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The lean green way for firms to beat the dreaded credit crunch

Green activist Jonathon Porritt appeals to county firms not to let the fear of inflation undo the good work they are doing for the environment, as he spoke to Business reporter Rory O'Keeffe

ECO-ACTIVIST Jonathon Porritt has told businesses: Environmental good practice can help overcome the credit crunch.

Speaking exclusively to WestBusiness after a appearance at the Cheltenham Science Festival, the sustainable development activist, who has long campaigned for companies to enact green policy, asked Gloucestershire's firms not to allow fears of inflation to undo the good work they have done for the planet.

And he assured owners that green schemes can help improve efficiency, keep prices down and profits up, despite a potential economic slowdown.

He said: "In Gloucestershire, people are rightly proud to live and work in a lush green county, and work hard to protect it. That work is as important as ever and we all face the same challenges, to reduce waste, use less non-renewable energy and choose locally-produced products to reduce carbon waste."

As politicians on both sides of the Commons back away from earlier commitments to environmental policy, fearing a backlash from voters feeling the pinch, Jonathon stressed that businesses could lead the way.

He said: "I suspect, from what is being said inside and outside the Houses of Parliament, that we are facing two years of economic uncertainty.

"That's clearly a challenge to us all, but companies have a massive part to play.

"Politicians are missing a trick by not linking taxation to carbon costs, dropping rates to replace with carbon charging, but if they are stepping back from environmental concerns then business can lead the way.

"Firms can actually sidestep, or at least lessen the effects of, the credit crunch by using increased efficiency to keep costs lower, meaning they can pass on improved prices to customers and stay at similar levels of business.

"Most of these strategies, such as cutting electricity use, recycling and cutting waste and so landfill taxes, have a clear financial



JONATHON PORRITT: advice for companies

advantage as they directly save cash.

"Whatever happens to the economy in general, we will definitely see energy prices increase, as we have seen the cost of oil peak, so prices will rocket.

"We are running out of space for landfill, and the taxes on that are coming because they are not only necessary but also part of the European environmental agenda, and by its nature, waste of any material costs money.

"Apart from that, and especially here in Gloucestershire, the public's attitude to

environmental issues is far more informed than ever before. I believe that the consumer will certainly choose to buy products from environmentally friendly firms ahead of those they know are acting in ways that are harmful to the environment, especially if the prices are the same.

"Companies can act, in any number of ways, and they will find that a little effort now can help see them through a challenging economic time ahead. It is a very rare win-win picture. Businesses win, consumers win and the environment wins."

Case Study: The Commercial Group



STUDY: Simone Mann and Arthur Hindmarsh of The Commercial Group

Profitable and kind to the environment

WHILE calling on Gloucestershire's businesses to beat the credit crunch by going green, Jonathon Porritt pointed to the efforts already made by firms across the county.

He said: "The interest in green issues shown by firms in Gloucestershire is one of the most heartening things I have seen in relation to combating climate change and its knock-on effects.

"We are really spoilt for choice with companies across the county, from the Green Shop in Bisley and Ecotricity in Stroud to others like The Commercial Group in Cheltenham, who have been really impressive in the way they have approached the issue. They are an example to small and medium enterprises of just what can be done."

Since 2007, when the Leckhampton Road, Cheltenham, firm set out to reduce its carbon usage, The Commercial Group has slashed its 1,078 ton carbon footprint by a staggering 75 per cent.

The company will achieve CarbonNeutral status by 2010, with a progressive programme.

From the re-routing of delivery vehicles, the introduction of energy efficient lighting and using Ecotricity as its energy supplier and a reduce/reuse/recycle waste management system, the company has made annual savings of more than £103,000 on overheads.

Its biodiesel tank will have paid for itself by the end of this year and the company's experience has proved that consumers will vote with their wallets to support eco-centric initiatives.

Its initial investment of more than £40,000 has already been recovered due to new business success, achieved predominantly due to the company's green credentials.

Company co-founder and director Simone Mann said: "Given the current business climate, it is understandable that there is a reluctance to invest in environmental initiatives, but the cost efficiencies and market differentiation that can be achieved with green policies in place, means that now is probably the best time to make the change.

"We've certainly proved that a business can be both profitable and environmentally driven."