



ESG Impact Report

2024/25



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Welcome

We are thrilled to be publishing our first Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) report. Quite fittingly, we also celebrate our 150th year as a successful, regional law firm in the Black Country in 2025.

It's imperative that we evaluate, reflect on and strive to improve our ethical impact and sustainability credentials as a business not only for the benefit of our environment but also for the communities we serve, the future generations, our business partners and our people.

By integrating ESG principles into our day-to-day activities, we demonstrate a commitment to reducing our environmental impact, promoting social responsibility through fair treatment and community involvement, creating social value and ensuring transparent, ethical governance practices at all times.

This approach not only helps us meet regulatory standards but also resonates with our clients and suppliers who prioritise sustainability and ethical operations. Emphasising ESG enhances our reputation, attracts values-driven clients and strengthens supplier relationships. It also ensures long-term business viability and showcases a dedication to responsible and sustainable business practices, making Higgs a preferred partner for those who value integrity and sustainability in their professional relationships.



Nyree Applegarth

Partner

Head of the Environmental Committee



Our aims

Higgs LLP is committed to reducing the impact of its operations and services on the environment, and operating as sustainably as possible.

We care about our impact on the planet, the environment and the local community and think that it's important that as a business, we always strive to minimise our impact on the planet, and encourage our clients, contacts and suppliers to replicate our values.



A desire to educate and empower our people to work and live sustainably and reduce our impact on the environment, in line with our values in 'Our Future.'



Environmental responsibility

Our achievements

Higgs' lending library

The Green Committee kicked off the year setting up a Lending Library, for people to leave books they have read and swap for others in the library!

This initiative has been a huge success with a mix of fiction and non-fiction being donated, including children's books, revision guides and recipe books!

The initiative also encourages everyone to consider buying or swapping secondhand books, rather than buying new, to reduce deforestation.



Litter picking

Volunteers from across the firm – not just members of the Green Committee – go out once a month and pick up discarded litter across the Waterfront Business Park to dispose of it correctly.

Up to 10 bags can be collected at a time!

The Big Green Hike

In March 2024, Higgs colleagues, their families and their dogs met up to hike the Clent Hills in aid of the Dudley Canal & River Trust.

£500 was raised for the Trust's vital work maintaining local waterways, and the walk proved to be a great way for colleagues to catch up and get some fresh air!



Environmental responsibility

Our achievements

World Honey Bee Day

Guest speaker Alison Wakeman delivered a talk on bees and their importance to the environment, with a hive demonstration, and sale of products made from local beeswax!

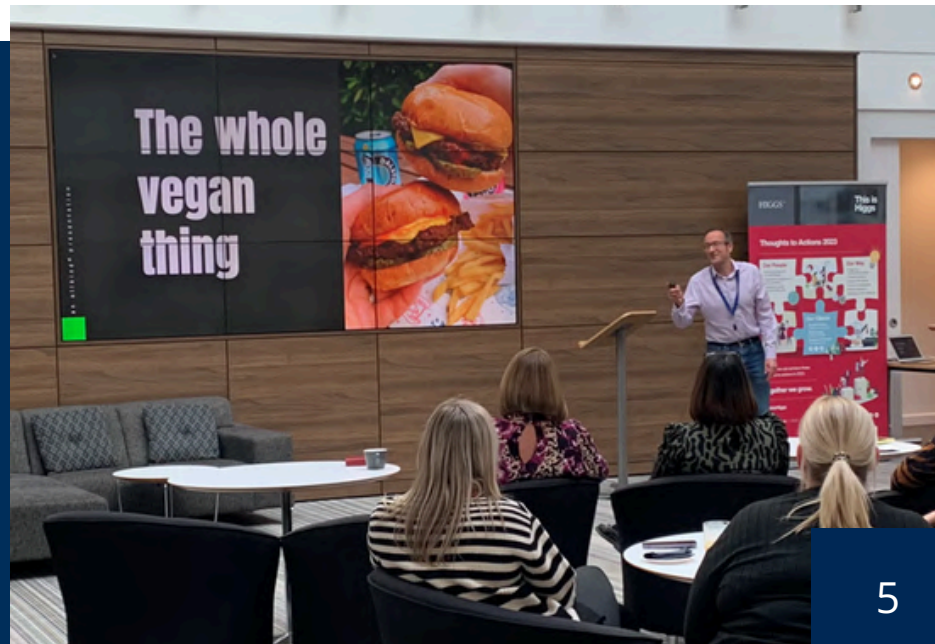


Big Green event

- Kids clothes swap shop
- Talk from Our Village Green a local refill shop
- Sale of eco refills and sustainable products
- Vegan cakes
- Recycling quiz
- Free literature on sustainability
- Free plants

