



For the life
you're after

Sustainable Action

Sustainability Management

Effective organisation and strong management ensures that sustainability is a live topic, is incorporated into day to day practices and is actioned in your business.

1. Sustainability Strategy

Having a sustainability strategy helps small businesses to align their operations with broader environmental and societal goals, supporting both profitability and responsibility.

What can you do to implement a successful Sustainability Strategy in your business?

Develop your strategy to align with your business objectives and ensure it is realistic and is measurable.

Allocate meaningful resources and budget (if required) to ensure that your sustainability strategy can be delivered.

Publish your business's sustainability strategy on your business website.

Undertake a regular review of your sustainability strategy – updating as appropriate.

2. Getting Organised

There are a few key actions that you can take to help your business embed sustainability.

What can you do to ensure your business is organised for taking sustainable action?

Assign a sustainability champion or team responsible for sustainability initiatives. Provide resources and a clear set of instructions.

Engage all employees in the development and implementation of sustainability initiatives. They work in your business every day and without their buy-in, you can't achieve success.

Include sustainability regularly on meeting agendas to ensure that progress is measured - and challenges are identified and addressed.

Communicate sustainability efforts and successes internally and externally. e.g. on social media, or website etc.

3. Data Privacy & Cybersecurity

Protecting data privacy and your IT network builds trust with customers and reduces the risks to your business that breaches can cause.

What can you do to protect Data Privacy & Cybersecurity in your business?

Educate employees on basic data privacy requirements and cybersecurity best practices (e.g. phishing, malware, password attacks, ransomware).

Ensure this training is regularly updated.

Implement strong password policies and two-factor authentication for all systems.

Regularly update software to ensure security patches are in place.

Ensure applications are regularly patched and updated to protect against known vulnerabilities and cyber threats.

Engage third-party experts to assess and improve your data privacy and security.

For more information see



AIB NI Business Security Centre [Fraud and Security Centre - AIB \(NI\) - Business \(aibni.co.uk\)](https://www.aibni.co.uk)

NI Cyber Security Centre [NI Cyber Security Centre](https://www.nicsc.gov.uk)

ICO [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](https://ico.org.uk)



Operations

4. Fuel & Energy

This is a high impact area for businesses. More efficient use of fuels and energy reduces operational costs and lowers carbon emissions, directly benefiting your bottom line and the environment.

What can you do to reduce fuel & energy consumption in your business?

Hire an energy consultant to conduct an energy audit to identify areas of high energy consumption and ways to reduce them.

In section 3 – we'll show where you can source funding to cover most if not all of the cost of these audits.

Educate employees on energy-saving habits (e.g., turning off computers and equipment when not in use).

Have regular touchpoints / reminders at staff meetings for staff to ensure this practice is followed.

Install timers or motion sensors to turn off lights in unused areas.

The cost of these can be offset by grant supports.

Case study

The Cork Airport Hotel, part of the Trigon Group (LED Lighting), is a 81 bedroom 4 star hotel located adjacent to Cork Airport. The hotel has set ambitious goals to lower its carbon footprint, reduce energy consumption and waste. One undertaking has been to install motion sensors in halls and light sensors on outside lighting. This relatively inexpensive investment of €3,000, has generated significant energy reductions of over 100,000kWh which in 2022 alone delivered savings of over €40,000.



CORK INTERNATIONAL HOTEL



Invest in energy-efficient appliances, machinery, and office equipment (e.g., printers, computers, HVAC systems) to reduce energy consumption and ensure they are regularly serviced to maintain efficiency.

Replace all lighting with LED bulbs or energy-efficient lighting options.

Review the light's energy efficiency labels to understand what are the best options.

Consider insulating your building, upgrading windows or purchasing more efficient heating systems to reduce your heating costs and its overall usage – protecting you from energy price increases.

Switch to renewable energy providers for your electricity.

Invest in renewable energy to power your operations and reduce reliance on fossil fuels

Solar panels are a cost effective and popular option for businesses of all sizes in addition to biomass boilers for larger business premises can be appropriate.

Case study

Ryans SuperValu (Solar) – Founded in 1991, the Ryan SuperValu Group is a well-established business of five retail grocery stores operating under the SuperValu & Centra franchise across Munster - where it employs over 500 staff.

In 2022, as part of a wider capital investment programme at its 26,000 sq ft Glanmire store, the business installed 162 solar panels on its rooftop space. Since becoming operational, the solar panels generate approximately 27% of the business's energy requirements - resulting in a material saving for the business with a potential payback period between 3.5 – 4 years.



5. Waste

Reducing waste minimises disposal costs, environmental impact and demonstrates responsible resource use.

What can you do to get started addressing waste in your business?

Implement office-wide recycling and composting bins for paper, plastic, and glass. Put signs up to help employees.

Get a food waste bin and start a composting program for organic waste if applicable.

Identify and solve for issues with waste management practices and policies in the business you operate, e.g. bad bin sizes, disorganised waste management area, lack of signage, use of black bags, team training etc.

