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Carbon goals

Meeting your carbon goals doesn't have to be at the expense of your growth plans

The British Standards Institute's (BSI) annual Net Zero Barometer Report 2022 reveals that nearly half (49%) of the UK's senior decision makers report they are prioritising growth in their organisation while a fifth (20%) are prioritising the reduction of carbon emissions. At Thomson, we believe that this is a false dichotomy and that a progressive and innovative Environmental Consultancy can help you prioritise both growth and ambitious carbon objectives.

The report identified that most of those surveyed (71%) had already set targets to meet net zero, and over three quarters were more convinced, following COP26, that net zero targets are genuinely achievable. While this is a huge step forward from the 2021 survey, the survey also revealed that only 21% of those consulted were aware of the concept of net zero targets and what they would mean in practice for their organisation.

Just under half of decision makers (45%) cited cost as a barrier, which they viewed as the "leading challenge" for organisations looking to reach net zero. The report reveals the willingness of decision makers to look toward external consultants with almost three quarters seeking independent guidance.

In a world where businesses are struggling with supply chain challenges, rising energy costs, labour shortages and high inflation it may be tempting to push net zero transition onto the back burner. But there is plenty of evidence to suggest that businesses can cut costs and cut carbon and find genuine competitive advantages in enhanced sustainability especially with the help of specialist environmental consultants.

You need a clear picture of your carbon footprint to map the path to Carbon Zero

Establishing the full extent of your carbon impact is particularly complex when you are working in the built environment and construction sectors.

To get a clear picture, you should measure and analyse the embodied carbon contained in construction materials, the carbon used by construction processes, the carbon sequestered in different building materials, such as wood, and the carbon impacts arising during operation and at the end of life.

If your project is a refurbishment, the calculations are more complex still, as you have to factor the savings in embodied carbon against your ability to achieve low operational carbon levels. Many experts now suggest that the lowest carbon building is an existing building. And with the accelerating costs of building materials there are increasing cost drivers to refurbishing existing structures over building from scratch.

Even with the most ambitious new building plans, 80% of today's homes will still be occupied in 2050 which means we will be retrofitting around 26 million homes in the UK alone. Computing all of these factors will have a bearing on decisions made throughout the process, so it is vital to have environmental experts working alongside you right from the project inception stages. They will provide a wider understanding of the issues at any site and a range of practical solutions to help you reach your carbon goals cost efficiently and quickly.

They can advise on the effectiveness and impacts of different approaches such as Passivhaus construction, sustainable water use and drainage, renewable energy technologies, circular economy approaches and many other carbon reduction innovations to help mitigate against climate change and ensure climate change resilience. They will also ensure you are able to report accurately about the carbon measures you are taking to keep you ahead of the changing regulatory requirements as Government environmental policies come into force.

Understanding local environments is as important as understanding the wider one

In the last 500 years, we have lost around 260,000 of our 2 million known species. Biodiversity loss poses as great a risk to our lifestyles as man-made greenhouse gas emissions. The planet's natural ability to suck carbon out of the atmosphere and sequester it safely in ecosystems on land, in the air and at sea, depends on biodiversity.

Myriads of plants, organisms and microorganisms drive carbon absorption. Denude our environments of their biodiversity and you are destroying the planet's ability to heal itself. That is why governments around the world are requiring developers and construction businesses to demonstrate biodiversity net gain as an integral part of their projects.

Empowering the natural environment to have a positive impact on carbon capture and storage is a far more effective weapon in tackling climate change than anything yet invented. It is also far less likely to result in unintended consequences and can protect us from some of the likely impacts of climate change, such as increased risk of flooding. An EU white paper recommends that we: "Explore the possibilities to improve policies and develop measures which address biodiversity loss and climate change in an integrated manner to fully exploit co-benefits and avoid ecosystem feedbacks that accelerate global warming."

Every part of the natural environment has evolved to play a productive, symbiotic role in our environment and when used carefully and creatively, it will work with us. As environmental consultants, we work closely with our partners to help them find intelligent and sensitive ways to work within natural environmental limits. We help them identify local opportunities and create environments that enable humanity and the natural world to thrive alongside one another in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

The UK is taking an environmental lead, we all need to be ready to step up to it

The UK Government's Net Zero Strategy, Build Back Greener, sets ambitious carbon goals and the regional Governments have even more progressive targets in their sights. They are also setting higher standards for biodiversity net gain – driven, no doubt, by the knowledge that as the birthplace of the global industrial revolution, we have significant ground to make up. An RSPB study revealed the UK at the bottom of the G7 league table for preserving biodiversity and we're third from bottom in Europe. The UN recommends the adoption of the Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII) and it shows that the UK has lost half of its biodiversity in modern times while Canada still retains 89%.

These losses can be redressed but it will require ingenuity and the assistance of ecological experts who can bring detailed knowledge and understanding of local ecosystems. Historically, the built environment has been a huge driver in biodiversity loss and with targets to build over 300,000 homes a year in the UK we have a lot of work to do.

There are also radical shifts happening in distribution and retail activities putting added pressures to reconfigure and relocate commercial properties. Achieving that level of development while increasing the UK's biodiversity will be a vast challenge and one that will require developers and construction businesses to draw heavily on best environmental advice to ensure that we leave our ecosystems healthier and better than when we started.

Before you plan anything, you need a better plan for the planet

We pride ourselves in tackling the problems facing development and infrastructure projects with positivity, passion, and pragmatism. Striking a healthy balance between human interests and the natural environment is complex and requires detailed, evidence-based, analysis. To achieve that, we need to fully understand the existing environment, examine all potential environmental risks, and establish the potential to make it better.

Data has a vital role to play in getting to grips with the nuances and complexities of any given ecosystem and the wider environment. We have invested heavily in our ability to gather environmental data and in the technology and expertise to process it accurately, quickly and in depth.

Armed with that detailed insight and understanding, we work with developers, planners, and all key stakeholders to help them fully appreciate the environmental significance of what they are doing. We help them ensure they anticipate and meet legislative requirements and gain market advantage by delivering a spectrum of benefits to the natural and built environment that go beyond simply eliminating carbon emissions.

There are limitless nature-based solutions with the power to transform the way we live while protecting our planet. If there is a project you'd like to discuss, we'll be more than happy to help you achieve the world's environmental goals without compromising your commercial ones.

To talk to our experts about how we can help you prepare your projects and plans for a greener, more sustainable future, get in touch.

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