



Sustainability Plan 2020 to 2025

May 2020



delivering promises, improving lives

Foreword

As a large social landlord, we have a key role to play in improving the sustainability of our communities, protecting the environment and combatting climate change. This plan is critical in ensuring that we build on our successes to date and continue to be a responsible organisation that considers our wider impact on the environment, reducing the carbon footprint we create through our service delivery, making our homes more energy efficient, promoting biodiversity and eliminating waste.

The needs of our customers are central to everything we do. It is therefore critically important that we factor fuel poverty and health and wellbeing considerations into our decision making processes when delivering this plan – considering economic, social and environmental impacts.

This plan sets out our key ambitions and actions to 2025, to ensure we are on the right trajectory to achieve our 2035 Vision milestone of leading sustainability through social change, through the provision of net zero carbon services, as set out in our 2025 Business Strategy and, more, broadly, support delivery of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UK's greenhouse gas emission targets.

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1. Plan aim

In May 2019, the UK Government declared an environment and climate emergency and set a target requiring the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero before 2050 to end the country's contribution to global warming. Regionally, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) have set the target for the Leeds City Region to be net zero carbon by 2038. Locally, Wakefield Council declared a climate emergency in May 2019 and pledged to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030.

As set out in our 2025 Business Strategy, we have set the 2035 Vision milestone of 'leading sustainability through social change: through the provision of net zero carbon services'. To achieve this 2035 vision milestone and to meet the WYCA's target by 2038, we need to take significant steps towards decarbonising our housing stock, supply chain and operations by 2030.

Importantly, as a social landlord, we have to consider the wider impact of our plans on our customers. Tackling fuel poverty therefore also needs to be at the forefront of our decision making when formulating our plans, to ensure our homes are affordable to run and support our customers' health and wellbeing.

Giving due consideration to economic, social and environmental issues as part of the delivery of services to our customers also ensures we are contributing to the UN SDGs, as ratified by the UK Government in 2015.

By taking a proactive approach there will be additional benefits to us in terms of business continuity and managing risk, supporting efforts to stimulate the supply chain for low and zero carbon products and services, upskilling of the workforce, enhancing our reputation through demonstrable leadership, ensuring sustainability of tenancies, and improved customer satisfaction.

Significant work must be undertaken between now and 2025 to ensure we are on the right path to achieve our 2035 Vision milestone of leading sustainability through social change. This plan ensures we take a strategic, planned approach to:

- achieving net zero carbon operations by 2030;
- sustainable purchasing;
- ensuring our assets are fit for the future;
- promoting biodiversity and protecting the environment; and
- training, engagement and governance in a low carbon economy.

2. Our Vision

We have a Vision to create confident communities. It has three, five year reviewable milestones:

- 2025 Make real change through social outcomes**
- 2030 Improving lives through continued social enterprise**
- 2035 Leading sustainability through social change**

We have four **Strategic Objectives**:

- To be a positive force through leadership and influence to develop the potential of our people.
- To be a partner of choice to create better places to live.
- To be a landlord of choice by putting the customer first.
- To adopt best practice in good governance.

3. Background to the plan

Every organisation and individual have a responsibility to ensure that, whilst efforts are made to meet present needs and to continually develop and improve standards of living, this isn't to the detriment of future generations and the natural world. The UN created the SDGs to act as a blueprint to achieve sustainable development across the world, and in 2015 all member nations adopted the 17 SDGs to be achieved by 2030. They call for economic, social and environmental issues to be tackled hand-in-hand – ranging from ending poverty, improving health and education and enabling economic growth through to tackling climate change and preserving oceans and forests.

In 2019 the UK Government amended the Climate Change Act 2008 to increase the legally binding carbon target from achieving an 80% reduction on 1990 levels to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, to end the UK's contribution to global warming. This follows on from the Paris Agreement 2015, where signatory nations agreed to keep global temperature rises below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit them to 1.5°C, this century. The evidence base is increasingly becoming clear that keeping global temperatures down is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and there are dire consequences if we do not. Extreme weather events and temperature rises could have adverse impacts on our assets and the health and wellbeing of our customers and employees – both directly and indirectly. Directly, through flood risk causing our assets to become uninsurable or through risks to the wellbeing of our customers through exposure to heatwaves and overheating in the home. Indirectly, as global commodity prices could increase, and energy security could become a greater issue; which could, in turn, impact on costs to the organisation and also on the ability of our customers to sustain tenancies and maintain a good standard of living.

Biodiversity is an interrelated and equally important factor to consider. Climate change has been identified as a primary driver of biodiversity loss and, likewise, the loss of biodiversity contributes to climate change. A report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published in 2019 identified that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history – and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely.

