

Sustainability and Giving Back Report 2023



Introduction

Three years on from the publication of our first Sustainability and Giving Back strategy, our ambitions in this area have grown alongside our business. Over the past three years we have built up a comprehensive set of resources for our family of businesses to support them in implementing sustainable ways of working, including e-learning courses, webinars, workplace posters and signs, and one-to-one advice through visits, calls and our dedicated sustainability inbox. We have also adopted processes to incentivise sustainability and giving back including the TerraCycle scheme, discounted Investors in the Environment memberships, volunteering days, tax-free payroll giving and donation matching.

In 2023 these processes went from strength to strength. As well as supporting our practices, we also increased our focus on elements of our central planning and support, to ensure that we embed environmental and social sustainability into our strategy as we grow. In particular, a key focus this year was on our energy use and carbon emissions, as we continued the rollout of automatic metering, started work on calculating our carbon footprint in more detail so we can set net-zero targets, and conducted energy audits in preparation for our submission under the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme in 2024.

We also expanded our scope, looking beyond our direct impacts and starting to calculate the carbon emissions arising from our supply chain. Many of our suppliers are also taking action on sustainability, and we launched our first supplier code of conduct and sustainability and human rights questionnaire to help us better understand where we can work together to make positive changes.

2023 was also our biggest charity fundraising year yet by quite some margin. Our colleagues' ingenuity, enthusiasm and generosity, combined with our donation matching scheme, meant we nearly doubled last year's charity donation total, with £294,056 going to 216 different worthy causes. As always, the money was raised in a huge variety of different ways. Highlights this year included three ultra-marathons, several quiz nights, a dragon boat race, two Channel swims, a duck race, a pink uniform week, and the transformation of an office into a fully functioning German Christmas market, among hundreds of other events organised by our dedicated colleagues.

A note from Jo:

"I am constantly inspired by the generosity and dedication of our colleagues, both in their work, and in their commitment to giving back to people, animals and the environment on scales from local to global. This year has seen our colleagues raise more than ever for their chosen charities, and often in ways that bring their teams together: organising fundraising events, taking on team challenges, or volunteering. That team spirit has also been demonstrated through the achievements of VetPartners businesses who have gained or maintained Investors in the Environment accreditation this year, given their time to energy audits, and formed green groups within their practices to work together on sustainability.

As our VetPartners family grows larger, we're looking to the future to ensure that we meet our vision of growing in a sustainable and ethical way. In particular, the net-zero project we launched in 2023 represents our commitment to long term planning and thinking, and I am looking forward to developing our climate strategy and targets during 2024".



Jo Malone | VetPartners CEO



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Looking forward together



Sustainability highlights

2023 has seen us start two long-term sustainability projects: starting to baseline our full carbon footprint and prepare to set net-zero targets, and a review of the environmental and social sustainability of our supply chain. In December, we appointed consultants Simply Sustainable to help us calculate our baseline carbon emissions: going beyond the scope 1 and scope 2 emissions we have already been reporting to calculate the scope 3 emissions associated with our upstream and downstream value chains. Once we have this detailed understanding of the makeup of our carbon footprint, we will develop our net-zero targets and – more importantly – the strategy that we’ll use to achieve them.

This year we also developed our Supplier Code of Conduct, setting out the minimum environmental and social standards we expect from the companies that supply us with medicines, equipment and other business supplies. Building on our existing relationships with our major suppliers, we engaged with them on our sustainability targets, and sent out our first sustainability and human rights questionnaire to help us understand the actions that they’re taking to make their own operations and value chains more sustainable. The answers to this questionnaire will also help us to ensure our procurement activity is carried out responsibly: with the aim of minimising any negative environmental or social impacts, and promoting positive changes throughout the whole life cycle and supply chain.

Practices continued to recycle the ‘unrecyclable’ with TerraCycle, recycling the largest annual amount since we began using the scheme. 6.4 tonnes of PPE, flexible plastics, pet food pouches and medication blister packs were saved from landfill or incineration and given a second life. This year the Health and Safety audit team has also added waste management to the topics covered in their on-site reviews, meaning we can now provide more personalised advice to practices on how to reduce waste volumes, increase recycling, and ensure safe and efficient disposal.

