CONNECTING YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL GOALS

How linking climate and social action can increase your impact



Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership

If we intentionally connect climate action, social value, and justice, we create healthier communities, stronger economies, and more durable environmental outcomes.

This resource was created following our Climate Action Breakfast on connecting social and environmental goals.



What is social value?

Social value is the social, economic, and environmental impact of a project beyond its primary purpose.

Projects with strong social value benefit people, communities, businesses, and the wider economy and environment of an area. Social value focusses on long-term, genuine impact – beyond simply counting outputs such as jobs created.

You may have heard of social value in relation to public sector contracts or corporate ESG reporting. However, the core value applies to all organisations, enabling them to bring positive change to people and communities through their work.

Social value is not a tick-box exercise; it is a powerful framework for creating lasting, meaningful change.



Why is social value important?

Through adopting a longer-term, broader view, building social value into your projects can:

- Demonstrate impact and improve your reputation to attract more customers, clients, or contracts
- Build trust and legitimacy with local stakeholders
- Attract funding (where applicable)
- Meet legal requirements
- Support community development
- Unlock public money to invest into the local area
- Strengthen connections between community organisations and businesses
- Create powerful long-term benefits



Social value and just transition

Social value is the practice of asking what wider benefits or harm a project creates. Just transition is that same principle, applied to our society's entire shift to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy. This is to ensure the transtion is fair, inclusive, and beneficial to everyone.

It recognises that environmental and social outcomes are deeply connected - climate action is interlinked with issues such as health, equality, employment, community resilience, and the cost of living.

To build a greener future, it must meet the wider social needs of everyone. Engagement with diverse communities is critical so that the response to climate change doesn't inadvertently worsen inequalities or lead to pushback.

Just transition is how we succeed in reaching net zero; it isn't an add on. Social value is key to a just transition.

Actions should be done **with** communities, not to them. This is how to create lasting change that's inclusive, cohesive, and supports a truly just transition.



Partnerships and collaboration are essential to delivering a just transition. No single organisation has all the answers.

Organisations all bring different expertise, but not everyone has the lived experience or local insights to make appropriate decisions on behalf of communities.

Therefore, we must collaborate and:

- Listen as much as we lead.
- Recognise that communities themselves and the organisations closest to them have the knowledge and relationships to enact change.
- Build engagement and partnerships in from the beginning of the project.

The risks of keeping climate and social action separate

- Reduced public support. People rarely support climate action that they see as unfair, expensive, or imposed upon them – and may even actively oppose it.
- Worsening inequalities. Climate interventions can unintentionally harm those already disadvantaged.
- Missed opportunities. A project focussed only on carbon reduction may miss the chance to deliver other benefits such as health improvements, skills development, community resilience, and local economic growth.



Opportunities in taking climate and social action together



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- Better outcomes. One investment can produce multiple benefits.
- Stronger communities and more sustainable projects. Projects designed with rather than for communities have higher participation, stronger ownership, and thus better long-term success.
- Greater resilience. Communities with stronger social networks and connections with local anchor organisations have more protection from the impacts of climate change.

Tip: From the start of a project, ask a) who's benefiting, b) who might be excluded, and c) how can benefits be distributed more fairly?



Measuring the impact of social value

How do we use social value to build greater climate resilience and support a just transition? We need to rethink how we define, measure, and create value.

Move beyond financial measures to more impact-led reporting that enables qualitative storytelling, such as case studies.

Social value examples from Bristol businesses

AtkinsRéalis

Construction company AtkinsRéalis builds social value into all their projects. Examples include:

- On a retrofit project, rather than simply installing the new technology and leaving, AtkinsRéalis engaged with residents early on to help them understand energy efficiency and how the investment is benefiting them and their homes.
- AtkinsRéalis take a proactive approach to supplier engagement: they work collaboratively with suppliers to build their capacity and upskill through training. They help suppliers of all sizes benefit from a low-carbon economy, not just the larger ones.



© AtkinsRéalis



© Burges Salmon

Burges Salmon

Law firm Burges Salmon try to ensure that any work they do ticks more than one box. For example:

- Paying over the standard rates for carbon credits with Oxygen Conservation – a project in Dartmoor, bringing benefits beyond trees such as job creation, biodiversity, and increased site accessibility.
- Supporting tree planting with Avon Needs Trees, including through corporate volunteering opportunities. Staff learn of the benefits of tree planting, bringing social value closer to home.

ecotricity Business

Renewable energy provider, Ecotricity Business, embed their values around food, energy, transport, and nature into all their partnership decisions, considering beyond the financial gains that a partnership can bring.

They partner with Leeds Rhinos rugby team, not only to provide renewable energy but to support behaviour change with their fans and wider community. For example:

- Ecotricity Business surveyed fans to find out how they got to matches, discovering that 80% arrived by car. They developed an electric bus scheme which cut this by 18% in just a year.
- They provided four sustainability workshops to Leeds Rhinos employees. This better equipped employees to talk to fans about sustainability and make changes back at home: ‘the ripple effect of behaviour change’.



© Leeds Rhinos rugby team

Tools and further support

- Frameworks to quantify the social return on investment:
  - TOMs (Themes, Outcomes, Measures) framework
  - LOOP tool
- To access more free resources, visit our Climate Action Programme resource library



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