

Building a company culture that empowers sustainability.

By Kieran Doona

EHS Manager

Wills Bros Group (UK & Ireland).



A little about me



- **Nationality** - Irish Citizen living in Scotland.
- **Personal Life** - Husband and Dad to Two Boys (aged 3+2)
- **Experience** - Working in the construction industry for 20+ years.
- **Employment History** - Working in EHS Role with Wills Bros Group for 17+ years.
- **Job Title** – EHS Manager (Wills Bros Group – UK).
- **Professional Associations** - CFIOSH / FIIRSM / MCIWM / MISEP / CEnv.
- **Passions** – Family/Sustainability/OSH/Volunteering

I ❤️ family,
sustainability,
OSH,
volunteering



A little about Wills Bros Group



Established in 1972.

Privately owned / family run business.

Roots in Rural Ireland.

Farming background originally.

500+ Employees.

€240 Million Turnover.

Primarily delivering contracts in UK & Ireland (occasional contracts in Mainland Europe).

100% focused on what we know (Civil Engineering).

<https://willsbros.com/>

Slido Survey



*What imagery
come to your mind
when you hear the
word*

“Sustainability”



Introduction



DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUSTAINABILITY (ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY WITH OSH ETC).



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SUSTAINABILITY.



WILLS BROS JOURNEY TO BECOMING MORE SUSTAINABLE IN THE CIVIL ENGINEERING SECTOR.



CASE STUDIES INCLUDING CHALLENGES AND HOW WE OVERCAME THEM.

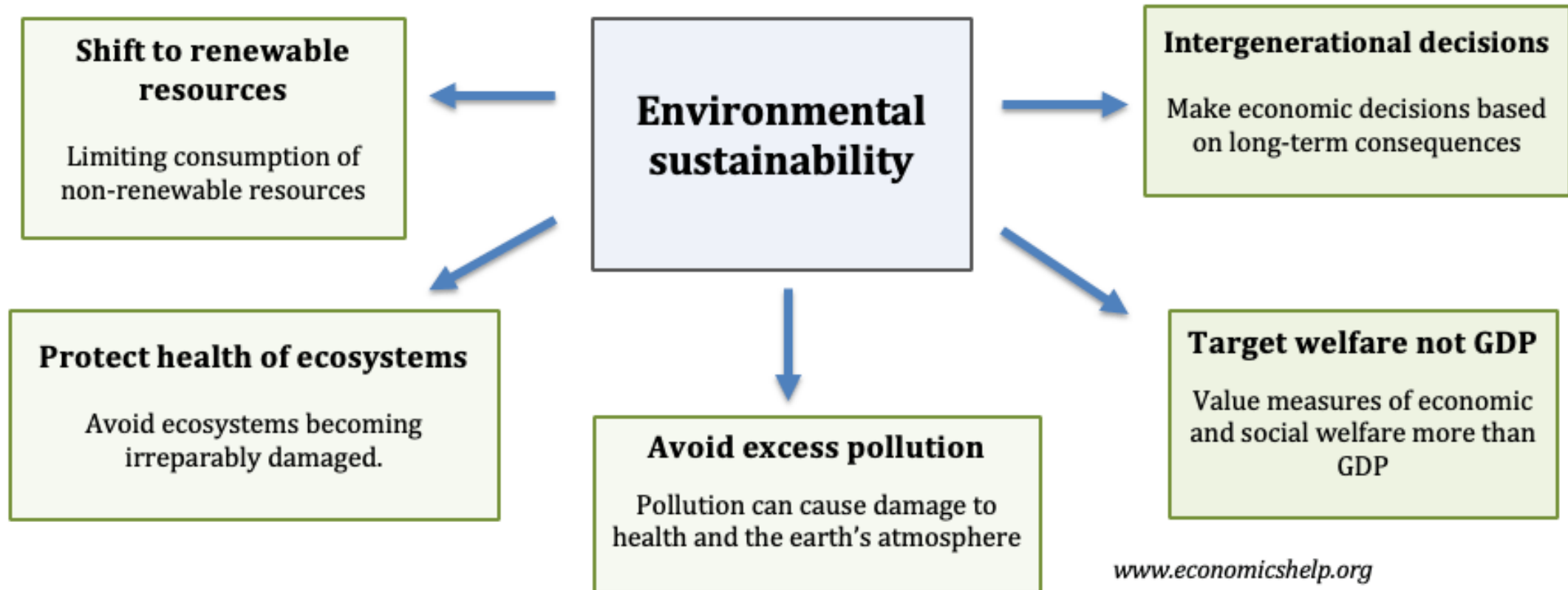


THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE ON OUR JOURNEY.



