

# Report on Feasibility Study – Visitor Payback Funds

## The Proposal:

As per discussions and subsequent minutes of Celtic Fringe meeting, dated 26<sup>th</sup> February 2008. From the minutes in question:

- *“FC (Fran Cree) asked if there was any way we could operate a voluntary tourism levy to raise funds for local environmental projects. There was a discussion about the experiences of other areas where this had been proposed or tried, including the Lake District, Cornwall, and Aviemore”.. These have been tried elsewhere, and appear to be generally highly effective at raising funds of this nature.*

The objective of the project has been to research into existing Visitor payback schemes (VPS), investigate successes – any operating issues – implications for operators etc, and to subsequently develop a pilot model for Wester Ross. This proposal has the support not only of Celtic Fringe, but also the local business and tourism associations in the Lochcarron and Ullapool areas of Wester Ross.

## Relevant local organisations:

**Wester Ross Environmental Network [WREN]** is one of seven regional groups in the Highlands made up of local people with a professional or personal interest in the environment. It is a voluntary organisation that evolved from the steering group that contributed to the Wester Ross Biodiversity Action Plan [BAP]. WREN seeks to deliver the national biodiversity agenda and is supported by the Highland Council, SNH, various agencies and NGOs in its efforts to promote and enhance the biodiversity of Wester Ross. Set up in 2004, WREN was originally a sub group of the Wester Ross Alliance but in 2009 established itself as an independent organisation and adopted a constitution. From 2005-07 it applied for, and was successful in receiving grant aid for a three year period, allowing it to operate a successful small grants scheme through which it funded 15 community environmental projects in Wester Ross. With WREN’s background and experience, it is considered an ideal body to ensure delivery of local environmental projects and an important player in any VPS.

**Celtic Fringe** is a community based tourism association representing over 100 Wester Ross based tourism businesses. It originated in 1997, and has developed a number of projects within the tourist industry in this area. Recognising that the local environment is a major influence on the decision making process affecting the decision by tourist to visit here, Celtic Fringe has an interest in assisting WREN to continue the small grants scheme if at all possible.

### **Why is this required?**

- Obtaining funding for all types of projects can be very difficult. This is due to a variety of reasons such as overall cash shortages, specific criteria affecting project eligibility, and complexity of application forms and general administration.
- If we are to bring about a rise in tourism numbers to this area, we need to be aware of the need for improvements to the environment – visitors expect this area to have a high landscape and biodiversity quality, and we must strive to meet this expectation.
- Similar projects have appeared to show that a significant amount of funds can be raised for improving the local environment through this type of proposal.
- This would promote local co-operation, benefit the environment, and lead to local and visiting people alike feeling that they have achieved something positive for the area.
- Finally, and crucially, this will greatly assist WREN in delivering the Biodiversity Plan for Wester Ross

### **The Wester Ross Biodiversity Plan:**

This has a number of aims:

- To ensure that all habitats are managed in a sustainable manner that takes account of their biodiversity interests
- To create more opportunities for people to take action for biodiversity
- To raise awareness and improve access to information about important habitats and species; and to establish a mechanism to help people deliver the Plan, monitor progress and share information on biodiversity matters.

A consultation exercise was undertaken as part of the plan, and which highlighted a lack of awareness about the biodiversity of Wester Ross. As a result, people requested a need for more user-friendly information and interpretation on wildlife, their habitats and the surrounding issues. Many of the recommendations contained in this report will contribute towards achieving this.

For further information, see:

[www.highlandbiodiversity.com/htm/counties/wester\\_ross/wester\\_ross.php](http://www.highlandbiodiversity.com/htm/counties/wester_ross/wester_ross.php)

## Methodology:

As described earlier, this is a project based around research – speaking to people – talking through the proposals – looking at any models currently operating in the UK. Following discussions with:

- Sally Dowden (Speyside Wildlife)
- Fran Cree (Celtic Fringe Chair)
- Alastair Pearson (Local Hotelier)
- Several WR local tourism operators

.....Celtic Fringe have now identified a working list of organisations and individuals who will be in a position to feed into – and develop – this proposition. \*\* *It should be noted that Celtic Fringe do NOT intend raising funds for their exclusive use and control.* What we propose is to link with WREN and to set up a system for administering these funds through them. Celtic Fringe will liaise with WREN and other organisations to examine and consequently recommend the most effective method of raising, administering, and utilising these funds to ensure that maximum benefits are directed towards the environment in this area.

In connection with the report itself, much of the research into past and present VPS was carried out using the Internet, and subsequently followed up through personal contact with the organisations described within the report. E – mail was also used, although this was not as effective as the telephone, due to the time that many people took to reply.

