

# Green buying tips



**Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, looks at some of the key green purchasing challenges for parks**

In 2009, the green purchasing debate intensified following the introduction of the EU's Directive to phase out incandescent light bulbs by 2012. As a result UK consumers are being forced to choose more energy-efficient lights, such as Compact Fluorescent (CFL) bulbs or Light Emitting Diodes (LED) fittings. Not surprisingly, there have been objections to this move and worries about the mercury that CFL bulbs contain and the quality of the light they provide. The media has been full of stories of people stockpiling their old bulbs.

Although the positive aspects of the move to more efficient bulbs are clear - they save energy and money and therefore cut down on the mercury emitted by power stations - the debate caused by the light bulbs does illustrate the need for good information. This article looks at the reality of making the right purchasing choice for both the environment and for park businesses.

## Where to start?

It is clear that the greenest form of purchasing is not to buy at all and to mend and reuse things. The most environmentally friendly question park owners and managers can ask is 'Do we really need to buy this?' It is often possible to adapt or upgrade things that the park already has or to lease, hire or rent instead. Many parks go to great lengths to cut down on the amount of things they buy. For example, by using compost made at the park instead of peat, reusing office envelopes and paper and recycling old drinks bottles.

These moves really do help the environment and can bring significant cost savings, but for most commercial operations, they are only possible in a relatively limited number of cases. The next best thing parks can do is to make sure they buy the greenest version of whatever they need. Tourism North East (TNE) proposes a good way forward, which includes three key elements that can help focus the park's green purchasing:

- have a green purchasing policy
- use a checklist to assess potential products
- start with local, ethical outlets, and only go further afield if necessary.

A green purchasing policy can be as simple or as involved as park owners and managers want. In its most basic form it can just be a statement to let customers and staff know that the park is committed to purchasing the most environmentally friendly options available. TNE suggests:

*'At [name of business] we aim to purchase local, greener products that are ethically and safely produced wherever possible. We commit time to checking our products and suppliers to ensure that, as far as possible, we choose to purchase products that require the least energy in production and use, use the least transport, don't use or produce hazardous materials, use sustainable raw materials, involve fair and ethical labour, and can be recycled, reused or biodegrade after use.'*

Parks can go much further than this and draw up a series of environmental purchasing criteria that set out the minimum level of environmental performance for the things they need to buy, whether it's the recycled content of the paper that's used in the office or the energy efficiency of new lodges. Environmental purchasing criteria for products and services in contracts or in tender documents can also be established.

## A green shopping list

The fundamentals of green purchasing are not in the policy however, they are in the day-to-day practice. TNE suggests that when buying a new product or service, it is useful to have a checklist to help parks to decide what the best option is as there are quite a few things to keep in mind. Park owners and managers should consider issues of durability (e.g. buy fabric bags instead of plastic), the energy the product or service uses, how a product is made or grown and the raw materials that are used to make it. If the product is polluting in any way, consider choosing a zero or least polluting option, e.g. choosing organic or low-VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) paints.

Packaging is also a big issue so look for products that have minimum packaging, that use packaging made from recycled material or that can itself be recycled. Recycling is also something to consider and where possible buy products that are made from recycled materials, such as office paper and toilet paper, and buy products that can easily be recycled or composted. Buying in bulk can also help the environment as it cuts down on packaging and transport costs. Purchasing both products, services and raw materials from local suppliers also cuts down on the environmental impact of haulage.

It is important to check the environmental credentials of the park's suppliers. Remember consumer pressure is a great catalyst for improvements. Do they have a green approach to production? Do they treat their workforce well and give something back to the community? Do they have a green transport strategy or energy policy? If it's difficult to find a green supplier, work with current partners and let them know what the park is doing for the environment and try to get them interested in doing the same. If the park gets supplies from any large companies, check if they are accredited to the environmental management standard ISO 14001.

## Costs

Cost is a key issue in the green purchasing debate as many green alternatives, such as recycled paper and phosphate-free greener cleaning products, can be pricier. This business decision is necessary, based on where priorities lie, however many green choices can actually save the business money in the long run.

For example, when purchasing equipment that uses energy, water or other resources that need to be paid for, investment in more efficient technology can bring cost savings in the long term.

