

City Issues: Seen to be Green.

Peterborough became an "environment city" in 1992 - one of only four in the country.

This status reflects the city council's commitment to sustainability in all aspects of life. From transport and recycling to improving air quality and promoting green spaces, a range of initiatives and projects have seen the city become one of only three sustainable energy centres in the UK. Its ambition now is to become the UK's environment capital. "In some ways Peterborough can already make that claim," says Jonathan Selwyn, chief executive of the Peterborough-based UK Centre for Economic and Environmental Development (UKCEED). "We can certainly claim aspects that, when considered together, make Peterborough unique. We have the environment city status, the environmental business cluster, the sustainable transport and energy projects, a proposed innovation centre and impressive recycling statistics.

"As far as we are aware, Peterborough has the only significant cluster of environmental businesses in the UK."

UKCEED aims to reconcile the city's economic development with environmental protection by addressing emerging policy issues and developing cross-sector partnerships. It is one of the big name environmental players based in the area. Others include English Nature and the regional base of the Environment Agency, to name just two.

As Jonathan Selwyn explains, the thriving green community can be attributed to a number of factors. Peterborough has been home to a strong engineering base for over 100 years. Now, some engineering companies have started to specialise in green technologies - notably Peter Brotherhood in renewable energy and Perkins in emissions control. The public sector has also become an important factor. The presence of, for example,

the Environment Agency and the contracts it has to offer have encouraged many consultancies to relocate to the area.

"Business clusters are based on the concentration of knowledge," notes Jonathan Selwyn. Further significant growth within the sector is being actively promoted. A new innovation centre to encourage start-up businesses to focus on environmental technologies is under development and UKCEED is working on a number of projects such as the Encluster Initiative to promote the expansion of Peterborough's green business base. During the last three years it has attracted over £1 million of investment to the city.

It doesn't stop there. Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) was established 14 years ago and works in close co-operation with the city council to respond to the challenges presented by its green status. With over 200 members spanning local authorities, businesses, community and environmental organisations, it aims to encourage sustainable development through initiatives and research.

PECT runs various schemes to help existing companies operate in a sustainable way. The Business and Energy Management Scheme is designed to help companies deliver more environmentally friendly profits by providing straightforward, low cost solutions to environmental management. Likewise, the Materials Exchange is a free online service where organisations can access information about redundant stock, surplus raw materials or material requirements. Launched in April 2003 to cut back on unnecessary waste, The Materials Exchange now has over 200 registered users. →

1. The city is surrounded by some of England's most beautiful countryside.





Notable PECT-led lifestyle projects include the 50 mile Green Wheel and the planned Green Grid. The Green Wheel, popular with commuters and leisure users, is a continuous network of cycleways, footpaths and bridleways providing safe routes around the city, through nearby villages, the Fens and the beautiful Nene Valley. The £11 million scheme was 50 per cent funded by the National Lottery and matched by public and private contributions. Not only does it contribute to a sustainable transport system, the Green Wheel also celebrates over 3,000 years of social, cultural and economic history with colourful interpretation boards and a series of sculptures.

Building on this success, PECT is working with the city council, English Nature, The Countryside Agency, Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency to plan Green Grid, a green infrastructure framework for the area. The partners are currently waiting to hear from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister about a £1 million bid for growth area funding.

As PECT chief executive Hugh Cripps explains, Green Grid comes in response to the city's planned regeneration which is expected to generate at least 21,200 new homes by 2020. "We are saying 'let's plan green space strategically. Let's have the green infrastructure in place before development starts, not as an afterthought,'" he asserts. The city council is aiming to reach English Nature targets that mean all residents live within 300 metres of a "green network". This target is challenging in established urban areas and the city council is trying to incorporate this rationale into new residential schemes. This should have a significant economic impact on Peterborough: studies have shown that house buyers are often willing to pay a 15 per cent premium to be close to, or have a view of, open green space. →

1. A sculpture near the Perkins factory on the Millennium Green Wheel.
2. Peterborough is home to English Nature's head office.
3. The bank of the River Nene on the Green Wheel Cycle Route.



Transport will continue to be a major barometer of Peterborough's environmental credentials. It is currently one of three sustainable transport demonstration towns in the UK. Last year, the city council commissioned a survey of 4,600 residents to assess travel habits and discover ways to encourage sustainable travel usage.

The research revealed that around two thirds of all trips in Peterborough are made by car and three out of four privately owned cars are used at least once a day. More than a fifth of car trips are of less than three kilometres in distance and over half are for shopping and leisure purposes. However, the survey also showed that three out of five trips could be undertaken by sustainable travel methods such as walking, cycling or public transport.

In 2004, the city council launched the £3.24 million Travel Choice initiative. Sustainable travel co-ordinator Jamie Gray says the survey is helping to mould the scheme: "One of the key findings was that lack of information was a barrier to increased public transport use. We placed an interactive information kiosk in the Queensgate bus station and we are installing new screens that will feature key information on bus times, train times and other travel options. Similarly, we are introducing a satellite tracking system to inform passengers of exactly when buses will arrive. We have just conducted a review of walking habits to identify key routes and make sure these are properly signposted and maintained."

Jonathan Selwyn adds: "The city is in a great position. Now we have to set down a marker and encourage the right kind of development with good architecture, new buildings using less energy and encourage more sustainable transport." ●

1. The 50-mile Millennium Green Wheel is popular for commuters and leisure.
2. A bridge that runs over the River Nene on the Green Wheel Cycle Route.
3. Improved signage for Green Wheel cyclists.