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Nature Positive Universities Pledge Update 2023

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What is the Nature Positive Universities Pledge?

The Nature Positive Universities Pledge requires us to restore species and ecosystems that have been harmed by our direct and indirect actions. It is not enough to halt the loss of nature; we must work to reverse nature loss so that by 2030 nature is visibly and measurably on the path to recovery. The scheme was developed and administered by UNEP and Oxford University and is administered by a team at Oxford University.

Our direct actions are the clearest and most visible opportunities for improvement. These actions include increasing the biodiversity of our sites and changing our operational processes and behaviours. Our indirect opportunities are less visible but are likely to result in considerably bigger impacts compared to our direct actions. Indirect actions include making changes to our learning, teaching and research works, how we encourage others to be more sustainable, and how we procure goods and services.

As part of our Nature Positive Pledge, we must measure our biodiversity baseline, set timescales & targets for improvements, analyse our ongoing performance and report on our actions. We are required to submit a report on our progress by the 30th of November 2023, via an online form. This report outlines the Nature Positive Pledge, our current progress, and planned actions.

Baseline Performance

In line with the requirements of the Nature Positive Pledge, we have carried out baseline biodiversity assessments of our three main campuses, as well as Missenden Abbey and Pinewood Studios. These assessments were carried out in the year 2022-2023 before we carried out any biodiversity improvement works. The assessments were carried out by Future Nature, the consulting arm of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. A qualified member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) carried out the assessments.

Worst Sites

The site with the lowest biodiversity is Pinewood Studios. This was expected as our site is made up of one building with no external grounds. Our domain has zero units of biodiversity. Due to the lack of external space, our opportunities to make improvements are therefore limited, though we may be able to work with Pinewood Studios to enhance other areas of the site.

Our second worst site for overall biodiversity is Uxbridge with 3 biodiversity units, as despite the small pockets of green space to the front and side of the building, the site has low total ecological value.

Aylesbury has a total of 6.7 biodiversity units, double the biodiversity units of Uxbridge. However, due to its larger footprint, it has a lower score relative to its area than Uxbridge.

At the time of the assessment, our High Wycombe campus was measured to have 14.8 biodiversity units, but due to the size of the site, it scored between Aylesbury and Uxbridge

when considering biodiversity units/m². It is anticipated that the biodiversity of the site has since improved and will continue to improve as we carry out further projects.

Best Sites

Our best site for overall biodiversity units is Missenden Abbey, with 33.5 biodiversity units. The site has a higher score due to the large number of trees and the presence of a meadow to the north of the site. Though there are plenty of opportunities for improvement, the manicured lawns limit the score and offer the greatest opportunity for improvement.

While Missenden Abbey has the highest total biodiversity score, it does not have the highest score relative to its footprint. Uxbridge has the highest ratio of biodiversity units per square metre, followed by Missenden Abbey. Rather than this being an endorsement of our Uxbridge site, this should be interpreted as showing the scale of the opportunity we have to improve our other sites.

Targets

Greening urban campuses is also one of the key priorities we set ourselves as part of our Sustainability Strategy. To help us to achieve our ambition we made biodiversity one of the Strategic Areas in our Sustainability Strategy.

These targets have been taken from our Sustainability Strategy

- 1 To produce a baseline measurement of biodiversity across our three main campuses in the year 2022-2023
- 2 To develop a simple biodiversity impact assessment that can be used to assess the expected impact of any new project by the end of the year 2022-2023
- 3 Develop a biodiversity action plan to improve biodiversity across our three main campuses by the end of 2024-2025
- 4 To require all building projects to achieve a biodiversity net gain of 10%
- 5 Carry out three projects each year to improve the biodiversity of our sites through habitat improvement projects from 2023-2024

While our biodiversity targets are largely focused on the direct benefits of greening our campus, we have also set ourselves targets to move towards a sustainable procurement system. A substantial element of this will be the measurement of environmental, social, and economic sustainability benefits associated with the procurement of goods and services.

Progress against Targets

- 1 To produce a baseline measurement of biodiversity across our three main campuses in the year 2022-2023

We have carried out baseline assessments for all our campuses. Assessments of our residences will follow in the coming years.

- 2 To develop a simple biodiversity impact assessment that can be used to assess the expected impact of any new project by the end of the year 2022-2023

We have developed a new Equality and Sustainability Impact Assessment for new policies and projects, it is currently in draft form and needs to be approved by the Policy Oversight Group, Sustainability Committee and EDI Committee before implementation. Those completing the assessment are encouraged to consider how the project or policy will have a positive impact on biodiversity and our Nature Positive Pledge.

- 3 To develop a biodiversity action plan to improve biodiversity across our three main campuses by the end of 2024-2025

We are yet to develop our strategic action plan, instead, we are focusing on developing our processes, and procedures and developing stronger links with our contractors and suppliers.

