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# Castle Climbing Centre

[www.castle-climbing.co.uk](http://www.castle-climbing.co.uk)

Award: Responsible Waste Management/Sustainable Food

## **The Mission**

The Castle Climbing Centre is a dedicated climbing centre with over 2,500 m<sup>2</sup> of climbing walls spread over five floors and is one of the busiest climbing centres in Europe. The climbing is housed within a grade 2 listed, Victorian building which was formerly a water pumping station.

Back in 2008, with the business well established and his family growing up, Steve Taylor (the Castle's CEO) had more time to really look at what was happening in the world, he read up on climate change and the problems we're facing, and decided that now was the time to act.

Let's be honest with ourselves. All of us are guilty of talking about what needs to change, but not many of us actually stand up and take action and to such an extent

that those actions cause a ripple effect, changing other people's perceptions. Steve is one such man and he set about creating a positive example. He approached the Castle's core managers and the board of directors with his thoughts about the state of the planet and his plans to make some changes to the business.

## **The Challenge**

The hardest challenge in any business or community is to change the culture. But that is exactly what we needed to do to move to a more sustainable way of living. The Castle's key strategies for managing change have been to involve people and communicate everything we're trying to achieve effectively. Our staff are the main drivers for change because without their commitment we couldn't have achieved what we have and it is them that keep the whole project moving forwards.

We also have to remember that first and foremost we're a climbing centre and people come here to climb, not to be bombarded with "hippy ideas". So with that in mind customers and visitors are encouraged to adhere to very simple processes put in place, such as recycling their waste. And our in-house café and shop allow us promote our ideals, from sourcing organic clothing to growing organic food. By communicating to customers what we are doing, and why, we hope in a small way to influence them to make informed choices in their own lives.

## Developing Sustainable Solutions

Sustainability is about making the right decisions for the long term, both for the business, our customers and the environment. This can be overwhelming for anyone starting on this journey, so we started small and simple: buying milk in recyclable glass bottles; separate bins for different waste streams; we stopped selling bottled water and instead fitted water fountains. Since these small beginnings we have changed most of our in-house processes and systems and are now concentrating on the bigger project of transforming the fabric of the Castle into an energy efficient building using sustainable building practices and materials and testing out some of the newest technologies around.

### Waste Management

We've challenged the "throw-away" culture by adopting a holistic approach and educating all staff and visitors on waste management. Since we began we have reduced the size of our landfill bin collections by 78%.

- All staff receive training on waste management and our Environmental Policy is incorporated into every employee's terms of work.
- Our procurement policy applies to *all* staff and *every* purchase.
- Customers and staff are encouraged to stream waste through waste stations around the centre (including battery recycling).
- Encourage customers to deposit their food waste in our compost bins if they have no home collection.

- Development of our permaculture garden means we don't buy pre-packaged food; dried goods are bought in bulk and we produce garden herbs/teas reducing use of packaged herbs/teas.
- We give away old climbing holds to customers for home use.
- Our development works produce offcuts of wood – these have been made into garden tables and benches.
- Retired ropes are used for garden trellising or donated to local artists.
- Compost production is now at 3 tonnes a year (2013). Had we put this kitchen waste to landfill we would have produced 1.43 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e (compared to just 15 kg by composting).
- Some food waste feeds our two small wormeries. Wormeries efficiently turn food waste into a nutrient-rich liquid fertilizer.

## Sustainable food

One of the biggest areas of change was the development of the green space that surrounds the climbing centre into a permaculture growing site. Work began in earnest in 2009 and five years later the garden is a thriving space which not only provides organic produce for our own café throughout most of the year, but also grows salad and veg for Growing Communities and provides plots for staff and the local community to grow their own food.

We have replaced all the pre-made food we bought in with homemade versions. The kitchen produces hot meals, soups, cakes, tray bakes, jams and pickles, utilizing all the

salad, vegetable and fruits that we grow here on site. 2012 was the first year we began weighing and recording food harvested, with 428.33 kilos supplied to the café.

We have a large number of herb beds so we can offer fresh herbal teas to customers throughout the summer months. A drying room was built in 2011 to enable us to dry a huge amount of herbs and flowers to sell in tea blends throughout the winter months. See [www.castle-climbing.co.uk/Direct-from-garden-to-mug](http://www.castle-climbing.co.uk/Direct-from-garden-to-mug) for more information about the 40+ varieties of herbs growing in our garden and how they're processed.

In 2013 we added a cob oven and roundhouse to the garden, built by staff and volunteers, providing the Castle community with a natural space to get together, make pizzas and bake bread or just enjoy the peace and quiet.

## Resource conservation

### Water

In 2012 we installed eleven 1,000 litre tanks for rainwater harvesting. Five of these now water the forest garden and herb beds via porous pipes whilst another six feed into garden taps. An additional 4,000 litres of historical tanks have also been put to use and water other areas and fill the pond in times of drought.

In 2011 we constructed a swale in the garden and began directing water from the men's showers and sinks into the hillside as a natural irrigating system for the area. Ecover shower products are provided by the centre, encouraging customers to use eco-friendly products.

