



PRO BONO

VOLUNTEERING

CHARITY

**GIVING
BACK**

ENVIRONMENT



**ANNUAL REPORT
2020/2021**



Stephens Scown launched its Giving Back Programme in September 2018. This is our third annual report setting out our impact in the period September 2020 to August 2021. This has continued to be a tricky year given the Covid pandemic, but we have sought to continue our work in this area and found some new ways to engage our colleagues and to give back.

Our Commitment (as confirmed in our Giving Back Policy) is:

- *Stephens Scown genuinely cares about our people, local community and the environment*
- *We seek to take business decisions and corporately act in a way that is consistent with this care and long term view*
- *We support our colleagues to follow their own passions for community and environment, to enrich their lives and increase the positive impact we can have*
- *We dedicate a significant proportion of our resources and energy to what we feel passionate about*
- *We wish to be an organisation that actively demonstrates this care, with a long term vision of becoming a leader in this field*

The Giving Back Programme is split into four pillars:

- *Environmental*
- *Pro Bono*
- *Volunteering*
- *Charity*



With the challenges of the last 18 months, it has been difficult to do as much volunteering or charitable fundraising, which is often reliant on face-to-face contact. This has been difficult given the requirements over the year to work from home. Our time this year has been focused on making headway with our environmental goals.

ENVIRONMENT

We are on a journey towards Net Zero Carbon – seeking to lower our carbon footprint. One of our core values is seeking to be sustainable and to do things efficiently and without waste. We want to leave behind a world that the next generation can enjoy.

Previous achievements include:



Recording our carbon footprint since March 2018 and taking steps to widen its scope and increase its accuracy

Giving all staff a metal reusable water bottle



Colleague campaigns



Moving to eco suppliers



Extensive renovations in our Exeter office to reduce energy use (double glazing and bathroom refits) and LED replacements in our Truro office

Installing EV charge points at our offices



Teams becoming 'PaperLite' – dramatically reducing our paper use.



50% vegetarian catering at internal events and offering plant alternatives to milk



How is our Carbon Footprint changing?

Our Carbon Footprint is measured in line with our financial year, 1 May to 30 April.



This is based on our scope 1 and 2 emissions. We are exploring how to measure and include our scope 3 emissions.

What have we achieved this year?

This year has been a milestone year as we have achieved our three key environmental targets of:

- *Agreeing a Net Zero Carbon Plan. The firm has committed to being Net Zero by the end of 2025*
- *Moving to a 100% renewable energy supplier*
- *Consulting on and rolling out a Green Travel Policy*

The last 18 months has seen phenomenal changes to the way we work, travel and interact with one another. This has had both positive and negative effects on the carbon footprint produced by the firm and its staff (Scowners).

2020/21 has seen our firm carbon footprint reduce significantly. This has been mainly due to a reduction in staff using the offices' facilities and a reduction in Scowners travelling to meetings and networking events. As society reopens we are acutely aware that we need to focus on ensuring our carbon footprint continues to reduce and we can reach our goal of Carbon Net Zero by 2025.

A detailed plan is now in place to support that goal, with six-monthly reporting to the Board and Scowners.

Our first major step to reaching our net zero goal was to move all our office utilities to a 100% renewable energy tariff from 1 July 2021. Based on the data for 20/21 this should reduce our annual carbon emissions by circa 62,190kg CO₂, a massive 91% of our emissions.

Travel is currently our next largest emitter of carbon and although the last year has seen a dramatic decrease in our carbon emissions (a reduction of circa 72,000 kg CO₂) our focus on this aspect is greatly needed. To tackle this, we have implemented a new Green Travel Policy that encourages and facilitates green forms of travel such as public transport and car sharing whilst limiting carbon heavy domestic and short haul flights (with carbon offsetting from 1 May this year for any unavoidable flights taken).

We have been promoting the use of electric vehicles by providing information and office charging, and encouraging car sharing by providing car parking spaces in the Exeter and Truro offices for those who do so.

The firm has stopped providing fuel cards and disbanded our pool cars. Instead we have partnered with Co Cars to offer electric and hybrid transportation for business travel.

