

## THE NEC – ENGAGING OUR AUDIENCES AND COMMUNITIES WITH THE SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

*‘Sustainability is at the heart of all we do’*

Brian Pell, Operations Director

**The NEC is the UK’s No 1 venue for exhibitions and live events, attracting over 3million visitors a year to 500+ exhibitions and events. We lead the way in sustainability initiatives and results for the sector. Ours is a creative industry prone to high waste levels - but we’re changing all that!**

*‘We believe we should lead by example and make a positive impact on the way people think and behave when it comes to sustainability,’*

Kathryn James, Managing Director

As industry leaders we enthusiastically embrace our responsibility for reducing the negative impact our sector has on the environment - and for finding new ways to work both in the long term and in our everyday activities and processes.

### LEADING THE WAY WITH SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

**We’re passionately committed to sustainability, and with the support of our board the NEC has developed and introduced many industry ‘firsts’.**

Everyone has a part to play, and our initiatives have been enthusiastically embraced by all 1650 members of Team NEC. They now extend throughout how we work with organisers, exhibitors, contractors, suppliers, visitors and local businesses and communities.

**Zero waste to landfill.** We are the only major venue to achieve Zero Waste to Landfill – thanks to our ground breaking Waste Pre-Treatment Centre, designed and implemented by the NEC team. We’ve gone from sending 95% of waste straight to landfill to ZERO, hitting our target 2 years early. In November 2014 the Centre diverted its 10,000<sup>th</sup> tonne from landfill. By May 2015 the total stood at 12,000 tonnes (the equivalent of the biggest asteroid to impact Earth this century!)

**Food waste to energy.** Early in 2015, we set up a partnership with Severn Trent Water to send over 120 tons of food waste to an Anaerobic Digestion Plant, just 4 miles from our site, to help power local sewage treatment works.

**Innovative energy saving & carbon reduction initiatives** Our computerised Building Management System monitors and controls the exhibition environment...and we have invested extensively in smart meters, increasing energy-efficiency, installed energy-saving chiller units, water-saving intelligent urinals, and introduced low-emission shuttle buses and motion sensitive escalators and travelators. 742 tonnes of Co2 emissions saved in 2014/15 – enough to brew 1million+ cups of tea!

**Eco-educating and empowering the industry, businesses and community** Our Facilities Management team share knowledge and experience of sustainability ‘best practice’ with local businesses and throughout our industry. We contribute to sustainability education programmes and work in close partnership with Solihull Council to support various local communities and community projects with recycled materials and through hundreds of hours of volunteer work.

**WE’RE COMMITTED TO MAKING A BIG DIFFERENCE...AND WE’RE DOING IT!**

## **HOW ZERO WASTE TO LANDFILL IS ACHIEVED**

- Waste generated during events and in office areas is separated into different streams and processed ready for transport to local suppliers.
- No material travels more than 30 miles for further processing.
- Processes within the facility enable the maximum amount of waste to be sent in a single load, reducing carbon footprint from transportation.
- Food waste is sent to a local aerobic digestion plant to power a sewage treatment works.
- Any waste not dealt with through the Centre is sent to a local Materials Recycling Facility, with residues going to the local energy-from-waste plant - preventing landfill.

### ***In 2014\* alone, the NEC diverted...***

- 128 tonnes of metal, saving 1,763 kwh of electricity
- 86 tonnes of paper, saving 1,462 trees
- 54 tonnes of plastic, saving 33.038 gallons of oil
- 82 tonnes of glass, equivalent to 287,000 beer bottles
- 447 tonnes of wood & pallets, saving 1,492 trees
- 113 tonnes of food, producing 33,900 kwh of energy
- 211 tonnes of cardboard, saving 211 tonnes of CO2

*\*2015 figures currently being calculated*

## **SAVING RESOURCES & REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS**

**Substantial investment is also being made in Innovative energy saving & carbon reduction initiatives\* - including the UK's largest single-space roll out of Smart Metering - is being made to help the venue limit the resources it needs to operate, increase efficiency of its operations and in turn, reduce our impact on the environment.**

*\*Outlined on page one*

### ***During 2014/15, total CO2 emission savings of 742 tonnes included:***

- 129 tonnes from gas consumption – enough to power 25 average cars and 1554 vacuum cleaners for a year.
- 192 tonnes from the efficient management of heating boilers, which would provide enough power to iron 24,615 shirts.
- 124 tonnes from back of house power management – enough to power a mobile phone to make a one hour phone call every day for 99.75years.