HOW EVERYONE CAN MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Environmental Sustainability



Different Focuses of Sustainability



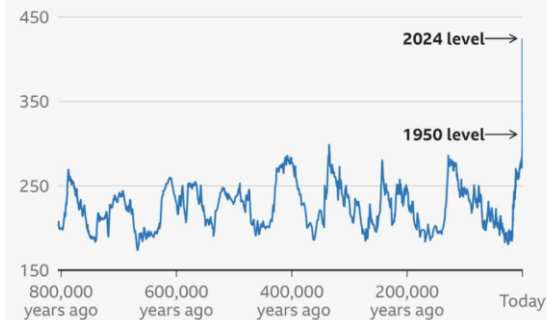
Aspect	Environmental Sustainability	Social Sustainability	OSH Sustainability
Focus	Protection of natural systems	Human and community well-being	Worker health, safety, and welfare
Key Practices	Pollution control, resource efficiency, renewable energy	Equality, education, inclusion, cultural integrity	Risk management, health promotion, safe workplace design
Main Goal	Maintain ecological balance	Create equitable, cohesive societies	Ensure long-term worker safety and productivity
Indicators	Carbon footprint, biodiversity index, waste reduction	Social equity, education levels, community resilience	Injury rates, worker satisfaction, absenteeism rates
Challenges	Climate change, resource depletion	Inequality, social exclusion	Emerging risks, mental health, ergonomic hazards

The need for Sustainability



Carbon dioxide levels are higher than any time in the last 800,000 years

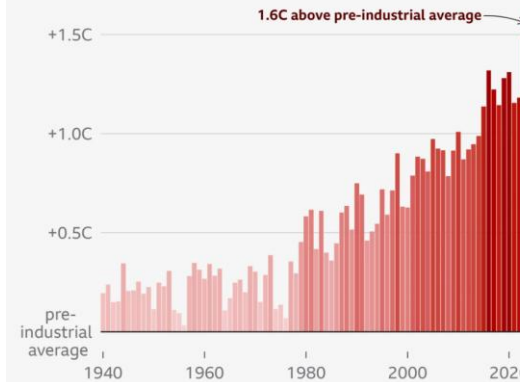
Atmospheric CO2 concentrations, parts per million



Historical data from ice-core records; most recent from atmospheric measurements
Source: NOAA/Bereiter et al., 2015

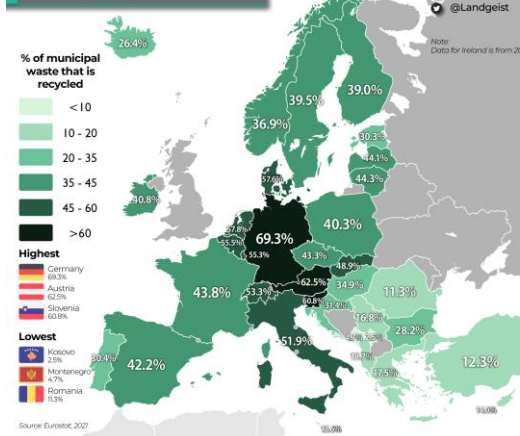
2024 was the first year above 1.5C

Global average temperature by year, compared with the pre-industrial average (1850-1900)

