KENT SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TOOLKIT

Your Guide to Sustainability in One Place

Image Source:
Explore Kent

Introduction

Climate change is a challenge that we're confronting, with the impacts likely to increase in severity with time. As a result, ambitious environmental targets, increased consumer awareness of environmental issues, and the threat of climate change are all requiring companies to rethink their practices and move towards business models that minimize their environmental impact, whilst also delivering high-quality goods and services.

Achieving such a shift in practices is challenging, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who may not necessarily have the expertise or resources to make drastic changes to how they operate. That's why at Kent County Council (KCC) we're seeking to create a business environment that empowers SMEs to move towards more sustainable methods, which can lead to several additional benefits such as reduced costs, new customer bases, and greater business resilience.

To help realise our ambition we've produced this toolkit to highlight work that has taken place within SMEs across Kent, demonstrating just some of the possibilities, as well as links to ongoing support and funding opportunities. This piece forms part of the legacy from the **Interreg FCE C-Care** project, where KCC has worked alongside 6 partner organisations across England and France to help SMEs to reverse some of the negative impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic and boost their post-pandemic resilience through 4 work streams, one of which being C-Care Support for Business Recovery.

Contents

1. Environmental Business Planning

First Steps

Whilst it might feel like quite a daunting prospect to start developing an environmental strategy for your business, it is one of the most important steps you'll take on your journey to becoming more sustainable. Here are some tips to help you get started on shaping your sustainability strategy:

Tips

- Start by stating your company's commitment to sustainability.
- Explain how you'll embed sustainability into your broader operations.
- Outline the measures you'll take to realise your commitment.
- Establish your targets and how you'll monitor and evaluate what you're going to do.
- Promote your achievements once you've reached them.

If you have the resources but lack the knowledge or confidence to produce an environmental business plan, you could hire an environmental consultancy to help. Their expertise will provide some great insights into what you could aim for, but understandably this may not be an option for everyone.

Carbon Calculating

Another step that you may wish to take is to try using a carbon calculator. There are numerous calculators out there, but the basic premise is that they allow you to gain a rough idea as to what your current carbon emissions are, which then provides you with an idea of the impact that your current practices are having on the environment.

Below are a few links to some calculators that could help you get started:

- SME Climate Hub's carbon calculator - SME Climate Hub Carbon Calculator
- Carbon Trust's carbon footprint calculator - SME Carbon Footprint Calculator
- Carbonfootprint.com calculator tool for small businesses - Small Business Calculator

There may be references to different scopes of emissions on the calculators. For more information on emission scopes, check out this link to The Carbon Trust website. For more information on greenhouse gas reporting, check out this link to the gov.uk website.
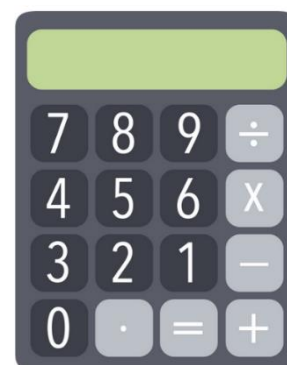
STEM (Steps to Environmental Management)

To verify the progress that you're making on your sustainability commitments, you may wish to consider obtaining accreditation from an independent auditor or consultancy. Paying for an audit is an option, but if you're looking for a cheaper alternative, LoCASE's STEM scheme may be for you.

STEM is a free, a self-certifying scheme, open to all small and medium businesses in the Southeast of England. The scheme recognises businesses that have embraced the decision to adopt environmentally friendly practices and will provide a standard against which companies can benchmark themselves, promoting resource efficient business practices whilst also providing businesses with a competitive advantage.

Upon successful completion of any STEM level, you will be supplied with the following:

- A STEM logo in .jpeg and .png format with your unique reference number on it.

- A certificate with your business's name, unique reference number and approval date on it.

- Listing on http://www.kent.gov.uk/stemregistry webpage.

