

Creating an Ecocentre

How CAT can help

Recent years have seen an upsurge in projects for environmental visitor centres. Two types of project have emerged, ranging enormously in scale. On the one hand, many existing facilities are adding a visitor centre with environmental features, and on the other, there are projects whose prime purpose is to demonstrate environmental excellence - ecocentres.

This leaflet lays out the likely stages that an environmental visitor centre project progresses through, plus remarks on how CAT can assist at each decision point with its expertise. Although these comments are made with a full-scale ecocentre in mind, many of these points apply to environmental visitor centre projects.

Over 25 years CAT has developed its own ecocentre into a flourishing £3 million enterprise attracting 75,000 visitors each year.

CAT Consultancy Services are currently advising on prospective ecocentres in Ballymena, Fermanagh, Rye, Hokkaido, and Milwaukee.

1. Vision development & feasibility assessment

What you will have to do:

- Scope the full range of choices open to you.
- Come to conclusions on a range of core questions - conclusions that must be shared by all the project group.
- Assess the factors for success i.e. assessing the skills that you require to successfully run it and assessing the potential of your particular locality.
- Consider the options for capital costs, running costs, capital grants and income.

What CAT can do for you:

- Undertake a feasibility study and produce a report addressing the questions above.
- Ensure that you tackle the really vital questions at this crucial early stage.
- Equip your project group with the knowledge to answer these questions.
- Give you a 'virtual grand tour' of the world's ecocentres, the concepts behind them, and the key common issues that arise from these.



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- Work with you to assess your group's strengths and local opportunities in the context of these key questions.
- Provide a training session to give the group a panoramic view of the state of the art ecological principles and techniques that a prospective ecocentre could deploy and display.

The feasibility report will form a basis for your initial fundraising activities, to enthuse potential backers and to convince them that the issues have been thought through.

2. Project design - a brief

Next is to look at practicalities of the design and how to incorporate environmental principles.

What you will need to do:

- Decide how the site design will reflect and magnify the vision you have arrived at.
- Reconcile conflicting demands for space and money.

What CAT can do:

- Create a brief for design of the centre that meets your needs whilst applying ecological principles. The brief includes advice on how to design the project to maximise possibilities for state-of-the-art eco-techniques.
- Design and run a 'planning-for-real' process for your group to input to the design and plan of the site.

The briefing document can include artist's impressions or architectural sketches or illustrations of comparable structures already in existence. Sometimes this initial design work might need to be undertaken as part of the initial feasibility work, e.g. for funding purposes. Some groups may have an existing relationship with an architect and can involve them in the planning-for-real, others will use the briefing document as a basis to invite architectural tenders.

3. Technical training & practical advice to the architectural team

CAT can offer technical training to your architects, their subcontractors, or, if you are doing it yourself, to you!:

- Advice and training on ecological building design and materials selection.
- Training on ecological building techniques, energy conservation, renewable energy, organic waste and water treatment facilities.
- Help sourcing materials and equipment.
- How ecodesign can create opportunities to employ the vernacular skills of your area.

4. Project management of the building process

CAT has project management expertise, but at this stage we recommend that you have a locally-based project manager. CAT can offer ongoing advice as the project takes shape. CAT could be part of your project team as an adviser.

5. Exhibition design & construction

After all your efforts it's vital to show them off to best effect.

CAT can offer:

- Advice on exhibition design, how to make them fun and engaging, not just educational.
- Full design and construction of exhibits.

CAT has also (perforce!) successfully made a display of the constructional process itself. In fact this is a stage where you can really show what ecological design and construction is all about. This implies bringing the project 'on-line' prior to final completion, which may sound daunting, but it can offer advantages in terms of an earlier income stream, and CAT can advise on how to manage the complications involved.

6. Operating the centre

You will probably need to distinguish between an initial 'establishing yourself' phase and later ongoing operation. If you employ CAT to help you get set up, we would hope to have an ongoing relationship to offer you continuing input - and for us to learn from your successes!!

Scale of charges

Charges will be by the day or the hour depending on what you require. CAT charges £50/hr (excluding VAT) for quick consultancies. Rates for larger projects are available on request.

Contact

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