



Our renewed commitment to sustainability

February 2024

Introduction

Sustainable tourism and the environment are fundamental tenets of YHA's charitable object and the foundation upon which our 90-year history is built.

Launched in 2020, YHA's 10-year strategy – Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime – contains a specific strategic priority on the environment:

“

We recognise that the risks to the environment and to the world and its population are a real and immediate threat. As an organisation that connects people to nature, we will set a strong example – in how we use our assets and through our work with partners we will help to improve the environment.

”

Mission

To enrich the lives of all, especially young people, by providing brilliant hostel stays and experiences that improve physical health, mental wellbeing and life skills.





Position statement

YHA's 90-year history is rooted in sustainable tourism and education.

YHA is a large charity with a powerful brand and platform. We will apply our resources to supporting sustainability in all aspects of our own work.

Through our places, we are connecting over a million people to nature each year. Through our programmes, we are encouraging young people to become the environmentalists of the future.

As a leader in the sectors in which we work, we will amplify the messages of diverse members, users and partner community groups. We will challenge ourselves, governments, charity partners and our communities. We will model good practice. We will be honest.

We have structured our approach to sustainability around the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

All of these are aligned to our 10-year strategy. We have made much progress on sustainability since launching our strategy. Some of this work is summarised in this document. But we know we have much still to do.

This short paper presents our position on sustainability. We will seek to make positive impact on all 17 SDGs but will focus our efforts where we believe we can have the biggest impact as a charity focused on sustainable tourism and the education of young people.

Making a positive difference for people and planet

Over one million people of all ages use YHA to connect to nature each year. We know that connecting to nature means people are more likely to protect and advocate for nature. This remains our single biggest contribution to the environment and is at the core of our charitable object.



We are a not-for-profit organisation.

As a charity our assets remain in trust for the community good. We start from a 90-year history of being there to reinvest in nature, the environment and to build community and public assets.

Hostelling, with its shared spaces and places, was and remains a model of sustainable tourism.

By definition using less resource and helping to create a community committed to sustainable practice.

We encourage and support active travel.

Whilst we recognise that cars and public transport are necessary aspects of an accessible YHA, and work to ensure both work well for the environment, 'active travel' - walking and cycling - is a core part of our culture and approach.

Hostelling as an international movement promotes and practices sustainable approaches.

As a member of Hostelling International, YHA subscribes to the movement's [policy on sustainable tourism](#).

Enabling adventure is part of our work of connecting people.

Many of our adventures take place within short traveling distances from home, often engaging with local communities across England and Wales. We actively connect people to the outdoors, to heritage and to culture, whether in the countryside, by the coast or in towns and cities.

Our hostels are community spaces and sustainable places.

Many of our hostels are repurposed buildings, and assets for community use. As we develop these recycled buildings we build in new approaches to environmentally friendly builds and practice.

Sustainability is impossible without social justice and diversity.

We value the diversity of our people – staff, volunteers, guests and partners. We invest in pay and wellbeing support, and have a focus on long term sustainability and care of the environment that runs at the core of our strategy. We are committed to developing our work on equity, diversity and inclusion and our EDI statement is [here](#).

Sustainability is considered in all aspects of our operating model.

This includes investing in sustainable infrastructure such as solar, biomass, heat pumps, low energy equipment and electric vehicle charging points; sustainable options across food and beverage including the removal of single-use plastic bottles from school groups' packed lunches, installing open-access water refill points, and including vegan options on our menus; and investing in our day-to-day operations including environmentally sustainable cleaning methods.

We will continue to provide meaningful options for people to support the environment – opportunities to take action and support sustainability behaviour change.

From volunteer working parties developing our grounds, and school groups planting trees, to developing green skills in staff and volunteers, through to micro-volunteering opportunities such as building bug houses and litter picking, and signage to encourage all hostel users to make sustainable choices.

Read about our impact

Want to find out more about what we're already doing to connect people to the outdoors, nature, culture and heritage? Our annual report is available at yha.org.uk/about-yha/impact. It provides a comprehensive review of our activities – detailing how we have pursued our strategic priorities – and summarises our contribution to England and Wales over the last year.

