

Report of the
EAI Charter
Network Meeting

Birmingham and
Midland Institute
Birmingham

Friday 10th May 2013



EUROPARC
Atlantic Isles

Conservation Without Frontiers

Introduction of
participants

- Mark Allum, Yorkshire Dales National Park
- Richard Blackman, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles
- Richard Clarke, National Association for AONBs
- Richard Denman, Charter Evaluation Committee
- Sue Goodfellow, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles (Chair)
- Harold Goodwin, Leeds Metropolitan University
- Barbara Grantham, Dragonfly Consulting
- Nicola Greaves, Cotswold Conservation Board
- Richard Hammond, greentraveller.co.uk
- Bruce Hanson, Broads Authority
- Samantha Isaac, Northumberland Coast AONB
- Nikki Moore, Wye Valley AONB
- Andrea Nicholas, Green Tourism Business Scheme
- Mike Pugh, Forest of Bowland AONB
- Rosie Simpson, Charter verifier
- Maxime Sizaret, Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
- Richard Tyler, Brecon Beacons National Park

Participants'
updates

Yorkshire Dales NPA: new action plan and strategy prepared in advance of the Charter re-evaluation by verifier Bettina Kreisel in April; Businesses have been having a tough time in the current economic climate; planning is beginning for the 2014 Tour de France.

EUROPARC Atlantic Isles: project proposal (POSTIE) submitted for Leonardo partnership, involving tourism businesses. News expected in July.

Brecon Beacons NPA: first year of Interreg Rural Alliances project, this includes training ambassadors and certification. Worked on Dark Skies certification which has also included training of ambassadors. The park is working on a visitor management plan that will be ready in draft by the end of July. This links to a branding project.

The Broads Authority: STEP Interreg project by the end of June; updating of the Enjoy the Broads website, development of more green content, which has been put into the App. A visitor payback

programme, Love the Broads, is being developed.

Green Tourism Business Scheme: Now encompasses 2300 businesses with six full-time assessors, engaging with big hotel groups. Looking to expand the company. (See later presentation).

Harold Goodwin / Leeds Met: preparing for major conference on 6th June, Paying for the Landscape, Antarctica. (See also later presentation).

Greentraveller: Now working with 21 protected areas, including four Charter Parks. Perthshire Green Resorts. Working on producing more services for destinations. (See also later presentation).

Richard Denman / Evaluation Cttee: Ev Cttee meets at the end of June to review Charter verifications; Has started working with Gower AONB in his capacity as Director of The Tourism Company.

Northumberland Coast AONB: has been undertaking consultation, interviews, aims and objectives of tourism strategy, which will be put to its working group in June.

Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust: working on Interreg IVb (Atlantic region) project “Go Sustainable”; incorporating sustainable tourism into everything they do; working on an artisans’ project “Craft International” in an Interreg Northern Periphery project; working towards Charter Part II.

Richard Clarke: was with SEEPL, but is now seconded to NAAONB as National Policy and Development Manager with a sustainable tourism portfolio, and in this role is developing an accord with Defra and Visit England.

Cotswolds Conservation Board: working on implementation of Our Land, and looking to develop Charter Part II, enhancing business networking. They now have 90 businesses working under the Our Land banner. Visitor Giving Scheme to be launched in a trial.

Rosie Simpson: Verifying Zemaitija National Park in Lithuania, which is part of the countryside homesteads network, strong on crafts, and interpretation.

Wye Valley AONB: Working through its action plan, tourism liaison group has changed significantly recently. Working on establishing a river Festival and a five year marketing strategy.

Forest of Bowland AONB: Bringing management and sustainable tourism strategies together. Working with farmers on a stewardship project, on an App for deer parks. Electric bicycle network has been

launched with some SDF money, but mostly from business contributions. The Bowland Experience continues to grow and its profits have been reinvested in the charity, which has helped with funding in recent years. 2014 is the 50th anniversary of the AONB and brings with it opportunities for tourism and education.

There was a request for sharing information on visitor payback schemes!

