

IMPACT REPORT 02



Welcome to Impact 02. This is our way, as a Certified B Corp, of sharing with you the progress we are making to become a better business – for people and planet, through deploying our work in a more purposeful, society-focussed way.

For those who read Impact 01, our theme was the 'journey so far' and the baby steps a new B Corp should take, whilst getting comfortable (or indeed uncomfortable) with your status and responsibilities. The idea of seeing B Corp as a journey, rather than a destination clearly resonated with our collaborators and B Corp community, as did the acknowledgement that the early stages are often lonely.

With Impact 02, our theme is nurture – the need to care deeply at all levels, at all scales, about who you are working for, with and to what end. Our practice sees the world through the lifespan of the Oak tree – we talk openly about having a 250-year time horizon because of it – and so we are exploring what change and progress looks like through this lens, rather than the four-year cycles of government and politics, or the decade-long view of banks and institutions.

To nurture takes time, so whilst Impact 02 is a review of our year, much of it focuses on the things we have begun, and less so on the jobs we have finished.

Re-setting our relationship, to see the world at the scale of an oak tree.

First, there
was soil.
Then there
was a city.

Cultivation of land allowed us to settle in one place and begin to share ideas. Agriculture gave us culture, and both gave rise to the city.

The city gave us an anthropocentric world, a world of human endeavour.

A world physically apart from nature.

First, there
was nature.
Then there was
humanity.

Since the advent of cities humanity has had one foot out of nature, we left the earth to explore the heavens.

We created science, technology, art, and all of the other aspects of humanity that make us unique. We elevated.

First, we
elevated.
Then we
disengaged.

We soared above the earth on a journey to the stars.

We became so fixated on the journey that we forgot our way back.

We broke our bond with the earth and became impossibly light.

The meaning of our lives is faintly sketched. We became untethered.

First, there was
a journey.
Now there is a
deepening.

Our human-centred journey took us so far away from home that we forgot ourselves. We elevated to such a degree that we became lightheaded.

We literally paved paradise and put up a parking lot.

Now we are standing in that parking lot wondering what it all means.

There has to be more to it than this.

You will notice your pace slowing when you lose faith in the destination.

We are returning to our senses. We are deepening.

First, there
was soil.
Then there
was a city.

Somewhere, underneath it all, there's meaning. We might need to dig a little.

No more journey. No more conquest.

We are putting ourselves on permanent garden leave.

We are learning the names of all the plants and reciting them silently like ancient vespers in the name of everything good in this world.

We are gathering ourselves.

We are striking up an old relationship with nature. We are speaking with something bigger than us. Where we built the city, we will build a garden.

WE ARE ALL ON *garden leave*

Every person in our team at Planit-IE is in the business of shaping places for the common good.

It wasn't long ago that somebody in our professions would baulk at the suggestion that their work was anything to do with gardening. The assumption was that we - the people transforming towns and cities and co-writing strategies for urban renewal - were far more important, erudite, and urbane than a gardener.

How utterly wrong we were.

A good gardener and a good designer may hold different tools, but their approach to the world is almost indistinguishable.

Their practice centres on:



Nurture



Stewardship



Care



Seasonality

Since our first impact report, we have been listening more closely to the towns and cities in which we are working, many declaring Climate Emergencies and striving to become greener and more biodiverse. In response we have hired more gardeners and created the role of Head of Regenerative Horticulture. We hope that our gardeners' skills and approaches will cross-pollinate with the talents and methods of our designers. We want gardeners who design and designers who nurture. As a result, we will create living places where people and nature can flourish.



We are building an invisible team of experts

Many of our team are feeling they are not '*expert enough*' to challenge the status quo when they see, and know, when those around us are doing wrong things. But many others can't get a purchase on that, so they are confused and wondering what it's all about.

Here's our working proposition – our rural studio in Gloucestershire will become Planit's Regenerative Design Studio.

We are growing the practice's Regenerative Design and Stewardship team. This is the 'other' job of Ed, our co-founder and Chairman, but probably the main one that will take up his time.

