

# Sustainability Champions



Blenheim Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site



A holistic approach to managing our land



Returnable cup scheme

## Blenheim Palace

Roy Cox, Estates Director

**Blenheim Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has long been known for its grandeur and rich history. But in recent years, it has also become recognised for its forward-thinking sustainability work. Roy Cox, Estates Director, shares how they're embedding sustainability across every level of the organisation while preserving the site for future generations.**

### How did you start your sustainability work?

"At Blenheim, we recognise that we are custodians of something incredibly special. That sense of responsibility led us to set long-term sustainability goals and establish a framework that ensures all parts of the estate work together. We began with the Blenheim Estate Land Strategy, which provides a holistic approach to managing our land and resources more sustainably. From that, we developed a series of ambitious targets – to become carbon neutral by 2027, double our biodiversity, and significantly reduce waste and water use."

### Are staff involved in your sustainable practices?

"Our people are at the heart of what we do and involving them in our sustainability journey has been essential. We provide training across departments so that everyone understands how their role can contribute. From gardeners to kitchen staff to tour guides, there is a shared commitment to our environmental goals. We also make

sustainability part of everyday conversations – encouraging ideas, celebrating successes, and fostering a strong culture of environmental stewardship. Our team takes real pride in contributing to a greener Blenheim."

### Can you tell us about your nature-related activities?

"We've implemented a huge range of initiatives to improve biodiversity across the estate. We're planting over 270,000 trees as part of one of the largest woodland creation projects in our history, and we've committed to enhancing 1,000 hectares of land to support wildlife. Our land management now focuses on regenerative agriculture, wildflower meadows, and habitat restoration."

"In the parkland itself, we've introduced new grazing techniques and restored historical water features, improving habitats for a wide range of species. We've also installed dozens of bird boxes and insect hotels, and we work with local conservation groups to monitor our progress and ensure our actions are making a measurable difference."

### Tell us about your energy and resource efficiencies

"We've invested significantly in renewable energy – installing solar panels across estate buildings and developing plans for further renewable infrastructure. In our operations, we're making big changes to reduce energy use, such as switching to LED lighting and improving the energy efficiency of our historic buildings wherever possible."

"We've also made strides in water conservation, installing smart irrigation systems in our gardens and reducing water usage across the estate. In terms of resources, we prioritise products with low environmental impact, such as eco-friendly cleaning products and sustainably sourced materials in our retail and catering outlets."

### How do you manage your waste?

"We took a deep dive into our waste streams by conducting a full waste audit. As a result, we introduced new systems to segregate waste more effectively, increased recycling rates, and significantly reduced single-use plastics across

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Over 270,000 trees planted



Becoming carbon neutral



Compost all gardens and food waste

## Blenheim Palace

continued

the site. We now compost all green waste from the gardens and food waste from our cafés, turning it into valuable compost for use on the estate.

"We also work closely with our suppliers to reduce packaging, encouraging the use of recyclable or reusable alternatives. One of our aims is to inspire a circular economy within our operations – ensuring nothing is wasted if it can be reused or repurposed.

"Our returnable cup scheme is a key part of a larger shift towards resource-conscious operations. By reducing single-use items, we not only minimise waste, but also reduce the carbon footprint associated with production and disposal.

"The scheme works like this: visitors are offered a reusable cup with a small deposit, which they can return at the end of their visit for a refund, or exchange for a clean cup with their next drink. The cups are then professionally washed and reused, creating a closed-loop system with minimal environmental impact."

### What are you hoping to do next?

"Our vision for the future is ambitious. We're progressing toward our 2027 goal of becoming carbon neutral across our operations. We're continuing to expand our woodland creation, habitat restoration and water management projects, and we're building on our regenerative farming work

to produce food in ways that improve soil health and support biodiversity.

"We also want to deepen our engagement with the local community – whether through environmental education programmes, skills development, or shared conservation initiatives. Sustainability for us isn't just about what we do behind the scenes; it's about being open, inclusive, and inspiring others to act."

### Do you get comments from customers about your sustainability practices?

"Yes, and it's incredibly encouraging. Visitors really respond to the efforts we've made in the parkland and gardens – they notice the diversity of wildlife, the changes in how we manage the landscape, and they often comment on how beautiful and peaceful the grounds feel.

"Many guests ask about our reforestation work or how we care for the land, and we're proud to be transparent about our journey. Sustainability features in our tours, events, and online content, and increasingly, we find that people are choosing to visit because of our environmental ethos."

### What advice would you give to businesses who are starting on their journey?

"The key is to start with a clear sense of purpose. You don't need to do everything at once – but you do need to know what you're

trying to achieve. Align your sustainability goals with your values and communicate them clearly to your team. Start with the things that are most achievable for you – then use that momentum to build further.

"Importantly, sustainability should be something you measure and track. Understanding the impact of your actions helps you stay accountable and demonstrate progress to others. Finally, don't be afraid to collaborate – whether with local groups, experts, or your own staff. The more voices you include, the better your outcomes will be."

### What quick wins would you suggest?

"There are some really easy steps that can make a big difference. Switching to LED lighting, reviewing your energy provider, reducing single-use items, and installing water-saving devices are all excellent places to start. Conducting a waste audit can also be incredibly helpful – it often reveals opportunities to cut costs and improve environmental outcomes.

"Even simple actions like signage to remind people to switch off lights or close doors can make a noticeable impact. But more than anything, keep talking about sustainability. Get people involved and celebrate small wins – because those small steps add up quickly."

[blenheimpalace.com/sustainability](https://blenheimpalace.com/sustainability)

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