

# GREEN GROWTH TRENDS IN THE EAST MIDLANDS 2025



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# HEADLINES

Based on the responses to the East Midlands Chamber (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire) Quarterly Economic Survey in quarter two of 2025:



## +3.3%

### GREEN GROWTH PIVOTS

The percentage of businesses in the East Midlands deriving sales from supplying green goods or services (GGs) has increased by +3.3% reaching 46.2% in the second quarter of 2025 up from 42.9% in 2024.



## 40%

### LARGE BUSINESSES UNDER PRESSURE

Only 40% of the large businesses report they are actively pursuing the green growth opportunities in 2025 compared with 75.0% and 68.0% of large businesses in 2024 and 2023 respectively.



## 9.1%

### DIFFICULTY IN COLLABORATING FOR GREEN GROWTH

A third of regional businesses report difficulty in identifying collaborative opportunities for green growth. Only 9.1% of regional businesses collaborate for green growth.



## -4.9%

### INFORMATION GAP PERSISTS

More businesses did not feel well informed about the support available for green growth in 2025, a decline of -4.9% on 2024 results.



## +2.7%

### DECARBONISATION INTENSIFIES

About 48.2% of businesses report investment in decarbonisation over the last 12 months, up by +2.7% on 2024 data.



## +15%

### SLOW UPTAKE OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Around 45.9% of regional businesses reported they never engaged with nature-based solutions, up by +15.0% on 2024 position.



## SKILLS GAP SHIFTS

The largest demand for green skills development is in business strategy followed by resource efficiency, energy efficiency, waste management and digital skills.



## -9.2%

### POLICY INCENTIVES ARE NEEDED

A drop of -9.2% in a number of businesses agreeing the current policy stimulates business engagement in green growth.



## ×3

### REGIONAL GREEN GROWTH TREND HOLDS

Three-fold increase in East Midlands businesses reporting turnover from GGs since the 2015 baseline.



## SMES INVEST MORE IN DECARBONISATION

SMEs report higher levels of investment in decarbonisation where 72.3% of medium, 50.0% of small and 33.3% of micro businesses invest to decarbonise. There is a -17.5% drop in large firms reporting investment in decarbonisation compared with 2024 data.

# KEY MESSAGES

“AMID ECONOMIC CHALLENGES, BUSINESSES IN THE EAST MIDLANDS CONTINUE INVESTING IN GREEN GROWTH AS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY.”

“THE SALES GENERATED FROM GREEN PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ARE REPORTED BY 46.2% OF REGIONAL BUSINESS IN 2025, UP BY +3.3% ON 2024 FIGURES.”

“THERE IS A SUSTAINED THREE-TIME INCREASE IN GREEN GROWTH ACTIVITY IN THE EAST MIDLANDS DURING TEN-YEAR PERIOD FROM 2015 TO 2025.”

“SMES INVEST MORE TO DECARBONISE; MEDIUM-SIZED FIRMS ALMOST DOUBLED INVESTMENT OF UNDER £100K IN DECARBONISATION SINCE 2023.”

“ABOUT 45.9% OF BUSINESSES HAVE NEVER ENGAGED IN NATURE RESTORATION, CONSERVATION OR BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS, UP BY +15.0% ON 2024 RESULTS.”

“COLLABORATION IS KEY TO HARNESSING THE BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE GROWTH. HOWEVER, ONLY A SMALL NUMBER OF REGIONAL BUSINESSES (9.1%) ACTIVELY COLLABORATED FOR GREEN GROWTH IN 2025.”

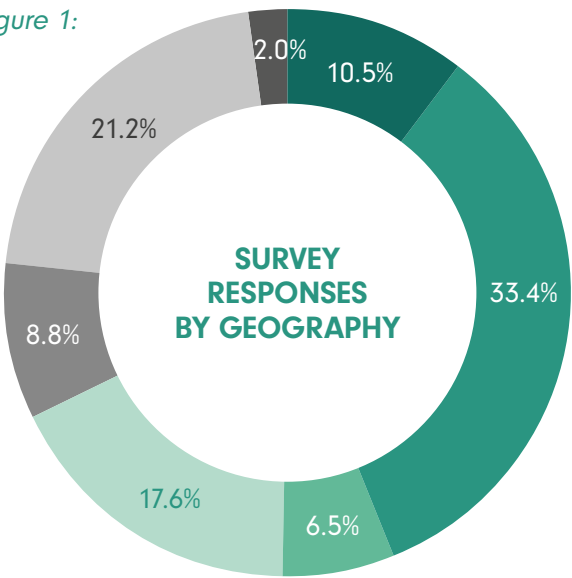
# INTRODUCTION

This report presents an analysis and discussion of the green growth trends and decarbonisation based on the data collected as part of the East Midlands Chamber Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) run from 12.05.2025 to 16.06.2025. Whilst the QES routinely explores a range of business interests, this analysis refers to a series of questions surveying awareness and engagement of the regional businesses with green growth, decarbonisation, uptake of the nature-based solutions (NBS) and collaboration for green growth.

Sectoral responses matched our previous studies with most of survey responses at 61.8% coming from services sector. Manufacturing and construction comprised 38.2% of the survey responses which is representative of the sector breakdown in the East Midlands (Midlands Engine, 2023).

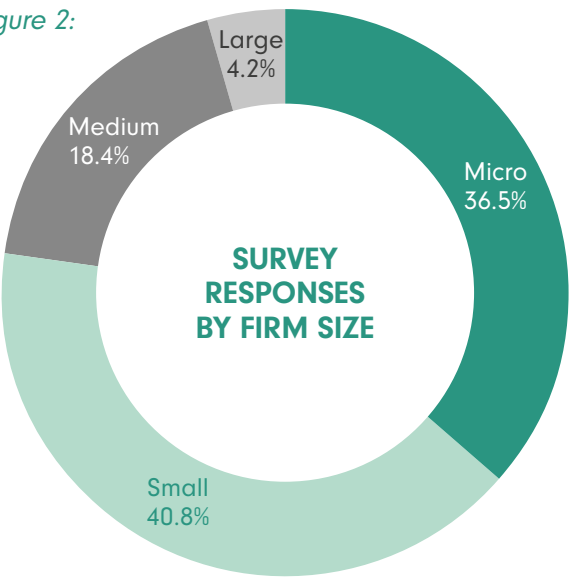
Small businesses represented 40.8% of survey responses followed by 36.5% of micro, 18.4% of medium-sized and 4.2% of large businesses. A proportion of SMEs in the survey responses is 95.7% which is comparable with the regional business composition. According to the latest Office of National Statistics figures, there were 181,250 of SMEs accounting for 99.6% of East Midlands businesses in 2024. Nationally, the same picture holds; SMEs represented 99.6% of business in the UK in 2024 (ONS, 2024).

Figure 1:



Derby City: 10.5%  
Derbyshire: 33.4%  
Leicester City: 6.5%  
Leicestershire: 17.6%  
Nottingham City: 8.8%  
Nottinghamshire: 21.2%  
Out of Area: 2.0%

Figure 2:



In this fast-moving arena, the terminology used by the regulators and the analysts is shifting. Previously, the Department for Business Innovation and Science used 'LCEGS' as an umbrella term to capture a range of business activities, spread across many existing sectors (like transport, construction, energy etc.) that focused upon the common purpose of reducing environmental impact (DBIS, 2015). However, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) now distinguishes between the Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy (LCREE) and the Environmental Goods and Services Sector (EGSS). Throughout this report we refer to 'Green Goods and Services' (GGSS); a term that reflects the broadest range of environmentally friendly products and services.