It's not just about landscape, or soil, or management; it's about the regenerative economy, of which all those other things are part. It's also about Regenerative Design in cities; in towns; in communities. All scales; all contexts. Regenerative Practice seems far more like the right title for what we are advancing here.



FOR CITY *gardening*



Howard Bristol

Innovation and Partnerships
The National Trust

For the National Trust, one of our most treasured institutions, the city is not a familiar habitat. But looking ahead – beyond the rolling country estates and stately homes – the Trust have a critical role in how our cities develop and adapt; become more green and engage their new communities.

Through our Plant NOMA project, we reached out, just as the Trust were reaching in to Manchester. Here's what they had to say.

"Cities are dynamic spaces. They're forever changing to meet our increasing and competing demands. It's what makes cities like Manchester continue to be such vibrant places to live, work, and play.

However, in many neighbourhoods, access to nature isn't equal. If you live in the city centre, you're less likely to have access to green space at home, with few people having an outdoor space they can call their own. Having a high-quality nature-rich green space near to where you live or work is a postcode lottery, too, and it particularly disadvantages communities in economically deprived or ethnically diverse areas.

Our city needs green infrastructure now more than ever. We need it for its environmental benefits, so it can cool our buildings and soak up rainwater, making urban spaces more resilient.

We need it because it promotes biodiversity and keeps pollinators buzzing. And we need it for ourselves – for our mental and physical wellbeing.

We can't solve problems with the same thinking that created them – and that goes for our access to urban nature and green space too. From replacing paving slabs with wildflowers, to reconceiving concrete megaliths as hanging gardens, it requires innovative thinking and bold action to green the grey. In Manchester, the National Trust will be opening Castlefield Viaduct as an urban sky park for a year from July 2022, breathing new life into one of Manchester's iconic structures.

To care about something, you need to know it exists. So in the fight for access to green space in the changing city, let's also take the time to notice our precious urban nature, and to connect with green spaces near and far. "Look deep into nature," as Einstein once said, "and you will understand everything better."



A *grand* PLACE TO ESCAPE FROM



Helen Antrobus

Assistant National Curator
(Cultural Landscapes)
The National Trust



‘It is a well-known paradox that love of nature is the strongest in places from which nature has been most resolutely thrown out.’

Written in 1906, these words from the Manchester Guardian are as pertinent today as they were then. The city of Manchester is in constant flux; new developments are met with a responsibility and a need to preserve, protect and facilitate green space. From the initiatives of Plant NOMA across the city to the work of the National Trust on the soon to be opened Castlefield Viaduct, these oases of green space serve to connect the people of Manchester (and Greater Manchester) to the joys and well-being that nature can bring.

The love of nature in a place where it had once been ‘thrown out’, however, is not a new concept. Since the advent of the industrial revolution, campaigners, charitable missions, and more importantly, the people of Manchester, have salvaged pockets of green space, and valued their connection to it.

This is a story of two halves – the movement to leave the city to form a connect to nature; and the actions taken to foster green spaces within the confines of the city itself.

Between 1900 and 1945, the people of Manchester ‘escaped’ to the beautiful and wild landscapes of the Peak District and the Lake Districts. The talk explores three organisations – the Clarion Cycling Club, the Co-Operative Holidays Association and the Manchester Federation of Ramblers – that facilitated these escapes, so that people of the city, notably working people, could balance their long and arduous working hours with time off in the countryside.

At the same time, access to nature close to home has always played a critical role in the life of the city. Where the industrial revolution had swept away green space in the heart of the city, the people who lived and worked in the city worked to create pockets of natural beauty on their doorsteps. Window boxes and backyard frames were used by the working-classes to grow flowers, whilst working bodies such as the tramwaymen and railwaymen formed their own gardening societies. Beyond these grassroots motions to bring greenery to the smoke, there were official bodies, including the parks committee, that cared for parks as ‘lungs’ in our over crowded cities’, as ‘pleasant places for rest and recreation of the people’. (Manchester Guardian: 1905).

