



Essex County Council
Environment and Climate Action



EARLY YEARS ADVICE PACK

Taking Action on Climate Change

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“ Climate change is a vital issue. By working together across our communities in Essex, we can create real positive change. ”

This advice pack is a collection of key guidance, tips, and information to help providers cut carbon, reduce their impact on the environment, raise awareness and help improve long-term sustainability across Essex.

The Essex Climate Action Commission has advised the county of Essex on the key steps to get to net zero emissions by 2050 in its report: **Net Zero, Making Essex Carbon Neutral.**

Early Years and Childcare providers have an essential role to play in supporting Essex to reach its net zero target. Examining and reducing the carbon footprint of their setting, embedding sustainability into the Early Years curriculum, and engaging with parents and the wider community, will support children to develop good habits from a young age.

Within the Early Years and Childcare system, we recognise there are many ways that Early Years provision is delivered, in many different settings, from large nursery chains to pack-away preschools, from childminders to forest schools. Large or small everyone has a role to play. Small changes undertaken together can have a lasting impact and often lead to new ways of thinking about how we live and work.

Reaching net zero will require change and proactive action from all of us, and will be achieved through making both large and small changes.



There are many practical and cost-effective (often free) changes you can make to help reduce your carbon emissions and ensure your setting is operating sustainably.



1. Teaching and Learning



Embedding sustainability into your EYFS curriculum

In 2015 the United Nations introduced its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Included in these goals is Education for Sustainable development (ESD), which features the aim to protect the environment and promote sustainability through teaching and learning. In England, those Sustainable Education objectives are reflected through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS 2021), and in Essex, they form part of our Early Years and Childcare Strategy.



Children are the future stewards of the planet, and we must teach them the skills they will need to fulfil this role.

Within the EYFS there is no prescribed curriculum, allowing practitioners the freedom to adopt their own pedagogy and develop a program around the needs of the children attending the setting. Ofsted - **“Leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give children, particularly the most disadvantaged the knowledge and cultural capital to succeed in life”** (OFSTED, 2023). It is important that ecological awareness and good sustainable practices are developed in our youngest citizens. Connecting children to nature and helping them form an attachment with their natural environment is the first step in their sustainable learning journey. This theme of nature and sustainable living can be woven through all areas of children’s development and should be seen as an integral part of the cultural capital of all children.

It is important that ecological awareness and good sustainable practices are developed in our youngest citizens.



Never too young to form good habits

We know from research that many of the attitudes and values we hold in later life are formed during the foundation stage.

Early years children absorb knowledge from all learning experiences and environments and by modelling what they see adults doing. Establishing sustainable practices and showing children the value of resources from an early age helps to establish positive habits that become skills for life.

Case Study - Fostering a life-long love of Nature

Encouraging a love of nature from a very young age is important for children’s health and wellbeing and for the wellbeing of the planet. Whenever possible get them outdoors and into nature.

The Essex Talk Listen Cuddle Campaign (TLC) has devised a fabulous **list of 50 fun things every child should have done by the time they are five years old** to help them learn and grow. This list can be used by settings and Early Years practitioners when planning activities or trips out, and it can be printed off and shared with parents. Most of these activities take place outside and will help foster a bond between children and the world around them.

TLC have also produced a very good **“Walk and Talk Out and About”** downloadable resource which is designed to promote interactions and conversations between parents and their children when outdoor.



2. Sustainable Action Planning

Everything from how you manage energy and waste, through to the food you serve and the resources you use, can have a huge impact on both the environment and your business costs.



Everyone has a part to play in moving towards net zero, but change cannot happen overnight. It is important to develop a strategic plan outlining the key steps you want to take.

One of the most important first steps you can take is to develop a **sustainable action plan or strategy**. Start by looking at your current carbon footprint and create an action plan of steps you will need to take to reduce your footprint. Some steps will be small and easy to achieve, while other steps will be larger and require more thought and planning. Having a realistic plan is the first step towards change.

In its simplest form, a sustainable plan should consider:

1. Your setting's commitment to sustainability
2. How sustainability will be interwoven into your curriculum and ethos.
3. The steps you can take across different areas (such as waste management, energy efficiency or food)
4. How you will take these steps and implement change (speaking to suppliers, upgrading your lights to light-emitting diode (LED) or moving to a renewable energy tariff)
 - You will need to consider timescales, staff support, budget and/or sources of funding.
5. Your metrics for success (how you will measure and evaluate your success – e.g., through meeting set targets)
 - You may also want to consider short, medium and long term targets and how these will be measured over time.

You can also join the [SME Climate Commitment](#) to halve greenhouse gas emissions before 2030; achieve net zero emissions before 2050; and disclose your progress on a yearly basis.

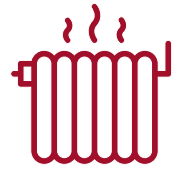


Calculating Environmental Impact

The first step of your plan was to calculate your carbon footprint, and there are a number of online tools which can help you to calculate your current carbon emissions and potential environmental and financial savings:

- [Carbon Cutting Essex App](#)
- Carbon Footprint – [Business Calculator](#)
- Climate Hero [Carbon Footprint Calculator](#) – allows you to measure personal and business-related operations, such as car journeys and hosting events
- The Carbon Trust – [SME Carbon Footprint Calculator](#) and [Energy Benchmark Tool](#)

When calculating your environmental impact, it is important to understand **scope emissions**:



Scope 1

Direct emissions from owned or controlled sources (such as heating and lighting the setting)



Scope 2

Indirect emissions through purchases made (such as electricity, heat and hygiene products and travel for work)



Scope 3

All other indirect emissions from a settings supply chain and associated activities (consider how parents/ staff travel to your setting, or food distribution chain)



Further information about scope emissions is available from a variety of sources, including [The Carbon Trust](#).



If you're concerned about the upfront cost of transforming your setting to be more environmentally-friendly – **don't fear**. The UK Government has a platform that allows you to search for **finance and support for your business** across several different areas and themes.



Communicating Sustainable Business Plans

Communicating your sustainable business plans and policies is important to raise awareness. This could be as simple as having **a dedicated page on your website**.



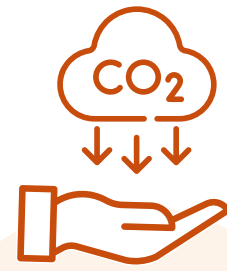
Friends of the Earth has developed a [Climate Action Plan for Schools resource](#). This pack contains a checklist of 50 measures that can be taken to help create meaningful actions towards combating climate change.

Although it is largely aimed at schools and older children, there are still plenty of ideas that can be incorporated into every setting and involve even our youngest citizens.

★ Early Years Charter

Our new **Early Years and Childcare Charter** embeds the vision from the Early Years and Childcare strategy, which sets out how we will help every child in Essex get the best start in life.

The charter supports our vision for children and families across the county and outlines how early years and childcare providers and partners will work more collaboratively to achieve this. This charter is created around four key principles, which we hope everyone working across the Early Years system in Essex will sign up to. Part of these principles includes looking for ways to reduce our carbon footprint and encourage and contribute towards the environment. We are committed to supporting settings by working together as an Early Years system and taking joint responsibility for achieving positive outcomes for all our families and a sustainable future.