For more information, click the following link:

Steps to Environmental Management Scheme (STEM)

If you're interested in signing up to a STEM workshop to hear more about the scheme, check out the following link to see when the next event is:

STEM Upcoming Events

Other Environmental Business Accreditations

There are additional accreditation schemes available, although most would involve some form of cost. ISO 14001 is a standardised framework that a company can follow to set up an effective environmental system, demonstrating that environmental impact is being measured and improved. STEM doesn't equate to ISO 14001 accreditation, but STEM could help you to prepare for ISO 14001, without bearing much financial cost.

Similarly, ISO 50005 is an energy management system alternative, with the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy sponsoring the free giveaway of up to 100,000 copies of the standard's booklet for UK businesses and organisations via the British Standards Institute.

2. Energy & Buildings

The sustainability of a set of premises contributes towards the overall environmental impact of an operation. There are a variety of adjustments that can be made to reduce the size of your carbon footprint and boost the resilience of your site, but making the right choice can be difficult, particularly if you don't own your building. Establishing what is achievable is key, and don't forget to contact the manager or owner of the property if you are limited in your options, as they may be open to sustainable modifications to the building, especially if they lead to cost savings in the future.

Lighting

Switching from halogen lightbulbs to LED lightbulbs are a great quick win that can save a significant amount of both carbon emissions and costs. LEDs produce the same amount of light as halogen bulbs, but produce considerably less waste heat, thus making them more energy efficient.

Check out this link to The Carbon Trust's Lighting Business Case Tool, which can help you calculate the business case for lighting upgrades: Lighting Business Case Tool

Water Saving

Hotter, drier Summers increase the likelihood of droughts which place a strain on our water supplies. Finding ways to reduce your water consumption whilst maintaining the same standard of product or service will help to reduce pressure on water supplies during hot spells, as well as reduce the cost of water bills throughout the year.

Here are some examples of how SMEs have managed to reduce their water consumption:

Pleasant Land Distillery - Reducing Water Usage By 90% Through Re-Use

Greensand Ridge Distillery - Greensand Ridge Distillery Water Saving

Equipment

Older equipment may not be as energy efficient as modern equivalents, which could be adding to your carbon footprint, although upgrades typically come at a higher cost to businesses.

There are still some schemes and grants that might be able to provide support for upgrading to more energy efficient capital through the LoCASE scheme (ending June 2023). Check out the link below to learn more about funding opportunities through LoCASE:

LoCASE Funding
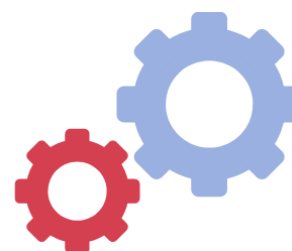
Renewable Energy

Renewable energy is derived from renewable sources such as the sun or wind, which produce zero, direct carbon emissions and is in abundant supply, unlike fossil fuels like oil and natural gas. There are now more opportunities for your business to benefit from renewable energy, whether it be generating your own renewable energy or buying it from a supplier.

Here are some examples of ways to generate renewable energy:

Solar Panels (Photovoltaics)

Solar panels, also known as photovoltaics panels (PVs), require an up-front investment but once installed and maintained correctly, produce what is essentially free energy. However, solar panels may not be suitable for your premises, as there are various technical aspects that must be satisfied for optimal performance to be achieved.

Here is an example of an SME benefitting from solar panels:

J&J Systems - J&J Systems & LoCASE

Heat Pumps

Heat pumps come in two forms: air-source and ground-source. Ground-source heat pumps are installed underground and extract thermal energy from the ground to produce electricity, whereas air-source heat pumps extract heat from the air to produce electricity. Ground-source heat pumps are more expensive and challenging to install, whereas air-source heat pumps are a cheaper, more viable option.

