

Sustainable Tourism Partnership

1st Meeting

24 August 2006, Scottish Seabird Centre

Present

Tom Brock, Scottish Seabird Centre (Chair)
Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Patricia Ferguson MSP [for first half of meeting]
Alan Rankin, Scottish Tourism Forum
Steve Hunt, Scottish Natural Heritage
Jane Clark, Scottish Natural Heritage
Kirsten Davidson, Scottish Executive
Penny George, Scottish Executive
Sandy Dear, VisitScotland
Willie McLeod, VisitScotland
John Ward, Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Katrina Morrison, Scottish Enterprise
Chris Taylor, Cairngorms National Park
Carron Tobin, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
Ian Gardner, National Trust for Scotland
Tom Hunter, Stirling Council (representing SLAED)
Bob Aitken, Scottish Environment Link
John Summers, Keep Scotland Beautiful
Paul Jennings, Dundee Science Centre (representing ASVA)
Jenny Hess, Historic Scotland
Terry Levinthal, Scottish Civic Trust

Apologies

Bob Kinnaird, Cairngorm Mountain

Action

1. Welcome and introductions

Tom Brock (TB) welcomed everyone present, and introductions were made.

2. Welcome from the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport

TB introduced the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, who was invited to formally open the Partnership. The Minister welcomed the diverse range of organisations represented around the table, and reminded everyone that the establishment of the STP is a key milestone in the recently published Tourism Framework for Change (TFFC). She stressed that it is vital we see sustainable tourism as incorporating economic, social, and environmental benefits.

3. Tourism Framework for Change – Update

Kirsten Davidson (KD) gave a summary of the TFFC, which was published in March this year. This strategy was developed in an innovative way, being primarily industry-led and drawn together in full partnership with the Scottish Executive, VisitScotland (VS), and

other relevant public bodies. It revolves around the key target of increasing revenues from tourism by 50% over the decade to 2015, and is underpinned by the central theme of sustainability and our ambition to make Scotland Europe's most sustainable tourism destination by 2015. There are various action points throughout the strategy for both the public and private sectors to take forward, and two key targets relating to sustainability. The overall aim is that we must work together to ensure that sustainable tourism as a concept is mainstreamed throughout the industry.

Tom Brock has agreed to act as 'sustainability champion', helping to promote the concept and encourage businesses Scotland-wide to get on board.

4. Sustainable Tourism Unit - Update

Sandy Dear gave a brief outline of the role of the new Sustainable Tourism Unit (STU) within VS. He explained that he has made the transition from heading up the now-disbanded Tourism and Environment Forum, to being Manager of VS's Sustainable Tourism Unit. The STU's primary role is to develop and implement VS's internal environmental policy and baseline environmental targets. He is currently co-ordinating the upcoming 'Green Week' in VS (beginning of October) to raise awareness of these issues amongst staff, and is working closely with the Tourism Innovation Group on the proposed carbon offset scheme for Scottish tourism. Willie McLeod added that it is important for VS to work in full partnership with others, as they alone cannot be responsible. Sandy's role is to help improve sustainability both within and outwith VS.

5. Role of Sustainable Tourism Partnership

TB outlined how he sees the role of the STP. He stressed that Scotland can lead the way in sustainable tourism, and is already doing so in certain respects. It is vital that the STP be a pro-active group that identifies and implements real actions to be taken forward not just a 'talking shop'.

It was agreed that there is an important communications job to be done and that we need to have a clear definition of 'sustainable tourism' that can be easily understood by the industry and easily translated into how it relates to profitable growth. It was agreed that the definition in the Tourism Framework for Change should be used.

Katrina Morrison (KM) added that we need to measure the scale of opportunity, and suggested that we might use case studies of businesses whose bottom line has benefited from using sustainable business practices.

Jenny Hess (JH) observed that within Historic Scotland, the implementation of the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) was what caused the 'light-bulb' to go on for staff, as they could see the results of their actions directly. The Minister reported that the Executive is using the commitment of Ministers and officials to stay in Green Tourism Business Scheme-accredited accommodation when travelling on business as one way of getting the message across. The Minister felt it was also important to keep repeating the message of the 3 aspects of sustainability – social, economic and environmental - to discourage people from focusing solely on the environmental side.

Jane Clark (JC) suggested that there might be a potential conflict of objectives if sustainability is to incorporate social, economic and environmental aspects – there could be issues with determining which of these should take priority. She suggested that the role of the STP could be navigating a way through this potential conflict to recommend the best course of action for businesses.