We also consulted with several tourism and business associations in Wester Ross, looking at how this proposal fits with ongoing work in the environment / tourism sectors. The proposal fits closely with several local initiatives, including the way in which Wester Ross is currently marketed, green tourism, and the developing brand logo for the area.

The Marketing strategy document (covering the whole of Wester Ross), is available from the Celtic Fringe website. With regard to developing the VPS, this is a highly relevant piece of work, since the Strategy clearly identified “environment” as being one of the most important reasons why people come to this area. It is therefore essential to develop a means of maintaining, developing, and improving this unique and valuable asset.

**Link through to the Wester Ross 5 year Marketing Strategy: (Note: This was adopted by number of local community, tourism, and business groups during 2006)**

[www.celticfringe.org.uk/marketing.pdf](http://www.celticfringe.org.uk/marketing.pdf)

\*\* This group consists of a mix of hotels, guest houses, B&B, and retail outlets. There is a geographical spread as well that includes Lochcarron, Gairloch and Ullapool, along with the three main business associations.

All the names mentioned in the report from different parts of the country (Cornwall, Devon, Lake District etc) were also quick to offer further advice and assistance if this is required.

## **Fund raising for the Wester Ross Environment:**

### **The study itself:**

The first thing that comes to light is that despite having had success, these schemes are relatively unknown in a European context, and quite rare in the UK. They are variously referred to as “Gift Aid” or “Visitor Payback” schemes.

*In the UK*, we discovered the following as some examples, past and present:

The Cornwall Sustainable Coast Project (COAST)  
[www.cstn.org.uk/](http://www.cstn.org.uk/)

South Hams District Council  
[www.southhams.gov.uk/ontherighttracks.pdf](http://www.southhams.gov.uk/ontherighttracks.pdf)

Pagham Harbour (West Sussex)  
[www.westsussex.gov.uk/ccm/portal/](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/ccm/portal/)

(Then type in “Visitor payback” to the search box: The appropriate page should be top of the list)

Step into the Cotswolds  
[www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/)

The New Forest Trust  
[www.newforesttrust.org.uk](http://www.newforesttrust.org.uk)

The Tarka Trust  
[www.tarka-country.co.uk/tarkaproject/trust.html](http://www.tarka-country.co.uk/tarkaproject/trust.html)

The Tourism and Conservation Partnership (Lake District)  
[www.ourstolookafter.co.uk](http://www.ourstolookafter.co.uk)

### ***And in Scotland:***

Lochaber Geopark  
[www.lochabergeopark.org.uk](http://www.lochabergeopark.org.uk)

Cairngorms National Park  
[www.cairngorms.co.uk](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk)

First of all, what is the definition of a VPS?

**VPS is essentially a voluntary opt in or opt out payment made by visitors to assist the conservation management of places they visit, differing significantly from the compulsory tourist or bed tax practiced in other countries. There is a dearth of published research and case studies, from around the UK and beyond, that have critically reviewed the concept and operation of VPS; all highlight that VPS is a complex concept to evaluate, both in theory and practice, involving a range of benefits and dis-benefits. The general consensus however has been that support for VPS varies considerably, with visitors on the whole being strongly receptive, whilst tourism business interests are more cautious.**

Almost all of these case studies go on to demonstrate that although the financial benefits can be immense, this is not the “norm” and the benefits experienced are more likely to be a significant “feel good” factor on the part of participants, coupled with an increased awareness of conservation projects, issues, and partnerships applying to the VPS

Ok, so there’s clearly an amount of these around. As mentioned above, it turns out that there have also been a good number of studies already carried out that look into these schemes going back as far as the mid 1990’s:

(See: [www.tarka-country.co.uk/tarkaproject/trust.html](http://www.tarka-country.co.uk/tarkaproject/trust.html) )

This appears to be the earliest mention on the Internet of a Visitor Payback scheme, and was part of a European project (funded under European Commission DGXXIII Tourism Unit). However, there have been many such studies and projects since ( list of references is given at the end of this report).

Unfortunately, all of these come up with much the same answer: VPS (Visitor Payback Schemes) are potentially excellent ways of creating a funding source for environmental / nature / conservation projects, however they are NOT a quick and steady fix.

In almost every case, a successful VPS takes place in an area of substantial visitor “footfall”. This appears to be because these areas in question know and understand that tourism is their main source of income by a considerable margin – in most cases, these are areas that are wholly dependent on tourism, and have a history associated with this stretching back decades. Businesses there are immersed in the subject, and have developed the local tourism industry to a very high standard over the years. Other more marginal areas, may well have created VPS schemes, but these invariably require a lengthy period of commitment to building these up to a stage where they could be classed as sustainable and successful.

