

Brabners
we make the difference

Certified



Corporation



B Impact Report 2023

brabners.com

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About Brabners

Brabners is a leading independent law firm.

We are a purpose-led firm with a national reach, that is anchored in the North, and we seek to play our part in demonstrating that business can bring about positive change, by being innovative, diverse and sustainable.

Our mission is to make the difference for our clients, our people and the communities we serve.



From our CEO: Bringing about Positive Change



Robert White
Brabners CEO and
Chair of the Brabners Foundation

When we were welcomed into the B Corp community in September 2022, it felt like a watershed moment in Brabners' sustainability journey.

As a purpose-led business and, at the time, the UK's largest law firm – and the first outside of London – to achieve B Corp accreditation, it provided independent recognition for our focusing on bringing about positive change for our clients, our people and the communities we serve.

A year later, our commitment to the B Corp movement has only strengthened as we continue to engage with the industry-leading knowledge of our colleagues in the global B Corp network. Their support has been instrumental in shaping the evolution of our sustainability strategy and, in turn, helped us to act more effectively as a flagbearer for the legal sector to incorporate people and the planet as measures of success.

Critically, it has also stimulated more sustainability-led conversations with the many clients and partners who share our values and ambitions.

The purpose of this, our first B Impact report, is not only to highlight the progress we have made this year but, critically, to reflect on what we can do better in the future.

As a firm, we have identified the role we can play in making a career in law more diverse and accessible, as well as how we can increase the positive impact we have on the communities around us.

At the same time, it is imperative that we continue to refine our sustainability strategy to further reduce our emissions on the road to Net Zero.

I hope you find this report a useful insight into our first year as a B Corp and that it provides practical insights for your own sustainability journey.

Our sustainability goals

Two years ago, we set out our sustainability goals – and tangible targets to support them – to demonstrate how we will play our part in bring about positive change, by helping to tackle the climate emergency. We wanted ambitious yet achievable targets and to be candid and transparent in our efforts to achieve them.

The information in this report documents our performance against these goals.

Goal: Reduce poverty by at least 50%.

Target: Support the Brabners Foundation in its goal to alleviate hardship.

Equal rights to ownership, basic resources, technology and economic resources.

Donate a year to pro bono projects. As a firm donate the equivalent of 365 days of fee earner time to pro bono projects.

Full employment and decent work with equal pay.

Ensure all suppliers pay real living wage.

Promote youth employment, education and training.

Introduce alternative work experience and recruitment processes (to include internships and apprenticeships) to become more accessible to a diverse range of candidates.

Safe and affordable housing.

Measure the support we give to clients to deliver new homes. Initially establish a baseline figure for client new home delivery and look to improve upon this year on year.

Reduce the environmental impact of cities.

Reduce commuter miles through the encouragement of agile working where feasible.
Reduce the number of non-electric car journeys by staff (commuting and business related).

Strong national and regional development planning.

Engage with regional development projects, including the Northern Powerhouse.

Sustainable management and use of natural resources.

Accurately measure our carbon footprint and achieve meaningful reductions year on year.

Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and sustainability reporting.

Lead by example by adopting best practices to encourage sustainability.

Integrate climate change measures into policies and planning.

Our SEGG reports to go directly to Management Board.

Build knowledge and capacity to meet climate change.

Enable staff to take up to 2 days' paid volunteering leave to further sustainability goals.

Governance: Transparent & Accountable

Governance may garner less profile than other areas of sustainability. However, it remains an integral part of our ongoing development as a business and now as a B Corp.

While we believe our approach is already both transparent and accountable, there is always more that we can do.

Most noticeably this year, we have made significant changes to our reporting structure – creating new leadership positions that allow senior colleagues to have oversight and cross-office responsibility for their practice area.

This will ultimately provide more direct lines of sight through the business and into our management board.

We have also strengthened our external reporting to transparently document and track progress against our goals.

