

Great Western Society Limited
Didcot Railway Centre
Environmental Policy – Issue 8, February 2026

Vision

Our vision is for Didcot Railway Centre to be recognised for the international importance of its collection and the value of bringing to life the golden age of steam as a dynamic Living Museum.

Mission

Our mission is to fulfil our potential as a heritage venue at the centre of its community. Accessible to all, striving to engage and inspire the widest possible audiences in the history and heritage of the Great Western Railway – the pioneering transport infrastructure that laid the foundations for contemporary transport innovation.

Values

Authentic | Welcoming | Engaging | Innovative | Great Quality | Sustainable.

The policy

The Great Western Society Limited has adopted this policy to show its commitment to complying with the environmental legislation and regulations that apply to its operations, and to demonstrate its commitment to being a sustainable part of the local community.

We recognise that in our day-to-day operations we impact on the environment in a number of ways and we wish to manage the potentially harmful effects of such activity wherever and whenever practicable and viable to do so. We are committed to being a responsible member of the community.

The principles of this policy are:

- Enabling and encouraging our visitors, volunteers and staff to recycle.
- Encouraging, in so far as practicable, efficient use of natural resources
- Protecting our flora and fauna
- Encouraging energy conservation
- Contributing to the sustainable development of the local Didcot economy

We will do this in our day to day operations and project work.

Our impact on climate change and / energy efficiency

We recognise the significance of climate change, and in particular the contribution caused by pollution from burning fossil fuels such as coal. However, we also recognise that our existence as a working historical museum means that we cannot eliminate this aspect from our operations. We are aware that issues such as climate activism, as well as higher temperatures and an increased risk of storms, may affect our future operation.

We have carbon footprint calculations going back to 2017 which have been produced by University of Reading student interns. However, there is no model calculator for museums or steam railways and so in 2024 we developed our own bespoke model. Although we have used this model, we have not been able consistently to calculate our carbon emissions as it is not always clear how much coal and other fuels we use in an actual year; CO₂ emissions

from burning coal make up over 2/3 of the site's carbon footprint so a small difference in the calculation can show a major difference. We continue to develop the process.

We have started work on our National Lottery Heritage Fund (HF) development project. One of the HF's investment principles is Protecting the environment and our application stated:

“In line with the overall site policy, the Engine Shed project will:

- install solar panels on the roof of the Engine Shed to power the Engine Shed's operations.
- harvest rainwater for use in the toilets and for watering the locomotives.
- use local suppliers, where possible.
- have a zero to landfill target as we will deal with materials on site as part of our normal management. Timber can be used to light engines, metal will be recycled as scrap and glass will be recycled. The only material we will remove from site will be hazardous substances, such as asbestos.”

In order to minimise our effects on climate change we will aim to become progressively more energy efficient by:

- Only running our trains on public running days or when operationally necessary.
- Encouraging visitors, volunteers and staff to travel to the Centre by public transport by providing detailed information about trains and buses on our website. We have signed up to Good Journey to offer discounts for car free travel.
- Encouraging visitors, volunteers and staff to use local cycleways and the new bike hub at Didcot Parkway Station.
- Encouraging our staff, volunteers and contractors to use fuel efficiently.
- Using thermostats to regulate the heating to ensure it is only used when needed and turn off electrical equipment that is not in use.
- Installing energy saving lighting (internal and external).
- Only using as much water as we need and ensure hot water tanks are insulated.
- Switching off engines when not in use.
- Keeping equipment regularly serviced and running as efficiently as possible.

Noise and nuisance

- Use the whistle only when operationally necessary
- Use a noise meter to ensure we minimise engine noise
- Avoid black smoke as far as possible
- Keep equipment regularly serviced
- Store fuels and chemicals appropriately
- Damp down coal and ash to avoid dust

Purchasing

When making purchasing decisions, we will endeavour to purchase goods and services with the best environmental performance, for example, by sourcing locally produced goods and services and minimising packaging and transport.

Storage, drainage and spillages

- We will ensure that hazardous substances are stored safely and securely and that appropriate spills kits are maintained.

- We will develop an environmental emergency plan and ensure that relevant GWS staff and volunteers are aware of the plan and have access to control measures.
- We will maintain all drainage systems to the appropriate standard to prevent pollution.

Waste Disposal and Recycling

- We aim to maximise resource efficiency by reusing scrap material where we can and by selling scrap metal.
- We minimise waste to landfill. Our waste is collected by Grundon¹ who state that 100% of the waste they collect is diverted from landfill. The waste is taken to a sorting facility where it is sorted by hand. Grundon recycles as much as possible and the remainder is taken to energy from waste (EfW) facilities where the waste is burned to generate power.
- We will ensure that all unrecyclable waste is disposed of in accordance with statutory legislation, including using Environment Agency approved contractors for disposal of recycled and non-recyclable materials, including electrical equipment.

Hazardous waste

We try to minimise the amount of hazardous waste we produce, and segregate and dispose of any hazardous waste following HSE guidelines.

Flora and fauna

We have worked with local specialists to improve the Centre for wildlife, including reviewing our flora and fauna and developing an insect survey that can be undertaken regularly. Colleagues from Wild Oxfordshire worked with our student interns to report on our biodiversity².

