

STEP workshop 11 May Public – private co-operation 14.30 -15.55

- Ian Russell, businessman and chairman of the Broads Tourism Forum led a presentation about the Broads Tourism Forum and how businesses can use a sustainable approach to attract customers. Ian Russell explained that the Forum is a collection of over 50 businesses connected with tourism in the Broads. Membership requires a small fee and signing a pledge that says the business will work at high quality customer care, respecting the local environment and trying to act in a sustainable way.

His business (Wroxham Barns – a collection of retail, refreshments and activities for families) is part of the Broads Quality Charter – a standard to meet for places providing food; and the Green Tourism Business Scheme which assesses the steps being taken by the business to minimise their environmental impacts. Matters he feels are essential for a successful business.

The Forum has worked at unifying effort through a marketing campaign where a small amount of public money brought in 4 times that amount to produce a high print run leaflet that promoted the whole area. The forum is also working with the Broads Authority to develop a clear brand for the area. After agreeing an overall framework the next step is to create visual and text support material for businesses to use to try and produce a more consistent brand / image about the Broads next year – again greatly increasing anything public bodies can spend on promoting the place.

- Discussion after the presentation:

There was interest in the scale of tourism in the Broads (7 million visitors over 300 km² bringing in over £400million to the economy) which is a well developed location having been encouraging visitors for over 100 years. It was useful to hear that being 'green' helped the profits of the businesses and generated return visits. There was some debate around the difference between businesses caring for the environment and businesses that offered a service or experience that was based on the quality environment itself. The belief was that visitors wanted to do a range of things and not all service provision could just be 'eco-tourism'. The ideal might be to try and reflect the special qualities in the area in the service provision (e.g. using local food products: helping people get out into the environment; modifying 'standard' activities so they were like the location – e.g. children's play areas using local materials). It was important to sell the place to local people as well as they would keep coming back, come throughout the year, and would act as your ambassadors. The tourism business staff need to be high quality and promoting the place as well. You will help businesses if the public sector facilitates all the administration: they like to work with the public sector but hate all the paperwork
- Collecting thoughts on what STEP can do to move this forward:

The Broads did seem to be leading in this area and sharing their approach would be helpful. However each country had much to share due to different ways of looking at things. The idea of being able to design matters from the start as in Flanders was seen as exciting. Working together on a common (international) database of visitors would also be sensible. Learning from real case study examples of businesses would help. Coming together in an international workshop with businesses representatives was seen as a good part of the future study.