

The question of 'managing' the environment



Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management examines the benefits of good environmental management

As I write this article, the assessors for this year's BH&HPA David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme are out in the field reviewing parks and one of the new things they have been asked to do for 2008 is to look in more detail at the way in which parks manage environmental issues.

Now, when the whole concept of 'management' pops up, many people run fast in the opposite direction, understandably concerned that they are going to have to submit to another round of consultancy-speak, form-filling and red tape. When it comes to the environment however, getting the management of the issues right can actually help a park streamline its approach, get the job done more effectively and reap the maximum benefits.

The benefits of good environmental management are highlighted in the feedback the Scheme's judging panel has received so far. As in past years, many assessors are reporting that parks are missing opportunities for environmental excellence because the key issues (primarily ecological management, resource and energy conservation and waste management) have not been thought through systematically. Others have missed the 'Gold' standard because staff lack on-the-ground leadership, or because 'head office' does not give any direction - all symptoms that the park or company is taking an

ad-hoc approach to the environmental challenge. In contrast, those parks that approach environmental issues in a focused and coherent way, i.e. treating them as management issues that should be 'plumbed in' to the overall organisation of the park, receive recognition for doing so.

In this article I suggest some of the things that those who manage parks - both large and small - can think about doing to help them manage their environmental work more effectively. Before I start, however, I'd just like to reassure all readers that my focus on management here does not mean that the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme has become obsessive about the subject. In fact, the Scheme takes a pragmatic stance and advises its assessors to look at the issue in context.

For example, the Scheme does not make a written environmental policy and action plan mandatory. Instead the assessors' guidance notes state that, *'If the park has a written management policy and action plan that's great, but please understand that many park owners and managers, especially of smaller parks, like to keep everything "in their heads"'*. It is therefore up to the assessors to gauge whether a park is doing enough to manage its environmental work properly - written policy or no written policy. In the final analysis, a park that has implemented a well-thought-out environmental plan (either written or oral) should be a high achiever. *continued...*

Where to start?

So where's the best place to start when thinking about environmental management? Well, as the song says, it's best to start at the very beginning by taking a look at the park business to see where its strengths and weaknesses lie in terms of its impact on the environment. By doing so, steps to take to reduce the park's environmental 'footprint' and boost its value to wildlife should be highlighted. This 'benchmarking' exercise is an important first step as it shows parks where best to focus their work.

There are, of course, many consultants out there only too willing to take money to do such a job - and it may indeed be worthwhile getting them in, especially in the case of a large, complex park. However, there are a number of other options, the first of which is to take part in the Conservation Award Scheme. Doing so means that the park will be visited by an assessor (usually drawn from the local Wildlife Trust) who will look at all aspects of the park's management and provide a written report detailing environmental strengths and weaknesses along with a list of recommendations about how to improve. This is a great starting point.

Whether a park takes part in the Scheme or not, the other approach that can be considered is a 'do-it-yourself' assessment. This should involve breaking the park's environmental activities and impacts down into their key elements. Then for each of these different aspects, parks should set out to see how they are doing. There is, of course, no need to look at everything at once if the time or resources are not available. Focus instead on one element (say ecological management) first, and then assess other issues (say energy consumption) later.

In terms of assessing ecological management, the best approach is to undertake a baseline survey of the habitats and species on the park, taking a 'snapshot' of how the horticultural and ecological management of the land is done. Equally, when it comes to waste management, water use, energy consumption and the consumption of other resources (from caravans to carbon paper) it is important to get a picture of the current state of play. Parks should take a look at both their operations (how they do things) and get a measure of their performance (whether it's the amount of energy they are using, the amount of water they flush away or the amount of rubbish they recycle). This means that park owners and managers (or their staff) will have to do a bit of legwork and dig out any relevant documentation and records such as bills and meter readings, waste disposal records and purchase orders.

There are a number of other issues to consider in building up a picture of a park's current environmental performance. These include legal compliance, the current employee training programme, the park's purchasing policy and its relationship with key contractors. All should be assessed to gauge performance from an environmental point of view. The BH&HPA Members' Handbook article at section II.17.2 is the best place to start when looking at legal compliance. Another place to look for guidance is the Netregs website (www.netregs.gov.uk), which provides an online tool to help businesses assess their environmental compliance.



