key Marketing Spend	
	£000s
Generic leaflet printing	15.4
Promotional giveaways	9.3
Visitor monitoring	6.4
Generic leaflet design	6.4
Brand development and manual	6.0
DVD production and footage	5.8
Trail maps / layout / print / distribute	5.7
Attendance at show	4.5
Race flyer design and print	2.5
Printing business packs	3.0
Promotional t-shirts	2.0
Vehicle wrap	2.0
PR campaign	2.0
Total	**71.0**

The above key marketing items represent around 55% of the 7stanes marketing budget.

The largest single marketing item is the generic leaflet design and print at nearly £22,000 or 17% of the overall marketing budget, equivalent to around £15,000 per annum. About 20% of the market report this as their main marketing information source i.e. 60-70,000 people. This equates to a cost of about £0.20 to £0.25 per head. In the future either sponsorship or advertising space should be considered in the 7stanes brochure to help fund its production.

The second largest individual marketing spend is promotional giveaways at events, exhibitions and shows, aimed primarily at children i.e. trying to widen the market base for the future. The attendance and participation at events has been an important and successful part of the 7stanes Phase 2 brand and awareness development campaign. In addition there has been a visible increase in attendance at shows and exhibitions with the setting up of the mountain bike display team. This exciting addition to the marketing toolkit has helped to increase general awareness and in particular awareness amongst families and novices / new markets etc (see Events Section 6.4).

8.3 Advertising

The Phase 1 study identified that advertising was not a significant marketing tool for the core mountain biker. The consultants still believe this to be the case. A campaign was devised through the VisitScotland autumn gold promotion campaign with only moderate success.

There perhaps is a possibility to advertise in women's or lifestyle magazines however the cost is likely be too great for only limited exposure and return. What may be more practical is to work with VisitScotland in the wider promotion of Scotland in England / overseas as an activity, short break destination and try to obtain 7stanes brand exposure in more generic VisitScotland advertising campaigns. This would hopefully result in little direct cost to 7stanes. It is understood to date there has been little exposure overseas and the brand recognition here is low (as identified earlier in Section 4.2.5). There is the potential to maximise the opportunity in the North of England given its proximity to the 7stanes.

8.4 Events and Exhibitions

As part of Phase 1 it was concluded that the 7stanes should develop and participate in a range of events, which should include individual site and 7stanes wide possibilities.

In Phase 2 this has been successfully achieved with events such as 7/24 (all 7stanes in 24 hours), Dalbeattie Hard Rock Challenge, '10 at Kirroughtree'. These events have been more enthusiast and specialist related where participants come to take part in events at the 7stanes.

However the 7stanes team have also exhibited and partnered in Phase 2 with other agencies and private sector businesses such as MB7, CTC, Tour of Britain, FCS, etc.

Exhibitions/events attended include:

- Outdoor Show Birmingham;
- Bike Show Birmingham;
- Tour of Britain; and
- Mountain Bike World Championship.

These events have been targeted to help meet one of the 7stanes core objectives of widening the market base, in particular to families, novices and children.

8.5 Mountain Bike Display and Race Team

A mountain bike display team has been set up as part of Phase 2. There is a pool of five volunteer riders with three usually attending each show. The bike display team has helped to increase brand exposure and widen the appeal of mountain biking generally. It has appeared at the Outdoor Show in Birmingham, the Tour of Britain and various County Shows etc. This has helped to increase 7stanes brand exposure. The display team has helped the 7stanes positioning campaign as a 'cool brand', particularly amongst the young.

There would appear to be an opportunity to increase the role of the 7stanes display team with further representations at county and other shows or in urban centres / festivals / events etc, and in particular in England. However, in order to achieve this, a sustainable business model for the team would have to be investigated i.e.:

– could the bike display team get private sector sponsorship?

– would event organisers pay for display team i.e. appearance?

– could the public sector support this as a separate project?

It is felt that this project could target new markets and opportunities, particularly in the North of England, a geographical location where marketing could be strengthened.

