



SINCLAIR GROUP

Sinclair Group Sustainability Report

This TCFD/IFRS report details our approach and performance across the TCFD/IFRS framework, spanning Strategy, Governance, Risk Management and Metrics and Targets and reports on the Financial Year ending 31st December 2023.

Introduction from our Managing Director

We recognise the part that our industry has historically played in the generation of greenhouse gasses. GHG emissions from the transport sector comprised 14% of global emissions in 2019. The car industry makes up 47% of the total transport sector GHG emissions, contributing 9% of the total annual global figure. In conjunction with our manufacturer partners, we are embarking in a new direction with the rapid rise in availability of alternate fuel vehicles. At the same time, we have to make sure that our internal operation of the business is delivered with as much positive impact on the environment as possible.

Our Group environmental commitment is to help all our employees, customers and suppliers understand the responsibility they have in protecting the environment and to minimise the impact they have on it. From senior management to junior members of staff, engagement and training is essential to achieve the behavioural change necessary to address the scale and urgency of the climate challenge. By improving this awareness, we want to make a positive contribution to environmental growth by protecting and enhancing the local and global environment whilst going about our business activities.



We also recognise that companies that are able to realise and implement the opportunities offered by new technologies, infrastructure and customer solutions will create substantial value for their businesses and wider society in the context of renewed public interest in climate change and the scientific and regulatory imperative to make substantial emissions reductions in the next decade.

Andy Sinclair
Managing Director, Sinclair Group

Our Aim:

“ We want to inspire our staff to understand climate change; their role in it and to make a difference at home and at work. That way we can make a positive change together. ”

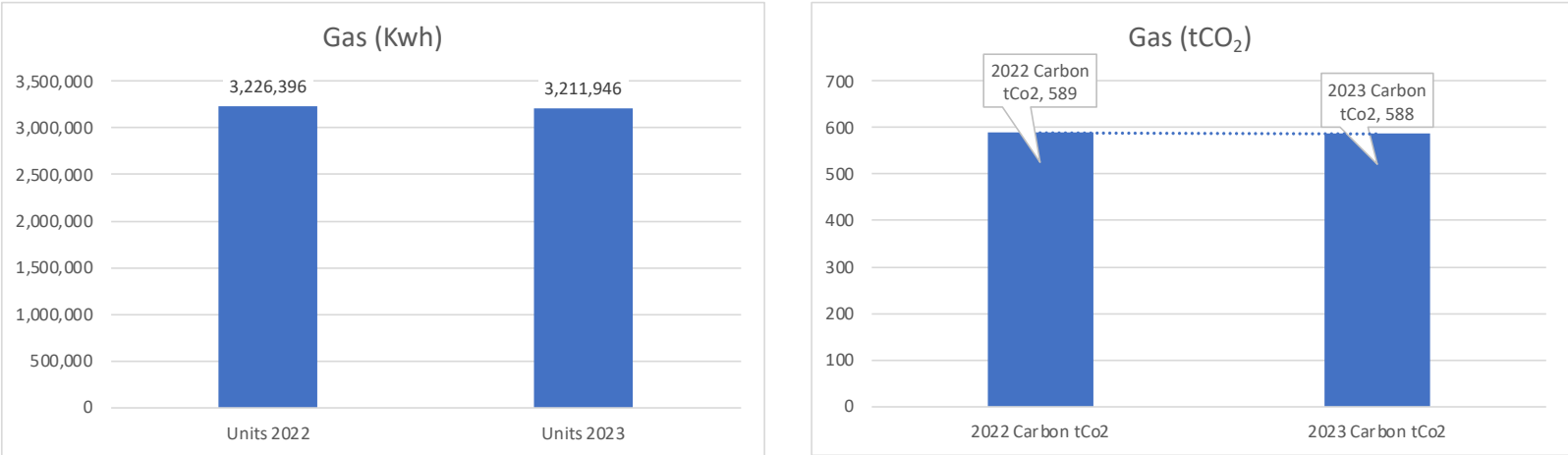
Climate Transition Plan

Our Goal is to achieve carbon net zero by 2050.

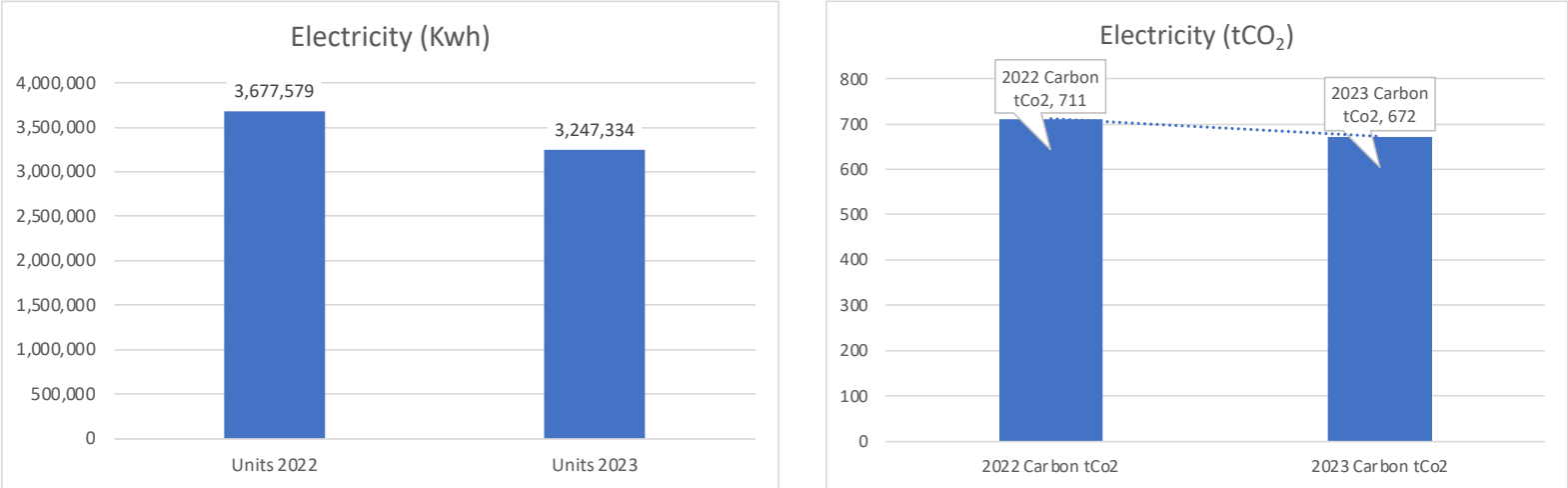
Where are we now? Our Performance:

