

RESETTING CLIMATE TARGETS

A guide for small to medium organisations in
Bristol and beyond.



Bristol Climate &
Nature Partnership

Foreword

Decarbonisation targets are crucial in helping organisations direct their climate action journey. However, what should an organisation do if it finds that its original emission reduction goals are no longer achievable?

This resource will take you through the process of resetting climate targets, exploring existing frameworks and providing alternative pathways to decarbonisation. It will demonstrate how climate leadership requires bold action, including adapting targets so that they are ambitious but also meet your organisation's reality and capacity.

This guide was created by [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#) and features a case study of the Bristol-based science centre and educational charity, We The Curious, whose experience of target resetting and how to successfully communicate this shift provided the inspiration for this resource.

The guide forms part of the Partnership's [Climate Action Programme](#), which aims to help organisations reduce their carbon emissions through a series of events, resources, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.



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The importance of targets

Setting a carbon reduction target is one of the first steps an organisation will take on their road to decarbonisation. A target:

-  Shows that your business or organisation is taking responsibility to limit your impact on the climate crisis. It positions you as a reputable and caring climate leader.
-  Acts as a guide on how and where your organisation needs to reduce emissions.
-  Allows comparability with other organisations.
-  Keeps your organisation accountable.



Key terms and frameworks



Key terms

Some key terms that you might come across when setting, or resetting your target include:

Carbon emissions: Often used to describe the accumulation of all the greenhouse gas emissions that are produced. This includes, but is not limited to, carbon dioxide.

Decarbonisation: A reduction or elimination of carbon emissions from a process or organisation.

Carbon neutral: The amount of carbon emissions that is emitted by an organisation has been balanced out. It allows flexibility in how this is achieved, with no limitations on carbon offsetting and removal.

Carbon net zero: A 90% (or more) reduction in absolute greenhouse gas emissions across scopes 1, 2 and 3 from an appropriate baseline. The remaining emissions are offset.



The categorisation of carbon footprints is split into three different scopes, to help organisations identify the areas they have the most influence.

These categorisations are:

Scope 1: Direct emissions from a company's owned sources e.g. fuel burned in company owned vehicles, natural gas for building heating, fluorinated gas leaks from air conditioning equipment.

Scope 2: Indirect emissions from purchased energy e.g. electricity, heating or cooling.

Scope 3: All other indirect emissions that occur in a company's value chain e.g. purchased goods and services, transport and waste.



Existing frameworks

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has highlighted the need for net zero to be achieved by 2050 to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Some actors have set climate targets aiming for net zero earlier than this, while others are not targeting net zero.

For example, Bristol City Council has set a target to be carbon neutral by 2030 across scopes 1, 2 and 3, and the West of England Combined Authority has a target of net zero by 2030.

There are a range of existing frameworks and initiatives that can help guide an organisation in creating a carbon reduction target, some common ones include:



Framework	Information	Restrictions
<u>Carbon Neutral (ISO 14068)</u>	A framework for measurement, methodology and evidencing. Sets an organisational pathway to net neutral carbon.	Has no specific carbon emissions reduction threshold and allows organisations to rely on a higher portion of offsetting. This is costly and can leave an organisation open to greenwashing allegations.
<u>Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi)</u>	The most commonly used framework – based on the IPCC net zero aim, organisations must achieve a 90% reduction in scopes 1, 2 and 3 by 2050 at the latest. Organisations also must set interim targets under this framework.	Primarily for larger corporates, with growing provisions for SMEs. Only caters to the private sector. For SMEs it lacks guidance on how to reduce scope 3 by 2030.
<u>Race to Net Zero</u>	A framework for all organisations including non-profits and SMEs. Also based on the IPCC net zero aim, organisations must reach zero in scopes 1, 2 and 3 by 2050 and a 50% reduction in all scopes by 2030.	A 50% reduction by 2030 may not be achievable for some organisations. Lacks guidance on how to reduce scope 3 by 2030.

