

The Crown Estate and its partners are bringing about real change when it comes to sustainability. We review how they are making the West End a greener, healthier and more sustainable place for generations to come

BY HARDEEP SANDHER

EMBRACING SUSTAINABILITY



With a platform as broad and unique as the West End, initiating a sustainable masterplan was always going to be difficult – or so it seemed.

Yet The Crown Estate’s aspiration to put sustainability at the heart of everything and every person living, working or visiting the West End is proving success can be achieved in this area, and has brought together landowners, developers and a whole host of consumer-facing brands to tackle a number of key sustainability issues affecting the West End.

“When you look at how internationally recognised places such as Regent Street and Piccadilly are in the West End, it provides a taste of how many people we can reach with our aspirations for a sustainable future,” says Claudine Blamey, head of sustainability at The Crown Estate. “The West End is on a global stage and, with our partners, we have an opportunity to bring sustainable living to the forefront.”

For The Crown Estate, sustainability is a notion that is deep rooted in the business, particularly as long-term management of its portfolios is core to its success. In London alone it holds almost the entire freehold to Regent Street and around half of St James’s. It is currently engaged in a multi-billion pound



redevelopment programme in the capital.

As it manages the property it owns with an incredibly long-term outlook, The Crown Estate aims to also approach sustainability in a more holistic way and integrate it into everything it does. This, according to the organisation, enables it to put forward better solutions on how to make a positive contribution to the area and society as a whole, above and beyond its regeneration of the West End.

2030 aspirations

The Crown Estate's approach to sustainability is broad, encompassing biodiversity and ecology as well as climate change. Its aims are listed in its 2030 aspirations, which focus on three key pillars that it is on track to achieve over the next 12 years. Its first aim focuses on "climate-proofing" the business and being climate resilient by 2030. This includes issues such as portfolio decarbonisation and putting in place effective climate change adaptation into a number of its development processes. The second pillar is focused on the creation of healthy places and habitats, which will allow its customers, employees and communities and natural habitats to thrive. Finally, The Crown Estate is aiming by 2030 to close the waste

loop by using circular economy principles.

The success of these aspirations is dependent on **The Crown Estate working with a number of partners;** from its managing agents and those occupying and **working in its buildings to those involved in the development supply chain process and neighbouring landowners, too.** By collaborating with others, The Crown Estate is able to consider the "bigger picture" in central London and identify where and how to unlock sustainability challenges and help deliver much longer-term results across the whole of the West End.

Blamey says: "This is not about us doing it alone. Together [with our partners] we want to innovate, find new and better ways of working that are informed by sustainability principles and can deliver better results and competitive advantages for all."

Partnership format

There are many in the West End who have a similar outlook, including Shaftesbury, Grosvenor, Howard de Walden and The Portman Estate, which all realise the difference they can make by embracing sustainability in

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the West End. But it is not just landowners. A number of occupants across the West End have joined forces with The Crown Estate in recent years to encourage a number of sustainable initiatives.

"The sense of collaboration between landowners, such as The Crown Estate, Shaftesbury and others is quite a recent trend that is being explored via the need to develop a sustainable community in the West End," notes Julie Hirigoyen, chief executive of the UK Green Building Council. "There is a clear realisation that actually, many of these initiatives cannot be done by one person or by one team alone. Yet by collaborating together on a range of different sectors – materials, transport, air quality – then there is a real opportunity to make a real difference in terms of sustainability."

Hirigoyen continues: "Moreover, not only is sustainability as a concept broadening, but today it includes social and wellbeing elements as well as physical elements of the space you occupy. More businesses are realising it is not just down to the landowners or developers anymore. From the client end of the spectrum to those involved in the supply chain, one has to look at the drivers that unpin each business and see how they too can help the sustainability challenge."