The survey received a total of **353 responses in Q2 of 2025**

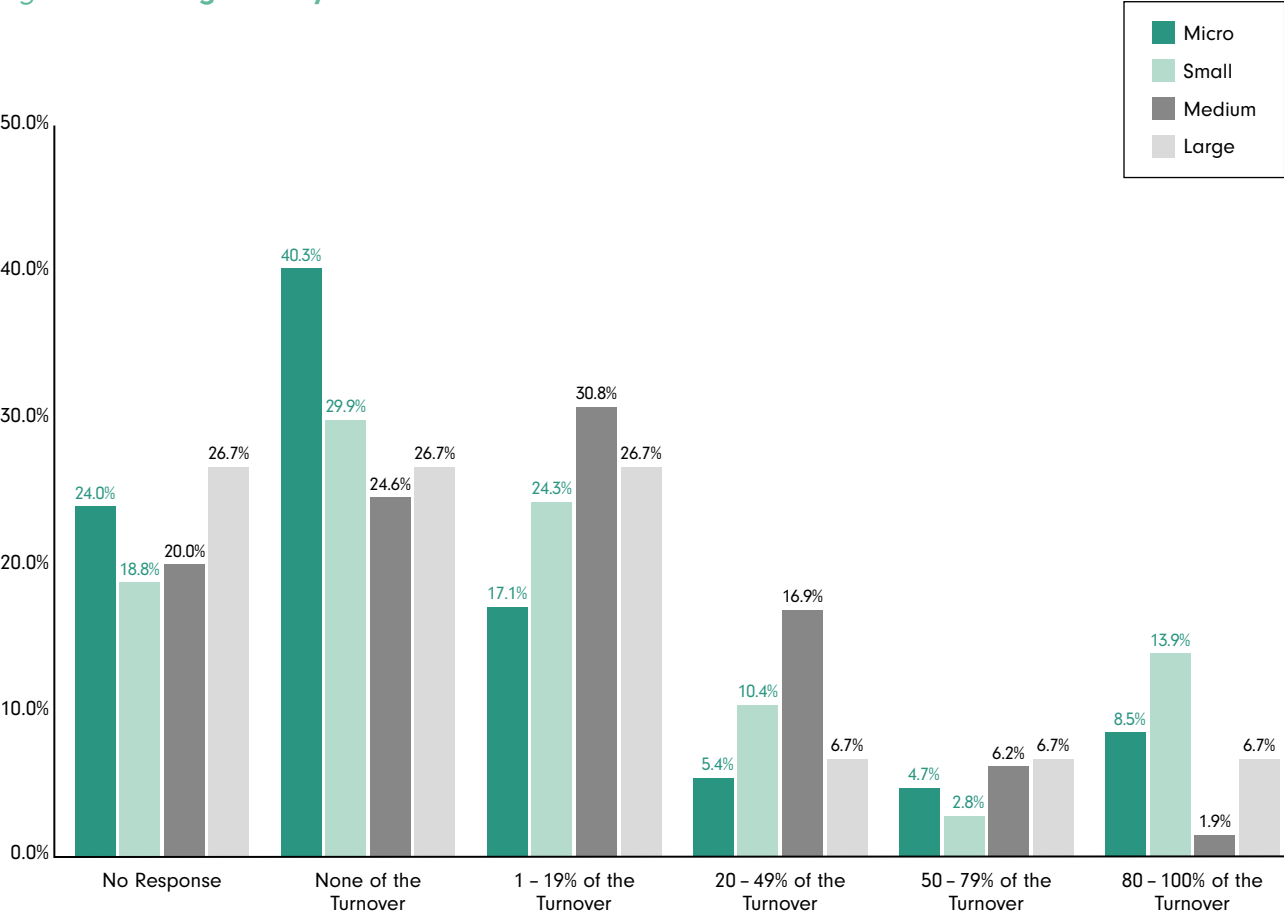
- 44% from Derbyshire County and Derby City
- 30% from Nottinghamshire County and Nottingham City
- 24% from Leicestershire County and Leicester City
- 2% responses are outside the East Midlands

# GGGS TURNOVER

## Q2 2025



Figure 3: Green growth by a firm size



About 46.2% of regional businesses generated a proportion of sales from green goods and services (GGGs) in 2025; +3.3% increase from 42.9% in 2024. Just over a third of businesses reported they **did not** generate any GGS turnover, +3.4% increase on 2024 results (*Baranova, 2024*).

The 1-19% GGSs turnover category remains the most common rate of green growth strategy adoption; it is reported by 22.9% of businesses surveyed. 9.6% of businesses reported 20-49% share of GGS in firm's turnover followed by 9.3% of businesses reporting 80-100% share of GGS. Only 4.2% of businesses reported 50-79% of GGSs share in a firm's turnover in 2025.

Comparative analysis of the turnover generated from GGSs with reference to a firm size is presented in Figure 3. It shows 40.3% of the micro businesses reported no GGSs turnover in 2025, an increase of +2.9% on 2024 data. A third of medium-sized businesses report GGS sales in 1-19% turnover category which is the largest share in this category.

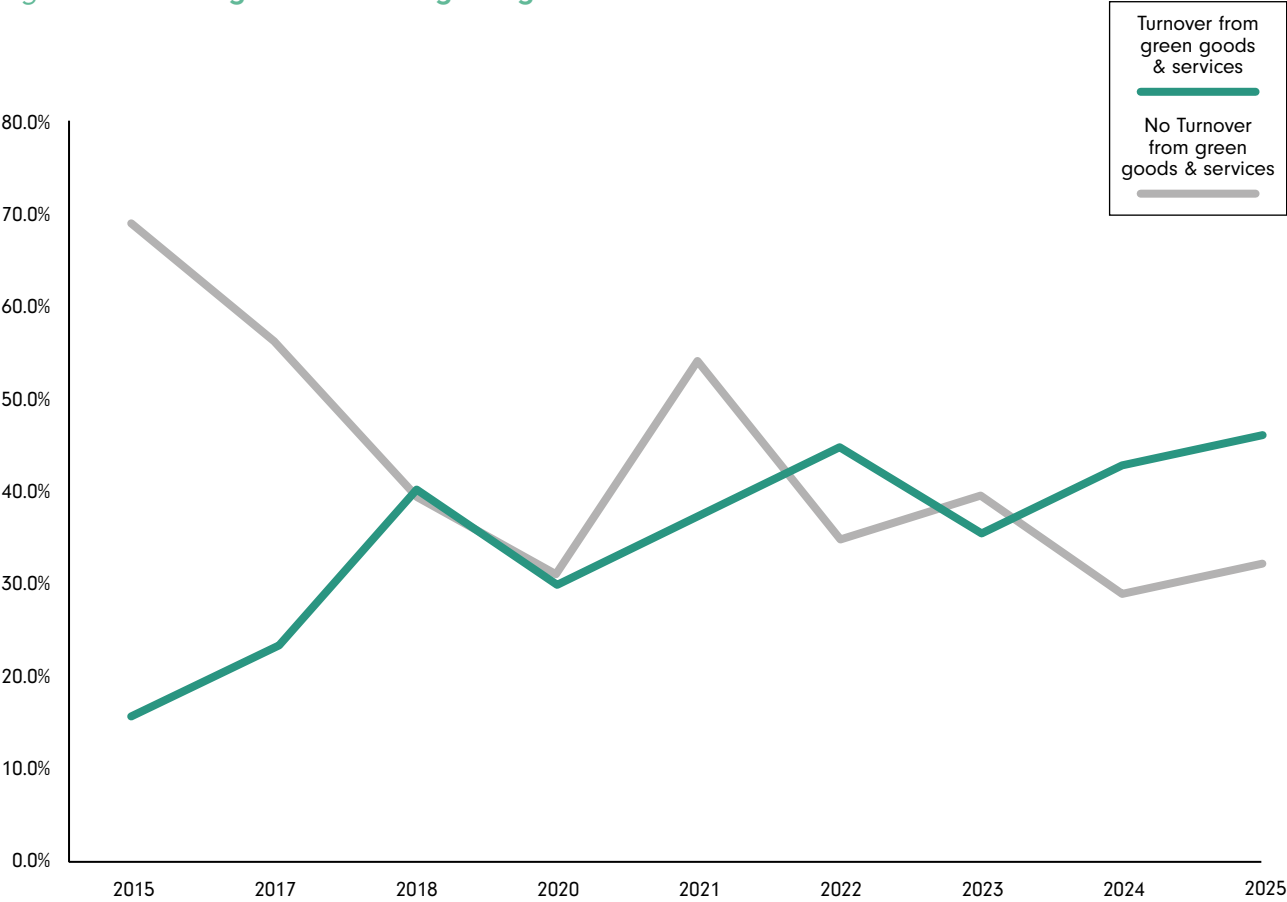
Medium sized businesses is the largest group reporting GGS sales in 20-49% turnover category registering a 16.9% contribution which a two-times increase on 2024 data. Large businesses outperformed others in 50-79% turnover category, an improvement of +6.7% on 2024 position. Encouragingly, small businesses reported more sales in the 80-100% of GGS turnover category, an increase of +3.8% on 2024 position.

# GGGS TURNOVER

## TREND 2015-2025



Figure 4: Turnover generated from green goods and services 2015 – 2025



A similar survey exploring the green growth trends was carried out since 2015, every year but 2016 and 2019 (Figure 4). Despite a downturn in 2023, the overall trend is positive where a number of regional businesses reporting the GGSs sales grew three times since 2015. On average, over a third of regional business reported sales of green goods and services over the last 10 years. The lowest level of the GGSs sales in the region was recorded in 2015 at 15.9%, and the highest at 46.2% in 2025.