Type	Scope	2022		2023	
		Units 2022	2022 Carbon tCO ₂	Units 2023	2023 Carbon tCO ₂
GAS (Kwh)	1	3,226,396	589	3,211,946	588
ELECTRICITY (Kwh)	2	3,677,579	711	3,247,334	672
EMPLOYEE COMMUTING (Miles)	3	7,673,827	1,935	8,251,427	2,080
WATER SUPPLY (m ³)	3	22,043	3	22,155	4
WATER SEWAGE (m ³)	3	14,006	4	11,460	3
COMMERCIAL WASTE NORMAL (Tonnes)	3	311	7	283	6
COMMERCIAL WASTE HAZARDOUS (Tonnes)	3	40	21	37	19
FUEL (litres)	3	627,830	1,470	801,764	1,830
TOTAL	3		4,740		5,202

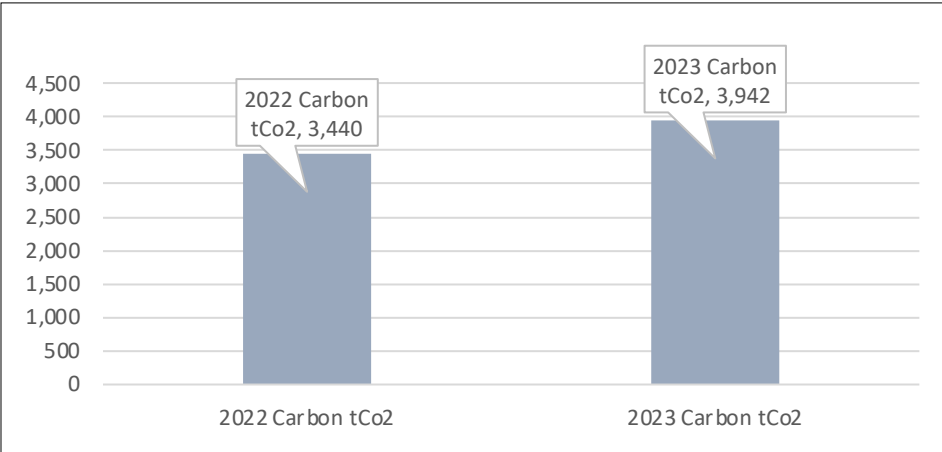
Scope 1 Emissions:



Scope 2 Emissions:

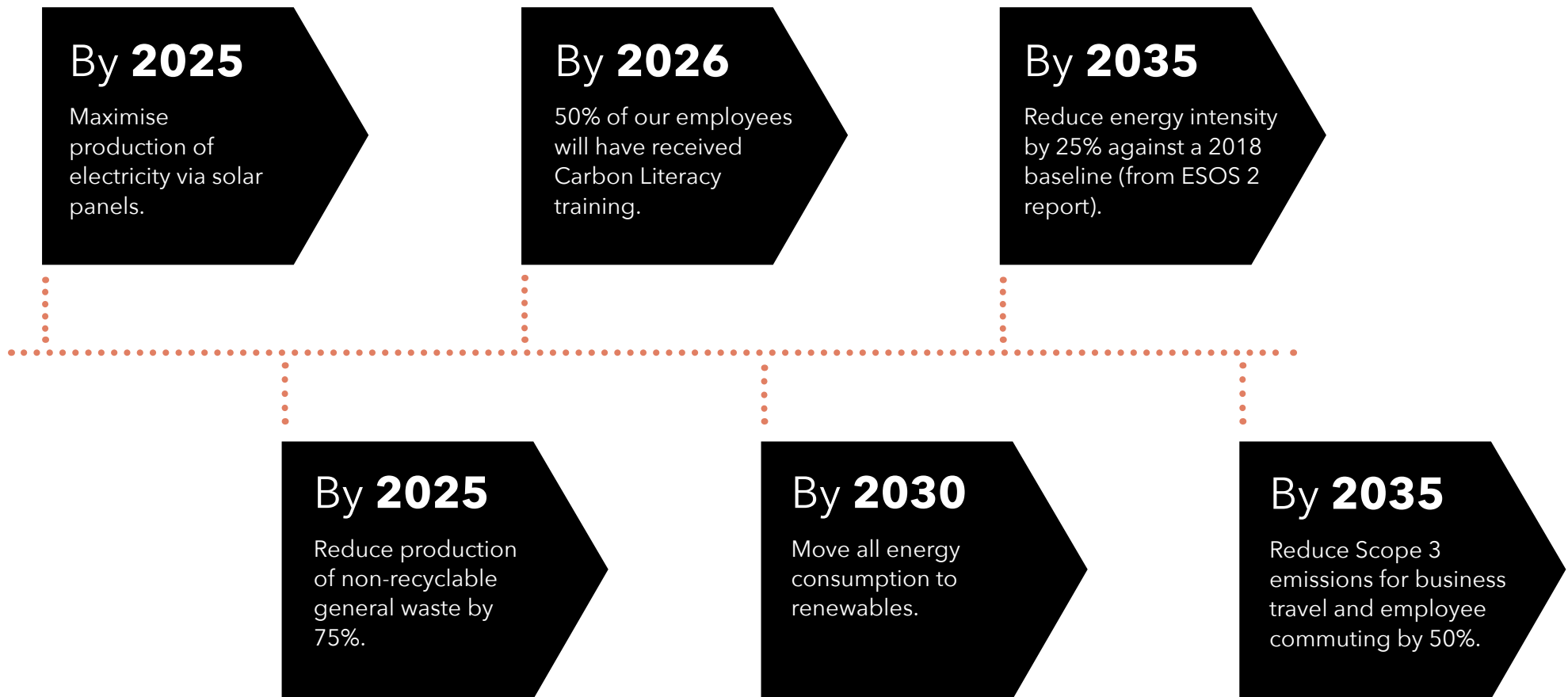


Scope 3 Emissions (see definition in the table shown on page 3):



Where do we want to be? Our Targets

To help us achieve net zero in operations by 2050, we are committed to achieving the following milestones.



