

Bates Wells' carbon reduction journey



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Introduction

There is a lot of confusion and all sorts of terminology around carbon reduction, net zero, and so on. As part of our efforts to set a Science-Based Target (SBT) we have reviewed all our actions to reduce our emissions over the last 14 years. In that time, we have increased what we are measuring and verified our calculations with the support of expert consultants, and since 2019, balanced the residual emissions that we haven't been able to eliminate. In 2013 we achieved ISO 14001 certification for our Environmental Management System. In 2015 we certified as a B Corp, and in 2019 we formally recognised the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis and made six commitments to help tackle them.

This guide is intended to share what we've done in the hope we can encourage others to take steps to make a positive impact on the environment.

Sometimes it's hard to know where to start, so by sharing our journey and the range of actions we've taken over the years, we hope it provides some thoughts on where others can look to reduce their carbon footprint.



FACT: One tonne of CO₂e is equivalent to driving once around the world in an average car (23,000 miles).



FACT: It takes 4 trees a lifetime (100 years) to absorb one tonne of CO₂e.

Carbon footprint

TIP: If you want to get started, our top tip would be to work out what you do that results in emissions and then to start measuring and recording data. Once you know what you are emitting and by how much, you can plan how to reduce it. This will be very different depending on your organisation.

TIP: There are lots of free resources on the internet with guidance to help you get started if you don't measure your footprint yet. As well as consultant services, you can find apps that help you measure and verify your carbon footprint. There are also tools that will do the calculation after you input your raw data if you already have that.



We began measuring our carbon footprint in 2009 and we have been actively measuring, reducing and being clearer about what makes up our carbon footprint since then.

Back in 2009 we mainly measured our Scope 1 and 2 emissions and our carbon footprint was 909 tonnes CO₂e. Over the following years we have not only increased what we measure but also taken significant steps to get our emissions down. Our emissions reduced by 87% between 2009 and 2021 even though we increased the emissions that we measured.

Year	Emissions (tonnes CO ₂)	Additional items measured
2009	909	
2010	857	
2011	873	
2012	817.23	
2013	560	Business Travel, Paper. Moved to Green Electricity
2014	572	+ Water
2015	437	Moved to new building with no gas
2016	396	+ Waste
2017	173	Lighting reprogrammed*
2018	168.31	
2019	265.4	+ Staff commute
2020	118.1	+ WFH emissions
2021	120.9	

2009 2009 onwards – we encourage our people to commute to meetings using green and clean transport as much as possible and discourage the use of taxis. Our people have been able to recharge the firm for bike rentals for getting to and from client meetings and events since 2009.

2010 We moved to virtual servers to reduce power consumption and since 2016 our servers have been running on green energy.

2013 We started to introduce some scope 3 emissions into our carbon footprint calculations including business travel and paper.

2014 We added emissions from our water consumption to the calculation.

2016 We added emissions from waste.

2019 We began to balance the residual emissions that we haven't been able to eliminate through researched and meaningful projects that support carbon capture, biodiversity and social inclusion.

We started to measure the emissions from our people's commute to work

2020 We started to measure Working from Home (WFH) emissions.

2021 We started to support additional carbon capture projects over and above our verified carbon footprint to take account of emissions that we haven't been able to measure. Our consultants developed more accurate measurements for WFH emissions resulting in an increased footprint for the year.

2022 We added the emissions from our purchased goods to our calculation as part of a project to set a SBT to measure our carbon footprint. We appointed consultants to help us with this. Initially, we felt that SBTs weren't for us as a single-location based law firm with relatively low emissions, but as we continue on our sustainability journey, the natural next step is for us to expand the reach of this work and consider all our emissions – including from purchased goods. By creating an SBT, you are not only taking steps to tackle the climate emergency but also reducing environmental impacts of your business as you evaluate all your spend and the impact it has on the environment. It increases the potential for your business to positively influence suppliers and contacts.

Paper

TIP: Encourage all of your people to think before printing, source more sustainable paper (we use **Envopap** that creates paper from recycled agricultural waste), and make sure any printers that you do use are as efficient as possible. Use sustainable ink, default double-sided printing, and ensure sleep timers are set up correctly on devices.

Year	Number of paper reams purchased
2012	7050
2013	6366
2014	6095
2015	5286
2016	5700
2017	5096
2018	4397
2019	4341
2020	1136
2021	641
2022	609

2012

In 2012 we started a long-term project to reduce paper use with a gradual elimination of all desk-based printers. We now use just 5 copier/printers across the office.

2019

We signed up to **Print ReLeaf** whereby any paper we do use results in tree planting projects in Madagascar. And we continue to include our paper usage in our carbon measuring and reporting while encouraging our people to go paper lite.

