UK Coffee shops fail to convince on climate change

A report on carbon management and reporting at nine UK coffee shop chains.

May 2020
Coffee shops fail to convince on climate change

**In March 2021 Ethical Consumer collaborated with Sorcha Bowles, an MSc student on the University of Glasgow's Earth Futures course, to compile a ranking of carbon management and reporting at nine UK coffee shops**

Coffee shops are extremely popular with over 25,000 outlets existing in the UK in 2018 (1). Whilst coffee shops, along with the rest of the high-street have taken a hit during the coronavirus pandemic (4), most large chains have been able to provide takeaway and we can anticipate coffee shops regaining their popularity post Covid-19.

As public awareness of climate change has increased, some coffee shop chains have been forced to acknowledge consumer demands for more sustainable products and services. This has led to shift towards a ‘greener’ image for many brands, often characterised by reusable cups and plastic alternatives which, in the grand scheme of things, do little towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Ethical Consumer has recently embarked on a new project to understand how seriously all companies are taking the climate emergency. We are looking for publicly available data which shows that companies:

(a) have set targets for carbon reduction in line with international agreements,
(b) are reporting annually on what their emissions actually are, and
(c) have a plausible plan for how they meet the targets, including reporting on measures they’ve already taken.

We set out to find out what some of the UK’s Coffee chains were doing to address and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Each company researched received an Ethical Consumer rating of best, middle or worst for carbon management and reporting, the results are summarised in the table below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>- none-</td>
<td>Best</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starbucks</td>
<td>Middle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greggs</td>
<td>Middle</td>
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<td>AMT Coffee</td>
<td>Worst</td>
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<td>Caffè Ritazza</td>
<td>Worst</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coffee Republic</td>
<td>Worst</td>
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<tr>
<td>Costa</td>
<td>Worst</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esquires Coffee</td>
<td>Worst</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nero</td>
<td>Worst</td>
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<td>Pret A Manger</td>
<td>Worst</td>
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Our rating results show a need to seriously question why some of the UK's biggest coffee chains are failing in the carbon reduction department. The worst in terms of reporting was
Caffè Ritazza, the only company with no mention at all of the environment on its website. No company received a best rating.

Hiding behind packaging?

Five out of the nine companies: Pret, Café Nero, Costa, Greggs and Starbucks, discussed either plastic reduction, recycling packaging or packaging made from recycled materials. Whilst this is an important issue in its own right, packaging contributes very little to the carbon footprint of coffee shops. In some cases, for example Pret, the conversations around climate change and the environment were governed by discussions around reducing plastic.

Similarly, a dominant theme on the company websites was the strong emphasis on reusable coffee cups. Many companies offered their own branded reusable cup and Pret offered a reusable cup discount. Again, while this may have a positive impact on issues such as litter and plastic water pollution, it was often framed as a climate change prevention measure. But some research has claimed that, with regards to greenhouse gas emissions, there is not much difference between reusable and single use coffee cups [3].

It is much easier for companies to hide behind paper straws, reusable travel mugs or recycled plastics than to actually confront and reduce their biggest carbon contributors which, as we can see below, are in the use of dairy products and in their wider supply chains. If these coffee shops are serious about reducing their greenhouse gas emissions, their attitudes need to change.

Milk

Starbucks report dairy as the biggest contributor to their carbon footprint. It could be assumed then that for all the companies researched, apart from perhaps Greggs, that dairy is also up there as one of their worst offenders. A latte made with cow’s milk can have a carbon footprint of up to 0.55kg of CO₂e. To put this into perspective, the average carbon footprint of a person in the UK is about 33kg of CO₂e a day (including all imported goods, and the carbon expended by the government on our behalf), meaning just one cup of coffee made with cow’s milk could make up as much as 1.7% of your daily carbon footprint.

Costa, Pret, Starbucks, Nero, AMT, Esquires and Greggs all mention providing plant based milk alternatives as a way of cutting their carbon, and all plant based milks do have significantly lower carbon footprints than cows milk (5). But Starbucks, Nero, Esquires and Costa charge extra for all plant milks apart from soya, which isn’t exactly doing all they can to encourage their customers to make the switch.

Currently we probably do not live in a world where “no dairy” is currently a realistic option for large coffee chains, but there are many more ways that companies could be encouraging their consumers to give plant based milks a try. We saw AMT Coffee, for example, advertise a promotion of a £1 vegan biscuit with any plant based drink purchased. Coffee shops could
also consider providing free plant based drink samples to make the transition from dairy seem like less of a jump.