Harold
Goodwin, ICRT,
Leeds

Britain has one of the world's most successful certification schemes in the GTBS. Visitors will always make some impact.

Metropolitan
University

The diversity of the world meant that there were great variations in sustainability. Whilst there are global issues, notably carbon emissions, others such as water deficits vary from place to place. Most issues are local and particular, and the question of who determines priorities is an important one. It is often easy to get brownie points, but what is it that makes a difference? There is no global market in this field; in the UK, ABTA state that the main issue for consumers is animal welfare, but this is not mentioned in the GSTC.

What's the role
of
certification?

What is certification for? Initially for recognition, then for marketing advantage, and then for measuring sustainability, for example in demonstrating reduction in consumption. Cost-cutting is important in this respect for hotels. For protected landscapes it's not about individual businesses.

There are currently two approaches, one for certification and one for sustainability reporting. They are not mutually exclusive. The public sector has been influential in their development. Protected landscapes have an interest in sustainable places as it is sustainable destinations that provide sustainable holidays. With places it's not just about business.

Criticisms of certification

Long lists (of criteria) – for example the GSTC - often reduce things to a lowest common denominator;

Often easy things are done, rather than important or challenging;

Impacts are often local;

Opacity of certification. How do you experience the difference?;

Lack of recompense as a consumer – there's no contract between certifier and consumer;

Who certifies? Are the criteria applied objectively, fairly and robustly?

Who polices the certifiers?

Churn in membership of certification schemes can reflect success rather than failure.

Measuring success involves waste, water, air pollution reductions.

Increases local sourcing. Outcomes and impacts rather than numbers of certified businesses. Interesting information is available at www.rtreporting.org

Sustainability is a destination level issue. Transparency in reporting is increasingly an issue.

Presentation available at: http://www.europarc-ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Certification_HGoodwin_at_EAI_Charter_Network_May_2013.pdf

Andrea
Nicholas, GTBS
Green Tourism
Update

GTBS calls itself a grading programme rather than a certification programme. It works on the principles of ISO 14001, and has a local emphasis. It's a private, not-for-profit company.

Four principles of sustainable tourism were highlighted. For reasons of transparency businesses are encouraged to inform guests about the GTBS and sustainable tourism.

GTBS work internationally, and is currently part of a project with Visit Scotland in Sweden.

Membership is distributed throughout the UK (see slide for details) and there are now more than 2300 businesses that have gained membership of the programme. Hotel chains are a growth area.

Distribution of bronze, silver and gold members was also discussed. Retention rates are highest at the gold level; motivation can be lost at the lower levels. The biggest reason for ceasing membership is economic, especially in 2009 (coinciding with the recession).

Businesses join for personal environmental reasons (94%), for marketing advantage (84%), and to improve quality of experience (74%). 8% have reduced their running costs as a result.

Several benefits of membership were outlined, including hands-on bespoke advice, the action plan and monthly technical newsletter, as well as supplier discounts.

In the future, the GTBS criteria will be updated for 2014, involving stakeholder consultation in the autumn of 2013. The first GTBS conference will take place on 8th November 2013, and will include an awards ceremony.

A question was asked on the how the final decision on the grade is made. Assessors are trained. Gold goes to committee, with two or three assessors.

The presentation by Andrea Nicholas of the Green Tourism Business Scheme is available at: http://www.europarc-ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/GTBS_at_EAI_Charter_Network_May_2013.pdf

**Offer to
Charter
Protected
Areas**

Following the discussions at the meeting GTBS made an offer that any business that joins the GTBS through a certified EUROPARC 'Charter Park' Europarc would be eligible for an offer based on their on-going promotion of GTBS, which would include waiving the £75 one-off joining fee and a discount of 10% on annual fees.

This would be organised directly with each EUROPARC Charter Park so there is a direct contact and means of checking if businesses are working with the Charter and the protected area.

It could also help in meeting the Part II requirements that some of the destinations are working with and encourage businesses to remain in Green Tourism and even attract some new applications to working proactively with Green Tourism.

