



Universities Partnership

Working together for Leicester,
Leicestershire and Rutland

Environmental Sustainability Theme

Progress Report 2024-2026



**DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY
LEICESTER**



**Loughborough
University**



**UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER**

Report authors: Dr Sandra Lee, Nik Hunt, Dr Andrew Reeves

Introduction

The Environmental Sustainability Theme supports the Universities Partnership's mission to improve the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This report summarises progress from June 2023 to Spring 2026, a period that saw the transition from pilot projects to large-scale regional delivery.



Our work continues to be guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on:

- SDG 13 – Climate Action
- SDG 4 – Quality Education
- SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

[View the 2023 SDG Mapping Report](#)

Our focus areas (refined for 2023–2026)

Based on stakeholder feedback and regional needs, the theme now concentrates on four workstreams:

- Local support for climate action – Governance, evidence and tools for regional energy transition
- Sustainability skills for employers – Carbon Literacy, diagnostics, graduate skills, careers training
- Nature recovery & biodiversity – LNRS alignment, biodiversity literacy, citizen science
- Evidence-based policy & research – Carbon evaluation, SDG mapping, civic impact analysis

Regional context

The regional landscape has shifted from high-level ambition to the practical realities of delivery.

Key developments shaping our work include:

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

Biodiversity is now a statutory regional priority. UP universities are supporting the mapping of wildlife corridors and nature recovery opportunities across the three counties.

Strategic Authority

The region is moving toward a new model of local government which will reduce the number and tiers across local councils. Alongside this there is a desire to work together more closely at a strategic level across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland through a Strategic Foundation Authority.

Emerging combined authorities across the UK are prioritising:

- evidence-led clean energy planning
- green skills and workforce development
- investable, place-based projects with clear delivery pathways.

Local Authority priorities

Recent political changes mean that some local authority priorities have shifted away from “net zero” as a standalone agenda. However, the underlying issues of climate adaptation, energy resilience and economic regeneration remain central to local policy discussions. These areas are highly interdependent and this work continues to support them through evidence, skills and practical tools.

The UP's role as a neutral convenor and evidence provider has become increasingly important. We continue to define sustainability through the local priorities of resilience, cost savings, productivity, infrastructure readiness and community wellbeing.

Environmental Sustainability Theme highlights 2024-2026



Resources produced

- [GreenerFuture Leics website](#)
- [Sustainability Action Plan toolkit](#)
- [11 publicly available webinars](#)
- [Digital LAEP](#)
- Clean Energy Project Community of Practice Climate Project Prioritisation Tool



Publications

- [15 case studies](#)
- **10** SME-focussed articles
- **3** practitioner and policymaker articles
- **1** policy paper



Skills and education

- **67** organisations Carbon Literacy accredited
- **1700** individuals CLT trained
- **107** trained student auditors
- **46** workshops, **36** networking events
- **10** student placement and intern opportunities
- **200+** students involved in Bioblitz & Consultancy challenge
- **170+** hours of community energy mentoring



Economic value

- **£540k** value delivered to local businesses
- **15 MW** community energy pipeline (via partners)
- **£1.8M** funding secured



Environmental sustainability

- **7,000 tCO₂^e** pledged from CLT participants
- **40,000 tCO₂^e** reduced by partner universities
- ave **50% tCO₂^e** reduction from net zero baseline



SME and business support

- **1,379** businesses engaged
- **419** supported
- **61** consultancy recipients

Major project highlights (2024-2026)

Leicestershire Collaborate to Accelerate Net Zero (LCAN)

Innovate UK Net Zero Living Demonstrator (2024–2026). Relevant Work Packages: WP1 (Governance) and WP4 (Business Advisory Service)

LCAN is the most significant collaborative project delivered during this period. It has:

- strengthened local governance for clean energy
- produced the region's first digital Local Area Energy Plan
- delivered a behaviour-informed SME advisory service
- established new long-term structures for cross-authority collaboration.

