Forestry Commission



Beechenhurst visitor centre

The Forest of Dean is an important area of oak woodland in the southwest of England, with over 30,000 people living in and around the area. Beechenhurst is a prime visitor attraction in the Forest of Dean with 300,000 visitors a year. Formerly the site of the Speech House Colliery, which closed in the early 1900s, Beechenhurst was transformed into a picnic site in 1969 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Forestry Commission. A Lodge was built in 1992 to provide catering facilities and toilets for the growing number of visitors. The site's popularity continued to increase alongside the development of open access for people to enjoy a walk in the countryside, family cycle routes and a sculpture trail. In 2007 funding from Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance and the Forest of Dean District Council enabled an extension to be built that would provide improved visitor facilities, including a bigger kitchen, restaurant, additional toilets and retail space. The £575,000 modernisation of the building was undertaken in an environmentally sustainable manner using timber and natural materials. The extended visitor centre has contributed to strengthening the tourist economy and brought economic benefits to the area by showcasing local products. Beechenhurst Visitor Centre achieved a 'Very Good' rating under the BREEAM standard scheme.



A new environmentally-friendly café, shop and information centre in the Forest of Dean showcases sustainability in its timber construction and sales of local crafts and produce

The 162m^2 single-storey extension to the visitor centre is located on the western side of the existing lodge. It provides a new 60-seat restaurant, with a part mezzanine first floor area, and an extended kitchen. The building has been constructed using traditional timber frame techniques using Douglas fir from the Forest of Dean. Western red cedar 'Royale' shingles cover the roof. Inside the building is European oak flooring. The new restaurant has a bright, spacious feel, with large velux windows allowing plenty of natural light to penetrate the building. A focal point is the central spiral staircase and balustrade made from ash. Energy efficient appliances have been installed in the kitchen. The new shop and information centre 'Forest Connections' is light, open and welcoming with European oak used for the floors and reception desk. Outside wooden columns made from locally grown Douglas fir are an attractive feature. Sandstone sourced from the Forest of Dean quarry just over a kilometre from the site was used to build the exterior walls.

Woodfuel

A 12 kilowatt multi-fuel log burner, fuelled using wood from the Forest of Dean, is the sole source of heating for the shop. It operates using clean-burn technology which produces heat more efficiently. The rest of the building has under floor heating which runs on LPG.

Solar

Four solar thermal panels mounted on the roof provide hot water to the hand basins in the toilets and kitchen.

Water and drainage

The toilets are fitted with water efficient ES4 toilets with a 4 litre flush and eye-level flush box, and energy efficient hand-dryers. An automatic air flush urinal system has also been installed.

Insulation and ventilation

In areas without solid insulation, walls have been well insulated using non-combustible, glass mineral wool with a water-repellent additive which has high thermal conductivity and zero GWP (Global warming potential). Double glazed windows have also been fitted.

Biodiversity

A priority during the planning and construction phase was the conservation of any ecologically important species on site, particularly those identified by the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. With resident long-eared bats roosting in the roof, the extension was sensitively placed 20 metres away to avoid any disturbance to the roost, and a bat baffle was installed in the apex of the roof to create an additional roosting space.

Local sustainable products

The shop 'Forest Connections' is a franchise that stocks local products and promotes the work of local artists and crafts people. Products on sale include hand-crafted silver jewellery, woodland-inspired pottery, charcoal, Forest of Dean honey and soaps. The shop also supports the local economy by promoting the Forest of Dean through its visitor information reception area.

Sustainable transport

Cycle facilities, including cycle racks, have been provided for staff and visitors. The Forestry Commission are currently working with Sustrans to install a cycle route and create a linked path network.

✓ Achievements

- Environmental Assessment Award under the Bespoke BREEAM 2006 scheme achieving a 'Very Good' rating
- Green Tourism Bronze Award

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