



Environmental Sustainability Strategy

2026





Vice-Chancellor's foreword

Our first Environmental Sustainability Strategy, approved in 2021, built on decades of leading research to make a long-term commitment to address the University's impacts on climate and nature. This updated Strategy holds firm on those commitments, strengthening them through a clearer emphasis on accountability, transparency and the measurement of progress against defined goals. We have shown leadership in the ambitious targets we have set ourselves and the journey required to reach them is now well underway.

In my 2025 Oration I called for Oxford to transform itself into a living laboratory for climate sustainability and biodiversity recovery. We have an unparalleled depth and breadth of expertise in developing solutions to the climate and nature crisis, and a unique opportunity to test them. In doing so, we aim not only to advance our own practice but to establish models of evidence-based intervention that can inform and guide institutions globally.

The journey towards our climate and nature targets will require us to navigate numerous complex ethical judgements, economic considerations, questions of equity and technology transitions. Success will depend on continued effort across the collegiate University, and with partners beyond it who share our commitment to environmental leadership through innovation and collaboration.

This Strategy provides a clear framework for the next phase of reducing the University's impacts on climate and nature, while recognising that it must continue to evolve as we respond to new evidence, technologies and challenges.

Professor Irene Tracey

Vice-Chancellor



President of the Student Union's foreword

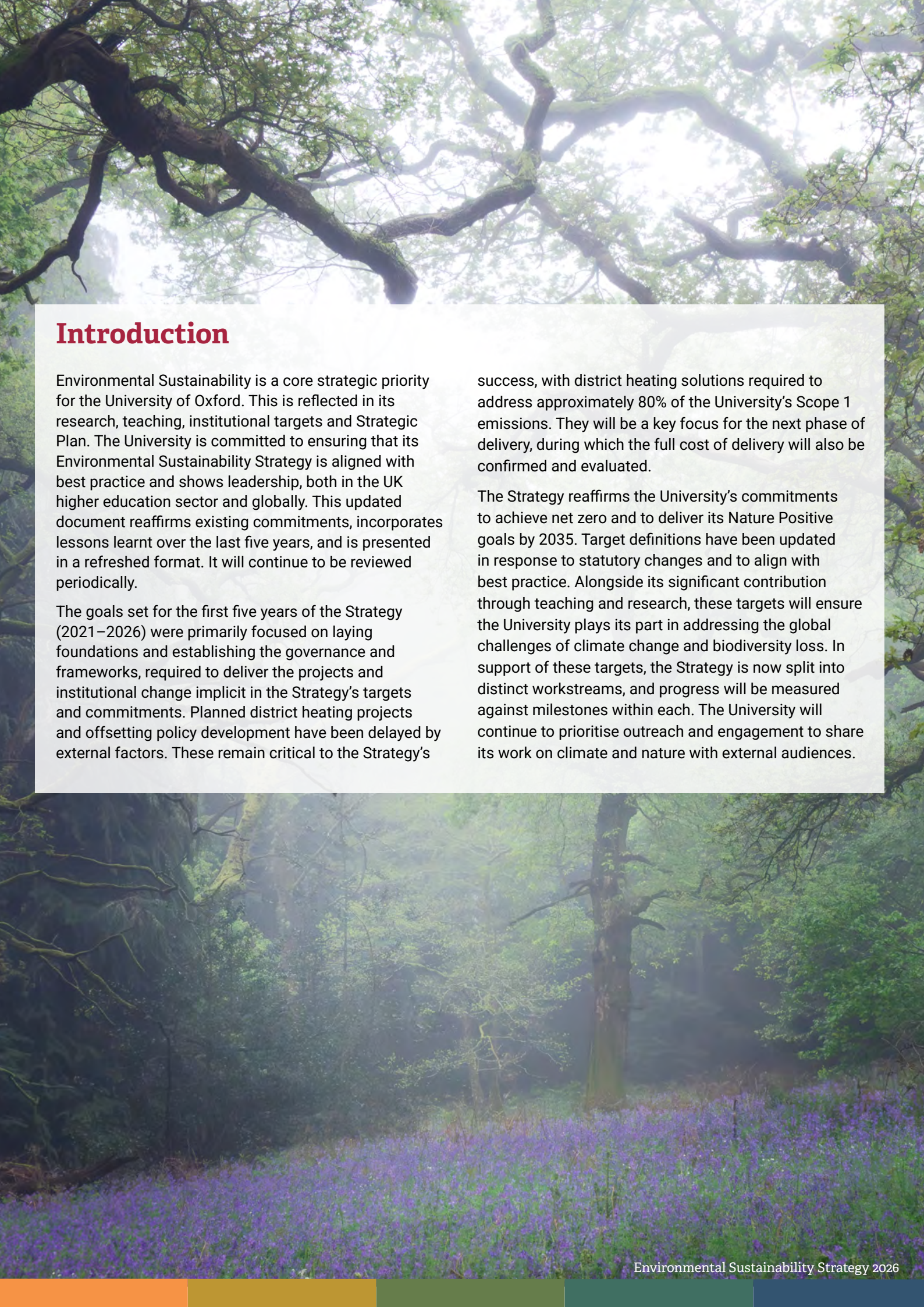
This review has enabled us to reflect on the Strategy we put into place five years ago and, as a Students' Union, we are pleased to endorse this important reaffirmation of the critical climate and nature targets we have set ourselves. We were consulted as part of the review process, and the result includes a clear set of opportunities for students to not only play an important part in delivery but also to help ensure the University continues to show leadership and accountability for progress towards its ambitious goals.

