



Futures in focus

Spring into sustainability



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Introducing our sustainability strategy: **doing more for the planet and for our customers**



Decarbonising Britain's homes is essential to tackling the climate emergency, but at Futures we also see this as a massive opportunity to help our customers by making their homes more comfortable and cheaper to run. We also want to create green spaces around our homes that help well-being and improve health for our communities.

Improving sustainability is a central part of our corporate strategy. We're working hard to understand our carbon footprint and look at how we can reduce our impact on the planet. While this may mean we all have to make changes in how we live, we are looking at ways to support our colleagues, customers and partners to make sustainable moves to reduce our impact on the environment. Our focus right now is on understanding what we can do to make our customers' homes more energy efficient, reduce fuel costs and ensure that homes are warm and safe to live in.

We are planning to invest a significant amount of money in the properties we own with the aim of making Futures net zero by 2050.

I truly believe that together we can make a difference to climate change. If you're a customer, colleague or partner, please get in touch by emailing sustainability@futureshg.co.uk.



Ceri Theobald

Group Director Strategic Partnerships & Growth

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An overview of the strategy

Improving our sustainability is a key objective for Futures. It supports our vision of providing great places, great services and great tomorrows. We also believe that helping both our customers and the planet more is simply the right thing to do.

Sustainability can describe lots of things. We think sustainability is about meeting the needs of the present without risking future generations' ability to meet their own needs. For us sustainability means doing more to support the natural world, drive economic growth and create a fairer world for everyone. At Futures we will continue to respect the environment, find smarter ways of working and be a stable business with a strong future. Our strategy sets out an approach to improving our sustainability in a way that is:



Holistic

This means integrating sustainability throughout our business, woven into all our strategies, representing our communities and being an intrinsic part of our culture and operations.

Affordable

We have to balance affordability with environmental outcomes. For example, it's no good making changes that make our homes unaffordable to run. A sustainable future is one that supports the planet, and our people.



Collaborative

We can't go on this journey alone, so we'll work with our customers, other organisations and the Government to achieve the best outcomes for everyone.





Data-driven

We'll use data to shape our decision-making, and work with industry experts to make sure that our approach is up-to-date, effective and based on hard evidence.

Continuous

We'll embrace new technologies and ways of working. We will also update our standards for our new and existing homes, and we'll keep looking for ways to improve our environmental impact.

The strategy sets out how we will:

-  **Make homes more affordable for our customers.**
-  **Improve our public and green spaces.**
-  **Improve the energy performance of our customers' homes and our organisation.**
-  **Support the local economy.**

There are four strands to the strategy, looking at different parts of our work - **our assets** (ie the things we own – mainly properties and land), **customers, culture and governance** (ie how we manage and control how Futures is run). Our work to deliver the strategy is overseen by a steering group and working groups to make sure that we stay on track.



01

Our assets

Our new and existing homes and the outdoor spaces around them are key to creating sustainable communities. We will aim to stop fuel poverty and create warm, affordable and energy efficient homes that help our customers to live sustainably. We will improve the biodiversity of our greenspaces and create clean and attractive communities.



02

Our customers

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do. We will work with them on the journey to net zero and support them as we introduce more low-carbon heating. Our money advice, employability and tenancy sustainment services will help customers to manage debt, get into employment and education, and live independently and sustainably.



03

Our culture

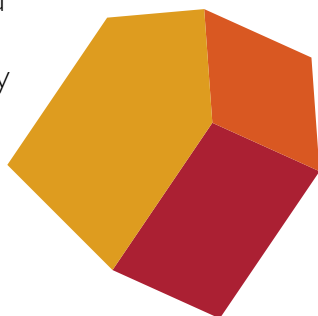
We will find greener, cleaner ways of working across our whole organisation. We will train our team members about carbon literacy to support them on the journey to net zero. We will also work with our suppliers to help them understand and reduce their environmental impact and will only work with companies that deliver social value to their communities.



04

Our governance

We will use accurate and reliable data to inform our decision-making and to manage risk. We will measure and monitor our progress toward reducing our carbon footprint, and stop using resources that don't meet the energy and social needs of our customers.



What does it all mean?



Sustainability is a hot topic at the moment, and it means something different to everyone – and that's because it's such a complex subject.

For one person, sustainability is about changing their shopping habits and recycling more, but for a business it might be addressing issues in their supply chain or big projects to reduce their carbon footprint. Because it's so varied, it can be difficult to keep up with the language around sustainability and understand exactly what it all means.

