University of Nottingham Climate Change and Sustainability Plan Consultation Documents

This document contains an Executive Summary and a full version of the University of Nottingham's draft Climate Change and Sustainability Plan for 2026-36.

The Executive Summary is the first document and will only take a few minutes to read. The full document is ten pages and starts on **Page 7**.

University of Nottingham Sustainability Plan
Executive Summary

Our Vision

The strategic impacts and objectives in this plan are founded in a vision that the University will be a leading institution in delivering solutions to address the climate emergency and ecological crisis. We have based this plan on three pillars:

- **Transition to a net zero, climate-resilient and nature-positive University**

  We will use environmental sustainability as a core enabler of the University Strategy, reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 while restoring biodiversity and creating conditions for nature to thrive across our campuses and estates.

- **Embed sustainability at the heart of our teaching, learning and research**
  We will place environmental sustainability at the core of our teaching, learning and research, equipping students, researchers and partners to lead the transition to a more sustainable future and positioning the University of Nottingham as a sector leader in sustainable higher education

- **Embedding a University-Wide Culture of Sustainability**
  We will build a strong culture of sustainability by embedding it into governance, decision-making and everyday practice. By working in partnership with organisations, contractors and suppliers who share our ambitions, we will amplify our impact and drive collective progress towards a more sustainable future.

Strategic Drivers

Improving our sustainability performance will help us to comply with legal requirements, build our organisational resilience, ensure our financial efficiency, improve the student experience, and improve our ranking and reputation.

Our Approach

We are adopting a whole-system approach, embedding sustainability into governance, strategy, operations, teaching, research and partnerships. Our seven

themes provide the organising framework for coordinated delivery across these interconnected areas:

1. **Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity**
2. **Carbon and Energy**
3. **Culture and Engagement**
4. **Partnerships and Civic Engagement**
5. **Resources and Circular Economy**
6. **Sustainability in Research**
7. **Sustainability in Teaching and Learning**

In developing this plan, we have structured each theme around three connected elements to guide policy development and delivery:

- **Strategic Impacts (the Why)** – the long-term outcomes we aim to achieve and the difference we seek to make through this strategy.
- **Strategic Objectives (the What)** – clear, high-level priorities that translate our ambition into defined areas of focus and action.
- **Success Measures (the How)** – specific, measurable indicators that enable us to track progress and hold ourselves accountable. Each measure will be supported by a defined target.

Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity

Strategic Impact

We become a nature-friendly and climate-resilient university.

Objectives:

Adaptation:

- Develop and update climate adaptation plans (accounting for impact on building, infrastructure and people) for each of our UK campuses.
- Account for climate risk in the organisational risk register and business continuity and resilience planning.

Biodiversity:

- Develop tailored biodiversity action plans for each of our UK campuses.
- Protect and enhance nature across our campuses.

Carbon and Energy

Strategic Impact

We reduce our carbon emissions in line with our Net Zero commitments.

Objectives:

- Reduce carbon emission and increase energy efficiency of our estate.
- Reduce our transport related carbon emissions.
- Reduce carbon emissions from our digital systems.
- Complete a Scope 3 baseline and reduce emissions from our supply chain.
- Increase our on-site renewable electricity and heat generation.
- Embedding net zero principles in our Estates Masterplan.

Culture and Engagement

Strategic Impact: We increase our people's capability to act sustainability and embed sustainability into governance and risk management.

Objectives:

- Provide opportunities, skills and tools to our staff, students and external partners to engage and take meaningful action to deliver this plan.
- Drive culture change at all levels to embed sustainability across the organisation.
- Embed sustainability into governance and risk management.

Partnerships and Civic Engagement

Strategic Impact

Stronger, lasting partnerships that accelerate climate action and deliver measurable benefits for our communities, region and global networks.

Objectives:

- Strengthen collaboration with local and regional partners to support climate resilience, inclusive growth and shared sustainability priorities.
- Use our research strengths to build national and international partnerships that deliver practical climate and environmental solutions.
- Share knowledge, expertise and best practice across higher education networks and our international campuses to drive collective progress.