Reduce paper use by moving to digital documentation and cloud storage for invoicing, documentation, and communication.

Recycle all your electronic waste through WEE or other approved channels.

Eliminate single-use items like plastic cutlery, cups, and straws in the workplace.

Look at more durable options which are more robust, last longer and cost less.

Case study

The Killarney Park Hotel (Single use plastics) is a 67 bed roomed 5 star, family run hotel located in the heart of Killarney, Co. Kerry. In a concerted effort to reduce waste levels, the hotel removed single use toiletries from bedrooms. Initial investment of €10,000 provided a payback period of less than a year with an annual cost-saving of €12,000 per annum. The environmental impact has been the removal of 250,000 small toiletry bottles from waste each year.



For more information on what you can do about waste in the workplace

[UK Business Climate Hub: Reduce waste and maximise resources - UK Business Climate Hub](#)

6. Water

Conserving water reduces costs, enhances resilience to water shortages, and contributes to environmental conservation efforts.

The Irish water regulator is the EPA <https://www.epa.ie/>, which operates independently under the department of environment, climate and communications. In Northern Ireland it is The Drinking Water Inspectorate, a unit within the Northern Ireland environment agency www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-environment-agency

What can you do to get started addressing water conservation in your business?

Monitor water use and set targets for reducing consumption.

Start by assessing your water usage using your rates bill – record it on a template e.g. X and compare on a monthly basis.

Check for leaks regularly and fix promptly to avoid water wastage.

When purchasing equipment, consider energy-efficient and water-saving dishwashers, washing machines, and other appliances to reduce water consumption.

Provide water stations instead of bottled water, encouraging employees to refill reusable bottles, which reduces plastic waste and water used in production.

Install low-flow taps and toilets in bathrooms to reduce water use.

Case study

Part of the Griffin Group (Water Conservation), the 102 bedroom, 4 star Ferrycarrig Hotel overlooks the stunning River Slaney Estuary in County Wexford. Due to increasing water and energy costs, the hotel set about reducing their water consumption by installing low flow shower heads. Shower flow rates of 26 litres per minute were reduced to 6 litres per minutes whilst feedback showed no impact on customer satisfaction. The reduced flow rates produce annual savings of €5,000 per annum on water costs and approximately €5,000 on reduced heating costs. The initial investment of €8,500 provided a payback period of 10 months.



Implement advanced water conservation technologies, such as greywater recycling or rainwater harvesting.

Case study

Arboretum (Water Conservation)

The Arboretum Group is an award-winning, family-owned business which won Retail Excellence's coveted Garden Centre of the Year award for 2022. The Group, with locations in Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and Kilquade, Co. Wicklow, has created destination locations with something for everyone from its garden café and restaurant to its vast horticultural selection in the garden centre to its kitchen store, home & gift shop, furniture area, fashion department all under one roof.

In August 2023, as part of an extensive capital investment programme with a focus on sustainability, the business began building

out its new state-of-the-art garden centre and retail facility in Kilquade which incorporates a rainwater harvesting system.

Rainwater that falls on the new and existing buildings is collected and is stored in a series of 38,000 litre capacity tanks. This reclaimed water, often refer to as "grey water" is used for all plant irrigation needs as well as toilet flushing on site, saving approximately 124,000 litres of water per year.



For useful hints and tips



In Northern Ireland, for more information, check out <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-environment-agency>

7. Packaging

Sustainable packaging reduces waste, overall environmental impact and can help differentiate your business in the market.

What can you do to reduce the environmental impact of your packaging?

Ensure your packaging is sized appropriately for your products to avoid unnecessary waste.

Switch to packaging materials that are easily recyclable, such as cardboard, paper, or certain plastics like PET.

Utilise biodegradable or compostable materials, such as plant-based plastics or cornstarch packaging, to minimise environmental impact.

Develop/provide packaging that can be reused by customers, such as sturdy bags, containers, or returnable packaging for future purchases.

Clearly label packaging with how customers/consumers can properly dispose of or recycle materials.

Repak operates the producer responsibility organisation for packaging and packaging waste under approval from the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications. You can find out more on the Repak website www.repak.ie. If your business is based in NI, check out Valpak, <https://www.valpak.co.uk/>



8. Purchasing

Sustainable purchasing reduces the indirect environmental impact of your business, encouraging sustainable practices in the wider economy.

What can you do to incorporate sustainable practices into your purchasing decisions?

Prioritise purchasing from suppliers with recognised environmental certifications. Are they a BCorp, use Origin Green etc.?)

Begin purchasing office supplies made from recycled or sustainable materials.

Ask suppliers to provide information on their sustainability practices and consider opting for greener options.

Purchase from local suppliers to reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation and support the local economy.

Opt for products made from recycled, compostable, biodegradable, or renewable materials to reduce environmental impact and resource depletion.