Other initiatives to explore:

 Pledge to Net Zero, the environmental industry’s global commitment, based on science-based targets.

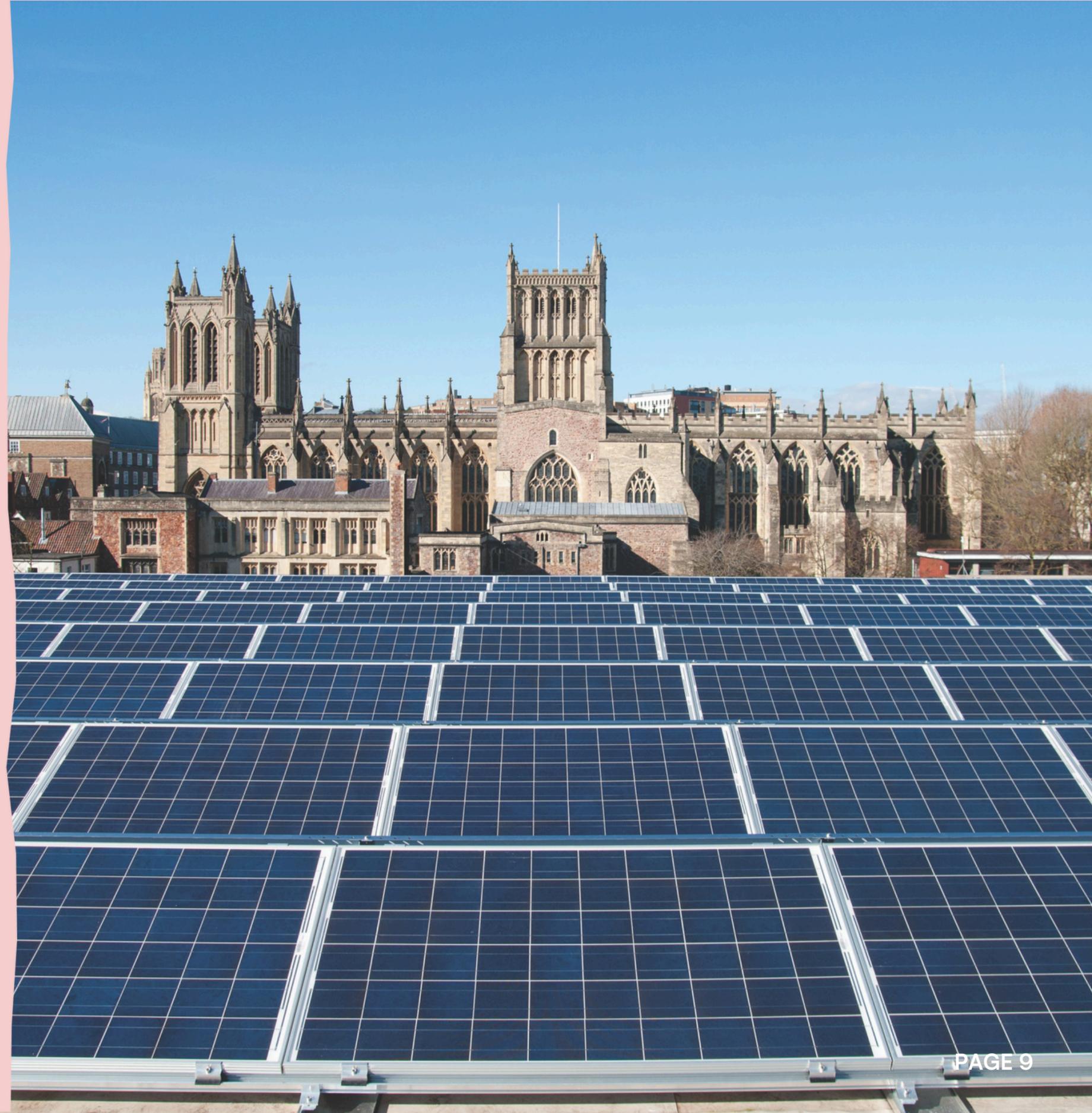
 SME Climate Commitment, a commitment to halve greenhouse gas emissions before 2030 and achieve net zero before 2050.

