

British Quakers source it ecologically, every time

Friends House, London

Many walk the walk when it comes to sourcing supplies in a way that doesn't damage the planet, but few organisations are prepared to take a hard look at everything they buy.

When the Quakers relaunched their central London offices in 2014, however, they did just that – examining everything they bought for the building to reduce to a minimum its impact on the environment. The aim was to reduce their impact on the environment – reducing carbon emissions and waste, choosing local resources and preserving the local ecosystem.

Friends House is an imposing, Grade II-listed 19th Century building made of distinctive black London bricks – similar to Downing Street, the famous residence of the Prime Minister. It was built to what today is considered a very poor standard of insulation – and it has draughty sash windows. Many corporate owners would simply have moved to a modern, better-built block rather than take the trouble to upgrade such difficult building.

'At Friends House, we are committed to sustainability. We want to reduce our impact on the environment while procuring goods and services in an ethical way. Our initiatives have had some very visible results and a positive impact on our business'

The Friends, however, decided to meet every challenge, fitting secondary double glazing to the windows, so they still look the same. They were not allowed to alter the external appearance, so fitted insulation inside on all external walls.

Another invisible but effective change was to fit solar film on the windows, keeping the inside cooler in the summer.

The list of other green procurement policies is impressive and includes:

Food service: one restaurant is now meat-free and all supplies are rigorously selected

Picture: FriendsHouse.org.uk

Catering and procurement

- Organic, Fairtrade and locally-sourced ingredients are used in meeting rooms, café and restaurant where possible.
- All eggs and poultry sourced from cage-free farms, resulting in Friends House being given a Good Egg Award and a Good Chicken Award by Compassion in World Farming.



- All fish for sandwich fillings is MSC certified.
- Use of animal products in meeting room catering has been reduced. At a minimum, menus are 40% vegetarian and vegan.
- The Seed Kitchen restaurant serves only vegetarian and vegan food, limiting the impact on the environment. It uses eco-sourced, FSC certified reclaimed wood for the counter, and has a maintenance free 'living wall' made entirely from preserved reindeer moss.

Water management

- A rainwater harvesting system was installed in 2016.
- Dual-flush toilets and motion sensors on taps and urinals reduce water usage.
- Water is bottled and filtered on premises.
- Water dispensers are located on every floor of the venue.

Green energy

- All energy is 100% renewable, sourced from Good Energy.
- All energy is free from fossil fuels and nuclear energy sources.
- Light fittings have been replaced with energy-efficient LED bulbs where possible.

Meeting room: No single-use plastic, and even the printers are low-energy

Picture: FriendsHouse.co.uk

Carbon reduction

- Work with environmental consultancy Avieco (formerly Carbon Smart), has determined the building's carbon footprint.
- The carbon footprint has been reduced by 29% since 2009.
- The carbon footprint per delegate per day has been reduced by 30% since 2017.
- Biogas is used to heat the building.
- Heating emissions have been reduced by 91% by since 2017.



Waste minimisation

- A zero waste landfill policy is in place, and year on year the zero waste objective has been maintained.
- All waste is recycled and treated by supplier First Mile.
- Recycling points are located on every floor and in every office space, encouraging staff to recycle.
- Friends House is a signatory of the Meetings Industry Association's 20PercentLess pledge, which commits to reduce use of single-use plastics by a further 20% by 2025.
- All single-use plastic has been removed from meeting rooms.
- Paper straws have replaced plastic straws and are only offered on request.
- Bio-film packaging is used for all sandwiches in the café.

The result is a building which retains its historic ambience but more importantly maintains the Quakers' reputation for careful and considerate stewardship of the environment. The building's green features make it a popular choice as a venue for conferences and meetings.

Not surprisingly, it has won awards, including:

- ECOsmart Gold venue status. ECOsmart is the accreditation programme of Greengage Solutions – recognising eco-friendly hotels and conference venues that meet certified standards of sustainability.
- Green Tourism Gold accreditation – among just a few London venues.
- Founding member of Camden Climate Change Alliance.
- Carbon Smart Gold certification in 2019 for efforts in carbon reduction.

The Quakers say: 'At Friends House, we are committed to sustainability. We want to reduce our impact on the environment while procuring goods and services in an ethical way. We take action to reduce our carbon emissions, cut our waste, choose local sourcing and preserve our ecosystem. Our initiatives have had some very visible results and a positive impact on our business.'

friendshouse.co.uk/sustainability

This article was first published on the Faith Plans website: www.faithplans.org/post/quakers-source-it-ecologically-every-time