From parks, allotments and flower shows, to cycling, mountains, lakeshore and trespass, the past shows how working people in Manchester have resolutely pursued both cultural and physical routes to access green space.

WHAT DOES *nurture* LOOK LIKE?

In our project at NOMA, garden is a verb.

It is something we have been doing a great deal of over the first year of our City Gardening project Plant NOMA.

We are in the business of city re-enchantment.

Development has dealt us a purified city of crisp, clipped lines and careful order. Sober streetscapes have forgotten their true nature and by turn we have forgotten ours. A wilder city lies slumbering and it is time we woke it up.

We invite you to step off the pre-prescribed pathways and transgress.

Breathe more deeply and feel more keenly, behave more wildly and care more fully. Dig a little deeper into what makes a city and explore a more-than-human landscape.

We make things enchanting by the kind of attention we give to them.

As we nurture the city, a more dramatic, romantic and abundant city awaits us. You are a human in a living world and this city is your garden.



Mental Health Benefits of spending time with nature



As designers and stewards, our teams intrinsically understand the need to make the most of the places we design for communities, as they seek to restore their balance and vie for more quality green spaces to create more spaces that benefit our mental health.

Spending time with nature and bringing nature into everyday life can benefit both mental and physical wellbeing to enable us to lead happy healthy lives in and out of work. Experiencing the sights, smells, atmosphere can help with the stresses of a busy life. This can be about small changes like bringing more plants into the studio environment or providing an outside space for meetings or lunch. We held Planit's Standish festival for all team members outside with many camped under the stars. This was a celebration of re-connecting with each other after spending forced time apart and an opportunity to be IN nature - picking, making, and eating meals using foraged items and some home-grown produce from our beds on site.

We have a calendar of events for our weekly newsletter to encourage team members throughout the year to take simple actions to improve their health and wellbeing. Many involve connecting with or getting out into nature such as Walk this May where we encouraged net-walking and walking meetings, and the Mental Health Foundation's awareness week whose theme was, conveniently 'nature'.

Spending time with nature yields measurable mental benefits and research in this area is growing a clear evidence base, which is why it's advocated by all the leading mental health charities and we begin to see the growth of the '*natural prescription*'.

Rural

Sited between two communities, one new, one old; Standish is the home of our Regenerative Practice studio and operates as a social experiment alongside a functioning business. Through iteration and collaboration we seek to foster community cohesion via events and participation in place.

We recently opened the studio doors for a lively event that brought together 40 new and long-standing residents of Stonehouse, and introduced them to our team. Invigorated by the level of support, the evening generated a wealth of opportunities to re-connect with nature, provide a place to come together, and (most importantly) get a good cup of coffee!

Our belief is a community is already forming – it just needs a space within which to coalesce. The Standish project acts as living proof to our clients of the social, cultural and brand value of delivering embedded community amenities and enabling active and authentic participation in place.





Old Knowledge

A teaspoon of healthy soil contains more micro-organisms than people on the planet. It is a living ecosystem, a 'soil food web'. Current farming methods break this soil food web, introducing mechanical and chemical inputs in place of organic processes. This degrades soils, damages ecosystems and releases massive amounts of carbon into our atmosphere.

At our Standish studio we have established a no-dig food growing system that replicates a forest's sustainable growing system. It removes the need to plough and builds up stable organic matter, sequesters carbon, and nurtures the soil food web.

With our ten no-dig beds we are growing nutritional food for the local community without herbicides, pesticides or artificial fertilisers. We're learning about regenerative land management, and reconnecting with elemental processes, which in turn inform our practice.

We are actively researching and developing our understanding of this greatest of resources, and how we can work better with it to restore soil health and recover nature across projects of all scales. This has involved knowledge-sharing and advocacy across the practice and a multidisciplinary audience of specialists, to raise awareness of soil health and develop best practice more widely in the built environment industry.

