

# CARBON CUTTING

Hospitality giant Whitbread employs a whole team of people to make sure that its operations are as sustainable as possible. FEJ hears how the adoption of innovative catering equipment is making a difference to its kitchens and ticking some very significant green boxes in the process.

Operators are often accused of paying lip service to the topic of energy efficiency, but as one of the largest players in the hospitality market, Whitbread has placed corporate and carbon responsibility firmly at the heart of its philosophy.

With revenues of £2.6 billion last year and some 45,000 staff employed in the UK, the decisions it makes around procurement have the potential to generate energy and cost savings on a colossal scale. For Ben Brakes, environment manager at Whitbread, sustainable kitchen design lies at the very heart of what contemporary hotel and restaurant management is all about.

“Our approach to kitchen design has sustainability and the wellbeing of our customers at its core,” he explains. “Investment in new, sustainable technologies in our kitchens is crucial. For example, we have installed new refrigeration systems that reduce energy usage and support our CSR targets as well as cutting-edge ovens that enable us to cook with less fat.”

Whitbread’s brands are among some of the most recognised in the business, including Premier Inn, Costa, Beefeater and Brewers Fayre. Considerable time is spent analysing the business and environmental impact of new equipment and, once a decision has been reached, the emphasis is on working closely with the supplier to ensure any large-scale roll-out goes smoothly.

The group’s main focus over the past year has been to continue making improvements that help it to serve healthier food to guests. With Premier Inn, which now totals more than 700 hotels, it installed Rational combi ovens at its in-house Thyme restaurants.

“These ovens are now in use in over 50% of our hotel restaurants,” explains Brakes. “They can simulate grilling, frying and baking, meaning that many



food items can be cooked at the same time with no transference of flavour. More importantly, no oil or fat needs to be added to create great taste, and any excess fat or grease is expelled from the food during cooking.”

## WHITBREAD: ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT TARGETS

	2014/15 Performance/£1m turnover	2020 Target (reset in April 2015)
CARBON	36.00% improvement in carbon efficiency against 2009 baseline	Reduce carbon by 15% (against a 2014 base line)
WATER	29.91% water consumption reduction against 2009 baseline	Reduce water by 20% (against a 2014 baseline)
WASTE	83.98% of operational waste diverted from landfill	Increase direct operations recycling rate to 80%

## ENERGY SAVINGS

In the past year, Whitbread has made the following savings:

£1.1m	Electricity utility budget cost savings in hotels and restaurants
£1m	Gas utility budget cost savings in hotels and restaurants
£306,000	Water utility budget cost savings in hotels and restaurants
5.81%	Improvement in carbon emission efficiency points
8.6	Million kWh of energy saved from energy efficiency projects
4,500	Tonnes of carbon saved by carbon reduction projects
60%	Renewable energy purchased



**“OUR APPROACH TO KITCHEN DESIGN HAS SUSTAINABILITY AND THE WELLBEING OF OUR CUSTOMERS AT ITS CORE”**

As a result of this cooking process, Whitbread says that the ovens produce cleaner and healthier results compared with traditional cooking methods, and have resulted in a significant reduction of fried food items, removing some 500,000 calories every year from the Thyme menu.

Whitbread’s commitment to energy efficient design was also illustrated by the Covent Garden branch of its Premier Inn by Hub brand becoming the first hotel in the UK to achieve an ‘Outstanding’ BREEAM rating at design stage. The hotel cost £30m to

build and includes state of the art heat, cooling and energy saving technologies to drive efficiencies. The heating and cooling for the restaurant is provided by variable refrigerant flow (VRF) air source heat pumps, which incorporate heat recovery technology and result in lower overall carbon emissions, when compared to traditional gas-fired boilers and conventional chillers.

The company says that ‘A’ rated refrigerated catering goods and energy efficient catering equipment have been installed in its restaurant kitchen,

while the restaurant supply and extract ventilation incorporates heat recovery technology between the air paths to ensure energy is retained within the building. “Changes to our kitchen equipment are driven by the commitments in the customer wellbeing and energy and environment pillars of our sustainability strategy. The roll-out of Rational combi ovens, the installation of eco dishwashers in our Costa stores and energy efficient refrigeration systems are enabling us to work towards our goals,” says Brakes.

As Whitbread opens hundreds of new coffee shops, restaurants and hotels, the company’s challenge is to ensure it manages its energy and environmental impact by reducing carbon emissions, being as energy efficient as possible, minimising water consumption and diverting waste from landfill.

Writing in the company’s latest Corporate Responsibility Report, outgoing CEO Andy Harrison said this is happening. “We’re doing this by investing in new technologies and ways of working, to test and demonstrate higher sustainability standards. In 2014/15, we succeeded in delivering a 36% improvement in carbon efficiency and a 30% reduction in water consumption against our 2009 baseline, and diverted 84% of all operational waste from landfill.”

