



The Veterinary Defence
Society Limited

Sustainability Impact Report

June 2023



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Introduction

The Veterinary Defence Society is deeply rooted in a heritage that stretches back over 150 years. This legacy, driven by the need to protect and support the veterinary professions, has instilled in us a deep sense of responsibility towards our communities and the world we inhabit.

As we reflect on our journey so far and look ahead to the future, we are determined to fulfil our responsibility to our planet too. We'll always keep our focus on delivering exceptional services and support, to veterinary professionals, but our desire is also to work in a way that ensures a sustainable future for all.

Sustainability, to us, is the natural evolution of our ethos of protection and support. A tangible testament to our commitment, to ensure a future where our actions and operations contribute positively to the world.



Our journey towards sustainability has not been a solitary one. Instead, it has been marked by collaboration, learning, and the shared desire to make a positive impact. We have sought the expertise of our peers, looked to industry best practices, and listened to our teams and members' expectations.

Together, we have embarked on a mission to ensure that our Society, in all its activities considers the needs of our business and the health of our planet.

This report provides a view of our efforts to move towards a business model that places environmental sustainability at its heart. Celebrating our successes, understanding our challenges, and envisioning the possibilities of a sustainable future. One that aligns with our professional obligations and our ethical commitments.

“Embracing sustainability is not just an obligation, but a responsibility and a choice, which we have proudly taken. We are working towards a thriving future for veterinary professionals, practices, and the environment we all share.”

Joanne Stonehewer
Director of Membership VDS



Our story so far

Why sustainability?

As a Society, deeply ingrained in the veterinary professions, we are acutely aware of the intricate balance of life on this planet. The delicate ecosystems, the vast diversity of life, and the fundamental and interconnected roles of all animal species and human beings - they are central to the work that our members accomplish every day.

Sustainability is a direct reflection of these wider themes. It is about recognising that we are part of a larger whole, and that our actions have profound effects on the health and wellbeing of our planet and its wildlife.

The value we place on sustainability is fundamentally intertwined with our mission and vision as a Society. We strive to support our members in their professional endeavours, defend their interests, and promote the welfare of animals and the environments they inhabit.

To truly uphold these commitments, we know that we must do so in a manner that is environmentally responsible and sustainable.



Our Approach

Our approach has been rooted in understanding our current impact, setting clear goals for improvement, and implementing systematic changes to achieve these goals.

The core of our efforts is based upon continuous learning, transparency, and accountability.



Our commitment to sustainability is not a separate initiative; it is an integral part of who we are and what we do.



Aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Our planet is facing massive economic, social and environmental challenges. To combat these, the UN SDG's define global priorities and aspirations for 2030.

VDS's alignment with the UN SDGs represents our steadfast commitment to a sustainable future. We understand that our actions today have an immense impact on the world of tomorrow, and through our ongoing efforts, we are dedicated to making that impact a positive one. It's an ambitious journey, but one that we're proud to be embarking upon.



The SDG's will help to improve our long-term resilience and business model. However, alignment is not merely about choosing goals that resonate with our mission. It requires taking the next crucial step of setting specific targets against each of these goals. This enables us to track our progress, maintain accountability, and ensure that we are making a tangible difference.

We have selected specific SDGs that closely align with our long term aims and values, and have set clear targets under each goal.

Protect Our Planet



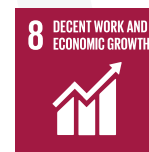
We are determined to mitigate the negative impact of our activities on the planet. We commit to reduce our carbon footprint, build climate change knowledge, and encourage sustainable practices and waste reduction. In a pioneering move, we are also developing a Net Zero plan to be shared publicly in 2024.

Affordable and Clean Energy



We pledge to source 100% renewable energy, reduce energy consumption, and share energy-saving actions for our colleagues working from home.

Health and Wellbeing for All



We are committed to safeguarding and enhancing the physical and mental wellbeing of our colleagues and members. We will support our colleagues and members in times of need, continue to support VetLife and the IVBF, and promote equity and inclusion in our workspaces.

A Good Life for Animals



We promise to protect veterinary professionals, practices and businesses, enabling them to focus on animal health and welfare, avoid investing in companies that profit from habitat loss or animal cruelty, and procure food from sustainable and animal-friendly sources.