Student advocacy was instrumental to the creation of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and students continue to demonstrate clear commitment to these issues, with numerous environmentally focused student groups active. Environment and Ethics representatives in every college are helping to connect the Strategy's goals with college sustainability plans and initiatives such as Vision Zero enable us to act together on issues that affect every University member.

As a Students' Union, we look forward to engaging our volunteers and wider student body with further environmental sustainability partnerships in the future. We are proud to help shape the development of our shared vision for an environmentally sustainable University and to support the ambitious work that will realise it.

Shermar Pryce

President for Communities and Common Rooms, Oxford University Student's Union



Introduction

Environmental Sustainability is a core strategic priority for the University of Oxford. This is reflected in its research, teaching, institutional targets and Strategic Plan. The University is committed to ensuring that its Environmental Sustainability Strategy is aligned with best practice and shows leadership, both in the UK higher education sector and globally. This updated document reaffirms existing commitments, incorporates lessons learnt over the last five years, and is presented in a refreshed format. It will continue to be reviewed periodically.

The goals set for the first five years of the Strategy (2021–2026) were primarily focused on laying foundations and establishing the governance and frameworks, required to deliver the projects and institutional change implicit in the Strategy's targets and commitments. Planned district heating projects and offsetting policy development have been delayed by external factors. These remain critical to the Strategy's

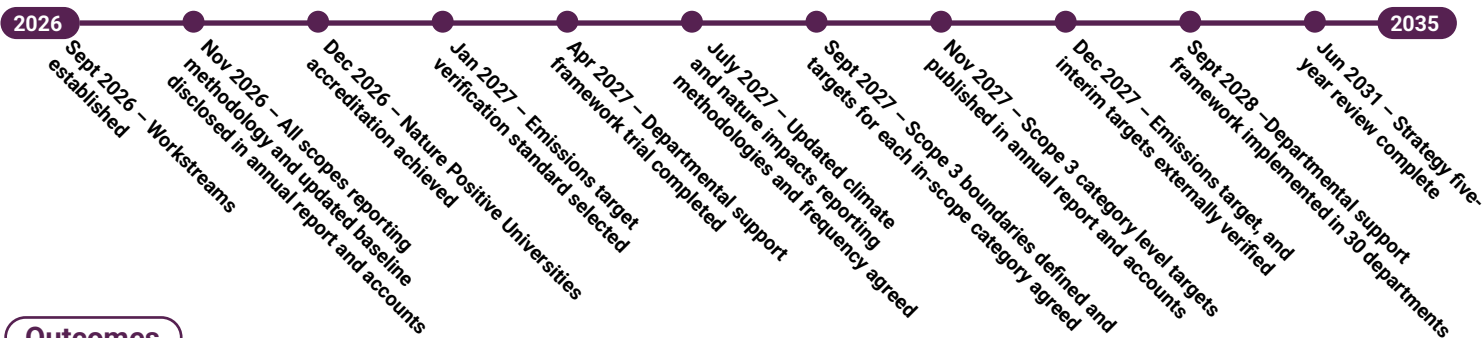
success, with district heating solutions required to address approximately 80% of the University's Scope 1 emissions. They will be a key focus for the next phase of delivery, during which the full cost of delivery will also be confirmed and evaluated.