The 7stanes have also developed a race team which competes at various, albeit specialist enthusiast events. The team is used to help raise awareness, however unless the events are spectator focused or held in England, the consultants consider this to have limited impact. The exception to this is when the team wins and it is given general press / PR exposure.

A promotional DVD was prepared circa £6,000 as part of the marketing strategy. This is an integral part of the promotional tools at exhibitions, events, demonstrations, shows etc.

8.6 Website

The 7stanes website www.7stanes.gov.uk was updated and re-launched as part of the Phase 2 project. The official website is important, both as a marketing and information tool. The 7stanes visitor survey estimated that 17% of the visitors use this as a key source for information.

The website layout is now very clear and very user-friendly. It provides information on each of the 7stanes sites, general news, forthcoming events, up-to-date trail conditions / closures, trail grading information, how to get to each location, downloadable trail maps, merchandise and business pages etc.

The new rider can also get skill tips, view the 7stanes video and link with the FCS mountain bike portal, as well as other sites throughout Scotland, International Mountain Bike Association etc. The visitor to the area is provided with links to VisitScotland in Dumfries & Galloway and the Scottish Borders. Business pages are aimed at increasing local business awareness and showcase the business information pack and how to get further information etc.

This is now an excellent website and it should be continually updated and refreshed as required in the future.

8.7 Branding

The Phase 2 project has witnessed an improved recognition of the 7stanes brand. This has been evident from the visitor survey work carried out as part of the study. The new logo, improved website, vehicle decals, exposure in cycle magazines, exhibitions and events have done much to reinforce and extend the 7stanes brand image. However it is the quality of the trails, the good visitor experience and the innovation that are the real brand values. The brand has established a 'cool' but high quality image.

It is understood that the ownership of the 7stanes brand lies with FCS, however some partners feel it requires better protection, but at the same time greater commercial opportunities should be explored on the back of the 7stanes brand in the future.

Some interviewees felt that Glentress and its cycling could easily survive without the 7stanes brand, some businesses and visitors still did not know that Innerleithen was part of the 7stanes brand.

Local businesses and the public sector in the Tweed Valley area are attempting to embrace a wider range of adventure sports than just a niche product such as mountain biking. As a result destination branding around adventure sports will be strengthened in the future.

It is likely that an overall adventure destination brand will be built up around the Tweed Valley. This will undoubtedly have greater mass appeal and be more attractive for both private and public sector investment than just the 7stanes brand (niche mountain biking). In the future there is the potential for the 7stanes brand to be lost as a specialist sub-brand within a wide, Tweed Valley destination brand.

The visitor survey carried out at the World Championships for the possible Innerleithen Uplift identified little or no 7stanes brand recognition amongst international visitors or international mountain bike competitors. Amongst the UK market however, brand recognition was good. Improved exposure of the brand in international markets should be explored via VisitScotland. New mountain bike facilities are being developed in Norway, Italy, etc. The Scandinavian market may provide future potential for example links between budget airlines and golf development.

8.8 Future Requirements

The marketing strategy, as part of Phase 2, was structured in such a way as to prepare templates, 'a kit of parts', for various marketing activities i.e.:

- new 7stanes brand identity;
- consolidated 7stanes brochure / generic leaflets;
- individual site tear-off maps;
- new website;
- user database.

As a result of the above approach, future marketing costs, over the next three years or so, can be reduced until rebranding or a change of marketing emphasis or collateral style is required. It is likely that the future focus will be on destination marketing and the 7stanes brand must develop better links with promotion of the wider area i.e. wider Tweed Valley, Solway Coast, Galloway Forest Park etc.

It is important in the future that the website is properly updated and maintained, and an annual budget amount is allowed for this. The future market emphasis is still likely to be on the marketing collateral identified above and an ongoing annual budget of £15,000 to £20,000 should sustain this activity. It is also important that the users' database is managed and added to.

The 7stanes management should encourage the increased usage of the 7stanes logo on third party local business websites.

The 7stanes display team should source a private sector sponsor to help it grow and develop, and increase its coverage at regional and national events and exhibitions etc.