Resources and Circular Economy

Strategic Impact: We reduce our waste.

Objectives:

- Apply the waste hierarchy across all waste streams and prioritising circular economy approaches to resourcing and waste management where possible.
- Prioritise resource sharing and reuse over replacement.
- Improve water efficiency.

- Develop and implement a sustainable procurement policy across our supply chain.

Sustainability in Research

Strategic Impact: We reduce the impact of our research activity on the environment.

Objectives:

- Maintain and strengthen adherence to the Environmental Sustainability Concordat.
- Integrate Sustainability into Research Strategy, governance and oversight, appraisal and funding.
- Strengthen Researcher Engagement and Support Culture Change.

Sustainability in Teaching and Learning

Strategic Impact: We embed sustainability in teaching and learning.

Objectives:

- Provide opportunities, skills, tools and resources to our staff, student and external partners to engage and take meaningful action to deliver this plan
- Drive culture change at all levels to integrate sustainability awareness and action across all parts of the organisation
- Embed sustainability into Education and Student Experience governance and planning.

Governance, Reporting and Review

The Vice-Chancellor provides overall strategic sponsorship for this Plan, reinforcing sustainability as a core institutional priority aligned to the University's strategy.

Executive accountability for delivery sits with the Chief Operating Officer.

Oversight of implementation will be provided by the Estates Committee, with matters requiring approval escalated to the Operations Committee and, where appropriate, the University Executive Board (UEB).

Recognising that sustainability spans research, education, risk and assurance, formal interfaces will be maintained with:

- The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, to ensure alignment with research priorities, impact, and external partnerships.
- The Education and Student Experience Committee, to support curriculum development, student engagement and graduate outcomes.
- The Audit and Risk Committee, to ensure sustainability-related risks and regulatory requirements are appropriately managed and reported.

- The Assurance Committee, to provide independent scrutiny of performance, data integrity and control frameworks.

Performance will be monitored through a quarterly sustainability dashboard reporting against agreed success measures and targets. An annual *State of the Environment* report will be reviewed by UEB and published to ensure transparency and institutional accountability.

The Plan will be reviewed following publication of the University Strategy[1] to ensure alignment with institutional priorities. It will also be subject to periodic review prior to 2035 to respond to changes in policy, regulation, technology and the wider operating context.

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[1] At time of writing this plan, the University Strategy is being drafted. Once the new strategy is published, this plan will be updated to align with the overarching strategic goals. The strategic objectives of the plan will remain.

University of Nottingham Climate Change and Sustainability Plan
(Full Draft)

Foreword from the Vice Chancellor

To be updated ...

Our Vision

> The University of Nottingham will be a globally recognised leader in science-informed action to address the climate emergency and ecological crisis.

By embedding sustainability at the heart of our operations, research, teaching, governance, culture and partnerships, we will deliver measurable environmental impact, restore and enhance nature, equip our graduates to shape a low-carbon and nature-positive future, and act as a catalyst for systemic change across the higher education sector and beyond.

Based on this vision, there are three pillars to support the plan:

Transition to a net zero, climate-resilient and nature-positive University

- We will use environmental sustainability as a core enabler of the University Strategy, reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 while restoring biodiversity and creating conditions for nature to thrive across our campuses and estates.

Embed sustainability at the heart of our teaching, learning and research

- We will place environmental sustainability at the core of our teaching, learning and research, equipping students, researchers and partners to lead the transition to a more sustainable future and positioning the University of Nottingham as a sector leader in sustainable higher education

Embedding a University-Wide Culture of Sustainability

- We will build a strong culture of sustainability by embedding it into governance, decision-making and everyday practice. By working in

partnership with organisations, contractors and suppliers who share our ambitions, we will amplify our impact and drive collective progress towards a more sustainable future.