For more information on heat pumps, check out the link below from The Heating Hub, an SME based in Kent who specialise in independent advice in the domestic heating industry:

The Heating Hub - The Heating Hub Air-Source Heat Pumps

Note:

If there isn't scope to produce your own renewable energy, explore different options with both your current energy supplier and other suppliers to see how you can incorporate at least some renewable energy into your tariff.

Retrofitting

Retrofitting refers to implementing new materials or technologies to improve the energy efficiency of a building. Retrofitting can take place in various forms, but some typical examples might include increasing the quantity or quality of insulation, improving the glazing on windows, or fitting draft excluders.
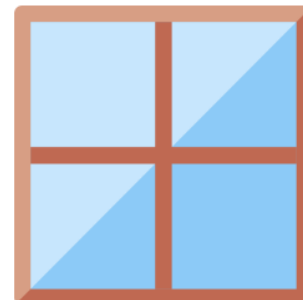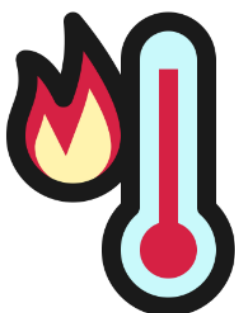
Here are some examples of businesses benefitting from retrofitting their facilities:

JIB Cannon & Son - Saving 20% on Energy Bills Through Cold Store Efficiency

Ro-Gro - Insulating an Electric Van to Cut 3000kg of Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Heat & Ventilation

Heat has a major impact on our wellbeing and productivity, which in turn impacts our capacity to provide a good quality of service. To mitigate against the increasing temperatures that we're likely to face, it is crucial that we consider how we can reduce the impact of heat on staff, whether it be through redesigning our premises or simply having clear protocols in place to protect employees.

For more information on how to address overheating and ventilation at your organisation, check out The Carbon Trust's 'Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning' guide.

Flood Risk

Greater rainfall during winter months and more intense episodes of rainfall throughout the course of the year will increase the likelihood of flooding in Kent. It is therefore crucial to account for increased incidents of flooding during business planning, with increased investment potentially necessary if you're prone to the impacts of flooding.

To be able to establish what your future flood risk is, take a look at KCC's Spatial Risk Assessment for Water, where you'll be able to see whether your organisation is likely to face increased surface water, fluvial or coastal flooding:

Kent Spatial Risk Assessment for Water 2021

3. Transport & Vehicles

Transport is another source of carbon emissions for many operations across Kent, but thanks to the upscaling of electric vehicle production and charging point infrastructure, plus schemes to promote active travel, there are now ways in which you can reduce your transport emissions without making significant changes to your operations.

Electric Vehicles:

Electric vehicles are a more sustainable alternative to conventional petrol and diesel vehicles, as they produce considerably less carbon emissions and other harmful emissions, such as PM2.5 and nitrogen oxide.

Not only that, but electric vehicles users are also less vulnerable to price fluctuations that can occur with diesel and petrol prices, and with the UK Government looking to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles in 2030, early adoption of electric vehicles and charging infrastructure will put your company in a better place moving forward.

Below are some examples of schemes and case studies where SMEs across Kent have been able to benefit from electric vehicle uptake:

Kent REVS Trial Scheme - Kent REVS Van Trial

Edible Culture - Edible Culture & LoCASE

UK Electric Bikes - UK Electric Bike Centre & LoCASE
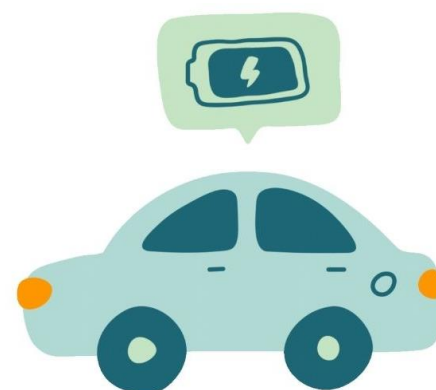
Active Travel:

Active Travel brings not only environmental benefits, but can also improve mental and physical health, and save money. Promoting active travel within the workplace can be a great way to contribute towards sustainability commitments and can be encouraged through creating monthly challenges within or across teams, improving the workplace culture in the process.