These principles include looking for ways to **reduce our carbon footprint** and **encourage and contribute towards the environment**

➔ If you have not already signed up to the charter please **join today** for more information and useful resources to support your climate action plan - eycp.essex.gov.uk/essex-early-years-and-childcare-charter

🏆 Environmental Accreditation/ Sustainability Certification

Obtaining accreditation for your setting will demonstrate your environmental credentials and commitment to sustainable practices to your families and the wider community.

Many different schemes are available online. Some are free and others will charge, so it is worth looking around. There are also several online forums e.g. Gecco, Family, Tapestry, and nursery world, all offering free support, guidance and ideas which can be very helpful.



3. Waste

Waste prevention, reuse and recycling tackle climate change by better use of natural resources, saving energy and ultimately reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

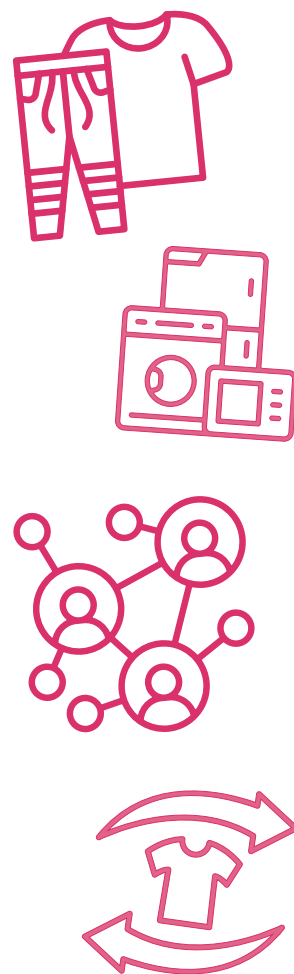


Case Study



Nannas Nursery in Colchester has a small cupboard outside their door where parents can help themselves to a mix of fresh and dried food without needing to ask. They have also redistributed blankets, clothes, toys and bikes to the local community.

Minimising waste means lower expenditure and carbon footprint – landfill should be the last resort. By developing a sustainable waste strategy now, you could be future-proofing your setting.



- **Explore second-hand markets** for items such as furniture and resources. There are a number of local schemes supported by Love Essex to help make these choices such as Freegle, the [Love Essex Fund](#), [clothes swap events](#), and the volunteer scheme [Love Essex Champions](#).
- For uniforms (if applicable), avoid uniforms imported from far afield. You might also wish to consider ways you can **reuse and recycle uniforms**. Could a second-hand uniform shop work at your setting?
- **Maintain and repair** items such as machinery or uniform. Consider a 'Mend it shelf', where toys and items are placed until they can be fixed. Allow the children to see that some broken things can be mended, as long as it is done properly and safely. The [Essex Shed Network](#) is a fantastic community of over 26 sites in Essex where small projects such as the repair of toys is often free (there may be a small fee to cover materials).
- **Use redistribution and sharing networks**, from donating surplus food to the local food bank or community fridge or using local Buy sell or swap sites to share unused equipment such as gazebos. Visit [Love Essex](#) for more ideas.
- **Host a clothing event** to swap or sell pre-loved clothing and potentially raise money for your school. Arrange a clothing collection with **LMB**, **Bag2School** or **Essex Textiles**. When you do need to buy new items, ensure they are as climate-friendly as possible, such as energy-efficient fridges or eco-friendly cleaning products.

Engage your Staff

- Offer **training** or identify **webinars about sustainability**, demonstrating your commitment to the issue.
- Encourage reusable items such as water bottles and coffee cups.
- Provide reusable cutlery, plates and refillable products.
- Provide **recycling bins** and **clearly signpost** how to dispose of items.
- Promote ideas such as packed lunches in reusable packaging.

Education

- Provide **separate bins for different types of waste** in the setting and educate children about which rubbish goes where. You could also consider **composting, promoting litterless lunches, eliminating bottled water or becoming paper free**.

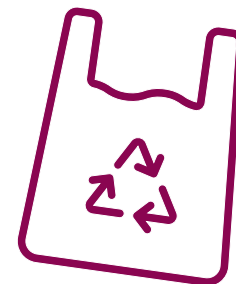
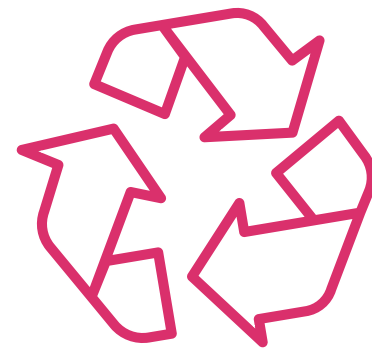
Raise awareness with parents about preventing waste

- Accept/provide reusable containers from/to for lunches- beeswax paper is an excellent sandwich wrap, rather than cling film or foil.
- Consider sending uneaten food home with the children to eat later.
- Encourage parents to talk about your sustainability practices, such as on social media, and offer opportunities for them to make their own suggestions.



Steps your business can take

- Follow the [WRAP guidance](#) to conduct a **waste audit** to understand what and how much you are throwing away.
- Repeat waste audits regularly and evaluate whether you could do more to prevent and reduce waste.
- Prevent waste from happening:
 - Limit what you print and use **digital solutions** such as e-receipts
 - Ensure effective stock **planning** through continuous **monitoring and evaluation** of purchases
 - **Ask suppliers** to reduce packaging delivered to you or return reusable packaging
- Dispose of waste correctly:
 - Make sure the right materials go in the right bins. If you're not sure about this, use the search tool at the top of the [Love Essex website](#)
 - Having a good waste system, such as using different coloured bins is a great way to engage the children in recycling
 - Ensure all items are **clean and dry**. Items which are not recyclable but placed in your recycling bin or sack can also cause issues during the recycling process
- Check waste collections for anything that cannot be reused or recycled:
 - Soft plastics are now being collected at many supermarkets.
 - Support [Terracycle collections](#) or similar schemes, such as [Return A Toner, to recycle empty printer cartridges](#)
 - Set up a battery collection box at your setting with [BatteryBack](#)

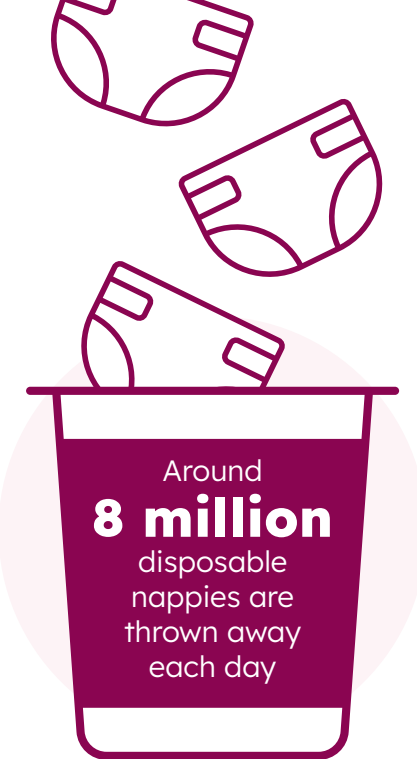


Nappies

In the UK, around 8 million disposable nappies are thrown away each day!

