



Sustainability

VisitEngland 

Hostel Accommodation

Sustainable Tourism Management Good Practice Guide

YHA Climbing course, Nether End, Derbyshire



Sustainability: Doing Business Even Better

Whether you are motivated to cut utility bills, want to improve your environmental impact or enhance the guest experience, taking a ‘green’ or ‘sustainable approach’ makes good business sense.

Rather than being a separate ‘bolt on’, ‘building in’ a sustainable approach is about improving the management of your business – using resources more efficiently, adding to the offer you provide guests and improving your relationship with your neighbourhood and any staff.

VisitEngland’s commitment to sustainable management and quality improvement

VisitEngland is committed to encouraging a sustainable approach among participants in its National Quality Assessment Scheme for Accommodation.

Questions sometimes arise as to how a sustainable approach can complement improving quality and, more specifically, how it relates to the requirements of quality standards.

This guide aims to demonstrate how these two approaches can be complementary as has been demonstrated by numerous businesses across the country.

A guest perspective

Relaxation and comfort are likely to be the motivations for guests, which may seem at odds with a sustainable approach.

So how can a sustainable approach be complementary with a high quality experience?

- While most guests do not actively seek ‘green accommodation’, research indicates that accommodation businesses taking action do have added appeal. This mirrors a trend for incorporating ethical credentials within products as an added element of quality rather than as a separate ‘ethical’ product.
- Many visiting hostels in rural locations will have been attracted by the special environment, which provides a natural link to the efforts taken by the hostel to improve its impact.
- There are many opportunities for ‘win-win’ situations. Eliminating draughts will improve guest comfort as well as reducing energy bills. Offering locally-produced food adds to the distinctiveness of the guest’s meal. Providing information on accessing the accommodation by a range of means of transport opens up your business to new markets.
- Where guest expectations for comfort have the potential to increase business costs and consumption, using efficient equipment, or renewable energy, will mean this can be accommodated with a lower impact.



The Broads National Park, Norfolk

¹ 59% of visitors stated that having green credentials had a positive impact on their likelihood to choose a tourism business compared to 41% stating that it would make no difference (SW England Visitor Survey 2009).



Putting it Into Practice

Plan for success

Make the most of precious time and money by understanding your starting point and prioritising action.

• Measure to manage

- Monitor use – record meter readings/fuel deliveries and combine with guest nights sold over the same period to compare performance over time.
- Sub-metering can create a better understanding and control of consumption and costs.

• Review your business

- VisitEngland's Green Start website at better-tourism.org provides a check list, identifies gaps and develops a tailored plan for your business.
- Walk round each part of your property looking for, and noting, problems/opportunities.

• Make a plan

- Be realistic – identify some immediate 'quick wins' and longer term actions.

Communication

Good communication can add appeal and enhance the guest experience. Done poorly it can feel tokenistic or preaching.

• Communicating your credentials

- Let guests know the actions you've taken and, whenever possible, how it will improve their stay.
- Be creative and visual in 'telling your story' rather than technical.
- The 'drip feed' of social media provides a great opportunity for examples to be presented.
- Never exaggerate on actions taken. Make use of annual awards and/or certification schemes to provide independent proof.
- Make sure staff are familiar with your policies so that they can explain what the business is doing.

• Getting guests involved

- Guests are more likely to join in if they first see your efforts and are aware of that other guests are taking action.
- Prioritise a handful of actions and present them positively as choices rather than rules.

Information to enhance your guests' stay

Information provided in reception and/or public areas can help guests enjoy the best of the area, providing a richer experience while improving the impact on the local economy and environment.

• Local culture & heritage

- Whether it's sampling the culture of a particular area of a city or discovering a village's history, providing examples of specific areas/attractions will give guests a richer experience.
- Highlight current events and any interesting history of the accommodation property.