## **ISO14001**

**In 2014, the NEC's ISO 14001 accreditation was maintained and extended. The venue is committed to meeting and exceeding its criteria in all relevant areas of its business.**

## **CASE HISTORY: MEETING THE CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY ‘THE SKILLS SHOW’**

The way we work with event organisers is a key element to the success of our sustainability initiatives – as shown in our relationship with The Skills Show, which we first hosted in 2012.

Many of 35,000+ exhibitors at the 500+ annual events at the NEC utilise ready-to-assemble shell systems and the like for their stands, while others create bespoke stands on site. All of which produces a large amount of waste, but nothing compared to some of our more experience based shows, which include The Skills Show.

This is a very different sort of event. Over 3 days, 78,324 visitors came to the November 2015 show - which filled 10 Halls with floor space equivalent to 12 football pitches. There were 58 World Skills competitions, demonstrating practical work skills - while a huge variety of ‘hands-on’ activities enabled young people to try their hands at practical tasks which gave them a taste of potential jobs. They included:

- Construction – with walls built and knocked down, roofing, dry walling, plastering, welding and metalwork, electricals and plumbing
- Painting, plastering, decorating, carpentry and joinery, stonemasonry, roofing, slating, tiling and landscape gardening
- Automotive refurbishing, body repair, aeronautical and industrial engineering
- Beauty therapy, hairdressing, floristry, cooking & restaurant services, butchery and forensic science

These activities produced a very different sort of waste, from contaminated waste like plasterboard, peroxides and chemicals, spray paint booths and filters and bitumen, to heavy industrial waste like bricks and mortar, timber and huge amounts of top soil. Despite much of this being well outside the normal parameters of exhibition waste, it was all separated out, processed and disposed of by the NEC team – with zero going to landfill.

### *How the NEC worked with the organisers*

- Our operational team have worked with The Skills Show event team over the last four years to determine not only the best solution for their different waste streams but also the most cost effective.
- Waste disposal for each event has been delivered within the organiser’s budget – this is an important factor in encouraging sustainable practices.
- Each of the Skills Shows events has seen close to 100 tonnes of waste produced, with over 80% being recycled via the NEC processes.
- On two occasions we have assisted with the redistribution of top soil to local community projects: 120 tonnes to Newlands Bishop Farm and 20 tonnes to New Roots Allotments, Bordsley Green

***“We are always exploring ways to reduce our impact in terms of resources and waste, and it is great to work with a venue with a similar commitment, that uses a variety of waste disposal methods to ensure that no waste produced will go to landfill”***

Helen Bothamley, The Skills Show

## **CREATING A CULTURE OF CHANGE & EDUCATION**

Creating a sustainable exhibitions environment is about educating people too – changing their habits and criteria within their daily working thoughts and practices.

**ORGANISERS & EXHIBITORS:** Organiser involvement is key to ensuring buy-in to the aim of ‘least possible impact on the environment’. The NEC’s waste & recycling management meet with each organiser annually to identify where and how they can prevent, reduce, reuse, recycle or recover waste. The amount of waste they can leave behind has been capped, encouraging recycling – and the NEC has frozen waste management fees for the last 3 years, giving organisers the ‘carrot’ to support NEC policies. Their experience at the venue empowers them with the knowledge and best practice they can share with their exhibitor, and apply when their shows are in residency elsewhere.

**SUPPLIERS:** The NEC procurement policy encourages suppliers to embrace NEC principles and provide sustainable products and solutions, working with them to reduce consumption and carbon footprint whilst they are onsite. Catering partners Amadeus operate a successful local sourcing policy, use fully recyclable packaging and work with the NEC to recycle all food & drink waste generated at its shows. Over 120 tonnes of food waste a year from exhibitions helps power a local sewage treatment works. It is transported to Severn Trent Green Power’s £13million food waste anaerobic digestion plant and processed into energy, with leftover material used as fertiliser by local farmers. Some materials are now returned to suppliers for reuse or re-manufacture - including light bulbs, fluorescent tubes, batteries, cooking oil and photocopier cartridges.