World Vegan Day event

Guest speaker Rob Masterson delivered a talk on veganism and the environmental impact of the diet. There was also the opportunity for vegan cake tasting which was very popular!



Reducing our Carbon Footprint

Higgs is committed to reducing the impact of its operations on the environment.

We have assessed our current carbon use and strive to reduce our carbon footprint by adopting energy-efficient technologies and transitioning to digital platforms to minimise paper usage.

We recycle everything we can, try to re-purpose it or offer it to a third party.

At the start of 2024 we switched to plastic-free packaging for milk and fruit, saving around **1500** plastic milk cartons and 2900 plastic fruit packages annually. We also launched an eco-refill service: staff bring reusable containers for cleaning products, saving around **15** plastic containers each time.

We have regular firmwide green awareness initiatives, e.g. 'car free week' and a challenges based on the nine Rs of waste.

World Car Free Day challenge

We challenged our staff to ditch their cars for a week and take alternative means of transport into the office such as car sharing, walking, cycling and public transport.

A brilliant **520 miles** of car journeys were saved by walking, running and cycling instead of driving.

This equates to roughly **140 kilos** of CO2 so a truly amazing result!

To mark this achievement we donated **£500** to the Heart of England Forest Organisation to allow them to plant more trees and restore vital woodland habitats



Energy

Talk on minimum energy efficiency standards

Nyree Applegarth delivered a presentation to GJS Dillon and its clients on the incoming Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards Regulations which became law in April 2024 and which will have a huge impact on commercial property whether leased or owned.

Many landlords are not aware of works they will have to do to bring their properties up to these new energy standards and which are only going to get stricter as time goes on.

The Property team at Higgs also received training on 'Green Leasing' and consideration of more climate friendly clauses when drafting.

Carbon emissions

Climate event: the route to net zero

Nyree also hosted a number of clients and contacts of the firm in a roundtable discussion from Grant Thornton on their journey to net zero and indeed, our own journey

Guest speaker Raj Kumar also delivered a talk on the challenges and opportunities of climate transition.

Guests were able to learn about the legal and commercial challenges of trying to increase a business's sustainability



Commemorative tree planting



Nyree Applegarth led a demonstration at our flagship Waterfront Business Park office on how to start growing your own fruit and vegetables at home. Attendees were able to take home seed packets and equipment to get started!

The Private Client team went to a local primary school to help rejuvenate a neglected outdoor space which enabled plants to grow, resulting in the children being able to use it again!

Projects like this combine our passion for green projects with our community spirit and commitment to helping local organisations. This visit was one of five school projects undertaken this year!

In collaboration with the Future Forest Company, all Higgs colleagues had a tree planted in their name. This planting was to mark the King's Coronation and his passion for the environment.

Waste management

Rubbish clearance at Hawbush Community Gardens

The Ekho Collective, a local community interest group, invited members of Higgs to assist in a litter pick at the Community Centre due to recent issues of littering and fly tipping.

A huge pile of rubbish was collected and disposed of, making the community centre safer and cleaner for its users again.





Social responsibility





Partnerships with the local community

Higgs is dedicated to fostering diversity, equity and inclusion and we are passionate about ensuring we have a diverse and inclusive workplace. We provide ongoing training programmes to raise awareness and understanding among our teams and actively seek partnerships with organisations that share our commitment to social justice and participate in Birmingham Pride. Higgs has a support network for LGBTQ+ and allies called Proud Together and is also a sponsor of LGBTQ+ sub-committee of the Birmingham Law Society.

Our charity for 2024 was Dudley Community First Responders and we were delighted to raise in excess of **£25,000**. In 2023, Higgs supported Black Country Women's Aid and donated **£15,000**.

