

Help is at hand

Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, explains the help available to make a park more environmentally friendly



Making a park more environmentally friendly is a big challenge that takes time, dedication and knowledge. However, the good news is that whatever the size of park and however ambitious the environmental plans may be, there are a range of organisations that can help with advice, information, practical support and even financial assistance.

This article highlights many of the groups that can help, but this is not exhaustive as there are so many. What's more, parks will most likely be able to develop extremely useful partnerships with specific local groups and businesses. For example, one park has formed a highly successful, long-term conservation partnership with the Ministry of Defence to safeguard a valuable wildlife habitat that lies between their respective landholdings. *continued...*





Wildlife bodies

One of the most important things that a park can do for the environment is to manage the habitats within its boundaries to help wildlife. Among the bodies that can help with this work are The Wildlife Trusts. There are 47 local Wildlife Trusts covering the whole of the UK, and they have over 800,000 members. Between them, these groups manage thousands of nature reserves and run marine conservation projects around our coast.

The Wildlife Trusts can help parks go green in a number of ways. Corporate membership of the local Trust will allow parks to get involved with and support its work – so contributing directly to local conservation. The Trusts also advise landowners on all aspects of environmental management and conservation, primarily through its nationwide network of environmental consultancies. According to the group, its consultants can help with a wide range of issues, including guidance on landscaping and environmental management (EMAS & ISO 14001). They can also help put together action plans to boost biodiversity, run staff training days and work on planning applications and development schemes.

The Wildlife Trusts also run the 'Biodiversity Benchmark' scheme. This is an assessment scheme that has a single-minded focus on the management of land for the benefit of wildlife. Taking part will help to measure, manage and improve the ecological value of a park.

Naturally, there are many other consultants offering advice on all aspects of ecological and environmental management. One place to look is the ENDS Directory of Environmental Consultancies, which provides a powerful search engine that narrows down choices by location and expertise.

Farms and golf courses

For parks that are part of working farms, there are a number of bodies that will help improve the environmental management of agricultural activities. The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) is one that offers independent and impartial conservation advice on any aspect of a farm's business. Its advice and assistance covers issues such as the Entry and Higher Level Farm Stewardship Schemes. It also offers an Environmental Health Check which is aimed at cutting through paperwork.

Parks that have golf courses can also get specific environmental advice from groups such as the Scottish Golf Environment Group. It offers free best practice and legislation advice on managing and creating habitats and landscape features, such as coastal links, grasslands, woodlands, heathlands, wetlands and ponds.



Regulations and government bodies

One of the most important things to check is that the park is up to date with its regulatory commitments. BH&HPA provides information on the latest legislation, including environmental regulations, that parks should be keeping in mind. Another place to look is the NetRegs website. This provides free guidance on what parks need to do to comply with environmental law and protect the environment.

When it comes to environmental legislation and licensing, approach the relevant government agency for advice. Central and local government is also a good source of advice and help on a range of wildlife management issues. For example, Natural England's Wildlife Management and Licensing Service provides a range of advisory leaflets, website guidance and published reports on everything from badgers to wild boar (tel: 0845 601 4523). Natural England also provides advice to parks that own or occupy protected areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Other agencies that can help include the Environment Agency, Defra, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. At a regional level, many parks also get help from local government and from the agencies that protect specific areas of the country, such as the various national park authorities.

Birds and bees

If members need assistance or advice to help a particular species or type of animal then there is, most likely, an organisation that can lend a hand. For example, the RSPB provides advice and training on how to manage land to help specific bird species thrive, the British Herpetological Society provides wide-ranging help on reptiles and amphibians and the British Beekeepers' Association will be able to help put the 'buzz' back into a park. The web is the first port of call to find a group that can help.

Flowers and trees

If parks are considering a wild flower planting scheme, or would like some help to see what the possibilities are, then professional advice can be sought from a qualified ecologist – the local Wildlife Trust will put members in touch with one or offer expert help itself.

Planting appropriate native plant species is a key step that any park can take to boost biodiversity. Plenty of great advice is available from a group called Flora Locale. Flora Locale's website has a comprehensive listing of seed suppliers and guidance on habitat creation. Alternatively, the Natural History Museum's website has the amazing 'Postcode Plants Database'. By using this service, it's possible to find out what native plants grow nearby – important information when it comes to working out what species can be incorporated into wildlife planting schemes.

If trees are a concern, then the Woodland Trust can help. This national charity runs the MOREwoods scheme to help landowners create beautiful new native woodland. Specialist woodland creation advisers are in place and can offer park visits, advice and potentially financial assistance.



Centre for
Alternative
Technology

Sustainability

If ecological management is one side of the environmental coin, then sustainability is the other. As with ecology, when it comes to advice and support on sustainability issues – reducing the amount of energy and other resources used and the amount of waste and pollution produced – there are a whole range of national and local organisations that can help.

