



WESTMINSTER
BUSINESS COUNCIL



WHITE PAPER

FROM GRASSROOTS TO GAME- CHANGERS: HOW SMES ARE POWERING ESG TRANSFORMATION IN PROPERTY & CONSTRUCTION

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF THIS WHITE PAPER IS TO SHOWCASE HOW SMES ARE DRIVING ESG INNOVATION ACROSS PROPERTY AND CONSTRUCTION THROUGH COLLABORATION, CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY IMPACT.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up more than 90 per cent of the UK construction supply chain. They are the sector’s lifeblood: agile, inventive and deeply rooted in their communities. Increasingly, they are also its conscience, driving Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) innovation from the ground up.

This white paper captures insights from ESG Advantage: SMEs in Property & Construction – Grassroots to Game-Changers, a Westminster Business Council (WBC) flagship event hosted by Gleeds, supported by Westminster City Council’s Economic Development Team, and sponsored by Bloom Construction, Jensen Hunt and rg+p.

Held in October 2025, the event convened SME leaders, corporates, policymakers and local-authority partners to explore how smaller businesses are turning ESG theory into measurable, scalable impact. The evening featured keynote insights, rapid-fire SME showcases and collaborative workshops whose collective intelligence forms the basis of this report.

Throughout, WBC acted as connector and catalyst, bridging business, government and community to accelerate a resilient, responsible and inclusive built-environment economy.

JENNIFER ADLER-POTTS
ESG IN PROPERTY & CONSTRUCTION DIRECTOR WESTMINSTER
BUSINESS COUNCIL
November 2025





SECTION 2



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SMES ARE NOT JUST ADOPTING ESG, THEY ARE DEFINING IT.



Across property and construction, SMEs are demonstrating that sustainability and profitability can move in lockstep. They are proving that ESG principles deliver competitive advantage, stronger partnerships and lasting community value.

This paper highlights their contribution and sets out practical recommendations for policymakers, developers, contractors and SMEs themselves.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Government and Local Authorities
 - Champion SME inclusion in procurement and simplify tendering.
 - Standardise ESG data and reporting to allow meaningful comparison.
 - Strengthen follow-up on Section 106 outcomes and social-value delivery.
 - Promote inclusive career pathways and modernise construction education.
2. For Developers and Major Contractors
 - Partner with SMEs to test circular, low-carbon and community-based solutions.
 - Integrate ESG metrics into design briefs and procurement criteria.
 - Share learning and data transparently to accelerate sector-wide progress.
3. For SMEs
 - Embed ESG in purpose and governance.
 - Track and communicate impact using accessible digital tools.
 - Collaborate across disciplines to amplify results.
4. For Educators and Industry Bodies
 - Build ESG competencies into curricula and professional training.
 - Promote the sector as diverse, innovative and socially valuable.