As well as working within our own businesses, we remained active in working for sustainability in the wider veterinary sector in 2023. Many VetPartners colleagues are members of working groups within VetSustain, a non-profit organisation working to promote sustainability in the veterinary sector, and our Head of ESG acted as module champion for VetSustain’s new training course on sustainability in practice. We also had an article published in *In Practice* magazine on ‘recycling the unrecyclable’, spoke about sustainability at the World Small Animal Veterinary Association’s annual congress in Lisbon, and recognised sustainable innovation in farming through our second annual Sustainable Dairy Farmer of the Year awards.

As always, we continued to offer personalised advice and support on sustainability to VetPartners businesses, plus discounted memberships to Investors in the Environment (iE). 20% of our UK businesses are now accredited or working towards accreditation with iE. By the end of 2023, nine had achieved Bronze, three Silver (including our central support office), and one the highest Green award.



Giving back highlights

2023 was the second year of our donation matching scheme, in which we pledge to match fundraising by our colleagues for registered charities up to 100%. The total amount raised for charity in 2023 was nearly double that of 2022, with a total of £294,056 raised for 92 different charities.

Nearly £20,000 of this total was raised for our charity of the year, Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust: a small charity working to alleviate rural poverty and improve animal welfare in The Gambia. As well as horses and donkeys, the charity treats any animal in need, and shares their skills and knowledge to train local people to care for their own animals.

As well as fundraising, three VetPartners equine vets travelled to The Gambia during the year to volunteer, including Quantock Vets clinical director Louise Ash who said, "My time volunteering with the Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust was quite possibly one of the best things I have done with my veterinary degree." Founder and director of Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust Heather Armstrong said, "Our very sincere thanks to the practices that held fundraisers for us. We are so very grateful to each and every one of you for the support that you have given us over the year, not only financially but with donations of equipment as well. We consider ourselves very lucky that VetPartners chose us as your charity for 2023."

In 2022 we chose World Land Trust as our group charity, pledging to support their Buy an Acre scheme for at least five years. Under the scheme, World Land Trust and their partners purchase one acre of habitat for every £100 raised and protect it for wildlife in perpetuity. In 2023 colleagues embraced our model of donating money to World Land Trust in the form of sponsorship for team building and outreach events, resulting in donations of over £38,000 which paid for the protection of 381 acres of land. Events included VetPartners Italy's conference stand, a CPD event for veterinary nurses in France, and the hugely popular Month of Movement, with VetPartners donating money for every 15 minutes of physical activity our colleagues did in May.

Our second annual Month of Movement proved even more popular than the first, with colleagues moving for a combined total of 8,321 hours doing a huge range of activities. Many teams came together to get active, including Tower Vets in York who did a team hike, St Peter's Vets in Hampshire who arranged a group spin class, and members of the central support team who ran a half marathon. In total, we donated £66,495 from the event, split equally between World Land Trust and Vetlife, an organisation that offers emotional and financial support to people working in the veterinary sector.

2023 was also the second year of us offering colleagues an annual paid day off for volunteering. Colleagues used the day for a wide range of volunteering opportunities, including teaching gardening skills to young people, hedgerow planting, and providing free veterinary care to animal rescue charities. Many colleagues used the day as part of a longer trip to volunteer abroad on initiatives such as neutering clinics and rabies vaccination projects.

At the end of the year, colleagues voted for our 2024 charity of the year. For England, Scotland and Wales the chosen cause was StreetVet: a charity that delivers free veterinary care and services to the pets of people experiencing homelessness. Our Northern Ireland charity of the year for 2024 is Guide Dogs NI, and for Ireland it is Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind: charities helping people who are vision impaired to achieve better mobility and independence.



Total donated in 2022
£150,002.00

Total donated in 2023
£294,059.43

Raised by colleagues
£168,058.69

Donations & match
funding from VetPartners
£126,000.74

Of which:

To our group charity of the
year Gambia Horse and
Donkey Trust
£19,193.38

To Vetlife
£39,903.61

To our group charity
partner World Land Trust
£38,124.52

To 89 different charities
chosen by colleagues
£196,837.92

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Looking forward together



Our targets: how are we doing?

In our first Sustainability and Giving Back Strategy in 2020 we set ourselves 21 targets, covering the period until the end of 2026, and our three guiding themes: ‘We are ethical’, ‘We are resilient’, ‘We are champions’.

