



Freedom Leisure: Embedding a Culture of Sustainability Through Carbon Literacy

Freedom Leisure is one of **UK's largest charitable leisure trusts**, operating more than **130 facilities** with over **23 million visits annually**.

While the trust had ambitious technical carbon reduction plans, leadership recognised that meeting these goals required a fundamental culture change across their 5,000 geographically dispersed workforce.

The Challenge

- **High-energy Operations:** Reducing power, heat and water usage across 130+ sites required behavioural change, not just technical fixes.
- **Logistical Barriers:** Training 5,000 colleagues, working varying, shift-based hours across England and Wales, needed a scalable solution and a collaborative approach.
- **Need for Organisation-wide Understanding:** A small sustainability team couldn't meet ambitious targets alone; success required buy-in from every level, from site managers to frontline staff.

The Solution: A Practical & Scalable Framework

Carbon Literacy offered more than *awareness* – it provided a structured, action-based framework that directly links climate science to measurable site-level impact.

Before: Limited Understanding

After: Operational Ownership

- ✔ **Multi-Level Strategic Rollout:** They trained colleagues at all levels. This included the Executive Leadership Team (for strategic buy-in), Senior & General Managers (for site-level energy use), operational staff (for day-to-day influence over emissions) and Technical & Support staff (for integration in procurement & estate improvement).
- ✔ **Flexible Delivery:** To reach shift workers, they implemented modular online sessions (4×2 hours or 2×4 hours) scheduled months in advance, allowing for cross-site collaboration without travel emissions.
- ✔ **Sector Relevance:** By using a Public Culture Shareable Course and moving to in-house delivery, they tailored the content to the specific realities of leisure centre operations.

Actions: Translating Learning into Strategy



Executive-Led Policy Change

Following their certification, the COO pledged a transition to an **all-electric lease vehicle fleet**, while the CEO launched a **green travel transformation** focused on staff and customer behaviour change.



Site Environmental Ambassadors

More than **100 Carbon Literate colleagues** are tasked with leading sustainability in their respective centres.



Collaborative Infrastructure

Launched a **Viva Engage community** and **regular online drop-in sessions** to ensure that pledges didn't just stay on paper but were shared and replicated across different sites.

“Environmental sustainability has always been a key business objective within Freedom Leisure, and the contributions of each Carbon Literate colleague move us closer to our ambitious organisational targets.”

– **Matt Wickham, COO**

The Impact: Quantifiable Savings & Cultural Shift

Since the start of its Carbon Literacy journey, Freedom Leisure has seen significant organisational, operational, and cultural benefits.

Measurable impact



221.2 tonnes CO₂e saved directly from Carbon Literacy pledges



12.2% reduction in energy consumption achieved across 2025–26, resulting in financial savings



181 colleagues certified (plus 7 external students), with more sessions planned



Motivation to act rose from 65% to 96% and 15% increase in confidence to identify carbon savings

Strategic impact

- **Sector Leadership**
Named 'Energy Management Team of the Year' at the Energy Managers Association Awards 2025
- **Unified Messaging**
Staff are more aware of the carbon costs of everyday decisions and better equipped to communicate environmental measures
- **Cross-Regional Collaboration**
Staff are regularly sharing best practices across regional boundaries, breaking down geographical silos
- **Operational Integration**
The Environment & Sustainability Working Group now operates three climate-focused subgroups, embedding a deeper understanding of emissions

Future: Scaling for Sector Leadership

- 1 Silver Carbon Literate Organisation (CLO) Status:** Scaling training to reach a critical mass of the 5,000-person workforce.
- 2 Value Chain Influence:** Exploring options to train local authority partners and suppliers.
- 3 Daily Integration:** Ensuring every site has trained colleagues to lead conversations and inspire action.

Despite the challenges, Freedom Leisure's experience demonstrates that the benefits – emissions reductions, empowered colleagues, financial savings – far outweigh the effort required.