• More than 'A to B'

- Many travelling to hostels will be doing so without a car, so ensure that good public transport information is available (including options for how to get from the nearest station/bus stop).
- Focus on destinations closer to you and accessible without a car.
- Promote the full range of ways that people can explore. Include any available public transport, not forgetting to mention any scenic journeys, the name of relevant bus stops and any special tickets, along with local walks, cycle hire/ horse-riding or guided tours.
- If it's possible to be a ticket agent for public transport providers consider selling passes/tickets.
- Investigate how best to meet the needs of cyclists and walkers such as drying rooms. Look into Walkers and/or Cyclists Welcome [training](#) and/or [accreditation](#).

• Visitor donations

- Join, or set-up, a voluntary 'gifting' scheme where a business collects funds for a local charity.
- Alternatively make a corporate donation to a local environmental or educational charity.

Customer care & housekeeping

• Cleaning products

- Consider using low impact phosphate and chlorine free cleaning products, alongside microfibre cloths, that reduce the amount of cleaning liquid. Look for the EU eco-label and buy concentrated to reduce packaging and costs.

• Recycling

- Many guests will be willing to recycle during their stay if opportunities are simple.
- Provide clear and attractive signage and think about which items are best in individual rooms and which would be best in dedicated recycling areas.
- Alternatively a business may choose to do their own segregation as part of their housekeeping or use a waste company that segregates as part of the service.

• Brief staff

- Make sustainable practices part of induction/ongoing training and invite suggestions.
- Consider forming a 'green team' or identifying a volunteer to lead on action.

Continued Putting it Into Practice

Heating & cooling



Being a key element of guest comfort, business costs and impacts makes this a priority:

- **Keep it in** – Insulating roofs and unfilled cavity walls is very cost effective. Insulating solid walls is more expensive and complex but good maintenance that keeps them dry and will improve performance by 40%. Use double/secondary glazing whenever possible.
- **Draughts** – Draught-proofing has excellent returns. Keep seals/brushes in good condition.
- **Heat generation**– Ask for an efficiency test to be included in boiler services – if below 80% efficiency consider a replacement. Consider renewable heat (air/ground source heat pumps, solar thermal, biomass or, if you have a pool, CHP). Don't forget to insulate pipes.
- **Controls** – Install controls that allow a greater range of set timings and the start time to be adjusted to outside temperatures. Ensure radiators have thermostatic controls (TRVs) and ensure they are turned down between stays (empty rooms can be kept at 14 degrees without dampness). The optimum temperature for stored hot water is 60°C.

FACT

Exterior

• Grounds, gardens and frontages

- Consider using materials that are in keeping with the local environment and encourage wildlife through bird boxes, wildlife areas etc. If this is a particular strength provide information to guests on what to look out for/has been spotted recently.
- Use water butts and other water saving gardening products. Time watering for the start and end of the day.

Interior

• Curtains

- Thermally lined curtains/blinds both help retain heat within a room and provide a darker room for sleeping in.

• Décor

- Use could be made of local art and/or photography including images depicting local scenes, historical, or heritage related images – it all adds to a visitor's enhanced sense of place.
- Allow sufficient space between heaters and furniture for warm air to circulate into the room.

Bathrooms – guest & public

• Toilets & urinals

- Older toilets (without dual flush) can be retrofitted with a water-saving device. [Use this guide to choose the appropriate device.](#)
- Ensure all urinals have controls (ideally presence detectors).
- Fit basin taps in public bathrooms with push taps/infra-red controls. Add aerators to mixer taps.

• Showers

- Showers generally use significantly less water than baths (unless a power shower).
- Aerated shower heads add air to provide the same force with less water. Tests show 40% savings, with 80% judging the shower experience as better/as good as previously. Use a push button to avoid showers being left on indefinitely.

Dining & cooking

Continued Putting it Into Practice

Lighting



- **Natural light** – Ensure that windows/skylights are kept clean, curtains are fully drawn and consider suntubes. Keep lampshades/fittings clean to improve performance.
- **Prioritise** – Focus improvements where lighting is on for longest – typically external lighting, corridors and other public and ‘back of house’ areas. Consider automatic light controls where they may be left on unnecessarily. Consider labelling banks of light switches.
- **Lighting** – LEDs (available in a range of formats) cost a fraction of tungsten/halogen lighting to run and last much longer. Unlike compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) they are instantly bright. Check for the brightness (measured in lumens) and the warmth of the colour (measured in kelvins).

