
Environmental Action Plan

The Society of Garden Designer's commitment to addressing the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and over-consumption of natural resources

FOREWORD

We are in a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. People are over-consuming natural resources and our current lifestyles are not sustainable, as defined by the UN Brundtland Commission “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.¹

In the UK, the construction industry contributes 6.7% of its total carbon footprint.² Whilst the contribution of landscape construction to these figures is unknown and is likely very small, there is clearly a culture of covering gardens in hard-landscaping or the ilk. This is likely to have a negative environmental impact, not just with regards to embodied carbon.

Half the world’s population lives in urban areas and projections suggest that this will increase to 66% by 2050.³ Apart from the overconsumption of natural resources and having a severe effect on ecosystem services, expansion of urban areas also divides up land resulting in fragmentation of natural habitats.³

However, private urban gardens in the UK amount to 520,000 hectares with public parks and gardens adding a further 44,000 hectares, compared with a total area of

approx. 275,000 hectares of managed nature reserves in England, Wales and Scotland.⁴

This large amount of land therefore has the potential to sequester carbon, provide ecosystem services, and offer diverse habitats to help reverse the loss in biodiversity. Together, gardens and urban landscapes can help us to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

To do this will require fundamental changes to the way we approach design and build landscapes and gardens so they have a positive impact on the environment. This will require resources and training and better evidence to guide decision making.

This environmental plan sets out how The Society of Garden Designers will empower and support its members to make sustainable, nature-based design solutions; work with other landscape professionals to develop tools to help measure the environmental impact of their designs and advocate a change at the supply chain and at government level; and to lead through The Society’s own sustainable business practice.

Rachel Bailey, MSGD, SGD Sustainability Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In light of the climate and biodiversity emergencies, the Society of Garden Designers (The Society) has committed to take real and tangible action. The Society promises to support its members to tackle and adapt to these emergencies and to demonstrate how it and the wider landscape industry can produce landscapes that sequester carbon and thus contribute to the government commitments to reduce our green house gas emissions to zero by 2050.⁵

Taking the strategy of the Landscape Institute as its starting point, this report describes the overall mission and four strategic areas of direct action relevant to The Society and its members that The Society will undertake to address these issues.

The science has been abundantly clear: action is needed immediately on both climate and biodiversity immediately. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that in order to keep the rise in global temperatures below 1.5°C this century, emissions of carbon dioxide would have to be cut by 45% by 2030.⁶ Just as critically, we must also take action on halting the decline of biological diversity: both as an objective in its own right, and to prevent further ecosystem collapse. In 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) showed that up to one million species could be lost in coming decades,⁷ more than ever before in human history.

The climate emergency and biodiversity crisis are explicitly linked, and there is a strong interrelationship between climate change, biodiversity loss, and human wellbeing. The landscape sector is at the juncture of these issues, and our response must address the existential threats to all three. It has been shown that people who feel connected to nature do more to protect it.⁸ As landscape professionals, we can create places that encourage a direct connection between people and nature through their own back gardens and the places they interact with daily, helping to promote pro-environmental behaviours.⁸ We can create gardens and landscapes that are designed not only reduce the carbon footprint but help sequester carbon and build resilience into our environments to help them adapt to already-inevitable climate shifts. Together this

will result in gardens and landscapes that have a positive environmental impact.

The Society has a duty to respond to these threats. In 2019, the Committee on Climate Change called on professional bodies in the landscape industry to step up their efforts in helping the UK meet its obligations:

“[We are] challenging the relevant professional bodies, to increase their level of engagement with members regarding climate change, and to improve the training, guidance and professional accreditation they offer”⁹

The Society has responded to this call by developing a strategy focused upon four goals, relevant to The Society’s role as a professional body:

1. **Equipping the profession** to provide solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss and over-consumption of natural resources
2. **Regulating and monitoring** the sector to encourage greater sustainability
3. **Advocating** for measures to address the emergencies with governments and industry
4. **Leading through our own sustainable business operations.**

These four goals are described in this report, which sets objectives for us to meet, work streams to deliver them, and examples of specific actions and commitments we will need over the next three to five years.

