

6 Ways Houghton Lodge Gardens is Sustainable

Sustainable tourism and responsible environmental management is something of huge importance to us here at House Lodge Gardens as a family business and we do what we can to ensure the longevity of the gardens so that they can be enjoyed by all and for future generations.

Here are some of our sustainability initiatives and our commitment to creating a beautiful, inclusive, and eco-friendly destination for visitors to enjoy while leaving a minimal impact on the environment.

Sustainable water management: We installed an irrigation system that relies on gravity-fed water harvested from roofs during rainfall.

Diverse wildlife conservation efforts: We've taken numerous steps to reduce our carbon footprint and promote biodiversity. By not mowing rough grass areas during "no mow May," the gardens allow daffodils and other spring flowering plants to thrive. We designed new buildings, specifically the Apple Rooms, to be a bat friendly venue, this has been a huge success and they are adoring their new home. We have created a wildlife pond in association with The Wild Trout Trust and local volunteers. We have established a number of nurseries for grass snakes.

Accessible and inclusive tourism: Despite the physical constraints of a historic site, we are committed to providing accessible experiences and actively exploring alternative surfacing options to make the gardens more wheelchair-friendly, ensuring that everyone can enjoy the beauty of the surroundings.

Chemical-free gardening: We rely on natural methods like footfall and controlled burning to manage and suppress weeds. This commitment to chemical-free gardening helps preserve soil health, promotes beneficial insects and pollinators, and contributes to a more sustainable ecosystem within the gardens.

Resource conservation and collaboration: Fallen timber is reused throughout, with smaller trees providing firewood and millable timber being used for various purposes. The gardens also have a robust tree replanting policy to ensure the preservation and continuation of their woodland areas.

Renewable energy: We have installed solar panels of discreetly sited solar panels with associated batteries- on a good day they should produce 20 kw an hour. This enables the Apple Rooms and the air-conditioning in the new Glass House to be carbon neutral. On the wider estate we host 200 acres of solar panels. These provide 40 megawatts of power to the National Grid.

SUSTAINABLE INFORMATION & POLICY

We are endeavouring to reduce our carbon footprint whenever possible:

1. We have invested in a robot mower which mows the front lawn. This means we are using the petrol driven mowers much less and only where the robot mower is unable to access. We have

not mown rough areas of grass usually with daffodils and other spring flowering plants and therefore “no mow May” was very central to our gardening diversity.

2. We have installed an irrigation system. This is gravity fed and uses water harvested from roofs during periods of rainfall.

3. We do not use chemical sprays and rely on footfall and burning to suppress weeds.

4. We have a policy of reusing all fallen timber. while some smaller trees end up as firewood, we use anything millable for timber. either using the estate’s stenner sawmill or a hired in band saw mill.

5. We have a policy of replanting our trees we have copies of our tree survey in the tearoom.

6. We have established a number of nurseries for grass snakes. These have been very successful as what was an incredible rarity 40 years ago is now a common event.

7. We have designed new buildings, specifically the Apple Rooms, to be a bat friendly venue, this has been a huge success and they are adoring their new home.

8. We have created a wildlife pond in association with The Wild Trout Trust and local volunteers. This is a collaborative effort and indeed some of our marsh marigolds were used in the Savills Garden at The Chelsea Flower Show in 2023. Splitting and sharing of plants is important in its development.

9. We are building a new fishing hut to the south of the gardens. This is based on the pattern books of John Plaw who we believe was the architect of Houghton Lodge. It is interesting that his modus operandi involved very much the retraining, involvement and collaboration of the farm and estate during the Regency period. We are adopting the same inclusive methods that he advised to construct the new hut. Whilst the materials will be different (in some cases) the methods of constructions and ethos will be consistent with the constructional practice of 230 years ago.

10. We have ignored the best practice advice of English heritage who advocated the use of ordinary portland cement for facing chalk cob walls. We continue to repair our chalk cob walls using non hydraulic lime - this absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produces a more durable render. We continue to use unskilled staff to execute these works as the level of inexperience produces a less textured surface. A professional plasterer who is expected and will attain a perfectly smooth finish is unsuitable for these exterior works where minor imperfections and the general texture of the wall shows its inherent charm and character.

11. We have established a new oriental garden and we have employed natural materials throughout. We have minimised the use of cement (with its high carbon contribution) in favour of natural stone and sympathetic bonding methods. The oriental garden has a stream whereby pumps (powered by solar panels) re-circulate the water from the pond to produce a lively stream and to reoxygenate the pond.

Houghton Lodge Gardens Sustainable targets

To plant 150 trees a year'

To offer solar powered car charging facilities.