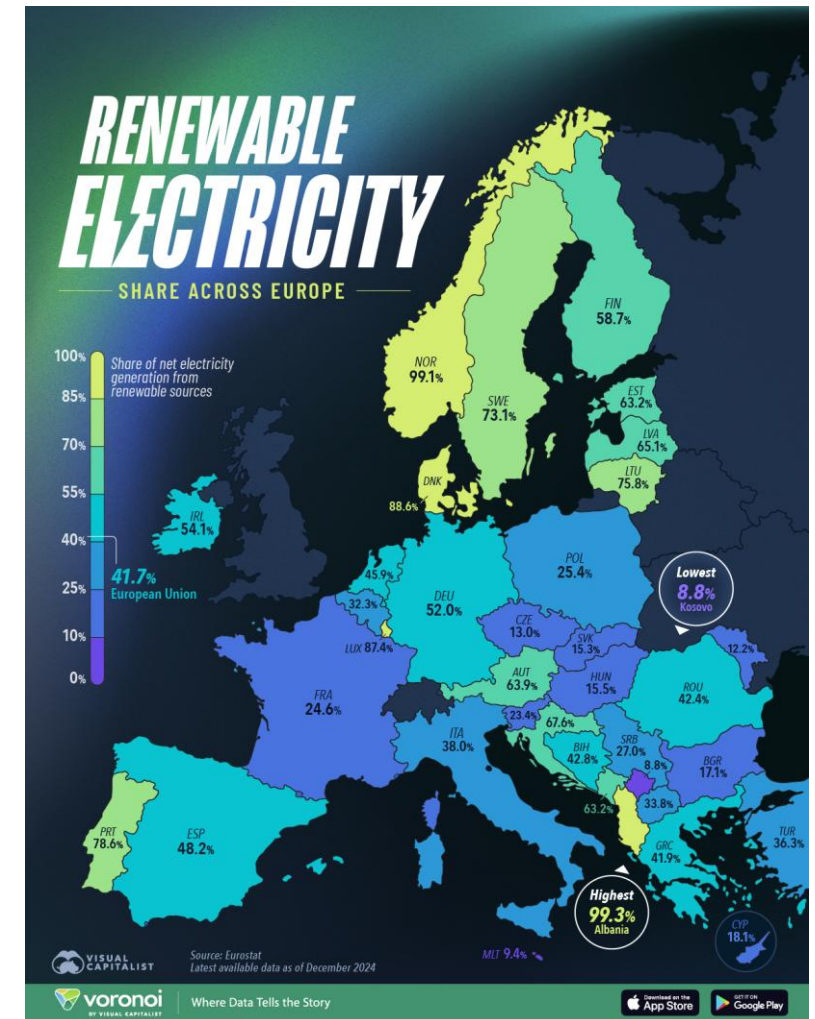
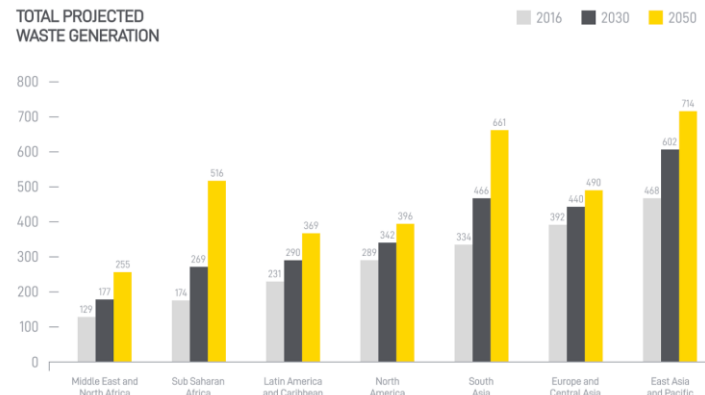