Opportunities and action plans

When assessing a park's performance, the key thing to do is to look for opportunities for improvement. For example, when looking at office buildings, it may be found that more efficient light bulbs could be used and/or that reflectors could be installed to improve the effectiveness of strip lighting. Or perhaps the environmental potential of grassland areas is not being maximised and setting aside a corner of the park for a wild flower meadow area could be considered.

Making these sorts of judgement calls requires a working knowledge of the alternatives and options - and perhaps most importantly, an assessment of comparative costs, potential savings and payback periods. A lot of information on these issues is detailed in past Journal articles (for example, in the July-August 2008 edition, there is an in-depth briefing on renewable heating options) and in the BH&HPA Members' Handbook article. The web is, of course, another fantastic resource to investigate different options and all sections of the Members' Handbook can be searched online on the Association's website at www.bhpha.org.uk.

Once parks have gathered this information together, they can then properly balance their potential improvement options against each other. Work can be prioritised based on the impact it will have and the investment required to make it happen. Having done this groundwork, parks can then develop a series of policies and environmental 'action plans'.

In the sections below, I have gone into more detail about an overall park environmental policy and an environmental purchasing policy - two key considerations for any park serious about environmental management. Action plans are the tools by which such policies are turned into achievements. They should set out a series of timetabled projects with, where appropriate, targets and objectives to aim for. For example, a park ecological management action plan will outline a series of specific improvement projects such as digging a new pond, introducing new native planting or thinning woodland to encourage more biodiversity. Such a plan might have a long-term target of boosting the number of species of birds visiting the park.



Environmental policy statement

A simple environmental policy can form the cornerstone of any park's environmental management approach, large or small. So what's such a policy all about?

According to Envirowise (an organisation that supplies free government-supported environmental consultation, advice and documentation for UK businesses), an environmental policy is, 'a written statement outlining an organisation's mission in relation to managing the environmental effects and aspects of its operations'. In other words, it sets out a series of commitments about how a business is going to improve its environmental performance and allows people to see what a company's aims and objectives are. For this reason a good park environmental policy will provide a touchstone for all staff, visitors and residents that lets them know what direction the park is going in and how it aims to get there.

Envirowise suggest three main things that should be kept in mind when drafting a statement:

- 1) keep the statement short - if it's longer than a sheet of A4, then it's probably too long
- 2) the statement is meant for everyone to see, so make sure it's easy to read and understand
- 3) the statement must be realistic, achievable and relevant to the business activities and practices.

The group also notes that it is vital to get commitment to making the policy work and that the statement should therefore be signed, dated and endorsed by the park owner or senior manager.

So for a park what should a statement say? Well, it should state that the park will, as a minimum, meet all relevant environmental legislation and that it will commit itself to improve its environmental performance over time. It should then lay out the key areas of action and what the park aims to do in each. Finally it should show that a park means business and that all these good words will be backed up with commitment, training and resources.

Of course, each park's statement will be as unique as each park; but I've tried to draw up a sample statement using the guidance from the Conservation Award Scheme as my inspiration. As can be seen, each statement in the policy is a springboard for a wide range of actions - it's not a policy to be signed up to lightly!

Sample park environmental policy statement

XYZ Park is committed to:

- work to enhance the value of our park for wildlife
- comply with the requirements of relevant environmental legislation and approved codes of practice
- assess the environmental impact of all current and likely future operations
 - reduce the pollution and waste produced by our park operations
 - reduce the consumption of all raw materials (including water), energy and supplies on our park
- train employees in environmental matters and encourage them to take a lead on environmental improvement projects
- expect high environmental standards from all our suppliers and contractors
 - help our customers to do their bit for the environment
 - help our customers to enjoy the wildlife on the park and to participate in its conservation
- work as a 'good neighbour' in our locality by supporting our local community and economy
- support local conservation projects.

As said, to be meaningful a policy must be a set of statements that a park really intends to commit to - not just 'hot air'. This means that its development must be carefully considered, preferably as part of an overall assessment of the park's environmental action. The best environmental policies are those that have been drawn up with the full involvement of staff - this helps get their commitment to action. On residential parks, home owners can also be involved in the development of an environmental statement.

