

A new line in WASHING

Eco Laundry founder Lola Grogan tells SUE CADE about the passion behind her environmentally friendly laundry and her big plans for the future

Lola Grogan may have held powerful positions at top corporates in London, but face to face she's down to earth, transparently honest and full of laughter. In fact, exactly the right person to bring a new eco concept in laundry to Devon.

Lola moved to South Devon five years ago after visiting the area with husband Barney. "We were driving to Dart Marina and as we came over the brow of the hill, I saw how beautiful it was and said, 'I just love it!' There were dads crabbing with their kids and people having real family time. We agreed we would move here and try it for a year."

Lola was nervous that she wouldn't meet people but when the boys started school everything changed, especially when Amanda Burdon from Luscombe Maye introduced herself, later encouraging Lola to start up a local property management service.

The Grogans bought a house at Little Capton, which came with a large, modern barn. After battling back Barney's ambitions of keeping cars in the barn, Lola dreamt up the idea of using



ABOVE: For Lola, sustainability extends to staff

it as a 'green' laundry for the tourist sector. "I couldn't believe there wasn't one here already, as Devon has a reputation for environmental awareness," she says. Not long after, the Eco Laundry was born.

Lola started small with the office located in a little summerhouse but growth has been rapid. "My very first load of

laundry was 30 huge bags, quite a challenge!" Local builder Foxy is working on a bespoke new office adjacent to the barn which is itself now a full blown laundry – and with her service greatly in demand, Lola is already thinking ahead to further expansion.

All the eco jigsaw pieces fit together: on site there's a borehole 60 metres deep that provides beautifully clean water not just for the laundry but for Lola's family to drink and shower in; solar panels for electricity with other energy coming from Good Energy; a biomass boiler to heat the water and intelligent washing machines that weigh the laundry and use only the amount of water needed. Detergents are eco-friendly brands, and Lola has done her research to make sure they meet her strict criteria.

Plastic free laundry campaign

Lola is spearheading a 'Plastic Free Laundry Campaign', encouraging laundries across the region to consider and address how much plastic they are using in the washing and delivery of their linen. The new campaign also seeks to address the high

level of laundry rejection rates, a huge waste not only on resource and energy but also financially.

New clients who have recently come on board with the Eco Laundry ethos and Lola's campaign include Deer Park Country

House and Exeter Golf and Country Club. Both fully support Lola's forwarding thinking and sustainable movement to reduce plastic consumption in the laundry industry and operate in a more environmentally conscious way.



LOLA'S TIPS FOR ECO-FRIENDLY LAUNDRY AT HOME

- 1** Switch to eco-friendly detergents.
- 2** Only wash full loads.
- 3** Think about how frequently you wash clothes and try to wash fewer loads.
- 4** Use the outdoors to dry when you can rather than use tumble driers.
- 5** When you are buying a new washing machine consider buying an intelligent one with higher levels of energy efficiency.

Lola Grogan, founder of Eco Laundry: 'I couldn't believe there wasn't one here already, as Devon has a reputation for environmental awareness'

These green credentials permeate the business. Anyone who has stayed in a hotel has seen fresh linen arriving wrapped in plastic. Not so with the Eco Laundry, where the clean linen is folded and placed directly into client bags. "It's clean and the bags are clean, so why wrap anything in plastic?" Lola's passion shines through and she's clearly horrified that some businesses still haven't reacted to the environmental crisis. She illustrates her point by telling me about the arrival of 750 tea towels, each one wrapped individually in plastic. "Suffice to say I decided not to work with that supplier!"

Lola questions our addiction to 'snow white' linen. "This might give the impression of luxury, but it's just not practical; off white or beautiful grey linen makes much more sense. Visual impact comes at a big cost."

She argues that waste isn't just about plastic. "One potential client had a 50 per cent laundry rejection rate – this means everything has to go through the whole process again, using more energy, more detergent." Lola passes rejected linen on to friends, charities or uses it for cleaning cloths. "I've never thrown a piece of linen away."



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Lola says her approach to running Eco Laundry was influenced by friends who had worked with Anita Roddick of the Body Shop. "We talked about the journey they all went on together and how important it is to make work fun and fair." For Lola, sustainability extends to staff – no-one at Eco Laundry is

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on a zero contract, they all have holidays, pensions and lunch breaks. Likewise, she is fair with her supply chain. "It doesn't make sense to screw a supplier down on price."

Lola is proud that hers is a personal business. "Clients come to me because they're looking for a green laundry but also because they like the fact that they don't talk to a call centre, they talk to me – it's the relationship that's important."

She's the first to say that there's still a way to go to reach the green heights she's aiming for. "Eco Laundry as a company is a work in progress. At the moment the delivery van uses Add Blue technology to reduce emissions but this is only a step in the right direction – I'd like to run the vans using by-products."

What's next for Eco Laundry? We talk about the potential of supplying services to ski chalet businesses. "Say that Sharpam Wine is making deliveries to the French Alps – well then there could be a way of piggy backing off their distribution to deliver Eco Laundry linen too." Lola thinks big but she also thinks green, and that's a really positive combination. ♦ ecolaundry.co.uk