Richard Tyler,
Brecon
Beacons
National Park
Green Tourism

Protected landscapes are part of the (GTBS) client base too – even if not directly.

Sustainable tourism is fundamental to sustainable rural development. What else will keep services going? Sustainable tourism is central to destination management, of which protected areas are a key part.

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy cannot be produced or implemented in isolation.

Being Green makes good business sense. Six training days have been held around this theme with a number of partner organisations. It also requires some form of green certification and businesses in the park have been working with the GTBS. This in turn is seen as a core part of destination management and Charter Part II.

It has been difficult to measure outcomes, as opposed to outputs.

Marketing activities have included working successfully with greentraveller.

Key challenges have included:

- identifying businesses to work with;
- the fact that 'quick wins' get done but that more can require expensive investment;
- payment;
- whether destinations need certification more than businesses?
- The future of grading and whether it could be replaced by user generated content (UGC), but this isn't necessarily compatible with

green certification. More work is to be done here, in partnership with GTBS.

The park will work with the current model but is exploring the possibility of other options.

http://www.europarc-ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/R_Tyler_BBNP_Green-tourism_at-EAI-Charter-Network_May-2013.pdf

Mike Pugh,
Forest of
Bowland AONB

Update on
Charter Part II
implementation

Should we be revising EAI's Part II methodology?

Membership in the Charter scheme peaked at 39 Charter partners, who acquired GTBS status. There are now 28 businesses meeting the EAI requirements. 17 members have been lost to the sustainable tourism partner scheme, because they had not renewed their GTBS membership. This was often due to economic reasons or changes in management.

Businesses are often more interested in identifying with the destination than with schemes such as GTBS, Visit England, which brings with it concerns over quality assurance.

Discussion

The following points were made in the discussion:

Alignment of management plan and sustainable tourism strategy in Forest of Bowland important.

Data collection:

- In looking at consumption patterns, water companies could provide aggregated business data on tourism businesses.
- The pursuit of perfect data harms the pursuit of good data! It's a matter of taking the first leap. Progress can nonetheless be made. A lot of data can be collected from the bottom up, which could be very interesting.
- Sharing could be useful too. It can be useful at the micro level, and offer a start at a macro level.
- There is a need for the process to be embedded to ensure continuity and counteract swings in government policies.
- Sometimes businesses, especially small family businesses, can't disaggregate data.

Regarding visitor feedback Trip Advisor is certainly useful, but for assessing greenness it's more difficult. Greentraveller is assessing this though.

The use of public money in supporting businesses was also raised. Some were more than happy to 'shout about' their businesses, as no public money is being given. Where support is offered, how do you

select partners?

A discussion began on the advantages and disadvantages of the GSTC approach.

Update on
EUROPARC
Federation
Sustainable
Tourism
Working Group

Mike Pugh provided an update on the EUROPARC Federation's sustainable tourism working group. He explained that although work had stalled recently work had been undertaken on revising the second part of the Charter. Any changes could have an impact on this group, especially those implementing Part II.

In the discussion it was noted that Part I is separate and that Part II should not get in the way of implementing Part I. The question of whether we actually need a Part II was raised, as partnerships are already being developed under Part I, in the forum for example. Partnership is important and the relationship between the protected area and its partners is the key factor.

Green
certification:
Should we be
revising EAI's
Charter Part II
methodology?

A number of views were expressed on Part II, which reflected the fact that some UK Charter Parks want to use it and that others do not:

- That it has a value in engaging businesses and giving businesses a lead, even if it does need reviewing.
- That many business partners are already acting in the spirit of the Charter.
- Thinking is evolving on partnership and certification. We should be looking at partnership.
- It is sensible that Part II is implemented at park level, but it is a European issue if used in a different way.
- The European Charter works very well at area level but at the business level, the European dimension is not (seen as) important.
- 'Our Land' provides a mechanism to work with businesses in the form of a 'promise to the landscape'.