Once it's been finalised, an environmental policy statement should be prominently displayed where people can see it and regularly discussed with park staff (and visitors if they are interested).

Purchasing policy

A green purchasing policy is a key development for any park committed to best environmental practice. It is also a valuable management tool as it lets everyone know - both staff and suppliers - what the park's environmental priorities and aims are.

Of course, the main reason for putting a green purchasing policy in place is that an awful lot of good for the environment can be done by buying the right things - whether it's an energy-efficient boiler or a seed mixture of local native wild flowers. Buying green also helps drive the market for goods that do less harm to the planet. One other benefit of a green purchasing policy is that it is a very visible way to show visitors and residents that the park is doing something for the environment - for example, if the park shop is full of interesting organic produce and there are energy-saving light bulbs in the shower block, then people know that they are visiting a green park.

Putting a workable policy together need not be daunting and can be an interesting exercise. For example, one park I visited recently has taken the green purchasing decision to only buy organic beer; this, apparently, needed a lot of research to decide on the best buy!

Of course, the greenest form of purchasing is not to purchase at all but rather to mend and reuse things. However, this is only possible in a limited number of cases, so the next best thing is to make sure the greenest version of whatever is needed is purchased. Parks can also help the *continued...*



environment by buying in bulk (to cut down on packaging and transport costs) and by trying to purchase from local suppliers (again to cut down on the environmental impact of hauling things about).

Cost is obviously an issue here as many green alternatives are pricier. This is where parks have to make a business decision based on where their priorities lie. However, remember that many green choices can actually save money in the long run. For example, energy-saving, compact, fluorescent light bulbs use up to 80% less electricity than standard bulbs and can last up to ten times longer. Keep in mind that everything does not have to be done at once; instead work slowly and surely to green the park's purchasing step-by-step, assessing the options and deciding what is affordable.

A green purchasing policy can be as simple or involved as a park requires. In its most basic form, it can just be a statement that the business is committed to purchasing the most environmentally-friendly options available. Parks can, of course, 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 that's the recycled content of the paper used in the office or the energy efficiency of new accommodation units. Parks can also establish an environmental purchasing policy and criteria for products and services in contracts or in tender documents (see the 'things to think about' list below for the kind of issues purchasing criteria should cover).

Beyond this, parks can also check out the environmental credentials of their suppliers - consumer pressure is a great catalyst for improvements. Do they have a company environmental management system? Do they have a green transport

strategy? If a really green supplier can't be found, then work with current partners - let them know what the park is doing for the environment and try to get them interested in doing the same. Where supplies come from large companies, check to see if they are accredited to the environmental management standard ISO 14001.

One word of warning: an increasing number of products falsely claim that they are 'environmentally friendly'. It is important to verify claims made by the manufacturer and supplier by, for example, asking for written documentation and 'proof'. Groups such as Friends of the Earth act as policemen here - so keep a look out for any newspaper reports alerting you to 'green scams' or 'green washes'.

Green purchasing: things to think about

■ **Energy and water** - when buying things that use energy or water (e.g. electrical appliances, washing machines etc.), check the efficiency of the item and go for the most efficient the business can afford. Many appliances now have environmental ratings that make the choice easier - for example, energy-efficient boilers carry the SEDBUK 'A' or 'B' rating, while the most efficient white goods carry the Government's A-rated energy label.

■ **Packaging** - look for products that have a minimum of packaging or that use packaging made from recycled material (or that can itself be recycled).

■ **Food** - when purchasing food for an on-site café or shop, look at how the products were grown, raised and processed. Go organic or 'conservation grade' and stock a range of these products in the park shop. For animal products think about welfare issues and choose 'free-range' etc. Parks shops can also stock 'Fair Trade' products such as tea and coffee.

■ **Chemicals** - use environmentally-friendly cleaning products (e.g. phosphate-free detergents) wherever possible and stock these in the park shop. Use low toxicity paints, varnishes and other chemicals. If cassette toilets are used on-site, supply formaldehyde-free fluids, such as Thetford's Aqua Kem.

