

VIY Environmental Sustainability Policy

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1. Background

VIY (Volunteer It Yourself) teaches young people trade skills by helping them to renovate community buildings; places like youth clubs, community centres, sports clubs and supported housing.

In delivering this work, we recognise our responsibility to reduce our environmental impact and to use our platform to educate and inspire more sustainable practices within the construction sector. Many of our projects are small-scale but high-impact, and we are committed to making them examples of low-carbon, resource-efficient delivery.

2. Our commitment and aims

Overall goal:

To reduce the environmental impact of our operations and projects while building awareness and action on sustainability among the young people and communities we work with.

In doing so, we want to demonstrate that construction with VIY can be 'good for the planet' as well as for youth, community and volunteering.

This policy will align with other relevant policies and guidance, including our Retrofit and Green Skills Offer (an internal document) as well as our [Carbon Reduction Plan](#).

Key aims:

- Comply with and exceed relevant [environmental legislation and sector guidance](#).
 - Prioritise sustainability in project set up, delivery, and sign-off
 - Collaborate with partners, funders and suppliers to promote innovation and sustainable construction practices, including relating to community retrofit, green construction methods and natural building
 - Equip young people with knowledge of sustainable practices in construction and empower them as green future workers
 - Actively reduce our organisational carbon footprint and set clear reduction targets (see Carbon Reduction Plan linked above)
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3. Focus areas

Strand 1: sustainable procurement

Because our budgets are limited and we frequently access donated materials, it can be challenging to ensure that we procure sustainably. That said, here are some key steps we can take towards sustainable procurement:

- Use FSC-certified or reclaimed timber wherever feasible
- Utilise Community Repaint initiatives on retrofit projects where possible
- Favour local suppliers to reduce transport emissions and support local economies
- Prioritise materials with Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) and low embodied carbon
- Create a preferred supplier list based on sustainability credentials, as well as preferred materials from these suppliers
- Require partners/donors to confirm environmental policies where significant in-kind donations are involved (or research ourselves where this requirement is not feasible)

Strand 2: sustainable resource use

This is likely the area where we can have the most immediate impact.

On-site practices:

- Set minimum waste diversion targets (e.g. 75% of project 'waste' diverted from landfill and recycled/reused)
- Promote reuse of materials from previous projects and partner sites, including use of storage facilities where possible
- In line with our Retrofit and Green Skills Offer, actively seek out opportunities for retrofit and improving energy-efficiency across VIY projects
- Look to include biodiversity enhancements where possible on projects (e.g. planters, insect hotels, green roofs)
- Linked to sustainable procurement above, use low-VOC paints and non-toxic materials to support indoor air quality

Operational practices:

- Implement a travel hierarchy prioritising public transport, car sharing, or EVs, recognising that travel by car is usually the most straightforward for project staff
- Continue to use digital tools to reduce need for in-person meetings
- Continue to encourage hybrid working where applicable to reduce commuting emissions
- Continue to prioritise use of refurbished tech including laptops and mobile phones wherever possible
- Develop an approach to digital emissions (including large attachments) as well as a policy towards use of AI (recognising it is resource-intensive)
- Where possible in future, offset essential travel through a certified scheme
- Conduct annual audits on office resource use where relevant (energy, water, paper, waste)

Strand 3: education and engagement

- Continue to offer Environmental Awareness as a key City & Guilds accreditation for VIY participants

- Build our collaboration with colleges, training providers and youth organisations on green construction skills, including Level 1 and 2 Retrofit/Energy-Efficiency accreditations
 - Promote and develop projects and project case studies highlighting our work in retrofit, green skills and sustainability
 - Provide training for staff and mentors in relevant areas (e.g. Retrofit courses, SEATS environmental awareness)
 - Support pathways into retrofit and green jobs in construction for all relevant young people
 - Calculate emissions savings through retrofit projects for wider dissemination and as part of our case for community retrofit
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4. Monitoring and governance

The following aim to provide oversight and guidance on the above:

- Appoint an Environmental Sustainability Lead within the team (NB this is our Retrofit and Green Skills Director, Tom Hague)
 - Develop and maintain a carbon footprint baseline and reduction pathway (see separate Carbon Reduction Plan)
 - Provide regular updates to our Advisory Board on sustainability
 - Report annually on environmental performance via our Impact Report
 - Explore accreditation or benchmarking (e.g. Investors in the Environment, ISO 14001 Lite, or BREEAM for refurbishment)
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5. Partnerships and sector alignment

We aim to work with our partners and other relevant sectors to further our environmental sustainability aims, as follows:

- Working with partners with a dedicated interest in sustainability (e.g. Future Leap, Centre for Sustainable Energy, Sustainability West Midlands) to share and develop good practice

- Contribute to policy discussions on green skills and community retrofit initiatives - via relevant working groups such as National Retrofit Hub and English Heritage as needed - as a means to engage in sustainability more broadly
 - Apply for funding specifically targeting retrofit, green skills, climate or sustainability in construction
 - Participate in local Climate Action Plans or similar initiatives close to regional bases
 - Create a comms and marketing plan to ensure wide stakeholder engagement with our work in sustainability, including our Retrofit and Green Skills Offer.
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6. Review and Action Plan

This policy will be developed into an ongoing Action Plan which will cut across the key points outlined above. This Action Plan will be reviewed quarterly, and this policy itself annually.