For example, to see sustainability in action, a good place to go is the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) in Wales. CAT is a working community that puts sustainable ideas into action. It addresses issues such as renewable energy, environmental building, energy efficiency, organic growing and alternative sewage systems. It runs a free information service, answering enquiries on a massive range of topics by phone, letter or email, five days a week. For bigger projects, there is also a consultancy service.

Regional groups

Regionally, there are a wide range of local green business forums, networks or clubs that have been set up to offer local businesses the information, support and networking opportunities they need to improve their environmental performance. For example, Yorkshire is served by the Better Business Environment Forum (for West Yorkshire), the North Yorkshire Green Business Club and the South Yorkshire Green Business Club. While, not to be outdone, Business Link Yorkshire not only promotes business enterprise but also has a website section dedicated to the environment and efficiency.

In Scotland, the Green Business Partnership (formerly known as the Business Environment Partnership) provides free and subsidised assistance with environmental management to small- and medium-sized businesses throughout Scotland. According to the group, it can help businesses achieve cost savings through waste management, energy efficiency, reduced effluent production, reduced water and raw material consumption.

Such regional groups can be a lot of help. For example, the ENWORKS Regional Resource Efficiency (run by the Cumbria Business Environment Network) offers small- and medium-sized businesses free environmental support and helps them to identify resource and cost savings. According to the group, it has assisted over 750 Cumbrian businesses to become more resource efficient. To date it has identified over £16 million in cost savings, 70,000 tonnes of carbon savings and helped divert 59,000 tonnes of waste from landfill.

Regional Tourism Development and Business Development Agencies are other good sources of information, so it makes good sense to search for a county online to find out what 'green business advice' is available.



Energy conservation

Energy conservation is probably the area where saving money and saving the environment is linked most closely together. Given the importance of reducing our dependency on fossil fuels, it's not surprising that there are a number of national bodies that can provide advice, assistance and financial support.

A key source of information and help on energy efficiency is the Carbon Trust. The Trust will carry out a survey of a park to assess the potential for energy savings. Each survey is conducted by an independent accredited consultant and produces a practical action plan tailored to the needs of the business. According to the Trust, its surveys have helped businesses identify potential cost savings of £170 million and over 1.3mt of carbon dioxide emissions since 2005. A survey can be free if a business meets certain requirements. The Carbon Trust is also the source of loans for energy-efficiency improvements or for the purchase of renewable energy technology: 0% business loans of £3,000 - £100,000 are available. (See thecarbontrust.co.uk/loans for details.)

Another key energy efficiency partner is the Energy Saving Trust. The Trust provides information on energy saving and renewable energy, including details of the government's Feed-in Tariffs (which provides a guaranteed rate of income for each unit of electricity generated by renewable energy systems such as solar panels) and the various other grants and loans available to companies in the UK. Of particular interest is its Energy Technology List, which provides information on energy-efficient products and technologies that attract 100% first year capital allowances. For similar information, including details of water-efficient technology that attracts the same allowances, visit eca.gov.uk. For parks that have a vehicle fleet, the Trust's transport advice programme can help to reduce costs and improve the environmental performance of cars and vans. Other groups that can help with transport arrangements include Sustrans, which has worked with a number of parks to build local cycle networks. *continued...*



Waste and recycling

Waste minimisation and recycling can be tricky areas of work to get right, particularly as they involve getting visitors involved. Nationally there are a number of government initiatives that are working to help businesses use resources more efficiently, reduce the amount of waste they produce and recycle more.

WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) provides a variety of support materials and information to businesses. Its sister initiative, Envirowise offers free, independent support to help businesses to use resources more efficiently and save money. For example, the Envirowise website contains the Green Street interactive learning tool which, according to the group, is a novel and fun way to help businesses consider their environmental impact, improve their knowledge of resource efficiency and save money. Other national groups that can help parks to cut down on its waste and boost its recycling include Wastewatch; its website contains practical tips on how to reduce waste in the workplace.

Water

Envirowise also helps businesses to improve water efficiency. For example, its water benchmarking tools allow parks to compare their water use against similar businesses. Its BigSplash project works with companies across Scotland to provide tailored support (including one-to-one assistance from an Envirowise adviser) on how to reduce water use and make savings. Alternatively, the Rippleffect project provides water advice and guidance across England.

Other organisations that can help to save water include the local water company. All water companies have a duty to promote efficient use of water among their customers and several companies run free water conservation audit schemes for businesses.

Green purchasing

One of the key issues in terms of becoming a more sustainable company is working with your suppliers to buy the greenest products possible. Envirowise's 'Guide to Green Procurement' sets out a step-by-step approach to help businesses move towards greener procurement. It includes a guide to green labels and presents a 'traffic light' style toolkit to help identify areas where current procurement practice could be improved to reduce environmental impact whilst also saving money.