The companies analysed also did not appear to make the most of the variety of plant based milks on offer, - they could go beyond the standard soya, oat or almond alternatives to include milks such as a pea or rice,

Coffee shops could also pay attention to things that increase their plant based milk sales, keeping track of how their customers interact with the options and recording improvements in sales in order to make sure their plant based milks are having the best impact possible.

**Looking down the supply chain**

Starbucks and Greggs were the only companies that acknowledged how much of their greenhouse gas emissions were coming from their value chains, with Starbucks providing a more detailed report as illustrated in the pie chart below. Starbucks reported that it estimated that 96% of its carbon footprint was associated with its value chain... This highlights how far behind the other companies we researched were, as they failed to provide detail or in some cases even mention their value chain emissions at all.

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**Starbucks Value Chain Emissions**

- Dairy
- Waste
- Food
- Services and Misc. Supplies
- Employee Commuting
- Logistics
- Real estate
- Non Qualifying Spend
- Merchandise
- Coffee
- Licensed Stores Utilities
- Other Beverages
- Packaging
- Equipment, Fixtures and Furniture
- Co-manufactured services
- CPG
- Business Travel
Starbucks

Starbucks was the best in sector for carbon management and reporting. It stated that it had set science based preliminary targets for reduction of carbon and also stated its aims for a 50% reduction in carbon by 2030 starting at a base year of 2021. This would be carbon reduction at a rate of 5.6% per year. However, because the company's plan to achieve its targets included buying renewable credits and renewable energy, it only received Ethical Consumer middle rating.

Whilst Greggs and Starbucks deserve acknowledgement for doing more than the other chains analysed, there is still much more they can do.

Conclusion

Popular coffee chains in the UK are failing to address their carbon footprints. If coffee shops are truly committed to reaching net zero by 2050, which many of those researched say they are, then the greenwashing tactics need to come to an end and they need to confront their greenhouse gas emissions, reporting on them with honesty.

We need to make sure that we hold big chains accountable for their lack of action and push for meaningful efforts towards carbon reduction.

For Ethical Consumer's best buy advice for coffee shops across all the issues we look at, see www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/coffee-shops
Also working on this project: Josie Wexler, Rob Harrison

This project was part of a pilot study for a broader Carbon Ranking Research Project at Ethical Consumer which seeks to apply our new Carbon Ranking across all 2,000 companies in our Buyers’ Guides by the end of 2022. We are beginning to seek funding for this project now. Please contact Josie or Rob using the form on our Research Hub site (https://research.ethicalconsumer.org/contact-us) if you think you might be able to help

References

#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20coffee%20shops%20and%20non%2Dspecialists.


AMT Coffee

Worst Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 17/03/21 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of AMT Coffee, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.
For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:
Sustainable farming, waste reduction, plant based milk options, and a need to reduce their carbon footprint but they did not go into any detail on how they would do this.
This was not considered to be an adequate discussion on areas of climate impact.
The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company did not report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The company did not report on its scope 3 emissions.

4. The company did not appear to have a future target inline with international agreements.
AMT coffee does not meet any of the criteria.
Overall, AMT Coffee received Ethical Consumer’s Worst rating for carbon management and reporting and lost a full mark under Climate Change.

http://amtcoffee.co.uk/news/whats-new/
Caffe Ritazza

Worst Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 21/03/21 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Caffe Ritazza, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.

For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company did not discuss any areas of climate impact or plausible ways to cut or deal with climate impacts.

The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company did not report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The company did not report on its scope 3 emissions.

4. The company did not appear to have a future target in line with international agreements.

Caffe Ritazza did not meet any of the criteria.

Overall, Caffe Ritazza received Ethical Consumer’s Worst rating for carbon management and reporting and lost a full mark under Climate Change.

http://www.cafferitazza.com/
Coffee Republic

Worst Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 17/03/2021 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Coffee Republic, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.

2. For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

3. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

4. To go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

5. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:

- Sustainable farming of coffee, working closely with supply chains and suppliers to help them improve environmental performance, energy and waste management, and less environmentally damaging transport solutions.

2. The company did not report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The company did not report on its scope 3 emissions.

4. The company did not appear to have a future target in line with international agreements.

Coffee republic meets criteria 1 but not criteria 2, 3 and 4.