These frameworks are useful for many organisations to help guide decarbonisation targets and plans. However, some have found these existing frameworks incompatible with their organisational capacity and needs or unsuitable for their type of organisation.

As a result, an alternative route has been used by some organisations.



Setting targets independent of these frameworks.



Exploring alternatives



Setting your own target

Setting their own climate target has become increasingly popular with education, public and non-profit sector organisations, who have found the existing frameworks too limiting or unsuitable.

Often these organisations have had a target in place but have had to re-evaluate and reset to ensure that their target is achievable.

Common reasons behind the need to adapt and reset include:

- ☰ Decarbonisation is a constant learning process, the understanding of the complexities behind achieving net zero has expanded since targets were initially set.
- 👤 The current available frameworks provide a generalist approach. Therefore, they don't always align with the reality, capacity and needs of every organisation.
- 🕒 Organisations don't exist in isolation. While they can work to influence their value chain emissions, this will not be entirely in their control.
- ✳️ Since setting the target, a greater understanding has been gained of limitations, such as financial capacity, staff resources, differing levels of carbon literacy.
- 🌱 Timeline limitations. The time it takes to transform ambition into action might not join up with your initial target deadline. Remember all the positive work that has still taken place as a result of your initial pledge and subsequent momentum.



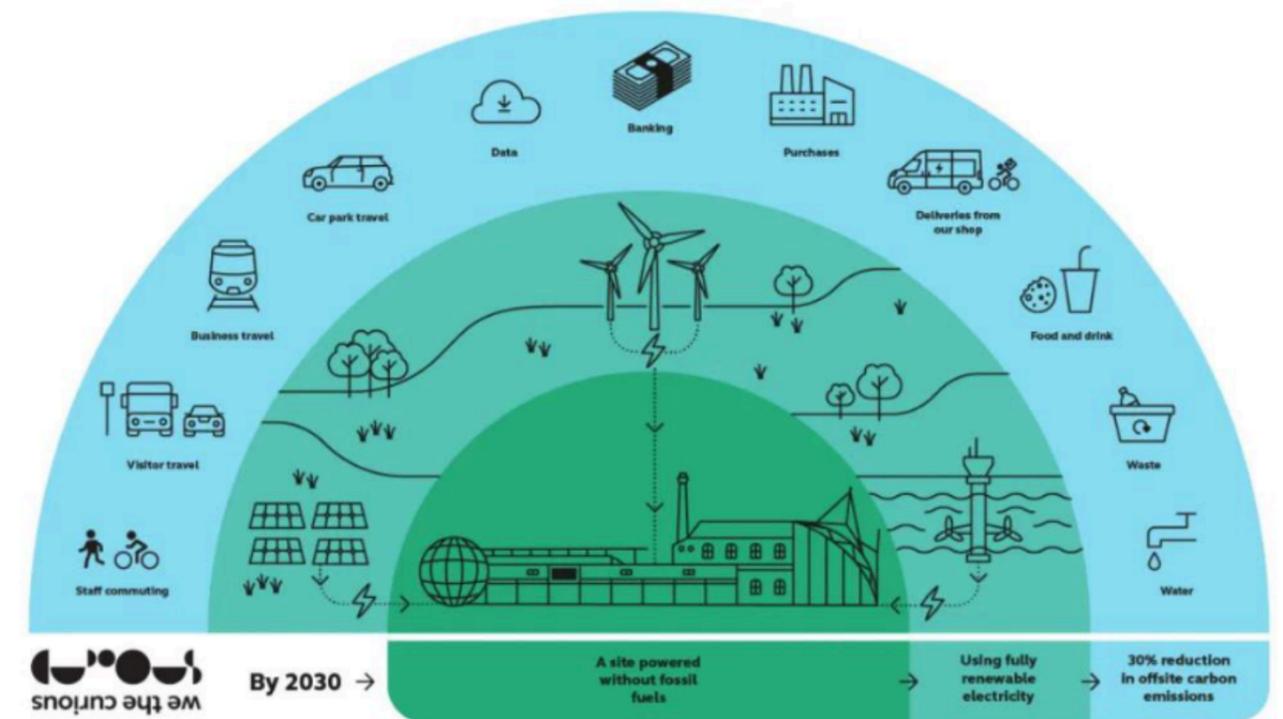
Climate leadership in action: We The Curious