Although not seen as direct visitor marketing, there needs to be closer liaison with social, community and business development initiatives, as this will help to broaden the user market.

The consultants consider that in the future, there still needs to be someone directly responsible for 7stanes marketing. The advice, guidance and management of marketing by Laura Stewart in Phase 2 for one day a week has been very successful.

9. Project Management and Physical Delivery

9.1 Project Management / Personnel

9.1.1 Introduction

The 7stanes project management is carried out by the following staffing structure / position:

Position	Current Staff	Date
• Project Manager	Colin Williamson	2001
• Lead Coordinator	Julie Cartner	May 2006
• Technical Coordinator	Andy Hopkins	October 2005
• Part-Time (50%) Project Development Officer	Andy Wardman	October 2005
• Part-Time Administrator	Margaret Bryden	July 2004
• Trail Builders x 2	N/A	January 2006
• Specialist Marketing Adviser	Laura Stewart	2006
• Specialist Consultant	Chris Ross	2006

The Phase 1 review identified the need for better coordination and consultation between senior management in respect of key issues such as marketing and product development. In addition, increased engagement with the private sector and a better market awareness & understanding was recommended.

Discussion with partners and local businesses has revealed that the project management of the 7stanes has been improved in Phase 2 in the following areas:

- forward planning – preplanning, delivery and snagging;
- communication with local businesses, liaising, helping to identify business development opportunities;
- improved reporting structures;
- project direction;
- marketing planning, strategy and delivery;

- visitor monitoring and surveying (albeit further improvement could still be made);

- event participation / hosting, set up and organisation;

- attracting and managing volunteers; and

- improved trail product quality control.

9.1.2 Future Improvements

In terms of future improvements to the project management structure / approach, only minor recommendations. It appears most of the previous issues identified previously have been addressed. Areas where further improvements could be made are:

- the continued development of third party business opportunities (this project is still in its infancy and needs more time to develop satisfactory outcomes);

- further developing and strengthening links to the local community (improving local community buy-in);

- identifying further health and social initiatives;

- developing further links to schools – devising a skills accreditation system for mountain bikers (see Cycle Scotland, Cycling Proficiency etc);

- developing a sustainable exit strategy for the partners – what is the future of the 7stanes project? (See beyond Phase 2 Chapter 10); and

- visitor monitoring and additional market research needs to be carried out. Whilst car and trail counters have been installed, initial calibration and siting issues need to be ironed out – further visitor market research is required.

9.1.3 Channels of Communication

As part of the project management process, the following channels of communication have been set up:

- project management communication re product development has improved through regular meetings between the 7stanes team and the three FCS Forest Districts;

- the Tweeddale Consortium has formed a mountain biking subgroup and a further group to project manage the Innerleithen uplift feasibility study;
- improved Dumfries & Galloway communication through the Chamber of Commerce interest group; and
- new 7stanes advisory group, combination of above two business groups and project partners.

9.2 Physical Development

9.2.1 Trails

The main thrust of the Phase 2 physical development was developing a network of more accessible trails to a wider market by developing additional, predominantly blue / green trails, but also realigning and re-grading some red and black opportunities (see summary below).

Table 7.1: Summary of Planned Trail Improvements – Phase 2		
	Approx. Length (km)	**Original Budget**
Glentress		
New Blue Velvet Trail	0.75	
Additions to Freeride Area	0.70	
New Green Trail Loop	2.75	
Total	**4.20**	**£70,000**
Innerleithen		
Red Extension (Black Descent Alternative)	**3.00**	**£52,000**
Glentrool		
New Blue Trail	**6.00**	**£140,000**
Newcastleton		
Blue Trail	**2.00**	**£40,000**
Dalbeattie		
Additions to Red / Blue Trail	5.50	
Skills Area	1.00	
Black Loop and Timber	0.60	
Total	**7.10**	**£103,000**
Mabie		
Blue Upgrade	0.60	
New Blue / Green Sections	1.60	
Red	1.40	
Skills Area	0.80	
Total	**4.40**	**£59,000**
Kirroughtree		
Black	2.80	
Blue	1.80	
Total	**4.60**	**£60,000**
Ae		
Red	4.50	
Blue	5.80	
Green	2.10	
Skill	1.20	
Downhill	1.50	
Total	**15.10**	**£113,000**
OVERALL TOTAL	**46.40**	**£637,000**

A total of 25km of blue and green trails were planned for Phase 2, all of which have been largely completed at the time of this review, with minor alterations and adjustment to help better realign the project to market needs (all alterations to the original plan were communicated to project partners and funders).