We’ve reviewed our progress against these targets to see where we’re on track, where we could do better, and where we’ve exceeded our ambitions. We’ve also reviewed the targets themselves to check they’re still relevant and helpful.



We are ethical

Target: “By the end of 2026...”	Progress	At a glance
90% of practices will be on renewable energy tariffs	93% of our UK sites are now on renewable electricity tariffs. <i>(In our 2021 review this target was increased from 50% to over 90% of sites on renewable energy tariffs).</i>	Achieved
We will know the carbon footprint of VetPartners and set carbon reduction targets for 2026 and 2030	In December 2023 we launched our net-zero project. We will calculate our scope 1, 2 and 3 carbon footprints and develop an evidence-based strategy to take us to net-zero, including interim targets. In late 2024 or early 2025 we will submit our carbon targets to the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) for approval.	On track
We will implement at least three ways to encourage or reward colleagues for positive environmental or social actions	Through our corporate membership with Investors in the Environment (iiE), we provided discounted iiE membership and additional support with the iiE audit process for 33 of our businesses in 2023. We also implemented a Give As You Earn scheme to allow colleagues to make tax-free charity donations via payroll. In 2023 £2,320 was donated through the scheme to colleagues’ chosen charities. <u>Previous years:</u> We launched our donation matching scheme: pledging to match fundraising by our colleagues for registered charities up to 100%. We set up a monthly prize draw for companies who tell us about Giving Back activities they’ve run. We published the VetPartners Giving Back Guide: a comprehensive resource to help colleagues find answers and inspiration about charity activities.	Achieved

Target: "By the end of 2026..."	Progress	At a glance
<p>We will make VetPartners sustainability resources available to all colleagues</p>	<p>In 2023 we updated our sustainability learning resources to include guidance on the new sustainability criteria for the Core and Environmental Sustainability awards under the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme.</p> <p><u>Previous years:</u></p> <p>We published the VetPartners Sustainability Guide on our e-learning platform: accessible to all colleagues. The guide covers all aspects of sustainability, with information specifically tailored for veterinary practices and VetPartners businesses. The content is expanded and updated on a regular basis by the Sustainability team.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>
<p>We will: deliver at least 10 hours of training and CPD to colleagues on sustainability per year and create role-specific training in sustainability and make it available to all new starters with VetPartners</p>	<p>In 2023 142 colleagues enrolled onto the sustainability resources section on VetPartners Learning.</p> <p>We did not deliver as much in-person or online CPD in 2023 as in previous years. However, we incorporated waste segregation into the health and safety review process, with members of the health and safety team now assessing waste management during site visits, and providing guidance and copies of our waste segregation poster.</p>	<p>On track</p>
<p>We will implement additional measures to reduce the use of and escape of anaesthetic greenhouse gases in 20% of practices</p>	<p>We began planning additional measures for this target at the end of 2023 for implementation in 2024: focused on improving access to training and knowledge sharing on low flow anaesthesia techniques.</p> <p><u>Previous years:</u></p> <p>In collaboration with the Clinical Board and Anaesthesia Clinical Interest Group, we ran a campaign on reducing the environmental impacts of anaesthesia - including a series of webinars, reference guides, and a commitment to phase out the use of nitrous oxide across the group. Over 99% of VetPartners practices now do not use nitrous oxide.</p>	<p>On track</p>
<p>We will develop a code of conduct for our suppliers on environmental and human rights and engage with all our tier one suppliers to ensure they abide by it</p>	<p>We have developed a Supplier Code of Conduct and a Supplier Sustainability and Human Rights Questionnaire, which we require our Preferred Suppliers to complete. In 2024, we will review the results so that we can better understand the status of sustainability and human rights monitoring in our supply chain, as well as celebrating progress and identifying where more support is needed.</p>	<p>On track</p>