Recognising some of the operational challenges that impact our reporting in areas such as our gender pay gap, we continue to look to improve the accuracy of the data we hold in relation to our colleagues. For example, we have delivered a three-percentage point increase this year to ensure that two-thirds (66%) of colleagues have

voluntarily provided data that helps support our decision-making in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

With these changes affecting how we move forward as a business, we are also targeting new certifications and standards that further strengthen our governance.

For example, we are pursuing the Lexcel Quality Mark – The Law Society’s gold-standard benchmark for client care, compliance and practice management. The mark will allow us to better assess – and improve, where possible – our approaches to client care, risk management, people management and structure, as well as our information management.

For the latter area of governance, the process is already underway for us to achieve ISO27001 – an internationally recognised standard that helps businesses to manage the risk associated with information security threats, including policies, procedures and staff training.



**B CORP
SCORE:
10.6**

Our People:

Building a more diverse firm

Our people are at the heart of everything we do. That's why we encourage them to be ambitious, show they care, do what's right and stand together.

In the past year, we've seen our newly embedded People Strategy gain momentum as we seek to create stronger career pathways and deliver against our strategic objective of building a more diverse firm.

To that end, we have launched new success profiles for fee earners and a promotion framework, including career laddering, to improve clarity and transparency and support holistic development. The framework also allows younger colleagues to prioritise their strengths early on in their careers. Under the new framework, 35 fee earners have been promoted this year.

An internal leadership programme, Brabners Career Pathways, is also in train to help homegrown employees progress through qualification routes specifically designed to support their teams and departments.

In keeping with our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and social mobility priorities, we have also launched new application-free insight days to enable candidates from diverse backgrounds to explore a career in law at any one of our four offices.

This initiative builds on our active plan to recruit from more diverse universities and higher education partners, as well as the introduction of contextualised recruitment – which upweights

the academic performance of those from a disadvantaged background applying for roles at Brabners.

We have also launched a new vacation scheme, paying the Real Living Wage to applicants, including graduates, taking time out from work or study.

These initiatives all continue to be supported by our colleague-led TAG (Together Action Group), and its five affinity groups which focus on:

- Gender Equality
- LGBTQ+
- Physical & mental health
- Social Mobility
- BAME

Working closely with our People team, TAG is supporting our firmwide policy review and helping to update performance development programmes as we continue to focus on how we can better attract and retain diverse talent.



**B CORP
SCORE:
37.3**

Volunteer and wellness days

Each of our colleagues is encouraged to dedicate two days a year to voluntary causes, including our peatland restoration project at Kingsdale Head. We also provide a wellness day for colleagues to use as they see fit

The Ian Bond Star Award

Our Star Award – named in memory of our much-missed friend and colleague – recognises colleagues who add value

Spotlight on health and wellbeing:

As well as having mental health ambassadors across the firm, we produce regular weekly content on physical and mental health. In addition, colleagues have access to a confidential employee assistance programme run by Unum Lifeworks to support simple and complex life skills.

Independent healthcare advice is provided by Help@Hand's easily accessible app and we have also partnered with Whysup to provide monthly wellbeing sessions in addition to our formal health insurance scheme, Medicash.

This year, we will be launching our Menopause Champions network, as well as MyHealth – a new system designed to provide colleagues with tailored support to meet their needs.

Clients:

Supporting better business

Our B Corp accreditation has reaffirmed our belief that business can bring about positive change. Over the past year, we have increased our focus on helping clients to achieve their sustainability goals.

This has included a comprehensive events programme designed to bring business leaders together to discuss sustainable business practices and support them on their own B Corp journey, while encouraging support for the Better Business Act campaign.

The programme has informed regular forums, such as our Lancashire Business Circle, as well as some of our broader reaching campaigns covering issues such as menopause in the workplace or sustainability within the retail sector.

Our support for better business has also extended to the work we deliver for clients – including the £550m regeneration of Oldham town centre and the delivery of Lancashire’s Eden Project Morecambe – all of which align with our commitment to regional prosperity in the North of England and levelling up.