Source: ERA5, C3S/ECMWF. Darker reds reflect greater warming

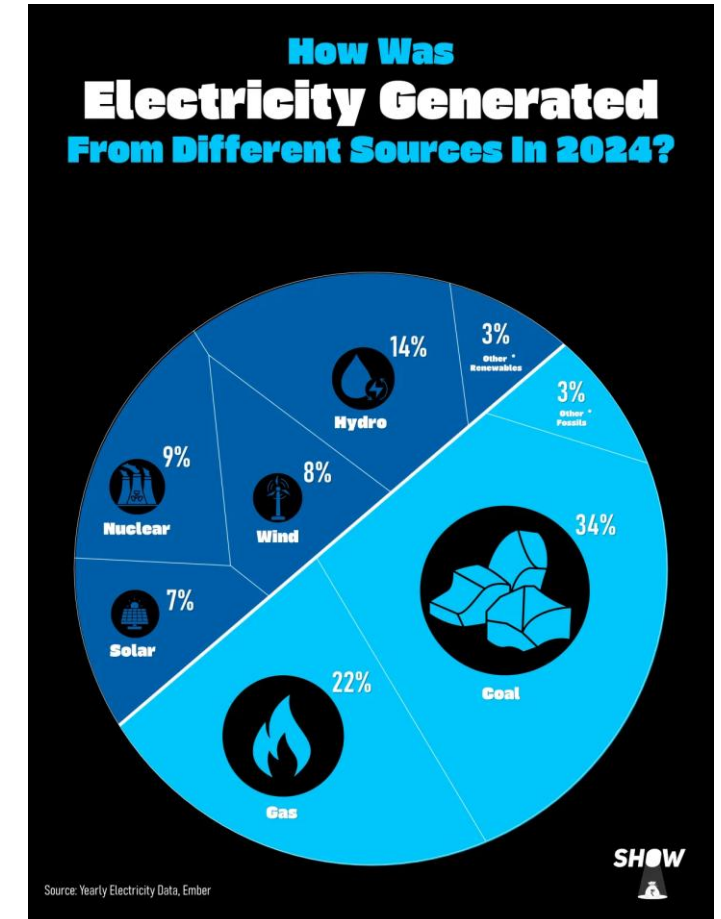
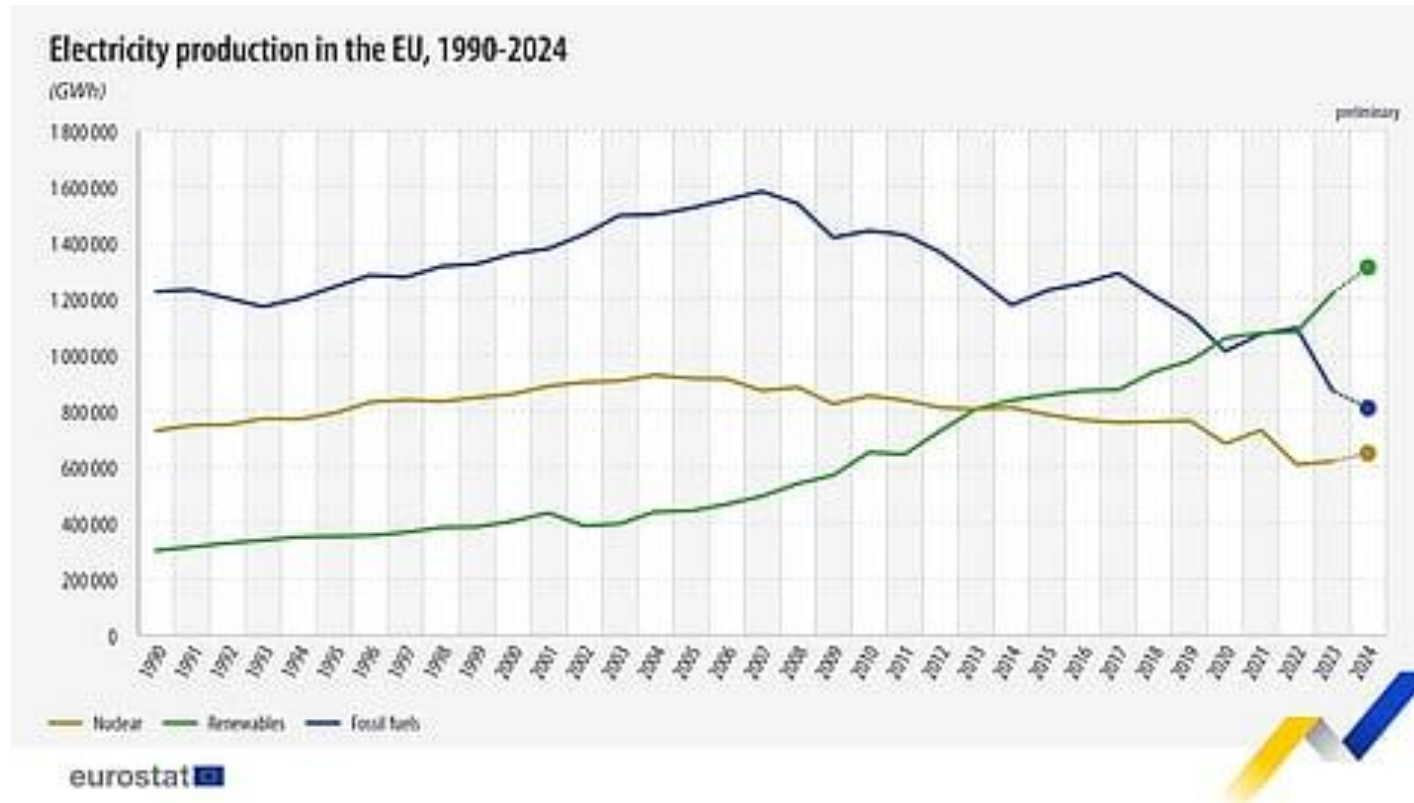
Recycling rate



