

Green Tourism Business Scheme in the Cairngorms National Park

Prepared by: Heather Galbraith, Sustainable Tourism Officer

Purpose: To update the ViSIT Forum on the recent series of seminars to boost numbers of businesses within the Green Tourism Business Scheme.

Background

1. One of the key priorities highlighted within the CNP Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action Plan is to strengthen participation in sustainable standards scheme, such as the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS). The GTBS is a VisitScotland quality assurance scheme operated by Green Business UK Ltd, a not for profit company. Awards under the scheme are made at bronze, silver or gold level.
2. In August 2005, only 24 businesses within the Cairngorms area were members of the scheme. Businesses have to be members of the relevant VisitScotland Quality Assurance scheme to sign up to GTBS. Where an appropriate QA scheme does not exist, VisitScotland have piloted a code of conduct agreement in the Cairngorms and this will roll out in late March.
3. In setting criteria for use of the Cairngorms Brand, it was agreed that businesses would have to meet criteria related to a) quality and b) environmental good practice. For most tourism businesses, the GTBS is the most accessible way to demonstrate environmental good practice, but take-up has traditionally been quite low. Feedback from businesses has shown that the main barriers to take-up of the scheme are the associated membership costs, and perceived lack of marketing benefit.

GTBS Seminars

4. In association with VisitScotland, two initial seminars were held, in Aviemore on 5th Dec 2005, and Ballater on 8th Dec 2005. Due to demand, a further seminar was later added in Boat of Garten in 31st January 2006. A total of 58 people attended the seminars, representing 53 different businesses. The majority of attendees were from Badenoch & Strathspey, with a disappointing turnout of only 8 delegates at the seminar in Ballater.
5. The aims of the seminars were:
 - To give businesses the opportunity to learn more about GTBS, including simple practical measures of environmental good practice.
 - To promote the benefits of GTBS membership.
 - To give information on further free sources of advice on related issues, such as energy efficiency.
6. The seminars were promoted by mailshot to all quality-assured businesses within the National Park, as well as to all attendees at the 2005 Cairngorms Tourism Conference. Press releases were also issued to local papers and details of the seminars were included in the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce e-newsletter. A significant number of delegates at the January event had been recommended to attend by those who had been to an earlier seminar.
7. As a further incentive to join the scheme, businesses who had attended a seminar were offered a free on-site follow-up visit by a GBUK assessor. If, at the time of the visit, the business was found to meet the criteria for at least bronze level of the award, they were eligible to join the scheme, and VisitScotland agreed to waive the usual joining fee and first year's membership fee.
8. A total of 28 businesses from the first two seminars signed up for the follow-up site visit, and so far 16 new awards have been made – 7 at bronze level and 9 at silver level. Site-visits and assessments are ongoing, particularly for those businesses who attended the later seminar.

Next steps

9. An update on the number of awards made will be presented at the next ViSIT Forum meeting in May. This will include information from businesses assessed in March site visits, as well as business who will by then be able to sign up to the VisitScotland code of conduct agreement, allowing GTBS membership without QA membership.
10. VisitScotland have agreed to fund another seminar on the same basis and this will be scheduled for later in the Spring.
10. GBUK and CNPA have discussed the possibility of establishing a 'green business club' in the area. This would allow GTBS members to discuss relevant issues and share best practice.