Delivering biodiversity net gain is a target for many of our projects and creating truly biodiverse landscapes represents one of our biggest challenges. We are working collaboratively with professional ecologists, in particular our old friend of 25-years, Paul 'Charlie' Chester, to challenge the typical mitigation-led approach that has failed to arrest the catastrophic loss of habitat and species in recent decades. We asked Charlie if he could share with an audience beyond Planit, the real magnitude of the challenges we are facing.



"We are using the historic and more biodiverse landscape of the past to inform our designs for the future. By working with the landscape and allowing nature to guide our design process I and the team believe that we can begin to achieve meaningful and sustainable net biodiversity gain."

"I'm increasingly of the view that the problem lies in my profession - lack of field skills / true passion for nature and mitigation-led approach along with the new breed who believe their role is to support development. **There is only one outcome - disaster.** Even worse is coming down the tracks, as the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management have identified a major skills shortage, particularly of ecologists with 7-10yrs + experience."

Paul 'Charlie' Chester
Ecologist



It's true that we are doing something different on a number of our projects where the clients are more enlightened and willing to listen, intently. It is, however, a challenge to make meaningful change and many projects are on a knife edge as to whether they will succeed or fail on biodiversity loss/gain.

To move the dial in the right direction, we must seek the experts, draw them closer and quickly use them to help us grow our own. As our Regenerative Practice studio takes root down in Gloucestershire, we will continue to focus on reversing biodiversity decline and ecological collapse across the range of our projects.

WHY WE NEED A HEAD OF *horticulture?*



In a world where cities and regions are declaring Climate Emergencies and trying to get to grips with delivering and stewarding softer, more resilient, and adaptable environments we, our clients and the citizens with who we work, must learn from the very best, and in turn become the change we need.

So, we were delighted when we found Pilar Medrano Dell, who had just completed the Master's in Landscape Management at Sheffield University, working closely with our heroes, Professors Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough - pioneers in modern native and climate-adaptive planting and management techniques.

From working in numerous roles across the RHS to being the first female horticultural lead at the Commonwealth War Graves commission, Pilar brings to Planit a unique set of skills and experience.

As the practice works to clearly define its role, reach, and purpose for the years and generations ahead, we are more regularly approached to advise on place governance, stewardship, adaptability, and resilience - subjects we are experienced and passionate around and learning more about each day.

She has joined our co-founder Ed Lister at the Standish Studio in Gloucestershire, helping to support and develop Planit's research and application into regenerative processes on all projects.

As we continue to build a team of experts around us, both within and close to the Practice, we are growing our knowledge and critically, comfort and agency to challenge conventions and lead from the front.



Open

Studio

Building a learning ecosystem – both within and beyond the Practice – is a critical part of our mission, and an unwritten part of the B Corp contract. You cannot be the change if you don't learn from others and teach those who will come after you.

For the first time in our 25-year history, we introduced a week-long series of open studio events, welcoming the next generation of Landscape Architects, Urban Designers and those studying for nature and climate-related qualifications to the practice. During April, each of our five studios welcomed students from across the country (and beyond) to have a look at our work, get an introduction to our culture and hear why we do what we do.

NURTURING GROWTH



It is always gratifying to receive a job application from someone whose interest was caught at a school event we supported, or bump into a University student who gained work experience with us. Building awareness of environmental design, encouraging young people to consider a career in the industry, or nurturing talent is as satisfying for us, as for students.

We sponsor and directly contribute to PLACED Academy, a free to access creative programme about the built environment for 14-18 year olds, and offer a wide-range of insights into the realities of professional life. Some of the most satisfying work experience we offer is directly related to our commissions, involving students in research and design development of schemes in the immediate areas that they go to school or live. Real-life, meaningful insights and contributions enrich their understanding and inform our work.

10 THINGS WE'VE DONE...

Impact 01 set out where we had begun, where we were going, and the small steps we had taken to get there. As we look ahead to our re-certification in July 2023, we will give greater focus to those steps we take next, running up to that important date. But, we haven't stood still in 2021/22, and over the this year, we've managed to make ten more, impactful steps forward.

