

BCSC Article for 'Local Government Executive'

How green are our centres?

Contrary to popular belief, the retail property sector does have an awareness of its impact on the planet's well-being. As major energy consumers and progenitors of significant carbon footprints, the country's retail property owners and occupiers are beginning to recognise their environmental responsibilities.

Hammerson, for example, whose developments include Birmingham's Bullring and Reading's award-winning Oracle centre, are one of several major corporations to have developed environmental policies backed by practical measures designed to reduce their use of energy, water and other natural resources, and curb their production of waste.

Land Securities, whose portfolio includes the White Rose Centre near Leeds and The Bridges in Sunderland, are equally environmentally conscious. Their environmental objectives date back to 2001, and have been revised annually ever since. Their targets for 2006 include the continuing exploration of fuel-cell technologies and wind power as alternative energy sources.

Among the country's major retailers, the John Lewis Partnership, Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda all have responsible objectives in this area.

John Lewis, for example, publicly quotes its energy consumption each year and has challenging targets for improving its energy efficiency. Figures for their Waitrose stores show a 19% increase in efficiency since 2003, with a 15% increase for John Lewis over the same period. The aim now is to further increase efficiency in the group's stores by 5% by 2008 and by 10% by 2013. Even the simple business of replacing thousands of halogen display lights with ceramic metal halide alternatives

helps in this area. Waitrose is investing more than £11 million in new refrigeration systems which will help reduce energy consumption. On the emissions front, the group also calculates its carbon footprint – the total amount of CO₂ emitted by its operations – every trading year, which enables it to set realistic targets for CO₂ reduction.

Supermarket giant Tesco is another organisation with a publicly stated sustainable growth policy. They believe it's not only what their customers want, but also what makes good commercial sense. Everything they can do to lessen their impact on the environment will play well with both today's and tomorrow's customers.

Sainsbury's are equally aware of their environmental responsibilities, with store design constantly being adapted in response to analysis, research and experience. Their supermarkets have automatic building controls designed to monitor and control lighting, heating, ventilation and refrigeration systems as efficiently as possible.

Asda's environmental policies owe allegiance to owners Wal-Mart, whose chief executive, Lee Scott, believes large international corporations like his must play their part in restoring the earth's life support systems. Two recently-built Wal-Mart stores – in McKinney, Texas, and Aurora, Colorado – are being used as living laboratories where new ways of saving energy, conserving natural resources and reducing carbon emissions are constantly being tested. Waste management is also high on the Wal-Mart agenda.

A great deal of what is being done in the sector is being driven not only by a growing awareness of the needs of the planet, but also by legislation being enacted at both international and national levels.

The UN objectives laid down in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and revised at Kyoto in 1997 and again in Johannesburg in 2002, have set the agenda for climate control. Under

the terms of Kyoto, the UK government is committed to reducing the country's 1990 levels of gas emissions by 12.5% by 2010. It has also set its own voluntary target of a 20% reduction in CO2 emissions by the same date. The UK's Building Regulations Part L, part of the government's overall strategy for climate change, covers many aspects of the conservation of fuel and power in England and Wales, and focuses in particular on the emissions issue. Other legislation, such as PPS22 which replaces PPG22, covers the new renewable energy policy which must be adhered to by local government departments preparing development plans and making planning decisions.

At a regional level, the European Union has responded to Kyoto with a number of directives covering the disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous waste. More recently, it has introduced Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) – which have yet to be introduced in the UK – which must be displayed on buildings as they are completed, sold or let.

Aside from the legislative pressure, there is, too, a general move towards a much sharper focus on corporate responsibility.

While the retail sector makes no claims to be at the forefront of new thinking or practices likely to improve the planet's health, the industry is clearly tackling areas where it can make an impact: energy use, waste management and emissions controls.

Increasingly shopping places are working in partnership with public agencies to establish a greener future.

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BCSC

Retail property organisation BCSC was founded in 1983. Its membership of 1850 comprises retailers, developers, owners, agents, architects, local authorities and others with an interest in the managed retail environment. For further information please visit www.bcsc.org.uk.