2022

We signed up to the **Greener Litigation Pledge**, encouraging parties that we work with to stick to electronic bundles and communications as much as possible.

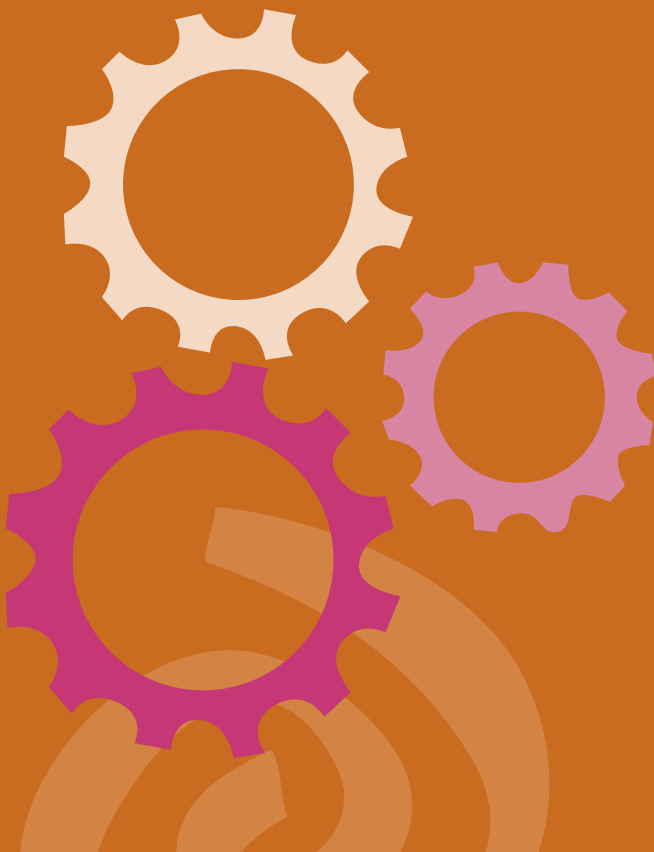
Between 2012 and 2022 our paper use reduced by 91%.



Supply chain



TIP: Think about what you buy and who you buy from. Use Directories that promote socially responsible businesses e.g. **Buy Social Directory** or **B Corp Directory**. It can cost more, but often results in an overall saving to consider sustainability when you are purchasing goods or services.



2013

We first introduced a green purchasing policy to give preference to purchasing environmentally friendly products and services.

2015

We introduced our first supplier questionnaire asking our suppliers for their environmental credentials.

2019

We introduced our supplier code of conduct which explicitly asks our main suppliers to reduce their impact on the environment.

2021

We undertook a procurement project to update our supplier questionnaire and code of conduct to place even greater emphasis on climate responsibility and net zero ambitions within our supply chain.

2023

We strengthened our supplier questionnaire further by asking for specific details about their actions to reduce their impact on the environment.

Our office space

TIP: Work with your landlord and other tenants in the building to help improve the environmental efficiency of the building.

Key areas where efficiencies can be made include waste, availability of recycling schemes, combining delivery/collection days with suppliers or other tenants, lighting and air conditioning/heating.



2015

When we moved offices in 2015, we moved to a building with a zero waste to landfill policy. The new building does not rely on gas, reducing our carbon footprint further. During our move we set up a 're-use and recycle' scheme which meant that many items that we couldn't use in the new space were responsibly recycled or donated to charity. As part of our move, we added LED lighting to our client suite, reducing the energy needed to light that space.

2016

We reprogrammed our lighting system to allow the lights to automatically turn off in areas where there is no movement after a short period of time to save on energy use. We saw a significant reduction in our electricity use – and our bills – after carrying out that project.

The landlord set up a tenant's group which has allowed for more collaboration across the building on environmental initiatives, in the same year we worked with them to switch the building supply to green energy.

2018

We negotiated with our landlord to get access to a side stairwell to allow more of us to take the stairs instead of the lift to our first-floor office and we introduced LED lighting in other areas where the lighting system needed to be upgraded.

2021

During 2021 and 2022, we undertook a premises review project. Following the pandemic, like most businesses, we had to adapt our ways of working moving to a more hybrid model. This resulted in us reducing our office space by 8,000 square feet and changing the layout to better meet our needs. As a result, we now have one less kitchen, fewer desks, less lighting, and less space to heat or cool resulting in lower energy use across the office – and financial savings too.