There are also key social and economic factors to consider. Nationally, 10.9% of households are in fuel poverty and 9.5% in the Wakefield district. Living in cold homes results in 9,700 excess winter deaths annually in the UK, as well as having a negative impact on children's educational attainment. Air pollution has a significant effect on public health, and poor air quality has been described as the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK.

As an organisation we have an impact on the environment and climate change in a variety of ways. This includes the following:

- Use of significant materials and resources to repair and maintain our assets, as well as when building new ones, have a significant impact through their embedded energy.
- Production of waste through the delivery of our services, which in turn needs to be collected and subsequently disposed, recycled or reused.
- Use of energy, for heating, ventilation, cooling and power, and water, to enable us to run our corporate buildings and continue service delivery.
- Fuel required for transport, to enable the services we provide to customers. This is currently the largest source of our operational carbon footprint. Furthermore, it has an impact on local air quality and congestion, through emission of particulates into the atmosphere.
- Making changes to the natural environment. We manage more than 30,000 trees and a large amount of green space in and around our estates. Removal of trees, off-street parking in place of gardens, or fencing instead of hedging reduce green spaces which act as natural carbon sinks, negatively impact on biodiversity levels and have an adverse impact on mental health and wellbeing.

As a large social landlord, the extent of our impact on the carbon footprint of the region goes beyond our operations and activities. The energy performance of our housing stock has a direct bearing on the level of energy consumed 'in-use' when they are tenanted by our customers. This is the single largest source of emissions related to the organisation.

It is important, however, to note and reflect on the great strides we have already made towards improving the sustainability of the organisation and our housing stock during the last plan. Key achievements include the following:

- Achieving a reduction in our carbon footprint of more than 17%.
- Installation of more than 500 solar panels on the roof of our head office, Merefield House.
- Roll out of LED (light-emitting diode) lighting across our corporate building portfolio.

- Implementation of a Sustainable Travel Policy, including roll out of the pool car system across WDH.
- Successfully maintaining our ISO 14001 environmental management system certification, year-on-year.
- Securing more than £1.25m of external funding to support delivery of our plan.
- Trialling several innovative technologies to inform future property investment programmes.
- Installation of over 2,000 energy efficiency measures into our housing stock to improve energy performance and reduce tenant fuel bills.
- Provision of 300 one-to-one energy efficiency and switching advice visits for customers.
- Training provided to in excess of 350 employees on a range of subjects including fuel poverty, environmental management and waste.

This plan to 2025 sets out ambitious targets to build on these successes and put us on the right path to achieving net zero carbon service delivery by 2035.

4. Annual milestones

Year	Milestone	Expected Outcome / Impact
2021	Review our approach to business travel.	Ensure a green approach to business travel and commuting.
2022	Develop and implement a Green Space Framework.	Establish a strategic approach to promoting biodiversity and protecting the environment across our estates.
2023	Review strategy for low carbon heating and renewables across both new and existing assets.	A strategic, planned approach to alternative fuel sources is in place, considering climate change and fuel poverty issues.
2024	Create and implement an approach to upskill and train our workforce for a low carbon economy.	Workforce are equipped to deliver services within a low carbon economy.
2025	Develop our strategic approach to sustainable procurement.	Embed sustainability into purchasing decisions for products and services.

5 Targets and plans for change

To meet the aims of this plan we will be delivering the following.

Net zero carbon operations by 2030

We will build on the progress made through the last Sustainability Plan, during which time we reduced our carbon footprint by more than 17% against 2015 levels. The scope of our carbon footprint will also be expanded and will cover the following:

Aspect	Scope	Key deliverables
Energy and water	Electricity, gas and water consumed in our corporate buildings and any properties we manage where we directly purchase the electricity, gas or water on behalf of our customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the fabric and heating, cooling and ventilation systems of all in-scope buildings. Identify and install energy and resource saving measures in all in-scope buildings. Appraise existing land and buildings we own to assess feasibility for renewables.
Business travel and commuting	White fleet, business journeys (grey fleet) and employee travel to and from work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review current approach to business travel, including mileage rates and reimbursement systems, provision of pool cars and electric charging infrastructure. Improve changing and bike storage facilities across corporate buildings. Implement an alternative fuelled white fleet.
Waste	Offices, construction, repairs and maintenance and all other activities producing waste as part of customer service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve resource efficiency across our operations by minimising waste and promoting re-use, introducing circular economy principles, such as through the paperless office. Investigate the feasibility of a furniture re-use and recycling scheme. Develop our approach to agile working.

It will not be feasible to eliminate all carbon emissions related to our operations; therefore, we will be required to offset our residual carbon emissions on an annual basis from 2030. Our approach to carbon offsetting will therefore need to be developed in readiness for achieving net zero carbon status.