We've put together this jargon buster to make sure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to our sustainability strategy at Futures. We want to bring everyone along on the journey with us – and to do that, we all need to start from the same point. So, with that in mind, here's what we mean when we talk about...



Greenhouse gases or emissions

An emission is a by-product from things that people do that is released into the environment. A good example of this is when your car uses petrol. The engine burns the fuel, releasing waste gases that go out of the exhaust pipe and into the atmosphere. There are seven greenhouse gases that contribute directly to climate change, including carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O). Human activity is increasing the amount of greenhouse gases being released into the atmosphere. These gases trap heat in the atmosphere, which increases global temperatures and causes climate change.

Carbon neutral

Carbon neutral is when a person or organisation takes action to 'offset' any carbon emissions they make. They continue putting out gases containing carbon but at the same time doing other things to try to cancel them out. This includes things such as planting trees and is known as 'offsetting'. Carbon neutral can be achieved entirely by offsetting although as carbon only makes up around 80% of greenhouse gases, it can't tackle the climate crisis alone.



Net zero

Net zero means trying to stop people and companies using or creating any greenhouse gases in the first place, rather than trying to offset what they emit. Net zero is the internationally agreed goal for taking action against global warming.

Carbon footprint

A carbon footprint is the amount of carbon emissions released into the atmosphere by the activities of individuals, communities or businesses. Carbon footprint is about the emissions caused by human activity, rather than emissions that occur naturally in the environment (for example from volcanoes).



Biodiversity

Biodiversity refers to the variety of living species on earth, including plants, animals, bacteria and fungi. Each of these species work together in ecosystems to support life. Biodiversity supports everything in the natural world that we need to survive including fresh water, pollination for food production, medicine and shelter. If we can improve biodiversity, we make it easier for our planet to sustain us.



Fuel poverty

This is a term used by professionals to describe people or households that are struggling to meet their energy or heating costs. Having a lower income or living in a home that is not energy efficient can cause fuel poverty. Rising energy costs put a lot of pressure on people and can sometimes mean that they have to make difficult lifestyle choices that can affect their health and wellbeing.



EPC (Energy Performance Certificate)

The energy efficiency performance of a building is currently assessed by an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). These are graded on a scale of A (most efficient) to G (least efficient). The assessment looks at both the cost of fuel for the property and its level of CO₂ emissions. The higher your rating, the more energy efficient your home is, which means it's likely to be cheaper to run.

Retrofit

Retrofitting means upgrading a building to make it more energy efficient and to reduce its contribution to climate change. An example of this might be adding more insulation. As well as helping reduce global warming, this usually makes homes more comfortable to live in and can also reduce running costs.



Fabric first

This is another term used by professionals in climate change. It means focusing on improving the energy efficiency of a building by putting in insulation before installing new types of 'clean' heating, such as heat pumps, that don't use fossil fuels. This approach reduces energy demand – which means it takes less energy to heat the home – which in turn helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and makes homes cheaper to heat. Fossil-fuel-free heating can be added later to deliver even more benefits.

RetroFIT for the Future...

In 2019, the UK became the first nation to pass laws to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

To meet this target, all emissions from housing need to be eliminated by 2048, according to the Climate Change Committee. The UK has some of the oldest and least energy efficient homes in Europe, which is driving the need to retrofit more homes. The Government has targets for all 'fuel poor' and social homes to meet EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) Band C by 2030, to help tackle climate change and fuel poverty.

At Futures, we know we have an opportunity to retrofit existing properties to create healthy homes that are energy efficient, comfortable and fit for the future. Our approach to retrofit follows a 'worst first, fabric first' approach, which means we will focus on improving the energy efficiency of the worst performing homes first and then move on to properties that are already more energy efficient.

We will upgrade existing homes with external wall, cavity wall fillings, floor and loft insulation. We may also fit internal wall insulation but only when it's essential as the work can be very disruptive to our customers. In some cases we may upgrade windows, doors or boilers – but these typically need replacing sooner than insulation so we will focus on longer lasting measures such as insulation to get the best value for money.

These changes will reduce energy bills and fuel poverty, help improve the wellbeing of our customers and reduce our carbon footprint. Further down the line we want to install more clean heating systems but these will deliver greater benefits in homes with better insulation.

The 'fabric first' approach will help to reduce overall demand for energy nationally so that there is less need for fossil fuels and help to protect households from rising energy costs.