Urban Tea Rooms and Aquavit – just two of the places bringing life to St James's Market



“By looking at best practices across a local area like the West End, we are able to create a community platform from which we can learn and go on to create change”

Ylva Johannesson



Decarbonisation

Encouraging sustainable goals for itself as well as its partners and its customers is an important part of meeting its 2030 aspirations, and The Crown Estate is working with organisations including the Sustainable Restaurant Association to focus on areas such as carbon reduction and to provide support for its restaurants. The SRA, a not-for-profit organisation, was formed in 2010 and aims to create a unique framework that can simplify the complexity of sustainability for the industry. Much of this revolves around its own three core pillars of ensuring food sources are sustainable, analysing the environmental impact of restaurant output, such as water and energy, and finally society; which focuses on treating people fairly.

Across the UK, it has 300 member businesses based in 7,000 sites, including the West End, which allows the association to share and encourage best practices in a number of areas.

Ylva Johannesson, head of sustainability consultancy at the association, says: “We have seen a real push from landlords including The Crown Estate and Shaftesbury for a framework to be put in place that can help our member restaurants improve their sustainable output. There are so many issues connected to a restaurant business that need engagement in order to drive change. Talking about them in a localised community, such as the West End, is a real opportunity for us to drive change. Whether that be speaking to individual businesses about better

investment in technology, such as automated light switches or exploring more energy-efficient fridges, or talking to landlords such as The Crown Estate about the consolidation of deliveries and waste removal. By looking at best practices across a local area like the West End we are able to create a community platform from which we can learn and go on to create change.”

In the past it has been notoriously hard for individual restaurants or retailers to move the needle on such issues when looking at it by themselves. But by working with other umbrella organisations (such as the SRA), The Crown Estate is working to put forward better solutions on a number of issues. Take the West End’s new delivery consolidation scheme, which has been hugely positive for the local community.

The Crown Estate’s delivery consolidation scheme, which groups store deliveries into single consignments at

a consolidation centre outside of London and brings them in at prearranged times using electronic trucks, has resulted in deliveries reducing by 80 per cent, an ease in West End traffic and taking up to 20 tonnes of CO2 out of the air each year. It estimates that the total social cost savings related to pollutants alone have been in the region of £81,000 each year.

By changing the infrastructure in this way, there is less pollution, air quality has improved and, in turn, is likely to mean that those visiting the area stay for longer, which affects the amount they spend and whether they are likely to return. So, this small sustainable initiative has resulted in a hugely positive economical change for the West End as a whole.

Embracing the circular economy

Admittedly, some sustainability aims are easier to achieve than others. While delivery consolidation has assisted in reducing carbon, more needs to be done in terms of the issue of waste.

Waste is one of the most challenging areas when it comes to sustainability. Waste has always been treated in a very linear way: an item is used, and then it is removed. But The Crown Estate, in line with its ambitions to remove all waste from its businesses by 2030, wants to reinvent business models and change the way it and other businesses work when it comes to the removal of waste.

To that end, it has embarked on a three-year partnership in 2017 with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Circular Economy 100, an innovation programme that helps enable organisations to realise their circular economy ambitions faster. As the latest corporate member of CE100, The Crown Estate will aim to embed the principles of the circular economy across the business and its activities. This for The Crown Estate can encompass a number of projects, from reusing waste materials in its development pipeline, to a shop fit-out that can be dismantled and reused fully.

For luxury retailer Bottletop, the notion of a circular economy and delivering something from waste material is embodied in its business model. Bottletop is a UK sustainable retail brand and a customer of The Crown Estate having opened its first store at 84 Regent Street in autumn 2017, following the huge success of its pop-up store. The retailer's business principles focus on producing ethical fashion and handbags from sustainable plastic and other material. But it is not just its ethical business ethos that is helping

to emphasise the circular economy; Bottletop's most recent store on Regent Street is being applauded as the world's first "zero" waste store.