From making these improvements alone we have already seen a 14% decrease in mains water usage (2012 figures).

Work on the installation of composting toilets, to replace our current ones is planned to start in 2014 and once completed (in 2015) we will be as close to water neutral as we can be.

#### Electricity

All of our new building developments have LED lighting installed, with daylight and movement sensors as standard. Our new basement-level climbing walls (built in 2014) have low-energy daylight tubes fitted.

In 2013 we replaced some of the centre's matting under the climbing walls. This new matting is bright yellow, and coupled with the light-coloured walls, helps to reflect as much natural daylight as possible into the centre.

In the next big phase of our developments we will replace the current leaking roof with a super-insulated one with auto-actuating sky lights for natural ventilation and solar PV panels fitted for electricity generation. We intend to generate our own electricity on site and once the panels are fitted we should be able to produce in the region of 45,000 kWh/yr of electricity.

#### Gas

The planned new roof, the installation of air source heat pumps and a new revolving front entrance door will hopefully further reduce the need for gas heating. We have already started by insulating the office and installing under-floor heating which will be used with an air source heat pump once installed.

In 2013 we moved to Ecotricity for our gas and electricity supply. We want to support Ecotricity's plans to develop

green gas mills in the UK as an alternative to continuing to rely on fossil fuels.

## Experiences

As previously mentioned, the hardest challenge has been making that cultural shift: for example, persuading both customers and staff to adhere to waste management strategy. It *has* been a success and we *have* reduced our waste output, but even getting people to do something as simple as put rubbish in the right bins isn't easy. We have found it hard to keep that momentum going and keep both staff and customers enthused without sounding like a whinging parent. We also have to be very careful not to "lecture" our customers and risk alienating them. After all, they are our bread and butter and they visit the centre to climb in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, not to be lectured on saving the planet.

On the other side of the same coin, when it comes to recruiting new staff, we are attracting applicants who are not just interested in the climbing aspect, but also those who have a keen interest in conservation. In turn they bring their own expertise (such as vegan cooking or how to build a solar dryer) and re-enthuse the staff with new ideas and new experiences.

We have learned a lot through our mistakes and successes. Sustainability within the business sector is a relatively new idea and is constantly changing and moving forward. We have learned that it takes a lot of time and human resources to keep pace with all the new ideas and technologies. As we have no one person dedicated to

keeping up-to-date with new developments, deciding on a new lighting system or what supplier to use for our cleaning products takes a lot of research, time that we can't always afford whilst trying to run a large, busy climbing wall.

We knew from the beginning that the objectives we had set out for ourselves would not always be easy, and not always financially rewarding. We learned to take the quick wins and be happy— such as implementing the simple things like changing our electricity supplier to one with green credentials. Do the simple (and the free) things first as there are lots of resources out there to help and guide you. You don't have to reinvent the wheel every time.

The permaculture garden is our biggest success in terms of being able to show people what being sustainable can mean. Customers, visitors and staff can see the food growing in our garden and then wander upstairs to our café and eat the produce. It's great that we can so easily see a reduction in our carbon footprint due to cutting out a fair number of food miles and packaging waste, plus being able to convert our waste food into compost, thus creating a closed-loop system. However, much more important to us has been the cultural and community engagement. The garden is hugely inspiring to all who visit, for staff, customers and volunteers who work in the garden and for school and community groups who use it as a teaching tool.



## The Future

We understand that we are in charge of an important piece of London's industrial heritage and we intend, throughout the design process, to retain and display as many of the historical features as we can whilst balancing our mission to become environmentally sustainable and to "green" this leaky old Victorian building.

In the next few years we plan to redevelop both sets of changing rooms, redesigning the showers to be more energy-efficient and install composting toilets. Our reception area is draughty and very cold in winter, so our architects are working on a new layout which will create a more insulated working area that doesn't cost the earth to heat and will improve the working conditions for our reception staff too. The pump rooms and a further two wells from the original pumping station will be developed into more climbing and training rooms, using sustainable materials and building techniques, in line with what we have already built.

The most expensive and biggest jobs will be to re-do the whole roof and install solar panels. All of these further developments of the Castle are viewed as long-term projects which we will be undertaking over a number of years to keep the project as economically sustainable as possible.

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### Authors

**Efua Uiterwijk** (Centre Manager) has worked for the Castle for seven years and been instrumental in the change of this small

business from a straightforward leisure enterprise into a fully sustainable business, leaving no area of operations unexamined. Efua has given talks on sustainable business practices and is always willing to share ideas and give advice to other organizations as part of the goal to communicate awareness of sustainability across all sectors.

**Claire Lee** (Marketing & Events Coordinator) has worked for the Castle for four years and is responsible for the organization's environmental reporting as well as implementing measures across the business. With over 10 years' experience in marketing and events, Claire's work in promoting the Castle's drive for sustainability, both internally and externally, has been vital. We are proud to support many local projects through events and workshops and Claire is always keen to hear from anyone with new ideas to join the Castle's ever expanding "green" network.

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