Keeping cosy in Ironville

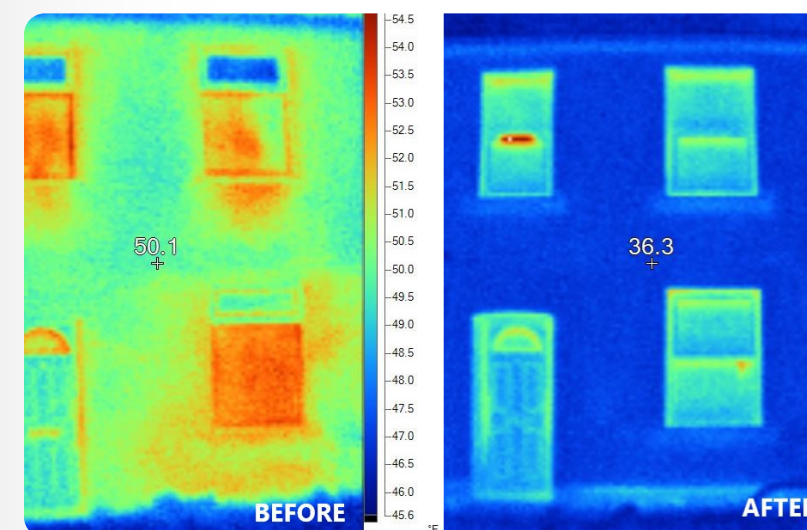


Thanks to a partnership with Amber Valley Borough Council, 21 homes in Ironville are in the final stages of having external wall insulation (EWI) installed.

This work should improve the energy efficiency of these homes, make them more comfortable to live in and reduce energy bills. All the houses are made with solid brick walls and were built over 100 years ago so the new insulation will significantly improve how warm they are as well as heating costs – and all without too much disruption to residents, as the work is done on the outside.

Alongside the external wall insulation we updated the windows at 15 of the homes and installed 14 Switcher smart thermostats. These give customers greater control over their heating, which in turn should result in lower fuel bills and reduced energy consumption.

The Switchers monitor the environment in the home and this has already shown that the average time for the properties to warm up by 1 degree has fallen to just 59 minutes, compared to over 2 hours before the work.



We used a special thermal camera to see where heat escapes from the homes before and after the insulation was added. Blue shows cooler areas and green, yellow and red show warmer zones. The walls are now much cooler on the outside and our customers' homes will be retaining more heat. You can also see from the pictures how new double-glazed windows are keeping heat in.

Thanks to some new government grants, more Futures homes will now be getting EWI upgrades. If you have recently had EWI installed or have been told you are on the list for improvements, we'd love to hear from you. How was the process and are you seeing a difference in your energy bills or how the house feels to live in? Drop us a line to communications@futureshg.co.uk.

What does sustainability mean to you?

We're committed to making meaningful, long-term change that supports our customers as well as the planet. With that in mind, we spoke to our amazing My Voice community to find out what sustainability means to them – because we want to bring everyone along with us on our journey to a more sustainable future. Here are a few responses from our community:



We need to clean up this planet for future generations.

- Brenderick

Everybody making small changes collectively makes a big difference... teaching our children this will secure our future.

- Proudmummy89

Being active in my local community 'and' in the My Voice community. Looking after my health by getting more exercise, walking and gardening. Cutting down on waste. Being more thrifty - not spending too much on food and clothing. Batch cooking - making my own ready meals for the freezer.

- Joyce B

All shall be given space to grow your own.

- Bigdon

The old adage of make do and mend rather than the current throw away society.

- Liesa

Want to join the conversation?
Visit myvoice.cmnty.com to join My Voice and help shape the future of Futures.

Planet-friendly gardening



Over the next few months you're probably going to be thinking about getting out into the garden so it's ready for those long summer days with the BBQ and the sun shining. But did you know that your garden is another great place where you can make a difference to our planet? Check out our easy tips for making your garden a more planet-friendly place.

Plants for pollinators



Inviting pollinators like bees and butterflies into your garden is a great way to enhance the ecosystems in your local area. By picking plants that are attractive to them, you're giving them the food they need to pollinate more plants – essential for growing the food we all eat. The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has lists of plants ideal for bees and butterflies. Check it out: rhs.org.uk/plantsforpollinators

Go peat free



Peatlands play a hugely important role in soaking up carbon from the atmosphere and are a vital part of the planet's ecosystem. To help preserve them, avoid using compost with peat and keep peat in bogs not bags! More on this here from The Wildlife Trusts: wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-go-peat-free

Keep off the grass



Highly manicured lawns may be pretty but then can produce more greenhouse gases than they soak up! Mowing half as often, swapping a petrol mower for an electric one and using hand tools rather than strimmers can reduce carbon emissions, support biodiversity and save time. Did you know, some Brits spend two months of their entire lives just mowing the grass?