Overall, Coffee Republic received Ethical Consumer’s Worst rating for carbon management and reporting and lost a full mark under Climate Change.

https://coffeerepublic.co.uk/about-coffee-republic/environmental-sustainability-policy/
Costa

Worst Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 23/03/21 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Costa, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.

For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:

Reduced use of natural resources, energy efficiency, improving overall business sustainability, measuring and monitoring their GHG impact, reducing energy consumption, all company owned stores been powered by 100% renewables since 2017, environmental and energy training for staff, plan to report annually on environmental progress, sustainable property design, encouraging suppliers to be sustainable, donating in date food waste to charities and sending the rest to be broken down for biogas, 2017 opened sustainable roastery powered by 100% renewable energy, EcoPod shops which are net zero energy buildings, biobean project which uses waste coffee, recycling and sourcing only British meat.

This was considered a reasonable understanding and discussion of how to address specific climate impacts.

The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company did not report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The company did not report on its scope 3 emissions.

4. The company did not appear to have a future target in line with international agreements.

Costa met criteria 1 but did not meet criteria 2, 3 and 4.

Overall, Costa received Ethical Consumer’s Worst rating for carbon management and reporting and lost a full mark under Climate Change.

https://www.costa.co.uk/behind-the-beans/planet/managing-waste
https://www.costa.co.uk/behind-the-beans/planet/cups-and-packaging
https://www.costa.co.uk/behind-the-beans/planet/reducing-our-footprint
https://www.costa.co.uk/policies-and-reports
Esquires Coffee

Worst Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 19/03/21 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Esquires Coffee, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.

For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:

Sustainable farming and sustainably sourced ingredients, connections with suppliers, use of local supplies to reduce their carbon footprint, teaming up with the ‘Too Good to Go app’ to reduce food waste, plant based alternatives and state they are advocates of going green and support the need for renewable energy but nowhere do they state if they have transitioned to renewables themselves.

This was not considered to be an adequate understanding and discussion of how to address specific areas of climate impact.

The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company did not report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The company did not report on its scope 3 emissions.

4. The company did not appear to have a future target in line with international agreements.

Esquires Coffee did not meet any of the criteria.

Overall, Esquires Coffee received Ethical Consumer’s Worst rating for carbon management and reporting and lost a full mark under Climate Change.

https://esquirescoffee.co.uk/
https://esquirescoffee.co.uk/news
Greggs

Middle Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 21/03/21 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Greggs, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.
For the company not to be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:
Ecoshop designs, energy saving and use of renewables, plant based options, driver efficiency training to improve fuel efficiency, food donation programme, environmental week for employees, use of accredited environmental management system to cut emissions and reduce waste, sourcing sustainably, end food waste, move to 100% renewables for shops by 2025.
This was considered a reasonable understanding and discussion of how to address specific climate impacts.

The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company reported its 2019 scope 1 and 2 emissions to be 95,962 tonnes of CO2e which was a 17% improvement from their 2018 Scope 1 and 2 emissions.

3. The company did report on some scope 3 emissions but only figures from 2015-2017 were published. Greggs state that by the end of 2021 they will have completed their Scope 3 modelling. The reported scope 3 emissions for 2017 were 10,445 tons CO2e, this was split into the following categories: energy transmission and distribution losses, waste, hazardous waste, water, effluent, business travel.
As none of the categories are related to suppliers and as the 2021 scope 3 report has not yet been completed, the reporting on scope 3 emissions was not considered sufficient.

4. The company has a target to cut at least 4.76% of its scope 1 and 2 emissions a year, with the target of reaching Net0 for scope 1, 2 and 3 by 2040 through the use of renewables. Greggs have signed the climate action roadmap in their aim to reach net zero by 2040. Greggs state they will have completed mapping their whole carbon footprint by the end of 2021 and when that is done they will set Science Based Targets to help pave their way to achieving net zero.
The company's targets were in line with international agreements.
Overall, Greggs received Ethical Consumer’s Middle rating for carbon management and reporting and lost half a mark under Climate Change.

https://corporate.greggs.co.uk/responsibility/the-greggs-pledge
https://corporate.greggs.co.uk/responsibility/environment
Pret A Manger

Worst Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

In 16/03/2021 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Pret A Manger, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.

For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:

The use of renewable energy for Pret managed shops since 2015, reduced energy consumption, sustainable farming practices, sustainable forestry (FSC accredited), recycling and environmentally conscious packaging, reusable cup discount, increased use of plant based food and products.