This action plan is aligned closely with that of the Landscape Institute’s Climate and Biodiversity Action Plan (published in 2020).¹⁰

With this report, we are declaring that the Society of Garden Designers is committed to addressing the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and over-consumption of natural resources.

We have a lot to do. To start with, we will help our members to address these issues whilst collaborating across the professional landscape industries to share resources.

Together, we can do so much more. Join us today and declare your commitment.

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1. GUIDANCE AND TRAINING

WE WILL... EQUIP THE PROFESSION TO TACKLE THESE EMERGENCIES THROUGH THEIR BUSINESS AND THEIR WORK

Aligning with the Landscape Institute, this goal focuses on The Society's role as a source of guidance and training. Our role here is to equip the profession with the tools and resources they need to design, create, plan, manage and promote projects that address the biodiversity crisis and climate emergency. We will provide a hub for advice and knowledge-sharing between members, produce technical guidance and information assets, run training and networking events and use the combined expertise of our members to inform the practice of other professionals. We will work with other professionals in the industry to improve our practice and projects.

OBJECTIVES We will...		ACTIONS How we can meet this objective
1.1	Embed biodiversity and climate emergency considerations into all our technical guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We already have... a started to create a set of technical guidance notes on various materials. - Develop a programme of guidance across subject areas - Add to the guidance notes - some in house and others in collaboration with the wider profession, academics and experts in their field
1.2	CPD training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a programme of CPD - We already have ...available a series of webinars (as of Jan 2022) that offer sustainable design solutions to the landscape industry - Share case-studies within the organisation and other landscape bodies - Develop a library of resources. - Encourage cluster groups to visit and attract speakers from local suppliers
1.3	Ensure that practitioners can measure the environmental impact of their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the first instance, promote the use of the Pathfinder tool to calculate the embodied carbon & how long to carbon positive status - Develop a user-friendly tool to measure the impacts of their design using a UK-specific embodied carbon tool and later an environmental impact assessment tool working with other professional bodies and with suppliers - Determine how to measure changes in biodiversity due to the design? - Develop and disseminate a sustainability design framework that can be applied throughout the design process
1.4	Develop relationships to enable collaboration between academics and SGD designers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invite academics to offer input into the guidance of landscape design - Collaborate with the Landscape Institute on this

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Publish technical guidance notes on The Society's website and communicate these through the newsletter and journal.
- Develop and make available a library of resources including a comprehensive set of technical guidances for members and communicate these through the newsletter and journal.
- Incorporate a CPD programme on sustainability matters into The Society's existing CPD programme by Summer 2022.
- Initiate collaboration across the landscape professional organisations by end first quarter 2022.
- Set up an inter-landscape professional organisation working group by end of 2022 to address the issues set out in this plan and to instigate the development of an environmental impact assessment tool.
- Case-studies are recorded through the environmental impact assessment tool, which can be accessed by other members and shared with a wider audience.
- Academics as well as other experts in their field contribute to the technical guidance notes by December 2022.

Environmental action plan

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2. REGULATION AND MONITORING

WE WILL... USE OUR ROLE AS A REGULATOR TO MONITOR AND ENCOURAGE BEST PRACTICE

This goal focuses on The Societies' role as a regulator of professional competence. Our role here is to apply ethical and professional standards and duties, which ensure that being a Registered Member of The Society remains prestigious, respected and authoritative tole; to provide a monitoring and oversight of the sector, tracking trends and change over time; and to recognise exemplary practice through The Society's awards.