As these nappies break down over hundreds of years, they will produce methane gas (a strong greenhouse gas) contributing to global warming. This is in addition to the environmental costs of manufacture and transportation before the disposables make it to the shop.

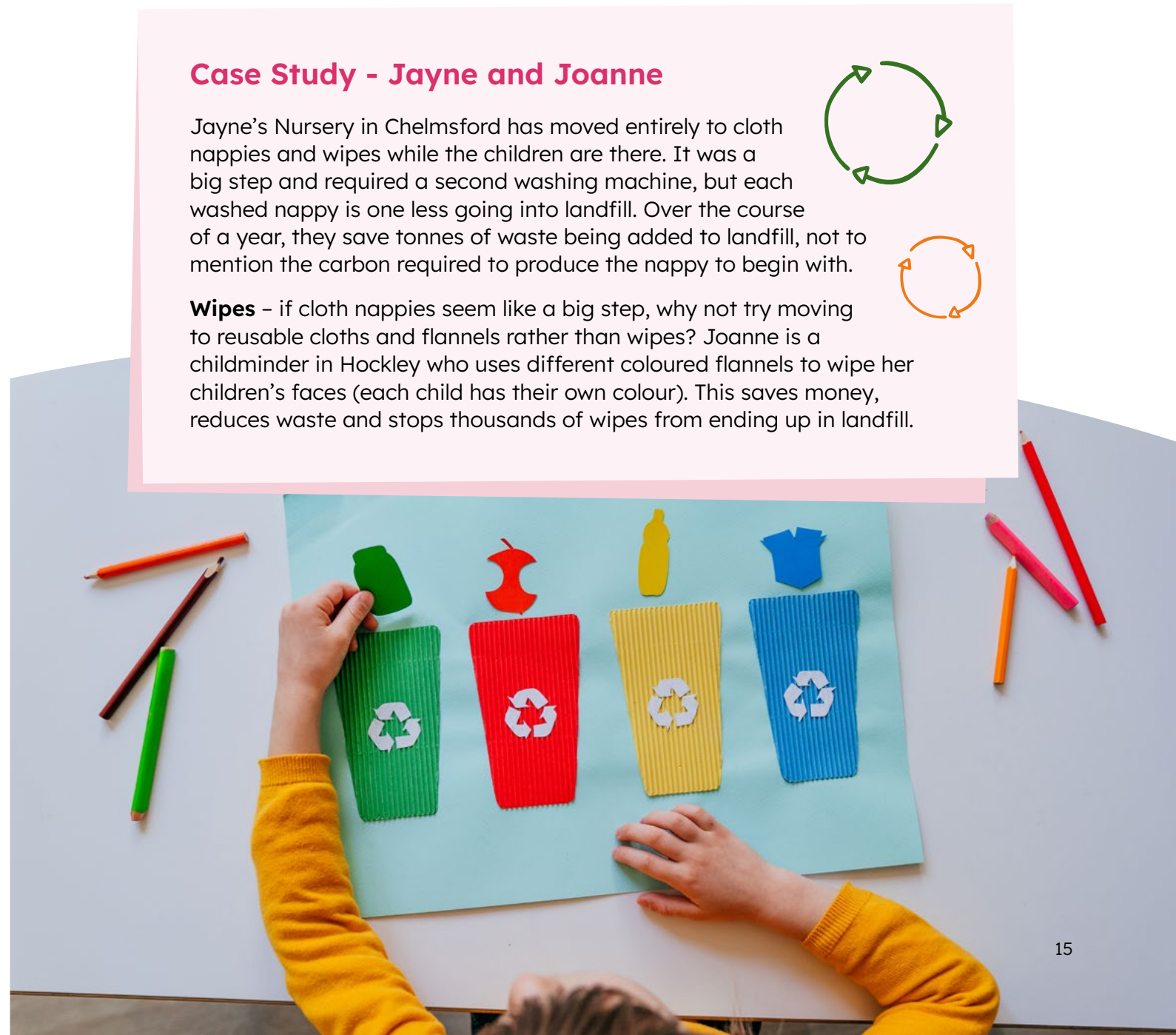
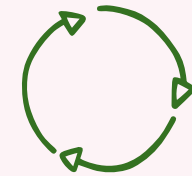
Cloth nappies can be used again and again. At the end of their useful life, they can be recycled at a textile recycling bank. To encourage families to try cloth nappies, Essex County Council is offering a £30 refund on the purchase of any cloth nappies, including new or pre-loved cloth nappies. Visit [the Love Essex website](#) for details.



Case Study - Jayne and Joanne

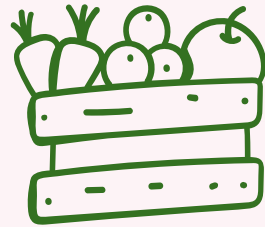
Jayne's Nursery in Chelmsford has moved entirely to cloth nappies and wipes while the children are there. It was a big step and required a second washing machine, but each washed nappy is one less going into landfill. Over the course of a year, they save tonnes of waste being added to landfill, not to mention the carbon required to produce the nappy to begin with.

Wipes – if cloth nappies seem like a big step, why not try moving to reusable cloths and flannels rather than wipes? Joanne is a childminder in Hockley who uses different coloured flannels to wipe her children's faces (each child has their own colour). This saves money, reduces waste and stops thousands of wipes from ending up in landfill.



Case Study - The Bell Day Nursery

The Bell Day Nursery in Saffron Walden has connected with its local Tesco and receives a donation of unsold food each Friday. Any food that is not used by the nursery is distributed to families. This scheme not only saves the nursery and families' money, it reduces the carbon footprint for the supermarket, and good food does not go to waste.



Food Waste

Food waste is a problem across many parts of our society.

Early years providers can play an important role in reducing food waste, as well as potentially being recipients of food donations before it ends up going to waste.

Five of the UK's biggest supermarkets (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Co-op and M&S) pledged in November 2021 to halve the environmental impact of a weekly food shop by 2030.



They will aim to achieve this by reducing carbon emissions, deforestation, packaging and food waste. These efforts will be monitored by the World Wildlife Fund. The food industry emits about **17.3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide** each year'.

Your setting may wish to consider:

- ✓ Building a relationship with your local supermarkets to access food which would otherwise go to waste. Many supermarkets have community engagement teams that ensure that food is donated to good causes if it cannot be sold before it expires. For example, **Sainsbury's has partnered with Neighbourly** to donate surplus food to local organisations, including schools.
- ✓ Buying from and/or working with local businesses and food suppliers. This has the potential to reduce carbon emissions from long haulage journeys and refrigerated storage. It may also provide opportunities for children to learn about the journey of food from harvest and production to reaching their plate. Sustainability and nutrition are important aspects of broader climate and wellbeing knowledge.
- ✓ Visit **Love Food, Hate Waste** for tips on how to make food last longer and exciting ways to use leftovers.