The nature of such savings is highlighted by the Carbon Trust, a government agency that gives advice to businesses on how they can reduce the amount of energy they use. Not

surprisingly, the Trust comes down squarely in favour of energy-saving light bulbs and calculates the potential savings that are possible.

## Example one

### The Trust assesses the case for replacing a 50-Watt spot with its energy-saving equivalent, an 11CW CFL spot.

If the light operates for 2,000 hours in a year, changing it will save 78kWh of electricity. Assuming electricity costs 7.9p/kWh, this saves about £6 per year. Typically, CFL spots cost about £12.50 (excluding VAT) each compared to about £2.00 (excluding VAT) for tungsten halogen dichroic spots.

This means that the payback on the additional bulb cost is achieved in about 20 months from the electricity costs saved. However, the savings do not stop there as according to the Trust, the CFL spots have a typical lifetime of 15,000 hours compared to only 2,500 hours for tungsten halogen dichroic spots and so substantial savings in maintenance costs and future bulb purchases are also achieved as, once in place, the bulbs do not need to be changed for many years.

## Example two

Other energy saving equipment can bring even more substantial gains. For example, a similar calculation for a single, 200kW commercial heating boiler, shows that the installation of a condensing boiler (to replace a conventional unit) should save around 10% of energy consumption (i.e. 30,000 kWh/year), which at a typical gas price of 2.5p/kWh would give an annual saving of £750/year.

The additional cost of using a condensing boiler (rather than a modern non-condensing type) as a replacement would be around £1,500, giving a payback on this additional cost of approximately two years. From that point onwards, the savings go to a business' bottom line. During all this time the appliance, be it light bulb or boiler, is responsible for less pollution and less environmental impact.

## Good neighbour

Of course, cost savings are only possible on certain products, but there are many other benefits from going green when shopping. For example, buying locally-produced food not only reduces the amount of pollution produced by importing food from the other side of the world, it also helps to make the park a 'good neighbour'. This work is very important and BH&HPA members may recall Clarissa Dickson Wright highlighting this during her inspiring speech at BH&HPA's 2008 Conference. She talked in particular about how important it was to the rural economy for businesses to buy and promote local food.

However, even buying local is not without its pitfalls. Clarissa's big campaign idea was to get Section 36 of the Trade Descriptions Act changed. This defines 'local produce' as 'the country in which they last underwent a treatment or process resulting in a substantial change.' According to Clarissa, this means that many non-local food products were slipping in and passing themselves off as something they are not. *continued...*

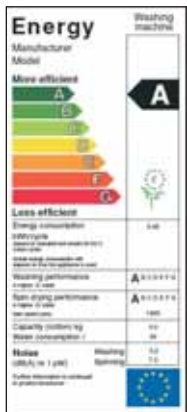


She asked for help with her campaign and laid down the gauntlet to BH&HPA members to support the rural economy directly.

The magic ingredient for getting this issue right is local knowledge and getting the information about local food can also be great fun. For example, one park I have visited stocked local organic beer in its pub and I am told the research for this was very rewarding. Since 2004, The Camping and Caravanning Club have displayed 'Eat Local' noticeboards. These give details of all the local foods that visitors can buy – the information coming from research done by Club sites and from recommendations from visitors. This is not only great for the local economy, but it's also great green news as it means that the food hasn't had to travel far to get from 'field to fork' and therefore saves energy.

## The greenest buy

How do park owners and managers decide what to buy? The first place to look is often the product itself. There are a wide range of eco-labels that will direct consumers to more environmentally-friendly choices. The most well known are probably the various logos such as the 'Mobius loop' that show that a product can be recycled or is made from a certain percentage of recycled material.



Another well known group of labels are the 'energy labels' found on various different pieces of electrical equipment such as fridges, freezers, washing machines, ovens and light bulbs. Products are generally rated from 'A' to 'G', with 'A' being the most efficient; 'A+' and 'A++' indicate the most efficient fridges and freezers. Other labels exist for other energy-using items. For example, energy-efficient boilers carry the SEDBUK 'A' or 'B' rating - view the boiler database at [www.sedbuk.com](http://www.sedbuk.com).

There are also various food labels such as the Marine Stewardship Council's label for sustainably harvested seafood and the Soil Association's Organic Standard for organically-produced food. There are labels for timber products, such as the Forest Stewardship Council's mark for sustainably harvested timber and labels for products that give a fair deal to their producers, such as the Fairtrade mark. There are also product-specific labels such as the VOC labels found on some paints. These indicate the relative content of VOCs which cause pollution and may be harmful to human health in the product.