*Some examples of VPS in action:*

(1)

The Tourism and Conservation Partnership (Lake District):  
015394 34630 / (Sarah Caley, Office Manager)



The Lake District Tourism & Conservation Partnership was set up as far back as 1993 as a pilot scheme to establish joint ventures between tourism and conservation organisations, hoping to connect visitors, tourism businesses and others to conservation organisations who protect the landscape and manage the impacts of visitor pressure. The aim of the partnership was to promote sustainable tourism by raising much needed funds for conservation projects in the Lake District – very similar to our own aims here in Wester Ross.

Sarah confirmed that her organisation was one of the first in the country to try this type of project – 15 years ago, to be exact. Their experience with the VPS has been a long haul, and it is only in the last 7 years that they have started really making this work. Initially of course, it was an unknown concept, and there have been a number of problems convincing the industry itself to adopt this as a serious fund raising scheme to bring about real benefits to the area. However, with perseverance, this is now working well, and by 2004, 170 tourism businesses – hotels, guest houses, B&B's, caravan parks, retailers and attractions- had helped raise £1/2 million for practical conservation. Since 2004, a further £1/2 million has been raised, bringing the current total to over **1 million pounds**.

It has to be borne in mind, that the Lake District actually run the VPS from a central office, with a team of 5 working on this on a regular basis – reflecting the much larger visitor numbers and the approach to tourism generally in that area. All money goes into a centrally managed project and pot and has to support salaries as well as conservation. Despite the apparent success, however, Sarah felt that the central issues were still essentially the same as before – the problem is not persuading the visitors to contribute, but to persuade the *industry* to embrace the concept.

In tandem with other successful VPS, the Lake District also have the full support of the local authorities and large organizations such as the National Park Authority, Natural England, The National Trust, Cumbria Tourist Board.

(2)

Cornwall Sustainable Coast Project

01872 562 057 (Jemma Taylor, Senior Project Officer for the COAST Project)



**Their aim is to work with all sectors active in the area: Business, Voluntary and Community groups, General public to “ to ensure tourism delivers social, economic and environmental benefit for all, as well as a fantastic holiday for all our visitors”**

Their experiences ran fairly close to the ones described above in the Lake District. Again, surveys showed that visitors were very receptive towards the suggestion that they contribute towards such a scheme, while businesses came up with a number of barrier comments, such as:

- **Lack of awareness/understanding about VPS**
- **Not visitor responsibility to support the local environment!**
- **Businesses are fearful that they will lose business as visitors will be put off by VPS –this contradicts all research to date that clearly highlights that visitors are very receptive to VPS**

Once again, though, the schemes put into place in that area have raised a significant amount of funds – unfortunately it is not possible to say how much, because the ones here are run very differently to the Lakes area. In Cornwall this takes the shape of individual businesses raising money in a range of different ways for a range of different causes. Businesses have chosen to go down this route, therefore keeping the ownership of schemes at the business level - which has the advantage of not needing a separate organization like they have in the Lakes. However, this does make it more difficult to quantify the returns. Actual methods used to raise funds vary from collection boxes, to Lake District style VPS, online donations etc. But as a guide to the VPS in action, the Primrose Valley Hotel at St Ives say they were the first hotel in Cornwall to introduce a visitor payback scheme where guests pay £1 per night per room on their bill. All raised funds go to the Marine Conservation Society, raising over £4000 to date (since 2006).

So, individual businesses are able to set up their own schemes and decide what these funds should be spent on. The COAST organization therefore, is there more as a consulting and enabling organization than anything else. However, they also operate a wide range of tourism and training initiatives designed to generate and sustain the local enthusiasm for the area. Based on the Cornwall experience, Jemma also suggested that this type of scheme works very well in a situation where this is linked up with others such as the Green Tourism Awards. This makes complete sense in

every way, as the two systems are closely compatible. In Wester Ross, there are certainly a number of businesses that this could apply to, and perhaps this should be a future option.