We have also updated our cycle to work scheme, partnering with the Green Commute Initiative and given colleagues information on local cycle routes.

Although currently unmeasurable and unrecorded, the reduction in travelling to and from work has reduced the individual carbon footprint of Scowners. However, the increased working from home will have seen a rise in carbon output through increased utilities use for equipment and heating. In order to tackle this issue staff have been provided with a code giving them £100 to switch to our new provider, Good Energy, to incentivise them to use energy from renewable sources.



In the office we have seen a vast reduction in resources such as stationery and waste. We have continued our relationship with our stationery supplier Commercial, which prides itself on scouring the supply chain to find reliable organisations offering the most sustainable office products. They also run their own assessments to gauge suppliers' credentials and proactively support the continual improvement of their approaches to ethical trading and sustainability. 87.5% of our stationery consumed is environmentally accredited and we will aim to increase this with a review of alternate products. The move to PaperLite working has been cemented with homeworking and has had a dramatic effect on not only the working habits of staff (becoming less inclined to print) but has seen our shredding collections reduced to monthly rather than fortnightly. The combined impact has reduced our paper consumption by around 2/3rds. The only teams still working with paper files are those working for the Legal Aid Board where these are required.

We continue to use a local refuse company that guarantees zero waste will go to landfill. All waste is sorted, recycled where possible, with the remaining waste used to produce energy. We have also saved 2665 trees through our confidential paper shredding, which is then recycled and re-used. This equates to approximately 97 tonnes of CO₂ absorbed.

Our colleague campaign this year centred on a 'Giving Back Advent', with a different message each day in the run up to Christmas, celebrating ways that staff could reduce their carbon footprint and have an eco-Christmas. This was well received by staff.

PRO BONO

Pro bono work is professional work undertaken voluntarily and without payment or at a reduced fee as a public service. The firm undertakes Legal Aid work for individuals at greatly reduced rates and has a history of undertaking wider pro bono work.

Teams are encouraged to undertake pro bono work for specific charities or community interest companies (CIC). This can be applied to all the work undertaken for the project (so it is free), or as a part pro bono (where it reduces the fees).

Our goal this year was to complete at least six pro bono projects as last year our target was five (which we exceeded). This year we have completed five projects – so more work needed in this area. If you have a project you need help on (and you are a charity or CIC) please let us know!

Our pro bono activity this year:

2

Magic Carpet – support with recruitment of a new CEO

Magic Carpet is an arts for health charity that has been part of the cultural community of Exeter for 40 years, inspiring growth, well-being and compassion for people challenged by health or social circumstances and hosting many thousands of participants over the years. For 20 of those years, the charity has been adeptly steered by the steady and expert hand of its CEO, Rob Wynne. However, when the time came for Rob to enjoy some much-deserved R&R in his retirement, the organisation needed to appoint a fitting replacement to help navigate the charity through the next stage of its development, and re-build its services in the post-Covid world, including online.

Following an introduction from Natalie Vizard, our Communications Manager and a Trustee of Magic Carpet, it was agreed that Mark Roby from our Employment team could provide Magic Carpet with some pro bono work to support the charity with the recruitment of their new CEO.

Jacky Cox, Chair of Magic Carpet's Board of Trustees says: *"From when we initially met, via zoom to scope out the work, through to our final contact, Mark was professional, helpful, clear and supportive. The guidance he provided has been invaluable. This has included identifying improvements to the job description and job advert through to health checking the employment contract and guiding us on current legal requirements. As a small, local charity we struggle to finance this kind of help and are very grateful to Mark and to Stephens Scown for his support at this crucial time."*

With Mark Roby's support, Magic Carpet has now successfully recruited Adam Atkins as their new CEO, who started his new role at the beginning of September.



1

Surfers Against Sewage – advice on HR processes

Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) is a grassroots movement that has grown into one of the UK's most active and successful environmental charities. They started as a response by the surfing community to the pollution on our beaches. One of their priority issues going forward is to tackle the plastic pollution that blights and strangles our seashores. More than 100,000 volunteers participate in their beach cleans annually.