Furthermore, we have launched our new pro-bono scheme to support clients who might not otherwise be able to access our services. The scheme is aiming to achieve our sustainability goal-aligned target to provide the equivalent of a full year of a fee-earning lawyer’s time free of charge.

True North – a new network for purpose-led businesses

In September 2023, we launched the True North network, bringing together like-minded purpose-led leaders, businesses and other organisations. The aim of the network is to re-define northern ambition by exploring practical solutions to the challenges that exist within the regional economy.

We launched the network with the publication of our True North report, which drew on insights from discussions with local leaders from across Lancashire, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield.

The report offers the perspectives of local leaders about the challenges we face, the opportunities in front of us and the part we can play in driving progress for a brighter and greener future.

Levelling up Oldham

Oldham Council’s £550m regeneration project is expected to bring millions of pounds of investment to Oldham. Our development team advised the council on its in-depth search for an appropriate delivery partner.

Ambitious local authorities and plans like this are one of the key reasons why Greater Manchester is a key target for investors — as outlined by our Northern Investment Index report published in early 2023.

The scheme itself — another northern initiative with national significance — is perfectly in keeping with our purpose-led approach and we’re looking forward to supporting its future progress.



Environment:

The Road to Net Zero

In 2021, we marked Earth Day by joining the climate change awareness-raising organisation Business Declares a Climate Emergency and the United Nations' Race to Zero campaign.

Two years later, we have achieved the future Net Zero Platinum Standard and continue to champion green initiatives as we look to make further inroads into our emissions and environmental impact.

Having been carbon neutral (through offsetting) since 2020, we are continuing to ensure all our waste is either recycled (65%) or converted to energy (35%).

At the same time, we recognise that simply offsetting isn't enough, which is why we're dedicated to reducing our emissions wherever possible – whether that's through more conscientious business travel and our newly formalised hybrid working policy or through working with partners like Open Kitchen to ensure our catering is sustainable.

Choices like this are being driven by SEGG, our Sustainability and Environmental Green Group, which encourages and monitors ethical choices in our supply chain, where we also demand that partners pay their employees the Real Living Wage.

Our most significant commitment to the environment this year though has been through our new peatland restoration project. Prior to becoming a B Corp, we entered into a partnership with Catherine Bryan, Tim Yetman and their Kingsdale Head peatland restoration project in Yorkshire. We committed to providing £50,000 over the next three years to unlock a further £500k in funding. The project is expected to restore more than 400 hectares of peatland, with a conservative estimated carbon reduction of more than 450 tCO₂e each year by the end of the project – equivalent to 22,000 mature trees.

The project, which came through our membership of Business Declares and is now supported by a willing army of Brabners volunteers; was named 'Sustainable Initiative of the Year' at The Lawyer Awards 2023; and contributed to our 'Excellence in ESG' shortlisting at the upcoming British Legal Awards.

- 22k trees – equivalent carbon capture through Kingsdale Head
- 100% - waste diverted from landfill
- 14% - reduction in energy use per person





Regular volunteer days at Kingsdale Head farm provide great opportunities to learn about sustainability as well as lending a helping hand – and to use our Brabners spades!

Community:

Making the difference to those around us

We believe our strength lies in our differences, not our similarities, and we are committed to doing all we can to foster greater equality, diversity and inclusion while supporting the communities we work in.

It is this outlook that contributes to more than a fifth of our colleagues being involved in our Together Action Group and its five affinity groups.

From a community perspective, our efforts to alleviate hardship are co-ordinated through our grant-giving charity, The Brabners Foundation. Since 2019, the Foundation has raised and distributed almost £150k in grants to 57 organisations across our office base in Lancashire, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester.

This is in addition to our new formalised pro bono scheme, which we expect will have a significant impact in the years to come.

