

Brilliant Businesses

Swinton Estate, Masham



Self-sufficiency the goal for Swinton Estate

The 20,000 acre Swinton Estate has been actively pursuing a green agenda since 2006 when a woodchip boiler was installed to provide heating and hot water for its luxury country house hotel, Swinton Park, near Masham.

Since then the pace has continued to pick up with a Gold Award for the hotel in 2013 in the Green Tourism Business Scheme and the launch in 2012 of a greener-than-green glamorous camping (glamping) business in the countryside a few miles from the hotel.



Mark Cunliffe-Lister, who manages the estate, makes the point that going green is not an end in itself. "The real issue for the estate is sustainability and that we should make it as self-sufficient as possible. We have made substantial progress but we still have more to do. For example, we are now looking at replacing our original woodchip boiler with a bigger, more efficient model."

Cutting heating bills by £15,000 a year

The original boiler has more than done its job, burning around 300 tonnes a year of wood taken from scaps of timber or "thinnings" on the estate. It cost around £200,000, half the funds being provided by grants. It has cut the cost of heating, which used to be provided by oil, by £15,000 a year. In addition, the wood it uses – which is felled, dried for a year and then chipped – has provided a useful income for the estate. Before the boiler was installed, the scrap timber was sent to the Barnard Castle area to be made into chipboard but, with the cost of haulage, it scarcely made a profit.

The new boiler will have an output of around 600 to 700 kw, double that of the original boiler. It will heat not just the hotel but a new swimming pool and spa which is due to open in 2014.



The Green Tourism Business Scheme is validated by Visit Britain through the International Centre for Responsible Tourism. Find out more at www.green-business.co.uk

Contact Mark Cunliffe-Lister on 01765 680900 or visit www.swintonpark.com

Recycling with the help of pigs

In other green moves at the hotel, cardboard is now crushed into bales on site and other waste is taken away by a contractor who ensures it is all recycled. Even vegetable peelings do not go to waste. Mark has been taking them home in a plastic sack and feeding them to two pigs in his garden.

“This trial was such a success that we are going to establish a smallholding on the estate with even more pigs to eat the waste food not just from the hotel but also for our cookery school,” says Mark.

Much of the food for the hotel and cookery school comes from the estate – venison from the 120 deer herd, grouse, pheasants and partridges from the 11,000 acres of woodland, and fish from the estate’s trout farm.

The estate also has 40 tenant farmers with 9,000 acres between them. They supply some, not necessarily all, of the beef, lamb and chicken for the hotel.

The hotel’s walled garden – once a Christmas tree plantation – has now been turned by Mark’s mother, Susan, into a highly productive area that supplies all the hotel’s flowers (except lilies) as well as asparagus, artichokes, herbs, raspberries, strawberries and blueberries.

Mark is also keen to help the local economy by providing jobs on the estate and at the hotel and also by encouraging tenant farmers to diversify into new activities. There is now a shooting school on the estate, a cross-country course for horses and an off-road driving business.

Off-grid glamping

Self-sufficiency has been taken one stage further in the estate’s glamping development known as Bivouac. Built in a beautifully rustic and sustainable site, it opened in April 2012 and consists of six log cabins and eight canvas yurts.

The log cabins are built on a round-wood timber frame of sweet chestnut and larch, heated by log burners, insulated by sheep wool and get their water from a nearby spring. Waste water from the showers and sinks is re-used in the lavatories, which work with a reed bed sewage system. There are solar lights, gas lamps and candles. The yurts are equally eco and, like the cabins, are entirely off-grid.

There is also a bunkhouse that sleeps 12 and a restaurant and café serving local produce that are all heated by a woodchip boiler.