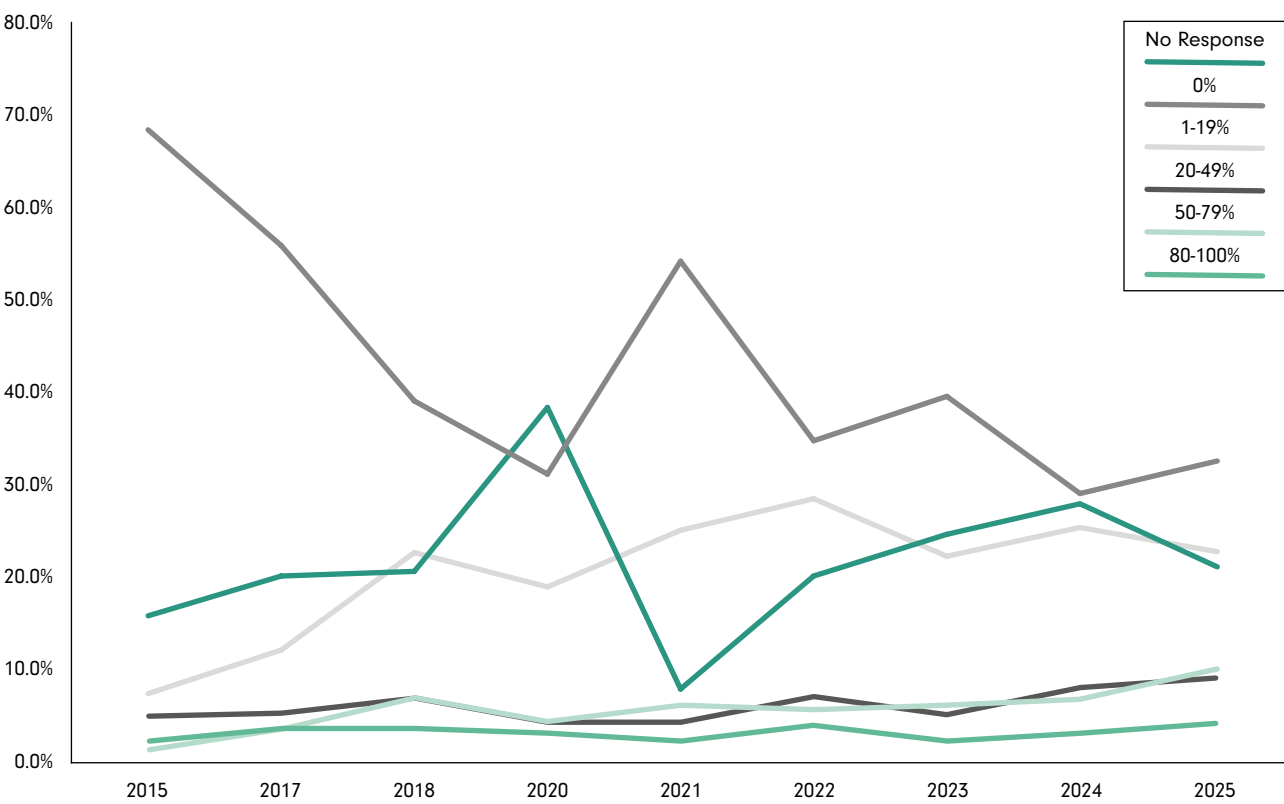
There is a gap of 13.6% between businesses that derive turnover from GGSs and the businesses that do not. The gap largely holds in 2025 despite a slight drop of -0.1% on 2024 figures. This is a two-year sustained gap where a number of businesses trading in GGSs exceeds a number of businesses reporting no turnover from sales of green goods and services in the East Midlands.



# GGs TURNOVER TREND 2015-2025



Figure 5: Turnover generated from green goods and services 2015 – 2025: a comparative analysis



A comparative analysis of the trend per GGS turnover category reveals an interesting picture of the regional green growth development over the last ten years (Figure 5).

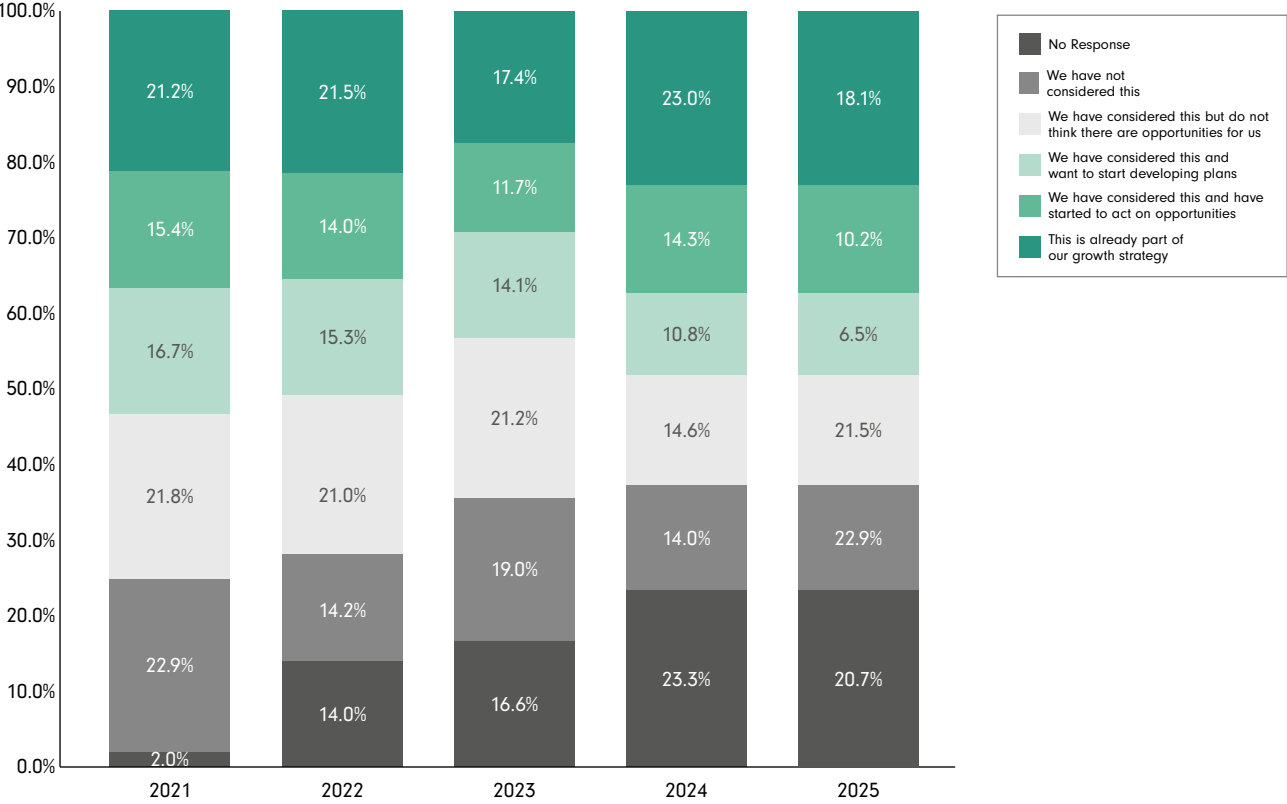
There is a +3.4% increase in 'no turnover from GGS' category in 2025 which is counterbalanced by a total of +5.7% increase across the three GGS turnover categories: 20-49%, 50-79% and 80-100%. Although there is a -2.4% decline in 1-19% GGS turnover category on 2024 position, it is still the largest GGS turnover category reported by the regional businesses in 2025.

Such a trend illustrates that most regional businesses are at the early stages of green growth and still derive a large proportion of sales from non-green products and services. Despite this, more and more East Midlands businesses are trading in green goods and services, and compete on the home and international green market niches.

# GREEN GROWTH STRATEGY



Figure 6: Green growth strategy adoption



The businesses were asked about a rate of the green growth strategy adoption (Figure 6).

