

Net Zero Plan for Stepping Stone Projects

Stepping Stone Projects (SSP) is committed to reducing carbon emissions and creating a cleaner and green environment. This is directed through our Environmental and Social Responsibility Strategies.

SSP has delivered on a number of measures set out in our strategies and places carbon reduction at the forefront of future and existing projects.

To date, SSP has:

- Purchased two Electric Vehicles (EV) and installed two EV charge points.
- Communicated with colleagues on the benefits of EV, provided training materials and videos and supported colleagues to use our EVs.
- From 2020 to 2023, made over a 40% reduction in petrol car travel through flexible and agile working environments and the introduction of EVs.
- Installed energy efficient boiler system at an SSP managed building in Tameside.
- Eco Energy refit six units with air source heat pump systems in Rochdale.
- Appointed six environmental ambassadors across our organisation, SSP's 'Green Team,' who monitor energy usage, recycling, paper usage in offices and advocate for environmentally conscious day-to-day working practices.
- Reduced paper consumption by c46%
- Biodiversity works e.g. grow and eat vegetable gardens in Rochdale.
- Successful Recycling Initiatives across all offices including lime bins for mixed recycling.
- Introduced 100% Renewable Energy Suppliers to property portfolio; already converted 76% of SSP managed homes to 100% renewable energy suppliers.
- Ensured, as much as possible, that customer visits are pre-planned, avoiding unnecessary travel.
- Introduced a Digital Transformation Programme to ensure paper consumption and unnecessary travel is reduced.
- Engaged in re-use and re-cycle initiatives – SSP have partnered with Dunelm and Hubbub, a Manchester-based Environmental Charity, to set up a pop-up shop filled with home items for our customers to use in future homes.

SSP will continue to reduce Scope 1 emissions by:

- Working in partnership with Cornerstone Place, Agile Property & Homes and Rochdale Borough Council, to build 14 self-contained homes for homeless people, using environmentally friendly construction including off-site panelised timber frames with cladding and render, triple glazing, Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems and Air Source Heat Pumps to create sustainable homes.
- Progress with air source heat pump systems and solar panels to a 12 bed, SSP owned and managed building

- Using learning and knowledge of environmentally friendly construction to inform any future opportunities and continue to advocate for environmentally friendly and energy conscious re-fits and new builds in any new projects.
- Introducing eight additional Electric Vehicles to our fleet and installing more EV charge points at our sites so that by 2026, 20% of colleagues can make use of EVs.
- Increasing the use of renewable energy sources on our projects and in SSP homes by switching 50 homes to renewable energy suppliers.
- Using the most energy efficient appliances in SSP homes, where possible using appliances with A+++ ratings
- Increasing the number of Environmental Ambassadors across the organisation, ensuring day to day working practices are environmentally friendly.
- Continuing to invest into SSP homes to ensure insulation and energy efficiency by working in partnership with landlords and developers.
- Continuing to create flexible working and agile working environments such as hot desks, mobile working ability, video conferencing therefore reducing the amount of travelling colleagues need to do to complete the daily tasks.
- Introducing customer-facing Digital Services through our Digital Transformation Programme, where customers can request and receive some types of support such as booking convenient home visits, submitting details and photos of non-urgent repairs, viewing self-help videos and receiving advice, viewing copies of support plans and essential documents, all contributing to a reduced carbon footprint
- Developing incentives and initiatives to encourage colleagues to use public transport or fuel efficient, hybrid and electric vehicles where possible, including:
 - Use of pool electric cars instead of personal petrol/diesel cars
 - salary sacrifice schemes for EV.
 - mileage expenses paid to colleagues using EV.
 - free EV charging points at our head and satellite offices.
 - cycle to work schemes.
 - considering locations of offices with regards to public transport

SSP will continue to reduce Scope 2 emissions by:

- Reducing energy usage in our customers' homes by buying and/or improving homes energy efficiency and insulation to the highest reasonable standards
- Piloting the use of thermostat monitors to manage homes alongside raising awareness of energy conservation with customers and providing the tools necessary to do so.

- Raising awareness and advising our customers on environmental issues, the cheapest possible energy tariffs, the financial support available to them and in energy saving techniques and behaviors
- Supporting customers financially with increasing energy costs via our Hardship Fund
- Reducing our overall energy consumption within homes, offices and through travel and improving our environment across the business by doubling the size of our 'SSP Green Team' Environmental Ambassadors
- Only using renewable energy providers in SSP homes
- Re-use and recycle initiatives such as partnering with local companies like Equestrian Flooring industries to donate used carpets from our homes.

SSP will continue to reduce Scope 3 emissions by:

- Providing support for small customer-led environmental projects such as vegetable grow-to-eat workshops, allotments and greener landscapes, using local and national community grant funds.
- Engaging external agencies to raise awareness of carbon reduction
- Promoting behaviors and influencing change in behavior to reduce energy consumption by colleagues, customers and partners through our 'SSP Green Team'
- Ensuring suppliers and contractors are local and have environmental pledges through Approved Suppliers and Contractors applications.
- Prioritising local suppliers and contractors that have public commitments to reducing carbon emissions and publicly report their efforts and progress.

Commitment to Carbon Reduction

Reductions in carbon dioxide emissions

In October 2022 SSP introduced two Electric Vehicles (EV) and installed EV chargers at two SSP sites. The purpose of these vehicles is to reduce carbon emissions produced when travelling to and from customers' homes, delivering support in the community. SSP has plans to increase the number of EVs in our fleet to at least eight by 2030 and to install several EV charge points across our sites.