"We wanted shoppers to understand who we are and what we do, as well as the materials we use to make our products," says Oliver Wayman, director of Bottletop. "And so we purposefully built our store as an 'exhibition' build, infusing robotics and recycled plastic into the build to really help it stand out. We used 3D printers to print the materials, which are all recycled plastic bottles turned into filaments (we will use around 60,000 of them) and will, layer by layer, place them into the wall panels. We have pushed the boundaries with this build, but making an entire store fit-out from recycled materials has helped us to tell our story better and embrace zero waste and sustainability as a concept."

Wayman notes that for many people the tide has turned in terms of sustainability, with a realisation that things like plastic waste are creating huge issues for the planet and its inhabitants as a whole. By showcasing a zero waste store, Bottletop is offering a solution as to how sustainable fit-outs can not only help a brand's ethos, but is also able to help the ecosystem as well.

Initiatives such as Bottletop's zero waste store are bold. But the best thing about it is how simple it is to understand and implement.

And Bottletop is not the only retailer pursuing a sustainable message in the West End. The New West End Company last year launched Bird Street, dubbed the world's first "sustainable street", which featured a range of pioneering pop-ups from independent fashion to lifestyle brands. The stores used visitor





“Making a store fit-out from recycled materials has helped us tell our story and embrace zero waste and sustainability”

footsteps to generate electricity while the wall paint purified the air.”

Social sustainability

One new area of sustainability has been labelled social sustainability and is sometimes regarded as a “second” wave of sustainable living – encompassing everything from wellbeing and mindfulness, to employment traineeships and volunteering.

The Crown Estate’s focus on wellbeing is broad, with the company trying to continually explore the social value of a development to understand how will it make a positive contribution to society. This also focuses on areas such as employment, particularly looking at a sustainable construction workforce over the longer term.

In particular, it engages with a number of tools to help employees better manage a work/life balance, as well as continually investing in health wellbeing,

including onsite nurse surgeries and exercise classes. These have proven to be hugely successful with more than 1,000 people across Regent Street signing up for the wellness programme. Meanwhile, The Crown Estate, in partnership with Westminster City Council and Cross River Partnership, has also helped more than 1,500 unemployed Londoners find work through Recruit London. This community and employment and training initiative helps Westminster jobseekers into sustainable employment and supports a range of businesses in the West End with free recruitment services. Having proved so successful, The Crown Estate launched its own ReStart project in 2016 to provide more intensive support for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the local area.

ReStart aims to help those people move back into sustainable jobs by offering one-to-one mentoring and coaching services during the application process

and ahead of job interviews for roles in the West End. The scheme has seen a number of success cases since it was launched, including Louise. Louise was referred onto ReStart as she was a single parent living in temporary accommodation. She had been actively applying for jobs in the retail sector for nearly six months but struggled to secure an interview.

Nathalie, the ReStart workplace co-ordinator, identified Louise's beauty and therapy qualification, and was impressed by her passion for the subject. Nathalie coached Louise to prepare her for an interview with a luxury makeup, skincare and beauty brand on The Crown Estate's Regent Street. As a result, Louise got a seasonal job at the brand's flagship Regent Street store in the run up to Christmas. Louise excelled in her seasonal role and was recently offered a full-time contract in the store. Talking about her experience with ReStart, she said: "Getting this job restored my confidence in myself. I am also very happy I could sign off from welfare benefits, and have money to pay my rent."

The Crown Estate believes that these partnerships alone have generated social value of around £40 million through savings on welfare and tax credits, increased tax and national insurance contributions, but, importantly, it has helped the wellness of those being employed by The Crown Estate and others within the West End.

Wild West End

Arguably, there is no shortage of initiatives helping to encourage a green revolution across the West End, yet one of the most visionary partnerships is Wild West End, which focuses on ecology and biodiversity.

By collaborating with the GLA, charities and, most importantly, neighbouring landowners Grosvenor, Shaftesbury, the Howard de Walden Estate and The Portman Estate, Wild West End is helping to enhance both the landscape and the ecological value of the West End.

Wild West End is part of The Crown Estate's own aspirations to enhance natural resources within the West End in order to reduce the urban heat island effect and improve the local area air quality; these are two of the key pillars that form its 2030 aspirations.

