



Natural
Distinction

FREE GUIDE

SME Sustainability Starter Guide

Practical steps to reduce your environmental impact and build a credible sustainability strategy.

Covering environmental policy, carbon footprints, sustainable procurement, and quick wins you can act on today.

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INTRODUCTION

What does sustainability actually mean for your business?

For SMEs, sustainability isn't about achieving perfection or chasing certifications. It's about taking honest, consistent action to reduce your environmental impact, and building a business that's fit for the future.

"Sustainability is not a cost. It's a signal. To your customers, your team, and your supply chain that you're serious about the long term."

Three things sustainability covers

Environmental

Your carbon footprint, energy use, waste, water consumption, and how you source materials and services.

Social

How your business impacts people — your team's wellbeing, your community, and the ethics of your supply chain.

Governance

The policies, leadership practices, and accountability structures that make your commitments credible and measurable.

This guide focuses primarily on the Environmental side - the area most SMEs want to tackle first, and where the most immediate wins exist.

You don't need a dedicated sustainability team or a big budget to get started. The most important step is to begin honestly and with a clear plan.



SECTION 1

Environmental Policy - what it is and why you need one

An environmental policy is a short, clear statement of your organisation's commitment to reducing its impact on the planet. It doesn't need to be long or complex. It needs to be genuine, transparent and committed to change.

What a good environmental policy includes

1

Your commitment

A clear statement that your business is committed to understanding and reducing its environmental impact.

2

Key focus areas

Energy, waste, travel, procurement — identify the areas most relevant to your operations.

3

Targets and review

Simple, realistic goals and a commitment to review progress at least annually.

4

Signed by leadership

Credibility comes from the top. A policy signed by a director signals that this is a genuine business commitment, not a marketing exercise.

An environmental policy is increasingly expected by public sector clients, corporate supply chains, and B Corp assessors. Having one in place is a simple, low-cost step that opens doors.



SECTION 2

Understanding your carbon footprint

Your carbon footprint is a measure of the greenhouse gases your business produces — directly and indirectly. Understanding it is the foundation of any meaningful sustainability strategy.

The three scopes of emissions

SCOPE 1

Direct

Emissions from sources you own or control — company vehicles, gas boilers, on-site processes.

SCOPE 2

Indirect

Emissions from the energy you purchase — electricity, heating, cooling from the grid.

SCOPE 3

Value Chain

All other indirect emissions — business travel, supply chain, employee commuting, waste disposal.

Where to start as an SME

- Collect 12 months of energy bills and fuel receipts.
- Log business travel from company owned vehicles.
- Note your primary suppliers and materials.
- Use a free carbon calculator tool to get started.
- Set a baseline - you can only improve what you measure.
- Don't aim for perfection - start with a commitment to improve.

You don't need to measure everything at once. Start with Scope 1 and 2 - your direct energy use. That alone gives you a meaningful baseline to work from.



SECTION 3

Sustainable procurement & supply chain

For most SMEs, the majority of their environmental impact sits in their supply chain - not within their own four walls. Sustainable procurement means making more conscious choices about who you buy from and what you buy.

Four questions to ask your suppliers

1

Do you have an environmental policy?

A basic but telling question. Suppliers who take sustainability seriously will have one. Those who don't but want to keep your business may be prompted to create one.

2

Can you share your carbon footprint or emissions data?

Increasingly standard in corporate supply chains. Even an estimate shows intent and awareness.

3

What are you doing to reduce packaging and waste?

Practical and easy to act on. Often the source of significant quick wins in your own operations too.

4

Are your products or services ethically sourced?

Covers labour standards, materials origin, and fair trade - all increasingly relevant to your own customers and clients.

You don't need to replace all your suppliers overnight. Start by engaging with your top 5 by spend. Ask the questions. The act of asking signals that sustainability is a business priority - and suppliers notice.

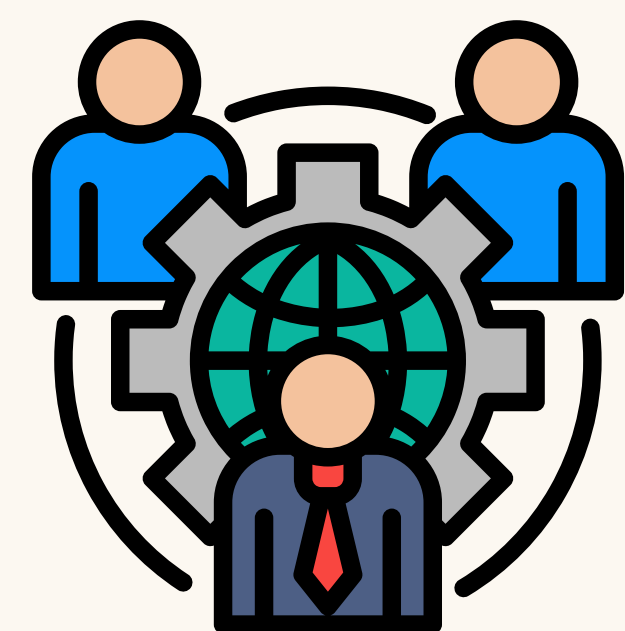
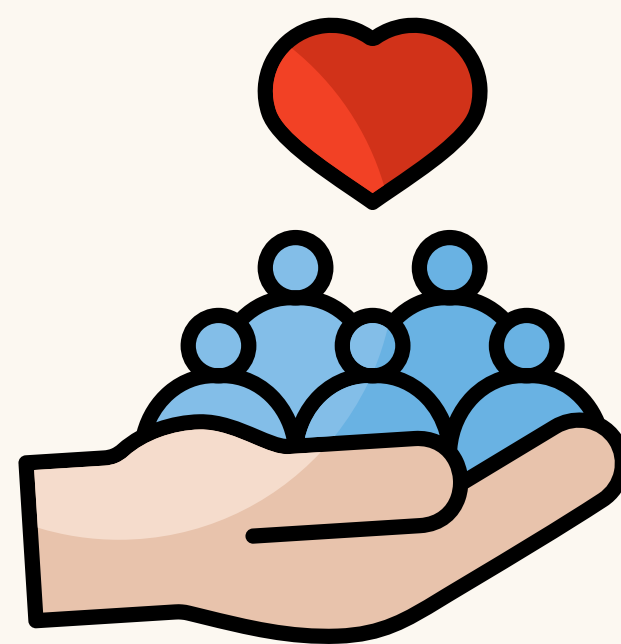


SECTION 4

5 sustainability quick wins for SMEs

Actions you can take this month without a big budget or a dedicated sustainability team.

- ✓ Switch to a renewable energy tariff.
- ✓ Review your top 3 suppliers for environmental credentials.
- ✓ Set a default remote-first policy for meetings where travel isn't essential.
- ✓ Hold a 30-minute team session on your sustainability values.
- ✓ Identify one community or environmental initiative to support formally.



Your personalised assessment is on its way

Book a free 30-minute discovery call to talk through what a sustainability strategy could look like for your business.

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