SSP's Social Responsibility Strategy sets out our target of 20% of SSP colleagues using our EVs by March 2026. In addition, SSP has introduced:

- a salary sacrifice scheme for EV;
- mileage expenses paid to colleagues using EVs;
- free use for colleagues of our charging points at our head and satellite offices.

SSP has implemented agile and flexible working arrangements for colleagues across our organisation with the core aim of reducing carbon emissions.

SSP is determined to be 100% paperless by investing in our Digital Transformation Programme and has reduced paper consumption by 46%. We continue to reduce this further with the introduction of DocuSign, SSP customer portal, on-line support planning and risk management system, on-line training platform and on-line health and safety consultants.

SSP has been able to demonstrate the reduction in carbon emissions using EV, becoming paperless, using only renewable energy in SSP managed homes and having flexible, agile working arrangements by using our Accounting System, SAGE and through utility accounts.

Through these methods, SSP has been able to ascertain a year-on-year reduction in petrol and diesel usage across the organisation, and we aim to continue this reduction with the salary sacrifice EV leasing arrangements brought in to use in early 2025.

Purchasing of sustainable materials, goods and services in our supply chain

SSP is committed to using Approved and Accredited local contractors and suppliers. Through our commitment to becoming cleaner and greener, SSP advocates for environmentally friendly solutions throughout our organisation and works to influence partners to do the same. This is achieved by:

- Using contractors and suppliers that comply with SSP's Suppliers Accreditation Policy, Application process and Code of Conduct
- Prioritising suppliers with Environmental Pledges
- Prioritising suppliers that report on Carbon Reduction

SSP's Social Value Coordinator and our Finance Team are responsible for recording this information centrally and Operational teams, locally. As part of our Social Value return to commissioners, information on local suppliers is returned through Star Procurement administered by The Social Value Portal using the National Themes and Outcomes Measures (TOMs) framework.

Adoption of environmental methods and management systems within our organisation (e.g. ISO14001, ISO50001, EMAS, BS8555)

SSP uses a platform administered by Citation who provide consultancy and software to manage Health & Safety across our organisation. Citation also provides services to successfully implement and manage ISO 14001 for Environmental Standards.

Although SSP does not presently have an Environmental Management System, this is something that we are considering with our senior leadership team and our Account Manager at Citation.

Reduction in waste produced and reduction in waste sent to landfill.

SSP's 'Green Team,' also known as 'Environmental Ambassadors' have attended training, conferences and completed awareness courses to enable them to lead and influence others in and around the organisation. The aim of the team, which is six colleagues, is to raise awareness and to develop initiatives to improve our recycling rates.

The Green Team have ensured that each office base and SSP managed home is equipped with a range of recycling facilities, making recyclable options available to both colleagues and customers across the organisation. They are also responsible for raising awareness of our efforts to become 100% paperless and help to monitor the use of paper in our offices.

SSP intend to monitor the reduction of waste produced or waste sent to landfill by ensuring 100% of colleagues are trained on Climate Change and are using the recycling facilities we provide. This will be monitored through HR and Training records.

Our Social Value Coordinator and Green Team can manage the effectiveness of these initiatives however SSP wants to encourage a culture where everyone is responsible for our environment.

Training of colleagues and suppliers to reduce our environmental impact

Working together is essential to maximising efforts to reduce our environmental impact.

SSP have partnered with a Manchester-based Environmental Charity, Hubbub, to engage and empower our customers to make practical and meaningful changes.

Hubbub have supported SSP to partner with Dunelm Home Stores who provide recycled or ex-display home items for our customers to re-use in future homes and have also supplied hundreds of mobile SIM cards, preloaded with data, to reduce data poverty.

SSP's Social Responsibility Strategy sets out our ambitions to have 100% of colleagues training in Climate Change. This will be monitored through HR and Training records.

Our Green Team, together with our Social Value Coordinator, will continue to drive the agenda throughout the organisation to promote and raise awareness with colleagues, particularly those in a position to approve contractors and suppliers.

SSP uses several methods to measure and monitor progress on our carbon reduction initiatives including SAGE, financial reports, internal reports, HR and Training Records as well as The Social Value Portal.

Appendix 1

Short-Term Actions (2025–2030)

Scope 1: Direct Emissions

1. Add 6 Electric Vehicles (EVs) and install more EV charge points.
2. Retrofit 12-bed SSP building with air source heat pumps and solar panels.
3. Complete construction of fourteen eco-homes using sustainable materials and systems.
4. Promote EV use via salary sacrifice, mileage incentives, and free charging.
5. Expand flexible/agile working to reduce travel.

Ongoing

1. Use A+++ rated appliances in SSP homes.
2. Continue digital transformation to reduce travel and paper use.
3. Increase Environmental Ambassadors to promote green practices.

Scope 2: Indirect Emissions (Energy Use)

1. Switch fifty more homes to 100% renewable energy suppliers.
2. Pilot thermostat monitors in managed homes.
3. Double the size of the SSP Green Team.

Ongoing

1. Improve insulation and energy efficiency in homes.
2. Raise awareness among customers on energy-saving behaviours and tariffs.
3. Maintain use of renewable energy across all SSP homes.
4. Support customers with energy costs via £55,000 annual Hardship Fund.

Scope 3: Other Indirect Emissions

1. Launch more community-led green projects (e.g., gardens, workshops).
2. Partner with local suppliers with environmental commitments.
3. Promote behaviour change through education and engagement.

Ongoing

1. Reuse and recycle initiatives (e.g., carpet donations, pop-up shops).
2. Ensure suppliers and contractors meet environmental standards.

Monitoring & Evaluation

1. Track progress via internal evaluations and environmental ambassador reports.
2. Measure reductions in travel, energy use, and paper consumption.
3. Adjust strategies based on performance and new opportunities.