Community partnerships

Being an environmentally-friendly park doesn't stop at the park gate. It also involves reaching out to the community and being a 'good neighbour'. Almost by definition, being a good neighbour is about working with a range of local groups, companies and individuals. Whether it's linking with other local businesses to publish a local tourist guide to boost the local economy, providing a bit of the park as a 'living classroom' for the local school or simply advertising the local fish and chip shop on the 'things to do' noticeboard, this important work is all about making partnerships and pooling resources. This means that, when it comes down to being a 'good neighbour' it is normally up to the park to reach out to specific groups in the neighbourhood. That said, there are a large number of groups on hand to help.

One of the most high profile is Business in the Community. This is one of The Prince's Charities, a group of not-for-profit organisations of which HRH The Prince of Wales is President. Business in the Community has over 850 member companies, from large multinational household names to small local businesses and public sector organisations. The group advises, supports and challenges its members to invest in their communities and to develop their businesses in a sustainable manner.

Regional networks

While Business in the Community is the national flagship for being a good neighbour, there are also a large number of regional groups that are working to link businesses and their communities. For example, in the south west VisitCornwall is working in partnership with the Cornwall Sustainable Tourism Project (CoaST) to create a sustainable tourism network that aims to make all tourist organisations 'good neighbours' to the local environment. On the Isle of Wight, a group called Natural Enterprise works to drive the sustainable economic development of the island by, for example, helping businesses fundraise for environmental projects. While the Lake District Nurture Lakeland (formerly The Tourism and Conservation Partnership) links the tourism industry and conservation organisations in a wide variety of projects, from footpath restoration through to water quality improvement.

The number of such regional sustainable development groups is steadily growing, so check to see if there isn't a similar organisation working in the region that will help the park to be a good neighbour to the environment and to local environmental projects.

Community projects

Of course, one of the most direct ways in which parks can get involved in their local communities is to hook into existing community organisations. Many towns and villages hold annual 'in bloom' or 'beautiful village' awards. These groups present great opportunities for practical assistance or sponsorship. Many communities also take part in regular 'tidy' projects, often under the umbrella of national groups such as Keep Britain Tidy - why not get involved in the group's 'Big Tidy Up'?

Local food

Linking a park with the local community can often really enhance the holiday experience for visitors. One area where this is most obvious is food. Helping people to find locally produced, fresh and seasonal food is a great way to add a wonderful extra dimension to their holidays and really give them a taste of their surroundings. One group that provides a really easy-to-use resource to help to do this is BigBarn. Simply enter the park's postcode to find local producers, farmers' markets, farm shops etc.

Awards

One of the key benefits of going green is the marketing boost it can provide. To help to capitalise on all the hard work the park has done for the environment there are a number of award schemes such as the Green Tourism Business Scheme. And, of course, BH&HPA's David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme, helps members to assess and improve all aspects of their parks environmental performance and to provide an effective way to let all customers know what the park is doing – true partnership in action!



Useful websites

Wildlife

British Beekeepers' Association - britishbee.org.uk
 British Herpetological Society - thebhs.org
 Countryside Council for Wales - ccw.gov.uk
 Defra - defra.gov.uk
 ENDS Directory of Environmental Consultancies - endsdirectory.com
 Environment Agency - environment-agency.gov.uk
 Flora Locale - floralocale.org
 Farming Wildlife Advisory Group - fwag.org.uk
 The Natural History Museum - nhm.ac.uk
 The Northern Ireland Environment Agency - ni-environment.gov.uk
 Natural England - naturalengland.org.uk
 NetRegs - netregs.gov.uk
 RSPB - rspb.org.uk
 The Scottish Golf Environment Group - sgeg.org.uk
 The Wildlife Trusts - wildlifetrusts.org
 The Woodland Trust - woodlandtrust.org.uk

Sustainability

Better Business Environment Forum - bbef.org.uk
 The Carbon Trust - carbontrust.co.uk
 The Centre for Alternative Technology - cat.org.uk
 Cumbria Business Environment Network - cumbriaben.com
 Enhanced Capital Allowances - eca.gov.uk
 Energy Saving Trust - energysavingtrust.org.uk
 Envirowise - envirowise.wrap.org.uk
 Green Business Partnership - greenbusinesspartnership.org.uk
 North Yorkshire Green Business Club - here4greenbusiness.co.uk
 South Yorkshire Green Business Club - sygbc.co.uk
 Sustrans - sustrans.org.uk
 WRAP - wrap.org.uk

Good neighbours

BigBarn - bigbarn.co.uk
 Business in the Community - bitc.org.uk
 Cornwall Sustainable Tourism Project (CoaST) - cstn.org.uk
 Keep Britain Tidy - keepbritaintidy.org
 Natural Enterprise - naturallenterprise.co.uk
 Nurture Lakeland - nurturelakeland.org

Awards

David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme - bellamyparks.co.uk
 Green Tourism Business Scheme - green-business.co.uk ●