

Welcome to Living Lightly B&B at 3 Brooklands, Totnes, TQ9 5AR

What makes this a “Lightly Living” B&B?

I purchased the house in August 2014 after living in rented accommodation in and around Totnes for 8 years. I bought the house with the intention of running it as a Bed and Breakfast. I wanted to demonstrate how we can holiday whilst minimising our environmental impact and inspire people to make some changes to the way they live in their own houses when they go back home. Most of my bookings are taken through Airbnb but I also take private bookings.

I have worked in the environmental field all of my adult life and I have always been hugely passionate about creating change in how people relate to this, our planetary home. The way I live reflects this passion. I believe that I make conscious decisions about all of my lifestyle choices, these may not always prove to be the ‘best’ choices, but they are ones I have thought about and I hope that by sharing with you some of my choices it will start a discussion about the choices that we all make, consciously or unconsciously in our day-to-day lives.

The idea of Living Lightly B&B is to create an experience that makes it more affordable the smaller your impact is whilst staying here, and at the same time offer a quality experience.

You will receive a 5% discount for each of the following:

1. If you bring your own duvet cover, double sheet, pillow cases and towels
2. If you arrive by and use public transport (excluding aeroplanes)

If you stay for more than 3 nights each subsequent night is 10% off the price per night.

If you have come to Totnes specifically to find out more about Transition, 5% will go to Transition Town Totnes.

Everything in the house has been sourced with consideration as to the impact that the item has on the environment.

- All of the furniture except my bed is second hand, the bed was made on Dartmoor by a local craftsman using local oak and other local timber
- Wool Duvets, UK made – Baavet - www.baavet.co.uk
- Wool pillows – bought at Greenfibres, Totnes - www.greenfibres.com
- Kaypok pillows – bought at Greenfibres, Totnes - www.greenfibres.com
- Bedding and towels are either second hand or bought new and organic. I have recently bought several sets of organic bedding from Greenfibres, after the previous sets rotted. The new ones are a much heavier weight thread, the downside of this is that they are much heavier, so less fits in the washing machine and they take longer to dry. They also look more crumpled than the thinner sheets and the creases don't blow out on the line. However they should last for over 20 years (as opposed to 4!)
- Cutlery and crockery is either second hand or made by-hand, mainly by local artists

Most of the rugs are the exception as these have come from my travels as a teenager in the days when I used to fly, though the Moroccan rugs in the hall, landing and lounge all came back on the train with me!

The only decoration to the house that I have done is in the small bedroom, this was painted with left over paint found in the house and Earthborn eco paint <http://earthbornpaints.co.uk/>. More recently, November 2019, I had the hall, stairs and landing painted. Mel Bee stripped the old wallpaper back to the original lime plaster and then used Posset Earthborn clay paint on the walls. For the skirting boards and door surrounds I found a tin of water based Satinwood in the shed that had been left by the previous owners, I added a bit of stain to match it to the rest of the woodwork and achieved a surprisingly perfect match!

The house has double glazing throughout.

Cleaning Products

Most of the time I use eco cloths without using products at all, I use small amounts of Sonnet <http://www.sonett.eu> cleaning products when necessary. I do occasionally (about 6 x per year) use a mould removal liquid, which is not environmentally friendly, for the shower tiles, however by wiping down every time I shower I greatly reduce the build up of mould and the need to use anything more.

Utility Providers

I am with Good Energy for Gas and Electricity and the Phone Coop for Broadband and Landline

The Front Hall

There is a rack for outdoor shoes made out of a pallet!

The front door has been draft proofed, with the aid of Transition Town Totnes' Draft Busting team, <https://www.transitiontowntotnes.org/draughtbusting-thermal-imaging/> it is a very ill-fitting door, but now no drafts come through the door. However the gaps between the floorboards in the hall generate a draft and need filling. Doors to the hall are kept shut except in the summer.

Guest Bedrooms

Floors

There are no carpets on the floors in the guest bedrooms; which is ideal for people suffering from allergies.

