

A practical guide  
for businesses

# Get More Sustainable Fast



# Are you ready for your journey?



**As well as helping to protect the planet, becoming a more sustainable business can help you:**

- ✓ Reduce costs
- ✓ Boost your bottom line
- ✓ Recruit and retain staff
- ✓ Improve your reputation
- ✓ Become a more attractive supplier to larger businesses

Beginning or building on your existing sustainable practices can benefit your business and the environment. For example:

- ✓ Improving efficiency, boosting productivity and reducing costs
- ✓ Enhancing your reputation with customers, the local community, shareholders and stakeholders
- ✓ Expanding into new areas – a net zero plan is a requirement for government tenders over £5m<sup>1</sup> and many larger business contracts
- ✓ Future-proofing your business to stay competitive
- ✓ Easing the impact of unstable energy prices through renewable alternatives
- ✓ Brushing up your tendering processes by making your supply chain more sustainable

# 72%

of customers are more likely to buy when a brand's values reflect their beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

# Your sustainability action plan



**This guide pulls together handy hints and best practice from expert sources across five critical areas of sustainability – energy, transport emissions, waste & recycling, supply chains and nature.**

The tips range from simple but often overlooked ideas to creative ways to become more sustainable. Click on the links opposite to go to the relevant section. There's something for all budgets and size of business. What will your next sustainability step be?

**Practical steps you can take**



**Encouraging action**

Taking your staff on the journey. Six quick employee engagement wins >



# Cleaner, greener energy



**Your energy use can significantly impact your bottom line and the environment.**

Lighting, heating and equipment all contribute to your carbon footprint. Cutting your energy consumption is one of the easiest ways to make your business more sustainable.

Exploring renewable energy sources can deliver further benefits if you want to go one step further.

**2035 – the government's target date for decarbonising the UK's electricity.<sup>3</sup>**

# How to get started



## Energy audits

Your energy-saving commitment needs a baseline so you can record, monitor and optimise efficiencies over time. To help with this, there is a free service to help your business begin the process clearly and credibly.



## Reduce the need for heating

Can you make your buildings warmer through insulation so you don't rely so much on energy? This will need an initial financial outlay, so it's important to explore the figures to work out how quickly your investment will pay for itself.



## Install a smart meter

Upgrading your gas and electricity meters can let you see your real-time energy consumption and how much it's costing you. This can help inform how your business could become more energy-efficient.



## Invest in energy-monitoring sensors

Every business should accurately measure its energy use to understand which areas use the most. Technology such as energy-monitoring sensors can provide you with an accurate picture.



## Empower your employees

Appoint an internal 'Energy Champion' and give them the responsibility to monitor, manage and cut emissions in the workplace. They should also communicate progress with other staff and bring everyone on board. Asking staff to come up with energy-saving ideas is another way to involve them.

# 6 quick energy-saving wins



Every sustainability goal has to start somewhere. It's never too late to get the ball rolling and start building momentum.



1. **The flick of a switch** – are your computers, machinery and lights left on overnight when not being used?
2. **Regular boiler maintenance** – heating costs can increase by at least 30% if systems are poorly maintained,<sup>4</sup> so it pays to service your boilers annually to save money and ensure safety.
3. **Review your room setup** – putting cupboards or filing cabinets in front of radiators can stop heat from circulating. Having your thermostat too high can result in people opening windows and allowing heat to escape.
4. **Replace standard light bulbs with more efficient alternatives** – greener bulbs such as LEDs can use up to 75% less energy than traditional ones.<sup>5</sup> Other energy-efficient lights include compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) and halogen incandescents.
5. **Use digital documents where possible** – ways to save on paper and printing costs include using e-signatures and online documents as standard in your business and supply chains.
6. **You've got the power** – enabling power saving mode on all staff computers means they'll use less energy when not being worked on.



# Supply chains through a sustainable lens



**With increased consumer awareness and regulatory requirements, all businesses need a transparent and credible approach to supply chain sustainability. From component and packaging suppliers to your choice of energy firm and logistics partner, your reputation matters more than ever.**

**80%**  
80% of the greenhouse gas emissions from typical consumer businesses are created by their supply chains.<sup>6</sup>

**77%**  
77% of manufacturers are subject to ESG conditions by their customers.<sup>7</sup>

# How to get started

## Make a firm commitment

Having a sustainability strategy for your business is no longer optional if you want to remain competitive. It may seem daunting, but it's important to remember it's an ongoing journey rather than something you need to fix overnight. The government's UK Business Climate Hub<sup>8</sup> has more on how to get started.