This huge community effort also contributes to citizen science that is helping change government policy and legislation to reduce plastic pollution. They have been a firm charity for two years. One of our Employment partners, Verity Slater, was delighted to help SAS with pro bono advice and support around its HR processes. As a growing organisation, SAS is keen to ensure it has the right structures and processes in place, ensuring all their team were treated well and the charity stayed in line with best practice and employment law.

3

Securing land for a Cub Hut

Having been evicted from their longstanding site at Wainhouse Corner, the "Second Bude/Jacobstow Scouts" Cub group found themselves homeless after over forty years in the hut built by volunteers, many now grandparents of current Cubs. Some generous clients decided to donate them an alternative plot of land in the corner of a field, subject to their gaining the consents needed. With outline planning permission granted, Partner Phil Reed and our property team acted on a pro bono basis on the client's behalf to enact the formal transfer and in October 2020, it was completed. An enthusiastic group of locals, parents and friends of the Cubs, were then able to seek full planning consent, raise funds and get started on a new hut.

4

FarmCornwall

As a firm, we are committed to promoting and supporting the rural community across the South West and we were delighted to provide pro bono assistance to FarmCornwall this year.

FarmCornwall is a charity providing invaluable advice and guidance to farmers and the farming community. Its work includes supporting those experiencing crisis situations involving animal welfare issues, business related problems, financial distress and mental health issues including support to those who are at risk of taking their own life. The charity also works with other local and national farming help charities which work to highlight and address the specific challenges experienced by those working in the farming industry such as isolation and financial uncertainty. It does this through its outreach work and the delivery of tailored programmes such as the Princes' Farm Resilience Programme which is specifically aimed at small livestock farming families to help improve business resilience. Our work, led by Partner Laurie Trounce, has been focused on the charity's governance and contractual arrangements which will support the charity to continue to fulfil its charitable objectives through the provision of much needed advice and guidance to those living and working in the farming community.

5

Exeter Law School – mock tribunal

Verity Slater, a partner in our Employment team, assisted the Exeter Law School Cornwall on 2 December 2020 for half a day by acting as the judge at a mock tribunal. The students on the course were required to plan the case and then act as witnesses and advocates in front of the panel led by Verity. The Law School is committed to delivering a teaching programme which goes well beyond traditional book-learning and which offers students opportunities which many undergraduate programmes simply do not offer, including opportunities to begin learning practical legal skills from a very early stage in their studies. The hearings are an important part of this – a first foray into the world of 'real' lawyering. Verity said *"the students did an amazing job of cross examining and summing up on a tricky area of harassment under the Equality Act. This was also a great opportunity to encourage them, give feedback on how to be a good advocate and to give back to the next generation of lawyers. The Mock Tribunal also reminded me how hard it is for Judges to recall, weigh up the evidence and come to coherent judgments all in a short timescale. That is why you need a straightforward case narrative, clear legal analysis and strong advocacy – something our Stephens Scown employment team work hard on and excel in."*



CHARITY

Our colleagues vote on our firm charities every two years. This year saw the change of charities from the 1 May 2021 with the firm-wide charity changing from Surfers Against Sewage to Mind. The Cornwall charity Invictus Trust changed to Man Down and the Devon Charity changed from Exeter Foodbank to Exeter Hospiscare.



- > **Surfers Against Sewage** is a grassroots movement tackling plastic pollution and protecting the UK's coastlines for all to enjoy safely and sustainably.
- > **Exeter Foodbank** has been helping local people in crisis since 2008, with free food for those most in need.
- > **Invictus Trust** is a small charity which aims to support and offer services to local teenagers who are suffering from poor mental health and associated issues.
- > **Mind** provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.
- > **Man Down** run safe talking and listening spaces to help meet the current emotional and mental health needs of men who struggle to cope with the pressures facing them in our modern society.
- > **Hospiscare** is the hospice charity providing specialist care to patients and their families living with life-limiting illnesses across Exeter, Mid and East Devon.
- > **Charitable fundraising** has continued to be a challenge this year with most staff working from home and less opportunities to get together to have fun and raise money. The charity ambassadors have done a brilliant job raising around £2000 over the year.