We The Curious, the world's first science centre to declare a climate emergency in 2019, revisited and reset their climate targets in 2025 after realising their original goal of carbon net zero across scopes 1, 2 and 3 by 2030 was no longer achievable.

Still deeply committed to decarbonisation, but realising they needed a target that was both ambitious and reflected the reality of their organisation, they took the bold step to re-evaluate and reset their own target.

The new target: a site powered without fossil fuels, using fully renewable electricity, and a 30% reduction in offsite carbon emissions by 2030 (against a 2019 baseline).



A closer look: reframing the scopes

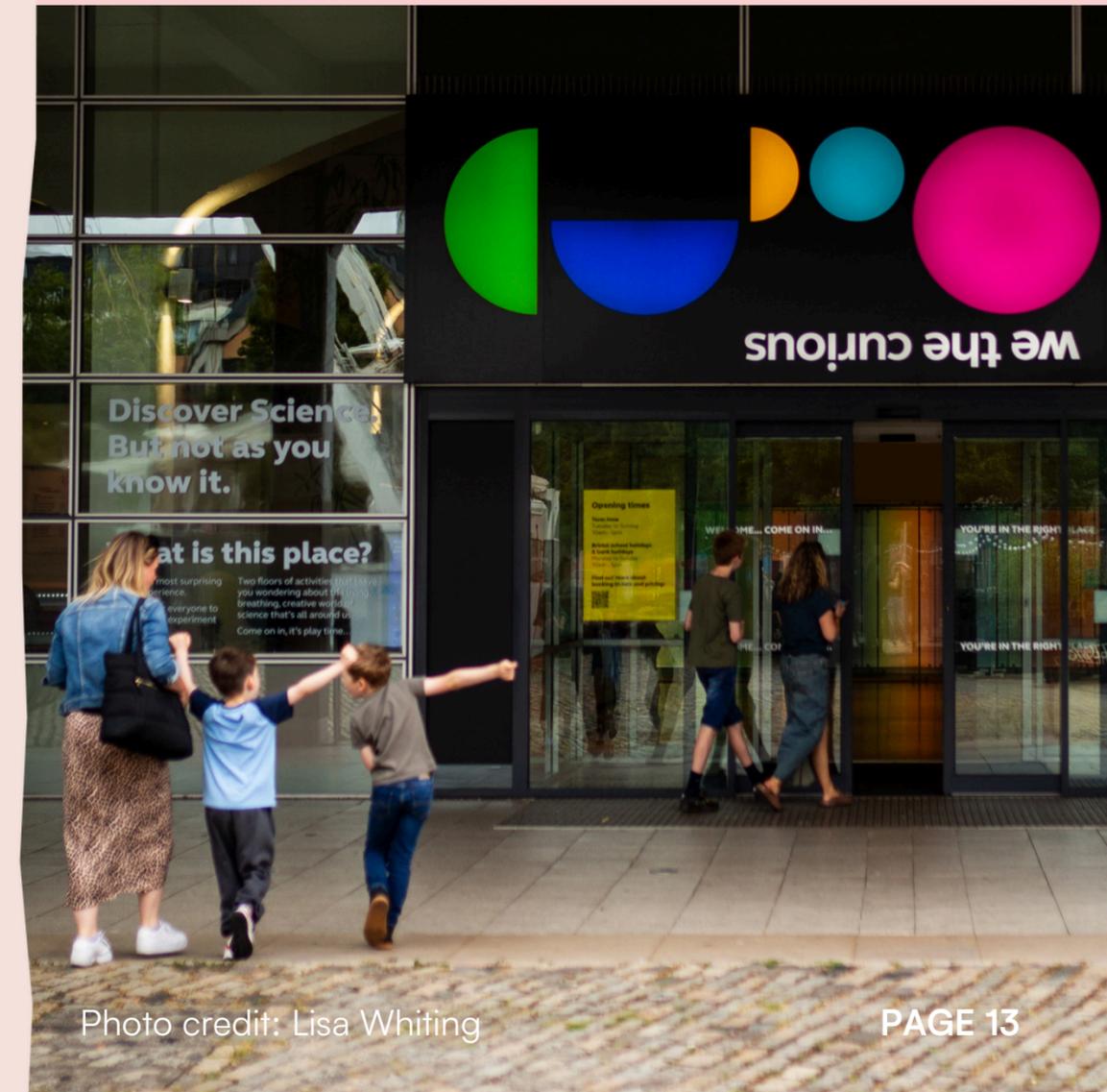
After listing all carbon emission sources associated with their organisation, We The Curious decided to reframe ‘the scopes’ by grouping them in a way that better reflected their operation, and what they had control and influence over. Rather than having a target for scopes 1, 2 and 3, We The Curious now categorise emission sources as either onsite and offsite emissions.

