



Association of Geotechnical &
Geoenvironmental Specialists

AGS Sustainability Charter Guidance

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The AGS Sustainability Charter

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Association of Geotechnical &
Geoenvironmental Specialists

Signing the AGS Sustainability Charter

What is the Charter?

- Published March 2025 on the AGS website.
- Covers all of sustainability – not a carbon pledge!
- Supports all members to embed sustainable practices into their operations.

AGS Sustainability Charter

Recognising the crucial role that geotechnical and geoenvironmental industries play in shaping a sustainable future, the Association of Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Specialists (AGS) is committed to fostering a culture of sustainability among its members. Given the diverse nature of AGS membership, which includes organisations of varying sizes and specialities, it is essential that sustainability targets are not only ambitious but also tailored to the unique capabilities and challenges faced by each member.

This Sustainability Charter serves as a framework for members to embed sustainable practices into their operations, while respecting and complementing existing commitments made under other sustainability initiatives and meeting legal obligations. By joining this Charter, AGS members pledge to take actionable steps towards advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

The commitments outlined in this Charter are designed to be practical, relevant, and achievable for all members, ensuring that each organisation, regardless of size or focus, can contribute meaningfully to the collective goal of a more sustainable industry. Through these efforts, AGS members will not only reduce their environmental footprint but also lead by example, driving positive change throughout the industry and beyond.

Members are invited to make the following commitments to uphold the values and objectives of this Charter:

1. Identify a minimum of two key operational aspects relevant to their business.
2. Assess the environmental, social and economic impact of these aspects, including the measurement of carbon emissions where applicable.
3. Set specific and measurable targets aligned with the relevant UN SDGs, considering environmental, social and economic factors.
4. Explore and implement strategies to enhance these aspects, including identifying necessary education and training.
5. Commit to ongoing monitoring and measurement to ensure progress towards the set targets.
6. Actively promote and drive sustainability by educating and influencing clients and the wider supply chain.
7. Commit to actively sharing knowledge and sustainability best practices with the industry through AGS channels.

Guidance will be provided by the AGS to allow members to define the relevant SDGs and potential aspects to focus on. Guidance will be appropriate to the various specialisms of our members.

By adhering to this Charter, AGS members will collectively contribute to the development of a more sustainable, resilient, and responsible industry.

Charter Approach and the UN SDGs

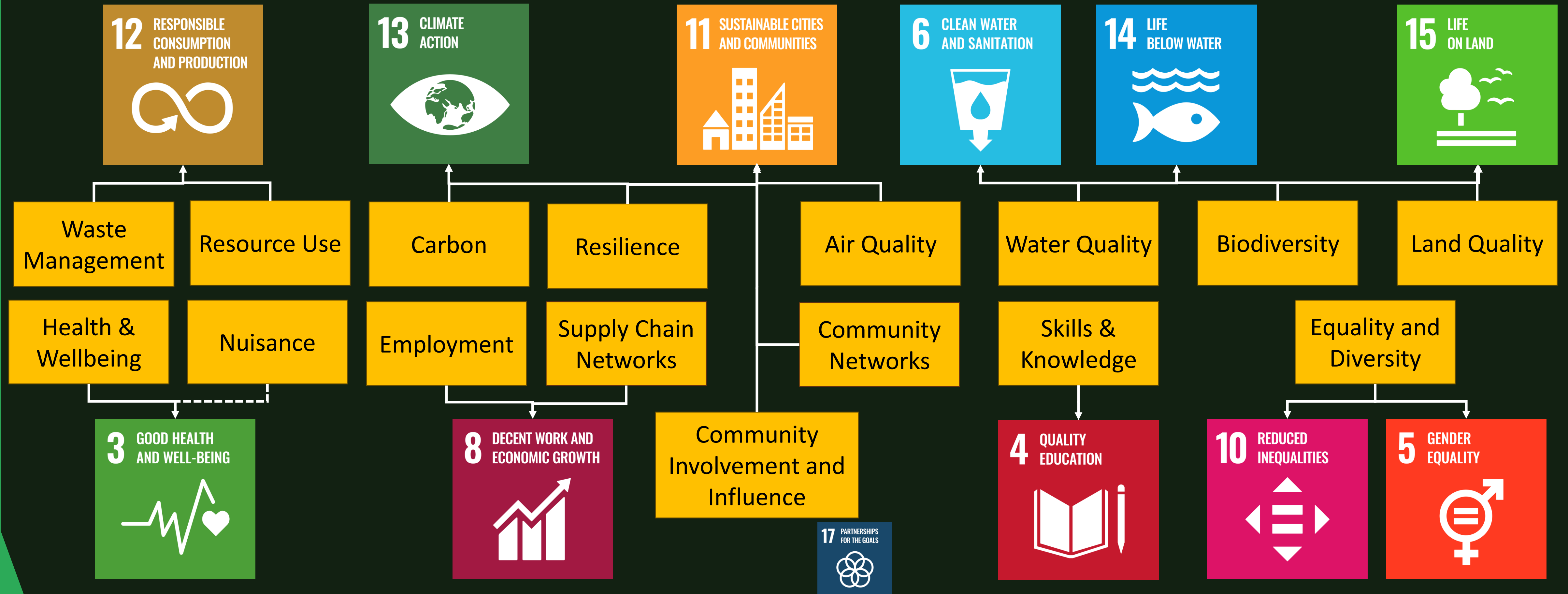
/// Approach is in line with ISO 53001 *Guidelines for contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