SECTION 3

WHY ESG MATTERS NOW

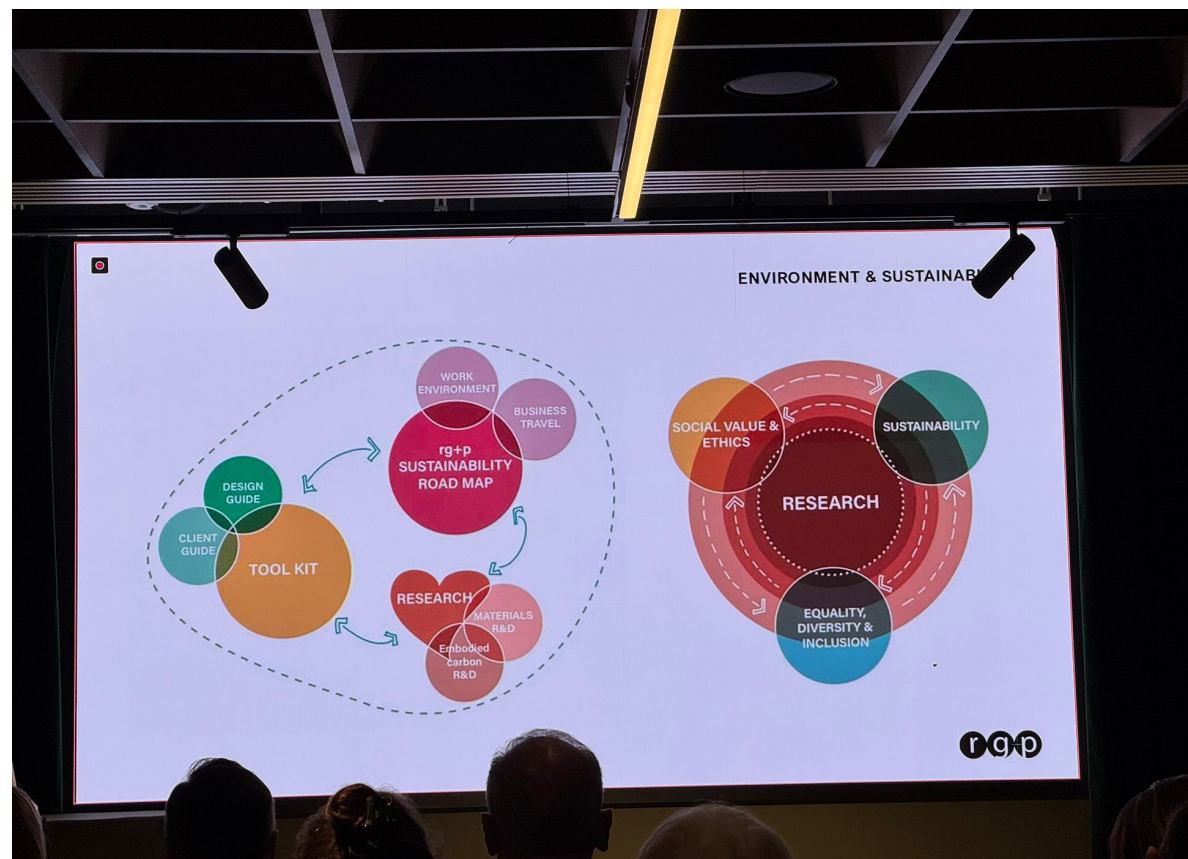
The construction industry sits at a pivotal moment. Global climate targets, evolving regulation and rising community expectations are reshaping how the built environment is financed, designed and delivered.

Investors and clients increasingly link ESG performance to access to capital and brand credibility. Yet the very scale of the sector's challenge, responsible for nearly 40 per cent of global carbon emissions, demands decentralised innovation.

This is where SMEs excel. Their agility enables experimentation, their proximity to communities fosters authentic social value, and their collaborative culture drives cross-sector partnerships.

Participant comment: "We cannot decarbonise construction from the top down. Real change happens through the supply chain."

As policy shifts towards outcome-based regulation and net-zero procurement, the SME contribution will define how quickly and credibly the sector transforms.



SECTION 4



ESG IN ACTION – EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

THE ESG
ADVANTAGE
EVENING
SHOWCASED
HOW DIFFERENT
BUSINESSES, EACH
SMALL IN SIZE BUT
LARGE IN AMBITION,
ARE EMBEDDING
ESG ACROSS
GOVERNANCE,
DESIGN AND
DELIVERY.

4.1 PROCUREMENT AS AN ENABLER – GLEEDS

Ben Pritchard, Project Director at Gleeds, challenged perceptions of procurement as a barrier, presenting it instead as a lever for sustainability and inclusion.

At projects such as Sizewell C, simplified tendering, early supplier engagement and outcome-driven criteria are unlocking SME innovation.

"Procurement is misunderstood and under-utilised. When done well, it can drive incredible outcomes."

His message was clear: procurement can shift ESG from paperwork to performance.

4.2 ESG BY DESIGN – BLOOM CONSTRUCTION

Founded with ESG principles at its core, Bloom Construction specialises in retrofit and refurbishment projects under £10 million.

Speaking on behalf of Managing Director Tom O'Toole, Jennifer Adler-Potts described how Bloom has embedded ESG across every dimension of its business approach:

- Governance – clear company-wide values of excellence, shared success and accountability; prioritising safety.
- Social – encouraging and enabling volunteering opportunities, contributing to youth programmes and partnering with universities.
- Environmental – using AI-enabled technology to track deliveries and waste; for instance, reducing fit-out carbon intensity to just 11 kg CO₂e per m² and 100% landfill diversion on a project for Derwent.

Bloom's experience proves that size is no barrier to measurable sustainability.