When we renovated our space, we wanted the refurbishment to be as sustainable as possible and promote the circular economy. This was a key factor of the procurement process for the work. As part of the build, we re-used glass from elsewhere in the office to put in new glass walls and re-used our folding partition wall from old meeting rooms to create internal meeting rooms. As part of the project, we removed the fridges from our meeting rooms to reduce energy use and refrigerant emissions. We gave old office chairs we no longer needed to the building cleaning team for their breakout room and allowed our people to take one home with them for their home office. Surplus cabinets were sent to **Reyooz** who refurbish and sell on unwanted office furniture to promote a circular economy. And we introduced over 30 m² of additional planting to the scheme to improve air quality and the environment within our office.

2022

We installed bug hotels on the roof to support pollinators in agreement with the other tenants and our landlord.

2024

We are planning to upgrade all remaining lighting to an LED system reducing energy use and emissions.

Reducing waste

TIP: Speak to your building management team about working towards being a zero waste to landfill building. At the same time research what items your Local Authority recycles and for the items they don't, consider reaching out to recycling companies who can take more hard-to-recycle items.



2008 We have been moving our stationery supplies to recycled options as much as possible since 2008.

2015 We switched from purchasing bottled water for our client area to a filtration system, allowing us to bottle filtered mains water in house. This meant we no longer needed a delivery of 60 glass bottles per week.

We started recycling our used coffee grounds with Bio-Bean saving approximately 5000kg per year of coffee from food waste recycling streams – instead the grounds are used to produce logs for use in domestic log burners. Since then, we have introduced a range of items to our hard-to-recycle schemes. Today our people can bring medicine blister packs, contact lenses, crisp packets, batteries, plastic bottle tops, empty beauty product containers, corks and stamps from home for recycling. These are more effectively recycled via specialist dedicated recycling streams that are rarely collected from domestic curb-side recycling services.

2017 We removed our water coolers from the office floor, relying solely on filtered mains water. On average we had 14 water bottles delivered per week, so this change had an instant carbon footprint saving by removing a 266kg delivery each week (as well as the weight of the empty bottles we returned). On top of this, the plastic from 14 water cooler bottles was no longer needed.

2019 We stopped buying milk in plastic bottles and switched to milk from a milkman in re-usable glass bottles saving 500 plastic milk bottles a month. Our internal catering is vegetarian by default – we estimate this to result in a 25% reduction in emissions from food that we purchase for consumption in our office.

2020 We began a plastic reduction project to eliminate single-use plastic from our catering, stationery, and cleaning products. To date we've achieved an 80% reduction and continue to look for ways to reduce the remaining 20%.



Staff engagement

TIP: Talk to your people to find out where they stand on environmental issues, what they want you to do and then use that to develop your approach.

We keep our staff updated on all of our environmental initiatives and policies via our fortnightly newsletter and our intranet – both of which have dedicated Climate Programme areas.



2012

In 2012 we held our first green day, running a range of environmental activities. Since then, we have held hackathons, arranged giveaways of sustainable products, and organised a litter pick to focus our people on environmental concerns.

2020

We signed up to **Climate Perks** to give our people additional journey days for sustainable leisure travel and partnered with fellow B Corp **Goodwings** to support people with net zero hotel bookings for both business and leisure travel.

2021

We introduced a sustainable swaps campaign to educate our people on ways to be more environmentally friendly in their personal lives. We also introduced a green energy subsidy, paying £100 towards energy costs to staff who swap to certifiable green energy (this also helps reduce WFH emissions).

2022

After consultation and research we switched our default staff pension to a more sustainable fund for new joiners. Following additional due diligence and staff consultation we transferred our preexisting staff pensions to the more sustainable fund, allowing people to opt out. 84% of the firm now have their pensions invested in one of the more sustainable options provided by our workplace pension provider.

Conclusion

This document has been put together not to hold ourselves up as an example, but to share what we have learnt so far, and inspire others to take practical steps on their own carbon reduction journey.

If you're not sure where to begin, our **Stepping Stones to Sustainability guides** are a good starting point, and can help you make efficient and effective changes to embed sustainability into the heart of your organisation.

If you'd like to discuss our journey, or yours, please do get in touch.

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Making a profit is core to all businesses but our goal is to combine this with a real social purpose. Our values are pivotal to us, they shape our decisions and the way we live and work.

We focus on positive social impact as much as we focus on being a successful law firm. Our top tier legal advice is coupled with a real desire to drive change and we were the first UK law firm to achieve B Corp certification, awarded to businesses that balance purpose and profit.

Today, our clients are diverse – from corporate household names, to public bodies, to start-ups. We're also the firm of choice for thousands of charities and social enterprises. We continue to lead the market we helped to shape.

Bates Wells challenges what is possible in legal expertise delivery.

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