

KASTARCHITECTS

IMPACT REPORT 2023

Certified



Corporation



KAST board meeting.

About us

At KAST Architects, we have a desire to help our clients live, work and play more sustainably.

The construction industry is extremely carbon intensive, so, as architects, we have a duty to ensure the designs we deliver minimise their impact on our planet.

Sustainability underpins, over-arches and threads through our approach to each project and is fully integrated within the design process.

We have always believed that there is a better way to do business and so over the years have tried to conduct ourselves in a respectful, ethical and mindful manner.

As a B Corp we have a framework for how we can improve as a business, balancing how we value people, the planet and profit.

This impact report charts our path to becoming certified in March 2022 and marks the end of our first year of certification. We also detail the positive changes we have made in the last 12 months and outline our ambitions for the years ahead.

A photograph of a wooden fence with vertical planks. In the foreground, there are several clumps of lavender plants with purple flowers. A window is visible on the right side of the fence, reflecting a landscape. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

"We offer our clients a bespoke local design response in a sustainable and thoughtful way. We have a passion for delivering sustainable solutions with integrity, that are modern and yet sensitive to their context."

Leadership letter

KAST was born in the autumn of 2014 with the express purpose of designing buildings in a way that minimised their environmental impact, either through their embodied carbon (the materials used to build them) or their operational carbon (the energy required to heat, cool and power them).

That approach to architecture remains at the heart of everything we do, but as we have grown as a practice, we have begun to turn our attention to improving how we care for our co-workers, our dealings with customers, the communities in which we work and how we run our business.

As a small practice it is hard to make huge leaps all at once without compromise or cutting corners, however tempting it might be to chase the big wins. Rather we prefer to take small steps in improving the business every day, which in turn embeds positive habits within and across the practice, enabling everyone to be a part of our continual improvement.

Therefore, in the 12 months since becoming B Corp Certified KAST has changed its bank, started calculating its carbon footprint and begun a 9-day fortnight working pattern. We have also signed up to the Surfers Against Sewage Ocean Network and are now a Corporate Partner to Plant One Cornwall, a community interest company that brings business, individuals and landowners together to plant trees in Cornish soil.

Nicholas James
Founding Director



The road to certification

Back in March 2020 things were a little strange. Lives were turned upside-down as the Covid 19 pandemic gripped the world and businesses had to quickly adapt to working remotely with workforces spread far and wide. At the time KAST was in its 6th year of trading and with a dramatic slowdown in the construction sector, there was a very real possibility of the practice going out of business.

We decided to look closely at how we operated as a business and see where we could strengthen and reinforce the values that were the foundations of KAST. In doing so, we became more conscious of the B Corp movement and decided to take a closer look. The more we researched it the more we realised that here was a framework for doing business, and doing it better. It formalised everything that we thought we were doing well and gave us a clear direction on how we could improve further.

Another aspect that particularly appealed to us was the holistic nature of how businesses were assessed through the 5 impact area criteria. It was not just focussed on the environment, or how a business treated its co-workers, but also considered the governance of the business, its links with the wider community and how it treated its customers.

We then took our time with the certification process. If we were going to do this we would do it thoroughly and bring the whole team along on the journey. So, following a period of getting our house in order, embedding new policies and dusting off old ones, we finally submitted our assessment in November 2021 and were officially certified on the 21st March 2022.

"We had two choices, to roll over and accept defeat or to build back better."



B Corp verified score



- 84.9 overall B Impact score
- 80.0 qualifies for B Corp certification
- 50.9 median score for most businesses

...and our goals for recertification

Becoming a B Corp is more than just a certification. It connects us to a community of like-minded businesses who share our goals; enabling collaboration and the sharing of ideas.

The assessment provides a framework for us to monitor our impact as well as challenging us to do more. To become a certified B Corp, a company must score a minimum of 80 points on the B Impact Assessment. This is an assessment that asks questions about how the day-to-day operations of a company, create positive impact for the company's workers, customers, community, and the environment.

In March 2022 KAST certified with a score of 84.9 out of a possible 200. By comparison, the median score for most businesses is 50.9. This demonstrates how difficult it is to become a B Corp, however we are acutely aware of how much further we have to go!

Over the last year, we have continued to use our business as a force for good, to make the small but necessary improvements throughout our organisation. Our aim for when we re-certify in 2025 is to achieve a score in excess of 90.



Workers

What we said we would do.

We wanted to improve the work / life balance for our team.

Most of us will spend a massive percentage of our time at work.
We let it take over and feed into all aspects of our lives.

We set out to find the right balance and implement it in our workplace with the intention of allowing our people to switch off from work and give their personal lives an equal measure of attention.

What we did.

KAST Architects decided to move to a policy of a 9-day fortnight to help promote a healthy work / life balance.

The benefits have been multiple: some have used the extra day to get domestic stuff done; others have spent time with friends or family; some have had a long weekend away without taking an extra day's holiday.

From a business perspective, there has been no discernible loss in profit or productivity; if anything, both have marginally improved. Importantly, staff energy, enthusiasm and happiness levels have all improved.