We are resilient

Target: “By the end of 2026...”	Progress	At a glance
<p>We will be diverting 90% of our waste from landfill</p>	<p>In 2023 we recycled 6.4 tonnes of PPE, plastic film, pet food pouches and medication blister packs through TerraCycle: an increase of 0.8 tonnes on 2022. As these items are not normally recycled, our investment in TerraCycle Zero Waste Boxes for our practices allowed us to give these materials a second life rather than sending them to landfill or incineration.</p> <p>Challenges remain for many non-replaceable clinical waste streams for which landfilling is the only current option, however we are continuing to investigate options with waste management service providers and our suppliers.</p>	<p>Off track</p>
<p>We will reduce our energy use by 20% (on a per practice basis) compared with 2021</p>	<p>Per-practice electricity use in our businesses increased by 11% in the 2022 – 23 financial year, compared with the 2021 – 22 financial year. The use of transport fuels and ‘other’ fuels (largely burning oil used in crematoria) increased by 24% and 26% respectively on a per-practice basis. Gas use decreased by 19% on a per-practice basis.</p> <p>Heading into 2024, automatic metering is now in place across 788 of our 889 (89%) electricity and gas meters currently supplied by Total Gas & Power. The number is set to increase to 92% by the end of February 2024, with the remainder in scope for AMR installation across the first half of 2024.</p> <p>In 2023 we audited a representative sample of our sites with our energy consultants, the results of which will inform an energy savings opportunity report in 2024.</p>	<p>Off track</p>

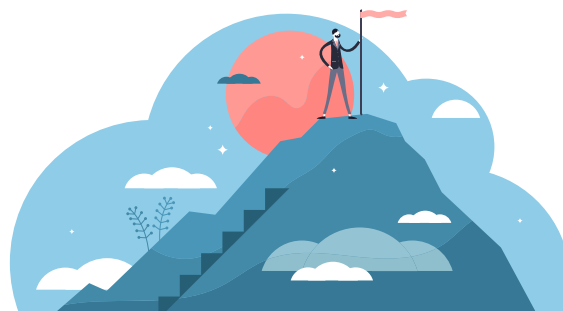


Target: “By the end of 2026...”	Progress	At a glance
<p>We will install water saving measures in 30% of practices</p>	<p>We did not make as much progress on this target in 2023 as we would have liked, as our focus is still on improving our ability to monitor our water consumption and ensuring we have complete records of our water meter coverage across our sites.</p> <p>Continuing forward, we will focus on getting full water meter coverage and reliable readings across our businesses, as well as reviewing and implementing targeted efficiency measures.</p>	<p>Off track</p>
<p>We will help 70% of our business conduct a personalised waste review: finding opportunities to minimise waste volumes and optimise waste management in their practices</p>	<p>We continued to support our businesses to conduct personalised waste reviews, supporting practices to minimise waste volumes and optimise waste management.</p> <p>In 2023, we continued to engage with our preferred suppliers on sustainability, including questions to help us get a clearer picture of how they consider final disposal during their product development.</p> <p>Looking forward, we will be reviewing whether we can implement centralised waste contracts aiming to identify improvements in dealing with our waste.</p> <p><i>(In 2021 this target changed from “we will achieve the Surfers Against Sewage ‘Plastic Free’ award in 10% of practices”).</i></p>	<p>On track</p>
<p>We will review and update the sustainability strategy annually</p>	<p>In January 2024 the sustainability team reviewed all of the targets and the progress we’ve made against them, with the results reported in this document.</p>	<p>On track</p>
<p>We will include environmental and social risks in the company risk register</p>	<p>In March 2021 the VetPartners risk register was reviewed and updated, and now includes environmental and social risks.</p> <p>Looking ahead, in early 2024, the VetPartners Risk Committee held a session on risks from climate change, which gave rise to planned actions to improve our mitigation strategies for a range of global risks, including environmental and social risks.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>
<p>We will establish a regular review process for environmental and social risks, and include mitigating actions in updates to the sustainability strategy and action plan</p>	<p>The first annual review of the company risk register took place in March 2022 incorporating input from the sustainability team on environmental and social risks.</p>	<p>On track</p>