The survey work in 2006 showed only 2% of visitors using the green trails and 7% the blue trails and 43% red trails. However, as most of the new development took place late 2006 and during 2007 and Survey work undertaken in 2007 as part of this study suggests an increasing use of green trails at around 10% and blue trails at around 25%.

Anecdotal evidence, in discussions with FCS, the Hub in the Forest and other business partners, suggests that the novice, beginner and the family market is growing as a result of Phase 2 product developments.

- Saturday kids' club at Glentress is oversubscribed;
- more family groups of varying skills level, estimated at around 15% of Glentress demand;
- greater proportion of women and children than previously;
- more school/community groups – Craigmillar Youth Group, Dumfries and Galloway Schools etc;
- direct involvement in under 16 sections of cycle clubs –for example Peebles Cycle Club;
- increase in mountain biking skills tuition – for example see Hub in the Forest, Transcend and Dirt School etc.

The freeride park at Glentress is viewed by project partners as a major driver in attracting new people to the forests. It is perceived as a 'cool' product and is unique in 7stanes terms. It attracts families and youths to Glentress and is of a sufficient draw to attract visitors from South of the Border, directly boosting economic benefit to Scotland. Trail counters on only one of the top sections of the freeride park descents records usage in excess of 170,000 rides per annum.

9.2.2 Product Gaps

Even after this phase of product development, it is evident that there are still some product gaps – discussions would tend to indicate that the 'gap' is green and easier blue trails which can accommodate bike trailers and 'tag-a-longs'.

For example, the green trail at Kirroughtree is largely on the public road and visitor market research has revealed some dissatisfaction with this; also the blue trail at this site is too much of a 'jump up' – a better green off-road alternative is required (like Glentrool or the 'Blue Velvet' at Glentress). Likewise the blue ascent from the Hub at Glentress is too steep for some users. This, together with the new green trail and the success of the freeride area, has created a focus at the Buzzards Nest car park, putting added pressure and safety issues on the forest road access. It is obvious that there are still some local issues to be addressed at each 7stanes site and product 'tweaks' will be necessary in the future. Future capital money will still be required to address these local issues.

One area in which trail improvements need to be made is links off site, in terms of links to wilderness trails (see Scotland's core paths network), and more importantly links to communities. The 7stanes management, together with project partners such as Sustrans, Local Councils etc, need to better connect each site to its community (for example Laggan Wolftrax and proposed link between Peebles, Innerleithen and Glentress).

By their very nature, most of the forests are remote, away from their communities, and direct links should be improved, in particular:

- Kirroughtree - Newton Stewart;
- Dalbeattie - Dalbeattie;
- Glentress and Innerleithen - Peebles; and
- Mabie - Dumfries.

The 7stanes project over the last six years has undergone an intensive product development build programme, with continual refreshing and additions to the single track trail network. This has boosted visitor numbers, given significant PR opportunities, and driven repeat and multiple visits. In the future this type of intensive product development will not be possible. As a result, and also due to activity strategies across England and Wales, driven by FCS and the Regional Development Agencies, there will be increased competition, and visitor numbers will be at risk at the 7stanes sites.

Discussions have revealed that if the 7stanes is to maintain its market position into the future, a programme of trail feature enrichment will be required. This does not mean building extensive new trails, but a strategy of developing short 'option' loops and features are needed. This will help to drive repeat visits by giving the visitor a wider experience. It will also help to distribute visitors more evenly throughout the trail network and help with skills development progression i.e. adding 'optional' blue features on a green trail, red features on a blue trail, or black features on a red trail for example. The future funding of this enrichment is an issue, as it was not part of the original 7stanes project. Trail enrichment may also offer sponsorship opportunities (which may help fund them) – this needs investigation.