WM suggested that there is not only an advocacy role incumbent on all the organisations present, but that all the organisations have a role in taking action or supporting action. Good intentions in discussing sustainable tourism must translate to action. It was agreed that change will need to be made primarily by tourism businesses, and that while some of the organisations around the table did run businesses themselves, most would be responsible for providing encouragement and support. TB explained that many of the representatives present were invited from umbrella organisations, in order that they can go back to their members or colleagues, and encourage active engagement.

ALL

A key role of the group is help direct and steer the work of the STU.

6. **Support for Partnership (admin, funding etc)**

TB explained that the secretariat for the STP is kindly being provided by the Scottish Executive. There is no core funding for this group, but specific project funding is available.

VS are contributing in kind through provision of staff (Sandy and colleague) who will co-ordinate the projects undertaken by the group.

7. **Membership of Partnership**

TB explained that invites had been sent to the relevant individuals and organisations whom he felt to be pro-active and able to ‘make things happen’. He asked if the group felt anyone was missing or not represented, or if anyone thought their involvement was not appropriate. IG commented that the accommodation sector was not represented. AR suggested inviting somebody from the Association of Self Caterers and/or the Chair of the Scottish Committee of the British Hospitality Association. KM commented that perhaps the social inclusion and skills side of tourism is not currently represented on the group, from an industry point of view. WM pointed out that transport is not represented on the group, and the Confederation of Passenger Transport was suggested as an appropriate representative to be approached.

TB

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a small sub-group charged with delivery. SH, CT, TH, and AR all volunteered for this smaller action group, and the Chair will have further discussions with other Partnership members to complete the group.

TB

8. **STP Chair**

The group agreed that Tom Brock should act as Chair for the Partnership, providing some continuity from his role as Chair for the Tourism and Environment Forum previously.

9/10. Actions and measures of success/Research

It was agreed that research is probably required first. In order to measure whether we are becoming more sustainable, we need to know what we're going to measure, and what our baselines are. We also need to identify opportunities for and gaps in current sustainable tourism development. For example, CT made the suggestion that perhaps there is a gap in our knowledge of the social impact of tourism, and of how communities can play a bigger role. Similarly, it was suggested that the consumer is making the switch very quickly to demand more 'sustainable' products and that it will soon be required of businesses to have environmental credentials. However, while there is evidence to demonstrate this in relation to 'green' issues more generally, there is none specific to tourism.

SH told the group that he has drafted a research brief since a previous meeting with the STP project funders and that this was currently being considered. JC suggested we should work closely with the Executive's Scottish Landscapes Forum, and should perhaps consider joint research with them in future. TL suggested that it will be important to benchmark Scotland against other European destinations. CT mentioned that the Europarc Charter uses measures for sustainable tourism, and perhaps we could use some of the thinking and models developed there.

11/12. Monitoring/Future Projects

TB asked the group for their comments on what kind of projects they envisage the STP undertaking in the future, once the research, indicators and baselines had been established. It was clear that communication of information and advice to the industry would be very important. AR felt that there are already numerous newsletters being sent out, and that perhaps it would be better to use what's already in existence, rather than creating something new. WM suggested that it would be best to use visitscotland.org for communicating to the industry.

Another suggestion was that a conference could be held to provide more information and advice to businesses. KM commented that holding a specific STP conference would tend to attract the 'already-converted', so perhaps better to try and get slots in conferences that are being set up by other organisations.

As our tourism industry becomes more sustainable, it will be important to tell potential visitors about our sustainable credentials. TB mentioned that he and SD had met recently with Marco Truffelli of visitscotland.com who told them there is currently money allocated within vs.com to put some sustainable tourism information on their website.

BA commented that transport is by far the least sustainable aspect of the tourism industry, and that while the GTBS is highly commendable, it does only tackle one aspect of sustainability in tourism. SD made the suggestion that a debate on the transport issue could be the topic of a future STP meeting, and KD pointed out that the STP can make representations to the Executive transport department through the Executive representations on the group, in spite of the public consultation on the new transport strategy having closed.

As far as future projects are concerned, Tom Hunter (TH) made the suggestion that the STP pick one geographical place in Scotland to work with initially, with a view to ultimately rolling out best practice across the country.

13. **Next Steps**

SD suggested that the next meeting should involve a discussion of what sustainable tourism in Scotland would look like, and how best to communicate ideas to industry. A proposal will be circulated ahead of the next meeting to speed up the process.

SD

14. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the STP should meet roughly 3 or 4 times a year. The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 29 November at 10.30am, at the old Council Chambers at the Municipal Buildings, Corn Exchange, Stirling.