TOTAL PROJECTED WASTE GENERATION



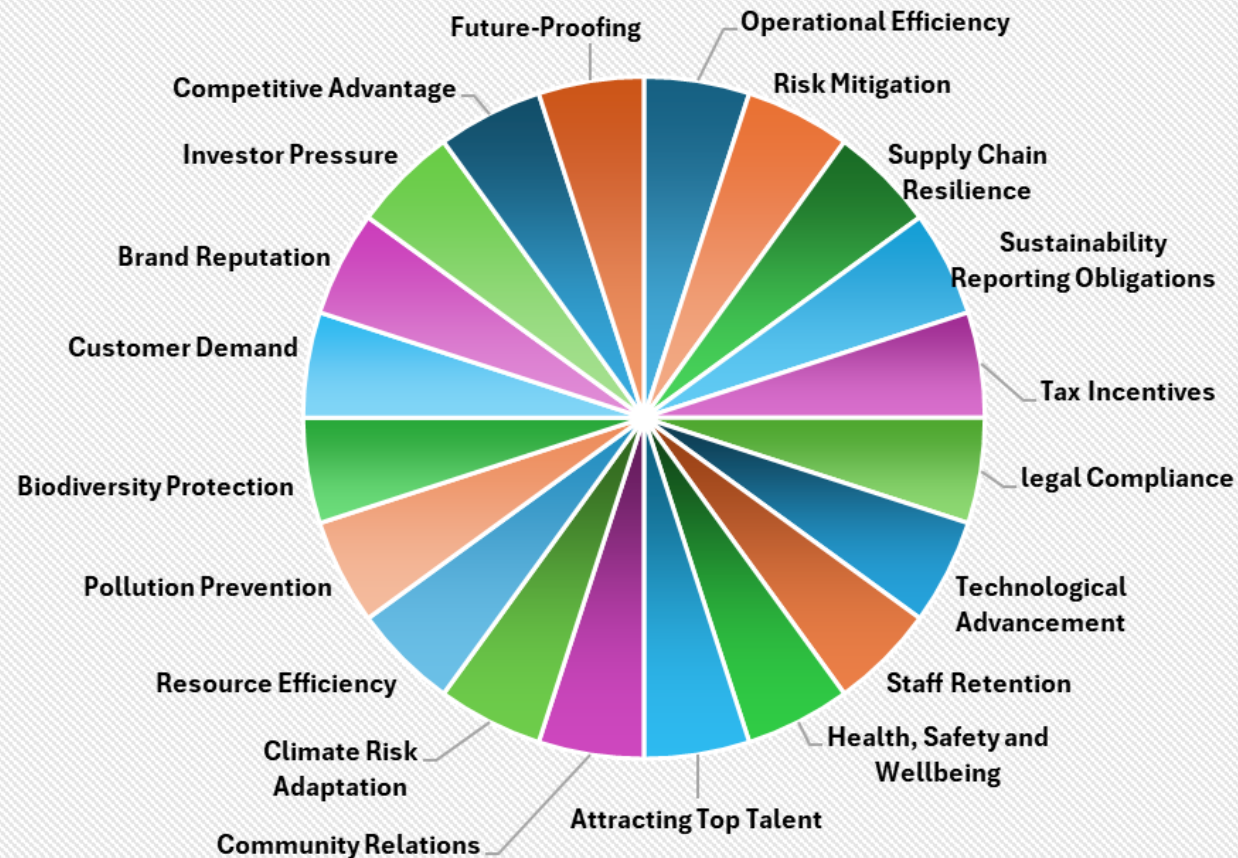
Trends in Electricity Production



The Business Case for Sustainability



The Business Case for Sustainability



Key Challenges to Sustainability in the Civil Engineering Sector



Aging workforce with rigid mindset "We've always done it this way" or "if its not broke don't fix it"

High embodied carbon in materials (e.g., cement, steel) with limited low-carbon alternatives available at scale.

Complex supply chains making it difficult to trace and verify sustainable sourcing.

Uncertain return on investment (ROI) for sustainability initiatives.

Pressure to remain competitive on cost in tendering processes that don't always prioritise sustainability.

Differing priorities between design, procurement, and construction teams on delivering sustainability targets.

Unclear or evolving government policies on carbon reduction and environmental compliance.

Geographical constraints limiting renewable energy integration (e.g., solar, wind).

Scarcity of local resources, leading to higher transport emissions.

Lack of client demand or willingness to pay for sustainability-driven solutions.

Inconsistent regulations and sustainability standards across regions.

Big Capital Investment for an Industry with tight profit margins

Short project timelines that discourage experimentation with sustainable methods.

Dependence on subcontractors who may not follow the same sustainability standards.

Limited data sharing between contractors, consultants, and suppliers for lifecycle assessments.

Difficulty in measuring and monitoring carbon emissions across different project stages.

Difficulty integrating new technologies

Balancing development needs with environmental protection and community concerns.

Logistical issues in transporting sustainable materials over long distances, reducing their benefits.

Difficulty embedding sustainability into company culture and decision-making.

Success in Overcoming Obstacles