We are champions

Target: "By the end of 2026..."	Progress	At a glance
<p>We will achieve the Investors in the Environment (iE) Green level award at central support office, and at least Bronze level at 25% of practices</p>	<p>33 of our practices (20%) are working towards an iE award, an increase from 18% last year. By the end of 2023, nine had achieved Bronze (5.5%), three Silver (1.8%) and one Green (0.6%).</p> <p>The central support office achieved the Silver award in 2023 and is now working towards Green.</p> <p>In light of the new Environmental Sustainability award launched by RCVS under the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS), this target has been changed to: achieve the iE Green level award at central support office, and at least iE Bronze level or the PSS Environmental Sustainability award at 25% of practices.</p> <p><i>(In 2021 this target was increased to aim for the iE Bronze award at at least 25% of practices, up from the 15% target originally set).</i></p>	<p>On track Target changed</p>
<p>We will publish an annual sustainability/CSR report</p>	<p>This is our third Sustainability and Giving Back report, and we plan to continue publishing them annually.</p>	<p>On track</p>
<p>We will establish a sustainability in farming working group</p>	<p>The Sustainability in Farming group formed in 2021 and delivered webinars and discussion evenings for colleagues on sustainable farming topics.</p> <p>In 2022 our research consultancy Kingshay collaborated with the Sustainability team to add sustainability training materials to their DigiFarm package, and published insights and training materials on related topics including sustainable parasite control, soil health and minimising waste.</p> <p>In 2022 we launched the Sustainable Dairy Farmer of the Year awards to recognise our farming clients who are committed to improving environmental sustainability, enhancing livestock productivity or fostering community relationships.</p>	<p>On track</p>



Target: “By the end of 2026...”	Progress	At a glance
<p>We will take action for wildlife and nature on site in at least 25% of our businesses</p>	<p>In 2023, colleagues from all over the VetPartners group participated in activities including a ‘Month of Movement’, resulting in us donating £38,125 to World Land Trust’s Buy an Acre project, allowing them to purchase and protect 381 acres of land.</p> <p>Going forward, we will review actions being undertaken by our suppliers to identify, monitor and manage material impacts on nature and biodiversity through our supplier survey and supplier engagement. We will also focus on actions that our practices can take for nature on their own sites.</p> <p><i>(In our 2021 review this target was changed from “we will implement biodiversity action plans at 10% of our farm and equine practices”).</i></p>	<p>On track</p>
<p>We will establish partnerships with industry groups and other organisations, helping to promote best practice for sustainability in the veterinary and farming sectors</p>	<p>This year VetPartners colleagues had an article published in <i>In Practice</i> magazine on ‘recycling the unrecyclable’, and spoke about sustainability at the World Small Animal Veterinary Association’s annual congress in Lisbon.</p> <p>VetPartners colleagues are also represented on BEVA’s Sustainability working group, and in an informal working group of sustainability professionals from the veterinary Major Employers Group.</p> <p>As in previous years, several of our vets and nurses are members of VetSustain working groups, or are recognised as VetSustain ‘champions’. Our Head of ESG also acted as module champion for VetSustain’s new training course on sustainability in practice.</p>	<p>On track</p>
<p>We will collectively volunteer 5,000 hours per year</p>	<p>Colleagues volunteered for a large number of causes in 2023, some on two-week visits abroad, some regularly in their spare time, and many using the extra paid day of leave for volunteering made available to all colleagues from this year. We contributed to travel expenses for two colleagues who travelled to The Gambia to volunteer for our charity of the year, Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust.</p> <p>We continue to track volunteering through our monthly survey and word of mouth, but we know that there is much more volunteering that colleagues do which we don’t hear about. We will continue to encourage colleagues to share their volunteering experiences with us, and in 2024 we will continue to support colleagues to volunteer by introducing a grant scheme for vets and RVNs who wish to undertake clinical volunteering abroad.</p>	<p>On track</p>

Target: "By the end of 2026..."	Progress	At a glance
<p>We will raise £50,000 for charity per year</p>	<p>In 2023 we nearly doubled our total from 2022, raising £294,059 for 92 different charities, including our group charity World Land Trust and our charity of the year Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust.</p> <p>In light of this, this target has been increased to: Raise at least £300,000 for charity per year.</p> <p><i>(In 2022 this target was increased from a goal of £50,000 to "We will raise at least £150,000 for charity per year").</i></p>	<p>Achieved Increased</p>

Find out more about sustainability and giving back at VetPartners here:

<https://www.myvetpartners.co.uk/sustainability>

<https://www.myvetpartners.co.uk/charity>

If you have questions or would like to be more involved in sustainability at VetPartners, get in touch at sustainability@vetpartners.co.uk