## Communicate the benefits

With 42% of millennials having already changed or planning to change jobs due to climate concerns<sup>9</sup>, attracting and retaining staff is one of the major benefits of a more sustainable supply chain. Make sure to include in your job adverts and discuss your commitment at interviews.

## Be prepared to invest

Whether it's meeting the environmental requirements of a new customer or being able to pitch for local government tenders, you may have to invest in new equipment and processes to prove your sustainability credentials. Speak to us about our [Green Finance](#) which can provide discounted lending for sustainable purposes.

## Supplier selection

There's more scrutiny than ever from customers, stakeholders and shareholders regarding who you do business with and how sustainable they are. It's wise to draw up a set of criteria and questions to vet any new suppliers.

## Seek expert help

If you're at the start of your sustainability journey, you'll likely need outside expertise with things like Scope 1 emissions reporting.<sup>10</sup> Making mistakes could lead to greenwashing claims.<sup>11</sup>



# 6 supply chain sustainability wins

Ready to start making your supply chains more sustainable? Here are some quick pointers to help you take the first steps.

- 1. Adopt a sustainable mindset** – it can be tempting to view sustainability as an external element to your supply chains. The sooner you treat it as part and parcel of your daily practices, the more progress you'll make.
- 2. Review your current relationships** – where can they be improved? Is there enough clarity from your suppliers? Do you need to explore other options?
- 3. Avoid greenhushing<sup>12</sup>** – failing to do any reporting on your sustainable practices could harm supply chain confidence and result in lost contracts.
- 4. Involve your workforce** – transparent internal communication around goals, measurement and targets is essential for sustainability success. You may want to appoint a Sustainability Champion to oversee things.
- 5. Stay up-to-date with regulations** – whether you're doing business at home or abroad, it's critical to be informed about legislation and reporting requirements that could affect you.
- 6. Get help with relevant accreditations** – you might want to pursue sustainable supply chain certifications such as BM TRADA<sup>13</sup> to demonstrate your commitment and need expert external advice to do this successfully.



# Tackling emissions within business transport



**It may not be possible for you to cut all business travel in favour of virtual meetings. However, greener ways to get around such as trains and buses can help to reduce congestion and pollution.**

If you're shipping products, you should also consider the environmental credentials and impact of your delivery partners. Do their policies align with yours?

**Driving results in over four times more emissions than train travel.<sup>14</sup>**

# How to get started



The guidance below covers how to reduce emissions through sustainable commuting, better business travel and smarter logistics.

## Embrace sustainable commuting

How easy are you making it for your staff to embrace greener travel options – for example, car-sharing and cycle to work schemes?<sup>15</sup> Things like EV vehicle incentives and installing bike racks, lockers and showers will make commuting to work on two wheels or on foot more convenient.

## Optimise your vehicle fleet

When did you last review your company vehicles and the types of journeys made? For example, if the majority of your trips are city-based, you could cut emissions and save money in the long run by switching to electric or hybrid vehicles as you strive towards net zero.