They have kept 2019 as their baseline year for their target for 2030 as this was their last normal year of operations (due to covid and a fire). And they have made the decision to treat large, one-off projects separately, whilst still measuring and reducing carbon emissions from them.

A guiding principle of their new target was to use clear and accessible language. As a science centre they found that communicating emission sources as scopes was an extra barrier to talking about decarbonisation.



To keep consistent with Greenhouse Gas reporting and to stay comparable to other organisations, they still categorise each emission source into the scopes for their carbon reporting (staying in accordance with the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol) — e.g. offsite emissions are comparable to many of the categories in Scope 3.



A closer look: why 30%?

Industry research conducted by We The Curious highlighted that 30% reduction by around 2030 is what many leaders in the field are working towards for scope 3 equivalent emissions. Having one overall reduction figure for offsite emissions allows more flexibility on reduction approaches, rather than separate targets for each emission source.

Taking action

We The Curious holds numerous festivals and events on their sites. Every external organisation and vendor involved agree in their contract terms & conditions that they won't burn fossil fuels onsite.

We The Curious might be one of the first organisations to publicly change their targets, but they probably won't be the last. Their overall ambition is still to one day become carbon net zero, this adapted target marks the next step to get there and outlines their new aims for 2030. To find out more about their work contact sustainability@wethecurious.org.



"Once we realised that our full net zero ambition could not be met by 2030, that opened up the possibility of creating a bespoke 2030 target. We used that opportunity to set a target built around the way our organisation operates, that recognises the realities of what we can control and influence, whilst still driving radical change in response to the climate emergency."