Food and Food Production Education

Thinking about the types of food we eat and where they come from is an important means to tackle climate change.

Simple steps such as having having vegetarian and locally sourced meals will reduce your carbon footprint.

Another consideration is where food comes from, and the journey it take to get to our plate. Choosing locally grown food from smaller-scale producers rather than the larger scale, international food supply chains will reduce your foods carbon footprint. Food that has to travel from overseas will have higher emissions, particularly if it has arrived by air freight.

Food Miles Calculator – A tool which helps to calculate how far food has travelled before it reaches the consumer.



Get to know your local farms and suppliers and supporting your local economy. You could get tips on how to prepare seasonal foods.

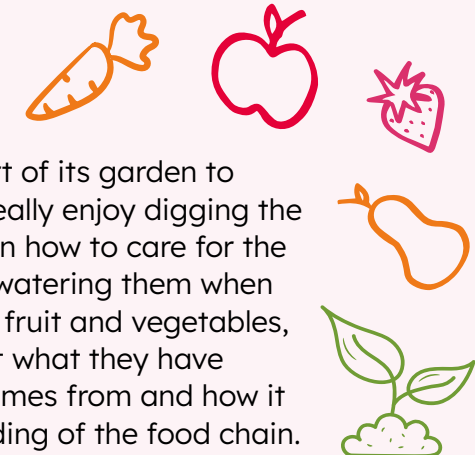
Climate Friendly Meals

We know it is important to eat a balanced diet. The EYFS promotes healthy eating, with an emphasis on eating a wide variety of fruit and vegetables. Support children in making healthy choices and to try fresh food over processed options.

Resources and activities you may wish to consider include:

- **Barleylands preschools and nurseries** – Offers **preschools and nurseries** an educational visit with emphasis outdoor learning, cookery and animal interaction.
- You might consider '**climate friendly**' days. These could include vegetarian/ plant-based options and meals sourced from local produce.
- Grow your own food and show the children where food comes from.

Case Study - Tiptree Preschool Playgroup



Tiptree Preschool Playgroup uses part of its garden to grow fruit and vegetables. Children really enjoy digging the ground and planting seeds. They learn how to care for the plants by not stepping on them and watering them when it's hot. When it's time to harvest the fruit and vegetables, the children are amazed they can eat what they have grown. Understanding where food comes from and how it grows supports children's understanding of the food chain.

4. Retrofitting Buildings & Energy Management

The physical space in which your provision operates can be a big driver of your setting's overall carbon footprint. One of the best things about improving your building's energy efficiency is that it can cut your bills and carbon footprint.



If you don't own your building, it is always worth speaking to building owners and/or landlords about how sites are managed.

Environmental legislation and incentives mean that many properties should be working towards improving their sustainability. Not only will building owners therefore be helping to tackle climate change, they will also be helping to future-proof their premises.

Ofgem has provided support for businesses, including advice on energy efficiency schemes.

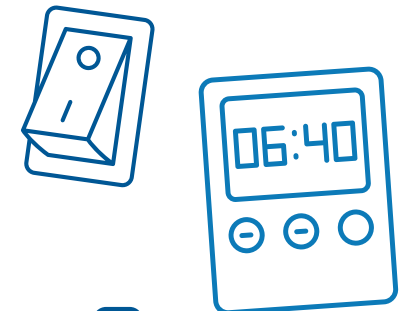
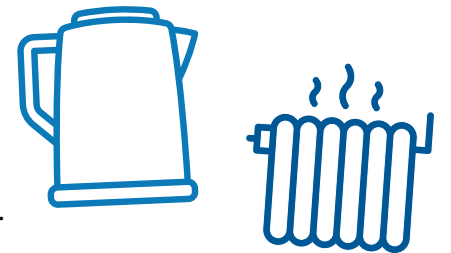
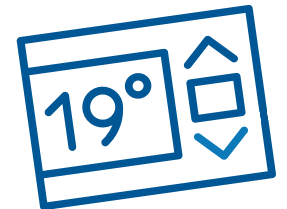


⚡ Energy

- Energy audit – can you examine how and when you use energy?
 - There are companies which specialise in conducting energy and broader sustainability audits of businesses. While many of these are costed, it could be a positive investment with long-term financial gains, identifying where you can make both environmental and efficiency savings.
 - The Carbon Trust's [Net Zero transition planning and delivery](#) has been designed to help UK-based businesses assess the typical energy use in their sector.