(3)

Lochaber Geopark

01397 705765 (Anna Trafford, “Outdoor Capital” office)

01397 705825 (Marian Austin, Nevis Range – participant)

01397 722246 (Kieron Kelly, Prince House Hotel – participant)



The Lochaber VPS was set up only recently, starting in 2005, displayed and promoted within Lochaber as:

#### **“The Outdoor Capital’s Visitor payback Scheme”**

They have had mixed results however. Having spoken to both the Head office and to several participants, it was generally felt that while there was clear potential in the scheme, Lochaber has obviously encountered problems. In the beginning, the scheme was set up using consultants that had been brought in – this resulted in a lack of focus as to how best to use the resulting funds raised. The consultants brief was focused on developing the idea of activities for the area, and the funds raised were soon seen to be supporting activities over and above anything else, whereas many of the hotel / accommodation businesses involved had other priorities. This has resulted in a gradual lowering of enthusiasm on the part of many businesses involved at the beginning, and while there are a number still involved (the Nevis Range being one of the major ones), the VPS has not worked in the way that was anticipated.

(4)

The Tarka Project - Tarka Trust – Tarka Foundation – North Devon Biosphere Foundation

01237 423655 (Andy Bell, Tarka Foundation)

01237 472135 ( Peter Jollands, Director, North Devon Biosphere Foundation)



### **European Visitor Payback Project 1996 (North Devon)**

In 1996 the Tarka Project became one of five partners across Europe in a Visitor Payback Project. The project, conceived and assisted by the EU DGXXIII Tourism Unit, aimed to demonstrate the potential of voluntary methods of raising resources from visitors for conservation and to raise awareness of the need to put resources back into the local environment in order to build a sustainable economy.

Funds collected were held in a Tarka Conservation Fund and used for a mix of large scale area wide schemes and smaller, local, largely community based, practical, educational and interpretive schemes to benefit the natural environment.

The main conclusions of the European project were that while visitors show a considerable willingness to contribute towards the conservation of the places they visit, the tourism industry lags behind the consumer in its enthusiasm to contribute. An independent charitable trust (the [Tarka Country Trust](#)) was then set up by the Tarka Project to administer the fund and develop the visitor payback concept further in the area.

The role of the trust was intended to act in the capacity of enabler and co-ordinator, working as the interface between those willing to donate assistance and those requiring support in order to implement environmental projects and programmes in northern Devon, and between them they have funded and supported a large number of environmental projects throughout the area.

In the process, they also developed strong links with a separate group, the Tarka Foundation, which started its life in 2002 as an organization who's "*main purpose is to assist policies and project developments that enable individuals, communities and enterprises to reach their full potential*"

Both organisations have always had close links with the Biosphere Reserve, and to reflect these links, the collective name has now been changed to the North Devon Biosphere Foundation Ltd, with the directors drawn mainly from the Biosphere Partnership. The foundation is now a driving force and delivery agent for the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, committed to the strategy and action plan and working closely with the Tarka Country Trust, which still exists in its own right.

Although as an organization, the initial Tarka Project is historical rather than current, there is a clear line of development able to be shown from its origins in 1996, through the support of numerous environmental projects over the years using a VPS and other methods, culminating with an active role in the creation of a UK Biosphere region. Many of the projects assisted by the fundraising were on very similar lines to those that WREN might progress, and many of the people involved in the Biosphere were also part of the Tarka Trust and the Tarka Foundation – they therefore have the experience and knowledge, which we feel Wester Ross can learn from.

It must also be considered highly relevant that Wester Ross is presently considering its position with regard to Biosphere Reserves, and there is a possibility that communities here will be making an approach to UNESCO for the region to become a Biosphere itself.

Therefore, as per the suggestion of a visit to an area that has tried VPS, we would suggest North Devon as the most potentially useful location for this – discovering more about the practical issues of Biosphere Reserves in the process.

#### **(5)**

Other Scottish based VPS:

The Lochaber VPS remains the only significant scheme operating in the Highlands area, if not Scotland. A group called “Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs” are developing a scheme just now, but this has yet to be launched. Historically, the Cairngorm National Park was developing a VPS until the press managed to get hold of the story, and described this as a “Bed tax” – the scheme was effectively holed below the waterline and never recovered. *However*, my understanding is that they are now looking at starting the process again.

#### **Common Strengths / Weaknesses of VPS:**

All the successful VPS work well, however these successes disguise numerous operational issues in practice. Each VPS spoken to commented that although these have brought in substantial benefits, they require ongoing support and staff training with most of the businesses involved. As an example, a significant number of guests will ask what the funds are used for, and unless reception staff can give a clear and knowledgeable answer to this, then visitors will often decline to be involved. In a similar vein, there needs to be point of sale descriptive material on display across the region in hotels, guest houses, local business etc, that tells visitors about the scheme – these materials need updating and maintaining.