FACT

Local produce

- Guests will appreciate the opportunity to taste some of the specialities of the local area and the use of local products.
- Build up relationships with local producers and promote their use to guests, providing some interesting information about where the food is sourced from. Make sure staff are briefed to have an awareness of the sourcing of the food.
- Make guests aware of nearby opportunities to buy products as souvenirs, such as farmers’ markets, farm shops or other specialist food shops that are nearby.

Guest kitchens

- Install energy and water efficient equipment – particularly in case of fridges, freezers and dishwashers. Look for the Energy Savings Trust and EU energy label (A+++ is now the highest).
- Encourage guests to use dishwashers when full as a means of saving water and energy and not to leave equipment on unnecessarily.
- Make guests aware of recycling opportunities (see earlier section).

Food preparation

- Choose energy efficient kitchen equipment, researching running, as well as purchase, costs and look into capital allowances (see ‘website’ section).
- Keeping equipment clean improves efficiency, as does keeping heating and cooling equipment apart whenever possible.
- Check seals on oven, fridge and freezer doors to ensure that they are performing efficiently.

Food waste



You pay twice for waste – once to purchase, once to dispose – so minimisation is essential. On average 21% of food waste arises from spoilage; 45% from food preparation and 34% from consumer plates.

- **Monitor** – Analyse which are the key food items that are getting wasted. In most accommodation it is potato, bakery, fruit and vegetable products.
- **Portion sizes** – Offering choices will better match the serving to the portion desired.
- **Focus on the food delivery, storage and use of items with a short shelf life** – these are most vulnerable to being wasted.
- **Have clear waste separation in the kitchen** so that items are disposed of in the correct containers.
- Sign up to the **‘Hospitality and Food Service Agreement’** which aims to reduce packaging and increase the proportion of food-related waste that avoids landfill.

FACT

Useful websites

If you'd like to find out further information about the following areas please access these useful links.

General advice & help

bettertourism.org – A self-check audit that produces a tailored plan for your business, along with case studies and other resources.

coastproject.co.uk – Information on a wide range of topics and opportunities to post questions and participate in discussions with fellow tourism businesses through this networking site.

Energy

carbontrust.com – Aimed at larger businesses but containing detailed topic guides, including a hospitality guide information on tax relief for new energy efficient appliances.

yougen.co.uk – Accessible information on renewables (and increasing energy efficiency) which includes blogs and help on finding a recommended installer in your area.

which.co.uk – While only members can access product reviews, the website also contains excellent advice on a range of energy efficiency areas such as choosing appliances, lighting and boilers.

Water efficiency

wrap.org.uk/content/rippleffect-water-efficiency-businesses – An initiative providing free business support (mainly online and phone based).

europeanwaterlabel.eu – products that have achieved water efficiency standards.

Waste (including food waste)

wrap.org.uk – Information on actions that can be taken to reduce waste and the opportunity to sign up to the Hospitality and Food Service Agreement.

Food and drink

localfoods.org.uk – Useful search tool for farmers' markets and farm shops near your business.

soilassociation.org – information on organic food and food miles.

Travel

transportdirect.info – National travel planning website offering door-to-door journeys by car, bike or public transport, a day trip planner, nearest car parks, carbon emission calculators and much more.

traveline.info – Choose your region and the website provides the opportunity for individual bus stop timetables, lists of public transport within a 20 minute walk and journey planning options.

travelengland.com – Highways Agency website with the latest road conditions & roadworks.

Certification, awards and communications

visitengland.com/green – Links to all certification schemes currently endorsed by VisitEngland.

visitenglandawards.org – The annual national awards include a 'sustainable tourism' category.

visitengland.com/green – Read 'Keep it Real', a comprehensive guide on communicating sustainability to guests.

futerra.co.uk – Research, examples and advice on how to communicate sustainability creatively.

For more information please visit
visitengland.com/green



The historic Red Lion pub in Cricklade, Wiltshire