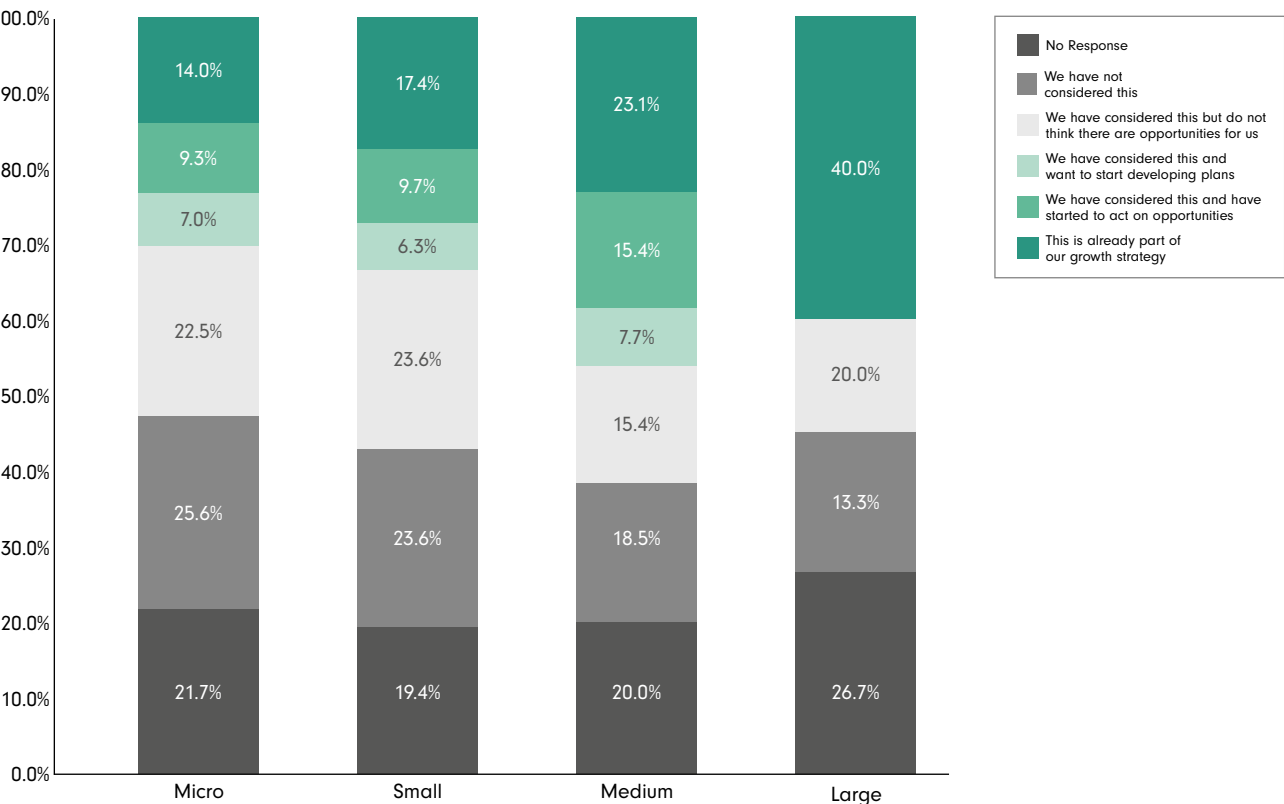
About 18.1% of regional businesses said that green growth is already part of their business strategy, a decline of -4.9% on 2024 results. Additionally, 10.2% of businesses indicated that they had 'considered [green growth] and are starting to act on opportunities'; this is down by -4.1% from 14.3% in 2024. Only 6.5% of businesses stated they are starting to develop green growth plans, a drop of -4.3% when compared with 2024 figures. These findings signal a slowdown in green growth strategy adoption in 2025 compared with the 2024 position.

Regional businesses are reporting a decline in confidence when engaging with green growth. There is a +7.0% increase in the 'we have considered [green growth] and do not think there are opportunities for us' response category on 2024 figures; a return to confidence level reported in 2023. There is an +9.0% increase in 'we have not considered this' category.

# GREEN GROWTH STRATEGY



Figure 7: Green growth strategy by a firm size



Analysis of the responses about green growth strategy adoption by company size presented in *Figure 7* reflects the trends described in the academic literature (*Baranova et al., 2025*).

Larger companies remain well in advance of their smaller counterparts when approaching green growth strategically: 40.0% of large businesses reported green growth is already being a part of the business growth strategy compared with 14.0% of micro, 17.4% of small and 23.1% of medium-sized businesses.

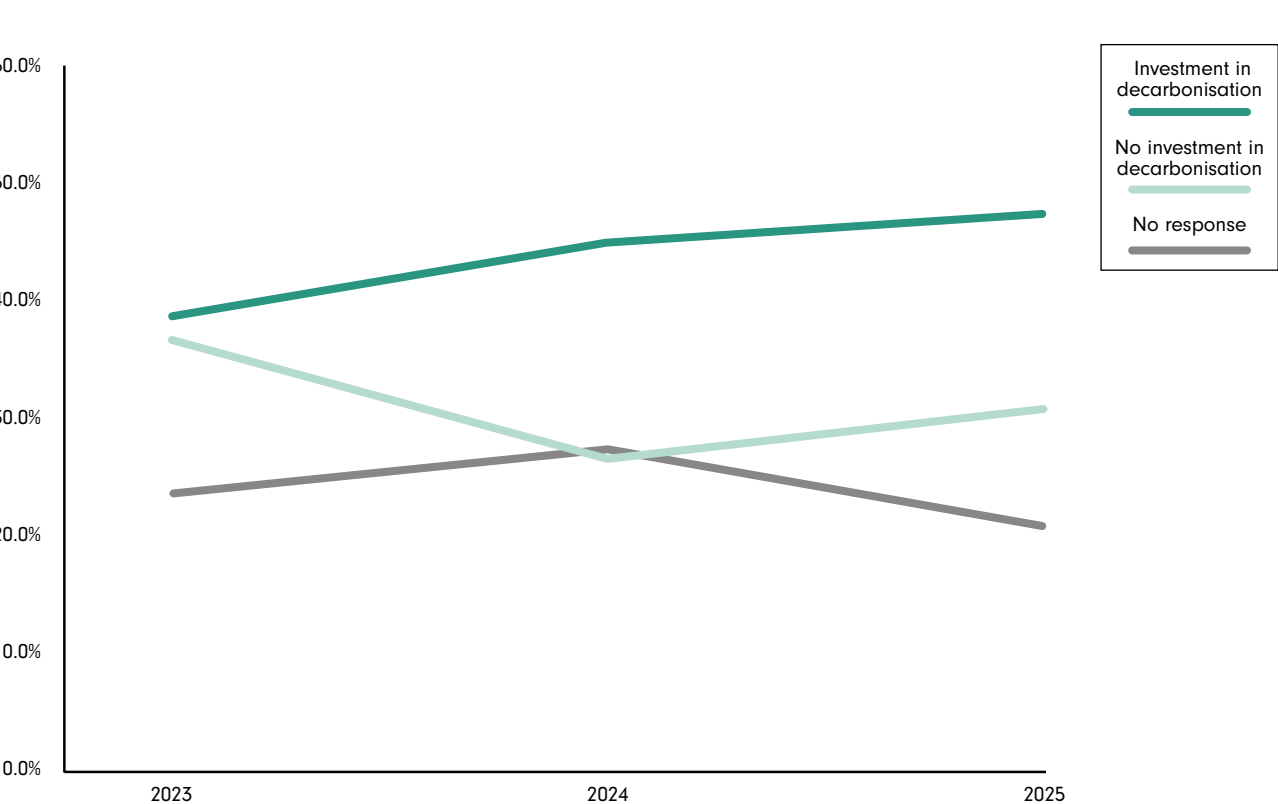
Over a quarter of micro businesses **have not considered** opportunities presented by green growth followed by 23.6% of small businesses, 18.5% of medium sized and only 13.3% of large businesses. Although there is a marginal improvement of in the confidence of micro-businesses, a decline of -0.7% in the 'not considered opportunities for green growth' reporting. More small businesses (+9.6%), medium-sized (+1.8%) and large businesses (+9.3%) reported they **have not considered** opportunities for green growth in 2025 compared with 2024 data.

More of large businesses reported they **do not see** green growth opportunities to capitalise on, an increase of +8.0% on 2024 figures. It is the biggest drop in confidence across all four business groups by firm size in 2025. These findings indicate a drop in confidence levels and increasing uncertainty about green growth business environment.