Our progress to date

Our previous detailed environmental strategy and carbon reduction plan Green Spirit ended in 2020. We made real progress during the period of the plan:

- **Reducing emissions from energy** by 23% from 2014-2018, and reducing staff transport emissions in the same period by 33%.
- **On-site recycling** increased to 65% by 2019, with 94% diverted from landfill.
- **We installed renewable energy solutions** (solar panels, biomass boilers, air source heat pumps, water turbine) at 18 sites and YHA's National Office in Matlock.
- **We installed water refill stations** at all of our hostels, removing 500,000 plastic water bottles from our network every year.
- **We reduced electrical consumption** through the roll out of LED lighting and thin client computer stations across the network.
- **We incorporated the latest sustainable technology** into our new hostel developments and refurbishments.
- **We have built sustainability into our procurement**, ensuring we are working with suppliers who put sustainability at the heart of their operations.

Prior to the pandemic we carried out a comprehensive environmental audit across our organisation to inform our next strategy.

The pandemic significantly affected our operating model and ways of working, in many cases accelerating our ability to reduce carbon use. Here are a few examples from the last three years:

- **We introduced new Tersano cleaning technology** into our hostels, resulting in a 43% reduction in chemical use across our network, at a time of significantly enhanced cleaning because of COVID-19.
- **We introduced home-made yoghurt**, removing 220,000 plastic yogurt pots per year.
- **We introduced hybrid working** across the organisation, which resulted in a 40% decrease in our Scope 1 and 2 emissions.
- **We extended our trial in EV charging** to include National Office and three of our hostels.
- **We introduced an energy project group and energy champions** across our properties, reducing energy consumption by over 10% through behaviour change.
- **We initiated and supported local sustainability** projects across our network, from tree and hedgerow planting to beach cleans to working with local community groups to reuse and recycle unused food and furniture.
- **With support from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund**, we developed, led and successfully ran the Generation Green programme, working with partners to connect over 115,000 young people to nature and developing new programmes, packages and toolkits to support environmental education.

YHA is committed to achieving net zero emissions no later than 2050. We will develop meaningful and realistic targets which allow us to measure progress, building on our Carbon Reduction Plan, which sets out how we intend to reduce our emissions by a further 26% by 2027.

Our top six priority SDGs

and examples of what these mean in practice.



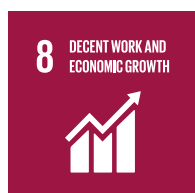
Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

- We will improve physical and mental wellbeing by providing activities and programmes and by supporting people to take their own action using our hostels as a base – both through overnight stays and as part of day visits.
- YHA's first Festival of Walking has encouraged 100s of people to come together at hostels across England and Wales to participate in social walks.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- Embed Generation Green to ensure as many young people as possible have the opportunity to connect to nature when staying at our hostels, as well as developing environmental skills amongst our teams and volunteers.
- Include clear information on public transport links in our revised Hostel Access Guides, and consider the potential for further marketing nudges and financial incentives to support pro environmental choices when travelling to and staying in our hostels.
- Improve employability and life skills through our YHA Campus and YHA Curriculum programmes, which link together our learning and development frameworks, work experience, volunteering, apprenticeships and career paths within YHA.



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- Implement our people strategy with a focus on supporting staff through the cost of living crisis; our work on diversity (including a 2023 focus on menopause and neurodiversity training) and on responding to staff voice through the annual staff survey.
- Create a project team with the skills and capacity to lead and co-ordinate work to develop our sustainability strategy and embed it across all that we do.



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

- Continued development and implementation of our “world class operating manual” to further reduce energy consumption, increase recycling and reduce the impact we have on the environment.
- Sustainability inductions for all staff to promote sustainable practices in the workplace.
- Introduce stronger environmental governance requirements in our procurement and due diligence processes in our immediate supply chain network.



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

- Continue to progress the actions within our Carbon Reduction Plan towards our goal of achieving Net Zero.
- Utilise Inspired, our energy consultants, to support our procurement and better management of our energy through real time tracking and reporting, including ESOS reporting.
- Continuing our cross organisational Energy Project Group and local energy champions to maximise savings in energy consumption and costs.
- Introduce a new organisational travel policy, including a new electric/hybrid salary sacrifice scheme for staff, minimising the use of petrol and diesel vehicles in our fleet.
- Developing our strategy for EV charging in the hostel network.



Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

- Further develop our work with local communities, and our partnerships with our franchise hostels, key suppliers and other like-minded organisations, to ensure a long-term sustainable hostel network.
- Take an active part in National Park, AONB and wider sustainable transport initiatives, including initiatives in Snowdonia, the Lake District and as a partner in the Peak District Hope Valley Travelling Light Pilot scheme.
- Ensure we follow best practice in sustainability in the charity, tourism and hospitality sectors, including consideration of joining industry accreditation schemes.

We welcome your feedback on this and our wider work in pursuit of a sustainable future. You can email us at sustainability@yha.org.uk