1. Set up **Change the Plan(it)** and associated working groups to prepare for Employee Ownership.
2. Created **sub-consultant and supplier surveys** /questionnaires to encourage sustainable and ethical practices, and promote B Corp.
3. Two team members undertook training for organisations interested in setting up their own **Carbon Literacy Training programme**.
4. Gathered data to calculate our **Baseline Carbon Footprint**.
5. Introduced '**carbon budget**' and emission offsetting alongside 'financial and time budgets' for annual Study Trips.
6. Enhanced **maternity and paternity benefits**.
7. Instigated **hybrid working pilot** during phased return to studio, and survey of all team members to inform our adopted approach.
8. **Appointed Head of Horticulture** to develop plans for climate resilient planting, carbon sequestration and regenerative landscapes.
9. **Established no-dig beds** as part of Standish sustainable food production initiative.
10. Trained a group of **Mental Health First Aiders** across the practice to support the team's ongoing health and wellbeing.

In reality, things rarely go to plan.... Even if you have a plan.

Likewise, those plans never go smoothly. You have ups and downs; peaks and troughs.

You set a course; you hit some marks, you miss others.

This is the ongoing story of our B Corp journey, specifically over the last year, related to our transition to becoming Employee Owned.

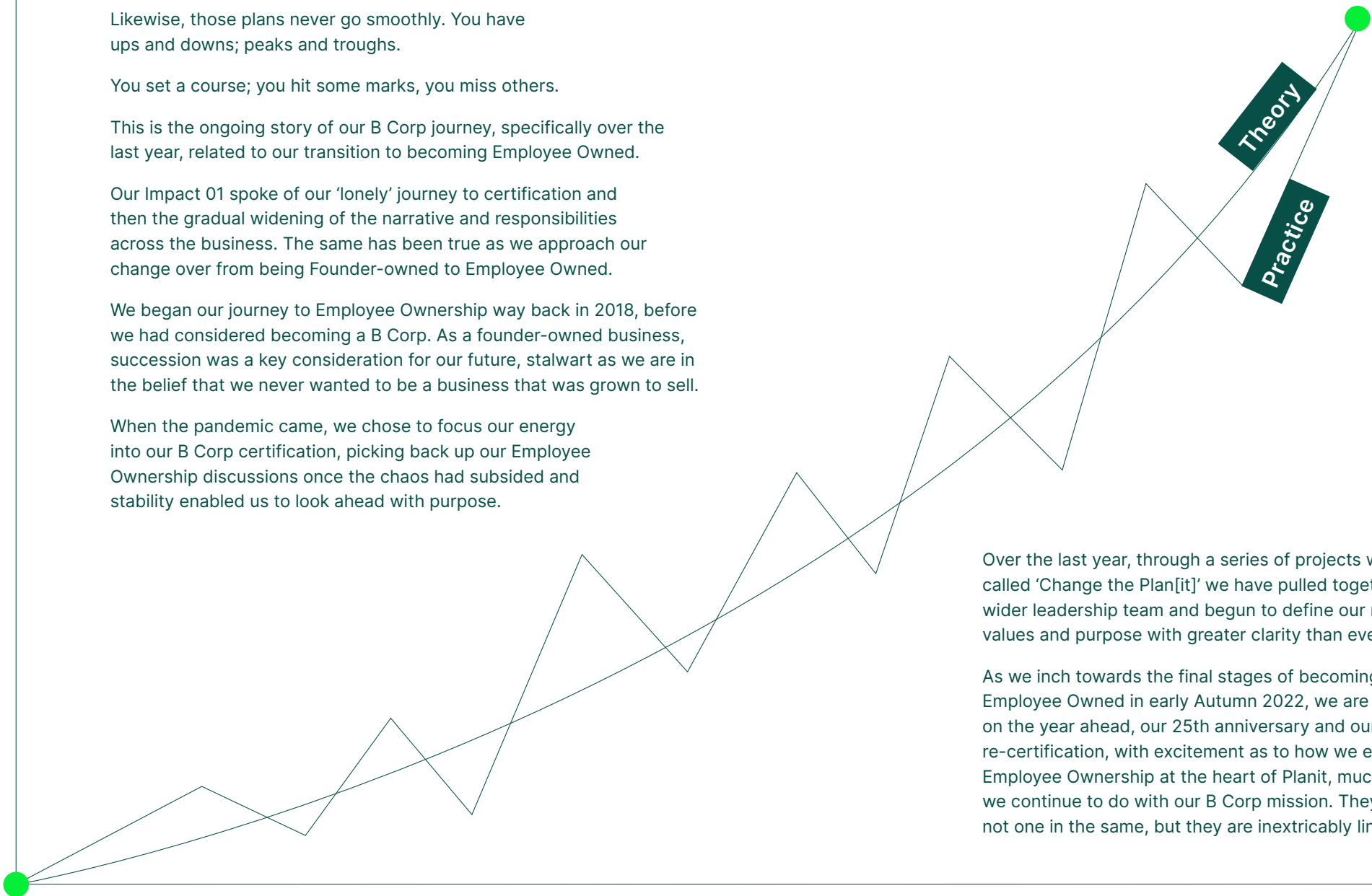
Our Impact 01 spoke of our 'lonely' journey to certification and then the gradual widening of the narrative and responsibilities across the business. The same has been true as we approach our change over from being Founder-owned to Employee Owned.