International Organization for Standardisation (ISO) is a highly regarded international body that sets out standards regarding the quality of goods & services. For detailed information regarding sustainable procurement, check out ISO 20400:2017 Sustainable procurement — [Guidance. https://www.iso.org/standard/63026.html](https://www.iso.org/standard/63026.html)

9. Freight & Logistics

Sustainable Freight & Logistics lowers operational costs and reduces emissions.

What can you do to make your freight & logistics function in your business more sustainable?

Ensure that vehicles are regularly serviced and maintained to optimise fuel efficiency, reduce breakdowns, and lower emissions.

Telematic software packages are a cost effective means of improving vehicle efficiencies by reporting on every vehicle detail including speed, idling, fuel use, tire pressure and more.

This information can mean savings on maintenance costs by better monitoring vehicles or improving fuel efficiency by learning more about driving habits.

Go digital – move away from paper records.

Implement reusable or returnable transport packaging, such as plastic pallets or crates.

Provide 'green driving' training.

Driver behaviour can have a significant impact on fuel consumption i.e, hard breaking / acceleration.

Upgrade to more fuel-efficient (HVO), compressed natural gas (CNG), hydrogen, hybrid or electric vehicles (EVs) in the company fleet.



10. Carbon Emissions

Reducing carbon emissions helps prevent climate change, reduces regulatory risks, and reduces your costs (watch out for increasing carbon taxes). Many of the actions in this section will help you reduce your carbon emissions but you must first understand your profile and know where you want to get to.

What can you do to get started addressing your carbon emissions in your business?

Calculate your carbon footprint for the first time using online tools such as

[My 2050 \(energysecurity.gov.uk\)](https://www.energysecurity.gov.uk/my2050)

For a more granular assessment work with a consultancy firm to help you.

In section 3 we'll discuss supports which can help cover the cost of hiring a consultant.

Commit to a recognised net zero plan such as SBTi

[Set a target as a small or medium-sized enterprise \(SME\) - Science Based Targets Initiative](https://www.sbt.com/setting-targets)

We will discuss carbon emissions and how to reduce them - in greater detail in section 4.



11. Pollution

Reducing pollution and managing harmful substances responsibly protects your workforce and the environment.

What can you do to get started addressing Pollution concerns in your business?

Train employees on safe handling, storage, and disposal of harmful substances.

Minimising the use of hazardous materials and finding greener alternatives – where possible.

Consider the impact of your operations on the local environment e.g. water run-off and seek third party advice if appropriate.

Ensure all chemicals are labelled and stored safely and according to regulations, in spill-proof containers and away from drainage systems, to prevent accidental pollution.

Remind employees to dispose of paints and other everyday items as instructed by the manufacturer.

12. Sustainable Products & Services

Meeting customer demand for sustainable products and services.

What can you do to get started addressing Sustainable Products & Services in your business?

Set up initiatives that allow customers to return old or used products for recycling, repurposing, or safe disposal, helping to close the product lifecycle loop.

Highlight sustainable products in marketing and customer communications.

Encouraging customers to make eco-conscious choices.

Begin by offering your customers a small range of sustainable products or services.

People & Community

13. Health & Safety

Strong health and safety practices reduce accidents and injuries, ensuring a safer workplace and lowering insurance costs.

What can you do to get started addressing Community Engagement in your business?

Conduct a health and safety assessment to identify potential hazards and risks in the workplace.

Provide basic health and safety training for all employees.

Ensure that all safety equipment, such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits, are up to date, easily accessible and regularly maintained.

Install adequate lighting in all work areas to prevent accidents, especially in high-risk zones such as warehouses and factories.



For more information

on how you can ensure your operation can implement a robust Health & Safety environment see [HSE: Information about health and safety at work](#)



14. Working Environment (Own Workforce)

Positive working conditions lead to higher employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention, while reducing recruitment costs.

What can you do to get started addressing Working Conditions in your business?

Make sure you are compliant with workplace regulations by reviewing employment laws.

Labour Relations Agency [Labour Relations Agency - Official | Improving employment relations in Northern Ireland \(lra.org.uk\)](https://www.lra.org.uk)

Improve workplace facilities, such as break rooms or rest areas.

Provide some flexibility of working for parents of young children, or those with elderly parents or those that act as carers for others.

Conduct regular employee surveys to assess satisfaction and identify areas for improvement in working conditions.

Provide parental leave, compassionate leave and other forms of leave to support employees during key personal moments.

Ensure that you have a consistent approach to employee treatment – to avoid challenges in the future.

15. Community Engagement

Engaging with the community strengthens a business's connection with their locality and helps create a positive social impact, benefiting both the business and the community.

What can you do to get started addressing Community Engagement in your business?

Participate in local clean-up events, cultural, arts, and heritage events or community environmental projects.

Sponsor or donate to a local charity or sustainability initiative.

Offer employees paid volunteer days to engage in community service.

Prioritise sourcing materials or services from local businesses, contributing to the community's economic stability and growth.

→ aibni.co.uk/steps-to-sustainability

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