

KASTARCHITECTS

IMPACT REPORT 2024

Certified



Corporation



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 progress over the past 12 months as we continue to search for small but meaningful ways in which we can improve the way we operate and also outlines our ambitions for the years ahead.



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.

There is no final destination for us, no end goal or point at which we will say, "That'll do." It is important for us to continue to grow and evolve, learning from other like minded organisations around us as we aim to do business better.

Nicholas James
Founding Director



Business since certification

KAST became a Certified B Corp on the 21st March 2022. We took our time with our certification process. If we were going to do it we were determined do it thoroughly and bring the whole team along on the journey.

Two years have now passed and during that time we have been searching for those small but meaningful changes that we can make as a business.

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.

We are working with a local charity that empowers Cornwall's vulnerable young people and have gained planning approval for a local not for profit Community Interest Group whose aim is to grow food and their community in planet positive ways. We are also working to design a new straw bale house in Cornwall.

In short we are laying the foundations for the future of the businesses, where people, planet, and profit are balanced fairly, treated with equal respect and purpose.



B Corp verified score

...and our goals for recertification



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

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 more we can improve by!

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.



Governance

What we said we would do

We have since been looking at ways in which KAST can be more transparent in how it communicates its social and environmental performance to a wider audience.

Our Annual Impact Reports are a useful way to record the changes we are making and communicating them with our stakeholders, demonstrating our current progress and future plans for the business.

What we have done

In March 2023 KAST published its first Annual Impact Report. It set the template for all future reports and detailed the improvements that KAST were seeking to make under the five B Corp headings of Governance, Workers, Customers, Environment and Community.

The report was written not just for our clients (existing and future), but also for staff members to ensure there was a collective understanding of the direction of travel and why we were making certain decisions.

The finished report was published on our website, shared on the B Hive Network and the Impact Reporting Archive, and publicised widely on social media.

Workers

What we said we would do

Following the successful implementation of a 9-day fortnight to help promote a more healthy work / life balance, we wanted to recognise our staff's hard work over the years in helping make KAST the practice that it is today.

This not only includes financial rewards, but additional time off and an increase to the pension contribution to aid with their long term financial security.

We also wish for our staff to have the opportunity to increase their knowledge base through training courses. This raises confidence in their own ability and in turn raises the practice's offer to existing and potential clients.

What we have done

The percentage of profits that were distributed as bonuses to non Directors increased to over 10%.

We increased the number of paid days off to 34 per year (inclusive of bank holidays). This is on top of every other Friday that the team enjoys off as a result of the 9-day fortnight policy.

Two members of staff have now taken the Certified Passivhaus training course and another is booked in for later this year.



Community

What we said we would do

We wanted to offer our design expertise for reduced rates or even for free to local organisations to enable them to secure further funding.

What we have done

KAST Architects is supporting 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, many of whom live with multiple disadvantages including poverty and social isolation.

BF Adventure uses their outdoor environment 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 creating a masterplan for the site to enable them to develop their facilities in a more structured and planned way.

This will also include redeveloping their administrative hub and provide much improved on-site staff accommodation.



Environment

What we said we would do

All of our designs seek to minimise the amount of carbon intensive materials used in their construction, such as concrete and steel, turning to more natural and renewable materials such as timber. We also work hard to introduce more innovative solutions to our buildings

What we have done

KAST has been appointed by Community Roots, a CIC based in Porthtowan, who have secured funding for a new barn that will provide space to process surplus veg, teach people about healthy eating and growing, and to hold events and training.

Community Roots adopt a 'no-dig' approach to growing their vegetables. This method avoids breaking up, lifting or turning the soil and avoids damaging the soil structure, disturbing fungal networks and releasing carbon that's locked in the soil.

In turn, KAST has adopted a 'no-dig' approach for the building, placing the barn on jack-pads which rest on compacted ground, removing the need for carbon intensive concrete foundations. As a result the building has avoided using approximately 40m³ of reinforced concrete, the equivalent of 11 tonnes of CO₂, as well as irreparably damaging the soil.



Customers

What we said we would do

In our last Annual Impact Report we committed to developing a client questionnaire, to be issued on the completion of each project. Customer feedback is incredibly important in the work that we do, however, this is something that until now we have not formalised.

Much of our work is iterative - designing a building for a client, discussing options, refining and developing the preferred solution, taking it through the planning process, the technical design stages and on to site. By the time the building is complete there have been hours of conversations and discussions, each one refining the design to meet and exceed the client's expectations.

What we have done

To conclude this process we have developed a client questionnaire which we have now started to issue at the end of each project. The questions go back to the beginning of the process, asking why they chose KAST, what we were like to work with and whether they would be likely to recommend us to others and why.

The responses collated so far have been incredibly positive and useful in helping us drive the practice.



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:

We will commit to increasing the pension contributions to our staff to ensure long term financial security.

We will commit to undertaking energy modelling on all of our projects to ensure the most energy efficient solutions for our clients. The growing in-house Passivhaus expertise and employee training will help greatly with this.

We will commit to sharing customer feedback publicly, including client quotes on our website.

We are looking at more innovative ways in which to reduce the carbon footprint of the buildings we design.

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



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