In each of the case studies above, and ALL of the South coast based VPS, it should be noted that there was considerable input, support, and assistance from either the local council involved OR a large scale organization such as a National Park. This was not just to start the project off, but has been ongoing.

### Strengths:

- Once established, can be very productive
- Work well in areas of high visitor footfall
- Can significantly raise awareness of environmental issues
- Funds can be used for a huge variety of different items
- The Visitor likes the idea and is very receptive to this
- VPS can integrate well with existing schemes such as the Green Awards to their mutual benefit

### Weaknesses:

- They require ongoing maintenance
- They need to be focused on a particular aspect of the area
- Business barriers need broken down
- Most business need a support / education style of programme for staff to accompany the VPS, and point of sale material
- Areas of comparatively low footfall may only gain minimal returns from a VPS

### VPS's as applied to Wester Ross:

As can be seen from the above “strengths” there are several apparent benefits of VPS. Combined with favourable responses from visitors as to whether they would use a VPS or not, this alone might be regarded as providing sufficient evidence to establish a scheme. In fact, several items have to ideally be in place before this can happen.

Other schemes have shown that an area not only requires a strong identity in place, but must also show sufficient awareness in local business of tourism's connection with the environment to generate participation in the scheme. Fortunately, we already have some of these items under development. Community groups here are currently operating a program aimed at the creation of a Wester Ross brand identity, and there are already nearly 70 groups and individual businesses signed up to this. These brand members are therefore well placed to subsequently participate in a program designed to raise awareness of the environment and associated issues.

The other crucial requirement is that the financial and staffing requirements of operating and sustaining a payback scheme been fully considered. The issue to be confronted here is that one of the points of concern that became evident during this study is that awareness of WREN is extremely low – in fact, almost non-existent. We held discussions in Gairloch, Ullapool and Lochcarron involving local tourism businesses from retail traders to B&B and Hotels. It should be noted that UNLESS one of them was directly involved with WREN, then it was unlikely they knew much about them at all.

WREN also suffers from a lack of capacity to potentially deliver this project – it is wholly voluntary, and members currently have other commitments. While it is well placed to undertake work in terms of skills and knowledge about biodiversity and the environment, extra support will be required to action any recommendations in this report.

Therefore a successful VPS would require a concerted effort from ourselves (CF), WREN, SNH, Highland Council et al, probably covering an initial period of at least six months prior to the following visitor season (for application to that season), and ongoing after this. The aim would be to dramatically raise awareness amongst residents and businesses not only of the local area and the importance of the environment, but also of WREN itself

Are the major organizations such as SNH / Highland Council actually be in a position to commit time and funds towards a sustained effort in raising awareness of the importance of the environment to tourism, local business , and the local economy? These organizations (or at least one large organization) would have to be involved from the outset. A look at all the successful VPS will show that in each case, they have had the backing and support of either the local council (*as in South Hams or Paghham Harbour*), the local National Park Partnership (*Lake District*), or a package of organisations such as Natural England, Cornwall Enterprise, and the Environment Agency (*COAST*). It is a proven fact that input and support from these sources has been necessary to operate the administration involved.

**Then there is the question of Visitor Numbers.**

If we look at some of the other areas with VPS, the statistics are thought provoking.

**Lake District: 15.5 million Visitors trips per year**

**Cornwall: 4.6 million visits**

**New Forest: 13.5 million Visits**

**Scotland (*in its entirety*): 16 million Visits**

**The Highlands of Scotland (*as a whole*): 2.8 million**

These figures (from Visit Scotland) are not broken down any further than this, but it is very clear that while we might think we are busy with tourism in Wester Ross, it really is quite far down the hill from many other areas in the UK, never mind Europe.

**As a guide to European figures, one tourist attraction alone (the Salt Mines, near Krakow) takes nearly half as many visitors alone as the whole of Scotland!**

Therefore even in the best case scenario, support will be required - certainly over the first few years (*see: recommendations - and bear in mind the fact that the Lake District VPS took nearly six years to establish its sustainability*). If this is covered by a time-limited source, such as European funding, then there is an inevitable danger that the scheme will prove unsustainable in the long term. Likewise, if revenue generation is the sole motivation in starting a scheme then disappointment is a strong possibility. It can be shown that other motivations such as developing partnership working between the tourism industry and conservation bodies, improving resident attitudes, and using payback as part of other initiatives encouraging people to act in an

environmentally sustainable manner, are required to justify the time and effort in a VPS.

The clear message that emerges from the experience of existing schemes is that payback is not something that can be entered into lightly. And particularly in this area, with a comparatively low visitor footfall, everybody would need to be pulling strongly in the same direction with enthusiasm for a successful VPS.