OBJECTIVES We will...		ACTIONS How we can meet this objective
2.1	Clarify and set new ethical and professional duties in relation to sustainability, climate and biodiversity	<p>SGD's activities: update the Mission statement & Code of Practice</p> <p>Adopt the LI/ IFLA Global Ethical Principles for the Landscape Profession? https://landscapewpstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2020/07/Global-Ethical-Principles-for-the-Landscape-Profession-consultation-draft-202007.pdf</p> <p>After adoption, update the Mission statement & Code of Practice, implement and develop guidance and resources for members to adhere to the new code of practice</p>
2.2	Revise / develop relevant CPD requirements and qualification pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce a minimum standard of 5 hours compulsory CPD for all SGD members per annum on sustainability-related matters - We have already... got an improved CPD recording system in place through an online platform - Revise/ develop a competency framework that aligns with the landscape Institute and that has the biodiversity and climate emergencies at its heart - Develop more stringent environmental criteria for adjudication
2.3	Support member's businesses to operate as low-carbon sustainable businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote tools and resources for calculating the carbon footprint for small and medium businesses - Support members to write a sustainability policy for their business
2.4	Monitor sector progress in sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embed sustainability metrics into future surveys to allow a measure of change to be recorded - Incentivise success in carbon measurement/ reduction/ biodiversity gain through case studies - use them to promote the landscape sector as a leader in sustainability via social media and our website - Work with the landscape and construction sector to establish industry-wide environmental targets and standards including carbon and waste reduction, and biodiversity gain
2.5	Award best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop a case-study library of best practice dedicated to these issues - We have already.... Introduced a new SGD award categories celebrating best practice in designing for the environment and sustainability to date. - Embed more stringent environmental criteria for award entry across all relevant SGD awards ensuring the 'best of ' is truly sustainable.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Publicly adopt the Global Ethical Principles for the Landscape Profession when finalised
- Members complete and record a minimum of 5 hours of CPD on sustainability matters out of a total 25 hours required per year by the end of December 2023.
- Award best practice through PR opportunities and through The Society's awards

Environmental action plan

The Society of Garden Designer's commitment to addressing the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and over-consumption of natural resources

3. POLICY AND ADVOCACY

WE WILL... ELEVATE THE VOICE OF LANDSCAPE IN ADVOCATING FOR GLOBAL CHANGE AND PUBLIC REFORM POLICY

This goal focuses on the Society's role as a national advocate for gardens as an important mitigator of climate change and biodiversity loss. Our role is to raise the influence and profile of the landscape sector and celebrate its successes, to lend our collective voice with the rest of the landscape industry to engage government and decision-makers to shape public policy, to promote the role of our member's in addressing national issues and to build partnerships with professional bodies and other national stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES We will...		ACTIONS How we can meet this objective
3.1	Develop evidence based policies for climate and biodiversity outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a programme of subjects for policies - Create a research and evidence-base for the links between landscape and climate/ biodiversity and how to maximise its impact - Connect with academics to help with this/ ask members for their help for potential contacts
3.2	Advocate for public policy change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage with the All Parliamentary Groups for Horticultural and Gardens (also see 3.4)
3.3	Increase our engagement and collaboration with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage proactively with neighbouring professions (eg planning, ecology, landscaping and architecture) to coordinate and share resources - Develop a relationship with landscape contractor's professional bodies (APL, BALI) so they are receptive to new installation techniques and materials that help meet our goals - Engage proactively with suppliers to produce lifecycle assessments of their products and to avoid greenwash
3.4	Stronger combined voice on the emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Join the LI and other landscape professional bodies to develop a set of agreed policies, approaches and aims - Empower our members to extend their influence on these topics at the local level through cluster groups.
3.5	Promote our commitment to addressing the emergency with the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge national debates on broader climate and biodiversity issues such as peat-use, artificial light at night, artificial turf/ plants - Promote award winners and relevant case studies through national press and social media - Promote suppliers and products who fulfil the sustainability criteria through sponsorship opportunities

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Change in public policies that are pro-environment and landscape
- Positive changes in methods and techniques adopted and used by landscaper contractors
- Active engagement between the various professional landscape bodies to implement agreed aims

Environmental action plan

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4. THE SOCIETIES OWN FOOTPRINT

WE WILL... ACT AS A SUSTAINABLE LEADER IN OUR OWN BUSINESS OPERATIONS

This goal focuses on the Society's role as an organisation in its own right. We are a Society that works in the interest of its members and the public and our role here is to lead by example in our own business practices, reducing our own carbon footprint, acting in a sustainable way, and ensuring that we are not setting a standard for others that we do not ourselves meet. By taking real actions and starting on this journey to improve, we will share what we learn and encourage others to follow.