In-depth interviews carried out as part of the Innerleithen Uplift Study suggest that the uniqueness of the 7stanes is weakening. English forests are developing single track trails and this increasing competition could potentially lead to less visitors to Scotland in the future i.e. weakening the economic gain of the project in years to come. Visitors suggested, that in order to maintain a competitive advantage, unique products need to be developed which cannot easily be replicated. It was viewed that a chairlift at Innerleithen may be one such product giving access to fun gravity-fed trails for all levels, attracting families, novices, children, as well as expert and event mountain bike competitions. This project is currently under detailed investigation, which could position the Tweed Valley as one of the premier mountain bike destinations in the World.

9.2.3 Central Facilities

Each of the 7stanes sites, with the exception of Newcastleton (café was closed after three months of opening), already have or will have central facilities. This is more than was hoped for at the beginning of the Phase 2 project.

- it is hoped that Dalbeattie will have facilities provided by an adjacent private sector operator;

- Glentrool and Kirroughtree are 'traditional' seasonal forest visitor centres, but Brake Pad at Kirroughtree has added bike retail and rental provision. The Galloway Forest Park visitor centres are currently subject to review and remodelling of each centre is likely to be recommended;

- at Glentress, plans have been drawn up, a new site purchased, and planning permission granted for permanent forest visitor facilities. This will provide extended café seating, retail, bike hire and wider forest interpretation / orientation facilities; and

- at Ae, central facilities have been developed, incorporating bike shop, café, changing areas and toilets. A private sector operator has been signed up on a lease agreement.

9.2.4 Trail Maintenance

The consultants' visual review of the trails has shown evidence of continued and ongoing trail maintenance to a high standard. This includes maintenance and cutting of the undergrowth, trees etc, filling potholes, breaking bumps, improving drainage where necessary, eradicating trail erosion, and redesigning features and obstacles if necessary.

It has been suggested that in the future that routine maintenance could be helped and augmented by a managed volunteer labour force. This would only work for trail repairs or trail enriching where work could be carried out by hand at locations where a larger volunteer pool could be assembled, and the volunteers could be quality controlled by 7stanes technical staff. A volunteer system is worthy of investigation.

FCS have a liability to maintain the 7stanes trail network for a period of 15 years. However as part of this review, the consultants have not been able to establish the full maintenance cost for each trail / network – this needs to be prepared and recorded by FCS in the future.

9.2.5 Suggested Improvements

As part of future development suggested improvements include:

- feature enrich existing trails with addition of 'optional' loops and obstacles;

- continue to fill product gaps and hone trail network at a local level;

- improve physical trail links off site – link with core path networks, communities and businesses etc;

- ensure each centre can provide a sufficient range of trail products for skills progression;

- ensure that trail heads provide high quality central facilities and that the appropriate atmosphere – buzz is created / maintained;

- consider the introduction of new products to counter increasing competitive environment i.e. Innerleithen Uplift;

- introduce children's cycle play products and cycle mazes etc – link to existing general forest visitor centre facilities;

- maintain the 7stanes very high quality programme of trail maintenance, trail design and health and safety;

- consider the setting up of accredited volunteer labour force managed by 7stanes technical and project development staff; and

- record and plan in the future for full trail maintenance cost.

10. Conclusions and Future Direction

10.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conclusions for the study and some recommendations for future development. The conclusions are grouped around the study objectives.

10.2 Conclusions

10.2.1 Project Delivery

The partners have reported satisfaction with the project management and delivery and also the method and level of communication between FCS and the partner organisations. The communication with businesses and the wider community has also improved during Phase 2. The partnership approach has been a key strength of the project and it will be important to maintain this in the future.

What is particularly pleasing about the approach of the project team is that they have used the experiences from and evaluation of Phase 1 to provide a clear direction and Vision for Phase 2 (the extent to which this vision has been achieved is discussed later).