4.3 ENGINEERING CHANGE – JENSEN HUNT DESIGN

Structural-engineering consultancy Jensen Hunt Design illustrated how technical innovation and cultural purpose intersect. Director James Mickelburgh presented their Impact Duty Manifesto and pioneering Viridipath carbon-tracking software.

Projects outlined includes a home built entirely without concrete, steel or cement, using natural materials and local supply chains to demonstrate radically low embodied carbon.

"Purpose, agility and innovation allow SMEs to act fast, to test, fail, learn and lead."

4.4 PEOPLE, PURPOSE AND PLACE – RG+P

For architectural practice rg+p, sustainability and social value are inseparable. Victoria Torres Quero outlined how internal committees on sustainability and inclusion guide both design and operations.

The practice designs for longevity, collaborates with universities and champions apprenticeships as routes into meaningful careers.

"Inclusion, participation and commitment, these are the real foundations of ESG."

Together, these case studies illustrated the depth of SME innovation, practical, data-driven and community-centred.

SECTION 5



SECTOR INSIGHTS – CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE WORKSHOP

SMES ARE
REDEFINING ESG
DELIVERY, TACKLING
DATA GAPS,
PROCUREMENT
BARRIERS AND
CIRCULARITY
CHALLENGES
THROUGH
PRACTICAL
INNOVATION,
COLLABORATION
AND MEASURABLE
IMPACT THAT
TRANSFORMS
POLICY AMBITION
INTO ON-THE-
GROUND PROGRESS.

The interactive workshops drew over 50 participants representing design studios, contractors, developers, consultants, educators and local authorities.

Their dialogue revealed how shared challenges can become shared opportunities when data, purpose and collaboration align.

5.1 KEY CHALLENGES

INCONSISTENT UNDERSTANDING AND MEASUREMENT

Different interpretations of ESG lead to inconsistent data, limiting comparison and recognition.

Michelle Regent, Gleeds: *"ESG data capture is improving, but there is no single standard. That makes it difficult to compare or celebrate real impact."*

PROCUREMENT BARRIERS

Complex, cost-driven frameworks exclude smaller innovators.

Chris Merritt, Olympian Homes: *"Procurement needs to reward impact, not just lowest cost."*

COST AND PERCEPTION

Short-term budgets eclipse long-term value.

Lawrence Brenchley, Hatfield Interiors: *"ESG is not a luxury, it is a long-term efficiency strategy."*

CIRCULARITY AND REUSE

Material marketplaces are emerging but constrained by insurance and data gaps.

Joanne Macey, Scott Brownrigg: *"The marketplace for re-used materials is still at its infancy."*

Jonathan Lodge, City Farm Systems: *"We need to learn from other industries, construction does not have to reinvent the wheel."*

SOCIAL VALUE GAPS

Section 106 commitments need stronger follow-up and measurement.

Bee Small, Project Alix *“Social value has to mean something beyond the contract, it should build lasting pathways into the sector.”*

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Representation must broaden to inspire future talent.

Lesley Bell, Gallus Studio: *“If young people can see themselves in the sector, they will believe there is a place for them in it.”*

5.2 EMERGING SOLUTIONS

1. Focus on impact, not labels. Authenticity matters most; impact must be evidenced through outcomes, not corporate structure.

Bee Small, Project Alix: *“Social value is not a label, it is a legacy.”*

2. Create consistent ESG data frameworks. Shared metrics across local authorities, developers and supply chains can enable fair comparison and reward genuine progress.
3. Promote circular construction. Develop warranty and insurance frameworks that legitimise reuse and encourage open-access material exchanges such as Material Index and Circotrade.

Joanne Macey, Scott Brownrigg: *“Material banks like Circotrade show what is possible, but reporting still needs to catch up.”*

4. Invest in skills and education. SMEs are already mentoring and partnering with schools. Coordinated programmes could ensure consistent messaging and broaden perceptions of careers.

Ella Thorns, Studio Bark: *“We must give young people a reason to feel proud about building the future.”*

5. Encourage collaboration across scale. Mid-sized firms can bridge policy influence and

practical agility.

Joanne Macey, Scott Brownrigg: *“Mid-sized firms are the missing link between innovation and implementation.”*

6. Design for longevity and adaptability. Whole-life design reduces carbon and increases social value.

Geoff Wilkinson, WCCL: *“Buildings need to last longer and be easier to repurpose, that is the real sustainability test.”*

5.3 COMBINED OUTCOMES

The workshop consensus: ESG succeeds when it is human, measurable and shared.