Sustainable purchasing – products and service delivery

To ensure we deliver our 2035 Vision of delivering net zero carbon services, work must begin now to embed sustainability principles into all aspects of the organisation. This must begin with the products and services we procure to carry out our operations and activities and meet customer needs. We will:

- develop and publicise our Supplier Charter which will set out our minimum requirements to suppliers, including those related to sustainability;
- review all specifications to ensure products and services procured are sustainable wherever possible;
- embed sustainable development principles into contract management; and
- establish the carbon footprint of the key products and services procured through our supply chain, to enable creation of further actions in this area.

Ensuring our assets are fit for the future

Our housing assets are the largest source of carbon emissions related to WDH, through the energy consumed in those properties by our tenants. Not only do they have an impact on climate change, they also affect fuel poverty levels amongst our customers and, accordingly their ability to sustain tenancies and their level of health and wellbeing. To ensure our properties are fit for the future we will do the following:

- Retrofit all existing stock to energy performance rating Band C standard by 2030 at the latest. A planned and measured approach will be required to see if retrofit work to higher EPC bands could be undertaken at the same time, given that the majority of our homes will still be in existence in 2050.
- Develop and implement a strategy for both heating and renewables, to ensure a planned approach to alternative fuel sources.
- Investigate alternative models for retrofit of properties and how this can be financed, such as through provision of energy as a service.
- Trial deep retrofit of properties to provide insight and develop our approach to the zero carbon homes required to meet climate targets.
- Build a net zero carbon development, to act as a blueprint for future zero carbon homes in the region.
- Appraise and implement renewable heating options in our new build developments, in advance of the Future Homes Standard.
- Update our new build specification to make sure our new homes are adaptable for a future climate.
- Develop whole life costing appraisal methodology when considering new build developments, including social, economic and environmental aspects such as energy costs, climate-readiness, transport infrastructure, green space and provision of local amenities.

Promoting biodiversity and protecting the environment

Our assets are more than bricks and mortar, we also own and manage over 30,000 trees and maintain a significant amount of green space on and around our estates. Ensuring our green space is well maintained and rich in biodiversity is important not only from an environmental protection perspective but also in terms of supporting our customers' health and wellbeing. To improve the quality of our green spaces we will:

- develop and implement a Green Space Framework to ensure we take a strategic approach to improving and maintaining our estate environments;
- develop our approach to achieve biodiversity net gain on all new build sites, to ensure that we are not having an adverse impact on the environment through our development programme;
- appraise all specifications for external environment work to optimise conditions for flora and fauna, and maximise opportunities to enhance biodiversity;
- review our approach to green belt and green field developments; and
- ensure ongoing compliance with environmental legislation, through the maintenance of our environmental management system.

Training, engagement and governance in a low carbon economy

Key to all of the ambitions contained within this Sustainability Plan is the buy-in required from our top management, employees and customers to take these targets and plans for change forward. It is therefore vital that employee engagement is carried out consistently on the key themes and programmes being delivered throughout the duration of this plan.

Furthermore, in order to take advantage of the move towards a low carbon economy and ensure that we correctly install, repair and maintain the new products we will be required to use, it is critically important that we upskill our workforce.

During the plan we will:

- create a Sustainability Steering Group, which will provide strategic oversight and generate ideas to support implementation of this plan;
- set up a programme of employee engagement, including the appointment of Sustainability Champions across the organisation, embedding sustainable development principles and enabling employees to make informed decisions;
- create and implement an approach to upskill and train our workforce for a low carbon economy;
- continue to provide one-to-one support to our customers on energy, water and resource efficiency and energy switching to provide them with the tools to run their homes as efficiently as possible; and
- investigate the opportunity to roll out a programme of sustainability ambassadors on our estates.

The plan will be delivered by undertaking the Sustainability Action Plan outlined at Appendix A, which sets out the actions that will be taken, the targets set and the outcomes which will be realised as a result.

The impact of Brexit on delivery of this plan should be considered as an ongoing concern, and we will need to adapt accordingly. There are risks related to funding availability, and our ability to attract external funding to facilitate delivery of key projects, as well as to the legislative landscape, which could change, or put new, responsibilities on the organisation.

This plan will be reviewed in 2025 to ensure that it is fit for purpose and takes account of progress made within the organisation, changes in legislation, technology and funding. It will also enable further targets to be set once baselining work has been undertaken, establishing the work required and to be incorporated into this plan going forward to 2030 and 2035.

Background papers

Net Zero – The UK’s contribution to stopping global warming (Committee on Climate Change, 2019).

UK Housing: Fit for the future? (Committee on Climate Change, 2019).

Clean Growth Strategy (HM Government, 2017).

United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2016).



Vision

to create confident communities

Mission

to inspire, transform and promote excellence

Values

to be creative, inclusive and work with integrity

delivering promises, improving lives