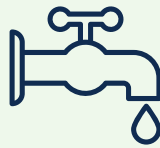
Our impact

Accurate measurement of our environmental impacts has enabled us to implement targeted and effective reduction efforts.



We began our sustainability journey by implementing our environmental policy and a waste management plan. These foundational documents provided the roadmap for our sustainable practices and set the standards for our operations. Next, we embarked on the task of understanding our environmental impact.

By calculating our carbon footprint and meticulously recording and monitoring our consumption of key resources such as energy, water, and paper, we have gained a clear picture of where we stand.



Armed with this knowledge, we have set ambitious yet achievable reduction targets. To help us meet these targets, we have introduced numerous initiatives aimed at reducing our resource consumption.

From encouraging members to switch to digital communications, to introducing office-wide recycling bins, we are continually seeking ways to lessen our environmental impact. Our efforts are not confined to just one person or team.

We have seen the power of education and awareness in driving sustainable change. That's why we have made efforts to keep our whole team, and our members, informed about our environmental initiatives and progress.

Through regular updates, we aim to foster a culture of sustainability within our organisation. One where each of our colleagues and members feel empowered to contribute to our collective sustainability goals.

Many small actions lead to big impacts



Our commitment to environmental sustainability is reflected in the practical steps we have taken to minimise our environmental impact.

We have focused our efforts on four key areas:

- Reducing our carbon footprint
- Managing waste effectively
- Conserving energy
- Reducing water consumption.

While we are proud of our achievements, we know that there is always room for improvement and are committed to continuing our sustainability journey.



Reducing our carbon footprint has been a priority for us. We have achieved this by investing in renewable energy sources for our offices, promoting remote work, and many other changes. Our sustainable travel plan encourages car sharing and the use of public transport wherever possible. Through these measures, we have managed to significantly reduce our emissions.



Waste management initiatives are aimed at reducing the waste generated by our operations and ensuring responsible disposal. We have introduced recycling programs in our office, and purchase supplies made from recycled materials whenever possible. Furthermore, we have eliminated single-use plastics from our premises and encourage our members to do the same.



Energy conservation is key, and what we do use is from a 100% renewable source. We have implemented energy-saving measures such as installing LED lights, encouraging everyone to turn off equipment when not in use, and optimising heating and cooling systems. We also purchase energy-efficient appliances and electronic equipment for our offices.



Water conservation is an often-overlooked aspect of environmental sustainability, but one we take very seriously. We have installed water-efficient fixtures in our offices and encourage our staff to use water responsibly.

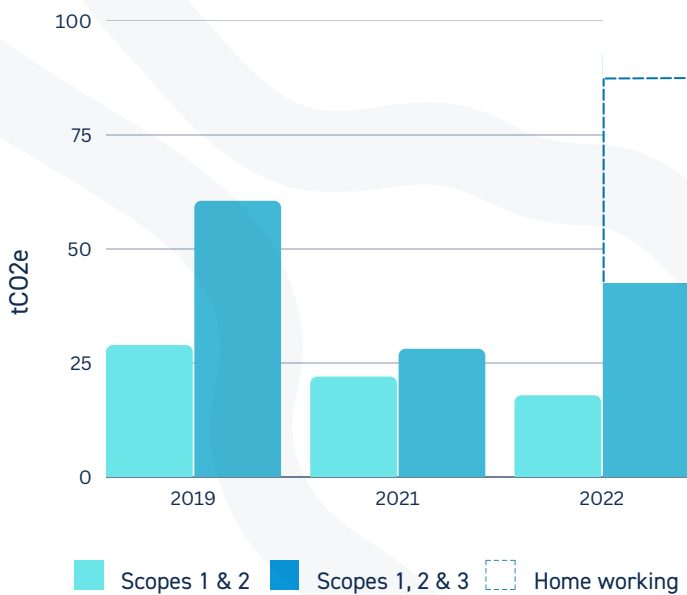
Controlling our carbon footprint



One of the most significant metrics in assessing our sustainability efforts is our carbon footprint.

Measuring our carbon emissions allows us to quantify our environmental impact, and establish clear targets for reduction.

Between 2019 and 2021, we saw a significant reduction in our total carbon emissions. In 2019, our total carbon emissions stood at 60.43 tCO₂e. This decreased by 47% in 2020 to 31.67 tCO₂e, and by 2021, we had achieved a further decrease to 28.02 tCO₂e, representing a 53% reduction from our 2019 levels.