## Review your work travel policy

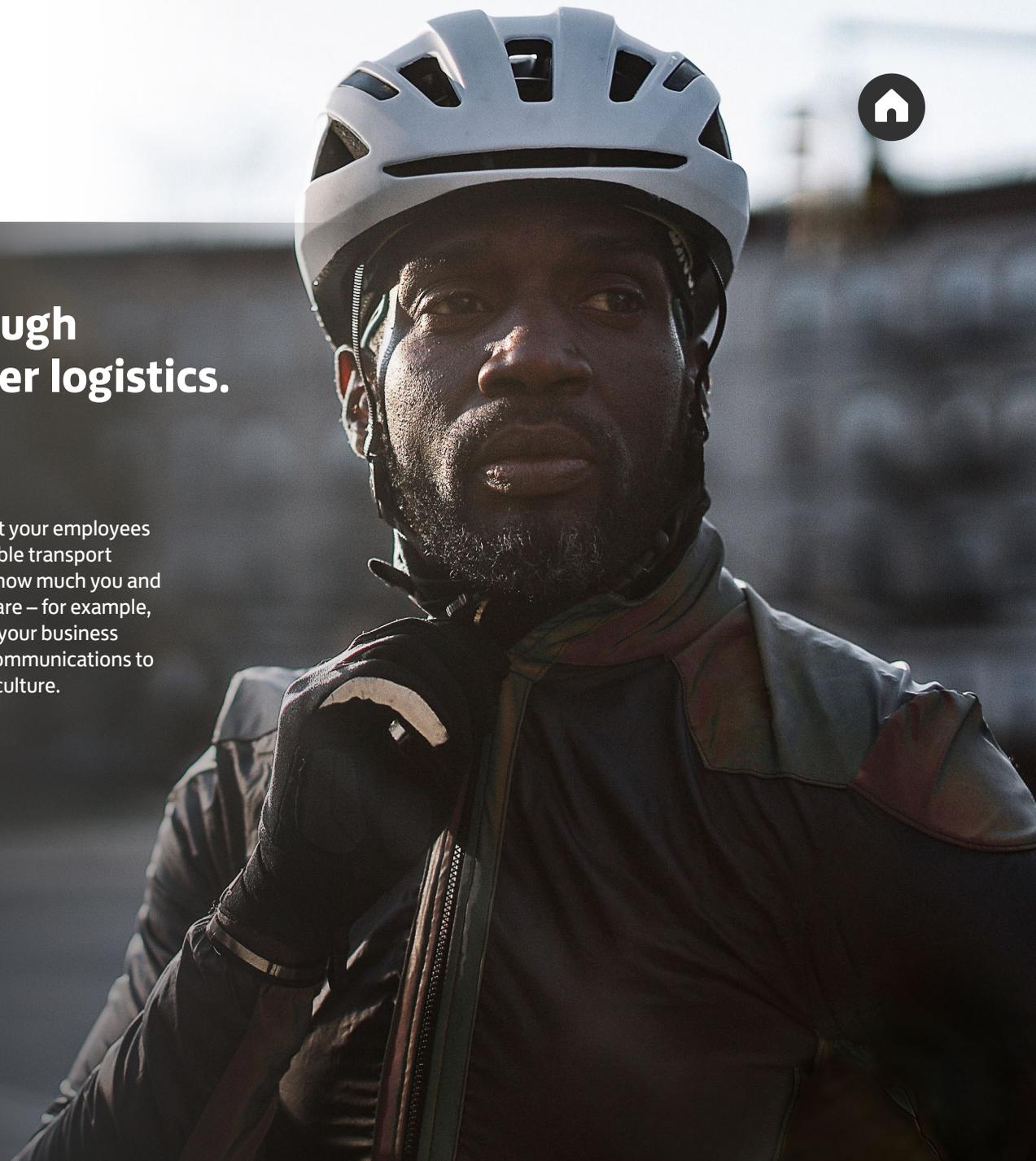
Do you have detailed guidance on virtual meetings versus face-to-face? Can you make train travel the norm over flying? Is there a list of approved hotel chains with robust environmental policies for employees to choose from when going away for work? You may also want to incentivise staff by offering them time off in lieu for choosing sustainable travel options.

## Smarter logistics

If your business makes regular deliveries, can you embrace route planning technology to help reduce road miles? Smarter stock management could also help cut the number of inbound and outbound journeys needed each year.

## Lead by example

One of the best ways to get your employees to embrace more sustainable transport practices is to show them how much you and your management team care – for example, reducing the frequency of your business travel and using internal communications to foster a more sustainable culture.