Strategy

Our Aim is to be:

- Regenerative, rather than exploitative
- Deliver value from creativity and innovation rather than consumption
- Think and act for the long term and across systems, and do this in collaboration with diverse stakeholders so everybody benefits.

Embed climate risks and opportunities into business strategy

Climate change is an urgent priority, so our journey to a more sustainable future has never been more important. We are working to recognise the threat posed by climate change and make sure that we mitigate against our risks by expanding our portfolio of business, working with varied partners at various stages in the process of electrification of mobility to make sure that we are protected from over-exposure to a single partner.

We realise that the speed of adoption of electric mobility will vary from region to region and across different sections of society - our range of partners have been carefully chosen to meet this variety. Going forward we will continue to expand our geographical operation areas, with the aim of further increasing our diversity and reducing exposure to localised climate risks such as flooding.



Aim for net zero emissions as close to 2050 as possible

Our carbon reduction plan is in line with the Carbon Reduction Budget of the Welsh Government. We have already been offsetting our gas and electricity to achieve a carbon neutral position. Currently 12 sites have solar panel installations, this will be expanded in the next 12-24 months, further increasing our use of renewables.

By 2030 we will utilise only electricity from a renewable source.

Since 2023, we have been sending our waste engine oil to be recycled as base oil for the production of new engine oil. This was previously sent for use as fuel in the marine industry. This single change has reduced our annual carbon output by 150,000 kgs.

We are fully engaged in the Welsh Government's recycling scheme and expect to see a significant reduction in carbon through general waste disposal in the next 12 months.

Our internal travel, deliveries and commuting are on the journey to full electrification. The UK Government's ZEV mandate will mean that by 2035, all new vehicles that we add to our fleet will be zero emission transport.

Ensure all employees have the skills required

All Board members and Eco Champions are Carbon Literacy Accredited. We will embark on an internal training programme that will see 50% of our staff also accredited in the next two years. That will require training of approximately 300 people per annum.

Embrace circular economy practices

The over-exploitation of natural resources required to achieve economic growth and development has negatively impacted the environment and adversely affected their availability and cost. So, it is easy to see why the idea of a circular economy, which offers new ways to create a more sustainable economic growth model, is taking hold across the globe.

We are engaging with this concept, actively pursuing ways of working with local businesses who can help us optimise in this area. Key projects include: sending shredded paper to become bedding for veterinary practices and sending 22,000 waste number plates to be beaded for making artificial limbs instead of incinerated. We are also engaging with the Royal Mint (located locally in Llantrisant) for the disposal of our obsolete



IT equipment. They are planning on utilising the manufacturing capacity generated by the move towards a cashless society to recycle this equipment, salvaging the metals to make jewellery and beading the plastic for re-use.

Support communities

We provide financial support for a foodbank in every town/city where we have a business. In addition, we encourage the staff to provide further donations as they are able.

Every member of staff is allowed a paid 'volunteering' day. The only qualification is that the community is better off as a result of their time. This makes over 950 days available for community improvement, ranging from charitable collections, to beach cleaning or community hall repairs.

The Sinclair Foundation is a registered charity jointly funded by our employees and the Sinclair family. In times of difficulty due to illness etc., the Foundation is available to provide support to all employees and their families.

Governance

Responsibility for overseeing and managing climate related risks and opportunities rest at the highest levels of our business. The Sinclair Group governing Board is committed to sound governance policies and practices, as well as ensuring that an understanding of the challenges faced by the climate crisis is fully achieved by our most senior people.

All Board members are qualified Carbon Literacy practitioners, having completed the Carbon Literacy Programme requiring the fulfilment of environmental commitments within their personal and professional life. In recent times, this has provided initiatives such as a company-wide promotion of 'Meat-free Mondays' as well as personal projects to improve insulation levels within our homes.

This environmental expertise at a Board level has meant that we are in a great position to give full attention to any matters that are raised that require an understanding of environmental impact.

Our internal 'Engage' communication app is used to share the latest developments in our pursuit of improvement with all staff.

Strategic Development Team

In 2021 we created the Strategic Development Team, led by a new role and Board member: Head of Strategic Development. This team picks up day to day responsibility for various areas that impact across our ESG responsibilities:

The Head of Strategic Development sits on the Board and has responsibility for the development of our ESG strategies and reporting mechanisms. They are also the Group expert



in the development of Values and Purpose and have ensured that our Purpose is fully aligned to the challenges of being a responsible business, maximising our positive impact of the world and society. In 2023, they delivered 20 workshops across the Group, ultimately developing the Group's Purpose of "Belong, for Good".

Belong, for Good is supported by the 4 enablers of Better Workplaces, Better Jobs, Better Communities, Better World. In turn each of these focus areas are designed to talk directly to the United Nations Sustainability Goals.

Group Environmental Manager: Another new role created in 2021 to support the Head of Strategic Development. The role has direct responsibility for managing any projects within the Group that relate to our impact on the environment. They have

just completed a Group-wide project to improve our recycling streams. This met the new Welsh Government's legislation, plus is expected to deliver a 65% reduction in our General Waste levels.

They are also responsible for maintaining the team of Eco Champions that we have installed at every site. These are existing employees who have volunteered to take on additional duties and be the 'eyes and ears and conscience' of the business. All Eco Champions are also Carbon Literacy accredited.

Purchasing Manager: This role has been brought under the Strategic Development team in 2022 to ensure that all purchasing decisions are made as ethically as possible, working in conjunction with the Group Environmental Manager to deliver support to the circular economy concept. They will be responsible for delivering the 2024/2025 project to increase the number of solar panels currently providing energy to the Group. They have also been working with our Energy Broker to provide a portal that delivers complete and real time visibility of our energy consumptions and GHG emissions for the first time.

Local Management: As a result of this new portal, the local Heads of Business for each Retailer will be made responsible for tracking energy consumption at their site. This will allow them to analyse opportunities for energy conservation and implement local changes.



Risks and Opportunities

In line with our major partners (i.e. the car brand manufacturers), we categorise risks as physical risks and transition risks. Physical risks are the result of extreme weather events and the increasing global mean temperatures. Transition risks result from the movement towards a low-carbon economy.

Time horizons: For the purpose of this report, we view short term as zero to three years; medium term as three to five years and long term as greater than five years.