CHRIS DUNFORD



Sustainability and Science
Director, We The Curious





We The Curious' experience of setting a new target

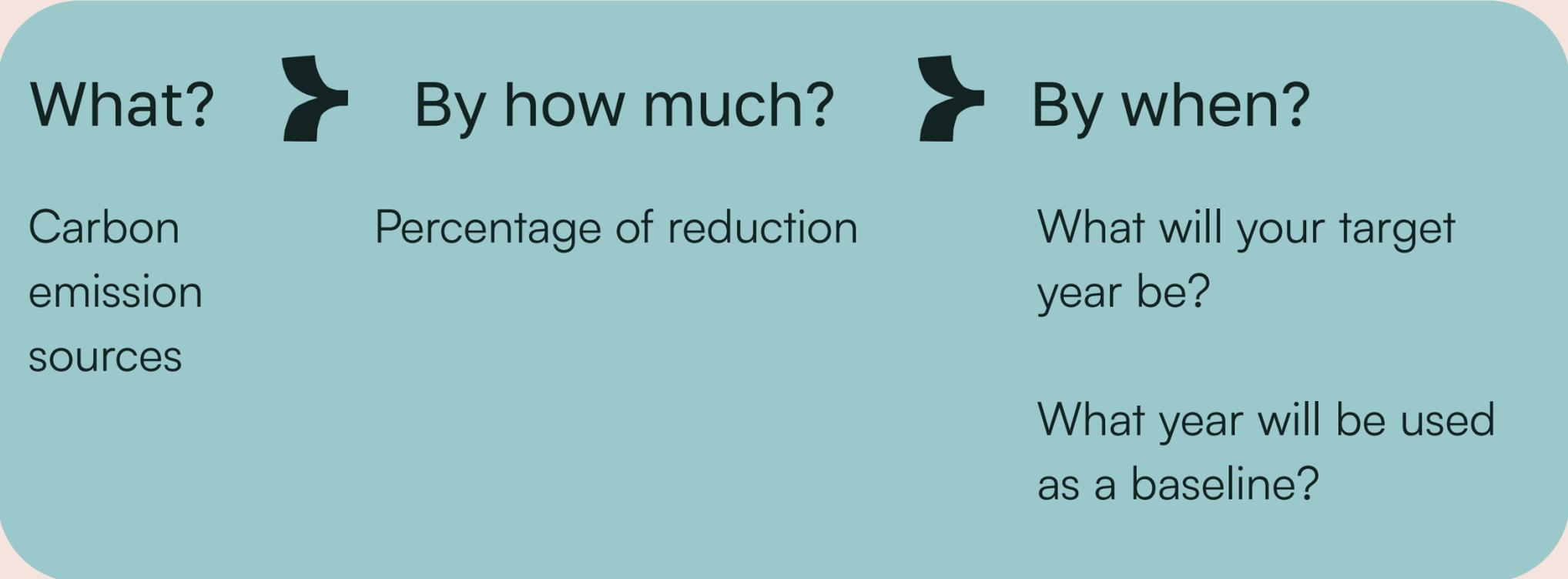


Steps We The Curious took when resetting their target

Once they had:

- ☰ Measured all their carbon emissions and calculated their carbon footprint
- * Reviewed the available decarbonisation frameworks currently available

The next step was to structure and set their new target. The basic structure of a target is:



Guiding Principles

To help guide their new target, We The Curious created a set of guiding principles. Guiding principles should be unique to your organisation and target. Their examples included:

- ☰ Using language and terminology that is clear and accessible.
- 👤 Ensuring that the target is exhaustive and transparent about what is and isn't included.
- ⌘ Keeping the target concise but detailed.
- ✳️ Remaining consistent with Greenhouse Gas reporting and aligning with the goals of other Science Based Targets. This will allow an organisation to be comparable to others and support reporting.



The process followed

- ☰ List all carbon emission sources associated with their organisation.
- 👤 Group these sources to reflect their operations — this can be done in the traditional format of scopes, or other approaches such as We The Curious adopting onsite and offsite emissions.
- ⌘ Decide which emission sources to include / exclude — often referred to as boundary setting. This step identifies what will be included in the decarbonisation target and can be supported by the guidance in the GHG Protocol and by consultants.
- ✳️ For each emission source, decide on an appropriate target. This can either be an elimination target — completely removing the emission source — or a reduction target.
- 🌸 Create a timeline for hitting those targets.
- 💬 Bring everything together and write the overall target, making sure that the new target is clear and accessible.



Communicating the target

Communicating a changed target is crucial to ensuring positive reception across stakeholders, leadership team, staff, suppliers and customers. We The Curious ensured that their communication strategy was:

 **Honest and transparent.** They openly communicated that their original target was no longer achievable and the need to reset.

 **Accessible.** They made sure that both the content of the new target and how it was communicated was understandable to a wide audience. Key tip: don't just rely on text — use visuals to accommodate different communication styles.