# DECARBONISATION



Figure 8: Decarbonisation investment in East Midlands, 2023 – 2025



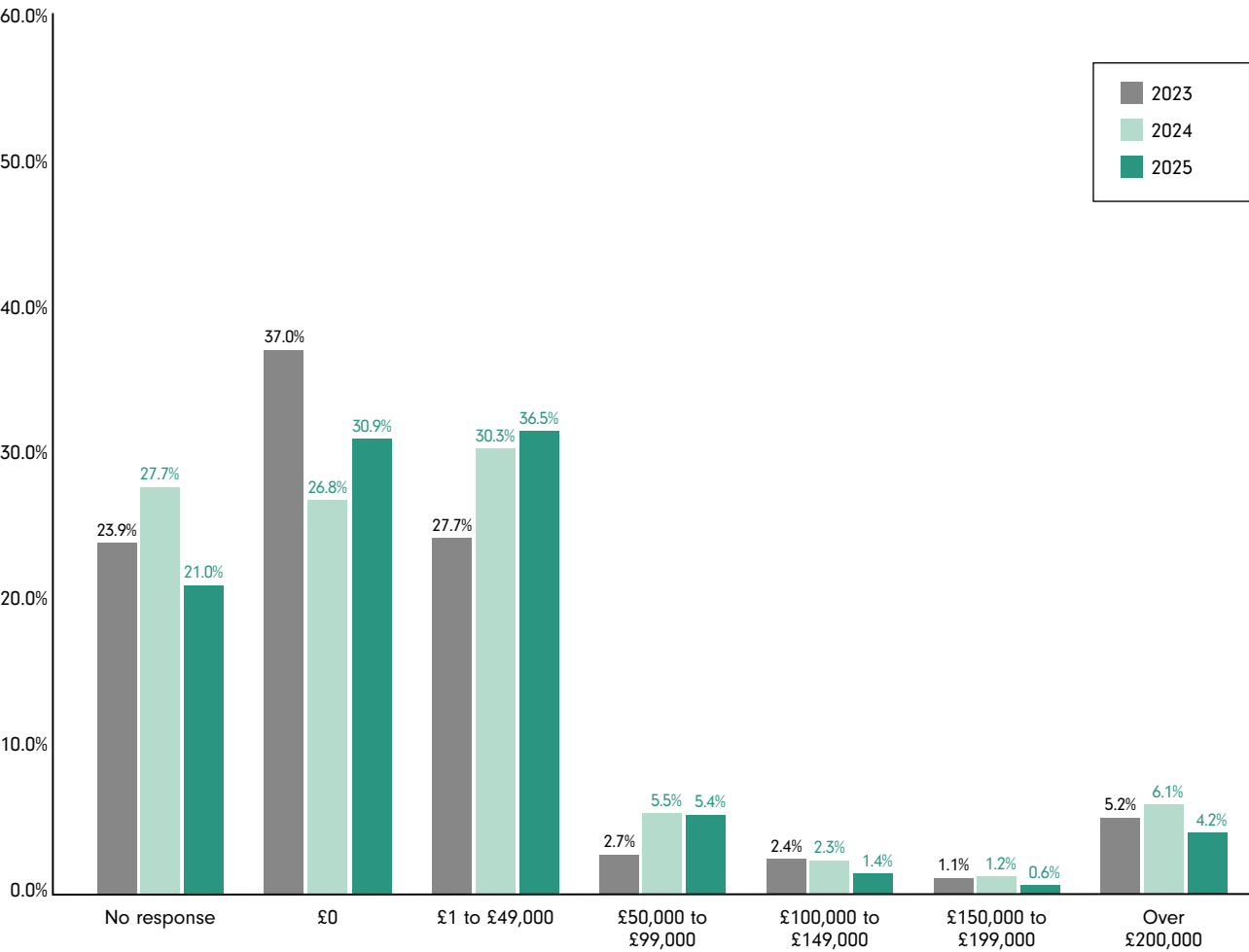
A number of regional businesses invested in decarbonisation over the last 12 month has grown by +2.7% on 2024 position. It is reported by 48.1% of businesses in 2025 (*Figure 8*).

This contributes to a sustained, +9.0% , increase in investment to decarbonise over the last three years. Despite a slight decline in businesses reporting of 'no investment in decarbonisation' in 2024, that number has risen again in 2025 by +4.1%. Meaning that 30.9% of regional businesses did not invest in decarbonisation over the last 12 months.

# DECARBONISATION



Figure 9: Decarbonisation by level of investment



A comparative set of data shows a decline in most investment categories in decarbonisation in 2025 when compared with 2024 results (Figure 9).

There is a +4.1% increase in businesses reporting no investment in decarbonisation. The only category of investment in decarbonisation that grew was under £50,000 and by +6.2% only. This is still the most popular level of investment in decarbonisation and reported by 36.5% of regional businesses.

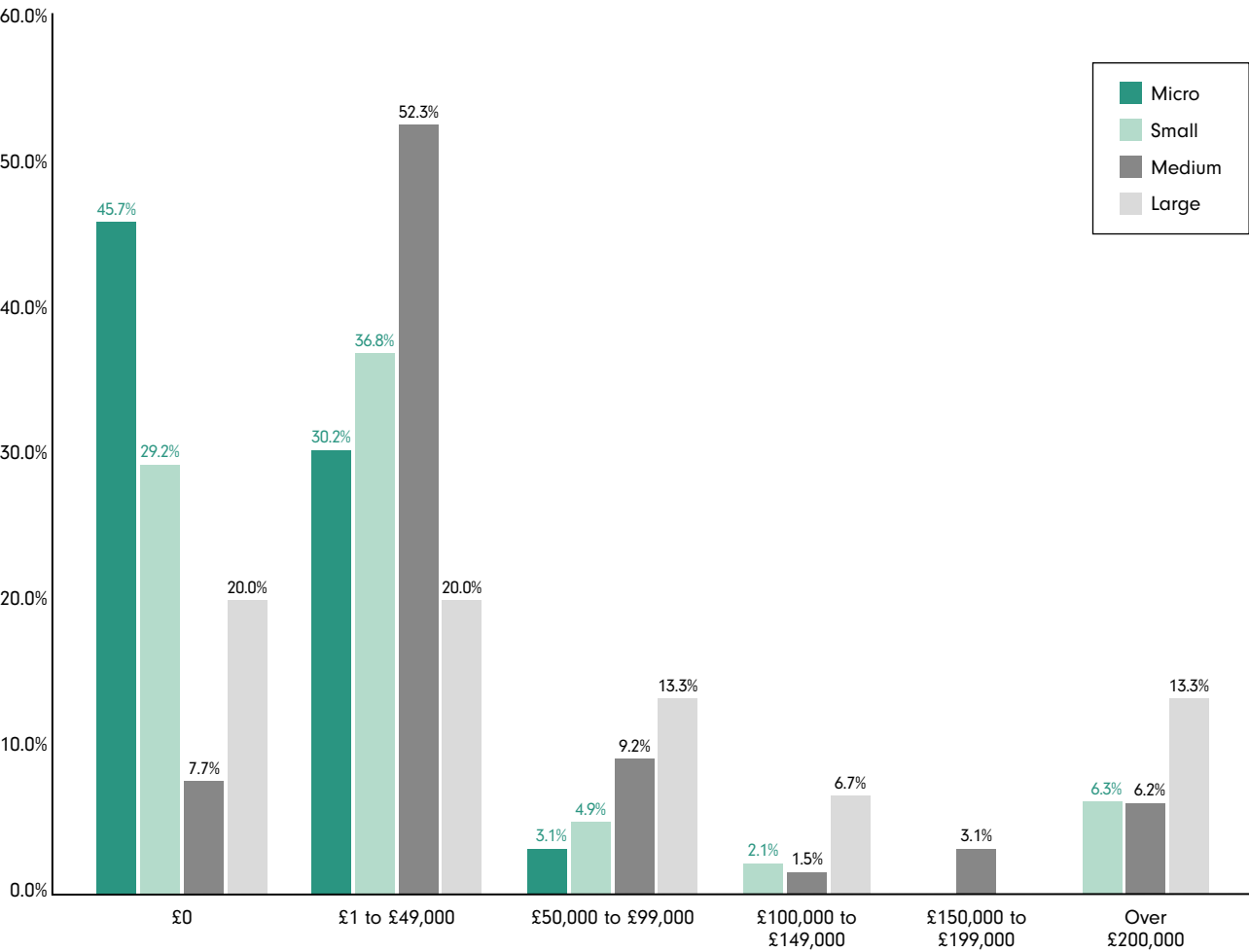
A close examination of the survey data reveals an interesting link between a size of the business and a level of investment in decarbonisation. Decarbonisation is becoming more diversified with more SMEs investing in carbon reduction efforts than ever before. Medium-sized businesses dominate under £50K investment category and the only businesses reporting £150-199,000 level of investment in decarbonisation.