Strategic Drivers

This Plan is shaped by five core strategic drivers:

1. Legal and Regulatory Responsibility

The UK has made a legal commitment to reach net zero by 2050, and environmental regulation and reporting requirements are increasing. As a large and complex institution, the University must meet these obligations. Taking early action reduces the risk of future non-compliance, avoids reactive and costly changes later, and ensures we are prepared for tightening standards and expectations.

2. Institutional Resilience and Risk Management

Climate change, biodiversity loss, energy volatility and supply chain disruption present material risks to our estate, operations, finances and our student and staff wellbeing. Embedding sustainability into governance, investment and decision-making strengthens long-term institutional resilience.

3. Financial Sustainability and Resource Stewardship

In a challenging financial environment for universities, improving energy efficiency and reducing waste is not only an environmental priority but a financial necessity. By lowering consumption and investing in efficient, low-carbon systems, we reduce exposure to rising energy costs and free up resources to support our core academic mission.

4. Education, Research and Global Impact

Our students expect universities to act responsibly and to prepare them for leadership in a low-carbon, nature-positive economy. Embedding sustainability into research, curriculum and campus life enhances the student experience, strengthens graduate outcomes, and amplifies the real-world impact of our research.

5. Global Alignment and Reputation

As a global institution, we align our sustainability ambitions with internationally recognised frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Demonstrating measurable progress enhances our credibility, strengthens partnerships, supports performance in sustainability benchmarks, and reinforces our position as a responsible and forward-looking university.

Our Progress so far

In 2020, following the leadership of the University of Nottingham Students' Union, the University formally recognised the climate emergency and committed to a science-based carbon reduction target.

Our carbon reduction targets, first established in 2018, set a pathway to net zero emissions by 2050.

In 2021, we published our Environmental Sustainability Strategic Delivery Plan, aligned to the University Strategy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. That plan has now concluded and is superseded by this refreshed and more ambitious programme of work.

Since 2018, we have reduced our Scope 1 and 2 emissions in line with our science-based targets. Building on this progress, and with continued leadership commitment and institution-wide ownership, we aim to achieve our 2040 and 2050 net zero targets.

Highlights

- 2020: UoN recognises climate emergency
- 2021: Publication of the Strategic Delivery Plan for Environmental Sustainability
- 2010-2025: Reduced Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions by 50%
- 2018: UoN divested from fossil fuels.
- 2020, Invest its endowment fund in line with the University's strategy and commitment to sustainability
- 2020: UoN signed up to Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) to benchmark efficient and sustainable lab practices
- 2022: Pledged to become Nature Positive University as a founding signatory
- 2022: Signed Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement to deliver shared sustainability objectives in collaboration with local partners
- 2024: UoN becomes a key signatory of the Wellcome Trust's Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice
- 2024: Publication of the Delivering a Just Energy Transition report
- University Park awarded Green Flags every year since 2003
- Climate risk assessment carried out for all three campuses
- QS sustainability (top 40), People and Planet sustainability (top 100) and Impact Ranking (top 200) University.
- Top 100 for world-leading research in several individual SDGs
- Curriculum informed by SDGs
- £75m backing zero carbon research

Our Approach

We will take a whole-system approach to embed sustainability across all aspects of the university. To make delivery of this plan manageable, we have developed seven themes through which the three strategic objectives will be made actionable:

- **Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity.** Mitigating the effects of climate change and building thriving ecosystems go together. The goals set out here will help to deliver a climate-resilient and nature-positive university.
- **Carbon and Energy.** Addressing our carbon emissions and energy usage is a vital aspect of building a sustainable, low-carbon and nature-positive university.
- **Culture and Engagement.** Our staff and students' capabilities and motivations are central to achieving this plan's goals, which will embed sustainability into our culture and operations.
- **Partnerships and Civic Engagement.** Approaching our civic partners purposefully and engaging with them collaboratively will help us to build a culture of sustainability within and external to the university.
- **Resources and Circular Economy.** Adopting the principles of a circular economy will help to reduce our waste production and our resource consumption, building a sustainable, low-carbon and nature-positive university.
- **Sustainability in Research.** As a research-led institution, it's our responsibility to ensure sustainability is embedded in our research practices and innovations, and that we play a leading role in embedding sustainability in the national and global research communities.
- **Sustainability in Teaching and Learning.** We are a teaching university, and our goal is to equip our students with the skills and knowledge to advocate for sustainability no matter which fields of work they choose to go into.