According to the TCFD Auto Preparer Forum in their World Business Council for Sustainable Development paper "Planning to scale the e-mobility transition: climate-related financial disclosure and the automobile sector" (2021), these are the main climate-related risks and opportunities impacting the auto sector: (right)



Category	Risk/opportunity	Potential financial impact ²²		
		Category	Impact (positive or negative +/-)	Commentary
Policy and legal	Increased pricing of GHG emissions (e.g. EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), California cap-and-trade) or costs to comply with other relevant regulation (e.g. emissions efficiency regulations etc.)	Capital investment, Revenues	-/+	GHG mitigation reduces risk
	Requirements to provide detailed environmental information at product level (e.g. scope 3 emissions) in different jurisdictions	Operating costs, Revenues	-/+	Conformance with requirements could increase costs but resulting information could lead to demand in products that satisfy environmental credentials
	Supportive EV policy incentives	Revenues	+	For example, subsidies could support sales and revenue as well as provide planning security
	Increasing driving range of EVs	Revenues	+	Increased sales due to confidence in products
Technological advances	Advanced battery technology	Operating costs	+	Economies of scale
		Capital investment	-	R&D spend on technology advancement
	Substitution of existing products and services with lower emissions options	Revenues	+	If a company develops and produces its own battery systems, this may improve confidence in products
		Capital investment	-	Investment in new lower emissions technology, plus costs of disposal or transformation of legacy assets
Market changes	Technological advances enabling resource efficiency	Operating costs	+	Reduced energy usage/output
	Changing customer behavior	Revenues	+/-	Consumer demand for 'greener' vehicles
	Increased development and uptake of MaaS	Revenues	-/+	Decreased personal car ownership. Impact could be positive with increasing offering of MaaS products
	Stigmatization of the sector as a polluting industry	Revenues	-	Decreased ownership of ICE or other emissions vehicles. However subject to change as EV penetration increases
Physical				
Acute	Increased severity of extreme weather events such as cyclones and floods	Revenue, Operating costs	-	Disruption to production
Chronic	Impacts of physical climate risks such as changes to monsoon weather patterns	Revenues	-	Economic impacts reduce market size

Physical Risks

Increased climate events disrupting our operations

Fortunately, as all of our operations are based in the south of the UK, we are unlikely to experience the worst of the climate events such as severe droughts or flooding.

These charts (right) show how the average daily temperature and rainfall in Cardiff is likely to change in the next half a century, even under the most pessimistic “business as usual”, high-carbon pathway (RCP 8.5).

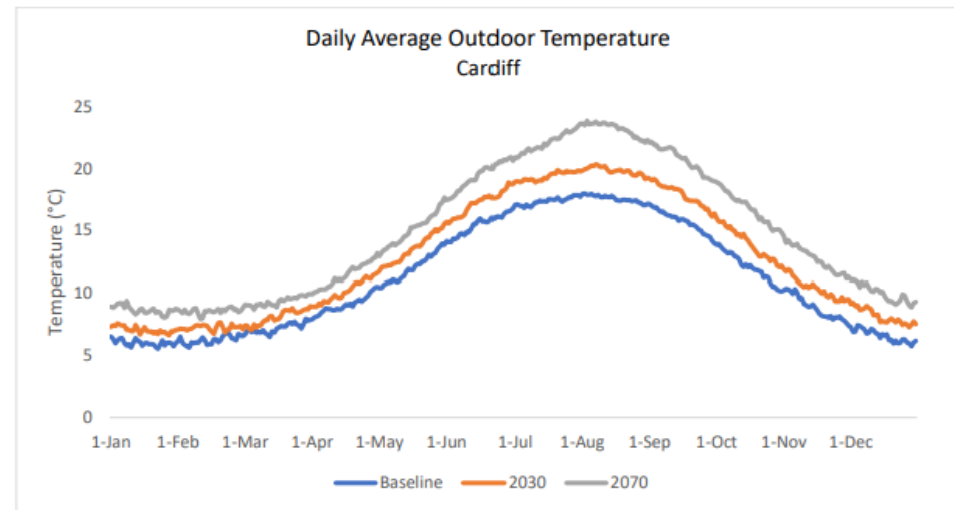


Figure 6: Annual profile of daily average outdoor temperature in Cardiff for baseline, 2030 and 2070

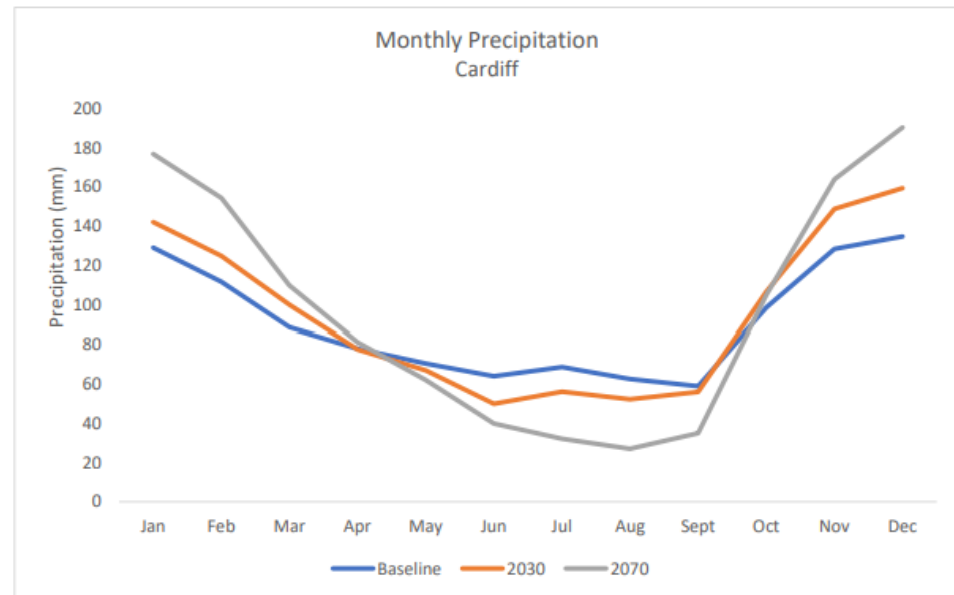
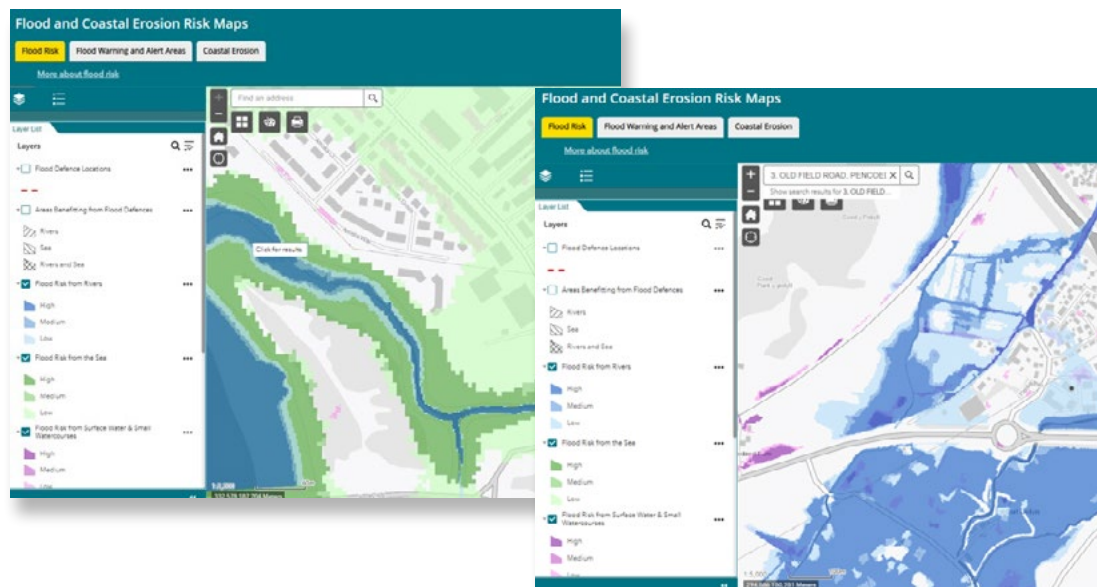


