

Practical ways to live sustainably, live healthier and save money

Small changes that fit your home, health, budget and circumstances

This guide brings together practical ways to use less energy, travel differently, waste less and support wider change. Choose the ideas that fit your home, health, budget and circumstances, and build gradually.

By the end, you will have realistic options to try at home, when travelling, while shopping and in your community. It is suitable for beginners, including actions that cost little or nothing.

Start here

Choose the group that best fits your routine, then begin with one or two actions.

Home energy

Actions 1–3: heating, lighting and appliances, washing and drying.

Travel and cooking

Actions 4–6: travel, cooking and hot water, meat and dairy.

Waste and shopping

Actions 7–9: food waste, buying and repairing, single-use items and recycling.

Nature and community

Action 10: support nature and speak up.

Home Energy

1. Use less heating energy

Set heating controls so rooms are warm only when needed. If it is safe and comfortable for you, try lowering the thermostat slightly. Draught-proof doors and windows, insulate accessible hot-water pipes, and consider loft or wall insulation when improvements are possible. Keep ventilation in mind to avoid damp and condensation.

Why it helps: Heating is a major part of household energy use. In South Yorkshire, household energy use accounts for 34% of all energy use, and a local study of more than 620 respondents found that rising energy costs remain a major concern. Small heating improvements can help reduce bills and emissions, while every home and household has different needs.

Source: South Yorkshire Sustainability Centre, 2024.

2. Switch to efficient lighting and appliances

Replace failed bulbs with LEDs, switch lights off in empty rooms, and turn appliances off when they are not required. When an appliance genuinely needs replacing, choose an energy-efficient model that suits your needs rather than automatically buying a larger one.

Why it helps: Energy Saving Trust reports that a modern LED uses 80–90% less energy than a traditional light bulb.

Source: Energy Saving Trust.

3. Wash and dry with less energy

Run the washing machine and dishwasher only with full loads, wash clothes at a lower temperature where suitable, and use a washing line or drying rack instead of a tumble dryer whenever practical.

Why it helps: Energy Saving Trust says day-to-day appliances account for about 24% of an average household's CO2 emissions. It recommends running washing machines and dishwashers only when full and air-drying clothes.

Source: Energy Saving Trust.

Travel and Cooking

4. Walk, cycle or use public transport

For shorter journeys, walk or cycle if you can. For longer journeys, consider the bus, tram or train. Combine errands, share lifts and use car clubs where suitable. These options can also reduce fuel costs and improve local air quality.

Why it helps: Energy Saving Trust cites research finding that replacing one daily car trip with cycling saves an average of 3.2 kg of CO2 per person.

Source: Energy Saving Trust.

5. Cook and use hot water efficiently

Only boil the water you need, put lids on pans, and match the pan to the hob ring. For smaller portions, consider a microwave, slow cooker or air fryer when suitable instead of heating a full oven. Take shorter showers where practical and avoid leaving hot taps running.

Why it helps: Imperial College London recommends using only the hot water needed, filling the kettle with the right amount, putting lids on pans, and choosing smaller cooking appliances where appropriate. These steps reduce the energy needed to heat water and prepare food.

Source: Imperial College London.

6. Eat less meat and dairy

Try one or more meat-free days each week, reduce portion sizes, or replace some meat with beans, lentils, chickpeas or other plant proteins. Cutting back on beef and lamb can be especially helpful. Choose seasonal fruit and vegetables where practical.

Why it helps: Friends of the Earth says animal farming is a major contributor to climate change. Imperial College London describes eating less meat and dairy as one of the biggest ways to reduce environmental impact.

Sources: Friends of the Earth; Imperial College London.

Waste and Shopping

7. Waste less food

Plan meals, check cupboards before shopping, make a list and buy realistic quantities. Store food correctly, understand date labels, freeze food before it spoils and turn leftovers into another meal. Compost unavoidable scraps if a suitable service or home system is available.

Why it helps: Waste Less South Yorkshire says that around 30% of general waste in South Yorkshire is food waste, and about 60% of that could have been eaten or drunk. Reducing food waste can also save the average UK family around £1,000 a year.

Source: Waste Less South Yorkshire – Food waste.

8. Buy less, repair more and choose second-hand

Pause before buying and ask whether you can use, borrow, rent or repair something instead. Choose durable items, maintain what you own, and use charity shops or second-hand marketplaces. Donate usable items rather than throwing them away.

Why it helps: Waste Less South Yorkshire encourages residents to think before buying, care for and repair clothes, and pass on items through charity shops, resale or friends and family. Keeping clothes in use for longer can reduce their carbon, water and waste footprints.