The Strategy reaffirms the University's commitments to achieve net zero and to deliver its Nature Positive goals by 2035. Target definitions have been updated in response to statutory changes and to align with best practice. Alongside its significant contribution through teaching and research, these targets will ensure the University plays its part in addressing the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. In support of these targets, the Strategy is now split into distinct workstreams, and progress will be measured against milestones within each. The University will continue to prioritise outreach and engagement to share its work on climate and nature with external audiences.

2035 Targets



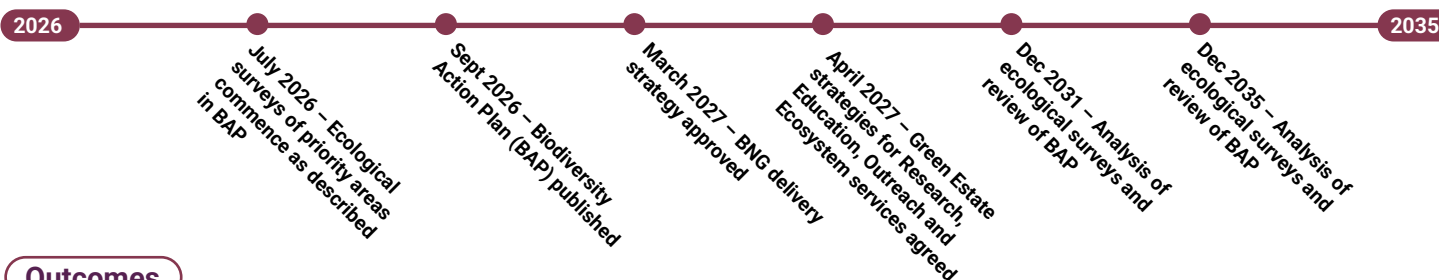
Governance and Reporting Milestones



Outcomes

Environmental Sustainability is embedded in University decision making. Targets are independently validated and verified with accountability, workstreams and milestones clear. Local goals are owned by departments. Annual public disclosures of progress in the University's annual report and accounts are transparent and consistent. Regular reviews of the Strategy ensure alignment with best practice, our research and the University's Strategic Plan.

Biodiversity Milestones



Outcomes

Biodiversity on the University's estate has been enhanced in line with Nature Positive targets. These interventions, and the University's biodiversity research, has been brought to the wider community through outreach and engagement events. All development projects on University land have achieved 10% statutory biodiversity net gain, measured in accordance with the Natural England Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) metric, and an additional 10% gain. The mitigation and conservation hierarchy guides actions to address nature and biodiversity impacts through a Refrain, Reduce, Restore and Renew approach.

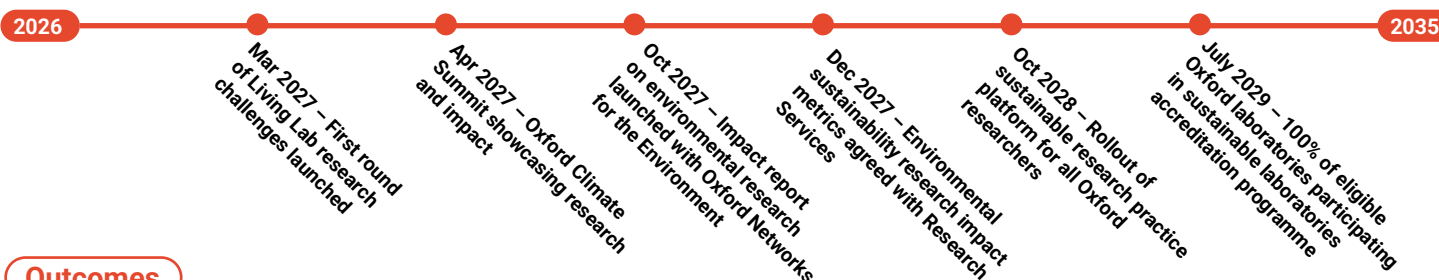
Education Milestones



Outcomes

All students have an opportunity to study environmental sustainability with progress on increasing environmental sustainability content in the curriculum over the Strategy period measured. Additional extracurricular learning opportunities are provided for students. Staff are empowered to support the Strategy through grassroots engagement programmes, accessible training and guidance. Public and community audiences are engaged with our climate and nature research and learning opportunities through the University's Living Lab programme.