We identified three aspects of each theme which will inform future policy and activity. The three aspects are:

- **Strategic Impact (the Why)** represent the broader, long-term consequences of executing the plan. Examples:
    - Reduce our carbon emissions in line with our Net Zero commitments
    - Reduce our waste
- **Strategic Objectives (the What)** are specific, measurable high-level goals that bridge our vision with daily actions. Examples:
    - Reduce our carbon emissions and increase the energy efficiency of our estate.
    - Prioritise resource sharing and reuse over replacement

- **Success Measures (the How)** are quantitative, verifiable data points used to measure our progress. Each success measure will link to a specific target. Examples:
  - Carbon emissions (tonnes) per year.
  - Percentage of our waste sent to landfill.

Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity

Climate change is already affecting our campuses, with flooding, heatwaves and wildfires disrupting operations, impacting students and staff wellbeing and damaging ecosystems.

These impacts create increasing financial and business continuity risks. Strengthening climate resilience will protect our people, infrastructure and research from further disruption.

Alongside this, accelerating biodiversity loss presents a wider ecological crisis. As custodians of diverse campuses and landscapes, we have a responsibility to protect and restore nature, creating resilient environments that support both wildlife and our long-term sustainability.

Strategic Impact

We become a nature-friendly and climate-resilient university

Objectives:

Adaptation:

- Develop and update climate adaptation plans (accounting for impact on building, infrastructure and people) for each of our UK campuses.
- Account for climate risk in the organisational risk register and business continuity and resilience planning.

Biodiversity:

- Develop tailored biodiversity action plans for each of our UK campuses
- Protect and enhance nature across our campuses.

Carbon and Energy

In 2020, the University recognised the climate emergency and accepted its responsibility to reduce the emissions that contribute to climate change.

We have set science-based targets for our Scope 1 and 2 emissions, with the ambition of reaching net zero by 2040 and absolute zero carbon by 2050, with and without offsetting.

We aim to cut our carbon emissions by improving the efficiency of our buildings and digital infrastructure, rationalisation our estate, reducing emissions from our vehicle fleet and increasing our use of renewable energy where feasible.

We aim to establish a revised carbon baseline and updated targets that include Scope 3 emissions. These targets will be shaped by the availability of viable technology, affordability, and the practical deliverability of solutions across our operations and supply chain.

Strategic Impact

We reduce our carbon emissions in line with our Net Zero commitments

Objectives:

- Reduce carbon emission and increase energy efficiency of our estate
- Reduce our transport related carbon emissions
- Reduce carbon emissions from our digital systems
- Complete a Scope 3 baseline and reduce emissions from our supply chain.
- Increase our on-site renewable electricity and heat generation.
- Embedding net zero principles in our Estates Masterplan

Culture and Engagement

We already have strong channels for communication and engagement, and there is clear appetite across our community to act on sustainability. We will build on this strong commitment to embed a culture of sustainability and equip our students and staff with the knowledge and confidence to take meaningful action to lead on environmental sustainability.

Delivering this Plan requires leadership and accountability at every level, which is why we aim to embed sustainability within our governance and risk management processes, ensuring that climate and environmental considerations are reflected in strategic, financial, and operational decisions.

Strategic Impact

We increase our people's capability to act sustainability and embed sustainability into governance and risk management.

Objectives:

- Provide opportunities, skills and tools to our staff, students and external partners to engage and take meaningful action to deliver this plan
- Drive culture change at all levels to embed sustainability across the organisation
- Embed sustainability into governance and risk management

Partnerships and Civic Engagement

The climate and ecological crisis affect our health, livelihoods and quality of life. We are committed to strengthening resilience and opportunity in our communities through partnership and collaboration.