Governance & Collaboration

Key outputs

- Clean Energy Project Community of Practice – regular meetings of officers across all local authorities
- Strategic Clean Energy Delivery Structure – designed to be “future-ready” for EMCCA and local government reorganisation
- Climate Project Prioritisation Tool – supports pipeline development and funding bids
- Shared analysis and evidence sessions – linking LAEP insights to economic development priorities

The UP acts as a neutral convenor, overcoming longstanding barriers to cross-authority collaboration in a two-tier area. This governance model is now recognised as a replicable approach for other UK regions lacking a combined authority structure.

GreenerFuture Leicestershire Business Advisory Service

This behaviour-informed service addressed a national challenge: fewer than 1% of SMEs typically access structured net zero support.

[Read the evaluation report](#)

SME engagement at scale

Between January and November 2025, the GreenerFuture Leicestershire Business Advisory Service supported **419** organisations, with **1,379** businesses engaged overall. The service combined simple diagnostics, tailored pathways and trusted local delivery to help SMEs turn intent into practical action.

What businesses achieved

Participating organisations implemented a wide range of improvements, including:

- energy efficiency upgrades
- renewable energy installations
- waste and materials reduction
- sustainable procurement changes
- 67 individuals achieved Carbon Literacy accreditation and 54 completed the Climate Leadership CPD programme — creating long-term capability within the local workforce.
- low-carbon transport measures
- biodiversity and nature-positive actions
- sustainability certifications and action plans

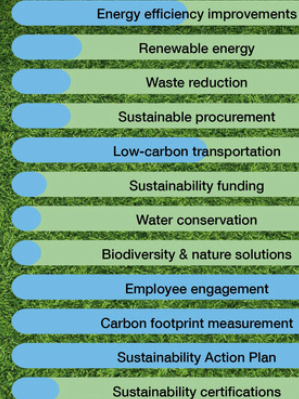
Uptake grew steadily throughout the year, with the strongest engagement coming in the final quarter as trust, visibility and peer recommendations increased. This included many SMEs who had never engaged with sustainability support before.

Project metrics

Carbon Savings Over **186 tonnes** CO₂e saved

Case Studies **13** published case studies

Range of Actions Implemented



Website

24,921 visits to resources page
1,175 visits to grants and funding page
300 diagnostic tool uses



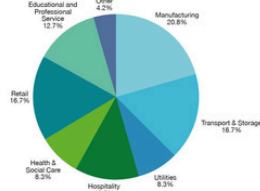
Research and Education



67 organisations Carbon Literacy accredited
46 workshops delivered
3 academic publications in preparation
Research disseminated at
1 international conference
1 national academic conference

Business Engagement

100 events including:
46 workshops **8** exhibitions
Spoke to **1,379** businesses



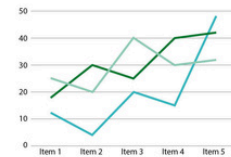
Business Support

419 businesses received direct support

- Stage 1: Essentials - Your sustainability start
- Stage 2: Growth - Sustainability in practice
- Stage 3: Leadership - Innovating for sustainability
- Climate Leadership Action Programme

Social Media

Online marketing campaign reached **577,167** impressions



LinkedIn organic activity = **500** followers, over **50,000** impressions and **90** reposts



Supporting Local People, Empowering Businesses

Boost your business' competitive edge with fully funded 1-1 consultancy

greenerfutureleicestershire.co.uk



Some of the businesses that completed the 6 week GreenerFuture Leicestershire CPD course

Skills, education and behaviour change

Carbon Literacy Training (CLT)

Since 2023, the three partner universities have trained 1697 people to be carbon literate, creating a permanent legacy of climate expertise across the regional workforce:

- 320 staff
- 1048 students
- 329 external participants, including 67 local organisations.

Using the Carbon Literacy Project's own impact data, we estimate our participants have saved up to **7,000 tCO₂e** from their pledged actions.

Student Climate Action Guide

Launching summer 2026

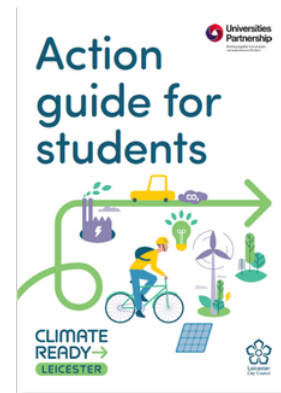
Developed with Leicester City Council, this guide provides practical steps for students to reduce their environmental impact and engage in local climate action.