Towels and Bedding

Are all either second hand or organic. Everything is line dried (throughout the year) and I do not iron anything. If necessary I will finish off the drying on the pulley clothes drier that I have above the log burning stove. I do not provide very large sized towels as these are harder to dry and can become smelly between uses, which would require a hotter wash, plus they take up a lot more room in the washing machine.

Hot Water Bottles

Hot water bottles are provided in the winter months, they have organic wool covers on them, bought from Greenfibres, Totnes.

Fireplaces

None of the fireplaces are in working order.

Other items

The kettles are both 2nd hand. I provide a wide selection of herbal teas and normal tea. I have phased out using brands such as Yogi and Pukkah teas as I have discovered that the sachets that each tea bag is wrapped in contain plastic so are not compostable. Hair driers are not provided.

Family Room (front of the house)

The extra king sized bed was in the house when I bought it, it has a UK wool duvet, purchased as a second, from Baavet and 2 sets of pillows, the under pillow is made from organic wool and the top pillow is made from sustainably grown kaypok, it is similar in feel to a feather pillow, I chose Kaypok as although I love feather bedding, there are no guarantees that the feathers are a waste product from the meat industry, many feathers are plucked from live birds. Both pillows are purchased from Greenfibres in Totnes. Both kaypok and wool are allergen free. There is a wool Baavet mattress protector on the bed.

Double Room (back of the house)

This smaller room has an organic wool duvet and wool mattress topper, both seconds from Baavet, the pillows are the same as in the family bedroom.

My Bedroom

The bed is made by Glenn White whitethornwoodcraft.co.uk using local Dartmoor timber – the header and footer boards are oak and the sides Ash???

The Bathroom

The Shower

Is an electric shower, this is an energy hungry way of heating water. I have purchased a shower mixer tap for when it breaks (it is about 14 years old) and this will run off the gas boiler. Gas overall is more efficient than electricity because less energy is wasted during production, however that is changing with the increase in electricity being produced from renewable energy in the UK. The shower uses relatively low volumes of water and definitely is not a power shower!

The Toilet

I have replaced the toilet handle for a dual flush lever, for a short flush pull the toilet lever up, and for a long flush push it down, however I encourage you to not flush wees at all; a fun sign above the toilet says "If it's brown flush it down, If it's Yellow let it Mellow. You have the choice but each time you don't flush you save about 7 litres of pure drinking water from being contaminated in the toilet. The toilet paper is recycled. I am trying to reduce my consumption of toilet paper by washing with the sink rather than using paper, or I put it in the bin if used for a wee and compost it.

The Sink

It is best to not use the hot water tap as it takes so long for the water to come through hot in the bathroom, it wastes water and runs the gas boiler unnecessarily. I just use the cold tap.

Toiletries

All of my toiletries are made from natural ingredients and most are organic. I use shampoo bars with zero packaging and soap rather than shower gels. I use bicarbonate of soda for deodorant – try it!! It is both the most effective and the cheapest deodorant I have ever come across. I add essential oils to make it smell nice.

The Breakfast Room

The fireplace is not in working order

The Lounge

Fairy Lights

The fairy lights are LEDs

The Log Burning Stove was in the house when I moved in, in a really cold spell it is not powerful enough to heat the kitchen, dining room and the lounge, so I have put up thick velvet curtains across the doorway so that the lounge can be closed off to make it easier to heat to a cosy temperature in winter. I only switch the heating on for upstairs when I have guests. I purchase local wood from Zav Bowden, it is well seasoned and a mix of hard and soft wood including oak.

Pulley Clothes Airer and Laundry

The pulley clothes airer gets the rising heat from the wood burning stove and is great for drying clothes when it is too damp outside. I plan my washing around the weather and throughout the year all bedding and clothes are dried on the line outside and finished off on the dryer when necessary. I rarely use an iron for my clothes (twice a year max!) and non of the bedding is ironed. A good blow on the line gets rid of most creases, provided that they are folded or hung up straight off the line, except the new, thick organic bedding, which is a bit like canvas! Being outside makes the washing smell fresh! If guests have stayed for less than 4 nights then I wash the bedding at 30 degrees on a short wash, this applies to the majority of guests.