As a research-led university, we create impact by working with others. We will deepen collaboration locally, regionally, nationally and globally to accelerate climate action.

Locally, we will work with our Students' Union and with **Nottingham Trent University** through the **Universities for Nottingham** partnership. We will continue to support regional priorities alongside **Nottingham City Council** and the **East Midlands Combined County Authority**.

Through networks such as **EAUC** and **AUDE**, and across our UK, China and Malaysia campuses, we will share knowledge, build capability and contribute to collective progress.

Strategic Impact

Stronger, lasting partnerships that accelerate climate action and deliver measurable benefits for our communities, region and global networks.

Objectives:

- Strengthen collaboration with local and regional partners to support climate resilience, inclusive growth and shared sustainability priorities.
- Use our research strengths to build national and international partnerships that deliver practical climate and environmental solutions.
- Share knowledge, expertise and best practice across higher education networks and our international campuses to drive collective progress.

Resources and Circular Economy

Our operations rely on significant resources water, food, equipment, furniture, and more which inevitably generate waste. Our goal is to reduce both consumption and waste by adopting a circular economy approach.

A circular economy follows the waste hierarchy (reduce → reuse → recover → recycle → dispose), focusing on reducing and reusing resources to minimise energy use and the environmental impacts of disposal.

In practice, this means considering the lifecycle of resources before purchase through sustainable procurement and providing staff and students with accessible networks for donating and reusing items such as furniture and equipment.

Strategic Impact

> We reduce our waste

Objectives

- Apply the waste hierarchy across all waste streams and prioritising circular economy approaches to resourcing and waste management where possible.
- Prioritise resource sharing and reuse over replacement
- Improve water efficiency
- Develop and implement a sustainable procurement policy across our supply chain

Sustainability in Research

As a Russell Group university, we are leaders in research and innovation. Building on our commitment to the **Environmental Concordat**, we will embed sustainability into our research practices and help lead the transition to greener research nationally and globally. We will also continue to support and champion research that delivers practical sustainability solutions.

Strategic Impact

> We reduce the impact of our research activity on the environment

Objectives:

- Maintain and strengthen adherence to the Environmental Sustainability Concordat
- Integrate Sustainability into Research Strategy, governance and oversight, appraisal and funding.
- Strengthen Researcher Engagement and Support Culture Change.

Sustainability in Teaching and Learning

We want to create a university community where teaching and learning equip students to contribute to a more sustainable world. Our graduates will leave with the knowledge, skills and values to champion sustainability in their careers and wider lives, whatever path they choose.

We will build on **UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** framework to embed the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to shape a more sustainable future across our curriculum and learning environment.

Strategic Impact

We embed sustainability in teaching and learning

Objectives:
- Provide opportunities, skills, tools and resources to our staff, students and external partners to engage and take meaningful action to deliver this plan
- Drive culture change at all levels to integrate sustainability awareness and action across all parts of the organisation
- Embed sustainability into Education and Student Experience governance and planning.

Implementing this Plan

Key Challenges and Dependencies

Achieving our commitments will require trade-offs, long-term investment and institution-wide ownership. The principal challenges and dependencies are summarised below.

Electrifying Heat

Our pathway to net zero requires replacing gas heating with electric heat through a new District Heating Network. This will significantly increase our reliance on electricity.

Delivery depends on grid upgrades, affordable low-carbon power and access to funding. Delays or sustained high electricity prices could affect the pace of transition.

Financial Pressures

The University, like much of the sector, is operating under significant financial strain. To manage this challenge, we will explore alternative funding models, including third-party investment and partnership approaches, to reduce the upfront capital burden while maintaining long-term value for the University

Estate Reduction vs Growth

Through our Estate Master Planning programme, we aim to reduce the overall size of our estate by around 25%. A smaller, more efficient campus will lower energy use and reduce emissions.