Whatever we have should be meaningful, even if only a few parks use it. Part II should be retained for those who want to use it. We can't remove fundamental elements, but a review is possible.

It was agreed that Mike Pugh make a suggestion to review the text, and that this be circulated. He thought it should be amended so that neither quality grading nor an Ecolabel be compulsory for a partner business, but that this should rather be encouraged. The proposal is included in the Annex to this report.

Short
presentations
from within
the network

Our Land

Richard Clarke, although now working for the NAAONBs rather than South East & East Protected Landscapes, which had led the work on Our Land, provided an update.

and partner organisations

An evaluation had been undertaken by EUROPARC Consulting, which had been challenging in some areas. It had identified achievements, but noted that some improvements were necessary in communications, that economic benefits needed to be demonstrated more clearly, and that governance arrangements needed to be clearer. The evaluation report can be circulated.

The initiative is now in its final year of RDP funding and there will be a need to generate some income once public funding is lost. Road shows are continuing around the country, highlighting the opportunities in collaborating. It is not a requirement to join!

greentraveller

Richard Hammond outlined the work of greentraveller as a publishing and marketing agency. It does not certify. It focuses on visitor experience, including accommodation businesses, local food and drink, visitor attractions, craft and local culture, locally-run activities and public transport. Visits to the destination are undertaken, and services such as social media and video production are offered.

Uniqueness of each place is important, but there are similarities highlighted as a group (of protected landscapes) too. An example destination was shown, which also included a link to train tickets, whilst places are connected with attractions and activities.

There is a content sharing partnership with Visit England.

1205 businesses are currently listed, with more in Powys and Cornwall to come.

The challenges faced by destination partners were illustrated together with the work that greentraveller does to address them.

A video from Powys was shown demonstrating the value of video for imparting understanding of sustainable tourism.

The importance of video in search engines was highlighted.

Interaction with images, e.g. on Facebook, can enable information sharing between residents and visitors.

The presentation is available at: http://www.europarc-ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Greentraveller_EAI_Birmingham_May2013.pdf

EUROPARC & Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

Mike Pugh gave an overview of the work of the GSTC as an

accreditation system for accreditation systems, as well as the meeting that the Federation working group had with representatives of the GSTC in Hanover in March 2013.

Full details are available in the presentation here:

<http://www.euoparc-ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Hannover-Report-March2013-MPugh-for-EAI.pdf>

Next activities The proposal to review the second part of the Charter would be circulated, initially among those interested in implementing it, before agreeing on a proposal.

The next meeting of the group could take place in the autumn either before or after EAI's planned training seminar on the rural economy.

ANNEX

EUROPARC Atlantic Isles Section

Guidelines for implementing Part II of the Charter.

Proposed revised wording for paragraph 5.

“5. The Business Partners

5.1 Accreditation

The PA Forum will encourage business partners to achieve and maintain a relevant quality grading certificate recognised by the national tourism body. In the absence of such certification the Forum (through the PA authority) will use its discretion to assess the quality of the services offered by a business.

The Forum will also encourage businesses to achieve and maintain an eco-accreditation appropriate to the operation and recognised by the national tourism authority. Where either no suitable scheme is available or the resources to achieve one are lacking, the Partner should demonstrate a positive attitude to sustainable tourism. This will be verified by the business’s Action Plan.”

M. J. Pugh

Forest of Bowland AONB

May 2013.

Existing Wording

5 The Business Partners

5.1 Eco-accreditation

Where an existing eco-labeling scheme exists, the business shall have achieved a form of eco-accreditation recognised by the Protected Area Authority, normally one recognised by the national tourism body (e.g. Green Tourism Business Scheme or Green Dragon), or alternatively one set up and run by the PA Authority.

Where neither a suitable scheme nor the resources to put one in place exist, the business partners should demonstrate a positive attitude to environmental management, backed by action. This will be verified as part of the Agreed Action Plan.

The business shall have achieved a **grading** recognised by the national tourism body if one is available for that business type. If none is available, the assessment shall be at the discretion of the PA Authority.