Events this year include:

Autumn Strava Challenge

Colleagues swam, ran, walked or cycled, recording their miles on Strava and seeking as a team to get the highest mileage over a three week period.

The Great Scowner Bake Off

An eight week challenge with different styles of baking needed each week including vegan, pastry, cakes and biscuits. This was a competitive elimination competition, just like the real deal on TV. There were some truly amazing entries – we just wished we were all together again in the office to eat them!

Christmas Jumper Day

#EFChristmasinabag – Exeter Foodbank ran a pledge for re-usable shopping bags filled with Christmas goodies including Christmas Cake, mince pies and a small family game. Each team in the Exeter office donated and we provided a whopping 36 bags full of Christmas goodies.

Christmas raffle

Christmas quiz

Christmas baking challenge – another great way for our colleagues who are keen bakers to show off their incredible talents.

Sponsored Dry January/Veganuary

Spring Strava Challenge

Scowner Springtime Strava Challenge – teams this time were recording mileage and seeing how quickly they could rack up 630 miles which is the total distance of the South West Coast Path.

Fantasy Football League

Euro 2020 football sweepstake

Charity presentations

November saw a well-attended virtual presentation by SAS lead Hugo Tagholm – a popular theme of questions in relation to new waste rising since the pandemic. In answer to a question about whether the current use of PPE has seen a rise of PPE waste ending up on our beaches, Hugo reported that he has sadly seen this as an outcome of the pandemic. However, the charity has in turn worked hard to engage the public through digital platforms to help raise awareness of the issue.

An enthused Partner, Ben Jones, spoke to a client about SAS, resulting in the client donating £5,000 of compensation received in a dispute directly to SAS, who were delighted with such a generous donation.

In August 21, we heard from all three of our new charities and the charity ambassadors in a virtual lunchbox. It was great to hear about their work and how we could support them. Particularly touching was the accounts of how Hospiscare makes such a difference at the end of a person's life, with such care and compassion and flexibility for the whole family's needs.

Hospiscare Twilight Walk

Scowners took part on Saturday 10 July 2021 walking 6 or 13 miles in Exmouth over the evening. Their entry and some sponsorship was donated by the firm.

Autumn and Spring Strava Challenge



The Great Scowner Bake Off



Donating to Exeter Food Bank



Decisions, decisions for Christmas Jumper Day

Firm Charitable Giving

We are proud to be corporate supporters of:

- Cornwall Community Foundation (C100 Business Club)
- Cornwall Wildlife Trust
- Roundtable
- Regen
- Dive Project Cornwall

Overall, our firm giving this year has amounted to around £8,500. This is in addition to the sums raised by the Charity Ambassadors and donated by clients.

2020 Long Service Awards

At Christmas we also celebrated long service awards for Scowners in a virtual event. As well as sending a gift, Scowners could choose to give a donation from the firm to one of these charities:

- [*Freedom*](#) – which plants trees to help local communities – we planted 88 trees in five countries on behalf of Scowners donating from their Long Service Awards charity donation, removing 14,130kg OF CO₂
- [*Stop Ecocide*](#) – lawyers helping make destruction of the planet a criminal offence
- SAS
- Exeter Foodbank
- Invictus Trust

Both the advent calendar and Long Service Awards were a great way to drive engagement and increase awareness of our Giving Back Programme.

Dive Project Cornwall Sponsorship

Signing up to sponsor the Dive Project Cornwall means we are able to help them in their mission to protect the oceans and marine life environment for future generations to enjoy. We're helping to give 400 lucky teenagers the opportunity of a lifetime to become Ocean Influencers and use their voices to inspire others to make a difference. Join us in this mission – [click here for more information](#).

Christmas cards with Cornwall Wildlife Trust

We were proud to partner with our client and friends Cornwall Wildlife Trust in sponsoring 6000 Christmas cards for 2020. Our donation helped with the cards' design and printing, enabling them to be sold to raise more monies for the charity.



Cornwall Adventure Challenge

A team attended this event in person early this September to help raise money for BF Adventure, a charity that works with 4000 young people a year, including children in care. 500 of these face multiple disadvantages including poverty. Over 200 receive specialist support to face learning and/or physical disabilities, behavioural challenges, mental ill-health and other issues linked with adverse childhood experiences.