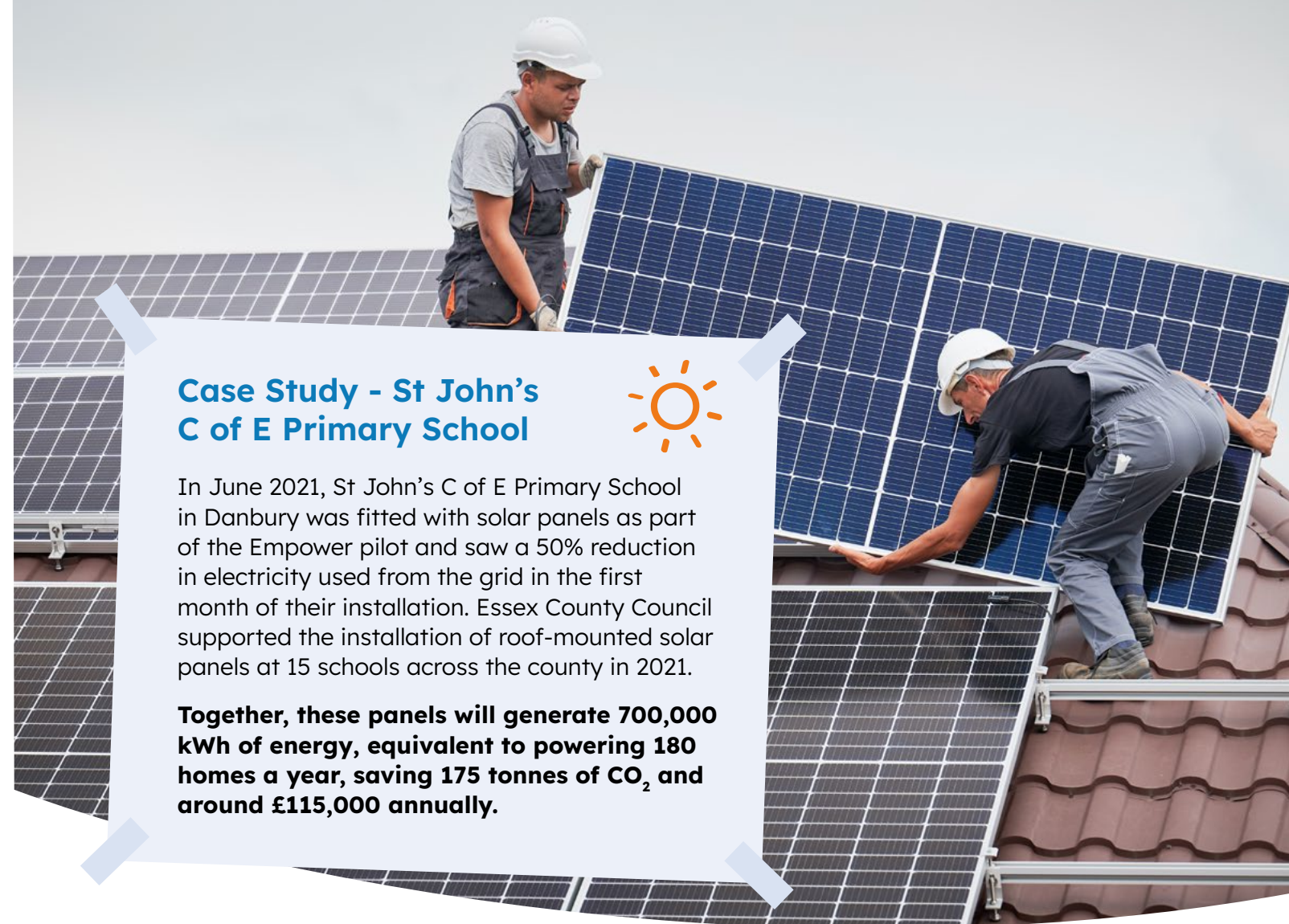


- Examine how you are using **timers and other automatic settings**
 - Are lights and heating coming on automatically when no one is in the building? This is not only bad for the environment but will be costing money.
 - Are lights, heating and computer monitors left on after staff leave the building? You can set building/appliance timers to switch off lights/heating/screens after a set time.
 - Label lights and appliances to show which should be left on or turned off.
 - External lights left on overnight can also be detrimental to nocturnal wildlife.
 - Motion sensors – could you invest in motion sensor detectors, so lights turn off after a certain amount of time when no movement is detected?
 - Behavioural change – raise with staff that there is a 'switch off' policy with lights and appliances.
 - Appointing an 'energy champion' volunteer, who is responsible for ensuring all monitors and lights are switched off when not in use (perhaps at lunchtime and at the end of the day). They could also monitor thermostats. This role could be rotated amongst the staff.



- Are you using **energy-efficient equipment**?
 - Could you explore **upgrading to more energy-efficient equipment**? There are schemes and grants that can provide assistance. Older equipment is less likely to be energy efficient.
 - Could you carry out a campaign to inform staff and children about the importance of classroom layout in keeping the room efficiently? Furniture is constantly being rearranged to accommodate children's needs, but it is important to make sure radiators and vents are not obstructed. This ensures better heat circulation and reduces the energy required to meet the heating demand.
- Move to **LED lighting**. These more **environmentally friendly** and **longer-life** lights will also **require less maintenance, saving money** in the long run. According to the Carbon Trust, switching from conventional lighting to LED luminaries could deliver cost savings of up to 80% for your business².
 - The Carbon Trust's [Lighting Business Case Tool](#) can help you calculate the business case for lighting upgrades.

Switching to LED lighting could deliver cost savings of up to **80%**



Case Study - St John's C of E Primary School



In June 2021, St John's C of E Primary School in Danbury was fitted with solar panels as part of the Empower pilot and saw a 50% reduction in electricity used from the grid in the first month of their installation. Essex County Council supported the installation of roof-mounted solar panels at 15 schools across the county in 2021.

Together, these panels will generate 700,000 kWh of energy, equivalent to powering 180 homes a year, saving 175 tonnes of CO₂ and around £115,000 annually.

- Explore renewable energy sources (those which do not rely on fossil fuels, such as solar and wind power).
 - Speak to your energy supplier about **renewable energy tariffs**
 - Could you explore **installing a renewable energy source**, such as solar panels?
 - Another way to support a low carbon energy transition is by participating in **'community energy' projects**. These initiatives put people at the heart of the energy system. Examples of projects include:
 - groups working to install solar energy in a village hall
 - free energy-saving advice to residents
 - electric car sharing clubs

These projects are either completely owned or controlled by communities or in partnership with stakeholders.

Essex County Council provides free support for groups to start and develop projects. More information on how you could get involved can be found through [Community Energy South](#), [Local Energy Communities](#) or email lowcarbon@essex.gov.uk.



Insulation, Ventilation and Overheating

Insulation

- Are the **walls and ceilings in your premises effectively insulated?** If not, heat could escape, resulting in colder working conditions, more environmentally damaging emissions being produced and increased costs from keeping heating on for longer.
- Could you consider having a new, more **energy-efficient boiler** installed, or even a **heat pump** (a more environmentally friendly alternative)?
- Are doors and windows being effectively insulated, **reducing draughts?** Are doors fitted so that they will close by default (an example being spring-loaded doors)?

Ventilation

- Are you managing ventilation in your premises effectively to ensure proper **airflow** and the **extraction of polluted air?**
- **Natural air ventilation** can be the simplest and most cost-effective means. Depending on the time of year and your setting's operations, this involves simple steps such as opening windows on opposite sides of a building floor to ensure proper airflow.
- **Supply or extract fans** – Extract fumes from an area (such as a kitchen) and circulate fresh air.

- Effective ventilation can also **reduce the risk of damp** developing.



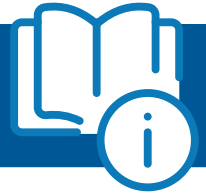
Overheating

- Consider **the sources of heat which affect your premises** (such as overexposure to the sun at certain times of the year). This will vary from premises to premises.
- **Utilise natural resources** – shade from trees or foliage on buildings is a green means of reducing overheating, whilst also creating opportunities for increased biodiversity. Could you consider planting trees or plants to reduce overheating?
- **Blinds or heat-reflective glass** can help to reduce overheating.
- **Consider how and when equipment is used** – the heat generated from electrical items will have an impact on your staff and operations. This will vary based on the equipment you use, but could you consider how best to manage heat-generating equipment, particularly during the summer?

Shade from **trees or foliage on buildings** is a green means of reducing overheating



Many in-depth resources explore these issues, including The Carbon Trust's '[Heating, ventilation and air conditioning](#)' guide.



Some of the changes to buildings suggested in this section may be referred to as '**retrofitting**' – the addition of new components, technology or features to a building, in order to reduce carbon emissions and increase efficiency.

It is important to speak to your local council about planning permission before undertaking building works. Many councils are supportive of works that improve sustainability and work towards net zero but applying for permission will be necessary in some scenarios.

Retrofitting is the addition of new components, technology or features to a building to reduce carbon emissions



Within the Home

Our **Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)** show how energy efficient your home is and if it requires improvements (below C).

The most efficient home is A+ and is less expensive to heat. The average in Essex, however, is D – and very expensive to heat.

To save money and carbon, you can find heaps of advice online – with almost all relevant Essex energy-saving initiatives found [here](#), including [Warm Homes Essex](#) and [Ofgem](#) energy advice for households.