The Wild West End was initiated by The Crown Estate and coincided with the publication of its London Ecology Masterplan. The masterplan developed a range of targets by consulting with the London Wildlife Trust and by targeting Westminster's priority species. Over a hectare of green space on rooftops across these landowners' buildings has helped to create a range of habitats for butterflies, birds, bees and other wildlife; fostering wellbeing and boosting productivity.

For Shaftesbury, the "greening" of the West End



"Health and wellness is moving beyond the energy efficiency of the building and the planet. We are now exploring how we can help the people"





Wellness

Some of these social initiatives contribute to building owners achieving a Wellness Certificate from the International WELL Building Institute, a public benefit corporation that is leading the movement to promote health and wellness in buildings and communities like the West End.

The WELL Building Standard was introduced in 2014 after six years of research and development, but there has been a rise in the uptake of the certification over the past two years. The WELL Building Standard is deemed to be the premier standard for buildings and interior spaces that are seeking to implement, validate and measure features that specifically support and advance human health and wellness. The Crown Estate is in the process of securing the WELL Building Standard for its St James's Market development.

Rachel Gutter, chief product officer at the International WELL Building Institute, explains that the process to certification follows a similar path to that of BREEAM. She says: "This is an exciting evolution for sustainability, and a true mark of the level of innovation and adaptability that businesses have – which are two things ingrained in the sustainability movement at large. The great things about the health and wellness movement is that it is moving beyond energy efficiency of the building and the planet. We are now exploring how

we can help the people occupying those buildings, the health and wellbeing of the individual.

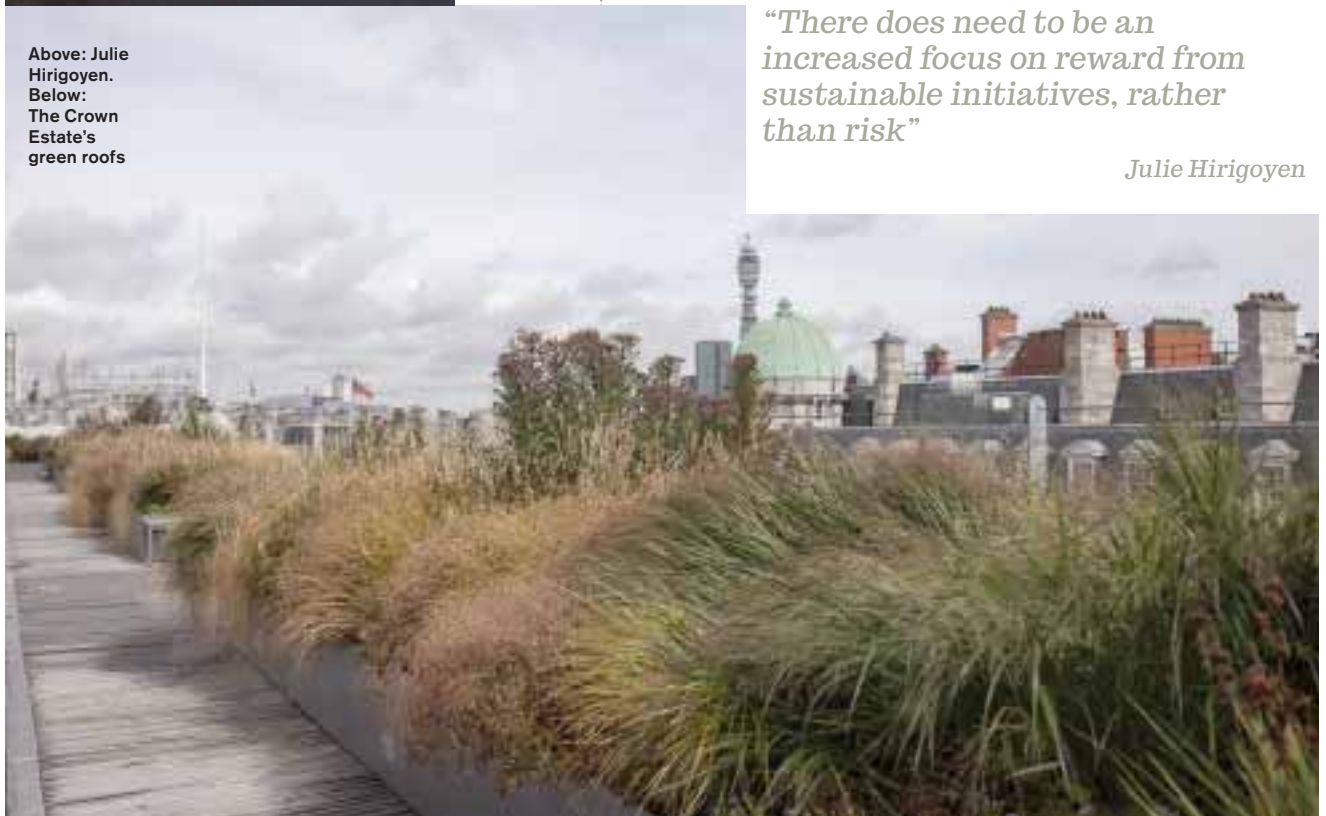
"Given the global visibility of properties in the West End, and the clout businesses have around the world, for those working and living in the area, it constitutes a huge opportunity. This is the time for companies to team up together, or for developers to offer programmes to employees and shoppers in order to encourage best practices." Gutter adds that instinctually and anecdotally, there is clear evidence that those involved in encouraging social sustainability are reaping a return on their investment.