Governance

What we said we would do.

One of KAST's main aims in 2022 was to find a more ethical bank for our business banking.

We wanted confidence that our money would not be used to fund anything that could have a negative impact on society, such as investing in, or lending to, companies that trade in things such as arms, tobacco or fossil fuels.

What we did.

After much research, including reading through a number of threads on the B Hive, we decided to switch to Starling Bank. There were a number of reasons behind our decision, including:

Woman founded - their founder is the only woman in British history to start a bank;

Partnerships with purpose - Starling only partners with brands and suppliers that treat their customers, team and the planet fairly;

How they invest - Starling does not invest in businesses that are harmful to individuals, groups or society in general (e.g., arms manufacturers, tobacco companies or the fossil fuel industry);

Taking care of the team - Starling is a Living Wage employer.



Governance

What we said we would do.

We wanted to understand better our office carbon footprint and our collective impact on our planet.

Yeah, sure, we all turn our computers off at the end of the day, check the radiators and only print the information we need, but if we don't measure our carbon footprint how can we improve?

Calculating our carbon footprint seemed the first vital step in our business becoming part of the solution of the climate crisis.

What we did.

In January KAST teamed up with Climax Community to calculate our office carbon footprint and identify means by which we can reduce our impact on the planet.

Climate Essentials is an online carbon management system that will help us to streamline our journey to net zero by measuring, managing and reducing emissions.

It is only through measuring our impact properly that we can make meaningful and effective changes to the way that we operate as a business.



Customers

What we said we would do.

We are in a climate emergency, and urgently need to reduce carbon emissions. In our capacity as architects and lead designers, we wanted to make a stronger stand against the traditional carbon intensive construction processes adopted by many larger client and contractor organisations.

What we did.

We secured planning approval for a low carbon primary school in the Midlands. In itself this is an everyday part of what we do as architects, so on the face of it may not be particularly newsworthy. However, this constitutes a seismic shift in thinking by the main contractor and the local authority.

When interviewed for the role of project architect and design team lead, we stated firmly that we would only take on the project if there was a real commitment for the design to move away from the usual default of a steel frame structure and embrace a solid timber construction. We put forward the argument of significant embodied carbon reductions and a duty to produce buildings for the next generation that help to preserve their future and not limit it.

We were successful in changing the direction of travel for both the client and main contractor.



Environment

What we said we would do.

We wanted to strengthen our connections with like minded organisations and support them in their local and national initiatives in caring for our natural resources.

There is also much to learn from others, whether they are in your line of work or not, and the sharing of knowledge is important.

What we did.

In May 2022 KAST joined the Surfers Against Sewage Ocean Network.

The St Agnes based environmental charity, Surfers Against Sewage, is dedicated to the protection of our oceans, waves, beaches and wildlife. The recently launched Ocean Network aims to inspire businesses to come together and protect the UK's unique coastal environment.

As a practice of surfers, swimmers, sailors, windsurfers and paddle boarders, the team at KAST has a strong link to the sea and the Cornish coastline. Joining the Ocean Network alongside like-minded brands, freelancers, businesses and creatives whilst supporting the work that Surfers Against Sewage do was an easy and natural decision for us, both individually and as a practice.



Environment

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What we did.

In February 2023 KAST joined a local tree planting initiative in Cornwall.

Plant One Cornwall is a community interest company that brings business, individuals and landowners together to plant trees in Cornish soil. They create habitats that benefit native wildlife and helps to combat climate change at a local level.

KAST has become a Corporate Partner, committing to support Plant One Cornwall for years to come.



Community

What we said we would do.

We wanted to offer our design expertise for free to a local organisation to enable them to secure further funding.

What we did.

In November 2022 we linked up with a local charity, BF Adventure, that empowers Cornwall's vulnerable young people. The picture perfect reality of Cornwall hides disturbing evidence of ingrained poverty and disadvantage that can have a life-limiting impact on children and young people. BF Adventure works with over 5000 children and young people each year, of whom many live with multiple disadvantages including poverty and social isolation.

BF Adventure uses their outdoor environment, 60 acres of heathland, woodland and flooded quarries, to enable the children and young people to identify their own social, emotional and physical barriers, to choose their own challenges and to empower them to overcome these barriers and unlock their potential.

KAST is working with BF Adventure to create a masterplan for the site to enable them to develop their facilities in a more structured and planned way.



The year ahead...

We have big plans

KAST will continue to seek new ways in which it can improve. At the time of writing, KAST is undertaking the following:

Now that it has joined up with Climax Community, KAST is calculating its office carbon footprint, targeting measurable improvements year on year.

KAST is using its in-house PassivHaus expertise to ensure all of its domestic projects achieve the highest standards of energy efficiency.

KAST is formalising its client feedback through the introduction of a new questionnaire to be issued on the completion of each project.

KAST will commit to post occupancy evaluations for its completed projects in order to better understand how our buildings perform and their positive impact on our client's lives.

We want to improve in a small way, every single day. We now have a plan and are sticking to it.



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Certified



Corporation