[The Energy Saving Trust](#) has further information on why a boiler is the **single biggest contributor to personal carbon emissions** – so consider fitting a **heat pump**. Learning more about how to make your **boiler more efficient** is also really important - look to [Simple Energy Advice](#) for further information on heat pumps, boiler efficiency and more.

It's very important for us to all switch to more **renewable energy provision** where possible, a form of energy from non-polluting natural processes such as **solar, wind or hydro power**, for environmental and economic reasons. Try to find a renewable energy provider advice channel, such as the [Essex Energy Switch](#).



5. Outdoor Space

Being in the outdoor environment is beneficial to children's development. Whether you have a large or small outdoor space, it is vital to helping children develop an appreciation of the natural world, the biodiversity of their area and their connection to nature.



Nature gardens and rewilding

Even if it is just a small patch of garden, by letting wildflowers grow throughout the year, biodiversity can increase ten-fold. Helping to promote natural processes of pollination and other key ecosystem benefits.

This will help bees, insects, birds and other wildlife to maintain their habitat, to ensure the ecosystem is in balance. Seeing wildlife in their back gardens helps children understand that we must share our space with nature.



Growing your own fruit and vegetables and keeping chickens for eggs, can significantly cut your **dietary carbon footprint** and is a fun and engaging project to share with the children.

The Royal Horticultural Society hosts the **School Gardening Awards** and has a number of resources available that could be used within your setting:

- [Setting up a school garden](#)
- [Gardening club calendar](#)
- [Greening your school](#)
- [Encouraging wildlife into the school garden](#)
- RHS also works with The Wildlife Trusts on the [Wild About Gardens Campaign](#)

Composting is a chance to turn your food waste into soil – a thriving ecosystem for insects and bugs that sucks up carbon from the atmosphere. This will also reduce your carbon emissions, as there is no need to transport and process this waste, and instead turn your waste into valuable soil improver that you can use across your garden.



- To help Essex residents get started with home composting, Love Essex offers [tips and subsidised compost bins](#).



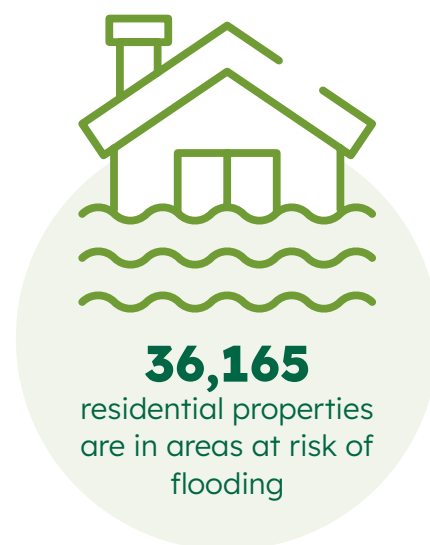
Flood Risk and Water Management

When it comes to water, everyone in Essex is eligible for a **free water saving kit** from Essex & Suffolk Water.

Water scarcity is a big deal here in Essex – it might seem to rain a lot, but in fact, East Anglia is one of the driest regions in the UK, with droughts and water scarcity projected to increase due to climate change.

Across Essex, 36,165 residential properties are in areas at risk of surface water flooding in a 1 in 100-year return period³.

Local flooding is set to become more of a reality for those at risk, as our existing drains and watercourses will not always be able to cope.



You can search by postcode to **identify your flood risk** with a **tool** from Essex County Council.

You can help to reduce your flood risk through **effective land use and green infrastructure solutions**. There are a number of schemes and resources available to support this, including the **Essex Forest Initiative (EFI)**, which will see tens of thousands of trees planted across the county.

If you would like to see **how your business can work with the EFI** (whether you have land to plant to trees or would like to volunteer), please contact environment@essex.gov.uk with 'Essex Forest Initiative' in the subject bar.

Some initiatives you may wish to consider include:

- **Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)** – serve as an important means of managing water. SuDS may include:
 - Using permeable building materials
 - 'Green roofs', whereby roofs have plants and other foliage incorporated into them to absorb rainwater
 - SuDS planters, which capture water from roofs and funnel them down into planters
- **Developing rain gardens** If you have an area that often floods, a rain garden would make an excellent outdoor feature. A rain garden is a sunken area in the landscape that collects surface water and allows it to soak into the ground. Planted with grasses and flowering perennials, rain gardens can be a cost-effective and attractive way to reduce surface water flooding issues and control runoff from your property. They generally only hold water during and after a rainfall event and are largely dry otherwise. They can also help children to understand water conservation. The area will create a mini ecosystem and encourage bugs and insects into the area.
- **Water butts** are a great way to manage water on premises and can be used to store water for purposes such as watering gardens. You may be eligible for a subsidised water butt, more information is available on the [Get Composting website](#). Just enter your postcode to access the Essex County Council subsidies.
- **Understanding where water collects on site** – if you do not own your commercial premises, it is worth working with landlords and site managers to understand where water pools after it rains, so you can identify where flood reduction measures would be of most value.



Green Spaces

In October 2019, The Essex Forest Initiative committed to plant £1million worth of trees in the next five years in order to offset carbon and provide many additional environmental, health and wellbeing benefits to Essex residents.

The tree-planting season runs from November to February/March, and in the 2022/23 season **98,000 trees were planted.**



If you don't have a garden, perhaps consider an allotment. More information will be available on your local council's webpage. Using an allotment is often another community-strengthening activity, giving you a great chance to enjoy the outdoors, encourage children's outdoor play and increase education. If that's impractical, window boxes for fruit and vegetables work wonders, allowing you to grow your own without needing a garden.

Encourage wildlife into your outdoor space. As part of the BBC's The Regenerators and The Green Planet, you can learn how to make seed balls to attract birds and improve biodiversity in school grounds.



Essex is fortunate to be home to several country parks and diverse habitats, including woodlands and beaches. [Explore Essex](#) provides a full list of these destinations and can assist with Early Year Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision (which can include an Education Ranger leading your group for the day). These trips are linked to the EYFS outcome guidelines. A number of educational resources are available to support outdoor learning.

Green spaces are proven to benefit the environment and human health and wellbeing. If you have lawns which are maintained, could you allow a certain amount to revert to its natural state? Rewilding parts of a lawn encourage important pollinators into a garden.



If possible, avoid artificial grass as this is particularly harmful to local wildlife. Artificial grass can hold a considerably higher temperature than natural grass, effectively cooking worms and insects below. It doesn't convert carbon dioxide into oxygen like grass does and has a negative effect on carbon in the atmosphere. It will only last between 10 and 20 years, after which time it will end up in landfill.

6. Transport and Travel

The motor car is one of the most intensive sources of personal emissions.



One mile in an average UK car can emit around **11 times as much carbon** as public transport per mile travelled – or 88 times the amount of CO2 compared with an electric bus!



We recognise that for most of us in Essex, a car is vital for our daily lives. However, perhaps there are some journeys where we could consider alternatives.

If you are one of our larger providers then the **Smarter Travel for Essex Network (STEN)** might be useful to you. It helps businesses with over 50 employees prepare and implement effective travel plans to promote and encourage active and sustainable travel. If you would like to join STEN or have any queries, please contact travelplanteam@essex.gov.uk.