Shallow Management Structure Means Quick Decision Making

New Generation of Leaders coming through who buy into Sustainability

The Construction Industry is Highly Adaptable and used to change.

The industry is driving the change.
Not Regulations

Longevity with senior leadership team helps with policy continuity

Increasing competency and technological solutions to Carbon Accounting.

Increasing awareness and support of climate change challenges

Clients are increasing setting measurable sustainability targets

Investing in sustainability makes financial sense

Investment in sustainability is needed to stay competitive

Focus on Faster Grid Connections to provide power Vs diesel generators

Initiatives such as the Supply Chain Sustainability School help with knowledge sharing.

Young People want to work in organisations that care about the environment

Doing it because we want to do it, not because you're contractually or legally obliged

New Energy Efficient Technology coming on the market all the time.

Considering green benefits as part of long-term capital investments.

Employing local people where possible.

Share Successes (e.g. Considerate Constructors Scheme Best Practice Hub).

Building Long Term Mutually Beneficial Supply Chain Relationships

Make Sustainability tangible, and relatable at a local level.

Reality Check Beyond the Headlines



Case study

How Wills Bros cut carbon by 87% on a high-voltage cable crossing

04 April 2022



One Carbon World ✓
@OneCarbonWorld1

Congratulations to Wills Bros who have just become the first civil engineering company in the World to achieve both the coveted Carbon Neutral Gold Standard and UN Climate Neutral Now Participation through One Carbon World.

[#carbonneutral](#) [#GoldStandard](#) [#welldone](#) [#willsbros](#)

Civil engineering firm Wills Bros slashes carbon emissions by 42% as profits double



How PAS 2080 helped the GAIA project to make major carbon savings

Civil Engineering driving the move towards a Sustainable Future !