Research Milestones



Outcomes

The quantity, engagement with and impact of research related to environmental sustainability has increased. The environmental sustainability of research practice is a routine consideration with an established framework supporting all research types. Performance is beyond compliance with funder requirements. The University maximises its potential as a Living Lab to enable applied research and learning through key decarbonisation and nature projects.

Procurement

Milestones

2026

Dec 2026 – Supply chain mapping complete

Mar 2027 – Supply chain action and engagement plan agreed

Jun 2027 – Supply chain emissions targets agreed

Sept 2027 – Supply chain nature positive targets and action plan agreed

Dec 2027 – Sustainable procurement training content developed

Jan 2028 – Waste targets defined for waste contracts

2035

Outcomes

The University's supply chain action plan identifies its principal climate and biodiversity impacts, describes how they are measured, reported on, reduced and compensated. At least 30% of the University's climate and nature impacts from procurement have been targeted with mitigation actions through supplier collaboration. Research collaborations and targets have reduced the impacts on nature of the most harmful commodities or product groups that the University procures.

Travel

Milestones

2026

Dec 2026 – Flight levy updated

Jun 2028 – International student flight mitigation options in place

Jan 2030 – Local student flight 2024–29 updated

Mar 2031 – Oxfordshire County Council's Vision Zero 2030 target supported

Jun 2031 – Travel Policy updated

Sept 2031 – Travel Policy updated business travel flight emissions reported

July 2035 – 35% reduction in business travel flight emissions reported

Sept 2035 – 100% of University's vehicle fleet electrified

2035

Outcomes

Walking, cycling and public transport are supported, private car journeys have fallen, and the University's vehicle fleet has been decarbonised. Aviation emissions from University business travel reduced in line with targets, reported annually and offset. University development partners have been assisted to adopt mixed-use development strategies for urban (re)development projects that reduce car dependency and create compact, liveable communities.

Investments

Milestones

2026

Jan 2028 – Net zero aligned Engagement Strategy agreed

Jun 2035 – The University has no direct investments in fossil fuels

2035

Outcomes

The University continues to hold no direct investments in fossil fuels and, as an investor, is recognised as being part of the solution to climate change and biodiversity loss. Annual reporting transparently discloses progress towards clear targets and fund managers are annually updated on the Oxford Martin Principles for Climate-Conscious Investment. The Investment Committee retains a member with relevant expertise in investment management and environmentally sustainable investment.

Digital and IT

Milestones

2026

Dec 2026 – Guidance on responsible use of AI launched

Mar 2027 – Impacts of IT and equipment education programme launched

May 2027 – Digital de-clutter guidance launched

Jun 2027 – AI and cloud environmental impacts reporting plan agreed

Sept 2027 – Deep dive environmental impacts foot printing for two key services on third-party infrastructure delivered

Dec 2027 – Sustainability targets for IT procurement approved

Jun 2035 – Deep dive into environmental impacts for two key services complete

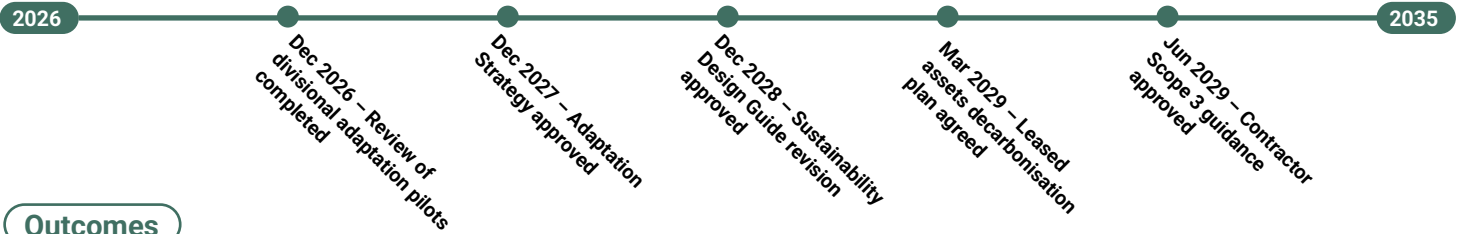
2035

Outcomes

The University's digital carbon footprint is well understood in terms of both energy use and procurement, within the institution and via partners. The granularity of IT emissions and third-party service data is continuously improved to ensure accurate Scope 3 reporting and purposeful mitigation. Academic and supply chain partnerships are leveraged to enable this. University members are well informed about digital impacts within their control and opportunities to mitigate them.