# 6 quick sustainable transport wins



## Ready to get started? Start making changes and seeing benefits right away with these steps:

- 1. Calculate and monitor your mileage** – every mode of transport has an emissions factor, so you can use online calculators to find out how much CO<sub>2</sub> is created per mile for those used in your business.<sup>16</sup> You can then apply this figure to your annual mileage for each mode of transport to get a baseline for your transport carbon emissions.
- 2. Choose sustainable suppliers** – if you use local courier firms, for example, can you work with one that has invested in a sustainable fleet of vehicles or provides different delivery options?
- 3. Encourage sustainable travel** – list the options with the lowest emissions when giving directions to your premises to encourage visitors and new staff to travel more responsibly.
- 4. Smarter deliveries** – use data to ensure you're using the most efficient routes and correct-sized vehicles for the volume of cargo in your deliveries.
- 5. Get help with your costs** – speak to us about your discounted lending for electric vehicle leasing, and cycle scheme investment for bike racks.
- 6. Improve your planning** – let's say you have a few clients in one place – are you or your team making multiple trips to the same city days apart? Better planning can reduce the number of visits you need to make, saving time, money and emissions.



## Green Asset Finance

Green Asset Finance is a type of asset finance that allows you to buy equipment and vehicles to help you achieve your sustainability goals. It allows you to spread the cost over time so you don't pay the full amount upfront.

As it's part of our Clean Growth Financing Initiative (CGFI), you'll pay a lower interest rate as long as the asset is used to reduce the environmental impact of your business.

Did you know you can use Green Asset Finance for electric vehicles?

# Reducing waste & raising recycling levels



**Businesses of all sizes can benefit from cutting waste as the UK works towards becoming a Zero Avoidable Waste economy by 2050.<sup>17</sup>**

**90%**  
90% of UK consumers think businesses should bear the cost of improving the sustainability of their packaging.<sup>18</sup>

# How to get started



## Set clear targets

Create company-wide recycling targets and provide regular updates on how teams are doing – you could even gamify the process and reward the most efficient people/ departments to encourage staff buy-in.



## Review your supply chain

Assess your suppliers to ensure you're working with businesses that can help you identify ways to reduce packaging and waste. Consider bulk buying or choosing recycled products with a lower carbon footprint.



## Embrace the circular economy

Exploring ways to extend the lifespan of your products and materials can boost your brand reputation and open new revenue streams. The circular economy starts with designing products that can be easily reused or recycled.



## Monitor your progress regularly

Measuring your performance against the initial waste and recycling targets you set is essential. This will enable you to assess where there might be teething problems, identify opportunities to improve things and keep your staff engaged.



## Make recycling easy

Install bins for food waste in staff canteens/kitchens and clearly marked recycling bins in communal areas for cans, cardboard, glass and paper. You may also want to have policies for recycling batteries and reusing or donating old technology.

# 6 quick waste reduction and recycling wins



Here are some quick wins which can lead to long-term gains in reducing workplace waste.



- 1. Greener cleaners** – give your cleaning staff eco-friendly products and make sure they recycle correctly or look for contractors with an environmentally-friendly approach.
- 2. Frame recycling differently** – for example, a simple labelling change on specific bins from “rubbish” to “landfill” will make people think differently about their habits.
- 3. Take control of your cardboard** – it’s one of the biggest waste streams for SMEs, and investing in a baler can help you flatten and compress boxes so they’re easy to take to local recycling facilities.
- 4. Make waste reduction easy** – provide your staff with reusable water bottles and coffee cups when you phase out single-use plastics on your premises.
- 5. Get started with some quick wins** – switching to rechargeable batteries in devices, refillable ink cartridges in your office printers and from plastic milk bottles to glass are all small changes that can have a big impact.
- 6. Keep an open dialogue** – speak to your staff, customers and suppliers regularly to share ideas around waste and recycling and let them know what initiatives you’re rolling out to play your part.



# Doing more to consider nature



Protecting nature and reducing the impact on the natural environment is an often overlooked aspect of an organisation's sustainability credentials. With biodiversity in decline, what can your business do to help reduce its impact on nature and the local community?

1 in 6

Around 16% of species are at risk of becoming extinct in the UK.<sup>19</sup>

# How to get started



## Bring in the right expertise

You may not have the resources to employ a dedicated employee to reduce your impact on nature, but you could hire a consultant to ensure you do everything correctly from the outset. If that's beyond your budget, guides such as this one from the [Woodland Trust](#) are a good place to start.

## Improve your premises

What kind of land is around your buildings? Is there an opportunity to increase biodiversity through planting trees and hedgerows? Can you get your staff involved in making improvements?

## What happens to your waste?

If you use a contractor to dispose of your waste, it's important to have transparency over how they dispose of it and whether it's likely to do any ecological harm.