Figure 3: Annual profile of average monthly precipitation in Cardiff for baseline, 2030 and 2070

However, in the short-term we do recognise that we are still exposed to some risk, most significantly the increase in localised flooding events at certain of our locations, mainly due to exposure to local river water overflowing its banks. Although some sites are exposed to sea water flooding, right.

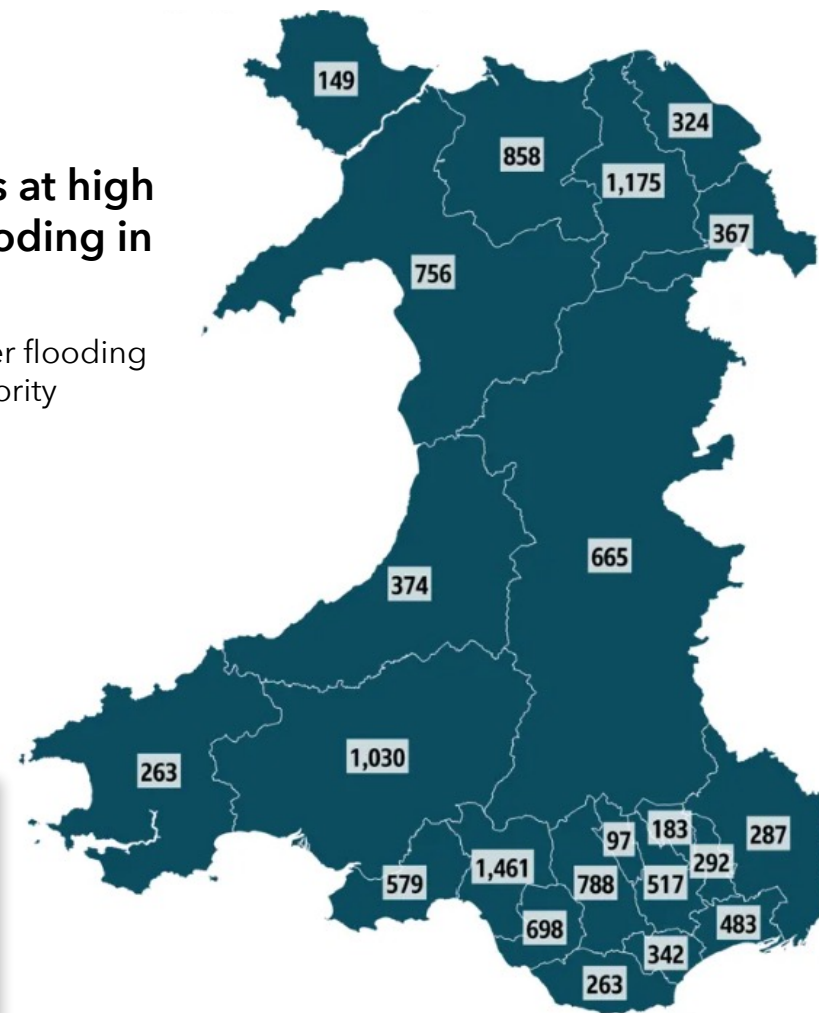
Response

We have established flood risk plans at any location that we have identified as being at risk. These plans not only involve mitigating actions like signing up to the National Resources Wales Flood Risk notifications and monitoring their published maps, below.



Properties at high risk of flooding in Wales

Tidal and river flooding by local authority



Source: Flood Risk Assessment Wales/Natural Resources Wales. September 2021

We also have identified the contingency actions required should any site suffer flooding, including how we direct customers and staff to minimise operation downtime. These plans detail how we should act to best protect the site and its equipment in case of flooding. Each site has a Business Leader who has the responsibility to be aware of the flood risk, the plan in place and how to execute it.

Finally, extreme weather conditions could impact our business continuity at certain locations, if our employees are unable to reach their places of work or if office locations and delivery stores were forced to shut. It should be noted however, that as result of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures implemented in 2020, we successfully facilitated home working for our key employees and accelerated the roll out of new digital tools and platforms that our people need to stay connected to our customers and with each other.

Opportunity

By being more focused on the potential risks associated with climate events, we would put ourselves in an advantageous position compared to our competitors. Within our conurbations, most of the Auto Retailers are within close proximity and are likely to experience similar flood type events. By being more prepared and able to react or direct custom rapidly, we would anticipate being in a position to trade much more quickly than our competition.