Graduate and careers skills development

- Sustainability training for careers teams across all three universities (30 careers colleagues)
- Graduate programme pilot supporting SMEs to attract and retain talent
- 107 student sustainability auditors trained (Race to Zero legacy)



Carbon Literacy participants playing 'How Bad are Bananas' - a carbon footprint game developed by a Leicestershire SME



Skills, education and behaviour change

Example projects

Sustainability in schools

Collaborative project with LCC – small group of Sustainability Ambassadors going into primary schools to deliver assemblies and lessons on waste & recycling. Delivered to over 100 school pupils so far.

Community workshops

Community workshops with the Falcon Centre (also a [GFL case study](#)) making draft excluders from LU's unwanted duvets to go in all of their service user homes. Attendees included Falcon Centre service users and LU students and staff



The **Sustainability Enterprise Partnership Project (SEPP)** is an interdisciplinary, work-related module in which students partner with local organisations to undertake sustainability audits, producing tailored reports and recommendations. This directly supports Universities Partnership priorities by contributing to local climate action whilst developing student green skills and employability.

Nature recovery and biodiversity

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) alignment

UP universities are supporting Leicestershire County Council to map nature recovery opportunities, linking campus biodiversity work with regional priorities.

Biodiversity Literacy Training (2025-6 pilot)

Funded through the theme's allocation, this pilot aims to build capacity for nature recovery across universities and partners.

Citizen science: Bioblitz and community events

Regular bioblitz events, Make a Difference days and other initiatives have engaged over 200 university staff and students in community projects, mapping local biodiversity, feeding into LNRS evidence.

The Leicestershire Climate and Nature Pact

Key Principles

- ✓ We commit to constructively **working together** to strengthen climate action which supports sustainable development.
- ✓ We support a **just transition** which ensures equality, inclusivity and enables local communities to take climate action.
- ✓ We recognise the important **role of civil society** including youth and children in addressing and responding to climate change and the need for cooperative action.
- ✓ We recognise the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and other global events and the need for **sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery and growth**.
- ✓ We recognise and support the **climate and ecological emergency** and the need to take climate action alongside protecting and enhancing ecosystems and biodiversity.
- ✓ We commit to **accelerating and taking decisive action** to 2030; the definitive decade.

[Read more about Biodiversity
Literacy Training](#)



Research, evaluation and civic engagement



SDG mapping and international recognition

Amira Kofi-Dhere's SDG mapping work received an RCE 2025 Award for excellence in Education for Sustainable Development.

[View the 2023 SDG Mapping Report](#)

Carbon evaluation for Leicester City Council

DMU supported the evaluation of carbon emissions from the City's festivals and events programme, producing a report and two MSc dissertations.

Co(I)laboratory projects



Collab for short, is a pioneering, collaborative research programme that aims to bring together researchers, community-focused organisations, and citizens to deliver meaningful change for the people of our local communities.

Projects supported by UP ES Theme:

Improving Health and Reducing Fuel Poverty: A Community-led Retrofit Approach for Homes in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland ([read more](#)).

Conclusion

Since launch, the Environmental Sustainability Theme has shifted from early pilots to the current coordinated, evidence-driven programme of regional delivery. Through LCAN, the GreenerFuture SME advisory service, skills programmes, biodiversity initiatives and civic partnerships, the Universities Partnership has built the governance, data, skills and community capacity needed for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to navigate a rapidly changing sustainability landscape.

This work now underpins local priorities around climate adaptation, energy resilience and economic regeneration and positions the region strongly for future combined-authority arrangements and investment opportunities. The result is a more connected, capable and confident local system — one that can turn long-term environmental ambition into practical, inclusive and investable action.

Priorities for 2026-2028

- Expand Biodiversity Literacy Training
- Strengthen university estate-based nature initiatives
- Embed LAEP insights into economic development
- Scale the GreenerFuture advisory model with new investment
- Community Climate Coaches programme
- Develop a shared Civic Impact dashboard
- Deepen collaboration with EMCCA on green skills
- Continue SDG mapping with integrity and transparency