■ **Horticulture** - if compost must be used, choose peat-free alternatives. If chemicals must be used, buy products with the lowest environmental impact in their class and make sure that they do not leave any lasting residues in the environment. When considering purchasing new plants from nurseries, commit to buying native species that provide food for insects and other animals.

■ **Wood** - when specifying wood products, use products from sustainable sources (e.g. FSC-certified) or alternatives such as products made from recycled plastics.

■ **Resource use and recycling** - where possible buy recycled and recyclable products such as paper towels and office stationery. *continued...*

Commitment and monitoring

Of course, any environmental policy or plan will fail if there are not the resources or staff to do the work. They will also fail if there is no commitment to the project from both management and staff. This makes it vital to ensure that a good, well-trained environmental team is put in place and that it has full backing from senior management (see below for more information on training). Of course, on a small park this is not such a big challenge as the owner or manager might very well be the person doing all the work. However, whatever the size of park, it is vital that one person has overall charge of the issue. On larger parks with many employees, this leader should also be backed up by a team of 'environmental champions' who can take responsibility for specific areas of the park, or areas of action (e.g. someone could take on the role of 'energy conservation champion').

Once the new environmental action plans have been put into play, those involved will want to see how they are doing - this requires monitoring. Parks can periodically reassess their performance and ratchet-up their aims and objectives, adding new projects as and when gaps in the park's performance are highlighted, or as resources become available. This 'continual improvement' process should be a key outcome of any successful environmental management approach - and should also be the best argument for putting such an approach in place.

Training

Training is a vital part of any environmental management approach. Not only does it ensure that employees are able to rise to the environmental challenge and take on any new tasks that might be asked of them, it is also a way of empowering them to come up with ideas of their own to improve the environmental performance of the park.

One place to look for advice and support for environmental training is Caravan Industry Training (CITO). The organisation has recently put together a training manual called 'Conserving the park environment'. This incorporates the principles of the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme and provides guidance and learning support material for one optional unit within the Level 2 NVQ Operational Services on Touring, Holiday and Home Parks.

According to CITO the new unit will provide, 'a firm foundation of understanding for anyone involved in the environmental management of a park. Armed with this information park staff will be able to make a really practical contribution to improving their park's overall sustainability and ecological value.'

CITO is also developing a new one-day course that incorporates the principles of the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme, which aims to do the following:

- increase awareness of environmental conservation and sustainability issues
- give an appreciation of why conservation is such a vital issue
- identify park responsibilities for preventing pollution and managing resources
- show how money can be saved by reducing use of resources
- boost the use of local products, services and facilities
- show how outdoor areas can enhance the natural environment and benefit wildlife.

Participants will be given work to complete after the course - for example, to show that they can implement what has been discussed by influencing environmental impact on the park, and considering routes for improvement.

According to CITO, the course is aimed mainly at, 'the "doers" on the park, the staff who put good environmental principles into practice'.

Further information can be obtained from CITO at www.cito.org.uk.

Taking things further

Once a park business has started down the environmental management road, there will probably come a time when it will consider one of the officially-recognised environmental management standards, such as ISO 14001 or Eco-Management Audit Scheme (EMAS).

Becoming certified or registered to these standards is undoubtedly a time-consuming task and one to which very few parks have applied themselves. However, there is a relatively new scheme designed for small and medium-sized businesses that may be of interest to park owners and managers that want to get further recognition for their environmental management work.

The IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) Acorn Scheme, is an officially-recognised Environmental Management System (EMS) standard recommended by Government. According to IEMA it provides a way to implement an EMS in a series of manageable phases using the British Standard BS 8555. In other words, it lets businesses start small and work in 'bite-sized' steps at their own pace, instead of having to put a fully-functioning EMS plan in place all in one go.

It also provides a clearly-defined route plan to ISO 14001 certification and/or EMAS registration, with UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Service) accredited recognition along the way. IEMA also claim that the Acorn Scheme helps businesses, 'focus on environmental improvements that are linked to business competitiveness and is flexible so that all types of organisation, whatever their size, can participate'.

Information on the Scheme can be found at www.iema.net/acorn.