/// ISO 53001 promotes

- holistic approach,
- practical tools to enhance business performance,
- optimising the impact of all organisational activities on both people and the planet.



Primary SDG Mapping



Philosophical Basis of the Approach

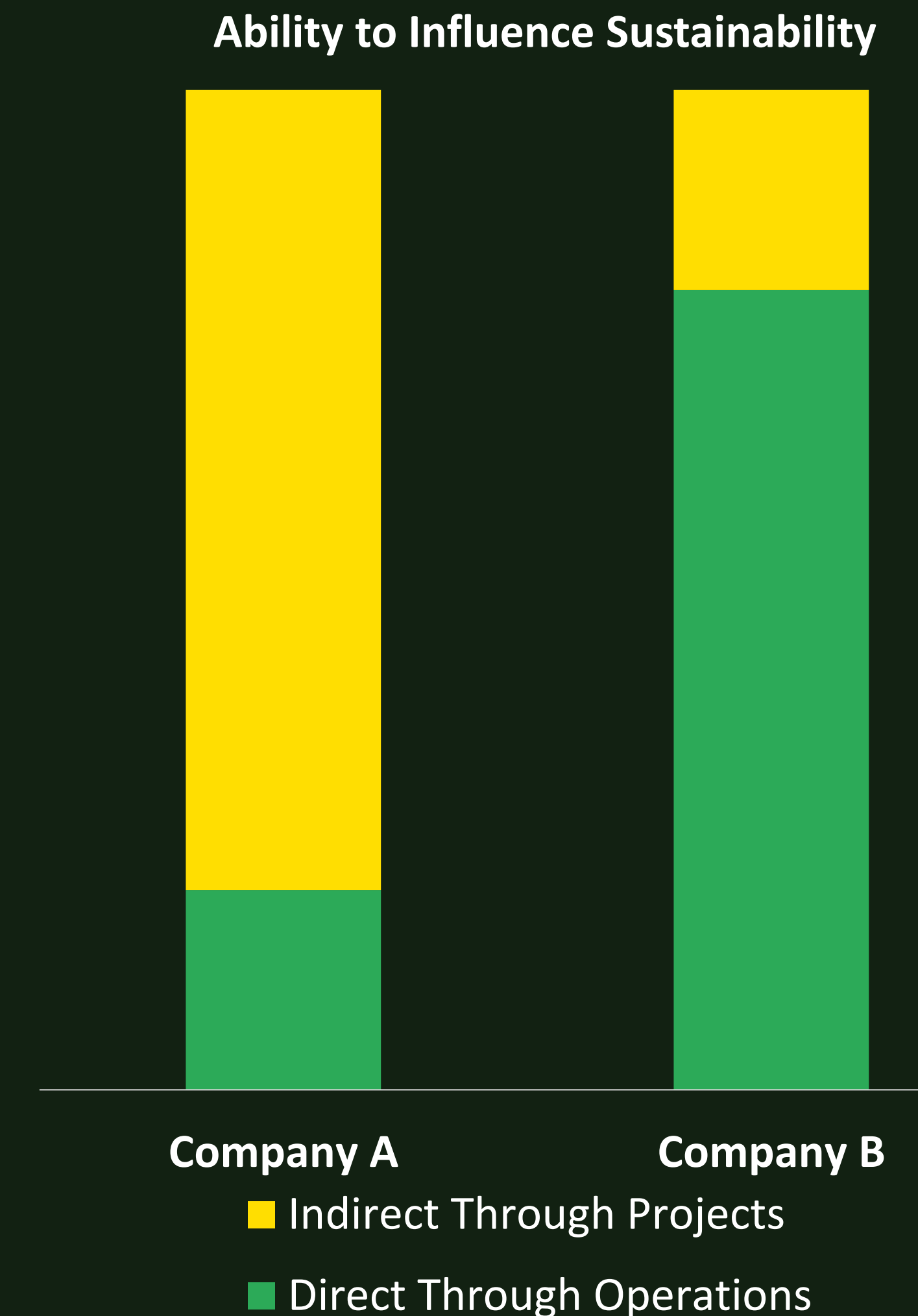
- /// The AGS membership is extremely broad and varied. Any combined charter must be relevant to all.
- /// Members may be at very different points in their 'sustainability journey'.
- /// A common commitment and framework to promote and share best practice across the industry.
- /// Take a broader approach to consider wider aspects outside of carbon.