In 2022, our total emissions increased to 93.81 tCO₂e. It's crucial to note that this rise doesn't reflect a reversal of our sustainability efforts. Rather, it's due to the inclusion of new factors in our carbon footprint calculation, particularly the impacts associated with home working as our teams adapted following the global pandemic.

If we consider only Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions (which excludes the impact of homeworking), our carbon footprint has continued to decrease consistently. From 28.89 tCO₂e in 2019, we reduced these emissions to 25.00 tCO₂e in 2020, 21.95 tCO₂e in 2021, and further down to 17.91 tCO₂e in 2022. This data illustrates the effectiveness of our strategies in reducing our direct and energy-indirect carbon emissions.

Our efforts in reducing our carbon footprint are yielding significant results, but we're still continuously striving to improve. While the addition of new factors such as homeworking has increased our measured total carbon emissions, we're committed to including more of our value chain and Scope 3 emissions, so that we can take full accountability for our impact. We'll work towards innovative solutions to reduce these emissions, and continue our progress towards true sustainability.

Since 2019 we have reduced our Scope 1 & 2 emissions by 11 tonnes of CO₂e - that's the equivalent of 323,529 cups of tea!



Our social impact



We firmly believe that our impact extends beyond our commitment to environmental sustainability. Our dedication to creating positive change encompasses the well-being of veterinary professionals, the broader community, and the animals our members care for.

The heart of the VDS lies within its stakeholders: our members, employees, and the wider veterinary community. By recognising the essential role that each individual plays, we're trying to create a work environment that is not just functional, but also supportive, inclusive, and empowering.

Veterinary professionals are the backbone of our Society, both as employees and members, and we deeply value their contributions. The well-being of our employees directly translates to the quality of care and services we provide.

Our comprehensive employee well-being initiatives aim to foster a healthy work environment where our teams feel supported, valued, and empowered. We offer flexible work arrangements, mental health resources, and professional development opportunities, to ensure that our people have the tools they need to succeed both personally and professionally.

As part of our 150th anniversary in 2015, we donated £150,000 to Vetlife, and an additional €20,000 to the IVBF. Since then, we have donated over £700,000 split between these two organisations, whose absolutely vital work we support wholeheartedly.

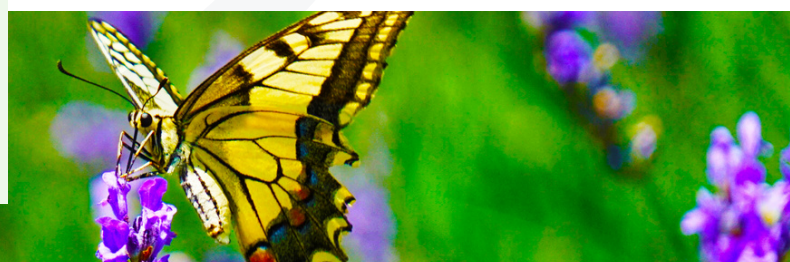


Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion remains steadfast. We believe that a diverse and inclusive workforce is crucial to driving innovation and promoting a sense of belonging. To this end, we have implemented policies that promote equal opportunities, irrespective of race, gender, age, or background.

By embracing diverse perspectives, we can better understand the needs of our teams and the members we support, leading to more inclusive and tailored solutions.

Recognising the impact of our actions on the wider community, we've launched several initiatives. These include supporting all of our colleagues with the opportunity to take an annual volunteering day, at a charity of their choice.

This year our teams have worked on various projects. Our whole company got involved to "Go the extra mile" for Ukraine and Great Ormond Street Hospital. They have also engaged in tree planting and conservation in urban areas, and have supported local wildlife efforts.



Sustainable growth



Our journey towards sustainability extends beyond our immediate operations, and into the broader spectrum of our business activities.

We have commenced a review of our supply chain, focusing on partnering with suppliers that demonstrate a clear commitment to sustainable and ethical practices. Our procurement policy favours products and services that align with our sustainability objectives, supporting local businesses wherever possible.

As a company that embraces our financial services regulatory requirements, we assess, monitor and act upon the financial risks of climate change that we face.