**BUSINESSES:** Through the year, the NEC contributes to sustainability events, explaining and demonstrating its environmental commitments. This year the NEC presented its Waste Pre-Treatment Centre case study to over 200 delegates at the Sustainability West Midlands conference including Birmingham Airport and Jaguar Land Rover. The NEC has been invited to Virgin Atlantic HQ to share best practice on waste management, later this year.

**SCHOOLS & COLLEGES :** 2014 saw the NEC get involved in “Your Green Future Solihull”. 400 pupils from 19 schools and colleges worked with over 25 local and national businesses to explore career opportunities in a low carbon, resilient future. The NEC sponsored workshops supporting students as they developed ideas for meeting its waste reduction targets.

**LOCAL COMMUNITIES:** The NEC supports a range of community initiatives – not just by donating many tonnes of recycled materials, but also with hundreds of hours of voluntary work from Team NEC. In July 2015, for instance, a group of 24 NEC volunteers helped the Three Trees Community Centre -located in one of the most deprived areas of Solihull - to transform a rubble-strewn outdoor area into a ‘sensory garden’ accessible by disabled members of the local community.

**NEC STAFF:** The NEC environmental committee ensures compliance, monitors performance and identifies targets for continuous improvement. New employees attend sustainability induction programmes including presentations on environmental awareness and responsibilities and the NEC commitment to reducing environmental impact.

**THE NEC GROUP:** The NEC is part of a Group including other major events venues. The benefit of taking a group approach to sustainability is that learnings and best practice can be shared across them all – with other Group venues now working towards energy savings and Zero Waste to Landfill.

## RESOURCES & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Since its launch in 2009, the NEC Waste Pre-Treatment centre has (to May 2015) diverted over 12,000 tonnes of waste from landfill. This has produced savings of £881,875 in Landfill Tax (£17,7729.60 in May 2105 alone, at the current rate of £80 per tonne), otherwise payable to HMRC. As a rising cost each year, negating the need for landfill has protected the NEC from a significant variable cost it used to incur each month (for instance, £17,729.60 in May 2015).

That is a very significant ROI, even though financial return was not the prime driver. These savings are delivered straight back into the Sustainable & Environmental team's budget, providing finance for additional sustainable projects.

**Our customers save money too.** Exhibition organisers are levied for the waste they leave with a Waste Management fee, which would normally rise on an annual basis. The amount of waste they can leave behind has been capped, encouraging recycling – and having achieved Zero Waste to Landfill in 2012, the NEC has been able to freeze waste management fees for the last 3 years. We have also introduced them, and their 35,000+ exhibitors, to waste management policies which enhance their CSR and which can save them money in other areas of their operations.

**Similar savings can be – and are being - achieved by the other organisations with whom we have shared our experience and expertise in waste management.** These range from local community groups and businesses to major companies like Birmingham Airport and Jaguar Land Rover, and a wide range of educational and charity organisations too.

***This has been recognised in a series of awards :***

*Within the industry:* The **2010 AEO Excellence Award for Sustainable Initiative of the Year**, the **2013 AEO Sustainability Award** and the inaugural **Eco Award at the Exhibition News Awards 2015**.

*In the community:* **'Best Waste and Recycling Scheme'** at Birmingham City Council's Sustainability and Recycling Awards, and the Birmingham Post Business Awards **"Environmental Award"**

*From sustainability organisations:* highly commended" at the **National Recycling Awards** in London and the **MRW National Recycling Awards 2014**.

Most recently, we won the **BIFM (British Institute of Facilities Management) 2015** award for 'The NEC: Our sustainability journey' – up against **competition from major brands like M&S and RBS**.

**The journey is far from over.** The NEC's commitment is to continual development towards sustainability. New initiatives are being developed, like waste to energy - in partnership with Severn Trent Water. With growing awareness of the importance of sustainability amongst the NEC's operating partners, new and better solutions are being sought, utilising the latest advances and technology.

**The NEC, in its 40th year, continues to be industry leader across all aspects of sustainability – and will do so for years to come. Other large venues, like EXCel, have followed the NEC's lead but are currently far off achieving Zero Waste to Landfill: the NEC has set the benchmark against which they can measure their performance. Our goal is to bring sustainability to every area of the exhibitions industry.**