What is the commitment?

- ▮ Members are invited to make commitments relevant to their business or team that uphold the values and objectives set in the charter.
- ▮ The charter includes 7 commitments to consider all aimed at improving your business or team's sustainability.
- ▮ Sign up process includes an assessment of key aspects relevant to each unique member business or team.
- ▮ This can all be completed on the AGS website.

Operation and Project Commitments

- Commitments 1 to 5 focus on *direct* operational aspects of your business and your ability to manage the impact they have on sustainability.
- Commitments 6 and 7 focus on the *indirect* impacts of project work and your ability to influence the wider industry sustainable outcomes.



Benefits of signing the charter

- /// Members who have signed are listed on the AGS Sustainability Website.
- /// Targets and measurements give an opportunity to share success with the AGS membership.
- /// Support SMEs with the Charter process and improve Social Value.

Importance of the Charter

- /// A flexible approach that allows all members to commit to sustainable practice.
- /// Allows teams / practitioners to sign up large companies where they may not have control over operational aspects of the business.
- /// A framework for AGS members to take practical and achievable steps to meet sustainability goals and share the success of members across the AGS.



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Operational Aspects and Impacts

Operational Aspects: What are they?

- /// **Aspects** are part of the business's normal functioning that directly contributes to—or detracts from—its sustainability performance.
- /// Can include - Energy use, waste handling, supply chain decisions, staff wellbeing, etc.

Operational Aspects Cont.

- /// Operational Aspects are provided for you to assess – no need to start from scratch.
- /// They are broken down to broad categories to be as relevant as possible to the AGS Membership.
- /// E.g. ‘Field Works (energy / fuel consumption)’ is separated from ‘Offices / Facilities (energy / fuel consumption)’ to suit different business types.

Operational Aspects: Importance Ranking – Companies Only

- /// Each business needs to rate the relative **importance** of the provided aspects.
No absolutes.
- /// Consider Environmental, Social and Economic factors.
- /// May be based on formal measurements or assessments undertaken as a business or less formal discussions as a team.
- /// Option to mark not applicable. e.g. Labs may not undertake fieldwork.

Complete
assessment using
the online form for
all aspects.

e.g. as a remote
team commuting is
considered low
importance but as
field works are
focused off shore
business travel and
accommodation is
extremely high.

Field work fuel
usage has a high
impact.

11. Please rate the relative importance of the following operational aspects to your organisation considering environmental, social and economic factors. *

	1 Low	2	3	4	5 Extremely High	N/A
Commuting	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business travel / Accommodation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offices / Facilities (energy / fuel consumption)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offices / Facilities (material consumption)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offices / Facilities (waste)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Field Works (energy / fuel consumption)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Field Works (material consumption)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

A large office based team may consider the office / facility energy use to be extremely high importance yet the material consumption and waste lower.