KCC has recently been awarded £565,439 to support the better design, planning and development of walking, cycling and wheeling schemes in Kent. The funding has been received from the Active Travel England's Capability Fund and will be used by KCC and council partners across the county to increase the resource and expertise required to deliver Kent's active travel plans.

To find out more about active travel across Kent, check out the link below:

KCC Active Travel Strategy

4. Waste

Disposing of waste often contributes to environmental damage, where landfill and waste-to-energy sites produce greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, what is needed is a greater focus on reusing, recycling, and recovering existing materials, moving away from the conventional model of consumption, production, and disposal.

Upcycle Your Waste

Upcycle Your Waste (UYW) is a scheme developed as part of an EU Interreg project that aims to accelerate the adoption of circular business cases by SMEs that transform waste flows into resources at a local level. The project aims to achieve this by developing and introducing knowledge, tools and facilities that enable SMEs and local authorities to make this transition.

For more information on the project, check out the following link:

Upcycle Your Waste

One of the outputs from the project has been a free training package to help interested organisations learn more on how they can reduce their waste levels and increase their efficiency. The link found below will take you to the training website:

Upcycle Your Waste Training

UYW Exchange Events

As part of the UYW scheme, KCC has organised events where SMEs can meet, network, and exchange waste that their organisation produces, but that might be beneficial to another SME's operations. This allows both businesses to save money, with the former saving money on waste disposal fees and the latter receiving raw materials for production for free, all whilst preventing waste from leaving the production cycle.

Highlights from previous events can be found here:

Upcycle Your Waste Highlights

UYW Guidance & Case Studies

Below you'll find a guide to help you establish what you could do with your waste, plus a number of case studies from SMEs that have benefited from projects linked to waste, highlighting just some of the possibilities out there for those seeking to reduce their material throughput and make savings:

Guide to Waste Management Opportunities

AW Group & Woodpeckers of Kent - Wood Reuse & Recycling

Gadds' Brewery - Carbon Dioxide Capture and Re-use in a Brewery

Nim's Fruit Crisps - Turning 30 Tonnes of Food Waste Into Profit

5. Circular Economy

Embracing the principles from alternative economic systems might help to bring a range of benefits to your organisation, as well as contributing towards your sustainability commitments. Changing the design of products and by-products so that they can be repaired and returned to the production process helps to reduce waste and costs, providing a more sustainable business model.

BLUEPRINT

BLUEPRINT is a project that aims to initiate the new policies, strategies and approaches required by local authorities to unlock sustainable and inclusive growth opportunities through the transition to a circular economy, while also upskilling 18 social enterprises to train 2000 disadvantaged individuals with the skills they require to secure new jobs linked to circular economy growth (increased recycling, reverse logistics and secondary markets).

For more information on the project, check out the link below:

BLUEPRINT (Blueprint to a Circular Economy)

As part of the project, numerous pilot campaigns have been run in order to demonstrate how principles of the circular economy can be implemented into everyday essential products and activities, such as food and fashion shopping.

To learn about the various pilot campaigns that have been run throughout the project lifecycle, click on the link below:

Blueprint Pilot Campaigns

FACET

FACET is a project that aims to increase the adoption of circular solutions in the tourism sector by supporting entrepreneurs in shifting from linear to circular. This will be done by demonstrating low-threshold solutions and extracting best practices, so that entrepreneurs receive hands-on knowledge and support in changing their business models.

To find out more about FACET, check out the link below:

FACET (Facilitate the Adoption of Circular Entrepreneurship in the Tourism and Leisure sector)

Given that one of the main aims of the project is the sharing of best practices, the project has produced a website full of case studies across different aspects of the tourism and leisure sector, ranging from construction of facilities to sustainable packaging. All of the case studies contain some useful information that could be extracted and applied to your own organisation, even if you're in an entirely different sector.