Further, we supported 17 other nominated charities including bereavement support groups, hospices, mental health charities, and an animal rescue centre. Each of these charities received a donation of £500. In total, **£23,000** was donated in 2023 to charities by Higgs.





Our support for Dudley Community First Responders

Higgs donated in excess of £25,000 to Dudley Community First Responders (DCFRs) in 2024, which has enabled the charity to purchase their third response vehicle which will significantly benefit the local community.

Dudley CFRs are volunteers for the West Midlands Ambulance Service who are sent to 999 calls in the local area, where they can arrive before an ambulance.

On average they arrive 5-10 minutes before, and for life threatening emergencies every minute counts to increase the chance of survival. Over the last 12 months they have volunteered over 5,000 hours and attended over 1,000 emergency calls. They're an invaluable support in the West Midlands.

Tim Jones, Partner at Higgs and Head of the Charity Committee said, "We are thrilled to be able to support such a worthy cause – seeing the new car and knowing that our incredible team at Higgs was responsible for that gives me an immense sense of pride. We know how important the volunteers are across the West Midlands for emergency support, and we hope that the new car helps to save more precious lives."

Sarah Trevalen, Chair of Dudley CFRs said, "The support of Higgs LLP has been instrumental in our ability to support the local community. All of our CFRs are unpaid volunteers and respond in their own time on top of day jobs, families and other commitments. Having Higgs provide a response car means that our volunteers can focus all their spare time attending life threatening emergencies in the local community instead of also having to raise money for vehicles as the charity grows.

"With 17 active responders we have already reached the limit of our current cars. We currently have 8 new CFRs going through training at the moment and more expected in January, so this additional car will significantly increase our capacity, allowing everyone to respond more frequently."





Diversity and Inclusion

As signatories to The Law Society's Diversity and Inclusion Charter, Higgs LLP is committed to developing a diverse business by engaging with the widest pool of talent and promoting equality of opportunity for everyone.

Our mission is to ensure that everyone is empowered to be the best version of themselves and to have a voice which can be shared, heard and respected. Our Partners and Directors, Management Boards and Colleague Resource Groups share insights, champion change and challenge both conscious and unconscious bias.



Birmingham Black Lawyers Open Day

We held an open day in conjunction with Birmingham Black Lawyers and a number of students attended to gain an insight into our culture and how law firms operate.

The event which aimed to support these aspiring lawyers with interview and presentation skills.

Members of the Inclusion Group participated in some of the activities

As charter signatories to The Law Society's Diversity and Inclusion Charter,

Higgs is committed to developing a diverse business by engaging with the broadest talent pool and promoting equal opportunity. Passionate about ED&I, we work with various organisations to raise awareness, e.g. Birmingham Black Lawyers.