10.2.2 Performance Against Targets

A number of ERDF targets were set for Phase 2 of the project. Analysis of performance against these targets shows that:

- whilst there is still a reasonable proportion of expenditure to be undertaken, the project team anticipate the spend profile being very similar to that projected;

- the physical development (output) targets have already been exceeded in the Objective 2 area. In the Transitional area whilst not yet achieved, the project team anticipate reaching the targets by March 2008 based on the remaining build profile;

- the target for number of visitors has been surpassed at 222,000 (131% of target);

- the target for total number of gross jobs has been surpassed at 139.2 (204% of target); and

- the gross cost per job is well below the (implicit) target at £6,917 (target was £14,118).

The project has, therefore, performed very well against its ERDF target, having already exceeded or expected to achieve in the case of output targets and already exceeded the results targets.

10.2.3 Net Additional Impacts

However, to assess the ultimate impact on the local (South of Scotland) and national (Scottish) economies it is necessary to calculate the net economic impact. The net impacts take account of additionality, displacement and multipliers. The analysis shows that the impacts (and key factors contributing to these impacts) for the project (including Phase 1 and 2) are:

- just under 400,000 visitors (394,626, which would put it within the top twenty most popular visitor attractions in Scotland with similar visitor numbers to Stirling Castle);

- a large non-local market at 80%;

- there has been a shift in the balance of visitors from elsewhere in Scotland to elsewhere in the UK and overseas (thus a broadening in the geographic appeal of the 7stanes);

- increase in the proportion of visitors with children at 15% (up from 10% in 2004;

- an increase in the quality ratings of the trails at 75% very good (up from 68% in 2004);

- 37% overnight visitors (up from 25% in Phase 1);

- day visitor expenditure ranging from approximately £6-14 and overnight visitor expenditure ranging from £30-44 (both have increased from Phase 1);

- an increase in the length of stay to 2 nights for Scottish visitors (up from 1.7 in Phase 1) and UK and Overseas visitors 2.9 and 4.8 nights, respectively (up from an average of 2.3 in Phase 1);

- net additional impacts of:

  - £9.29m expenditure, 204.6 FTE jobs and £3.72m GVA at the South of Scotland level;

- £7.58m expenditure, 227.5 FTE jobs and £4.14m GVA at the Scottish level;

– an ERDF cost per net job of £8,396 (at the South of Scotland level) which is actually lower than the gross cost per job target; and

– a total public sector cost per job of £17,400 (some other recent tourism studies show a cost per job ranging from £15,000 to £25,000). So the 7stanes project performs relatively well within this range.

Whilst the increase in visitor numbers has generated additional impacts this is not the only reason, rather the increase in the proportion staying overnight, average length of stay and daily expenditure have also contributed to this. Therefore, all four factors have been key achievements of Phase 2. The project has performed very well in terms of net additional impacts and cost effectiveness.

10.2.4 Local Business Engagement

Phase 2 has seen more proactive engagement with local businesses by the project team and partners. This has included: development of a business development pack (that identifies opportunities for local businesses); providing access to text and logos from the 7stanes, working with the LECs to engage with business and developing two business groups (Tweeddale Consortium and a subgroup of the Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce). These groups are being proactive in progressing a number of activities/initiatives in order access the business opportunities generated by the development of the trails.

Results from the business survey show that the project has been directly contributing to new business formation. In 2004, the only on-site business was the Hub, whereas in 2007 there were further two and plans for others. In addition, existing businesses have also benefitted from the mountain biking market.

However, the impacts are not limited to onsite businesses. Two thirds of the offsite businesses interviewed experiencing increased sales. Also a good indicator of the benefits (current and potential) from the market is that a number of onsite and offsite businesses have undertaken/plan to undertake developments to meet the needs of mountain bikers.

However, whilst there has been significant progress in engaging with local businesses there are still opportunities to be realised in the future. One key consideration here will be whether that engagement is solely in terms of the opportunities from mountain biking or from the wider outdoor sports market. Having said that there is a need for input from both sides – public and private sector – it is about collaborative working. Another key point to consider is the future promotion, whilst individual businesses can promote 7stanes the promotional impact is much greater where businesses can collaborate in their promotional activities particularly the larger the geographic market being targeted.