It was a fantastic opportunity for fun and re-connecting as well as to support this brilliant charity. We had booked and paid for our place last year even though the event had already been postponed.



Supporting the arts

Over the year we have supported two arts projects financially. This has been a welcome boost to an area that has struggled through this period given the pandemic:

- *Gwaryjy* (which means "theatre in the house" in Cornish) – creating a Covid-safe pop-up indoor theatre for the community in Cornwall which was ready for Christmas 2020. This provided a much-needed boost to live performances in the area, with clear plastic pods for the audience to sit in.
- [*Park House Opera*](#) – enabling live Opera to take place outdoors once again.

Donations to colleagues for their personal fundraising efforts

The Giving Back team has a budget to distribute to colleagues who are involved in personal challenges to raise money for charity.

The contribution varies per challenge as follows:

Tier 1

Bake sales, 3k runs, bungee jump or physical events with little training
£10 contribution

Tier 2

Sky diving, physical events that require training for a shorter period (say up to 4 months)
£50 contribution

Tier 3

Marathon, Climbing Kilamajaro, any other event that requires more than 4 months training
£100 contribution

Scowners have been undertaking walking, cycling and running events raising money for charities of their choice including Pancreatic Cancer, Crohn's & Colitis UK, Children's Hospice SW and Cancer Research. It has been amazing that even with restrictions on us, our colleagues have been supporting what is important to them and we have been able to continue to help them with their endeavours. One example was Louise Carpenter, from our Exeter reception team who walked 100k over 24 hours to raise money in memory of her partner, Mark who sadly was lost to Pancreatic Cancer two years ago. Louise raised over £1,500 in her fundraising. Well done Scowners.



Supporting charity events internally

The firm has match funded and added donations to charity events organised by the charity ambassadors – like the Scowner Strava Challenges – giving money per mile. We have also donated to charity for those who completed Dry January or Veganuary and to celebrate events like the bake-off.

Giving Back Christmas advent calendar

We launched an online advent calendar through December where each door had a Giving Back theme such as eco tips, charitable donations or celebration of fun events through the year. Donations were made through this to our firm charities as well as some extra donations to Exeter, Truro and St Austell Foodbank (where each of our offices are based). We recognised that this Christmas not everyone was as lucky as we were given the issues identified locally with food poverty.

Through the calendar we also donated to two environmental charities to emphasise our environmental commitment and to raise colleague awareness of what they do.

- [*Freedom*](#) – which plants trees to help local communities
- [*Stop Ecocide*](#) – lawyers helping make destruction of the planet a criminal offence

VOLUNTEERING

Many of our colleagues use their free time away from work to support charitable causes or to support those in need. This is recognised, celebrated and supported by the firm, and colleagues are often asked to take up external voluntary roles as part of their personal development. Colleagues may also use our flexible working policy to alter their hours so they may undertake voluntary work more easily in their free time.

We also encourage all staff to undertake volunteering during their work time via:



Firm organised volunteer days/sessions. This is organised by our Charity Committee.



Allowing every colleague with more than six months service to have up to three paid days per annum to undertake their own volunteer work for a registered charity or CIC. This is applied pro rata for those that work part time.

Our target this year was for three teams to organise a team volunteering event in their socials or projects. This has not quite been met due to the lockdown restrictions: two events were organised but had to be cancelled at the last minute due to changes in Government Covid guidance.



Our Employment team did a litter pick along Malpas Road in Truro. What they said surprised them most was the kind comments and thanks from members of the public who walked past! A real feel good and worthwhile event.

In the 12 months from 1 September to 31 August 2021 only five days of volunteer leave have been booked by colleagues. However, the amount of time recorded as being used on CSR and charity work has been high at 186 hours. It's likely that more people have been using the flexible working time we have to support charities and communities on an ad hoc basis rather than booking formal volunteer days.

