



## The Old Coach House, Nr. Machynlleth Gaining Green Accreditation



**Location:** The Old Coach House, Dolcorsllwyn, Aberangell, Machynlleth, Powys, SY20 9AB

**Proprietors:** Sue and Paddy McKillop

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**Website:** [www.theoldcoachhousecottage.co.uk](http://www.theoldcoachhousecottage.co.uk)

**Grading/Awards:** Visit Wales \*\*\*\*, Green Tourism Business Scheme Gold Award,

**Number of Rooms:** Two en-suite bedrooms and a 2 bedroom self-catering cottage

**Seasonal Opening:** Open all year round

**About The Old Coach House:** Proprietors, Sue and Paddy McKillop, moved into the Old Coach House in October 2006, the newly refurbished cottage opened in May 2007. Sue and Paddy started providing B&B accommodation in May 2008, they have two double, en-suite bedrooms.

The Old Coach House is about 160 years old and was originally the coaching quarters for Dolcorsllwyn Hall. The Old Coach House Cottage which is attached to the main house and was the coachman's living quarters, has been refurbished throughout to provide comfortable self-catering accommodation.

**The Green Tourism Business Scheme:** The GTBS is the national sustainable tourism certification scheme for the UK. Originally developed in partnership with Visit Scotland, it is now the only certification scheme validated by Visit Britain, through the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT). Businesses opting to join Green Tourism are assessed by a qualified grading advisor against a rigorous set of criteria, covering a range of areas, like energy and water efficiency, waste management, biodiversity and more. Those businesses that meet the required standard, receive a Bronze, Silver, or Gold award based on their level of achievement. The current network of members is comprised of a wide range of business types, including accommodation providers, visitor attractions, corporate offices and others.

**Going for it! - The Old Coach House and GTBS:** Sue and Paddy first heard about the GTBS scheme via a Cambrian Mountains Initiative Meeting which lead them to attend a GTBS workshop run by Glasu in Spring 2009. Glasu is a local partnership of public, private and voluntary/ community organisations which forms part of the Powys Rural Partnership. Glasu were running a pilot project to encourage businesses to gain green accreditation, participating businesses were offered:

- a waived GTBS joining fee (normally £59.80)
- reduced GTBS annual membership fees
- free advisory visit by a specialist green tourism advisor - to prepare a business before a grading visit, improving a business's chances of achieving a good grading result.

Once graded, businesses could access additional project resources to support them with

- technical advice and networking;

- promotion and marketing.

Paddy and Sue believed strongly that they should run their business as sustainably as possible but were uncertain as to whether they should join a green accreditation scheme. The discounts provided by the Glasu project were sufficient incentive to encourage Paddy and Sue to join GTBS for their B&B business. They applied to Glasu and an advisory meeting was arranged at the end of November 2009 with Barbara Grantham and two GTBS representatives.

This half day meeting was very positive and Paddy and Sue realised that they were already operating quite sustainably but that there was a lot more that they could do.

**Practical Improvements - How did joining GTBS change the way in which The Old Coach House was run:** Paddy and Sue had taken energy efficiency into account in refurbishing their property, and they already incorporated sustainable business practices into the way they ran their business. For example:

- The refurbished guest bedrooms have double glazing, well insulated walls and thermostatic controls on all radiators.
- They provide 'Fairtrade' tea, coffee and drinking chocolate purchased from a local Welsh company.
- Breakfasts and evening meals are made using as much locally sourced food as possible from the wide range of individual shops in Machynlleth and farm providers in the surrounding area.
- Their organic garden provides fruit and vegetables as well as the flowers that are displayed throughout the house.
- Chemical-free cleaning and laundry products are purchased in bulk to reduce wasteful packaging. Similarly, the 'Faith in Nature' products are purchased in bulk to be decanted into smaller and re-useable containers in the en-suites.
- Almost all of the rubbish from The Old Coach House is recycled or composted.

As a result of the advisory meeting Paddy and Sue had a list of actions, which they then worked on over the following couple of months.

The following policies/documents had to be written;

- form showing the annual electricity/fuel consumption of The Old School
- GTBS Green File
- GTBS Policy (displayed in bedrooms)
- Environmental Policy
- Visitor Charter (copy included in the bedroom browser and on website)
- Action Plan

In drawing up these policies Sue looked at the proformas on the GTBS website and the policies of other businesses, then she wrote the policies for The Old Coach House in her own style.

