



Sustainable Business Awards for the South East 2004

Case Study - Sandy Balls Estate Limited

Company Background

Sandy Balls Holiday Centre is nestled in the beautiful surroundings of the New Forest, Hampshire. The land was bought by the Westlake family in 1919 from the Bremer Estate with a small holiday centre established at the site in 1930, set up as an altruistic centre with an educational purpose at its heart. Set in 125-acres of woodland and meadow land, Sandy Balls now has some 100 lodges, 140 holiday homes and 200 touring/camping pitches. In addition, on site it has a number of facilities including a pub, restaurant, two shops, a leisure centre, bike hire and riding stables.

Sandy Balls commitment to sustainability is at the heart of everything it does. The company sees itself as custodians of a wonderful natural site, it has an inherent responsibility to ensure both the business and natural surroundings are preserved. The business is wholly dependent on people being able to enjoy the natural environment. By adopting the 'VICE' principle (Visitors, Industry, Community, Environment), Sandy Balls hopes to manage the different stakeholders expectations in a beneficial manner to all. The 'VICE' principle ensures a sustainable business approach and sets out that anything you do should not significantly impact on any one of these components.

Sustainability Initiatives






Sandy Balls' close business relationship to the natural surroundings means that it has been involved with the implementation of several sustainable initiatives such as minimisation of waste, improved resource, and promoting environmental and social good practice in the tourism industry. Sandy Balls' realisation that true sustainability cannot stop at the gates of the holiday centre has seen it look for new ways in which it can engage with the local community. This would involve further protecting the local environment, acting as a leading member of the Community Tourism Group and Local Tourism Association, and seeking to promote sustainable approaches to business.

Contribution to a Sustainable Economy

Where possible and reasonable to do so Sandy Balls uses local suppliers. The company recently rejected a cost saving option of centralised collective purchasing as this was felt inconsistent with its commitment to the local economy.

As well as being a significant employer in the local area, Sandy Balls, on average, attracts some 50,000 people a year to the region helping to support the local economy. In the period 1999 to 2002, Sandy Balls invested £1.5 million in diversifying its accommodation and making further improvements to the site.

Summary of Key Achievements

- Leading member of local tourism groups helping to develop and promote sustainable tourism 
- Replaced 40% of its lodges with more energy efficient designs that use on average 20-30% less energy 
- Promote and encourage clients to recycle their waste generated whilst staying at the Centre, reducing waste to landfill 
- Introduction of a number of energy and resource saving initiatives such as energy efficient light bulbs, improved insulation of accommodation 
- Engaged with local community to help protect the wider environment surrounding Sandy Balls 

KEY



ENVIRONMENTAL
BENEFITS



BUSINESS
BENEFITS



ECONOMIC
BENEFITS



SOCIAL
BENEFITS

A second £2 million investment programme has subsequently been completed in 2004 with the addition of new lodges to the hire fleet. This initiative is not aimed at increasing numbers to the site, but more at spreading the numbers more evenly throughout the year, and improving the sustainability of the business.



The Centre is set in within the New Forest and built around a balance being achieved between business and the natural surroundings



Guests to the Centre are encouraged to segregate their waste improving the volume of waste they are able to recycle

A move away from high peaks in numbers during August and low numbers in the off-seasons means the impact to the local environment and community will be reduced, and enable more sustainable management of the tourism industry.

In supporting the local economy, Sandy Balls pays for and distributes 13,000 guides to local businesses aimed at informing visitors of the local attractions and enabling the local businesses and community to benefit from its guests.

Enhancing Environmental Quality

Irrigation system has been installed on the 90 hanging baskets around the central facilities on the site, ensuring optimum water usage and reducing the labour demands. A solar heating system has been installed for heating of the outdoor pool, minimising oil/gas use. Lights in buildings are fitted with sensors or timers where possible to minimise electricity consumption.

All guests on the site are encouraged to segregate their waste to aid recycling through the provision of recycling bins across the site for glass, paper, cans and plastics. This is then collected up by the staff and stored in a centralised location for collection. Recycling facilities are also open to the local community.

All of Sandy Balls' garden waste is recycled on site, which has meant that it is now fully self-sufficient for compost and mulch.

Sandy Balls has also invested some £80,000 on the purchase of environmentally-friendly vehicles such as an LPG car for offsite journeys and electric vehicles around the site.

Improving the Social Wellbeing of Stakeholders

Sandy Balls is used as an example of sustainable good practice promoting Local Agenda 21. Local Agenda 21 is a scheme set up by the New Forest District Council to encourage tourism accommodation providers to think and run their businesses in a "sustainable" way. This provides excellent opportunities for the

sharing of good practice with other tourism businesses, to which Sandy Balls donates management time for the dissemination of its experience and policies.

Sandy Balls is a major local employer, offering opportunities to retired, return to work and seasonal workers. During the period of 1999 – 2003 the number of fulltime positions increased from 153 to 172, with the creation of more than 100 seasonal positions each year.

All the staff receive core induction training, as part of which they are taught to be knowledgeable about environmental good practices and the surrounding environment, so that they can ensure guests are well informed.

Sandy Balls undertakes apprenticeships as well as encouraging day-release studying, contributing to, or cover the training fees. It also provides long-term university placement positions and work experience opportunities for local schools.

In keeping with the educational theme originally conceived when the Centre was first established, the staff organise guided walks, orienteering and nature trails aimed at both adults and children. The grounds of the Centre are also open to the local community to enjoy. Other activities are laid on for the kids, such as making bird boxes, which are then put up around the Centre as part of a substantial nesting programme.

Working with local health care professionals promoting exercise and dietary control through their onsite leisure centre, Sandy Balls is able to promote healthy living to the guests and to the local community.

Sandy Balls is a leading contributor to the local community, making donations and contributions to such causes as establishing the Fordingbridge Museum, setting up a community tourism group and the donation of a skateboard "half-pipe" to Fordingbridge town council to help with youth engagement. It is also involved with numerous other local projects, schools, groups and small donations each year.

Sandy Balls' careful management of the natural environment in which it is set and the balance it has drawn between business and the environment, has been recognised by the awarding of the David Bellamy Conservation Gold award several times. It also holds the Visit Britain top five star award.

Sandy Balls is now beginning to take a leading role in efforts to establish a visitor stewardship and payback scheme for the New Forest, acting as a pilot business. The Visitor Stewardship Programme reflects and interprets the New Forests cultural heritage and landscape to communicate its unique distinctiveness to visitors.

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