

HIGHER WISCOMBE, Southleigh, Colyton, Devon Self catering



When Alistair and Lorna Handyside bought a run down farm four years ago, they knew that they wanted to build a low impact business.

Located in the beautiful Southleigh Valley, in the heart of East Devon's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Higher Wiscombe now offers three luxurious, converted stone barns for group parties of 6 to 32. The couple describe their successful business as "luxury self catering with a sustainable twist."

"We always set out to be green," says Alistair. "Our motivation was our children, wanting to take responsibility and knowing it's relatively easy to do. Our experience is that to build a property to these standards, much less energy is used than one built to buildings regulations. So, we installed bio plants and low energy equipment from the outset. Energy costs money."

An Innovative Approach

Leading edge practices in sustainable management include:

- Use of three Green Cone plastic containers with lids for food waste. Buried in well drained soil in a sunny spot, allows warm air to circulate so that the cones, as effective digesters, rot food down to nothing. Guests simply empty a kitchen caddy into a cone by the recycling area.
- Guests' carbon emissions caused by their holiday, offset by Higher Wiscombe via Climate Care.
- A heat pump recovery system used for the swimming pool. Guest rules ensure replacement of the thermal cover after use to retain heat as an additional heat source.
- The Bio ecological water treatment system that uses no chemicals and requires only infrequent emptying every three years.
- An ethical and green buying policy which ensures excess packaging is minimised, goods are bought in bulk and never from Tesco! Local suppliers are used wherever possible or from elsewhere in the region and the UK.

Positive results

Guest feedback is almost universally positive. Landfill reduction by as much as 80%. Green credentials used as a main marketing tool. An estimated 35% saving on oil than if built to base regulations; 25% or £1,500 per annum on electricity; 75% of guest rubbish recycled; £10,000 saving in materials by re-using every brick, piece of timber and stone in refurbishing the barns.

Contact Details

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Environmental Policy

1/ Recycling: New Recycling centre built , animal proof bins, now covers ALL food waste (via three Green Cones), paper, cardboard, glass, tins, plastic bottles. Estimated reduction in bags to landfill possibly 85%. Bottleman is main recycler.

2/ Explanation of Green policy clearly displayed in Barns, on literature and on website.

3/ Feedback forms now on version 4. Getting great feedback on Green issues from customers.

4/ Course attendances. Green Awareness Training, 2 day course by Envision via SWT. Understanding Climate Change at Bond Pearce in Bristol. 1 day lecture. Marketing Climate Change, run by the Institute of Marketing in Exeter, evening lecture and debate. On Marketing and Climate Change course, 4 days.

5/ Environmental statements published in barns and on the web.

6/ Extended links to Devon Wildlife Trust, we are now a Corporate sponsor.

7/ Audit of energy consumption carried out.

8/ We offset guest's carbon emissions caused by their holiday with us via Climate Care.

9/ Increased on site offerings to encourage guests to use cars less.

- Games room, recycled French windows, second hand games equipment, all excellent condition but no packaging. Games room has timer switches and PIR's.
- Facilities for Walkers and Cyclists. Now Accredited Cyclist and Walkers premises.
- Picnic initiative. Providing wheelbarrow kit for picnics in orchard. (Enough for 20+)
- Outside games, badminton, petanque and croquet, all quality second-hand kit.

10/ Putting bird feeders in cottage gardens.

11/ Involved in pushing Green Tourism, Premier Cottages, Easco and assisting with local businesses. Helping organise meetings and pushing the national agenda. Have got numbers of GTBS members in Premier Cottages up from 10 to

40. Been asked to present at GTBS Conference at Gleneagles in September. Presenting to Rotary Club this Autumn and taking Part in Devon County Council Green day in Ottery.

12/ Wildlife Diary from 1/1/2007. Also use diary to monitor bags of rubbish taken to top of drive.

13/ Water harvesting for garden water summer 2008.