The Kitchen

Food Purchasing Decisions

This is a vegetarian household, I ask guests to respect this by not bringing meat or fish products into the house. From an environmental point of view this reduces my carbon footprint by about a quarter according to studies, clearly this will depend on what I eat, if I ate tofu burgers all the time then this would be higher. The decisions I make around food are the following in order of priority:

- Local and seasonal - added bonus - no or minimal packaging
- Organic from independent shops (not supermarkets)
- Affordable (I buy dried goods from Essential and Hodmedods in bulk, this contributes less packaging too)
- From local independent shops

I always choose loose fruit and veg, even if they are more expensive.

The breakfasts that I serve to guests are vegetarian, most of the ingredients are organic, all the dishes are made using the majority of ingredients sourced locally (within 30 miles). Except:

- Oats from the UK
- UK Barley flakes (for granola), fava beans (for baked beans), buckwheat and pea flour (for pancakes) from Hodmedods <https://hodmedods.co.uk/>,
- bread – generally made by me, currently from Stoates UK sourced stoneground flour

Recycling

The recycling system is intricate! We can recycle everything in Totnes pretty much except soft plastic wrappers. I go through the rubbish bins that guests have in their rooms to recycle as much as possible. I actively choose not to buy food that is excessively packaged. I only put my recycling bags out when they are full, generally once every 2 months.

- Plastic – with recyclable symbols 1 (polyethylene terephthalate) and 2 (HDPE – High Density Polyethylene). These are collected by the council fortnightly. These are mostly bottles, but also some containers (often not the bottle tops). I wash and squash these, to increase the amount of plastic that can be carried by the recycling lorries, otherwise they just carry air!
- All other hard plastics are taken down to the household waste recycling centre on the Totnes industrial estate, however recent reports on UK plastic waste being dumped in the seas and in toxic heaps in poorer countries

in Asia has led me to stock pile the plastic until I get assurances from the council that their plastic is actually recycled. In my view it would be better if it went to the local incinerator along with the general waste than be dumped in an unknown location abroad.

- Compost – anything compostable, including tissues, cooked food (small amounts) fruit and veg peelings, confidential papers, newspaper and cardboard is composted at home. As an organic gardener I find I cannot make enough compost for my garden! I collect seaweed off the beach, after a good storm.
- Metal - including tin and foil, beer bottle and jam jar lids – these go in the council fortnightly collection with the plastics type 1 and 2
- Paper and card – if it isn't going either in the compost bin or to light the log burning stove then it gets collected fortnightly, by the council in blue plastic bags, that they provide. The council has recently added Tetrapaks to the paper and cardboard collection.
- Glass is not collected from the house and has to be taken to one of the collection points around the town.

Rubbish

When I moved in to the house I asked the council to remove the black wheelie bin that they provide for refuse, as I only fill 1 supermarket carrier bag of refuse every 2 weeks, this includes in the height of Summer when the Bed and Breakfast is busiest, I just pop this into one of my neighbours' bin on the day of collection.

The Cooker, Hob and Grill

The hob, grill and cooker are all gas, this is a more efficient source of heat than electricity and eliminates the need for a toaster. I only use the large ring when using a large frying pan and generally boil the kettle slowly on a medium ring as I figure out this planning ahead must use less energy than burning the flame on full.

Washing Machine

I recently bought an A+++ , new washing machine that had been marked down in price because it had a minor scratch on it. For guests that stay less than 4 days I wash bedding on a 30 min, 30 degree wash. Most other washes are 40 degree and last an hour, occasionally I will do a hot wash for items that are not getting clean on a 40 degree wash.

Dishwasher

Again this was here with the house and though I use it very rarely it has been very useful for when the B&B is busy, I only fill it with crockery and cutlery, not pots and pans as these normally require more elbow grease and are an inefficient use of the space in the dishwasher.

