



University of Oxford Environmental Sustainability Annual Report

2024-25





Heat decarbonisation

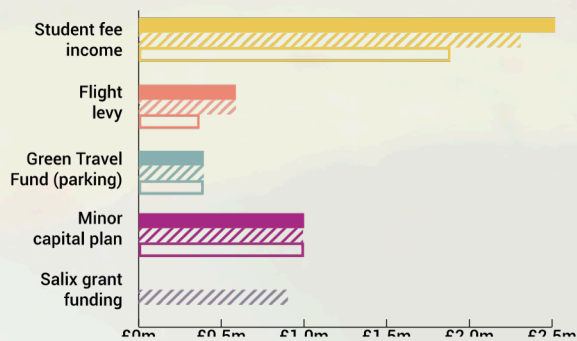
District heating has the potential to eliminate over 30% of the University's Scope 1 emissions and is a key commitment in the Environmental Sustainability Strategy. Progress has been slower than anticipated due to the complexity of such a large infrastructure project, but close collaboration is ongoing with Oxford City Council, the colleges and other local stakeholders to investigate a city-wide solution.

The completion of the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities is a prominent sustainability milestone in the University's capital plan delivery. The centre is designed to use very little energy for heating and cooling and is on track for certification under the Passivhaus standard by the end of 2025.

The Oxford Sustainability Fund is now well established and has allocated £3.5m to support energy efficiency projects and feasibility studies, paving the way for improvements across more than 200 University buildings.

OSF funding

□ 2022/23 ▨ 2023/24 ■ 2024/25



Oxford University Sport has benefitted from a £176,000 investment in 272 solar panels covering the swimming pool roof. The installation is expected to drastically cut emissions, provide almost a quarter of the pool's energy needs, and will pay for itself within eight years.

'This project significantly increases the generation capacity previously installed as part of the Acer Nethercott Sport Hall project and clearly signals our department's ongoing commitment to supporting the University's Sustainability Strategy.' Jon Roycroft, Director of Sports

Saïd Business School's heat pump project, also funded by the Oxford Sustainability Fund,, completed its first year of operation. Combined with optimisation of the building management system, the project has contributed to a significant 40% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions for the building.

'The pioneering air source heat pump project was delivered through close collaboration between Saïd Business School, Oxford University Estates Services and our trusted partners. It marks an important milestone in our journey towards net zero carbon. The significant and immediate emission reductions achieved reinforce our conviction that prioritising decarbonisation and investment in on-site low-carbon energy solutions is more impactful and enduring than reliance on offsetting.'

Ian Downie, Director of Estates, Saïd Business School

Power purchasing changes

Significant changes to the Greenhouse Gas reporting protocol covering the purchase of electricity are under consultation. The UK is also entering a period of energy system change driven in part by energy market reform, the government's Clean Power 2030 Action Plan and the establishment of GB Energy.

Considering this rapidly evolving landscape, the University's Planning and Resource Allocation Committee paused the purchase of zero carbon energy certificates, and a long-term energy procurement strategy will be aligned with developing guidance.

The short-term impact is an increase in the University's market-based Scope 2 emissions for this reporting year. An ongoing independent carbon accounting review, which will expand the scope of emissions reported to align with the Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework, has also increased reported Scope 3 emissions. This comprises more granular student travel and supply chain data than has been reportable in previous years. Continuously improving supply chain emissions data and mitigations will be a key focus going forward.

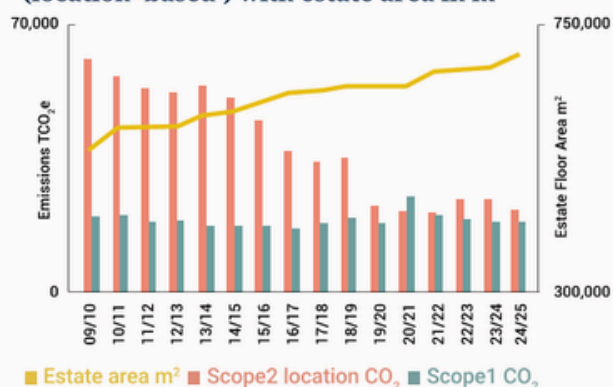
Carbon emissions data

Scope 1, 2, and 3 carbon emissions data in tonnes of CO₂e from 2021/22 to 2024/25 (market-based emissions⁴)

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Scope 1	19,854	18,860	18,218	18,468
Scope 2	0	0	0	18,052
Scope 3	230,823	251,574	250,876	267,542

The University remains committed to its 2035 net zero target, and the last 15 years of data shows a positive decarbonisation trajectory for Scope 1 and 2 emissions relative to the estate, which has grown 24% over the same period. Although progress on decarbonisation is being made, the ambitious targets within the University's Environmental Sustainability Strategy will require the pace of change to be accelerated. Unlocking this step change will be a clear focus of the ongoing fifth-year review of the University's 2035 Strategy.

Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions in tonnes of CO₂e (location -based⁵) with estate area in m²



Engagement with our staff and student community is critical to all the University's sustainability activities. Over 500 teams of volunteers in departments, colleges and laboratories delivered environmental action through the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) scheme and Green Impact, reaching staff and students across the collegiate University. Additionally:

- The Estates Services team trained over 180 event and building managers in sustainability.
- Engagement with biodiversity on University green spaces grew (recorded on iNaturalist, a web-based citizen science platform). Around 1,500 people took part, logging 4,500 observations.
- The University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums trained 75 colleagues in carbon literacy, helping embed that 'every job is a climate job'.
- The LEAF programme, which provides a standardised framework with actions and resources for laboratories to reduce their impact including assessment and certification, continued to grow impact. The number of LEAF-registered laboratories has risen to over 400 across all academic divisions. Each of these is estimated to save about £3,700 and reduce emissions by 2.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) annually.

'The response of the Oxford community to new sector requirements for environmental sustainability has been swift and impressive, thanks to the active engagement of principal investigators and to strong collaborative working across departments, divisional offices, and central services – all signaling a positive shift in how we deliver culture change at scale.'

Dr Tanita Casci, Interim Director of Research Services

Education and research

The Vice-Chancellor's Colloquium on Climate expanded significantly in 2024/25, engaging over 300 students. The colloquium offers students a unique interdisciplinary extracurricular learning opportunity, and is delivered by Oxford Lifelong Learning in partnership with the Environmental Sustainability team.

On Earth Day (22 April 2025), the Public Affairs Directorate launched a Climate and the Environment campaign to share the breadth and depth of the University's sustainability research. This campaign showcases the University's contribution to understanding the world around us, exploring

⁴ Scope 2 market-based emissions include the impact of certificate backed zero carbon electricity procurement in the reporting year.

⁵ Scope 2 location-based emissions are calculated at the prevailing carbon intensity of the UK electricity grid.

solutions to the climate and biodiversity crisis, and influencing decision-makers at all levels of government. The campaign will run through the UN COP30 meetings in Brazil and then serve as a repository of our sustainability research.

World Environment Day (5 June 2025) saw the University co-host the Right Here, Right Now Global Climate Summit, with UN Human Rights, the International Universities Climate Alliance and 9 other universities around the world. In addition to a 24-hour global livestream, 36 events took place over the week hosted by departments, colleges, and community partners.

In 2024/25, the Environmental Sustainability team also launched a new small grants programme to fund research and education projects that advance the Environmental Sustainability Strategy. Recipients represented all divisions, as well as the Students Union. One of the funded projects is hosted by the Department of Biology, and involves a recent graduate continuing their master’s research exploring the biodiversity impacts of Oxford’s supply chains and identifying opportunities for mitigation.

Travel

The University’s new Local Transport Strategy was approved in late 2024. It applies until 2029 and is backed by £2m of funding. The strategy aims to cut deaths and serious injuries from collisions by improving safety for pedestrians and cyclists. It encourages people to build sustainable modes of transport into their routine without feeling they are putting themselves in danger.

In support of this, the Sustainability team hosted hundreds of students, staff and community members at two Vision Zero events to promote road safety. Free bicycle safety training was also delivered to 360 staff and students, funded by the University’s Green Travel Fund.

The flight levy has been in place for three years, and the table below shows the trend in flights across this period. While both flights and emissions increased sharply from year one to year two, this is in line with the post-COVID return to normal operations, and this trend has slowed over the last year.

In 2022 the University’s Travel Policy set a target to reduce emissions by 20% to 24,000 tCO2e against the 2018/19 pre-pandemic baseline of 30,000 tCO2e. This target has been met. While the number of flights has increased in 2024/25, the emissions have reduced due to a reduction in long-haul flights and in distance flown. The income the levy generates is paid into the Oxford Sustainability Fund, and this has so far raised £2m to support sustainability projects across the estate.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of flights	13,000	14,500	15,000
Total emissions	18k tCO2e	25k tCO2e	24k tCO2e
Flight levy revenue	£541k	£750k	£720k



An assessment revealed that our estate includes 24 different habitat types, including over 550ha of woodland and over 550ha of grassland. Wytham Woods comprises 320ha of woodland and is considered irreplaceable under the BNG metric.



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Based on data from the University of Oxford Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25.
Image credits: Sustainability Photographer of the Year collection; Elizabeth Lettman; Weatherall Photograph.