Construction and Property

Milestones

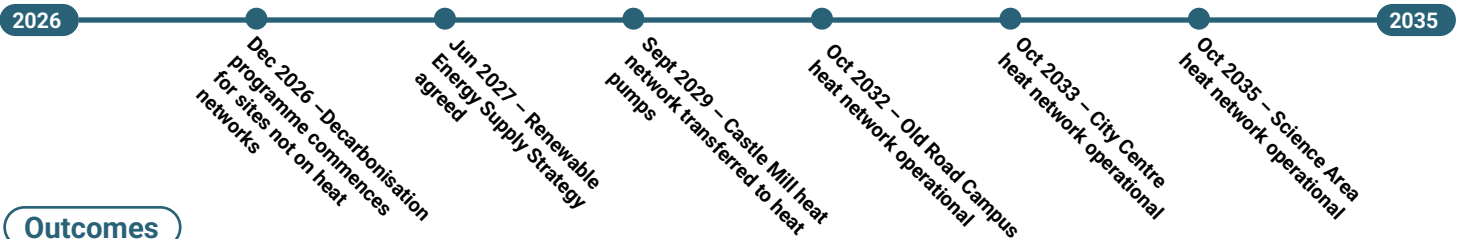


Outcomes

The University's new construction and refurbishment programme supports Strategy targets to deliver a resilient and net zero aligned estate. The Sustainability Design Guide is updated to reflect the University's Scope 3 emissions targets, a strategic approach to adaptation, embodied carbon and feedback from the Capital Projects continuous improvement process. The University's commercial property portfolio is managed to align with Strategy targets.

Energy

Milestones

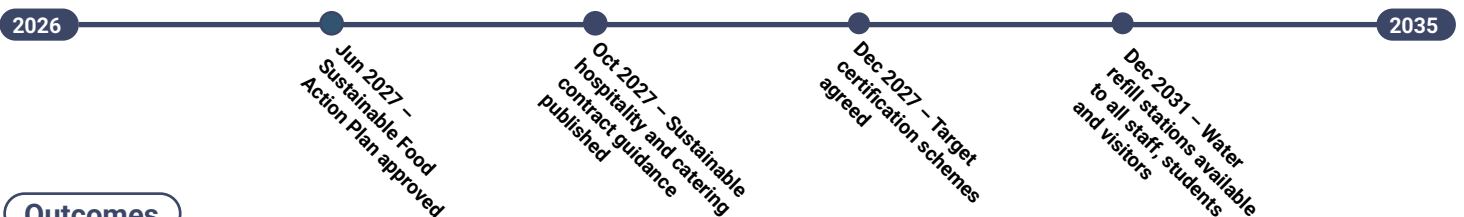


Outcomes

Fossil fuel use has been eliminated where possible and the Scope 1 emissions pathway from the University's estate is net zero aligned. Electricity supply is zero carbon, local where possible, maximises renewables and is optimised to align with the heat decarbonisation programme.

Food

Milestones



Outcomes

The carbon emissions and biodiversity impact of food served at the University have been measured and reduced. Academic, college and supplier partnerships are used to test interventions and scale solutions. Externally verified certification schemes are in place to assess the sustainability credentials of the food offered at the University.

Offsetting

Milestones



Outcomes

The University's offsetting strategy is aligned with its research and with the Oxford Offsetting Principles, provides thought leadership and ensures that the required offsets to deliver Strategy targets are secured when required.

Funding

Milestones



Outcomes

The cost of delivering the Strategy is fully understood, affordability has been confirmed at the earliest opportunity and funding is secured. Funding sources ensure equity, incentivise Strategy outcomes and are tensioned to minimise financial impact on education and research priorities. Continued transparent, annual reporting of the Oxford Sustainability Fund.

Sustainability Governance

Execution of the Strategy is overseen by the University's Environmental Sustainability Subcommittee (ESSC) which comprises representation from each division, the Students' Union and the college community. Members are supported by University officers, and by co-opted academic and professional subject matter experts. Financing is channelled via the Oxford Sustainability Fund which has been established to accumulate capital for significant investments required in the University's estate.

Each workstream has a clearly identified lead with delegated responsibility for delivering its milestones and outcomes as well as managing and reporting on risks, issues and dependencies. Workstream leads report to ESSC, which manages risks at a programme level, with onward reporting into the

University's risk management system as required. This structure ensures accountability, transparency and prompt action to address challenges.