***So ask the question .....Would local business pay for this themselves? Unlikely.***

This can be achieved. However, there would have to be thought given to *how* this is achieved, and there will have to be a commitment shown towards this being a relatively long term process.

The marketing strategy referred to earlier on in this report (at the end of page 2) defined the environment as being one of the major reasons people come to this area not only for all sorts of holiday breaks, but also to live, work, and bring up children in the area.

And it must be borne in mind that a successful VPS should not be looked upon as a simple fundraising exercise: This comes with a clear opportunity to significantly raise awareness and knowledge of the Wester Ross environment through a linked programme of training and education.

The possibility must therefore be that Wester Ross could be turned into a model example of how the environment and biodiversity of the area can co-exist with tourism to the benefit of all. With 15.5 million visitors every year, The Lake District (for example) is well past this stage – they are more likely to be firefighting against a tidal wave of tourism, whereas in Wester Ross we still have a real opportunity to look after what we have.

Therefore, it can be seen that this is NOT simply about fundraising, and we feel this would fit well with an ongoing programme aimed at raising awareness, knowledge, and actions in all matters connected to the environment of Wester Ross – it IS our greatest and most unique selling point to residents and visitors alike. And we live here as well – we would all unquestionably draw benefits from these actions working together in co-ordination, including:

- Raising of environmental awareness amongst visitors and residents alike
- A successful delivery of the biodiversity plan
- A sustainable funding source for future work covering the above items

To put a successful VPS in place, therefore, there are certain actions that must be considered by several of the organizations that are potentially involved. These can be outlined as follows:

From WREN's point of view:

**As an organization it must consider undertaking a promotional drive as an integral part of a long term development strategy, and instigate the above as a project WITH committed support from the organizations previously mentioned.**

Support for all of the above is required from SNH, Highland Council, WREN and CF (and other organizations as may be appropriate):

**They should consider a project manager to be put in place with the environmental and administration abilities required to enable a sustainable VPS to be created**

A start off point would be:

**A focused campaign to raise awareness of the environment amongst the trade. This is an opportunity for all.**

Followed by:

**Selling the idea of VPS not just to business owners, but to staff at all levels.**

And:

**Developing convincing point of sale information for rooms, reception, and the press. This might be in the form of a catchy logo, getting children involved, or a number of other "hooks"**

Finally:

**Examine alternative fund raising ideas, perhaps to be integrated with a VPS**

**But:**

**The original aim of the proposal was to bring about improvements in Environmental resources - if there is no agreement, or it is seen as too complex to go down this "VPS" road, are there alternatives?**

## **Other Options:**

**From the Environment's point of view, from WREN's point of view (and indeed, Celtic Fringe's) there are a number of other options:**

### **Online Donations:**

This is easy to set up, virtually free (via a "Spanglefish" website or similar), and requires little or no maintenance bar updating a website on a regular basis. This is at its most effective when operating through a recognized charity. Neither WREN nor CF are charities, although they are constituted voluntary groups.

We would therefore need to set up such a group. That is not difficult in itself, but this then requires clear record keeping and an annual audit: Both are cost items. Income from online donations is not reliable, but it is steady, and there is always the chance that a mystery benefactor suddenly donates a significant sum!

*Why a Charity?* **See: [www.justgiving.com/](http://www.justgiving.com/)**

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, people are far more likely to "give" to a Charity – there is a strong feelgood factor involved. But charities also have to meet certain regulations and criteria surrounding clarity of information on their activities, and have complete transparency of accounts. If you are considering donating online, you have to be certain that the money you donate *is* actually going to the organization that you wish to help out. Donating to a recognized charity gives the "giver" that degree of confidence.

Finally, on a purely financial basis, a recognized charity can also qualify for gift aid, where charities are able to reclaim 25% of tax on every donation from a UK based taxpayer.

### **Collection Boxes:**

The view is that (especially in a rural area such as this with many voluntary groups relative to population) there are already too many of these. Furthermore, they do not readily engage visitors or encourage them to donate anything more than a few pence a time.

However, while the above comments may be true in shops or businesses, this is not the case in accommodation services such as B&B or Guest Houses. Therefore there may well be a case for engaging with such premises – though this might be labour intensive from a collection point of view, with only small amounts of money raised. Having contacted a number of Celtic Fringe members, it is likely that we would be able to put boxes into approx: 50 of these across the region. The returns would be small but consistent. We have priced starter boxes from as low as £2.50, although a realistic figure would allow for a better quality box and an "environmental" theme. This will be an option as well, therefore.