We would also reduce the impact on our properties, again allowing ourselves to bounce back into operation at a quicker speed.

Building/Property Resilience

Climate change will undoubtedly continue to impact how we live in and how we manage the physical condition of our buildings, both now and in the future. Over the medium to long-term timeframe, the increasing temperatures will see heating loads in Wales decrease in winter. In summer, we will experience more uncomfortable conditions across the board. Wetter weather and associated wind-driven rain across most of the country will also bring its challenges, both for building upkeep and associated indoor moisture levels.

Specifically:

Moisture risks: Moisture risks are more likely to occur due to climate change, i.e., changed precipitation patterns, impacting building envelope moisture dynamics. This will also impact indoor environmental quality and occupant health.

Solar risks: Solar degradation is more likely to occur due to climate change, i.e., changed temperatures and solar radiation, with the potential to affect the performance of building fabric (both solid and cavity wall construction) especially south-facing facades. This will also impact indoor environmental quality and occupant health from overheating risks.

Inadequate ventilation: Reduced ventilation (should indoor air not be regularly exchanged/extracted) not only results in the build-up of moisture that can lead to



damp and mould growth, but it also leads to a build-up of indoor contaminants or pollutants, which both contribute to poorer indoor environmental quality and subsequently reduced health and wellbeing.

Response

Any new buildings we construct will always comply with the standards of modern construction in place at that time. These standards will reflect the current thinking around insulation to improve efficiency; heat dissipation to minimise the need to use energy for cooling; air flow to reduce the risk of mould and damp.

Most of our buildings are of recent construction, built from steel frames with cladding. These buildings have not been identified as being of significant risk in the work conducted by Professor Carolyn Hayles, Embedded Climate Research Fellow Cardiff School of Art and Design Cardiff Metropolitan University in her paper for the Welsh Government entitled: "How resilient are buildings in the UK and Wales to the challenges associated with a changing climate?" November 2021, revised February 2022.

However, we do have a selection of properties that are of brick construction, and these are at greater risk due to the nature of their build. They are also at greater risk due to the age of their roofs.

We are committed to an ongoing programme of maintenance to protect the integrity of our buildings. In 2024, we completed three roof upgrade projects which have all been focused on the prevention of water ingress, protecting the building structures against further damage and minimising the growth of mould inside our sites.



Opportunity

This focus on the standards of our properties will have a positive impact on the morale of the staff who have to operate within them. Our commitment to 'Better Workplaces' (one of the four pillars supporting our Belong for Good Purpose), is aimed at delivering a more enjoyable, fulfilling workplace experience. We anticipate this will have a positive impact on staff retention and subsequently improve our operating costs: savings from recruitment and training, plus improved effectiveness from having experienced, capable staff.

Increased climate events impacting our suppliers

In the medium- to long-term, increased intensity, frequency or duration of storms, droughts and other severe weather events as a result of climate change may disrupt the production of our manufacturer partners (OEMs), the production, logistics, cost and procurement of products from their suppliers, and the timely delivery of vehicles to customers. This could negatively impact on working conditions for our partners and their suppliers. Any of these could have a material, adverse effect on their financial condition and operational performance.

Some key raw materials for EVs, such as lithium, cobalt, copper, and nickel, are especially vulnerable to water-stress impacts, since droughts and flooding affect exploration, processing, operations, transport and other important production and supply chain processes. Furthermore, many of the world's largest copper and lithium mines are located in areas of high or extremely high, water stress, including the southern United States, Mexico, South America, southern Africa and China.

Response

Over the last five years, we have actively sought out additional franchise partners in order to diversify our portfolio of OEMs. By increasing the number of partners, we increase the number of locations that are responsible for the manufacture of vehicles and their supplied parts, reducing the exposure from localised climate events.



We now operate with suppliers who originate from Germany, Spain, Czech Republic, Korea, China. They have production facilities that are based in Europe, Asia, Southern Africa, South America, North America.

We will continue to review all opportunities to expand our portfolio and further protect ourselves from the climate events.

Opportunity

This diverse portfolio of partners has meant that we have moved into a pre-eminent position in our localities, the size of the business and numbers of customers mean that we now offer new car products that collectively represent over a third of all new cars sold in the areas. i.e. 35 out of every 100 new cars bought in South Wales are bought from the Sinclair Group. This increased diversity means that we have even better choice to offer our local customer – building further on their loyalty.

The inclusion of brands such as BYD and Ora means that we are able to provide full mass-market and luxury Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) across a wider range of price points – crucial in an area like South Wales, which has traditionally been one of the worst areas for average salaries (and therefore affordability) in the UK.

The increasing size of our business also brings an opportunity to drive operating efficiencies across our entire portfolio, especially in regards to centralised support functions such as Accounts, HR, IT, Marketing etc.