Alternatives to Driving

Walking and cycling on a traditional bike or an e-bike are good alternatives to making short journeys by car. The campaigns '**Stop, Swap, Go**' and '**Safer, Greener, Healthier**' both present numerous benefits and opportunities to transport by bike – with inevitable improvements to your physical health and fitness and reductions in your environmental footprint.

You can also promote **Active Travel** with your families, including walking and cycling, which reduces emissions and improves physical wellbeing. You can find out more about Active Travel here: **Smarter Travel for Essex: 'Embracing Active Travel to make a safer, greener and healthier Essex'**.

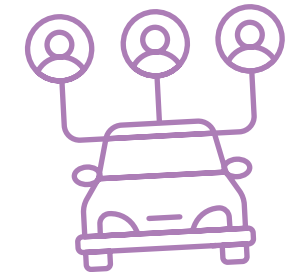
Taking public transport wherever and whenever we can is the best option. Recent improvements to Essex bus services as part of **Bus Back Better** will help you to find a journey by bus easier, and make it quicker, cleaner and more practical.



DigiGo is a fully electric shared public transport service for residents in suburban and rural areas of Essex who may have little or no access to existing public transport links. It works on-demand, at a time that is best for you, rather than having set routes and timetables.



Car share a journey if destinations are the same, similar or en-route, halving your emissions and potentially leading to new friendships and experiences. Check out the **Essex Carshare** scheme.



The Energy Saving Trust also provides guidance on how **efficient driving can reduce carbon emissions**.



Remember: The UK Government has **set a target of 2030 for the ban on sales of new petrol and diesel vehicles**. This means that it will be increasingly expensive to drive petrol cars.

Some useful resources include:

- **Government grant schemes for electric vehicle charging infrastructure**
- **Government grant of up to £1,500 for new low emission vehicles**
- The Carbon Trust – **Fleet Upgrade Tool**

Case Study - The Bell Day Nursery

The Bell Day Nursery in Saffron Walden took the huge step of removing their car park and creating extra outdoor play space. By removing their car park, it sends the message you are expected to walk. This setting is fortunate enough to be in the centre of town, and there is a public car park nearby if people do want to drive. However, most families and staff walk to nursery. Of course, a car is a necessity for many families to get to our settings, particularly those with mobility issues. Still, it is worth considering how staff and families travel to the setting and how to make it easier for those looking to reduce their carbon footprint.



7. Sustainable Business Networks

There are lots of local, regional and national sustainable business networks which provide ideas, guidance and resources.



They can be a great source of information, inspiration and provide the opportunity to connect with other settings and businesses working to become more sustainable.

Check the **local business/environmental associations within your district**, such as the **Brentwood Environmental Business Alliance** or The **Colchester Business Enterprise Agency** (COLBEA is also commissioned to support eligible businesses on low carbon projects. Please enquire directly with COLBEA). These local organisations can often offer tailored advice, guidance and host a wealth of resources on their websites.



You can enter your postcode to identify your local council [here](#).

You may wish to consider:

- **Better Business Act** – A coalition of businesses committed to ensuring companies are working to improve their impact on the environment
- **The Broadway Initiative** – Collaboration between business organisations to support net zero and environmental goals
- The Net Zero Innovation Network (NZIN) – Brings together businesses, anchor institutions, universities and others to support a more sustainable future by promoting innovation. NZIN is working to make Essex a centre of excellence for innovation in addressing climate change and is developing a pipeline of projects where members work collectively to help Essex become a net zero county by 2050. You can learn more about the network and if your business is eligible to join by contacting NZIN@essex.gov.uk.
- **The South East Business Hub** – part of BEST Growth Hub. It works to develop economic activity and support businesses. It hosts a number of resources for SMEs – including a [Net Zero portal](#).
- **Eco Schools** – which inspires and empowers children; raises environmental awareness; improves the setting environment; creates financial savings and provides action plans for focus areas.

8. Funding

For many early years' settings, funding can be an obstacle to taking steps to become more sustainable.



Several regional and national funding schemes are open to small businesses to support their sustainability journeys.

A selection of funding schemes which may be relevant to your setting are listed here. **Please note that these schemes are subject to change and are often time limited.**



- **[Backing Essex Business](#)** – Provides up to **12 hours of professional business advice, group and one to one mentoring**, as well as **loans for business growth and start-ups**.
- **[Clean Growth Fund](#)** – Invests in companies focused on driving clean growth in the low carbon economy
- **[Grants Online](#)** – A newsletter that includes UK and regional green funding opportunities
- **[South East Business Boost](#)** – Offers up to **12 hours of free business support** and **Growth Grants of up to £10,000**. While grant applications must focus on growth, this can also include sustainability focused projects.
- **[South East New Energy Project](#)** – Part of a University of East London-led programme. Eligible SMEs can benefit from free energy audits and surveys for renewable energy projects. Grants of up to £30,000 to support investment in energy projects are also available. Please contact sene@uel.ac.uk to enquire.
- UK Government – Platform for businesses to **explore finance and support available** to them.



Financial Institutions

Many high street banks now offer **special green or sustainable financial options** for their customers. It is worth **speaking directly to your bank** about potential funding support or options available to you.

British Business Bank

The UK Government established the **British Business Bank** and aims to support SMEs. It has a **sustainability hub** and a number of resources available for SMEs:

- **[Smaller Businesses and the Transition to Net Zero](#)**
- **[Net Zero: An A to Z Guide](#)**
- **[What is Net Zero? An Introduction for Small Businesses](#)**

9. Useful Apps and Resources



Resources and information available to support settings

Resources are diverse and cover topics such as plastics, healthy seas, the natural world, food production, energy conservation, waste management and carbon emissions. Below are a select few examples of resources and initiatives you may wish to use in your school:

- [Common Seas](#) aims to quickly and significantly reduce the amount of plastic produced and to stop it polluting our rivers and seas.
- SchemaPlay provides training to extend children's learning through free-flow play. Training courses: language, science, self-esteem, schema spotting and learning outdoors.
- [OMEP-UK – Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Citizenship Award Scheme](#) provides EYFS resources to develop a parent partnership in supporting children's education for sustainable development in early childhood.
- The Early Years Eco Wheel™ Scheme – This scheme is based on the 8 R's of sustainable action - Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Repair, Return and Recycle. It provides a toolkit to support Early years settings become more eco-friendly.
- Persil's Dirt is Good project and Dirt is Good Academy aims to encourage children to learn about the outdoors, the environment and climate and to feel empowered to make a difference.
- Several popular schemes reward climate and environmentally-friendly efforts made by young people, including the Blue Peter Green Badge Award.