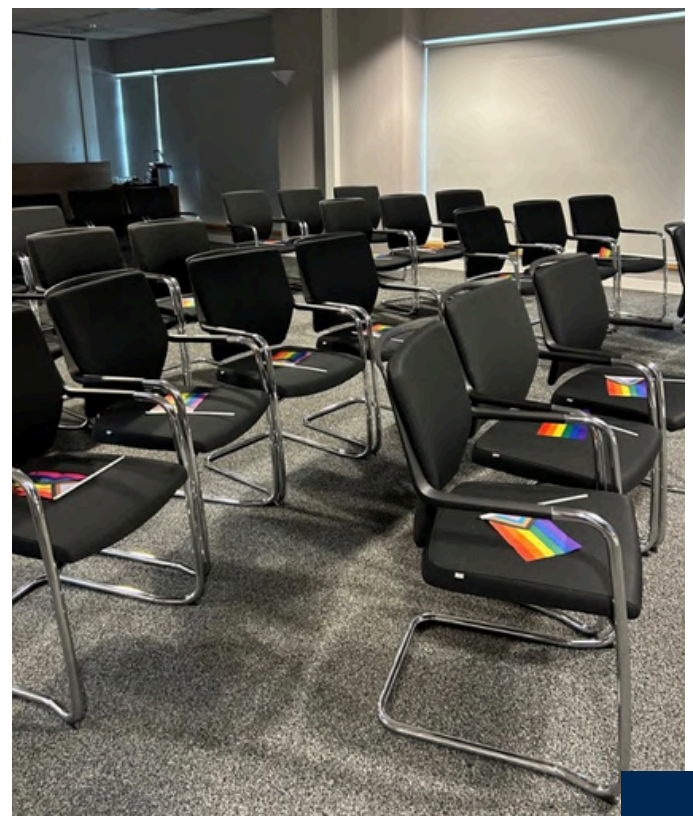
Diversity and Inclusion

Higgs' Proud Together Network

Proud Together is a network that was formed as a sub-committee to the Inclusion Group in 2023. The purpose of this group is to progress diversity and inclusion with a specific focus on the LGBTQ+ community, as well as holding educational and social events for the wider firm.

For example, to commemorate LGBTQ+ History Month in February 2024, we held a showing of the film 'Pride' at our offices, which explored the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in Britain during the 80's. In May 2024, we organised a walking group at Birmingham Pride which is now an annual event, and is always well attended and enjoyed by colleagues across the firm.

The group has also held social events for members, to provide a space where colleagues can socialise and be the most authentic version of themselves.





Higgs as an employer

Real Living Wage

As a firm we have committed ourselves to the Real Living Wage, which is the only UK wage that is based on the cost of living. This is to ensure our wage meets are employees everyday needs.

Cornerstone Employer

Higgs is a Cornerstone employer and engages with local schools, colleges, and universities. We aim to inspire the next generation through careers fairs, our vacation scheme, and career guidance sessions.

Social Mobility Index

We participated in a panel event which launched Birmingham Law Society's Social Mobility Pledge (a key priority in Alice Kinder's plans for her Presidential Year).

The pledge aims to improve accessibility to the profession and we will be working with the Social Mobility Foundation to understand how Higgs fits with its benchmarking index.

This complements the work the firm is already doing with schools as part of our commitment as a Cornerstone Employer.



**We entered
the Social Mobility
Employer Index
to take action on
socioeconomic diversity**



Our Employee Resource Groups

The work in maintaining and growing our ESG initiatives is done by our various committees who meet regularly to strategically plan future initiatives.



Green
Committee



Inclusion
Group



Social
Committee



Charity
Committee



Wellness
Team



Family
Friendly Group



Menopause
Resource
Group



Proud
Together

Governance

We understand the risks of our business with an overarching firmwide risk register together with bespoke risk registers for each department. The partners, strategy and management boards work to understand and mitigate those risks through the introduction of processes, training, supervision, review and monitoring.

We welcome external audit and feedback and have held ISO 9001 accreditation since 1997.

Our residential property team holds the Law Society CQS accreditation and the clinical negligence team is SQM (Specialist Quality Mark) accredited.

Governance forms the backbone of Higgs' ethical practices. We uphold the highest standards of integrity and transparency in our operations, with regular audits and assessments to ensure compliance with industry regulations and guidelines. Maintaining a robust governance framework ensures we build trust with clients and business partners.

The firm is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). The SRA Standards and Regulations are the guiding principles and codes of conduct that set the benchmark for a compliant law firm and sit at the heart of all our decision making.

We have dedicated officers who ensure we are meeting our regulatory obligations.



Matt Dudley, Partner
Compliance Officer for Legal Practice



Steve Chaplin, Finance Director
Compliance Officer for Finance and Administration



Beverley Scriven, Head of Standards & Ethics
Money Laundering Reporting Officer



Looking ahead: our future plans

How does our work link to 'Our Future'?

- We will create a challenging and inspiring environment where creativity and original thinking are encouraged
- We will play people in their best positions and give them freedom and autonomy to make their most effective personal contribution
- We recognise the importance of things outside Higgs that matter to our people
- We will listen to our clients, understand and respond to their needs
- We will constantly innovate, seeking out new and better ways of delivering our services
- We aspire to do things better than before, and better than others
- We will seek best of brand suppliers with common values who can add value to our business
- We will conduct ourselves with integrity at all times, even if it costs us, or is difficult.



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A list of members' names is available for inspection at the Registered Office. We use the term 'partner' to refer to a person who is a member of Higgs LLP or an employee of a subsidiary of Higgs LLP who is a lawyer with equivalent standing and qualifications and not as a reference to a partner in a partnership.