Heating

The gas boiler is approximately 14 years old, it provides hot water and heating. My heating generally does not go on until November, and then only as needed, I do not have it coming on at a set time as I prefer to evaluate whether I need it on, on a daily basis. I use the wood stove if I am the only one in the house and a hot water bottle in bed! There is electric underfloor heating in the dining room, however this is expensive to run and I rarely use it unless I am on my own and working from home, I find a hot water bottle under my feet when I am sitting at the computer to be cheaper and just as effective!

Taps

I replaced the taps in the Kitchen as I wanted filtered water for drinking. The lever on the left is for filtered water, the filter lasts me over 4 years.

The Garden

There is a communal back passage for residents to use (you will see people walking right past the back door, to access their properties).

The garden was laid out as you see it today when I moved in, however I have made a lot of changes to the plants. The previous owners were not familiar with English garden plants and had grown a lot of ornamentals, I have removed most of them including Bamboo, A New Zealand Flax, Fatsia Japonica, a Camelia, a willow dome and another willow and have replaced these with flowering perennials, two apple trees that I am espaliering (one eater, one cooker), a corkscrew hazel and chokeberry tree (deciduous with edible fruit). I have also filled the rockery with edibles including perennial kale, chard, rhubarb, perpetual spinach and lettuces. There is a grape vine that crops really well. The bees love the sedums which spread in the garden and I have planted an area of wild flowers in front of the deck. I garden organically though occasionally resort to organic slug pellets. You will see a lot of straw in the garden, this is my attempt to convert to no-dig gardening, the garden was initially weeded, then covered in compost, then a layer of cardboard and then straw. The cardboard and straw acts as a weed suppressant and a mulch and helps to retain the moisture in the soil.

The decking in the garden, that was here when I arrived at the house, was completely rotten and in 2018 Kevin Ireland (carpenter specialising in sustainable, local timber <http://www.silvaleaf.co.uk>) replaced it, we discovered that all of the uprights were rotten as well as the joists under the decking. The original wood was chemically treated soft wood. Since arsenic has been banned for this purpose, treated timber is fairly ineffective and can last for as little as 2 years.

I chose to employ Kevin as he specialises in using quality, untreated timber, it is locally sourced larch and comes from Zav Bowden's saw mill. The larch should last 15 years. I have shortened the overall length of the deck to allow more growing space. In 2019 I replaced the rotting garden furniture (and put it in the log pile) with some lovely chunky furniture, made from a tree that fell down in storms, on the Dartington estate. The furniture is made by a local project that works with prisoners; Landworks www.landworks.org.uk train them in wood working skills and growing food as part of their rehabilitation. A great, local story for a great cause.

Down at the bottom of the garden (N facing) I have created a woodland area, with pulmoneria, helebores, ferns, primroses, cowslip and cyclamen, I replaced the willow dome with a compost bin made out of pallets; the two triangle designed bays can be accessed on 2 sides, which allows one to be dug out whilst the other remains.

I also have a wormery, just outside the backdoor, which I use for kitchen waste that isn't full of onions or citrus peel as these aren't enjoyed by worms! I also have a water butt outside the backdoor, though this is insufficient in a dry summer and I need to increase the volume of water that I am collecting.

The wood store and bike shelter were made when I moved in to the house to provide easy access to my recumbent tricycle.

Transport

I have not had a car since at least 2010 and instead converted my recumbent tricycle to electric so that I can go longer distances. I borrow a car on occasions and pay 40p per mile, to a neighbour. I have chosen not to fly since 2006. I have taken many trips to Europe by train including Barcelona, Morocco, The Czech Republic, Denmark and Italy.

I do hope that you enjoy your visit and maybe take back some ideas from Living Lightly B&B to adopt in your home. I am always interested to hear of any further changes I could make to reduce the impact that I, and my business make to this one beautiful planet that we share, do let me know if you think of anything.

Please free to take a copy of this or if you would like me to email you a copy let me know before you leave, or take one of my cards from the breakfast room and get in touch.

May we tread lightly as we travel through this life and may we leave this planet in a better state than when we arrived on it.

Warmly

Holly