Following their advisory meeting they improved the way they operated in a number of areas;

- Energy consumption: prior to joining GTBS Sue and Paddy were not reading their electricity meter regularly, they applied for and received a Smart Meter from their electricity provider and were immediately impressed with the insight it provided into their energy consumption. 'I was particularly shocked at how much electricity the electric oven used, especially for cooking things such as jacket potatoes' Sue McKillop.
- Installed an insulating jacket for the hot water tank
- Sourced a brand of toiletries from naturally derived sources, that had no synthetic additives and which damaged neither the user nor the environment ([Faith in Nature](#)). They provide 'Faith in Nature' shampoo and shower/bath gel as well as natural soaps in each of the rooms.
- Where possible they started buying supplies in bulk to reduce packaging

- Although they already sourced local/Welsh/Fairtrade produce, up to that point they hadn't told their guests about it or used it in their marketing - so they made changes to their advertising literature and website to make sure it reflected what they do.

**The Grading Inspection:** The GTBS Grading Inspection of The Old Coach House took place in February 2010. 'This was a very rigorous, professional inspection, everything we claimed to do was checked' Sue McKillop.

By the day of the inspection all the policies were in place. In addition to the changes outlined above, the inspectors were impressed with;

- the promotion of public transport. 'In 2010 the number of guests opting to have a car-free day out on the train has increased, with very positive feedback from the guests' Sue McKillop
- the inclusion of 'nature diaries' in the rooms, to encourage visitors to enjoy and record the wildlife they observe during their stay

In February 2010 Paddy and Sue were delighted to hear that The Old Coach House had been awarded a GOLD GTBS Award.

**The GTBS Membership Process and Fees:** Your first step is to contact the GTBS ([gtbs@green-business.co.uk](mailto:gtbs@green-business.co.uk)) for a membership pack (no obligation or cost).

Then complete and return the application form. You will then receive an 'awaiting grading logo' and gain access to the members area and newsletters on the Green Tourism Website. You will then be contacted by the membership coordinator ([dawn@green-business.co.uk](mailto:dawn@green-business.co.uk)). Your grading visit appointment will be offered with 6-7 weeks notice. You will then need to complete an annual data information form. After your grading visit you will receive a report within 8 weeks. You will be revisited once every 2 years.

The joining fee (one-off) is £55 + VAT. The annual fees are then based on the number of bedrooms, self-catering units or full time employees depending on your business type. For example a 3 bedroom B&B would have an annual fee of £84.78 +VAT.

**The Grading Criteria:** GTBS recognises that every business is different, therefore, flexibility has been built into the GTBS criteria. There are over 150 individual measures in the criteria, which focus on 10 different areas, as follows;

1. Compulsory - compliance with environmental legislation and a commitment to continuous improvement in environmental performance
2. Management and Marketing - demonstrating good environmental management, including staff awareness, specialist training, monitoring, and record keeping
3. Social Involvement and Communication of environmental actions to customers through variety of channels and range of actions, e.g. green policy, promotion of environmental efforts on the website, education, and community and social projects
4. Energy - efficiency of lighting, heating and appliance, insulation and renewable energy use
5. Water - efficiency - e.g. good maintenance, low-consumption appliances, flush offset, rainwater harvesting, as well as using eco-cleaners
6. Purchasing - environmentally friendly goods and services, e.g. products made from recycled materials, use and promotion of local food and drink, and use of FSC wood products
7. Waste - minimisation by encouraging, the 'eliminate, reduce, reuse, recycle' principle, e.g. glass, paper, card, plastic and metal recycling; supplier take-back agreements; dosing systems; and composting
8. Transport - aims to minimise visitors car use by promoting local and national public transport service, cycle hire, local walking and cycling option, and use of alternative fuels
9. Natural and Cultural Heritage - on site measures aimed at increasing biodiversity, e.g. wildlife gardening, growing native species, nesting boxes, as well as providing information for visitors on the wildlife on and around the site
10. Innovation - any good and best practice actions to increase a business's sustainability that are not covered elsewhere

Each business is scored on up to 60 measures and the results will establish what award level they have achieved, i.e. Going Green, Bronze, Silver, or Gold.

**The GTBS Grading Process:** Prior to your grading visit you will be advised to review your activities using a checklist and collect evidence into a Green File.

Depending on the size of your business the grading visit takes approximately 2 hours, and is carried out by a registered Green Tourism Assessor. It has two main purposes; to assess your achievements in relation to the criteria, and to give you advice on how to operate more sustainably.

The Grading visit is by appointment and involves an interview with key staff/owner/general manager. During the visit the advisor will look at any paperwork/bills/staff records and will go through a check list. They will have a look around your property (bedrooms, kitchen, pantry, utility room, visitors lounge, toilets and bathrooms, loft, heating and hot water systems and garden/grounds) providing advice throughout the visit. In addition they will need to see your website, Green File, Responsible Visitor Charter, and the information you provide for your guests on public transport, wildlife on and off your site and car free activities, as well as receipts as evidence of local, ethical, recycled/recyclable purchasing.

After the visit you will receive

- a comprehensive grading report
- an award level based on the scoring of 60 measures
- a series of further recommendations and actions
- a GTBS plaque and certificate
- digital logos