Large companies outperform by a volume of investment in decarbonisation leading in £50-99,000, £100-149,000 and in over £200,000 investment category. On the other hand, micro businesses is the largest category of businesses, at 45.7%, that report 'no investment' in decarbonisation still. This is an increase of +3% on the 2024 results.

# DECARBONISATION



Figure 10: Decarbonisation by a firm size



There is a drop of -17.5% in a number of large businesses investing in decarbonisation in 2025 when compared with 2024 position. The biggest share of that drop is in investment of over £200K investment category - 15.8% followed by -5.0% drop in under £50K category. The decline in investment did not happen in all categories; there is an increase of +6.7% and +0.8% in decarbonisation investment levels of £100-149,000 and £50-99,000 respectively (Figure 10).

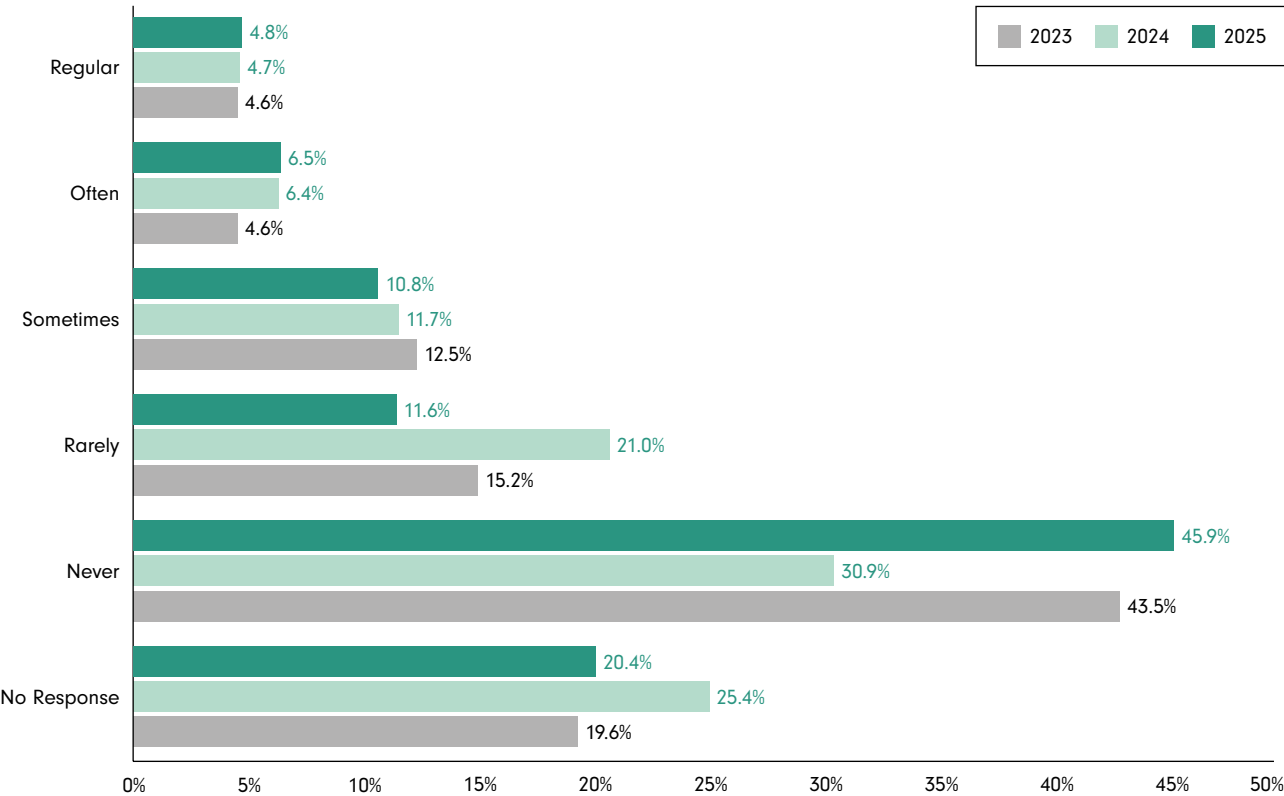
According to our analysis, the real stars of decarbonisation in 2025 were medium-sized businesses. They reported the biggest increase of +18.1% in under £50K investment category, which accounts for 52.3% of regional medium-sized businesses investment in Net Zero over the last 12 months. This is the biggest positive change in the level of investment in decarbonisation across all business sizes.

A decline in large companies' investment in decarbonisation could be explained by a number of factors including political uncertainty that undermines Net Zero transition and renewed political opposition in Europe and America (Economist, 2025). Economic constraints such as rising energy prices, trading tariff wars affecting global markets and increase in National Insurance contribution in the UK are affecting business appetite to invest in decarbonisation. Additionally, for many large businesses, the "low hanging fruit" carbon reduction projects have been dealt with, and more significant, and often costly, investments are needed to support more complex and multi-level transition to Net Zero.

# NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS



Figure 11: Engagement of regional businesses with nature-based solutions



The study looked at the levels of engagement with the nature-based solutions (NBS) such as nature restoration and conservation projects, biodiversity enrichment, and sustainable land management. The survey respondents were asked to indicate how often their business engaged with the nature-based solutions over the last 12 months (Figure 11).

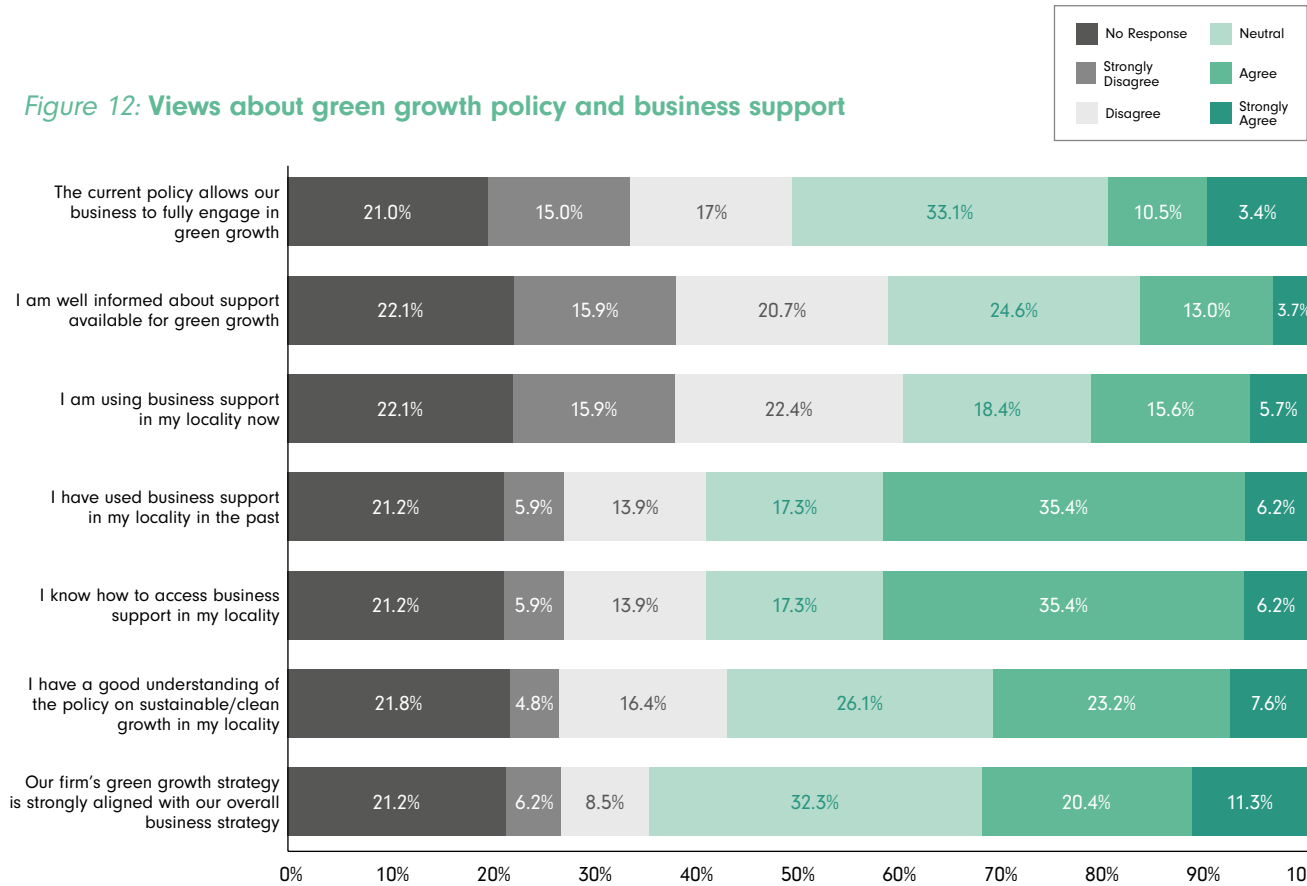
A comparative analysis of 2023 – 2025 survey data shows a mixed picture with a notable increase of +2.4%, up from 2023 level, in a number of businesses reporting they **never engaged** with NBS. Despite a fall in this category to 30.9% in 2024, this year has seen a substantial jump (+15.0%) up to 45.9% in a number of regional businesses reporting a non-engagement with NBS.