### Be specific

To increase credibility and transparency around what you're doing, it's vital to avoid generic statements about how you're protecting nature. You should include verifiable facts and figures in any sustainability reports you produce.

## Review your transport impact

How are goods getting to and from your premises and what's that impact on the natural environment through air and noise pollution?



## Plant trees on your land

We are helping to fund the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods and MOREhedges schemes to help landowners plant trees and hedgerows at a subsidised rate.

The Woodland Trust are offering partial funding for planting 0.5 hectares (ha) of new woodland or more as part of the MOREwoods and MOREhedges schemes. The MOREwoods and MOREhedges schemes can bring a multitude of benefits to your land, such as:

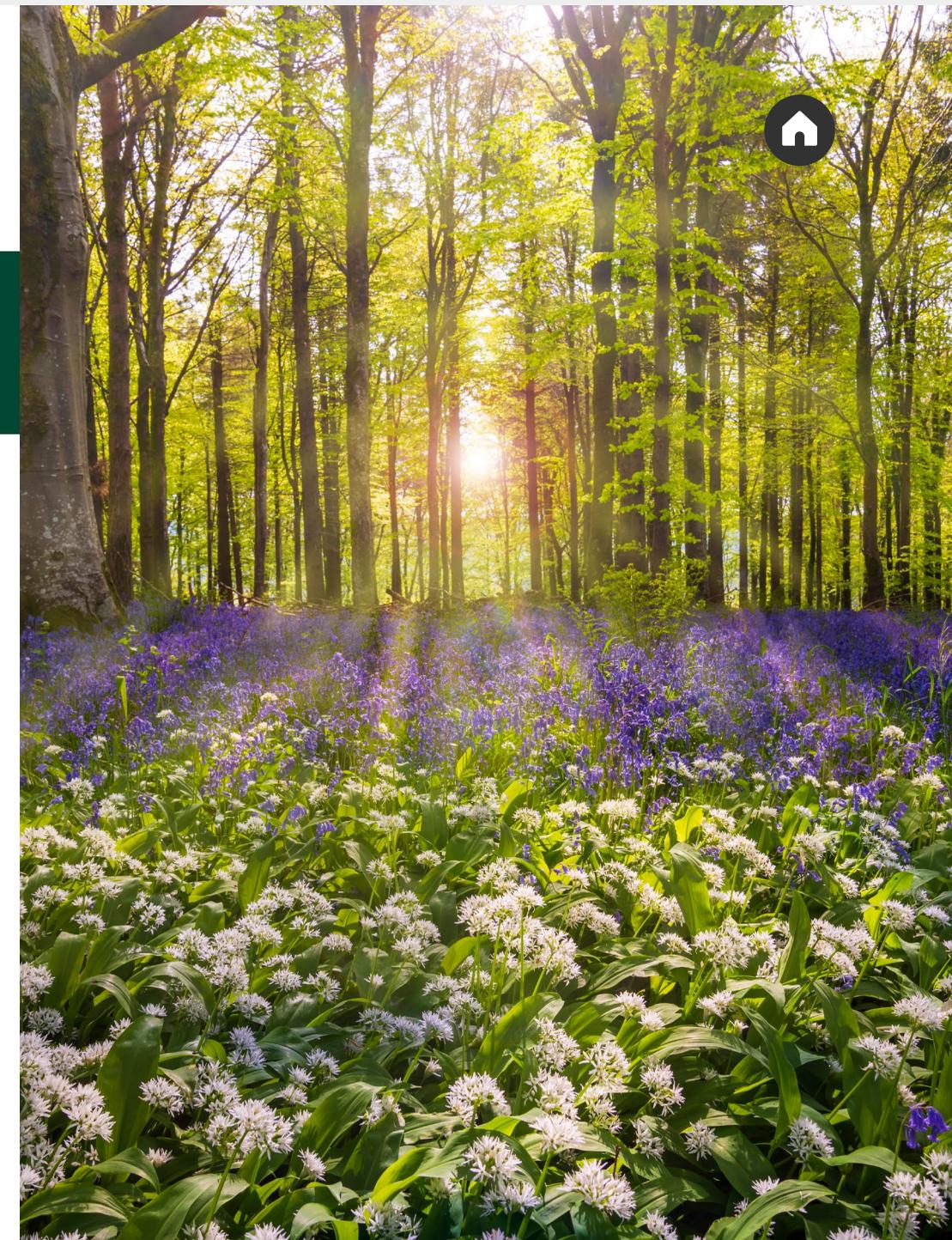
- Capturing carbon
- Protecting soil
- Helping to manage flooding
- Increased biodiversity
- Offering habitats for game and wildlife



# 6 quick nature wins

Read below for guidance on how your business can kick-start its commitment to improving the natural environment.