10.2.5 Marketing and Promotion

A key recommendation of Phase 1 was that the project should have a strategic approach to marketing. This was achieved by preparing a three year marketing strategy in March 2006.

It can often be very difficult to establish a direct attributional link between marketing & promotion and its ultimate aims, in this case increased visitors, increased length of stay and a broader mix of visitors. The activities within the marketing strategy were aimed at increasing awareness within the UK market and within the broader market segment i.e. outwith the mountain bike enthusiast market. The re-launch of the website seems to have been successful with a much larger proportion of visitors using it to find out about the trails than previously.

It is clear from the analysis above that whilst the number of visitors has increased their length of stay and average spend has also increased. In addition, the proportion visiting with children has increased thus broadening the market appeal. The awareness of the brand has also increased significantly since Phase 1. Therefore this would seem to suggest that the more strategic approach to marketing has helped to bring about these changes in awareness and the market profile of visitors.

10.2.6 Achieving the Phase 2 Vision

There was a clear vision for Phase 2 of the project and the extent to which the various objectives within it have been achieved is discussed below.

Achieving Sustainable Economic Growth

As discussed earlier the project has performed very well in economic impact terms. Maintaining this in the future will be dependent on ensuring adequate maintenance, refreshment of the product and marketing and promotion in the future (these are discussed in greater detail later).

Building on the Reputation for Quality of Experience and Product

There has been good feedback on the quality of the product through media coverage of the trails, partners' comments and businesses but ultimately the true test is the feedback that is received directly from the mountain bikers using the sites. Analysis of the survey results shows that the ratings for the sites have improved over time with 75% rating them very good in 2007 (compared with 68% in 2004). This is very encouraging because the ratings have improved at the same time as the visitor numbers have more than doubled. A key factor going forward will be to maintain that quality reputation.

Working with More Business

As discussed earlier, the level of engagement with businesses has increased significantly since Phase 1. Businesses are deriving impacts from the market and have or plan to invest in facilities to meet the needs of the market. However, it is recognised that there is further work that can be undertaken in this area to increase the benefits for local business. There is also a need to consider how businesses may want to position themselves in promotional terms in the future i.e. will they want to promote themselves as part of a wider outdoors activity market?

Promoting Scotland Internationally

There is increased awareness of the brand with the survey showing that 96% where aware of the 7stanes brand compared with 75% in 2004. Awareness of other trails within the 7stanes has also increased since 2004. The proportion of the visitors from elsewhere in the UK and overseas has also increased since 2004.

However, the level of awareness of the 7stanes appears to be much higher for UK and Republic of Ireland visitors (78% from survey at World Championship) compared to overseas visitors (8% from same survey). However this is not a criticism of the project, it is more cost effective to undertake promotion in the UK market and it was sensible to focus on this market first.

Having now raised awareness amongst the UK and Republic of Ireland market there is a need to raise the profile in overseas markets. However, for promotion in overseas markets it may be more practical to work with VisitScotland in the wider promotion of Scotland in the English and overseas markets as a short break destination and try to obtain 7stanes brand exposure in more generic VisitScotland advertising campaigns.

Working with Schools, Youth Groups, Communities and Improving the Nation's Health

Phase 2 of the project has also seen a broadening in the types of users of the trails. Greater focus has been put on encouraging other types of user groups. There a number of different groups and indeed types of groups using the trails including schools, cycle/mountain bike clubs and specific community initiatives. These organising have varying objectives that the 7stanes is helping to contribute towards including tackling anti-social behaviour, promoting healthy living, building confidence, generating an interest in mountain biking and fitness in general, and enhancing the skills of users so that they can utilise the facilities more fully.

It is recognised by the partners that there is more than can be done in this area and other initiatives are under development such as Stepping Stanes.

In terms of improving the Nation's health it is recognised that keeping fit (linked to a balanced diet) are the key ways to achieving this. Many of the people that are participating in mountain biking may already be people that undertake regular exercise. However, where it is raising their fitness levels this will help to contribute to their health.