Team and office arrangements will need to be considered

Field work is not undertaken by this team

11. Please rate the relative importance of the following operational aspects to your organisation considering environmental, social and economic factors. *

	1 Low	2	3	4	5 Extremely High	N/A
Commuting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business travel / Accommodation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offices / Facilities (energy / fuel consumption)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offices / Facilities (material consumption)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offices / Facilities (waste)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Field Works (energy / fuel consumption)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Field Works (material consumption)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

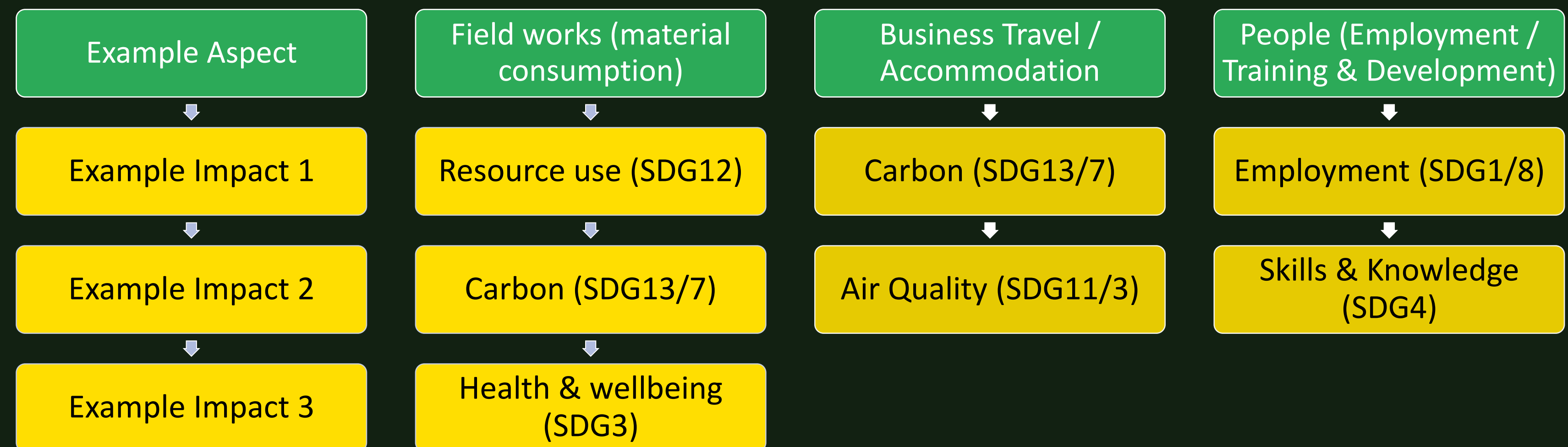
Sustainability Impacts linked to UN SDGs

- /// The importance rating should be used to choose 2 important operational *aspects* for which relevant SDGs should be selected.
- /// The relevant *impacts* of the selected two *aspects* then need to be identified. It is these *impact* areas that should form the basis for goals and targets.
- /// SDGs have been mapped to impact areas that would be relevant to the chosen operational aspect - option to add 'other' is included.

Operational Impacts: What are they?

- Aspects of operational activity will have sustainability *impacts* on the world.
- The form is set out to help you in this process.
- The impacts relevant to your business may vary, but here are some typical examples.

examples.



Selecting Aspects and Impacts

Considerations => What are highest rated aspects? What are we already measuring and targeting? Which impacts carbon? Which combination provides balance across environmental, social and economic?

12. Please select the **first** key operational aspect that you commit to assessing as part of this charter. *

Business travel / Accommodation

13. In relation to your **first** key operational aspect please select the impact areas for which your targets have been set. *

We recommend focusing on the high impacts you have identified

- ☐ Employment (SDG1 / SDG8)
- ☐ Health & wellbeing (SDG3)
- ☐ Nuisance (SDG3)
- ☐ Skills & knowledge (SDG4)
- ☒ Air quality (SDG11 / SDG7 / SDG3)
- ☐ Equality & diversity (SDG10 / SDG5)
- ☒ Carbon (SDG13 / SDG7)

e.g. Business travel / accommodation

- High carbon impact
- Part of existing carbon targets
- Level of control

Carbon
SDG13

Air Quality
SDG11, SDG3

14. Please select your **second** key operational aspect that you commit to assessing as part of this charter. *

People (work with local communities)