OBJECTIVES We will...		ACTIONS How we can meet this objective
4.1	Reduce our carbon footprint to net-zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carbon audit of The Society's business - Develop a schedule to reduce carbon footprint with SMART goals - Set a target to reduce our corporate carbon footprint
4.2	Change practice across the whole business to reduce carbon emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change practice across the business to reduce carbon footprint, such as at conferences, symposia, in person CPDs, sponsors etc. - Work with/ switch suppliers to promote sustainable practices throughout the supply chain
4.3	Align our strategy with the UNSDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review and update our three-year strategy to be inline with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)
4.4	Communicate and ensure we are held accountable on these commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report against carbon reduction targets and sustainability in our annual reports - Report against our SMART Goals set for High level goals 1 to 4 - in the annual report and to our members in the newsletter. - Investigate suitable method of environmental certification for the SGD and implement it - Create business sustainability champions amongst members

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Develop and meet the schedule to reduce carbon footprint of The Society
- Develop environmental criteria for sponsorship and a strategy for phasing this in
- Regularly communicate to members reporting against our carbon reduction targets and sustainability through the Society's newsletter, journal and annual report.

Environmental action plan

The Society of Garden Designer's commitment to addressing the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and over-consumption of natural resources

So far

In October 2021, The Society has set up a Sustainability Working Group with the overall aim of putting together an overall strategy as to how we are going to tackle the two emergencies. We intend to work within The Society and with other professional bodies to:

- Empower its members and provide tools so member's can create low carbon, high biodiversity gardens using sustainably sourced materials
- To deliver CPD to increase member's knowledge
- Educate the public to The Society's sustainability strategy
- Work with colleagues in other professional bodies and Influence partners to implement sustainability strategies

We have...

- Created this report setting out the overall goals with their objectives and how we intend to meet these goals.
- Engaged with the Landscape Institute and the Association of Professional Landscapers and Horticultural Trades Association to work together in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises.

BOX 1. AREAS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Gain an understanding of the climate emergency, the biodiversity crisis and the UN Sustainability Goals

- Through formal and informal CPD

Translate an understanding of the issues into practice

- Low carbon material specification
- Low environmental impact/ nature-based design solutions
- Design and manage for adaptation
- Design for improved biodiversity
- Design for reduced natural resource consumption and minimal waste

Foster skills in collaboration

- Work with contractors and your supply chain
- Work with ecologists and experts in their field on sustainability matters

Measure Impact

- Before and after intervention

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The Society of Garden Designer's commitment to addressing the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and over-consumption of natural resources

Next Steps

This action plan is only the beginning and acts as a statement of the Societies commitment. We will be monitoring progress against the objectives over the coming years and working with this sector to seek new avenues to create change.

This report also represents the areas over which we have direct control as a professional society. Landscape is by its nature a collaborative discipline; we will have much greater influence working together as a sector and in partnership with other professions.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED...

Send us feedback: If we have overlooked something, please let us know. This is a working document and will be updated regularly. We want to hear your ideas and feedback on the areas set out in this document: whether there are other things you think we could be doing as a professional body, or whether there are better actions we can take to meet these ambitions.

Join a working group: to deliver these objectives and make a real difference, we are going to need lots of people to get involved. Over the coming months and years, we will be establishing task-and-finish working groups and advisory panels to help us deliver several of the action areas contained in this document – for

instance those in Boxes 1 and 2. If you would like to volunteer to join one of these groups, please contact us.

Send us case studies: We will be researching and promoting practical examples of how our members can make a difference on-the-ground. If you have a case study of good (or even bad) landscape practice – across design, planning, management or science – please share.

Partner with us: Finally, whether you are a SGD member, another professional, an organisation, policymaker, decision-maker, etc. – if you can help us deliver the ambitions set out in this document, please get in touch.

All enquiries and comments to: rachel.sustainability@sgd.org.uk

BOX 2. WORKING GROUPS TO:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop CPD programme on sustainability matters• Develop technical guidance notes• Collate resources to develop a library• Engage with industry professionals | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage with relevant organisations and researchers• Develop an environmental impact tool• Support member's businesses• Support The Society in achieving Goal 4 |
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Environmental action plan

The Society of Garden Designer's commitment to addressing the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and over-consumption of natural resources

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Environmental action plan

The Society of Garden Designer's commitment to addressing the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and over-consumption of natural resources