Also in Phase 2 there was a focus on developing lower grade trails aimed at encouraging a wider market including families, children, those that are beginners and novices. Where there is increasing concern over the level of physical activity being undertaken by people, in particular children, any activity that can encourage interest and as a by product increase activity levels should be encouraged. Whilst it is very difficult to quantify, this broadening the market should hopefully help encourage higher activity levels amongst participants (note the very direct link to schools in the Dumfries and Galloway area which will be helping to contribute to the aims of active schools and the Stakeford Groups specific initiative where increasing fitness levels was a key objective).

Further development in this area is also dependent to an extent on identifying other organisations to collaborate with. The 7stanes team do not have the time and resources to run social or health initiatives but they could identify and encourage participation by more of the organisations that do deliver these kinds of initiatives (a good example of one that has already operated by the Stakeford Group).

10.3 Future Direction

As discussed above the project has performed well in economic impacts terms whilst significant progress had been made in engaging with local businesses and encouraging wider user groups (although there is scope for further development of these latter activities in the future). However, a key issue for the project is the sustainability of what has been achieved to date. This is particularly important in the face of increasing competition, both within and outwith Scotland. Whilst maintaining the product will be important in the future this will not be sufficient to increase the market size, rather refreshing and promotion of the product will also be required.

Indeed support beyond simply maintaining the trails will be required to maintain the present market scale. The risk of limiting support to maintenance only is that the market size begins to decline over time.

The project team are considering some different options for taking the project forward in the future. However, whichever option is selected it will need to be able to deliver against a key set of objectives for the future which will include:

- a partnership approach to ensure that the right skills and forms of support can be provided;
- ongoing maintenance of the trails to ensure that the quality reputation is maintained;
- refreshing the product to ensure continued interest from the market. This will not be on the capital investment scale experienced in Phase 1 and 2 but rather would be based on provision of short 'option' loops and features (for example offering 'optional' blue features on a green trail or red features on a blue trail);
- product 'tweaks' at certain sites, there are still some local issues to be addressed at some of the sites;
- establishing links offsite through partnership with other organisations such as Sustrans, Local councils etc;
- marketing and developing the brand. Further marketing particularly to overseas markets is required but there is a need to co-ordinate this with VisitScotland promotional activity. There is also a need to consider the most appropriate way forward for the brand and how it will fit with other wider brands such as Tweed Valley, Solway Coast, Galloway Forest etc or development of an outdoor activities brand for the area;

- developing further business opportunities. Whilst businesses need to develop their own responses to the market opportunities. They also need to understand the overall strategic approach for the facilities in the future to encourage them to investment with confidence about the future product;

- broadening the scale of social/community use. Whilst a 7stanes project or FCS could not deliver this there is a role in encouraging other organisations to do so;

- identifying the potential for sponsorship opportunities (this would require discussions with the Scottish Government, UK Government and SoSEP to clarify and conditions/criteria that apply to sponsorship and whether it could be used to support future development of 7stanes); and

- identifying other potential sources of income (i.e. merchandising, car park fees etc).

Ultimately it is about having a transitional phase to develop a model that can deliver long term management and sustainability of the facilities and reduce the public sector funding required over time.

A study is currently underway to develop a national tourism strategy for mountain biking. 7stanes is a key asset within the mountain biking sector in Scotland and therefore it and its future development will have a key role in helping to support the national strategy.

10.4 Future Monitoring

In terms of appropriate performance measures these could include:

- spend (both private and public with the aim of increasing private sector spend);

- km of trails where maintenance has been undertaken and km of product refreshed;

- number of links to offsite facilities achieved;

- investment in marketing and promotion, and number reached within each target market;

- number of businesses participating through the respective business groups in each area;

- number of social/community groups using the trails;

- value of sponsorship secured and increase in income generated;
- number of visitors; and
- visitor origin, length of stay, and expenditure and employment impacts (although these unlike those above would be evaluation indicators rather than monitoring indicators).