

North East England Tourism Awards 2009 Sustainable Tourism Award

Gold award winner: Hunting Hall

The 2009 Gold Sustainable Tourism Award was awarded to Karen Burn for the two 4 and 5 Star environmentally friendly, self-catering cottages she runs with her husband, Tom on Hunting Hall farm, near Berwick on Tweed, Northumberland. 'The idea for our first cottage came out of a teenagers' environmental project,' says Karen. 'My husband and I were both youth leaders with the Wildlife Trust and as part of a project the Northumberland Eco Wild Team (NEWTs) suggested creating an eco-friendly home using one of our empty cottages.'

'We decided to make it into a holiday cottage so that guests could try out green ideas for themselves and see that an eco house could be a comfortable home. Hopefully people would then be encouraged to be more sustainable in their own home. Newt Cottage was so successful it gave us the confidence to renovate the second property.'

The opening of The Fuffins in May 2009 was one of the reasons Karen decided to enter the North East England Tourism Awards. She says, 'We felt buoyed with enthusiasm! We had just opened the second cottage and our guests were so supportive. The assessor, when we had our quality assessment, also recommended the awards. Her encouragement tipped us over the line and we decided to enter for the sustainable tourism and self-catering awards.'



The family spent a long time putting the entry form together. Karen says, 'We had so much to say, it was a challenge to fit it into the word count. I made a note of all I wanted to say and then focused on the most important things. The family proofread it again and again – and made suggestions.'

'The assessment was a very positive occasion and the pre-visit preparations engendered terrific team spirit in the family. I knew from experience we had

so many green measures it was almost impossible to remember them all. So I made a list of all the things to look at in each room and area of the business. We also made a video, which was great to show off what we were doing.'

Karen adds, 'It was a real confidence-building exercise. Listing our green measures really made us appreciate our achievements. For me, the aspect I'm most proud of is the way we've been able to develop the ethos of the NEWTs' original project about sharing green ideas to help more people lead a more sustainable life.'

For Karen, another important achievement was installing heating systems using ground and air sources, and solar energy. These involved a huge outlay for the business but, as Karen points out, they give guests a chance to live in a home with energy-efficient heating. 'As we encourage guests to monitor the electricity usage as part of a light-hearted competition, they can see exactly how efficient the systems' energy use is.'

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'As one young member of NEWTs said, "If just one guest goes home thinking it is worthwhile to make their own house a bit greener, then we will have done something valuable." We are proud of sharing our ideas for a greener lifestyle with our guests.'

Karen also highlights the farm trail, which describes their sustainable farming practices and work for wildlife. She says, 'The trail is a culmination of years of work with youth projects at Hunting Hall. That's where all our work started – getting young people to care for their natural heritage. If we can help them see how special their environment is, they will work harder to protect it in the future!'

Karen concludes, 'It's great how one little idea from the NEWTs has developed to make something so special. The result has been a business we can be proud of, spreading green ideas far and wide, and delivering tremendous customer satisfaction with repeat bookings and recommendations. The Gold award has given us the confidence to move forward with renewed enthusiasm towards being even greener.'

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