- Data consistency and impact-based measurement underpin credibility.
- Procurement reform can unlock SME innovation.
- Circular-economy principles need structural support.
- Social value must evolve from compliance to culture.
- Education and inclusion sustain progress.

Sophie Shrubsole, WBC CEO: *“SMEs are proving that innovation, authenticity and collaboration are the real drivers of ESG success.”*

SECTION 6

REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

MOMENTUM IS BUILDING ACROSS THE SECTOR, WITH SMES, CORPORATES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES COLLABORATING TO EMBED ESG PRINCIPLES, SHARE DATA AND ACCELERATE PROGRESS TOWARDS A RESILIENT, NET-ZERO FUTURE.

Despite persistent challenges, the mood across the sector is changing.

SMEs are forming partnerships with corporates to pilot net-zero technologies and social-impact frameworks. Local authorities such as Westminster City Council are embedding ESG within economic-development policy. Digital tools now allow even the smallest firm to measure and share impact data.

The momentum is tangible. From grassroots innovators to major developers, collaboration is no longer optional.

Cultural change is equally significant. Transparency, openness and willingness to share lessons are becoming the new competitive advantage. The sense of isolation that once characterised ESG implementation for SMEs is being replaced by community, network and purpose. Westminster Business Council continues to nurture this collaboration through its growing ESG in Property and Construction Network.



PARADISE DEPOT - RG+P LTD DESIGN

SECTION 7



RECOMMENDATIONS

For Policymakers and Local Authorities

- Create a national ESG framework for the construction sector with consistent metrics for carbon, circularity and social value.
- Mandate impact-based procurement scoring and transparent Section 106 evaluation.
- Invest in inclusive skills pipelines linking education, apprenticeships and SMEs.
- Fund regional ESG innovation hubs to support pilot projects and shared data platforms.

For Developers and Major Contractors

- Simplify supplier onboarding and reduce administrative barriers for SMEs.
- Integrate ESG targets into contracts and performance reviews.
- Publish case studies and benchmarks to share learning.
- Reward measurable social and environmental performance, not lowest cost.

For SMEs

- Define a clear ESG purpose aligned with business strategy.
- Use available digital tools to track and publish impact.
- Collaborate across professions to scale solutions.
- Engage locally; community presence strengthens both brand and purpose.

For Educators and Industry Bodies

- Embed ESG literacy in all construction and design curricula.
- Promote construction as an innovative, technology-driven, civic career.
- Offer continuous professional development focused on ESG data and social-impact measurement.

Together, these steps can turn ESG from aspiration into industry standard.

SECTION 8



CLOSING REMARKS

THIS WHITE PAPER MARKS A COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT TO TURN DIALOGUE INTO ACTION, UNITING SMES, INDUSTRY AND POLICYMAKERS TO BUILD A FAIRER, GREENER, AND MORE INCLUSIVE BUILT ENVIRONMENT.

This white paper represents the collective insight of the ESG Advantage event attendees which was organised by the Westminster Business Council ESG in Property & Construction Network, a network of businesses proving that responsible growth and commercial success are inseparable.

Westminster Business Council thanks all contributors, speakers and partners for shaping this conversation and demonstrating the power of collaboration.

Jennifer Adler-Potts, ESG in Property and Construction Director, WBC:
"Our goal is to turn conversation into collaboration and ideas into action. By connecting every part of the value chain, we can build places that are not only sustainable but equitable, inclusive and enduring."

WBC's ESG in Property and Construction Network will continue to convene high value forums, share best practice and champion the role of SMEs in delivering a net-zero, socially inclusive built environment.

PANEL

Michelle Regent, Gleeds

Tom O'Toole, Bloom

Victoria Torres Quero, RG+P

Ben Pritchard, Gleeds

James Mickelburgh, Jensen Hunt

EVENT ATTENDEES

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Ania Wozniczka-Wells, David Miller

Anika Ahmed, Gleeds

Antonia Antoniou, Me7 Ltd

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Ella Thorns, Studio Bark

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George Harle, Gleeds

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Jill Poet, Organisation for Responsible Businesses

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WBC is a membership organisation that connects SMEs, corporates, local authorities, and communities to build a resilient, socially impactful economy. We run respected virtual and in-person networking events to help attendees grow their networks and client bases, and make highly personalised, facilitated connections.

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