Solar Farms



Onshore Wind



Battery Storage



**Interconnector Cable
between Ireland and
France**



Flood Prevention



Sustainable Transport



Landfill Remediation



Cycle Lanes

Wills Bros Journey to Sustainability

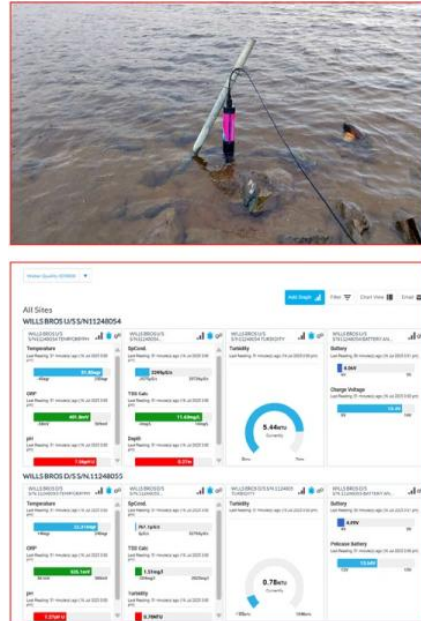


SOLAR POWER



Since installation, the 155kWp capacity array has generated an impressive 107,000 kWh. represents a saving of more than 27 tCO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) when compared to the average carbon intensity of local grid electricity.

CONTINUOUS WATER MONITORING



In-situ sondes provide continuous water quality data at custom-set 15-minute intervals and are equipped with alarms that trigger when parameters exceed permitted levels, providing immediate response in the event of a breach.

SOCIAL VALUE



A Personal Approach

- Community Engagement
- Local Employment
- Local Suppliers
- Local Impact
- Local Sponsorship
- Site Visits
- Mentoring
- Educational Programmes
- Work Experience
- Charity Fundraising
- Promoting Careers
- Donated Materials
- Equal Opportunities

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY



Every Year we rebrand the company as 'Wills Sisters' to promote women in construction and women in non-traditional roles.

Control over Decision Making.

- Limited use of Subcontractors
- In-House Material Testing
- In-House Design
- In-House Ecology
- In-House Sustainability
- In-House OSH



Wills Sisters - Promoting Opportunities for Women in Non-Traditional Roles



**THINK CONSTRUCTION
IS JUST FOR BOYS ?
THINK AGAIN**

The Importance of Leadership and Culture along the Journey



A company's sustainability journey starts at the top. When a Business-owner prioritises sustainability, it becomes embedded in the organisation's DNA.

Leadership commitment transforms sustainability from a series of ad-hoc initiatives into a structured, measurable strategy.

Leaders play several key roles in this process:

- Setting the Vision and Embedding Sustainability into Business Strategy
- Employing and motivating people who share the same vision.
- Driving Organisational Culture and Accountability
- Engaging Stakeholders and Building Partnerships
- Investing in Innovation and Future-Proofing the Business

A Balanced Approach to Sustainability

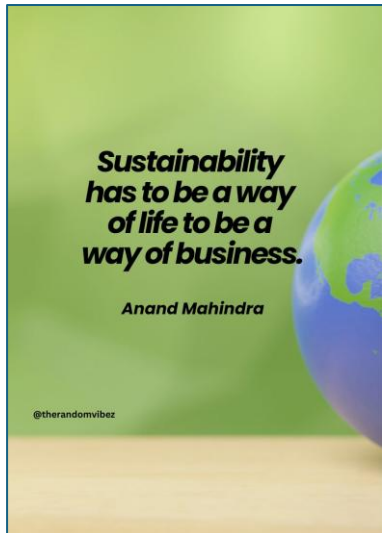


Return to Slido Survey

The Results !!!!



Closing Sustainability Quotes



6. "Sustainability is no longer about doing less harm. It's about doing more good."
- Jochen Zeitz



I've been Kieran Doona
EHS Manager – Wills Bros Group.

Thank you !

- Lets keep the great discussions going on LinkedIn.

