

'Love the Broads' Visitor Giving Initiative
Report by STEP Project Officer

Summary: Broads Forum members have previously been informed that a visitor giving initiative was to be established in the Broads, as part of the STEP Interreg programme. This report provides an update on the implementation of the pilot project involving seven tourism businesses during the summer season of 2012, and looks ahead to the future development of the scheme.

1 Introduction – The Vision

- 1.1 The tourism industry depends to a considerable degree upon the natural attractions of the Broads, yet it inevitably adds to the pressures on this already fragile environment. In simple terms, visitor giving (or visitor payback, as it is sometimes called) means persuading visitors to direct a small proportion of their spending towards the conservation of the natural or historic environment, typically through a tourism business. But it can be about much more than that as well.
- 1.2 It can convert the emotive value of a place into a literal financial value, and it is capable of tapping deep into the psyche of the visitor who feels a direct and emotional connection with the landscape. Furthermore, it connects the visitor with those who care for the landscape, and sitting in between them is the businessman who profits from both.
- 1.3 Yet everyone can be winners here, and profiting most of all can be the landscape itself. Businesses understand the need to invest in their own product, and garnering investment in The Broads itself is the next logical step. The key is to capture the 'wow' factor of the destination – or perhaps its spiritual essence - and to transform that into a desire to do something positive to nurture it.

2 Visitor Giving – The Basic Mechanics

- 2.1 Every business is different, and there are many models for raising cash. Asking for very little, but from a lot of people is most efficacious, and it should be in a way that is as unobtrusive as possible. It might be a small supplement on the ticket price for an attraction or the cost of bike or boat hire, 5p or 10p on a cup of tea perhaps, or a pound or two on a restaurant or accommodation bill, etc.

- 2.2 Opt-out is the Holy Grail of fund-raising. It has an extremely low refusal rate, and once set up it costs little to run. There should be clear information to inform customers of the scheme at or near the point of sale, but often people may be completely unaware that they are contributing at all. But indeed they might do so two or three times in one day – for example, having a meal, buying a boat ticket, and then using accommodation that is a member of the scheme. The businesses would not, however, seek to ‘hide’ the contributory element, as they can gain considerable marketing advantage from being seen to be raising funds for a good cause in this way.
- 2.3 A membership scheme will encourage regular individual giving, and it is already possible to donate online or by text. It is planned also to look at other opportunities such as legacies and direct business sponsorship for specific projects.
- 2.4 ‘Love the Broads’ was set up and implemented by the Broads Authority, using EU funding from the STEP Interreg programme. It is an absolute imperative, however, that the money raised is not seen to be going to any kind of ‘Authority’, or ‘the council’ etc., and for this reason the scheme is now owned and administered by the Broads Trust, a completely independent registered charity.
- 2.5 Ideas on where funds for the initial period of administration until stability is reached, in hopefully a couple of years, would be most welcome

3 Where Will the Money Go?

- 3.1 The aim is to raise funds for the following:
- Protecting the environment
 - Funding conservation works
 - Developing sustainable tourism projects
 - Access and interpretation infrastructure
 - Supporting education about the environment.

But... the money should not be used to replace the existing statutory work of other agencies/authorities which has been affected by the recent funding cuts!

- 3.2 A number of specific projects have already been identified, and ideas for others are always welcome. The Broads Trust is in the process of establishing a small grants panel to administer applications and allocate funding. Individuals may not apply, but a wide range of constituted groups or organisations are eligible. Money from Visitor Giving is ‘clean’, and it can be used to match-fund any other source.

4 The Pilot Project

- 4.1 It was decided at the outset that a small pilot project should be run in the first season, as a learning exercise before attempting to operate the scheme on a larger scale. Businesses were approached initially through Broads Tourism,

and all those who were asked to participate agreed with enthusiasm: Broadland Cycle Hire, Ferry Marina, The Dairy Barns, Norfolk Broads Direct, Wroxham Barns, Clippesby Holidays and Bank Boats.

- 4.2 Two or three of these companies could not start collecting immediately, for various operational reasons, but the others were able to implement their collection mechanisms in time for the main summer season. All of them report a highly positive response from the public, with very low refusal rates – exactly in line with experience in the Lake District, where more than £2 Million has been raised in this way over the last 17 years.
- 4.3 The target for the first season was a modest £5,000, and the active businesses appear to be on track for their own individual targets, despite a difficult period of trading this year. A substantial donation was also received from a private individual.
- 4.4 The STEP Interreg Programme was able to fund a further strand of income generation through the production of pin badges, which are offered in attractive display/donation boxes. These can be made available to other outlets as well as the participating businesses, and they are already performing well in raising money.

5 The Future

- 5.1 Funds will soon be allocated to the first beneficiary project(s) and it is essential to build quickly on the success of the pilot scheme. The business plan envisages significant expansion over the first five years and a campaign this winter is planned to recruit a further group of businesses in time to start collecting money from Easter onwards.
- 5.2 There is great enthusiasm in many quarters for the 'Love the Broads' initiative. All the signs are that it can be a considerable and on-going success in the Broads, following the Lake District model. The key challenge for the Broads Trust, however, is reaching the goal of economic sustainability. There are significant, continuing and growing administrative implications, and these will have to be addressed. Ideas on where funds for the initial period of administration until stability is reached, in hopefully a couple of years, would be most welcome. The seed funding provided by STEP is now finished, and the Trust is currently seeking other sources of support in this early period.
- 5.3 Visitor Giving schemes have been run in a number of other parts of the country, but only that in the Lake District can be said to be truly successful. Too often schemes are set up but then just left to their own devices, and at best these will merely 'tick over'. Some have simply withered and died. The key to success or otherwise is the involvement of the business community.

- 5.4 It is essential that the participating businesses are driving the scheme (and seen to be driving the scheme), as well as being out there collecting the cash. That is the secret of the success of the Lake District Tourism and Conservation Partnership, which was only very recently formed into a charity and renamed Nurture Lakeland. The business community in the Lakes is clearly bigger than that in the Broads, but we are very fortunate here in that we have some top-class performers (both big and small) who are able to take a lead, and there is every reason to be optimistic that 'Love the Broads' will succeed.
- 5.5 It will be very helpful to hear of any suggestions on how Broads Forum members might be able to disseminate the principles and practices of visiting given to their organisations, helping more businesses to become involved, generating good project ideas and passing on creative ways of getting visitor contributions.

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Broads Plan Objectives: None

Appendices: None