

Sustainability Champions



All planting uses native species



Enhancing biodiversity



On-site food production and foraging

Lower Mill Estate

James Ponting, Ecologist

Nestled in the Cotswolds, Lower Mill Estate is a nature-rich development that has embraced sustainability at every level of its design, build, and operation. Ecologist James Ponting shares how the estate's ambitious environmental practices are helping to protect biodiversity, manage climate risk, and connect people with the natural world.

How did you start your sustainability work?

"Our sustainability journey began with a strong commitment to ecological responsibility and community engagement. From the outset, we adopted a comprehensive Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) that guides all activity on-site, from planting to habitat creation. This plan is renewed every five years to ensure we're continuously improving and adapting to new environmental challenges.

"Our goal has always been to lead by example in the protection and restoration of wildlife habitats, and to show how development can coexist with biodiversity in a meaningful and lasting way."

Are staff involved in your sustainable practices?

"Sustainability is one of our core business values, and it's embedded in everything we do. Staff across the estate actively contribute to our environmental mission. We even run a

rewards scheme to recognise individuals who consistently champion our values.

"For instance, our on-site allotment supplies produce to our restaurant, Ballihoo. Head Chef Paul Budd incorporates foraged ingredients into our menus, bringing a truly local and seasonal flavour to our food.

"I also lead regular wildlife and ecology tours to educate homeowners and guests about the estate's biodiversity - something that's vital in inspiring deeper connections with the natural world."

Can you tell us about your nature-related activities?

"Nature is at the heart of everything we do. Our estate has been designed to support wildlife from the ground up. Hedgerows and tree lines have been strategically planted across the site to provide habitat and corridors for species movement. All planting uses native species, ensuring resilience to climate change while offering benefits like urban cooling and noise mitigation.

"We've taken specific action to support endangered species. For example, Great Crested Newts benefit from dedicated receptor ponds with protective fencing, and blackthorn, vital to the survival of the Brown Hairstreak Butterfly, has been incorporated into every new hedgerow.

"We also make nature accessible. With pond dipping stations, bird hides, wildlife trails, and wheelchair - and bike-accessible paths, we've created inclusive spaces that help people of all ages to explore and learn."

Tell us about your energy and resource efficiencies

"Our buildings are constructed using Structural Insulated Panels (SIPs), known for their high thermal performance and use of sustainably sourced timber. We integrate bird houses, bat boxes, and bee bricks into the build wherever possible to support urban biodiversity.

"In terms of water management, we use a network of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) - including swales, reedbeds,

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Green roofs



Local and seasonal ingredients in our menus



On-site allotment supplies produce to our restaurant



Restoring wildlife habitats

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permeable paving, and drainage ponds. These features not only help mitigate flood risk but enhance biodiversity and offer residents direct contact with blue and green spaces.

"Green roofs also play a vital role, intercepting rainfall, reducing runoff, and adding natural beauty to built spaces."

How do you manage your waste?

"Our design approach reduces the need for hard landscaping, helping to minimise surface runoff and flood risk. Soft landscaping, like native tree planting, complements our flood strategy and waste reduction goals.

"We also encourage on-site food production and foraging, reducing reliance on food with high packaging or transportation costs."

What are you hoping to do next?

"We're excited to expand our programme of wildlife walks and talks, helping more

residents and visitors engage with the landscape and its inhabitants. By deepening understanding, we hope to foster long-term stewardship of the environment."

Do you get comments from customers about your sustainability practices?

"Yes, and they've been incredibly encouraging. One particularly meaningful piece of feedback came from Dr. Gemma Jerome, Director of Building with Nature, who described our development as a 'national exemplar' for green infrastructure.

"This kind of recognition helps to validate our efforts and provides momentum for future progress."

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

"My advice is simple: start small. Even the smallest action is better than none.

Sustainability can feel daunting, but building momentum through achievable goals makes the process more manageable and rewarding."

What quick wins would you suggest?

"Education is key. When people understand the value of the natural environment, they're far more likely to protect it. Whether it's through guided nature walks or informal conversations, sharing knowledge helps instil passion and purpose across teams and communities."

Is there anything you wish you'd known before you started?

"Not particularly - we've learned as we've gone, and that's part of the process. What matters most is a genuine commitment to improvement and being open to new ideas."

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