Source: Waste Less South Yorkshire – Love your clothes.

9. Reduce single-use items and recycle correctly

Carry reusable bags, bottles, cups or food containers when they are useful to you. Choose products with less packaging or refill options. Flatten cardboard before recycling. Keep recyclables clean and dry where possible, and check Rotherham Council guidance rather than relying on recycling rules from another area.

What to do in Rotherham

- **Pink-lid bin: general waste, food waste, plastic bags and film, nappies and wipes.**
- **Green bin: paper and card, including newspapers, magazines, leaflets, cards without glitter and loose shredded paper.**
- **Black bin: plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays; glass bottles and jars; tins, cans, foil, empty aerosols and cartons.**
- **Brown bin: garden waste such as grass cuttings, hedge clippings, prunings, twigs and plants. Do not put food waste, cardboard, soil or rubble in the brown bin.**
- **Put bins out by 7am on collection day, keep lids shut, do not leave side waste, and do not compact bin contents.**

Source: Rotherham Council – What goes in each bin.

Nature and community

10. Support nature and speak up

What to do

- Volunteer with Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust.
- Join or support local wildlife campaigns.
- Record wildlife sightings through Nature Counts. Garden and nature-reserve records are welcome.
- Get involved with Nature Recovery Rotherham and help protect local green spaces.
- Take action on planning proposals that could affect wildlife and nature.

Why it helps: Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust has more than 500 volunteers helping nature locally. Volunteering, recording wildlife, wildlife gardening and supporting campaigns all help build evidence, protect green spaces and give local wildlife a better chance to thrive.

Source: Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust – Get involved: wildsheffield.com/getinvolved/

Low-cost quick tricks

Start with the actions that cost little or nothing. Use this checklist to choose a few changes that fit your routine.

- [ ] Only boil the water you need in the kettle.
- [ ] Try one meat-free meal each week using low-cost beans, lentils or chickpeas.
- [ ] Switch lights off when leaving a room and replace bulbs with LEDs as they fail.
- [ ] Plan meals around food already at home and freeze leftovers in labelled portions.
- [ ] Run washing machines and dishwashers with full loads; wash clothes cooler where suitable.
- [ ] Borrow rarely used tools, books and equipment, or look in a charity shop first.
- [ ] Air-dry clothes when weather and space allow.
- [ ] Carry a reusable shopping bag and refill a water bottle.
- [ ] Use heating timers and radiator controls; close curtains after dark without covering radiators.
- [ ] Use reusable containers for packed lunches and leftovers.
- [ ] Walk one short journey each week, or combine several errands into one trip.
- [ ] Check local recycling guidance before putting an unfamiliar item in the bin.

Community action and ways to get involved

Individual choices matter, and community action can help make lower-carbon options easier for more people. Choose an opportunity that matches your interests, time and capacity.

- Journey Matters – active travel: support for Rotherham residents to make more journeys by bike, including free bike loans and e-bike loans for up to three months, free bike health checks, cycling advice and free cycle-training courses: journeymatters.co.uk/
- Waste Less South Yorkshire events – including BDR Waste Treatment Facility tours for Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham residents: wasteless-sy.co.uk/whats-on/
- Volunteer with [Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust - wildsheffield.com](wildsheffield.com).
- Get involved with Community Action – South Yorkshire Climate Alliance.
- Do you love where you live? Love Where You Live – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Play the Carbon Footprint Game | Climate Stewards.

Evidence and further reading

- [Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust – Get involved: wildsheffield.com/getinvolved/](wildsheffield.com/getinvolved/)
- [Journey Matters – free bike loans, repairs, training and cycling advice: journeymatters.co.uk/](journeymatters.co.uk/)
- [South Yorkshire Sustainability Centre – Investigating household energy consumption habits in South Yorkshire, 4 November 2024: sysustainabilitycentre.org/stories/investigating-household-energy-consumption-habits-in-south-yorkshire](sysustainabilitycentre.org/stories/investigating-household-energy-consumption-habits-in-south-yorkshire)
- [Waste Less South Yorkshire – Food waste]
- [Waste Less South Yorkshire – Love your clothes]
- [Waste Less South Yorkshire – Recycling]
- [Rotherham Council – What goes in each bin]
- [Waste Less South Yorkshire – What's on]
- [Friends of the Earth – Live sustainably: how to be a conscious consumer]
- [Energy Saving Trust – How to reduce your carbon footprint (updated 11 June 2026)]
- [Imperial College London, Grantham Institute – 9 things you can do about climate change]
- [United Nations ActNow – general background evidence: Actions for a healthy planet]