Transition Risks

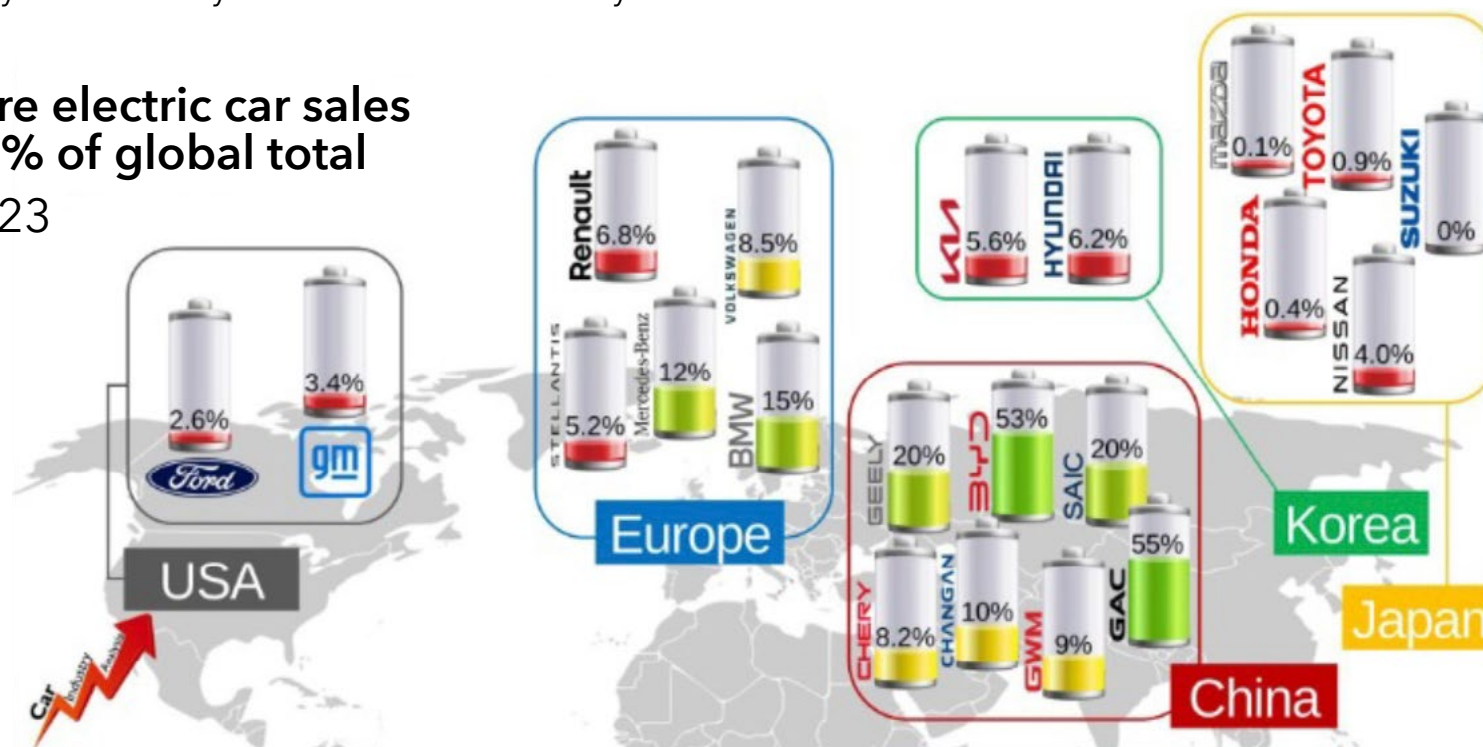
Lack of natural demand for EV products could affect sales rates and profitability

Over the medium- to long-term, consumer adoption of EVs will be critical to the success of the business and could be impacted by numerous factors. These include the proliferation of charging infrastructure, the pricing strategy of the OEMs, the development of new battery technology. If the OEMs fail to deliver on their EV strategy, it could materially and adversely affect our results financially.

Response

The diversity of OEM partners safeguards us against some of the impact that may arise from these issues. Some of our partners (Ora, BYD) are exclusively or significantly BEV production focused. Our more established partners such as Mercedes or VW have strategies that cover the full extent of the market, offering Petrol, Diesel, Hybrid and BEVs.

Pure electric car sales as % of global total 2023



We currently run communication programmes to introduce prospects to our alternative brands if they do not purchase from the brand where they make their initial enquiry.

The close proximity of our dealerships means that it is relatively easy to switch sell customers across brands (some of our Retailers already operate with a 'Shop-in-Shop'/Multi-brand business model and this is likely to increase in the future). In times of extreme distress or lack of product, we are confident that we have sufficient alternative offerings to capture most of the customers across our operating territories. We will continue with our strategy of cautious acquisition of existing businesses combined with more aggressive pursuit of fresh OEMs to ensure we maintain control of our geographical areas.

Opportunity

Beyond these risks, we view the global shift to low and zero emission drivetrains as a strong opportunity to grow our market presence and strengthen our position. We are a first mover in our industry, offering end-to-end solutions that include the vehicle, implementation advice, services and charging.

All of our businesses are made up of New Car, Used Car and Aftersales Departments. This means that under periods of lack of new car supply, we continue to benefit from other income streams, switching to greater volumes of used cars if required. We have seen historically



(post-Covid), that lack of new car supply actually results in improved used car profitability and potentially a subsequent increase in business GP.

We have also retained partners who are still focused on delivering high quality and affordable Plug-in Hybrid electric Vehicles (PHEV) and Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicles. Having access to these at times of high demand will further support our operating profits.

Employee skill set shortages and retention challenges

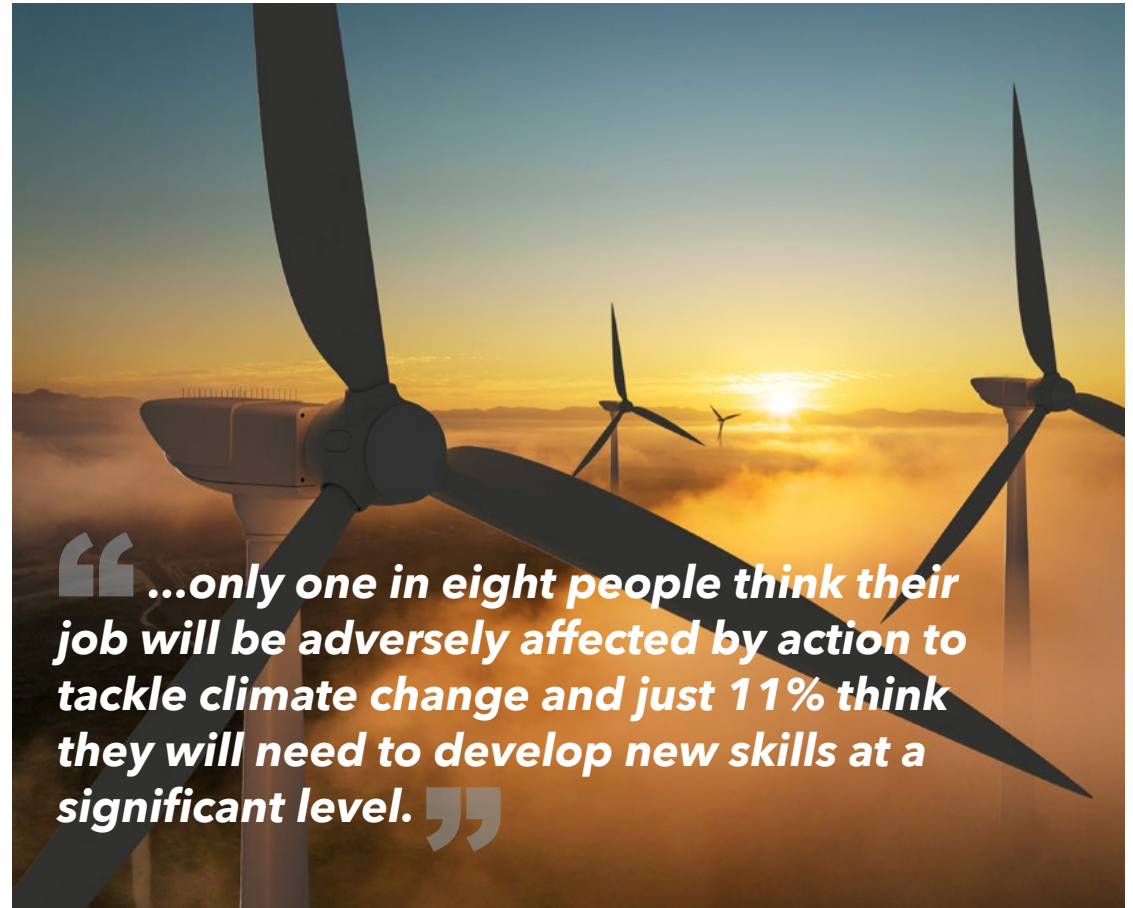
According to Business in the Community (BITC), only one in eight people think their job will be adversely affected by action to tackle climate change and just 11% think they will need to develop new skills at a significant level. Unfortunately, of those who do believe a change is coming, 80% of them do not think their employer is doing enough to help them prepare, or don't know what their employers are doing.