15. In relation to your **second** key operational aspect please select the impact areas for which your targets have been set. *

We recommend focusing on the high impacts outlined above

- ☐ Employment (SDG1 / SDG8)
- ☒ Health & wellbeing (SDG3)
- ☐ Nuisance (SDG3)
- ☒ Skills & knowledge (SDG4)
- ☐ Air quality (SDG11 / SDG7 / SDG3)
- ☐ Equality & diversity (SDG10 / SDG5)
- ☐ Carbon (SDG13 / SDG7)
- ☐ Resilience (SDG13 / SDG11)
- ☐ Water quality (SDG6 / SDG14)
- ☐ Community involvement & influence (SDG11 / SDG17)
- ☒ Community networks (SDG11)

e.g. People (work with communities)

- Moderate impact
- Part of existing Social Value Plans and targets
- Level of control

Health &
Wellbeing
SDG3

Skills &
Knowledge
SDG4

Community
Networks
SDG11

Operational Aspect 1

12. Please select the **first** key operational aspect that you commit to assessing as part of this charter. *

Select your answer

Commuting

Business travel / Accommodation

13. Offices / Facilities (energy / fuel consumption)

Offices / Facilities (material consumption)

Offices / Facilities (waste)

Field Works (energy / fuel consumption)

Field Works (material consumption)

Use drop down box to select the 1st chosen aspect from the table above.

please select the impact areas for which your targets have identified above.

Operational Aspect 1

13. In relation to your **first** key operational aspect please select the impact areas for which your targets have been set. *

We recommend focusing on the high impacts you have identified above.

- ☐ Employment (SDG1 / SDG8)
- ☐ Health & wellbeing (SDG3)
- ☐ Nuisance (SDG3)
- ☐ Skills & knowledge (SDG4)
- ☐ Air quality (SDG11 / SDG3)
- ☐ Equality & diversity (SDG10 / SDG 5)
- ☐ Carbon (SDG13 / SDG7)
- ☐ Resilience (SDG13 / SDG11)
- ☐ Water quality (SDG6 / SDG14)
- ☐ Community involvement & influence (SDG11 / SDG17)
- ☐ Community networks (SDG11)
- ☐ Supply chain networks (SDG8)
- ☐ Resource use (SDG12)
- ☐ Waste management (SDG12)
- ☐ Biodiversity (SDG14 / SDG15)
- ☐ Land quality (SDG15)
- ☐ Other

Tick boxes relating to the relevant impact areas (with associated UN SDG)

- ☒ Employment (SDG1 / SDG8)
- ☒ Health & wellbeing (SDG3)
- ☐ Nuisance (SDG3)
- ☐ Skills & knowledge (SDG4)
- ☐ Air quality (SDG11 / SDG3)
- ☐ Equality & diversity (SDG10 / SDG 5)
- ☒ Carbon (SDG13 / SDG7)
- ☐ Resilience (SDG13 / SDG11)
- ☐ Water quality (SDG6 / SDG14)
- ☐ Community involvement & influence (SDG11 / SDG17)
- ☐ Community networks (SDG11)
- ☐ Supply chain networks (SDG8)
- ☒ Resource use (SDG12)

Target Setting

- Specific and measurable targets to be set.
- Related to the key impact areas selected above.
- Aligned with the relevant UN SDGs.
- A carbon target should be included as a minimum; therefore 2 targets are likely to be necessary.
- The aim is to include a commitment to ongoing monitoring and measurement to ensure progress towards the set operational targets.

Target Setting

16. For the two key impact areas you have identified above please provide specific and measurable targets that you have set / commit to setting for the key impact areas above. Considering environmental, social and economic factors. *

These targets should be aligned with the relevant UN SDGs. This should include a carbon target as a minimum. Note the AGS may use this anonymised example in guidance for other members.

Enter your answer

One box to complete to allow more complex targets that might address more than one aspect simultaneously

Sharing Targets

- Sharing published carbon targets – for example, a website link for Pledge Net Zero or mandatory carbon reporting.
- Sharing internal targets –If you have the systems in place consider your carbon targets and EMS performance KPIs.
- Performance is monitored and managed internally.
- Internal sustainability training programmes may be part of an EMS already.