We have installed wildlife cameras to identify local fauna and drinking water for wildlife. In addition:

- We have reviewed our grounds management to optimise the environment for flora and fauna while keeping visitors safe and operating a living history museum. See Appendix A.
- We commissioned a Preliminary Roost Assessment of the Coal Stage and no evidence of bats was found internally or externally. The report recommended the addition of bird boxes to enhance bird nesting habitat in line with the South Oxfordshire Local Plan. The Engine Shed project includes a bat survey.
- We have minimised the use of chemical weedkillers commensurate with operational safety and will only use an appropriate chemical weedkiller applied by qualified staff.
- We have produced a Nature Guide and encourage visitors to appreciate the wildlife at the Centre.
- We deal with invasive weeds and diseases in line with Environment Agency guidelines.
- We have provided designated wildlife areas.

Retail sales

- We have installed a water refill station to encourage visitors, volunteers and staff to refill their own water bottles.

¹ Waste Collection & Disposal Service. Grundon, www.grundon.com/services/general-waste/ and Energy From Waste. Grundon, www.grundon.com/facilities/energy-from-waste/

² Enhancing Didcot Railway Centre for Biodiversity, Wild Oxfordshire, November 2025

- We do not use plastic bags in the Shop and only provide paper bags when asked by the customer.
- We have reduced single use plastics and use re-usable or recyclable crockery and cutlery.
- We will publicise that visitors have the option of bringing their own mug for hot and cold drinks.
- We provide vegetarian and vegan options in the Refreshment Room to help visitors reduce their meat consumption as personal contributions to climate change.

General

- We will support our volunteers and staff with the necessary training and capability to implement our environmental objectives as part of their contribution to our aims, including encouraging our volunteers and staff to become Carbon Literate³.
- We have introduced the requirement for all GWS Board reports to have considered the environmental impact of any decision.
- We will consider how we can develop measures for our environmental performance and monitor on a regular basis.
- We will include environmental improvements (e.g. energy saving, water recycling, solar, heat pumps, etc.) in all new building projects, commensurate with retaining the historical atmosphere of the Centre.
- We have designated our Chief Executive as our Environmental Champion.

Review

This policy was reviewed by the Didcot Railway Centre Senior Management Team on 5 February 2026 and approved by GWS Board on 21 February 2026. The policy will be monitored and reviewed biennially.

Ann Middleton
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³ <https://carbonliteracy.com/toolkits/museums/>

Appendix A: Vegetation management and control at Didcot Railway Centre

This has been reviewed in line with Wild Oxfordshire's Enhancing Didcot Railway Centre for Biodiversity report.

In general, we will keep all railway tracks, point levers and a three foot margin clear of vegetation for operational and safety reasons. In the rest of the Centre we will maintain the areas, as defined in Maintenance Works Component Site Areas, as follows:

Ref	Area	Comments
1	Centre Sidings	Industrial area. No public access. Planting to screen untidy areas at the London end. Wild Oxfordshire's report recommended that this area be enhanced and allowed to establish as wildflower grassland with the proposed formal garden in a different location, such as next to the ticket office or by Didcot Halt Station. No overall chemical weedkilling but hand spot removal of vigorous plants, e.g. buddleia, to prevent forestation and to keep the path to and from Portakabin clear. To be reviewed as part of Centre Sidings development. Public area between Steam Rail Motor Shed and Refreshment Room to be grassed and to be mown.
2	Between GWT Museum and Didcot Halt	Area from Wantage Road Garage and beside Didcot Halt to be mown and kept clear of weeds that may be a hazard to visitors. Branch Line to be kept tidy and clear of nettles.
3	Main Line Platform	Main Demonstration Line to be kept clear of weeds. The triangle behind the Ticket Office to be grassed and mown.
3a	Area by Ramp	This would seem to be an ideal area for wildflowers, either self-seeded as now or supplemented with wildflower seeding and reflect the traditional trackside vegetation. It will require basic management, including twice a year mowing.
4	Between site entrance and GWT Museum	Front of Shed to be maintained as industrial area and clear of weeds. Coal Stage ramp to be strimmed to prevent overgrowth. Buffer stop end with periodic cutting back of vigorous species.
5	Engine Shed and Locomotive Works	Area beside Engine Shed and Loco Works, and between Engine Shed and Main Demonstration Line, to be mown and kept tidy. Garden area by the Loco Works to be maintained. A lozenge shaped area of wildflowers could be created around the pollarded willow which would not impinge on the 'routes of desire' for pedestrians.

Ref	Area	Comments
		A larger lozenge shaped wildflower area in the centre of the grass between the Loco Works and Main Demonstration Line was established in 2025 and is to be maintained in accordance with the recommendations of Wild Oxfordshire.
6	Sidings to rear of Locomotive Works and Picnic Area	Picnic Area to be mown and kept clear of weeds that may be a hazard to visitors, e.g. nettles Area by Main Demonstration Line to be left for wildflowers. Mound to be cleared, screened and planted with flowers. Wildflower areas around the margins to be maintained.
7	Carriage Shed and Traverser	Traverser and surrounding area to be kept clear of weeds.
8	Oxford Road	Area between Oxford Road and Siding to be mown and kept clear of weeds that may be a hazard to visitors, e.g. nettles, hemlock. Leaf mulching and wildlife areas to be developed and maintained. Tree cover to be reviewed as part of Heyford Station Building Project.
9	Broad Gauge	Broad Gauge and Branch Line to be kept clear of weeds and mown to reduce fire risk in summer.
10	Signalling (Didcot Halt to Transfer Shed)	All signalling equipment to be kept clear of vegetation. The S&T Department is responsible for the Branch Line garden areas.
11	Transfer Shed and Broad Gauge Engine House	Area between Oxford Road and Transfer Shed to remain a wildflower area, the triangular area behind the shelter has a particularly rich flora (Wild Oxfordshire report 2025).