At the same time, planned growth in student numbers and research activity may increase energy demand in the short term. Balancing growth with carbon reduction will require careful choices and a consistent focus on long-term impact.

Scope 3 and International Travel

While we do not yet have a fully developed Scope 3 baseline, we recognise that indirect emissions are likely to represent a substantial share of our overall footprint. Developing more accurate data will be an early priority of this Plan.

Data and Evidence

Our emissions data, particularly for Scope 3, is not yet as robust as it needs to be. Improving accuracy and transparency will require better systems, clearer accountability and stronger supplier data.

Culture and Ownership

Sustainability cannot be delivered by Estates alone. Meeting our commitments will require clear leadership and shared accountability across academic, technical and professional services, financial decision-making and operations.

Governance, Reporting and Review

The Vice-Chancellor provides overall strategic sponsorship for this Plan, reinforcing sustainability as a core institutional priority aligned to the University's strategy.

Executive accountability for delivery sits with the Chief Operating Officer.

Oversight of implementation will be provided by the Estates Committee, with matters requiring approval escalated to the Operations Committee and, where appropriate, the University Executive Board (UEB).

Recognising that sustainability spans research, education, risk and assurance, formal interfaces will be maintained with:

- The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, to ensure alignment with research priorities, impact, and external partnerships.
- The Education and Student Experience Committee, to support curriculum development, student engagement and graduate outcomes.
- The Audit and Risk Committee, to ensure sustainability-related risks and regulatory requirements are appropriately managed and reported.
- The Assurance Committee, to provide independent scrutiny of performance, data integrity and control frameworks.

Performance will be monitored through a quarterly sustainability dashboard reporting against agreed success measures and targets. An annual *State of the Environment* report will be reviewed by UEB and published to ensure transparency and institutional accountability.

Success Measures

Progress towards our objectives will be tracked by specific measures that have been created in concert with this sustainability plan. The draft success measures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review

This plan will be reviewed upon the publication of the University Strategy. Revisions may be made in order to align the sustainability plan with the overarching strategy.

The plan will also be reviewed periodically before 2035 as necessary in response to changes in context.

Appendix 1. Success Measures

Theme	Strategic Impacts	No.	Success Measures (unit of measure, reporting frequency)
Carbon and Energy	We reduce our carbon emissions in line with our NZ commitments	1	Scope 1&2 CO2 emissions per FTE staff and student (tonnes, quarterly)
		2	On-site renewable electricity generation (kWh, quarterly)
		3	Staff and student single occupancy car journeys (number, quarterly)
		4	Scope 3 Supply Chain
Resources and Circular Economy	We reduce our waste	5	Total waste produced (tonnes, quarterly)
		6	Waste per FTE staff/student (tonnes, quarterly)
		7	On-site waste segregation (percentage, quarterly)
		8	Water consumption per FTE staff/student (m3, quarterly)
		9	Waste to landfill (percentage, quarterly)
		10	Reuse data (kg, quarterly)
		11	Total water consumption (m3, quarterly)
		12	Waste divirted (kg, yearly)
Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity	We become a nature friendly and climate resilient University	13	Biodiversity on campuses (habitat units, every 3 years)
		14	New buildings that are certified at least BREEAM Excellent or equivalent (percentage, yearly)
Culture and Engagement	We increase our people's capability to act sustainably and embed sustainability into governance and risk management	15	Sustainability training delivered to staff/students (percentage, yearly)
		16	Departmental platform assessment framework uptake (number of participants, yearly)
Sustainability in Research	We reduce the impact of our research activity on environment	17	Labs with LEAF accreditation (percentage, yearly)
		18	Research applications with links to UN's Sustainable Development Goals (percentage, yearly)
Sustainability in Teaching and Learning	We embed sustainability in teaching and learning	19	Courses with sustainability modules or aligned to UN's SDGs (number, yearly)
		20	Sustainability Challenge (number, yearly)