Example: Operational Commitments

- Regional Ground Investigation contractor.
- Operational aspects with highest impact include Business Travel and Field Works (energy / fuel consumption).
- Relevant SDGs for travel included Health & wellbeing (SDG3), carbon (SDG13 / SDG7) and resource use (SDG12).
- Relevant SDGs for field work energy use included Nuisance (SDG3), carbon (SDG13 / SDG7), resource use (SDG12) plus Water quality (SDG6 / SDG14) and Air quality (SDG11 / SDG7 / SDG3).
- Commitment set to reduce carbon expenditure vs. £ turnover 10% year on year (covers carbon).
- Commitments set to invest in electric power equipment to reduce impact to Water and Air quality as well as resource use.





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Project Aspects and Impacts

Project Aspects: What are they?

- For a team involved in design these would be the relating to the structure or solution provided. E.g. A low carbon foundation design / Nature based solutions.
- For a ground engineering teams this could be how the investigation is designed. E.g. Efficiency in the delivery of the GI – Fuels, Materials and Waste.
- A flexible approach allowing teams to commit to a focus on sustainability within every step of their workflow.

Project Impacts: What are they?

- /// Aspects of project activity will have sustainability *impacts* on the world.
- /// The form provides some examples that may be relevant to your projects.
- /// The impacts relevant to your business may vary, but here are some typical examples of impacts likely to be common across projects.

Waste
Management

Resource Use

Carbon

Land Quality

Supply Chain
Networks

The project commitments

The Charter sets out the following commitment for all signatories:

- exploring and implementing strategies to enhance these aspects, including identifying necessary education and training
- actively promoting and driving sustainability by educating and influencing clients and the wider supply chain
- actively sharing knowledge and sustainability best practices with the industry including through AGS channels

The project commitments

18. Does your company also commit to the following through your **project** work:

1. exploring and implementing strategies to enhance these aspects, including identifying necessary education and training
2. actively promoting and driving sustainability by educating and influencing clients and the wider supply chain
3. actively sharing knowledge and sustainability best practices with the industry including through AGS channels