### **Purchase of local products:**

Several businesses felt that the best way for visitors to contribute was 'via their actions, i.e. buying local produce, using sustainable transport, recycling, signing local petitions, helping with a beach clean/footpath restoration'. This highlights the business resistance to ask visitors for extra cash donations.

## Conclusions and Short / long term Recommendations, therefore:

### Short Term:

- **WREN and Celtic Fringe set up a joint charitable association, and establish an online donation system as a foothold in this market**
- **WREN set up clear systems to enable them to utilize funds effectively through establishing, delivering, and reporting on projects carried out.**
- **Celtic Fringe use their membership resources to set up a collection box program in B&B / Guest Houses / Hotels that will accept boxes.**
- **The organizations involved (WREN / CF / SNH / H. Council) examine this report, and consider the long term recommendations below, including putting a project manager in place with the remit of developing a fully sustainable long term VPS, coupled with other schemes as seen fit and necessary**
- **Consider other organizations that might be involved: This may well include a number of groups whose remit differs to WREN. As has already been clarified, issues of biodiversity and the environment may also be linked to the tourism industry, local business, and education - including childcare and other community interests.**

### Long Term:

- **The agencies agree the resources, both financial and support based, to support a co-ordinated drive to educate and inform local businesses and their staff members on the environment and its importance to the local economy**
- **A project manager is appointed**
- **Environmental training is put in place for local people / hoteliers etc. This could be done using a local facility such as the Strathcarron Centre, which has experience in this type of training, and use local organizations and individuals for delivery.**
- **With the assistance of this person, WREN itself undertakes a drive to promote itself within the area, perhaps through two or three high visibility projects**
- **A VPS scheme elsewhere \*\* is actually visited and talked to**
- **A scheme is ultimately set up here**
- **This is tied in not only with training, but also with the Green Award Scheme, and the developing “Brand” quality criteria for the area**

\*\* For a visit, the suggestion here is the Tarka Scheme, North Devon, ([www.tarka-country.co.uk/tarkaproject/trust.html](http://www.tarka-country.co.uk/tarkaproject/trust.html) ). The reasons for this are outlined at the end of the study No4 into working examples of VPS. This could be a highly productive area to visit. Also, see website links as below:

[www.northdevonbiospherefoundation.org.uk](http://www.northdevonbiospherefoundation.org.uk)

[www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk](http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk)

<b>Further Sources of Information and assistance:</b>
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**The COAST project:**

Jemma Taylor, Senior project officer.....01872 562 057

**Pagham Harbour Trust, West Sussex:**

The Visitor Services Warden..... 012343 641508

**Lake District Tourism and Conservation Partnership:**

Sarah Caley, Office Manager .....015394 34630

Cote How Guest House....015394 32765

**The Tarka Trust, North Devon:**

Andy Bell, Peter Bollands.....01237 423655

**Lochaber Geopark & Outdoor Capital:**

Nevis Range, Princes House Hotel, Outdoor Capital, Great Glen Way

Marian Austin (Nevis Range Manager).....01397 705825

Kieron Kelly (owner, PH Hotel).....01397 722246

Outdoor Capital (Anna Trafford, Manager).....01397 705765

Lynda Dodd, (Great Glen Way).....01320 366633

**Cotswolds Conservation Board:**

01451 862000

**New Forest Trust:**

Sarah (Office).....023 8081 3955

Oliver (Chief Verderer).....as above

The Bell Inn.....023 8081 2214

**Visitor Payback: Looking at the Realities behind the Successes**

[www.countrysiderecreation.org.uk/journal/pdf/summer\\_2001/3-vps.pdf](http://www.countrysiderecreation.org.uk/journal/pdf/summer_2001/3-vps.pdf)

**Visitor Payback: Developing and Implementing Effective Schemes**

[www.insights.org.uk/articleitem.aspx?title=Visitor Payback – Developing and Implementing Effective Schemes](http://www.insights.org.uk/articleitem.aspx?title=Visitor+Payback+-+Developing+and+Implementing+Effective+Schemes)

**Visitor Payback: On the right tracks**

[www.southhams.gov.uk/ontherighttracks.pdf](http://www.southhams.gov.uk/ontherighttracks.pdf)

**Voluntary Tourism Payback Initiatives**

[www.inspiringtourism.co.uk/components/docs/Terry Stevens Visitor Levy presentation info paper.pdf](http://www.inspiringtourism.co.uk/components/docs/Terry+Stevens+Visitor+Levy+presentation+info+paper.pdf)