Reskilling workers who might be at risk in a transition was the top-rated business action towards a just transition but most people are in the dark about the changes they will experience at work as a result of the transition. The majority do not think their jobs will be affected, which is in contrast to the size and scale of change we know is needed across industries. Those who do think their jobs will be impacted are mainly in highly energy intensive sectors (YouGov Surveys Sept 2021, published in BITC - Leading a Just Transition Jan 2022).

The result of this is that there is not currently a large focus on re-skilling employees to do vastly different roles.

As an employee:

- Just one in five think their employer is doing enough
- More than a quarter think their employer is not doing enough
- Almost half don't know what their employer is doing



Response

Our **Belong, for Good** programme is focused on ensuring that our managers are more aware of the design of individual jobs, as well as asking them to focus on the structure of the businesses and the roles contained within each site. One of the 4 key pillars to **Belong, for Good** is 'Better Jobs'.

They are challenged to ensure that the roles being occupied by our staff are fit for purpose; that they solve the immediate business requirements; deliver sufficient challenge and enjoyment to the member of staff; are flexible enough to accommodate future changing requirements, regardless of whether those requirements are driven by the business or our staff.

Additionally, 50% of our staff will receive Carbon Literacy accreditation in the next two years as part of the **Belong, for Good** programme.

Belong, for Good will also form the core of our new internal communication strategy over the next two years. It will receive extensive social media coverage, driving awareness of our Company Purpose to all potential employees.

Opportunity

We fully engage in all manufacturer sponsored staff development programmes. These programmes are focused on all elements of the business and are a result of the future challenges coming to the industry. They are intended to ensure that with the rise of EVs, our staff know how to talk about, sell, repair and operate these new technologies. This ensures they are prime position to engage with our customers, remove the mystique and maximise the profit opportunity.



“ ***Belong, for Good will also form the core of our new internal communication strategy over the next two years.*** ”



Revenues from Repair, Maintenance & Tyres may be impacted by the proportion of EV/hybrid vehicles.

As the proportion of BEV vehicles increases due to the pressures from Government, there will be additional aftersales impacts especially if we manage to achieve the low carbon pathway. Firstly, the total volume of new vehicles sold may reduce. The ZEV (Zero Emission Vehicle) mandate currently in place insists that 22% of all new cars sold by an OEM will be BEV, this rises to 28% in 2025. The current take-up rate is mid-teens for Retail and Fleet sales combined (below 10% on pure Retail sales). In order to meet the 22% and avoid fines of £15k per vehicle, the OEMs may choose to artificially reduce the supply of ICE vehicles to redress the percentage.

This reduction in units will be felt within our service departments, we will see fewer cars for services, repairs and MOTs. Combined with this reduction in units will be an additional impact that comes from the sale of BEVs themselves. BEVs require less regular servicing, so we will see a natural downturn in the number of visits to our workshops. Additionally, with fewer moving parts and no requirement for oil, the revenue streams within our aftersales departments will see a further reduction. We will see the cars less frequently, spend less time actually working on them and be selling fewer parts to keep them road safe and legal.

Response

We are planning to change the pricing structure of our services as the need changes. What are currently ‘free of charge’ services will have to move to a paid model. This could include things like:

Free coffee from a machine	becomes	Barista style café with food and drink
Free wash and vac	becomes	‘Paid for’ complete Valet or Detailing Service
Limited accessory shop	becomes	More significant apparel retail space

Opportunity

The weight of a BEV is significantly greater than the equivalent ICE vehicle, due to the mass of the battery. The impact of this is that tyre wear is increased. By embarking on a programme focused on improving the selling skills of our service advisors in the areas of tyres, we can take advantage of a significant market that is currently dominated by the independent tyre-fitting companies.

Mood board



This greater focus on tyres will have a positive knock on in terms of the sale of additional products like wheel adjustment and tracking, all high margin activities.

We may also be able to benefit from the fact that the BEVs will be on site for a reasonable duration and offer a monetised battery charging service, so that the vehicle is ‘ready to go and full charged’ at point of collection.

Summary

Through solar panel installations, LED lighting and other measures, we have actively reduced our overall energy consumption and generated cost savings. We will continue to make substantial investments in our facilities to improve energy efficiency and responsible resource management.

While we have made great strides, we continuously seek new opportunities to further enhance the environmental efficiency and the community impact of our operations.

In future reports, we will enhance our capability to measure individual site performance, adding in efficiency metrics at an individual business level, allowing us to track where we are seeing the greatest improvements and target those areas lagging behind.

Through it all, we remain committed to our purpose of **Belong, for Good**. Through engaging with our employees; coaching and empowering them

We believe we can be a power for improvement for future generations of employees, stakeholders and customers.



“ While we have made great strides, we continuously seek new opportunities to further enhance the environmental efficiency and the community impact of our operations. ”