

OPINION

Climate Action

Harborough Climate Action

Beginner's guide to carbon offsetting

With information provided by Carbon Savvy (www.carbonsavvy.uk) Harborough Climate Action takes a look at the what, why and how of carbon offsetting.

What are offsets?

Offsetting your carbon footprint means making a contribution to a project that is removing CO₂ from the atmosphere to balance out the carbon emissions you are creating. Offset projects usually take place in the Global South. They include both CO₂ capture projects such as forests, mangroves and seaweed farms, and CO₂ avoidance projects such as providing cookstoves to reduce fuel use, preventing deforestation, or replacing coal power stations with wind and solar.

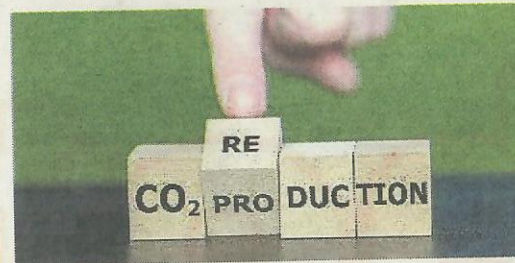
Why invest in offsets?

We can all make small changes at home or at work to reduce our carbon footprints year on year, but generally this will be too slow to avert climate change. To make bigger reductions it's cheaper and easier for many people to purchase offsets. From the planet's perspective whether we reduce our carbon footprint to zero or fund carbon reductions elsewhere makes no difference - as long as the total amount of CO₂ emissions goes down.

Are offsets reliable?

Searching "buy carbon offsets" online will offer a variety of offset providers. Prices will typically range from £10 - £40 per tonne.

Different certifying bodies guarantee different stand-



ards with 'Gold Standard' and 'Verra' being the most rigorous. Although some offsets have less rigorous certification processes and may not achieve all that they claim, offsetting still causes billions of tonnes of CO₂ to be removed from the atmosphere every year by funding vast nature regeneration projects, energy efficiency schemes, and the implementation of renewables. You may be

offered a deal on carbon offsetting when you book an airline ticket - but do check out the details before taking this option.

Why do we need offsets?

Because the time scale for reaching net zero is tight, large scale carbon reductions are needed. These cost money to implement and the lack of funds is slowing down decarbonisation. Offsetting is one of the most effective schemes to inject cash into carbon reductions activities.

How much should I spend on offsets?

There is not enough scope for offset projects to mitigate all our emissions, so it is essential that we reduce our emissions as well as purchasing offsets. What proportion of our funds should we put to each? Offset

prices are likely to increase, so buying more today is better than waiting until tomorrow. Carbon reductions are often more expensive than offsets. Therefore if you have a carbon saving budget, the recommendation is to spend 2/3 on carbon reductions (such as insulating your home, buying organic food or switching transport types) and 1/3 on offsets.

Three approaches to offsetting

Buy a couple of tonnes annually to reduce your carbon footprint by 10% per year.

Offset your entire carbon footprint for this year and become carbon neutral.

Purchase offsets equivalent to twice your annual footprint each year in order to gradually offset your life to date.