Our approach to making the legal sector more inclusive is also gathering pace. In September 2023, we celebrated the first full year of The Maurice

Watkins Bursary in partnership with We Love MCR. Through the bursary, budding law professionals aged 15-22 can apply for grant funding to help cover the cost of essential items including laptops and books for studying, travel costs for internships, or clothing for interviews.

The Bursary has already made awards of more than £10,000 to support young people who are pursuing or considering a career in law.

We have also provided grant funding to support schools in less affluent areas, delivering legal skills workshops that have touched the lives of around 100 young people in the North West. This includes a new cross-industry partnership with Liverpool Chamber of Commerce's School-Business Network – led by senior Brabners employees.

From Pub to Pulpit

Blackburn Music Society, a large mixed voice amateur choir, was able to reform thanks to a £750 grant from The Brabners Foundation. Established in 1932, the choir boasted around 150 members before it ceased performing regularly due to Covid-19.

In June 2023, more than 50 singers helped reform the society with a collaborative music event, Pub to Pulpit. The funding helped pay for rehearsal workshops and advertising for the concert.

Key sponsorships

- Manchester 2023 Para Swimming World Championships
- Wirral Chamber Music Festival
- Manchester Law Society (Pride 2023)

Fatima's story

Fatima was taken into care due to a violent home situation. She is now excelling as a care leaver, securing a first in Law from the University of Manchester, and now aims to do her Bar Practice Course to become a family barrister. She secured £5,000 from the Maurice Watkins Bursary fund to contribute to the £12,000 fee for her course.



Building for the future: What's next?



Simon Lewis
Partner and Head of Brabners' Sustainability
and Environmental Green Group

There is a lot we can be proud of in our first year as a B Corp. Personally, I have taken great heart in the success of our support of Kingsdale Head and the wider Great North Bog initiative.

Not only did it contribute to Brabners being mentioned in a report on the 'Race to Net Zero' by the United Nations but, closer to home, it was recognised by our industry peers as the Sustainable Initiative of the Year at the 2023 Lawyer Awards. It also played a key role in Brabners being shortlisted for Sustainable Business of the Year at this year's edie Awards, alongside major international brands such as Vodafone and Microsoft.

The formalisation of our pro bono scheme is also a major step forward – showing commitment to our sustainability target of providing 365 days' worth of advice and guidance to those without access to legal support every year.

Ambitious projects like this have the potential to be transformative and it has been incredible to witness the number of colleagues across Brabners who have been keen to play their part.

Often though, it is the incremental gains that deliver less celebrated but equally impactful positive change – something we remain mindful of as we look to build on our existing B Corp score (90.5) in the year ahead.

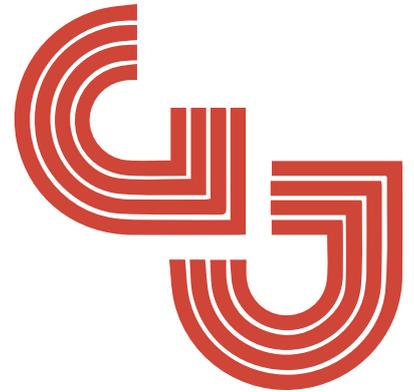
Wherever possible, we also hope to ensure our actions make the difference in more than one area.

For example, we have set out our intentions to invest in a new sustainable eating initiative that will not only reduce emissions but will also support colleagues' mental and physical wellbeing and engagement with local communities. We also hope to facilitate more sustainable lifestyle choices among our team – for example, pursuing ways to accelerate the transition to electric vehicles.

Whatever we do, we intend to do so transparently – recognising that we have made better progress against some of the sustainability goals set out at the start of this report than others.

Finally, we intend to strengthen our relationship with the B Corp movement – working closely with inspiring organisations like Business Declares, the Better Business Network and UK For Good – and supporting those aiming to become B Corp-accredited.

Proud to Work with...



REGENERATION
BRAINERY

Brabners

we make the difference

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