Calculators – Emissions/Savings

- Carbon Footprint – [Business Calculator](#)
- Climate Hero [Carbon Footprint Calculator](#) – measure personal and business-related operations, such as car journeys and hosting events
- Greenhouse Gas Protocol – [GHG Emissions Calculation Tool](#); report [Scope 2](#) & [Scope 3](#) emissions
- The Carbon Trust – [Net Zero transition planning and delivery](#); [SME Carbon Footprint Calculator](#); [Fleet Upgrade Tool](#); [Lighting Business Case Tool](#)
- Zero Business Carbon – [Calculate the cost of your emissions](#)



Finance, Funding and Support

- [Backing Essex Business](#) – Offers advice, mentoring and business loans
- [British Business Bank](#)
- [Clean Growth Fund](#) – Invests in companies focused on driving clean growth in the low carbon economy
- [Grants Online](#) – Newsletter UK and regional green funding opportunities
- [I-Construct](#) – Support and grants for businesses working in the construction and built environment sector
- [KEEP+](#) – Can provide [funding and expertise](#) to support to SMEs
- [South East Business Boost](#) – Offers business supports and grants
- [South East Business Hub](#) – Business support and advice
- [South East New Energy Project](#) – Offers free energy audits and surveys for renewable energy projects, as well as grants of up to £30,000
- UK Government – [finance and support for your business](#); [Training and employment schemes for your business](#)



Sustainability Hubs

- [British Business Bank](#)
- [Federation of Small Businesses](#)
- [Institute of Directors](#)
- South East Business Hub – [Net Zero portal](#)
- UK Government – [SME Climate Hub](#)



SME Sustainability Guidance (General)

- British Business Bank – [Smaller Businesses and the Transition to Net Zero](#); [Net Zero: An A to Z Guide](#); [What is Net Zero? An Introduction for Small Businesses](#); [Net Zero: How being carbon neutral can help your business grow](#)
- British Chambers of Commerce – [From Now to Net Zero: A Practical Guide for SMEs](#)
- British Retail Consortium – [Climate Action Roadmap](#)
- Business in the Community – [Driving Sustainability Through Procurement](#)
- [Business Sustainability Kit](#)
- CDP – [A Climate Disclosure Framework for SMEs](#)
- Confederation of British Industry – [ESG Tips](#); [Goal 13 Impact Platform: How businesses can accelerate climate action](#); [Financing Green – Guide for SMEs](#)
- [Council for Sustainable Business](#)
- Essex County Council – [Social Value Catalogue](#); [Goal 13 Impact Platform](#)
- Small Business Britain – [Small Business Sustainability Programme](#); [Small Business Planet](#)
- [Supply Chain Sustainability School](#)
- World Wildlife Fund – [Emission Possible](#)
- Barleylands Farm Park – [School visits](#)
- Essex Wildlife Trust – [School trips and education facilities](#)



Transport and Travel

- [Cycle to Work Scheme](#) – guidance and options for employers
- Energy Saving Trust – [Business Transport](#); [Efficient Driving](#)
- Essex Highways Report – [Smarter Travel for Essex: ‘Embracing Active Travel to make a safer, greener and healthier Essex’](#)
- [Modeshift STARS](#) – an online travel planning tool kit
- Safer Essex Road Partnership – [free support for driving to work policies](#)
- [Smarter Travel for Essex Network](#)
- The Carbon Trust – [Fleet Upgrade Tool](#)
- UK Government – [Electric vehicle charging infrastructure grants; new low emission vehicle grant](#)
- [Government grant of up to £1,500 for new low emission vehicles](#)



Essex-based social media pages



Facebook:

- [Eco - Essex](#)
- [Essex Climate Action](#)
- [Essex Forest Initiative](#)
- [Essex Wildlife Trust](#)
- [Love Essex](#)



X (formerly Twitter):

- [Essex Climate Action \(@essex_climate\)](#)
- [Essex Wildlife Trust \(@EssexWildlife\)](#)
- [Love Essex \(@loveessexuk\)](#)



Instagram:

- [Eco - Essex \(@ecoessex\)](#)
- [Essex Climate Action \(@essexclimatecommission\)](#)
- [Essex Wildlife Trust \(@essexwildlifetrust\)](#)
- [Love Essex \(@loveessexuk\)](#)



YouTube:

- [Essex Climate Action](#)
- [Love Essex](#)

We hope you have found this resource helpful and informative about the steps you can take within the EYFS and at your setting to reduce its impact on the environment and to help Essex reach net zero.

You are playing a vital role in helping Essex to support communities in tackling climate change and reach its goal of becoming a net zero county by 2050. We look forward to working with you on your journey towards greater sustainability.

We are keen to ensure this document remains relevant and helpful to the EYFS over time. Therefore, we aim to produce updated versions of this advice pack when discussions, legislation and priorities around climate change evolve. If you have any ideas or resources which could be included in this pack, or if you think an example of your setting's climate change action plan could be incorporated, then we would like to hear from you.

Please contact: environment@essex.gov.uk or earlyyearscharter@essex.gov.uk

The resources and information in this pack have been compiled in consultation with individuals from across Essex County Council, Early Year settings and providers, charities and not-for-profit organisations.

We are extremely grateful for their expertise, insights and time.



Glossary

Green Public Procurement

A process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured.

Green Skills

Green skills are knowledge, experience, values, attitudes and abilities that support carbon reduction and resource efficiency to increase climate resilience and enhance natural assets.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG)

Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to climate change. This causes the greenhouse effect. Water vapour (H₂O), carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), methane (CH₄) and ozone (O₃) are the primary greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Net Zero carbon

The state where there is a balance between the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by a human activity, and the amount which is removed. A commitment to net zero carbon is associated with a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to achieve this balance.

Retrofitting

Retrofitting refers to the addition of new components, technology or features to a building, in order to reduce carbon emissions and increase efficiency. This may include the introduction of smart meters, improved insulation or the fitting of new windows.

Scope Emissions

- Scope 1 – Direct emissions from owned or controlled sources (such as company vehicles)
- Scope 2 – Indirect emissions through purchases made (such as electricity, heat and steam)
- Scope 3 – All other indirect emissions from a company's supply chain and associated activities (such as business travel, transportation and distribution, and purchased goods and services)

Social Value

Social value is defined through the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 which came into force in January 2013 and requires all public sector organisations (and their suppliers) to look beyond the financial cost of a contract and consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area.

Sustainable Procurement

A process whereby organisations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only for the organisation, but also for society and the economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment.

Sustainability

A characteristic or state whereby the needs of the present and local population can be met without compromising the ability of future generations or populations in other locations to meet their needs.

References

- 1 'UK leads 45 governments in new pledges to protect nature', UK Government press release, 6th November 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-leads-45-governments-in-new-pledges-to-protect-nature>
- 2 The Carbon Trust, 'The Journey to Net Zero for SMEs': www.carbontrust.com/our-work-and-impact/guides-reports-and-tools/the-journey-to-net-zero-for-smes, pg.6
- 3 Environment Agency data



This information is issued by:
Environment and Climate Action

Contact us:
environment.climatecommunications@essex.gov.uk

Environment and Climate Action
Essex County Council
County Hall, Chelmsford,
Essex CM1 1QH

www.essex.gov.uk

 [Essex Climate Action](#)

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The information contained in this document
can be translated and/or made available in
alternative formats, on request.



Essex Climate Action Commission

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