**Tourism Deliverables: Visitor payback**

[www.heathproject.org.uk/content\\_pdf/en/VPSReportHEATH\\_1.pdf](http://www.heathproject.org.uk/content_pdf/en/VPSReportHEATH_1.pdf)

**Finally, there was a European project run in 1996 -7 on this very subject. The results back up pretty much everything that has been said in this report. This is a direct quote from the study findings, originating in Germany:**

'Visitor pay back schemes'

The conclusion from the project was that visitors are willing to pay for conservation in the places they visit. Whilst the amounts donated may be low, added together they make a significant contribution over time. The easier the system is to administer the better, the opt-out supplement is one of the most effective means, as few people decide *not* to make the contribution. Involving the tourist enterprises is critical: whilst there may be some resistance initially, the project demonstrated that those who did get involved responded very positively.

Keys to success in a visitor payback scheme are:

- have it run by a "worthy" organisation ( e.g. an NGO or a voluntary organisation),
- a readily identifiable "good cause" to be the beneficiary
- link a request for donations to good interpretation e.g. of conservation issues when exploring a site
- support and involvement of tourist enterprises
- good publicity, on-site and in advance if possible
- a simple approach to visitors and an easy process fore making payments
- efficient means of collecting money and giving it to beneficiaries
- a monitoring and feed back process



*Douglas Gibson,  
Celtic Fringe Tourism Association, March 2009*

*Attached: Summary of previous Celtic Fringe / WREN projects*

### **Previous WREN projects:**

- 15 projects from £98 to £20,000; the smaller ones we were able to fund 100%. 2005-2007.
- One project discovered a colony of rare water voles and we were able to change the project objectives at very short notice so that it could be used to enhance the habitat for these animals
- One project made the first ever British film recording underwater footage of Arctic charr courting in their natural habitat.
- Two final projects to increase interest and involvement in biodiversity: biodiversity toolkit from which people can borrow equipment on a library basis – bat detectors, moth traps, field guides, etc, and a travelling exhibition of Wester Ross species and habitat posters written by local people for use in local events.
- The smallest projects we supported were:
  - Wildlife notice board (£98) – gives a monthly update on what has been seen in the area
  - Shieldaig Calendar (£341) – a special binder to help the community produce a calendar to highlight local biodiversity and landscape through 12 photographs chosen in local competition. Calendar will be sold to visitors to raise funds for local projects
  - Strathburn restoration (£500) – clearing rubble out of a burn so that trout can run again – work was done by volunteers in the end so no need for a digger or our money. The application acted as a catalyst to get the volunteers involved
  - Fisherman's tales (£800) – the local radio station will train an ex-fisherman to interview other west coast ex-fishermen about the catches of the old days and the wildlife they saw. The interviews will be made into programmes for broadcast (if you want copies get in touch)
- These small projects provide huge payback on the investment by reaching thousands of people and making real and lasting improvements to the environment. Three of the four definitely would not have gone ahead without WREN support and the other probably would not have done so.

### **Previous Celtic Fringe projects:**

- New tourism trail set up in conjunction with HOST (now VisitScotland), the Local Enterprise Company, Highland Council. This was called the Wester Ross Coastal Trail, and featured greatly improved signage across the area aimed at attracting and guiding visitors around Wester Ross.
- Website with information and links to other sites connected with tourism locally and in the Highlands. This can be found at [www.celticfringe.org.uk](http://www.celticfringe.org.uk)
- A new website is about to be launched covering the whole of Wester Ross, high in photographic content, with an interactive newsletter facility
- Booklet for the region between Lochcarron & Braemore Junction, aimed at guiding visitors around Wester Ross in a friendly and informative manner (15,000 copies sold)
- We have strong links with a number of localised projects aimed at bringing benefits to the area in general.
- Local accommodation packs carrying details of the many attractions and activities which the visitor can experience when they are travelling through Wester Ross. There are approx: 1,000 of these in circulation at present.
- We assist and support Wester Ross Music and Arts Events where possible.
- An “Activities Guide” for the area, giving details of a wide range of activities for visitors to the area, and including details of childcare facilities, walks, fishing trips, leisure centres and many other attractions.
- All members are linked up on an e-mail based discussion group
- Founder of “Tourism@ Wester Ross”, which has developed a long term marketing strategy and regional branding for Wester Ross as a strong identity on the world stage. T@ WR has successfully brought together the business and tourism groups in several separate communities with the aim of working together on joint projects.
- We developed, launched, and are currently promoting a brand identifier for Wester Ross
- Future projects included a training proposal aimed at the 16 – 25 age range, covering tourism, local culture and heritage, and business planning skills