We began our journey to Employee Ownership way back in 2018, before we had considered becoming a B Corp. As a founder-owned business, succession was a key consideration for our future, stalwart as we are in the belief that we never wanted to be a business that was grown to sell.

When the pandemic came, we chose to focus our energy into our B Corp certification, picking back up our Employee Ownership discussions once the chaos had subsided and stability enabled us to look ahead with purpose.

Over the last year, through a series of projects we have called 'Change the Plan[it]' we have pulled together our wider leadership team and begun to define our mission, values and purpose with greater clarity than ever before.

As we inch towards the final stages of becoming Employee Owned in early Autumn 2022, we are focussing on the year ahead, our 25th anniversary and our first re-certification, with excitement as to how we embed Employee Ownership at the heart of Planit, much as we continue to do with our B Corp mission. They are not one in the same, but they are inextricably linked.





Original intention
+116 Tonnes of Carbon

Change from China to Portugal
-13.5 Tonnes of Carbon

Change from replace to repurposed
-73 Tonnes of Carbon

Hardscape Products Ltd have worked collaboratively with Planit for over two decades. We are both closely aligned in our business and design ethos and fulfilling the Hardscape mantra of ensuring our materials / proposals fit the given design, rather than adjusting design to fit only available materials.

Zero carbon ambition is in our collective DNA, as is the wider ESG agenda demonstrated by Hardscape only recently becoming Employee Owned.

The existing materials in Oldham's streets are no more than 15 years old and the majority were ideal for repurposing thereby unlocking the carbon credit of reuse and not having to remake new.

Working together from the inception of the design process and using our local and innovative offsite alongside onsite techniques, 236 m3 of existing material was refreshed with a carbon credit / negative of 73 tonnes of carbon. When we did bring material in, through using closer origin Portuguese new granite versus Chinese, a further 13.5 tonnes of carbon were gained. A whopping 87 Tonnes deficit from the atmosphere!

Conversely, if all new material had been used, the Carbon cost would have been a positive 116 Tonnes released into the atmosphere.

Big ideas, translated to small details = big impact. Now that's better than zero!

Matthew Haslam

Managing Director

Hardscape Products Ltd



Ten Podcasts / documentaries
/ films that we've watched
or listened to recently that
we think you should to!
Click on each to enjoy...




Colophon

The titles in this document are set in Ryman Eco.

Ryman Eco is the world's most beautiful, sustainable font - an environmentally sustainable typeface, using an average of 33% less ink than standard fonts. Read more about it [here](#).

All images are from Planit projects and shot by either Fii or [withloveproject](#).

If you want to talk to us about B Corp don't hang back.

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