The criteria used to judge which products should carry these labels give a good indication of the thinking that has gone into them and why the products are greener. Take, for example, the European Ecolabel - an official Europe-wide

award (with a flower logo) for non-food products such as cleaning and detergent products, paints, toilet tissue and clothing. The group that awards these labels assesses a wide range of environmental impacts, across the lifetime of a product, from production and use through to disposal. For example, the label's criteria for detergents for washing machines and dishwashers specify that any detergents carrying the label must break down into harmless elements once they enter the environment, that they must work well at lower temperatures to save energy and that guidelines must be provided for efficient use, promoting savings in energy and detergent. It is, however, interesting to note that Ecover, probably the most high-profile brand of green cleaning products, does not carry the EU Ecolabel. According to the brand's website, this is 'for the simple reason that Ecover believes the standards and criteria for carrying the flower are just not high enough yet'.

## Shopping online

The web has fantastic information about green choices. For example, [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org) contains a wide variety of buyers' guides, for everything from electricity suppliers to floor coverings and carpets. It details the issues behind the green purchasing decisions it advocates: such as why not using peat for horticulture is a vital step for any park that wants to help preserve Britain's biodiversity - lowland raised peat bog is a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the EU Habitats Directive. Another great website is the Carbon Trust's website - [www.carbontrust.co.uk](http://www.carbontrust.co.uk). Try its 'find a bulb' chooser ([www.carbontrust.co.uk/energy/startsaving/tech\\_lighting\\_lamps-luminaires.htm](http://www.carbontrust.co.uk/energy/startsaving/tech_lighting_lamps-luminaires.htm)). This answers the bulb questions posed earlier and shows that there is an energy-saving alternative for most bulbs out there and as LED technology improves and comes on stream, this situation will only improve.

Parks can also find out how to get financial help with their green purchasing online. For example, energy-efficient lighting is just one of the energy and water-saving technologies supported by the Government's Enhanced Capital Allowances Scheme. Under this scheme, it's possible to claim an 'enhanced' 100% capital allowance on qualifying investments in equipment in the first tax year - see [www.eca.gov.uk](http://www.eca.gov.uk) for the items covered by the scheme. There are a number of other grants and loans available for green purchasing, e.g. ample, unsecured, interest-free energy-efficiency loans of up to £100,000 are available for small and medium-sized businesses through the Carbon Trust when equipment, such as lighting or boilers, is replaced or upgraded. Businesses qualify if they can show that they will be making a significant energy saving. Loan Action Scotland manage a similar scheme in Scotland (<http://loanactionscotland.blogspot.com>).





## Watch out for green wash

Unfortunately, one of the big problems surrounding green purchasing is that a number of products make bogus claims that they are 'environmentally friendly'. It is important to verify claims made by the manufacturer and supplier. Ask for written documentation and proof. Pictures of birds and flowers mean nothing unless backed up with a clear explanation of what a company is doing to make its product green. Groups such as Friends of the Earth (FoE) act as 'policemen' here, so keep up to date with news of 'green scams' or 'green washes'.

Recently, one of the most venerable green labelling schemes – the Forestry Stewardship Council's certification – came under fire from FoE: *'Most FSC timber certifications are highly reliable – guaranteeing that wood has been sourced sustainably and improving forestry standards in many countries,'* says the group's website before explaining that FoE is concerned at reports that, *'some FSC certificates are failing to guarantee rigorous environmental and social standards'.* As a result, FoE is supporting a review of the FSC scheme and suggests the following four-step approach for anyone buying wood:

- 1) First repair, restore or adapt something you already have.
- 2) Then buy secondhand, recycled, reclaimed or waste timber.
- 3) Only then, buy locally produced timber products that are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified.
- 4) And only if you have no other option buy FSC certified products from farther afield. If there is no timber available from a locally certified forest, the FSC logo is always preferable, the group advises.

## Buy, buy, green

Although green purchasing is not always an easy option and can entail a fair bit of research and hard decision-making, it can also produce real results, both for the business and for the environment. Why not buy into the idea and see whether the park can have its own green purchasing 'light bulb moment' and reap rewards from buying green. ●

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