To take a look at the case studies on offer, follow the link below:

FACET Best Practices

6. Agriculture & Food

The agricultural and food & drink sectors face numerous challenges as a result of several external factors, such as climate change, soil erosion, and wider geo-political pressures. Due to the diversity across both sectors, where firms can vary from primary producers of horticulture to manufacturers of processed products and anything in-between, the support and guidance available varies greatly regarding increasing the sustainability of SMEs and their operations.

Growing Green

Growing Green was a government-funded pilot training programme that helped horticultural, food and drink businesses in Kent meet net-zero targets by giving them the skills, knowledge, and funding to become more sustainable. Led by NIAB as part of the Growing Kent and Medway project, Growing Green invited up to 40 micro businesses and SMEs to volunteer in the pilot, where their input helped to develop a bespoke sustainability training package for the horticultural and plant-based food and drink sector.

For more information on Growing Green, click on the link below:

Growing Green

Case Studies

Numerous case studies have been produced that showcase some of the work that SMEs have done thanks to the Growing Green programme, plus other projects. Below are links to case studies, each with a slightly different focus, due to the diversity of the businesses:

Pleasant Land Distillery - Reducing Water Usage By 90% Through Re-Use

JIB Cannon & Son - Saving 20% on Energy Bills Through Cold Store Efficiency

Ro-Gro - Insulating an Electric Van to Cut 3000kg of Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Nim's Fruit Crisps - Turning 30 Tonnes of Food Waste Into Profit

Roughway Farm Online - Dehusking Machine For Nuts Creates New Market

Zak's Kombucha - Encouraging Reuse Rather Than Recycling

Ela's Beehive - New Sensors to Improve Honey Yields

7. Funding

Here are some links to sites that are either offering funding opportunities or providing direction to other sites that provide funding opportunities:

LoCASE – A range of grants were still available for SMEs across Kent & Medway, although the proposed application cut-off date has now passed.

Growing Kent & Medway – Business Innovation Vouchers (opening later in 2023) that can be used by businesses to access technical research support for businesses in the horticultural and plant-based food and drink supply chain sector across Kent & Medway. Other grants are still available, but many have application dates are closing in Spring 2023.

Clean Growth Fund – For technology businesses that are driving the transition to net zero through developing disruptive products and services. Application form found towards the bottom of the page.

Evergreen Fund – An investment fund that provides seed and growth capital to ventures with a positive, measurable, sustainable impact on the environment, amongst other criteria.

Grants Online – A newsletter that lists different funding opportunities across the Energy, Environment and Transport sectors in the UK. The page is updated regularly with links, although due to the diversity of sectors included you may struggle to find an opportunity relevant to you. There is also a grant search tab on the website to navigate this issue.

I-Construct – A construction and built environment supply-chain network that provides support and funding opportunities to small businesses seeking to meet sector challenges and grow sustainably. Free membership until the end of 2022, enquire to see if membership is still free post-2022.

SENE – An ERDF project led by the University of East London that is eligible to SMEs within a defined area that can benefit from free energy audits and surveys for renewable energy projects. Contact sene@uel.ac.uk for more information, specifically on the application closure.

UK Government – The UK Government's platform that lists finance and support links for businesses, compiled by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Zero Carbon Business – Another list of support and funding opportunities available to businesses on their path to net zero. The list was last updated January 2022, so make sure to check that the scheme you're interested in is still open for applications, as some of the opportunities may have since closed.

Kent & Medway Growth Hub – Local grants and funding opportunities for Kent and Medway. To find your local growth hub, click this link.