- 1. Pick a few issues to get started** – remember, it's a marathon, not a sprint. Small changes can result in a big impact.
- 2. Measure the impact of your efforts** – this is a critical step for reporting and doing more in the future. It can also help motivate everyone involved when they can see tangible results from their efforts.
- 3. Appoint someone to lead your initiatives** – to make an ongoing impact, it's important to assign responsibility to someone internally to drive your good work around nature so it doesn't fall by the wayside when things get busy.
- 4. Engage with the local community** – as well as being good for PR, involving local school kids and groups, for example, can raise awareness of key issues like biodiversity loss.
- 5. Seek out collaborations** – working closely with nature charities can help your business make a greater impact while enhancing the credibility of your efforts. For example, you may want to nominate one as your 'Charity of the Year'.
- 6. Don't forget your supply chains** – when you start to do more as a business to improve the natural environment, it's something you should start to ask about and bring up in conversations with your supply chain partners.



# Encouraging action

**There's plenty to think about when starting on a sustainability journey for your business. Things like goal setting, reporting, staff engagement and deciding on top priorities must be carefully considered.**

**64%** of Gen Zs and millennials believe they have the power to drive organisational change and they're being listened to by their employers.<sup>20</sup>



# How to get started



## Begin with a baseline

It's vital to kick-start your sustainability commitment or net zero journey with a detailed audit so you have a starting point to work from. Our

[Sustainability Baseline Audit](#) is available to all businesses and provides a detailed PDF checklist to work through as well as lots of useful information and tips.

## Lead from the top

Many successful businesses have made sustainability a core part of the company culture. This can manifest in business statements, values, and how they reward colleagues for their progress toward sustainability. The whole business needs to point in the same direction, which starts with senior management demonstrating how vital sustainability is.

## Share your sustainability goals

Communication is critical to success. Let your employees know how they can contribute to your vision by reducing waste or volunteering on a nature project. Regular updates via staff meetings or company newsletters will help keep everyone engaged and driven to do more.

## Encourage employee ideas

Making your business more sustainable isn't about preaching or broadcasting to your employees. Everyone needs to feel like their opinions and ideas matter and your staff can be a great source of new suggestions to help your business on its sustainability journey.

## Appoint sustainability champions

By having a dedicated in-house person, you're much more likely to be successful in achieving your goals. This person or team could be responsible for arranging staff training, drafting policies and measuring the impact of your new approach.



# 6 quick employee engagement wins



**When everyone in your business pulls in the same direction towards a shared sustainability vision, you can achieve great things together. Here are some quick ideas to increase participation.**

- 1. Be clear about the challenges and opportunities** – sustainability is ongoing and there will always be more you can do. However, it's vital to celebrate your small wins along the way to maintain enthusiasm.
- 2. Embed sustainability into your culture** – it shouldn't be viewed as something new or a 'bolt-on' to existing practices and processes. It's about how you do things every day going forward.
- 3. Break things down into smaller tasks** – sustainability is a vast topic and can feel overwhelming when viewed as one big goal. Start with a few quick wins to build momentum and foster a sense of achievement within your teams.
- 4. Provide relevant training** – this will demonstrate your commitment to taking sustainability seriously and allow your staff to learn new skills and put them into practice. All our relationship managers have been trained in partnership with the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. Take a look at their courses.
- 5. Reward progress and success** – employees are more likely to stay engaged if incentives are offered when they make positive changes in the business. These could be financial rewards or gifts.
- 6. Provide regular updates** – by measuring the impact of your sustainable practices and updating your employees, they're much more likely to be motivated to do even more. You should also prepare to answer questions and take any feedback on board.



# Sources



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