This was considered as an adequate understanding and discussion of how to address specific climate impacts.

The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company did not report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The company did not report on its scope 3 emissions.

4. The company did not appear to have a future target inline with international agreements, only mention of a general target to do more in the future.

Pret A Manger meets criteria 1 but not criterias 2, 3 and 4.

Overall, Pret A Manger received Ethical Consumer’s Worst rating for carbon management and reporting and lost a 1 mark under Climate Change.

https://www.pret.co.uk/en-gb/sustainability

https://downloads.ctfassets.net/4zu8gymtwqss/1TDKFkJkWYtv7bUseurNw7/ f7f4dd0f4f430860964932568906c85a/Pret_A_Manger_2019_ESG_Report.pdf

https://www.pret.co.uk/en-GB/the-pret-foundation
Starbucks

Middle Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 23/03/21 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Starbucks, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.

For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:

Renewable energy, energy conservation, climate adaptation efforts, building to LEED standards and beyond, commitment to build and renovate 10,000 stores globally, conservation at the farm level, supplier relationships, change in packaging, signatory to RE100, engagement on environmental issues with staff, prioritised working on dairy emissions as it is their biggest carbon contributor, aim to be resource positive by 2030, food emissions, plant based alternatives, recycling.

This was considered a reasonable understanding and discussion of how to address specific climate impacts.

The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company reported their 2018 global carbon footprint to be 15600000 metric tons CO2e, this included scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. Scope 1 and 2 emissions only accounted for 4% of this with 2018 scope 1 emissions reported as 319600 metric tons CO2e and 2018 scope 2 reported as 285600 metric tons co2e.

This was considered to be sufficient.

3. The company reported their 2018 scope 3 emissions to be 14990000 metric tons co2e.

Scope 3 emissions were split into the following categories: - dairy, coffee, waste, licensed store utilities, food, other beverages, services and misc. suppliers, packaging, employee commuting, equipment, fixtures and furniture, logistics, co-manufactures services, real estate, CPG, non qualifying spend, business travel and merchandise.
Dairy was reported as the biggest contributor to their carbon footprint account for 21% of all scope 3 emissions. This was considered to be sufficient.

4. The company stated it had set science based preliminary targets for reduction of carbon and also stated that it aims for a 50% reduction in carbon by 2030 starting at a base year of 2021. This would be a carbon reduction at a rate of 5.6% per year. However, the company mentions offsetting their carbon by buying renewable credits and renewable energy. Due to their inclusion of offsetting in their carbon reduction reporting, Starbucks did not meet criteria 4.

Starbucks met criteria 1, 2 and 3 but did not meet criteria 4.

Overall, Starbucks received Ethical Consumer’s Middle rating for carbon management and reporting and lost half a mark under Climate Change.

https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/environment/climate-change

16
Carbon Ranking Caffe Nero

Worst Ethical Consumer rating for carbon management and reporting

On 25/03/21 Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Caffe Nero, looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Ethical Consumer was looking for the following:

1. For the company to discuss its areas of climate impact, and to discuss plausible ways it has cut them in the past, and ways that it will cut them in the future.
   For the company to not be involved in any particularly damaging projects like tar sands, oil or aviation, to not be subject to damning secondary criticism regarding its climate actions, and to have relevant sector-specific climate policies in place.

2. For the company to report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions (direct emissions by the company), and,

3. to go some way towards reporting on its scope 3 emissions (emissions from the supply chain, investments and sold products).

4. For the company to have a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in line with international agreements (counted as the equivalent of at least 2.5% cut per year in scope 1&2 emissions), and to not count offsetting towards this target.

1. The company discussed:
   Plastic reduction, sustainable sourcing of coffee, working with the rainforest alliance to encourage sustainable farming, recycling used coffee grounds processing them into fuels to power biomass boilers.
   This was not considered to be an adequate understanding and discussion of how to address specific areas of climate impact.
   The company was not found to be involved in any particularly damaging projects.

2. The company did not report annually on its scope 1&2 greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The company did not report on its scope 3 emissions.

4. The company did not appear to have a future target in line with international agreements. Caffe Nero did not meet any of the criteria.

Overall, Caffe Nero received Ethical Consumer’s Worst rating for carbon management and reporting and lost a full mark under Climate Change.

https://caffenero.com/uk/about-us/our-ethics/