There is a marginal change of +0.2% in a number of businesses who engage **regularly** with NBS reaching 4.8% in total. More businesses report they engage **often** with NBS (+1.9%). There is a reduction in business engaging **sometimes** and **rarely** at -1.7% and -3.6% respectively. Comparing levels of NBS engagement by a firm size, our data shows a disparity between larger and smaller companies. For example, 66.7% of large business engage with NBS whilst 41.5% of medium-sized, 31.8% of micro and 28.5% of small businesses are doing so. Overall, more regional businesses reported **non-engagement with NBS** in 2025 at 45.9% against 33.7% of businesses in 2024; an increase of +12.2%.

# POLICY AND SUPPORT FOR GREEN GROWTH



Figure 12: Views about green growth policy and business support



Survey participants were asked to respond to a series of statements about the green growth policy and business support in the East Midlands (Figure 12).

Only 13.9% of businesses stated that current policy allows businesses to fully engage with green growth; a drop of -9.2% when compared with the 2024 survey results and return to a confidence level position recorded in 2023. Such a drop could be explained by growing uncertainty about commitments of local and national government to deliver on clean growth and Net Zero policy.

More businesses did not feel well informed about the support available for green growth in 2025 at 36.5% when compared with 28.0% in 2024; an increase of +8.5%. Only 16.7% of the survey respondents felt well informed about the support available for green growth in the region; a drop of -4.9% on 2024 results.

There is an increase of +8.4% in businesses reporting they used business support in their locality in the past, a total of 41.6% of regional businesses in 2025. About 21.2% of businesses stated they use business support locally at present; this is an improvement of +7.8% on 2024 figures.



# POLICY AND SUPPORT FOR GREEN GROWTH



There is a continued year on year decline in confidence about how to access the business support regionally. 41.6% of businesses were confident in their knowledge about the access to business support, a continued 5-year drop of -7.7% from the 2021 position.

About 30.9% of businesses stated that they have a good understanding of the green growth policy. This is a drop of -4.4% from the 2024 position at 35.3% awareness rate. These responses indicate a need for concerted efforts across the regional support agencies to raise the awareness of and to promote engagement with the pro-environmental business support more widely.

There is a -7.4% drop in a number of businesses stating an alignment between the green growth aspirations and overall business strategy: reported by 31.7% of businesses in 2025 when compared with 39.1% in 2024. A weakening of an alignment between the green growth aspirations and business strategy is concerning as this impacts negatively uptake of the green growth opportunities at domestic and international markets. Additionally, this could slow down sustainability transition and business contribution to sustainable regional development in the East Midlands.

In summary, regional businesses perceive business support and funding system for green growth as being quite complicated, short-term and inconsistent. The pathways of accessing green funding and green skills development support is lacking visibility across the regional institutions. The quality of green business support varies greatly. There is limited governance and co-ordination at a regional level to allow for economies of scale and scope in the business support delivery. There is a lack of innovative synergies, and opportunities for inter-organisational collaboration and capability development that could be championed through the green growth policy and support provision.

# SKILLS FOR GREEN GROWTH

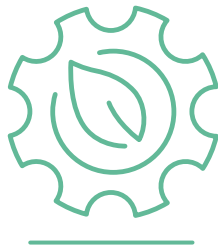
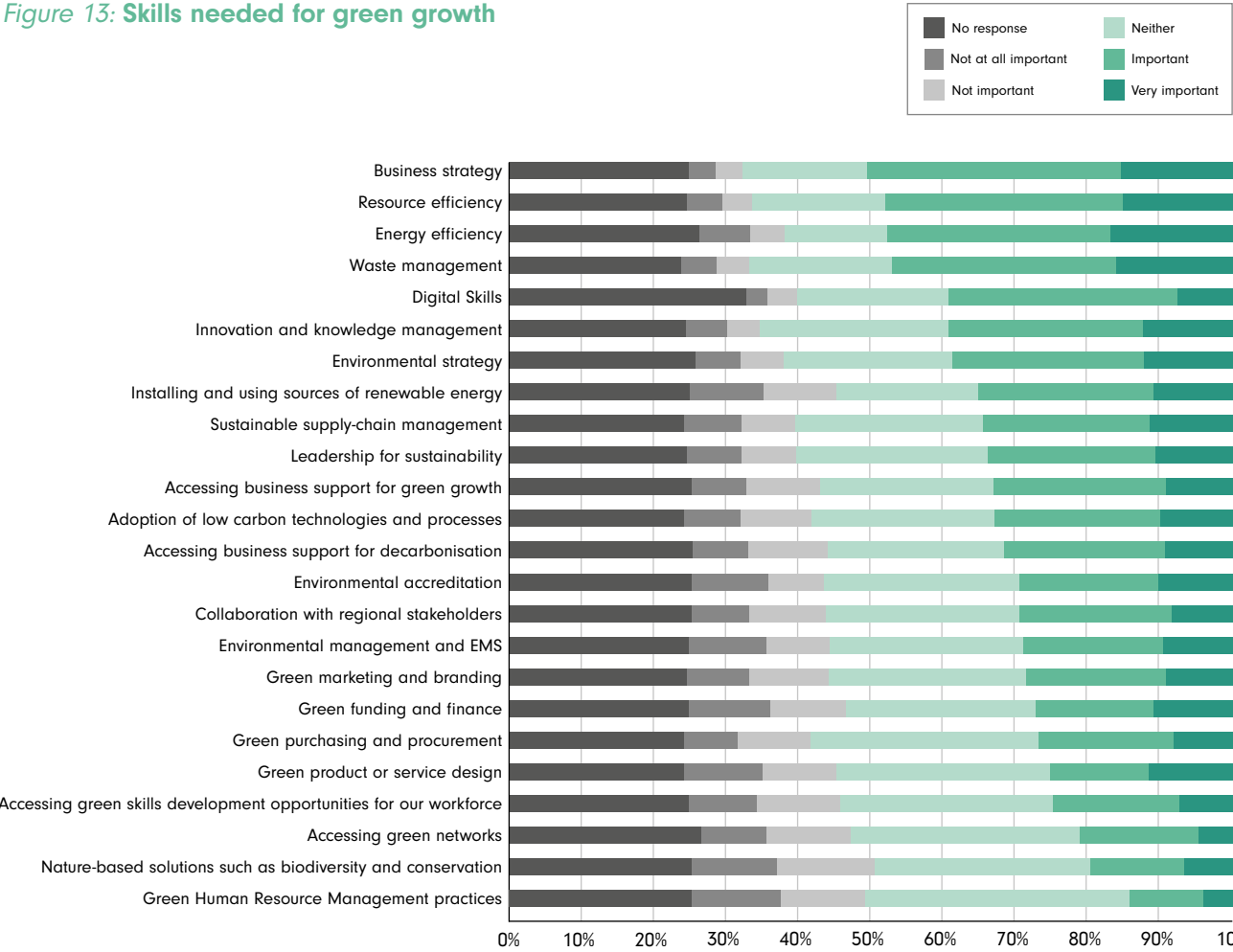


Figure 13: Skills needed for green growth



When asked which of 24 listed skills areas businesses need strengthening to capitalise on green growth opportunities, business strategy and efficiency-focused skills led the responses.

Business strategy was considered an important area of skills to be strengthened by over a half of the businesses or 50.4% (Figure 13). Resource efficiency (47.9%), energy efficiency (47.6%), and waste management skills (47.0%) followed soon after. Digital skills, at 39.1%, conclude the top 5 skills needed for green growth.

Energy and resource efficiency skills remain in the top three green skills categories in demand since 2021. Business strategy and waste management skills have been in the top five skills sets over the last three years. These findings highlight a consistency of the demand for green skills needed for businesses to succeed in green growth strategies.