8. Toolkits Across Kent & the Southeast

As alluded to at the start of the toolkit, a key aim of this output is to share information and highlight other activity across Kent and the Southeast, allowing readers to quickly access pertinent resources to help guide them through the next steps to increasing the sustainability and resilience of their organisations. Below are a few environmental toolkits and sources of information, as well as a brief description of the source, that may contain more detail on some of the topics covered in this toolkit:

Visit Thanet Business Sustainable Tourism Toolkit

A detailed toolkit that provides a lot of useful tips on how to make changes to your operation at different cost levels that are applicable to not just SMEs in the tourism sector, but almost all enterprises. Follow the link below to and download the document to see for yourself:

Visit Thanet Green Tourism Toolkit

Kent Downs AONB Business Resources

Another toolkit focused on the tourism sector that contains some useful insights that can be applied to other areas of business:

Kent Downs AONB Business Resources

Brighton & Hove City Council Climate Information for Businesses

A page that consists of a collection of resources that are applicable to all sectors with specific focus placed on sustainable business, purchases and supply chain, circular economy and more. Click the link below to see more:

Brighton & Hove CC Climate Information for Businesses

Essex Climate Action Commission Business Advice Pack

A comprehensive advice pack that covers all of the major aspects of sustainability, as well as including a number of helpful links to funding and other sources of information:

Essex Climate Commission Business Advice Pack

SME Climate Hub Toolkits

The SME Climate Hub has a number of fantastic guides and tools that are tailored to support SMEs on taking steps towards greenhouse gas emissions, ranging from a carbon calculator to a financial support guide. The link below will take you to appropriate page, where you can then look through the various guides that they have available:

SME Climate Hub Tools & Resources

9. Links to Other Resources

Here are some additional resources that may be of use to you on your sustainability journey:

Zero Carbon Business - Zero Carbon Business

Sussex Chambers of Commerce Sustainability Page - Sussex Chamber of Commerce Green Sustainability

British Business Bank - British Business Bank Sustainability

UK Green Building Council - UK Green Building Council Circular Economy

Planet Mark Guides/Toolkits - Planet Mark

The Carbon Trust - The Carbon Trust

British Retail Consortium Net Zero Roadmap - British Retail Consortium Climate Roadmap

SME Climate Hub - SME Climate Hub

Federation of Small Businesses - The Federation of Small Businesses Sustainability Hub

Institute of Directors - Institute of Directors

10. Glossary

Here is a list of definitions of some terms that you may have come across in this toolkit that you may not be familiar with:

Carbon Footprint - Carbon footprint refers to emissions that are associated with the consumption spending of UK/England residents on goods and services, wherever in the world these emissions arise along the supply chain, and those which are directly generated by UK/English households through private motoring and burning fuel to heat homes. [8]

Carbon Neutral - Climate neutrality refers to the idea of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by balancing those emissions, so they are equal (or less than) the emissions that get removed through the planet's natural absorption; in basic terms it means we reduce our emissions through climate action. [4]

Climate Change - Climate change refers to the long-term shift in average weather patterns across the world. Since the mid-1800s, humans have contributed to the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the air. This causes global temperatures to rise, resulting in long-term changes to the climate. [3]

Energy Efficiency - Energy efficiency refers to the ratio of output of performance, service, goods, or energy, to input of energy. [7]

Greenhouse Gas - Greenhouse gases are gases—like carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane, and nitrous oxide—that keep the Earth warmer than it would be without them. [2]

Net Zero - Net zero refers to as a state in which any human-produced carbon dioxide or other planet-warming gases can be removed from the atmosphere. This can be done naturally, such as by restoring forests that absorb CO_2 out of the air, or by using technology that can capture and store emissions or directly pull CO_2 from the atmosphere. [1]

Renewable Energy - Renewable energy is energy derived from natural sources that are replenished at a higher rate than they are consumed. Sunlight and wind, for example, are such sources that are constantly being replenished. [9]

Retrofitting - Retrofit refers to the introduction of new materials, products, and technologies into an existing building to reduce the energy needed to occupy that building. [6]

Soil Erosion - Soil erosion is a widespread degradation process that naturally occurs on sloping land, in the case of water erosion, or in windy areas with scarce vegetation. [10]

Sustainability – Sustainability refers to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. [5]