Linkages between workstreams are logged and managed by workstream leads to ensure co-ordinated and effective action. For example, impacts from the procurement of third-party goods, services and works may be addressed by relevant actions in other workstreams, in particular; Food, Digital & IT, Travel and Construction & Property.

Direct engagement with divisions, departments and students is led by the Environmental Sustainability team. This includes developing support frameworks for departments, administration of grassroots initiatives such as Green Impact and supporting the increased sustainability of research practice.

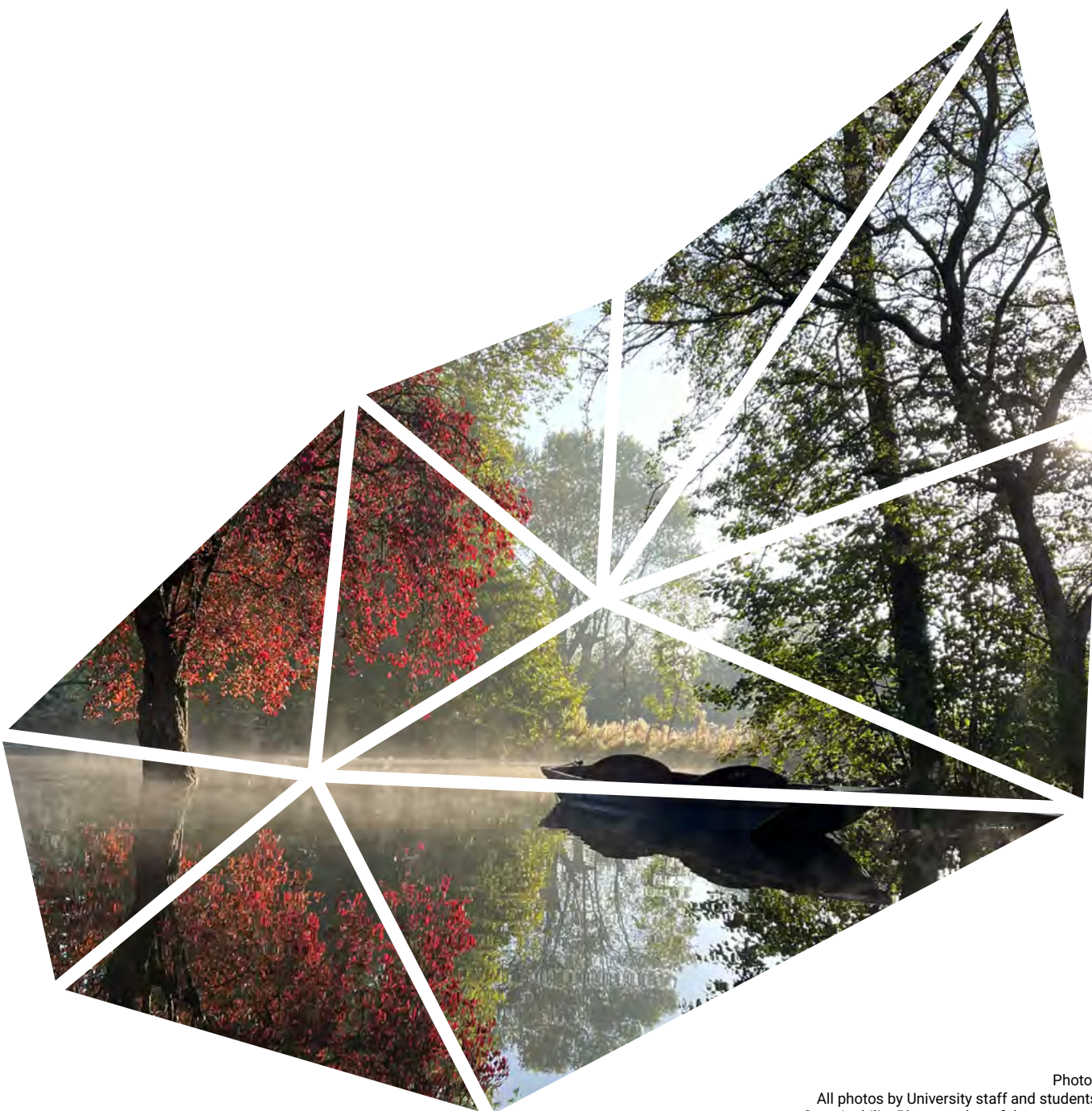


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