The Chancery Lane Project

One of our Corporate partners, Gavin Poole, took part in a Hackathon for the Chancery Lane Project -a pro bono initiative that brings legal professionals together to collaborate and rewrite contracts and laws, in order to support communities and businesses in fighting climate change and achieving net zero carbon emissions.

The “Hackathon” was getting a body of lawyers together to work on drafting for greener contracts and saw lawyers volunteering from the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and the UK and the Americas.

“The problem of climate change can seem overwhelming,” says Gavin, “The Chancery Lane Project empowers all lawyers constructively and collaboratively to apply the skills that we use daily for the greater good”.

“We were led through a drafting process, which involved each of us identifying our own simple climate change issue and creating a short narrative about it. The really inspiring step was then to submit the issue (in skeleton form) to a Zoom group (about six in my case). Using contemporaneous on-screen drafting, each of us was able simultaneously to edit, comment and add to the particular clause. So powerful! Once that input had been given, we were left for a few days to finalise the drafting for peer review”. These clauses then form a bank of terms that lawyers around the world can use in their work to influence around climate issues.”

Volunteering at Exeter Vaccination Centre

Rebecca Harmer volunteered at Exeter Vaccination Centre, marshalling in four-hour shifts to help people move around the site safely. She said “It was such a lovely atmosphere and everyone was very happy to be there. I felt like I was helping with a very small part in the fight against coronavirus!”

Additional volunteering leave continued to be given to colleagues during the period of lockdown in order to help those who were in greater need due to the ongoing global pandemic. Colleagues were given two hours each week in which they could volunteer to help the elderly or vulnerable around them. This was in addition to our usual three days a year of volunteer time.



Coaching for England's Touch Rugby Squad

Lexie Williams, our first Solicitor Apprentice, has been spending her free time volunteering as an assistant coach for the England Touch Rugby Squad. In September 2021, she supported the team at the Autumn Internationals Series held in Manchester. The event saw the England Women's Open team that Lexie was coaching finish the series with six wins out of six against Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

Lexie also coached the Women's Open B team to seven wins out of seven against the England Women's 27's – so a very good set of results for England! The team are now setting their sights on the Euros which will be held in Nottingham next year.

In addition, Lexie is Head Coach for the Truro Trojans Touch Rugby Team, which she also does on a voluntary basis.



Knitting

Our client, Age UK, put out a plea in April saying they needed a further 1000 smoothie hats to meet their quarterly quota to be able to apply for their funding. Our Knitting Club jumped into action and delivered the goods – with one colleague, Ella Taylor knitting 622 alone! Their contribution has greatly assisted Age UK hitting their target and enabled a good start to their next target too.

Benchmarking – B Corp

Through this year we have been cementing our commitment to the B Corp movement. Certified B Corps are a new kind of business that balance purpose and profit. They are legally required to consider the impact of their decisions on their workers, customers, suppliers, community, and the environment. It is a community of leaders, driving of a global movement of people using businesses as a force for good.

With the support of our board, we presented to the Partnership in January 2021 and voted to seek to become a B Corp organisation.

Our application has now been submitted and we are working through that process to verify our application. There is no guarantee as this is a high hurdle to overcome, but we are hopeful that we will be admitted.

We already think and act in many ways like a B Corp due to our Employee Ownership and Giving Back Programme. It is the right time to be part of this growing movement and show we are part of the solution and not part of the problem and to ensure that we are meeting the highest levels of ethics and purpose in what we do.

Goals

We achieved a number of our set goals this year, including making the B Corp application, moving to 100% renewable energy, our net zero carbon plan and Green Travel policy. Through these and the various online staff events, we have continued to drive engagement with the Giving Back Programme and charitable giving.

Areas that have been harder to achieve this year have been the amount of volunteering that people have done (most likely impacted by concerns over Covid) and engagement with pro bono projects. This has also been negatively impacted by how busy our teams have been through Covid. Given the positive impact on wellbeing of volunteering particularly, this is definitely one to focus on this year.

Giving Back remains an established part of our firm's strategy (as part of our Scowner Experience pillar) reflecting the ongoing and developing commitment of this firm to our people, community and planet.



Verity Slater
Giving Back Partner
27 September 2021

GIVING
BACK