No diggity!



No dig gardening is really gaining pace in the UK. Rather than digging soil to remove weeds, which disturbs the soil's ecosystem, you can try different practices such as shallow hoeing, hand weeding and using organic matter such as cardboard boxes for mulching. More on this here: horticulture.co.uk/no-dig-gardening

Leave those leaves



Fallen leaves provide winter habitats for insects and protect early plants from the worst frosts. If you can't stand them on your lawn rake them onto your borders as mulch. If that still pops your head how about using them as compost instead of chemical fertiliser. Fallen leaves provide precious nutrients – find out more by visiting blog.nwf.org/2014/11/what-to-do-with-fallen-leaves

Things you can do to make a difference

It can be really overwhelming when you think about all the different ways that you can live more sustainably – even with all the information at our fingertips, knowing where to start can be really tricky!

That's why organisations like the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) have put together a carbon footprint calculator, which asks you questions to determine where you can make the biggest impact on your sustainability journey. Visit footprint.wwf.org.uk/ to take the quiz and find out what you might want to focus on. Here are some top tips for each area:

Home

- Make the switch to LED lightbulbs, and make sure you're turning off appliances at the switch when you're not using them. Chargers keep using power when plugged in even if the appliance you are charging up has been unplugged.
- When it's time to switch, look for renewable energy providers that use greener, cleaner energy sources.
- Repurpose and reuse furniture rather than buying new, or look for second-hand or nearly new options on Facebook marketplace and shops like the British Heart Foundation.



Travel

- The most eco-friendly transport option is cycling – it creates no emissions, keeps you fit and healthy and keeps cars off the road. It's also one of the cheapest options after the initial cost of the bicycle.
- If cycling's not for you, consider public transport options like buses and trains instead of jumping in the car for every journey. Remember, you don't have to completely cut something out to make a difference – even small changes can have a big impact overall.
- Still need the car? Try to maximise your fuel efficiency by removing unnecessary weight, keeping your tires at the right air pressure and reducing your speed where it's safe to do so.

Food

- One of the biggest impacts you can have on the environment is reducing meat, fish and dairy in your diet. You don't need to cut it out entirely – even going meat-free once or twice a week could make a real difference.
- Eating locally and seasonally is another way to change your habits and get more variety into your diet, all while minimising your carbon footprint. Visit your local greengrocer for advice or look for 'wonky' veg boxes in the supermarket – the vegetables are still perfectly good for cooking, but they're just not as pretty!
- Limit your food waste as much as possible by finding creative ways to use your scraps. If you've not got room for composting, making crisps out of potato peelings or stock from the stalks, tops and leaves of your vegetables gets you more bang for your buck and less waste. Win-win!

Stuff

- Break up from fast fashion by shopping thriftily – check out charity shops, apps like Vinted or Depop or ask others in your local community if they'd be up for a good old fashioned swap meet! It's a great way to extend the life of your clothes and save money.
- Try to think quality over quantity when shopping – whether it's clothes, toys for your little-uns, or items for your home. It's much more sustainable to save up for one really good quality item than buy the same lower quality item three times over.
- Consider wooden or natural rubber toys for children rather than plastic, as these are likely to last longer and can be handed down to siblings, cousins or friends of the family when they're done with them.



Get involved in sustainability at Futures



Our strategy is full of long-term projects that are really embedding sustainability into the fibre of our organisation – so in some cases, it may be a little while before you see the results of them.

In the meantime, there's lots you can do to get involved in our sustainability work:



We might get in touch with you to tell you we want to retrofit your home, so keep an eye out for more information in the post or over the phone. We're also keen to hear from customers who've already had this work done, so we can share your stories with other customers and show the difference it's made. If you'd like to take part, email communications@futureshg.co.uk



Follow our helpful tips, found in this magazine and on our website. You can even keep an eye out for Steph's sustainability tips in our monthly customer newsletter, and our energy saving guide, coming soon! Get involved by signing up to be a part of our My Voice community, where you can share your own tips and get advice and ideas from other customers on making sustainable changes.



This is just the beginning of our sustainability journey, and we want to take you along with us. If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact us at communications@futureshg.co.uk and we'll be happy to help.



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