# SKILLS FOR GREEN GROWTH



Table 1: Priority areas for skills development ranked

Skill Area	Agreement Level
1. Business strategy	50.4%
2. Resource efficiency	47.9%
3. Energy efficiency	47.6%
4. Waste management	47.0%
5. Digital Skills	39.1%
6. Innovation and knowledge management	39.1%
7. Environmental strategy	38.5%
8. Installing and using sources of renewable energy	34.8%
9. Sustainable supply-chain management	34.3%
10. Leadership for sustainability	33.7%
11. Accessing business support for green growth	33.7%
12. Adoption of low carbon technologies and processes	31.4%
13. Accessing business support for decarbonisation	29.2%
14. Environmental accreditation	29.2%
15. Collaboration with regional stakeholders	29.2%
16. Environmental management and EMS	48.1%
17. Green marketing and branding	28.3%
18. Green funding and finance	26.9%
19. Green purchasing and procurement	26.9%
20. Green product or service design	24.9%
21. Accessing green skills development opportunities for our workforce	24.6%
22. Accessing green networks	21.0%
23. Nature-based solutions such as biodiversity and conservation	19.5%
24. Green Human Resource Management practices	13.9%

STEM-based skills, such as energy and resource efficiency, installation and use of renewable energy sources, are in the **top 10** green skills in demand. Digital skills are unsurprisingly in the **top 5** green skills sets in 2025. Innovation and knowledge management skills occupy 6th place; a continuous rise over the last three year from 12th position in 2023 (Table1).

Environmental management skills are increasingly becoming more important for businesses to manage and minimise the environmental impact. Environmental strategy (7th place), environmental accreditation (14th place), and environmental management and EMS (16th place) are related areas of skills that are growing in demand from the regional businesses.

Sustainable supply chain management and leadership for sustainability remains in the top 10 green skills in demand over the last four years. This signals an intensifying engagement of the regional businesses in supply chains operating across domestic and international green market niches.

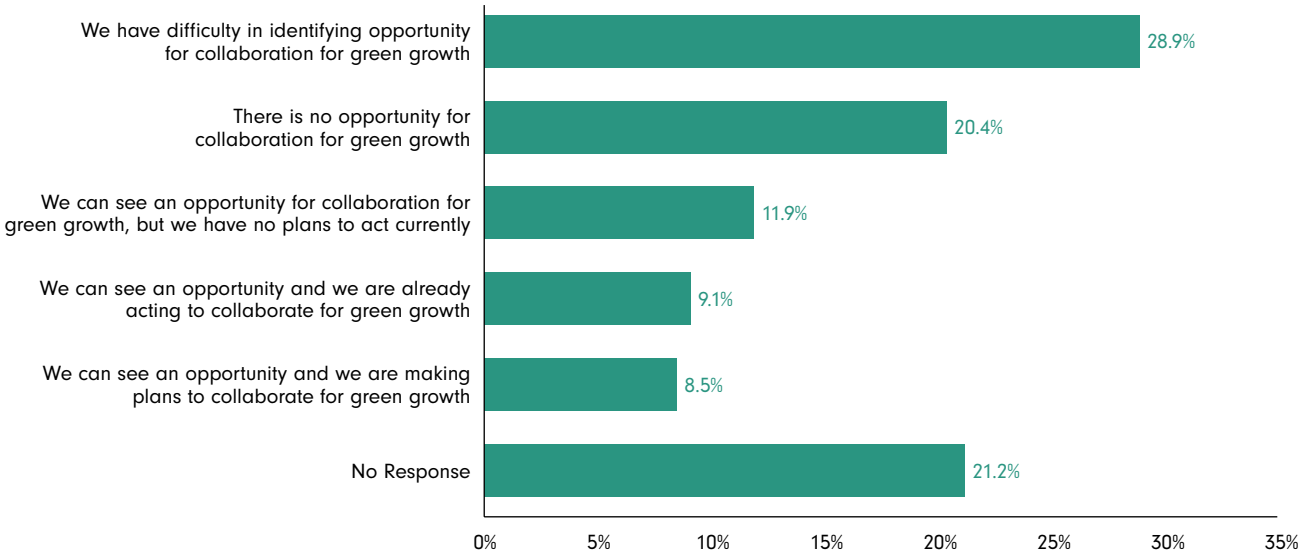
Access to business support for green growth, and business support for decarbonisation remains in the top 15 skills since 2022. This indicates a consistent appetite for knowledge exchange, skills development, and capital investment to stimulate green growth in the region.

Altogether, as competition intensifies in the green market niches, business strategy skills are becoming more in demand as a necessary competence to harness and sustain competitive advantage. These are positive signs that green market niches are becoming more competitive thus promising to deliver a better value for customers and driving green product and service innovation. Businesses want skills that allow them to achieve energy and resource efficiency internally and as part of green supply chains. They recognise a need for skills that drive decarbonisation such as waste management, installation and use of renewable energy sources and sustainable supply chains. Digital skills are recognised in the top 5 skills enabling green growth.

# COLLABORATION FOR GREEN GROWTH



Figure 14: Collaboration for green growth



Multi-stakeholder collaboration is an important tool for green innovation and achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). As one of the UN SDGs, Goal 17 (Partnership for the Goals) targets strengthening of the collaborative approaches and partnerships in driving and providing resolutions to sustainability challenges.

In the context of regional support for green growth, the study asked businesses to indicate a level of collaborative activity (Figure14). The results, first of its kind for the East Midlands, indicate that almost a third of businesses, or 28.9%, **have difficulty** in identifying opportunity for collaboration for green growth. About 20.9% of businesses report they **do not see any opportunity** to collaborate for green growth. A small proportion of businesses, at 11.9%, see the opportunity to collaborate for green growth but choose not to act at present.

Only 9.1% of regional businesses can **identify collaborative opportunities and collaborated** for green growth in 2025. Whilst only 8.5% of businesses are planning to do so.

# CONCLUSION

The study findings support development of the following highlights.

## HIGHLIGHT 1 »

- Proportion of businesses across Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire that generate sales in green goods and services (GGS) increased by +3.3%, from 42.9% in 2024 to 46.2% in 2025.
- A number of businesses generating sales from GGS exceed by 13.6% a number of businesses reporting no sales from GGS.
- However, there is a slowdown in confidence levels of businesses adopting green growth strategies.

## HIGHLIGHT 2 »

- More businesses invested in decarbonisation in 2025, an increase of +2.7% on 2024 results, reported by 48.1% of regional businesses.
- Despite this, a scale of decarbonisation investment is declining with under £50K being the only investment category that grew in 2025.
- SMEs intensify investment in decarbonisation; they reported an overall increase of +18.6% investment in decarbonisation.
- Large company scale down in over £150K and under £50K investment in decarbonisation resulting in an overall drop of -17.5% on 2024 performance.

## HIGHLIGHT 3 »

- Number of businesses accessing business support has increased when compared with the past years. About 21.2% of businesses stated they use business support locally at present, an increase of +7.8% on 2024 figures.
- Businesses feel less informed about the support available for green growth, a drop of -4.9% in information confidence level on last year.

## HIGHLIGHT 4 »

- There is a sustained demand for skills in the areas of business strategy, energy, resource efficiency and waste management over the last three years.
- There is a slowdown of the uptake of the nature-based solutions for regional businesses.
- A third of business have difficulty in identifying green growth opportunities and collaboration for green growth. Very few regional businesses collaborate for green growth.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings support development of the following recommendations.

## GREEN GROWTH BUSINESS SUPPORT »

- Business support agencies and policymakers need to respond by providing a focused support for green growth.
- The support needs to be place-based and responding to the specifics of small and large businesses.
- There is a need to broaden a scope of the green growth business support to reflect the 24 green skills areas identified in this report.

## DECARBONISATION »

- Strengthen support for decarbonisation initiatives of regional businesses by providing grants, expert support as well as sector-based and place-based incentives.
- Work across multiple stakeholders in the region to ensure support for decarbonisation is well signposted, consistent and long-term
- Establish support programmes for eco-innovation and green R&D specifically.
- Establish peer groups/networks where large companies support eco-innovation adoption in small businesses.

## UPTAKE OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS »

- Increase a number of nature-based solutions (NBS) projects and nature restoration initiatives that business can contribute.
- Improve visibility of the NBS projects in the region.
- Develop effective pathways to encourage the uptake of NBS.
- Provide specialised support and funding for business wanting to invest in NBS and nature recovery.

## COLLABORATION FOR GREEN GROWTH »

- Improve visibility of green growth collaborative opportunities in the region.
- Established mechanisms that encourage and incentivise collaboration for green growth through funding and business support provision.

# REFERENCES

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