"These are not the obvious things that people think about when it comes to sustainability," says Jane Wakiwaka, sustainability manager at The Crown Estate. "But our aim is to ensure that not only our own practices are sustainable but that we can assist others as well. We want to engage with as wide an audience as possible on these themes." So last year, The Crown Estate installed a pavilion during Regent Street Summer Streets to highlight its involvement in the wellbeing movement, working with retailers such as Lululemon to highlight what was on offer. It also used the pavilion to showcase other sustainable initiatives to do with biodiversity. The Summer Streets events welcomed more than 1.7 million visitors, a huge audience to be engaged with sustainability.

is an intrinsic part of its sustainability strategy, with the company recognising the value of green features not only for the benefit of city wildlife, but also to the occupiers and users of the area. And even small-scale enhancements have greatly benefited biodiversity, such as its pollinator-friendly window boxes and hanging baskets throughout its villages. As well as hosting a series of “green roofs” across its St James’s Market scheme, The Crown Estate has also facilitated a series of allotments on the rooftops of a number of buildings on Regent Street. The allotments are run by Jo Ryan of the Sustainable Flower Bag Company, but



Above: Julie Hirigoyen.
Below:
The Crown Estate's green roofs



around 45 residents and clients of The Crown Estate work together to continually crop a range of flowers and vegetables throughout the year.

Jo Ryan says: “Gardeners are given access twice a day to the table-top allotments, allowing for a total of 90 gardening hours a week. The response has been phenomenal, and it has been fantastic to work together and prune throughout the seasons.”

At nearby Heddon House, two beehives house 100,000 honeybees, maintained by beekeeper Dale McCann. Whilst urban bees are a rarity, initiatives such as Wild West End and Regent Street allotments are both helping them to survive and benefiting from their new home – all vegetables are pollinated by bees, for example.

The UK Green Building Council’s Julie Hirigoyen notes that collaborations such as Wild West End prove that sustainability is beginning to be seamlessly embodied and integrated in a variety of different ways, and is no longer the last afterthought for many developers in the West End today. However, more needs to be done.

She says: “Increasingly we are seeing businesses articulate and better measure the value they drive from sustainability programmes. But there does need to be an increased focus on reward from sustainable initiatives, rather than risk. If that viewpoint can be changed, then we are looking at a new era of uptake for sustainable initiatives.”

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