We're dedicated to responsible investment, ensuring that our financial activities have a positive impact on the world and have made recent changes to our investment portfolio as part of that journey. Investing wisely is not just about the potential for financial returns - it's also about contributing to a future that aligns with our values. A future where our planet is protected and our communities thrive.

Planning for long-term financial stability has been crucial. We have developed a comprehensive risk management strategy that considers climate-related risks and other sustainability-related uncertainties. We have also committed to regular audits to ensure transparency and accountability in our practices. We also assess, forecast and act upon any identified changes to our claims profiles and experience from climate change to ensure the ongoing relevance of our services to members and a robust solvency position.

Going Green

We are delighted to share that we recently achieved a significant milestone in our sustainability journey: the Green Accreditation from Investors in the Environment.

This recognition reflects our ongoing commitment to environmentally friendly practices and underscores our dedication to sustainable growth. The Green Accreditation is not simply an award, but a testament to our rigorous approach towards integrating sustainable practices into the very core of our business. Furthermore, it validates our strategy and commitment to continual improvement in this vital area.

We proudly view this accreditation as a reflection of our values, the hard work of our teams and our promise to our stakeholders. As we continue to build on this accomplishment, we are further motivated to create positive change, inspire others in our industry and beyond, and pave the way for a more sustainable future.



Looking ahead

We are focused on our mitigation efforts and widening our impact. We aim to further reduce our carbon emissions, increase our recycling rates, and broaden the scope of our social initiatives. Our future goals are ambitious, but we are confident in our collective ability to achieve them.

As part of our sustainability commitments, we will continue to monitor, review and take proactive measures to further reduce our environmental impact.

We plan to invest further in renewable energy sources and explore more opportunities to balance our carbon. We aim to achieve zero waste across all our operations, focusing on reducing, reusing, and recycling wherever possible. We're also working to refine our travel plan, to promote sustainable commuting options for our employees.

Our carbon reduction targets for the next five years are being set, reflecting our commitment to continuous improvement.



We plan to introduce more sustainability-focused training programmes, and create more opportunities for our teams and members to get involved in community engagement activities.

We collaborated with Vet Sustain to conduct a survey of our members on sustainability in veterinary practice. The results of this have been published in the Veterinary Record and will allow Vet Sustain to focus their efforts on producing needed resources.

Collaboration with Vet Sustain and the BVA helped our members to take climate action in their professional lives, with our Greener Practice webinar series.

Beyond these operational goals, we are aiming to foster a culture of sustainability that extends to every aspect of our operations. We want to ensure that every decision we make, from investment to recruitment, aligns with our commitment to sustainability.



Join us on our journey

We invite our members, employees, and stakeholders to join us on this transformative journey towards sustainability. By embracing sustainable practices in our professional lives and supporting our green initiatives, we can make a significant difference together.



For our members, this could mean choosing to update their contact preferences to reduce paper usage. For each switch we will also plant a tree on your behalf - so far our members have planted 1,247 trees!. Every little action counts and contributes to our collective impact.

Veterinary professionals are key to sustainability through their contributions to food safety, animal welfare, and public health.

They champion sustainable practices in livestock farming, ensuring our food systems are both eco-friendly and healthy. By responsibly using antibiotics and monitoring diseases, they safeguard the effectiveness of treatments and protect public well-being.

Many passionate individuals also lend their expertise to wildlife conservation efforts, treating injured animals, conducting research, and contributing to the preservation of biodiversity.

Veterinary professionals have a pivotal role to play in 'One Health', a global initiative that recognises the interconnectivity of human, animal, and environmental health. Their unique expertise enables them to monitor and control zoonotic diseases, safeguard food security, and promote animal welfare. This vital work contributes to maintaining the delicate balance within ecosystems and ensuring overall planetary health.

With their connection to animals and the environment, vets and veterinary nurses can inspire others to embrace sustainable living, creating a ripple effect for a greener future. Their contributions are vital in our shared journey towards a sustainable world.


As a Society with over 150 years of experience, we are honoured to be the chosen Professional Indemnity Insurers of the vast majority of UK and Irish veterinary professionals. We pledge to continue our work with the same values, vigour, and dedication as we incorporate sustainability at the heart of our operations.

We are not just an organisation – we are a community with a shared purpose. We appreciate your continued support and look forward to sharing more achievements in our sustainability journey with you.

So far, our members have helped us to plant over 1,200 trees!



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