14/ Joined the following organisations:

- World Responsible Tourism Day 14/11/07.
- Became Corporate Sponsor of Devon Environmental Business Initiative, Runner Up Sustainable Tourism 2006.
- Joined Future Footprints to help link local food to our guests
- Signed up to Energy Saving Trust and committed to reduce energy (in our house) by 20%

15/ Training: Trained our cleaning staff how to use miracle cloths and ecover cleaning materials.

16/ Involving the Children: Children involved in recycling and decisions such as carbon offset. All have watched the Al Gore Film, "An Inconvenient Truth," with us and are right behind us.

17/ Marketing Nature and Green:

Discover Devon Nature

Organic Holidays.co.uk

New detailed section on website

Link to Devon Wildlife Trust

Make RSPB/DWT and local nature reserve brochures available in the barns

If you read our website these are main themes that run throughout.

18/ Assisted with Discover Devon's Green Paper on Sustainable Tourism 2007/8. Provided case studies to Future Footprints, GTBS, Ecover, Green Cone and South Hams Tourism.

19/ Green Information pack kept up to date in office.

20/ Devon Wildlife collection boxes in all barns.

21/ Have requested an Envision Environmental Audit, but are not yet in their grant area, awaiting further information.

22/ All Sanitary waste kept separate. Does not go into Biodigester. Possibly incinerate in future?

23/ We Monitor and keep feedback from guests:

24/ Moving to Coop bank via FSB initiative. (Currently on hold, overdraft!)

25/ Supported SWT Switch off campaign and Future Footprints Put local food in fridge campaigns

26/ New notice board area under construction. Will show where guests can walk on our land, remind them of Countryside Code, show them where picnic sites are and have a notice board for latest local news. Will be complete for autumn.

27/ Outside lights low energy and some on PIR's to reduce light pollution.

28/ We supply rechargeable torches for guests.

29/ Pool is now for guests and has a heat pump recovery system. Rules for use include replacing thermal cover after each use to both retain heat and to work as an additional heat source.

30/ We do have instant hot water systems.

31/ We have a bunded Oil tank that can contain spillages.

32/ We have an ecological water treatment system, it uses no chemicals and only has to be emptied infrequently, allegedly every three years.

33/ All toilets are reduced volume flush system.

34/ We can provide grading of electrical equipment, for fridges, freezers and washing machines.

35/ We have an ethical and Green buying policy. Consideration is made on the very great majority of purchases. We minimise purchases that have excess packaging. We buy bulk cleaning materials and decant, we buy bulk pet food, we buy bulk meats and buy vegetables loose, plus many many more examples. We never buy from Tesco, we buy locally wherever possible. The meat and game in our freezer all comes from the valley. We minimise purchases from large companies, to the no choice variety.

36/ We use recycled paper and all empty cartridges sent to Devon Wildlife Trust.

37/ We support Fair Trade, all the tea and coffee supplied is Fair Trade.

38/ Local food information updated and improved.

39/ We do use micro fibre cleaning cloths.

40/ In Waste minimisation we do recycle all steel, cardboard, we don't create hazardous household waste, all washing products are eco friendly. We also compost all garden waste.

41/ We have started to put public transport information on website, the cleaning staff car share.

42/ Gained NQAS for Cycling and Walking certification.

43/ Created cycle stores for guests. Enough room for 16 bikes to be stored.

44/ Dedicated page on our Wildlife on website.

45/ We use local materials for all our ongoing projects.

46/ Have been asked by Hugo Swire, Conservative MP and shadow DCMS who is setting up a Tourism Task Force to write a paper on sustainable tourism.

47/ We subscribe to the Totem Sustainable Tourism Report.

48/ I am the committee member responsible for Green Tourism at EASCO,(English Association of Self Catering Operators).

49/ I am the Board Member responsible for Green Tourism for Premier Cottages.

50/ I speak at Green Awareness days of the business benefits of green awareness days and have helped in my own time many local self catering business gain GTBS accreditation.