*

☒ Yes

☐ No

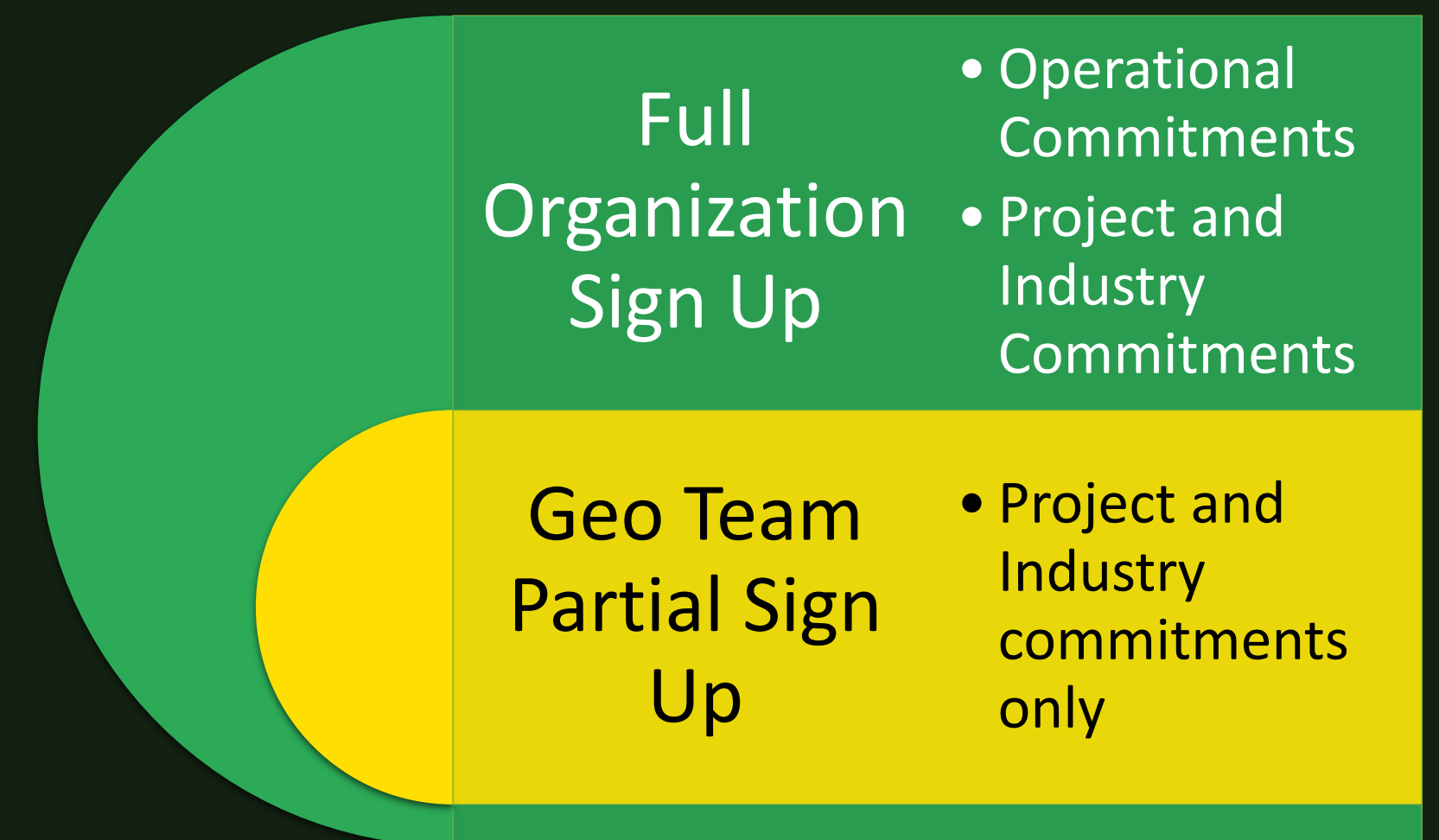


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Team Sign Up

Team vs. Organisation

- /// The sign up form allows for Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Teams to sign the charter independent of the wider organisation and can set commitments relevant to their project work.
- /// These teams have the potential to enact significant change in sustainable approaches.
- /// Charter allows for teams to set commitments to sustainability within the project scope.



Team Project Commitments

- /// Teams just asked to assess impact areas of project work.
- /// For example, a Geoenvironmental team might choose (amongst others)
 - Carbon (SDG13 / SDG7)
 - Resilience (SDG13 / SDG11)
 - Resource use (SDG12)
 - Waste management (SDG12)
- /// Team discussions will be required!
- /// Same project commitment also required as for a company.

Team Project Commitments

Select the relevant impact areas of the projects your team works on – option for other at bottom of list

Your Geotechnical/Geoenvironmental Team Project Commitments

By signing this Charter on behalf of your Geotechnical/Geoenvironmental Team, your Team is pledging to embed sustainable practices into your **projects** and take actionable steps towards advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

10. In relation to your work on **projects** please select the relevant impact areas. *

- ☐ Employment (SDG1 / SDG8)
- ☐ Health & wellbeing (SDG3)
- ☐ Nuisance (SDG3)
- ☒ Skills & knowledge (SDG4)
- ☐ Air quality (SDG11 / SDG7 / SDG3)
- ☐ Equality & diversity (SDG10 / SDG5)
- ☒ Carbon (SDG13 / SDG7)
- ☐ Resilience (SDG13 / SDG11)
- ☐ Water quality (SDG6 / SDG14)
- ☐ Community involvement & influence (SDG11 / SDG17)
- ☐ Community networks (SDG11)
- ☐ Supply chain networks (SDG11)
- ☒ Resource use (SDG12)

Project Impacts: Target Setting

- /// What elements are within the control of a team?
- /// Utilise the assessment of impact areas.
- /// *Carbon usage within foundations is within the control of our design team therefore our commitment is to recommend further ground investigation to all clients where we feel this can avoid overly conservative design and unnecessary carbon expenditure. The client shall be presented with estimates of the impact of both approaches.*

Next Steps

- Hit submit on the form.
- The AGS sustainability working group will review submissions and reach out if any further information or clarifications are required.
- Companies and teams signing the Charter shall be listed on the AGS website.
- FAQs - <https://www.ags.org.uk/ags-sustainability-charter-sign-up/sustainability-charter-faq/>
- Examples and Guidance - <https://www.ags.org.uk/ags-sustainability-charter-sign-up/charter-guidance/>