



# How Waitrose became part of the scenery

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Waitrose's Bagshot branch is in its Home Counties heartland so much so it actually blends into the landscape. But that's not all that's special about the 21,500 sq ft store

**S**upermarkets aren't renowned for their architectural subtlety, but when Waitrose planned a new store in Bagshot, Surrey, nestled between protected parkland and a quiet residential neighbourhood, it had little choice.

To convince councillors to take the "unusual" step of approving a 21,500 sq ft food store in the middle of a valued part of the countryside, architects Phillips Tracey designed a 48,000 sq ft undulating roof blanketed with 11 species of plant, moss and grass. "When you look down, you simply see a green roof that blends into the landscape," says architect Brendan Tracey.

Waitrose says it also holds in heat, boosts plant life and reduces run-off water. And the store's eco-credentials don't end there.

A heat recovery system captures waste energy to heat the branch and provide hot water, there are LED lights throughout, and water-cooled refrigeration reduces the emission of harmful HFCs.

Opening to the public in August 2015, the store didn't come cheap, costing £15m in total and £9m for the outer shell alone. "You don't normally get that amount of money spent on a building like this," says Tracey.

Waitrose head of architecture Andrew Thorp is more restrained. All he'll say about the cost is that it's "comparable" to other stores. "From a Waitrose point of view, it's about constructing buildings that fit the site."



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Smack bang in the middle of “Waitrose heartland”, a multimillion-pound investment doesn’t seem like too much of a gamble anyway. After all “you don’t have to tell anybody what Waitrose is all about here” says branch manager Gary Collyer.

In fact, two further Waitrose stores – at Sunningdale and Frimley – already sit within a 10-minute radius of the new Bagshot branch.

“Sunningdale is seven minutes away, but light years away from what we’re offering here,” says Collyer of his former store. But neither he nor Thorp are concerned at cannibalising their own trade.

“We call it infill,” says Collyer. “Sunningdale is 50,500 sq ft and overtrades considerably so it’s taking a bit of pressure off them.” And while “we have taken some money away from our own branches we’ve also hopefully taken a lot from our competitors”.

As long as they don’t move in next door. Occupying only half the former nursery, Waitrose is still waiting for news on which businesses will occupy the three empty units adjacent to the store after Notcutts garden centre pulled out in 2014. “We’d obviously like the tenant to complement us,” says Collyer.

### Shop floor

Inside the store, a floor-to-ceiling glass façade looks out on to the 300-space car park. Checkouts benefit from a two-storey height that dips down above aisles

1. **The sedum roof features 11 different species of plants and moss**
2. **The store – opened six months ago – is the third Waitrose within a 10-minute radius**
3. **Checkouts benefit from a double storey height and glass façade**
4. **The store features a bakery/café**
5. **Since opening more than 850 customers have filled in Measure the Magic feedback forms on the site**
6. **Waitrose will share the retail park with up to three more (as yet unknown) tenants**
7. **LED bulbs light the eco-store and waste energy heats it**

30% wider than at other Waitrose stores, and at the far end is a bakery/café with 50-plus seats. Customers can also collect John Lewis orders made online or visit a Johnsons dry cleaners concession.

“We’re conscious, as all supermarkets probably are at the moment, that customers could sit at home on their computer and order food online,” adds Collyer. “We’ve got to provide people with an experience, a reason to get off their bums and engage with us. We want people to be in the bricks as well as doing the clicks.”

Fresh produce is an important part of that, he adds, with modernised fish, meat and cheese counters – a new look Waitrose hopes to roll out across more sites. Lines on the fresh fish counter have nearly doubled from 55 to 100-plus since the store’s opening as customers demanded more exotic options.

“Our sales in the beginning were up 80% to 90% on the previous week on some days,” adds Collyer. Total sales have been “massively more than the business expected” – up 30% on budget some weeks.

Six months in, there’s still plenty to do on Collyer’s checklist. “If you give me a pen and paper and 20 minutes I’ll give you 100 things we could be better at and that we’ll work on this year,” he says.

Training up some of the 160 staff as category specialists is just one example. And, as impressive as it might be, he insists the building they are all working in is only the “starting point”.