 **Tailored to their audience.** Different audiences will require differing levels of detail about why the target has been changed. For example, investors will likely require more detail than customers about the targets and timeline.





Clear on why their target was changed. They highlighted the progress that had been made to date and what they learnt during this process, emphasising that the momentum to tackle carbon emissions was still central to the organisation's work. Key was celebrating their successes but also acknowledging the need for change.



Had a communication timeline. They started by engaging with their leadership team and stakeholders, then expanded to staff, before finally engaging in public communications.



Understood by staff. This was through staff training sessions and cross-departmental working groups.



Proactive. By actively promoting their changed target they stayed in charge of the narrative. For example, through public speaking engagements.



Your new target



Considerations when resetting your target

- 🌿 Ensure that your adjusted target can still be comparable to other organisations and aligns with Science Based Targets — you still want to be able to measure your emissions in line with the GHG Protocol for reporting.
- ✳️ Research what others in your industry are doing to guide your target.
- 🌱 Keep your target realistic but ambitious, draw inspiration from others but tailor to your organisation, using past learnings to guide your new goal. Remember why you are having to reset.

- ☰ Ensure your baseline year is an accurate representation of your normal activities to reliably compare and track progress. You may have one-off carbon intensive projects in certain years, avoid these if you can or make sure you have a way to account for these projects in a way that won't make reduction look greater than it is.
- 👤 Consider devising multiple versions of your new decarbonisation timeline with differing levels of detail, to aid communication with different audiences.
- ✳️ Decide on the level of offsetting and for which emissions you will use it for in your bespoke target. Keep in mind that the general guidance is set at 10% of emissions once a 90% emissions reduction has been achieved. A common offsetting allocation is for unavoidable staff air travel.



Taking action

In your timeline of action, you will have laid out which emission sources you were going to tackle and when. Now it's time to decide the actions that will achieve your emissions reduction goals. This is outlined in a climate action plan. Starting points include:

- ✿ Setting up projects each year that focus on targeting specific emission sources. Don't focus on all areas at once, keep attainable by staggering action areas.
- * Ensuring progress towards your new target is measurable.
- 👤 Ensuring appropriate governance is in place to implement and track climate actions. This can be through cross-department working groups, including both the sustainability team and the staff members who will be implementing the changes.



Reviewing targets

Remember that your climate target will need to be regularly reviewed and refreshed, rather than it being a process that comes to an end.

As demonstrated by the case study of We The Curious, this is part of effective and transparent climate action and leadership.



Support and resources



Resources

-  Just starting out on your climate action journey? Explore Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's [setting reduction targets blog](#)
-  Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's [Communicating Climate and Nature Action resource](#)
-  [Greenhouse Gas Protocol's Guidance](#)
-  [We The Curious's new decarbonisation target](#)
-  [Science Based Target Initiative](#)
-  Understand your impact with the [SME Climate Hub carbon calculator](#)
-  Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's [Managing and Measuring Carbon Emissions resource](#)



Find out more

Thank you for using this guide, we hope you found it useful and we'd love to hear your feedback and what other resources would be helpful to you. Please get in touch at contact@bristolclimatenature.org.

This guide is part of Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's Climate Action Programme, which offers events, communications, and resources to help organisations at all stages of their climate action journey reduce their carbon emissions. Find out more about the programme [here](#).

If you aren't already one of the Partnership's 1,300+ member organisations and would like to join, please visit [our website](#) to register. You'll be the first to hear about our events, activities and opportunities to get involved and support our work. You'll be in good company.

Acknowledgments

A huge thank you to Chris Dunford and Ella Norwich at [We The Curious](#) for their support in producing this guide. Their honest reflections of their target resetting journey provided the framework for this guidance. We The Curious are a member of the [Climate Leader Group](#), a community of organisations who are leading the way on climate action in Bristol. If you would like to speak to them further, you can reach them at: sustainability@wethecurious.org.

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