- 4 To require all building projects to achieve a biodiversity net gain of 10%

Our current building projects are primarily refurbishment and fit-out projects on existing buildings with little to no existing biodiversity. We will be implementing biodiversity improvements as these projects develop.

- 5 Carry out three projects each year to improve the biodiversity of our sites through habitat improvement projects from 2023-2024

We have already completed three biodiversity improvement projects this academic year, with another two to three projects to follow this year.

Recent and Scheduled Activities

Nature Positive Campus Concept Plan

We appointed a sustainability-focused architectural practice to develop principles and concept plans for greening our High Wycombe campus. This project was focused on improving biodiversity, providing green spaces to boost well-being and the sustainable use of materials. We are now using these concepts to develop our long-term plans for the site.

Parklet

We acquired, refurbished, and replanted a parklet from the Local Authority and sited it at our Brook Street student residence. It includes approximately 30 plants from four different species. We would like to carry out further biodiversity activities across our student residences.

QEII Memorial Garden and Planting

The new Queen Elizabeth II Memorial Garden includes hundreds of new plants from approximately 40 different species with a focus on native, low-maintenance plants that boost biodiversity. We also planted a further 625 bulbs with a mix of snowdrops and honey garlic alliums which will grow in the spring. Several bat boxes were fitted as part of the project to encourage new species. A new 40m long hedgerow has also been planted alongside the Gateway building; over time this will become a valuable new habitat.

As part of their welcome activities, our international students planted daffodil bulbs near the large willow on our High Wycombe Campus. These should also bloom during spring and will help make the eastern side of the campus more welcoming and biodiverse.

Roof Garden

Our High Wycombe Redevelopment includes the creation of a new roof garden for staff and learners. We will be planting a range of new plants and low hedges as part of the finished roof garden works. As we are approaching winter, we will wait until spring to plant the garden to minimise the risk of losing new plants to frost and poor weather. As part of the new development, our main contractor will be installing four bird boxes and a bat box.

Wildflower Meadow

The existing wildflower meadow outside of South Wing has been mown and reseeded with a variety of native wildflower species. The meadow covers 175 square metres and includes at least 12 species of wildflowers in addition to any seeded this year. It is anticipated that the wildflower meadow will show an increased variety of wildflowers next year which will add to the biodiversity of the site.

Species planted include:

- Autumn Hawkbit
- Betony
- Bird's-foot Trefoil
- Bluebell
- Borage
- Common Agrimony
- Grasses
- Common Sorrel
- Cornflower
- Calendula
- Daisy
- Papaver

Owen Harris Grounds

We are working with Chiltern Rangers, a local environmental and social inclusion charity to carry out biodiversity works on our main campus. The project will deliver biodiversity improvements in the areas between Alexandra House and the western perimeter of the site.

The trees, planters, planting, and grassed areas surrounding Owen Harris and Car Park D will be improved by the end of 2023. Due to the age of the trees located at the perimeter of the site, some of them need trimming and others are recommended for removal entirely. These will be replaced with young trees and the materials reused.

Our students will be invited to take part in clearance and planting activities. This opportunity will both help to increase awareness of biodiversity issues and offer an opportunity for a well-being boost.

The project will include:

- Planting 35m of new native hedgerow next to Owen Harris
- Creating a new wildflower habitat next to Owen Harris
- Installing swift and sparrow boxes and a house sparrow terrace
- Improvements to the existing metalwork outside of Owen Harris
- Refurbishing and replanting the existing planters
- Trimming the existing perimeter trees to an appropriate height and extent
- Planting 200 new hedgerow plants
- Planting three new trees to replace older trees which are recommended for removal
- Removing the overgrown central island shrubs and reseeding the area with wildflowers
- Creating a stag beetle habitat from wood removed as part of the car park tree trimming activities

Summary Image

The following sketch shows the areas on the main campus that have been or will shortly undergo biodiversity improvements. The roof garden is marked, but not detailed as the work will be carried out in spring 2024.



Next steps

Over the next year, we intend to carry out further work to improve the biodiversity of the main campus by making the site greener and more pleasant to staff, learners and visitors. We also aim to carry out biodiversity improvement works to some of our student residences, as well as our Aylesbury campus. These plans will be developed over the coming years.

Due to the shift from low maintenance but low ecological value grasses to higher ecological value wildflower and planted areas, we aim to review our landscaping and grounds maintenance needs. We hope that our grounds partner will be able to support our ambition to improve the biodiversity of our sites.

Our indirect impacts are harder to quantify, which makes measuring progress challenging. We have started to change how we procure goods and services but acknowledge that there is more that we need to do. We intend to further develop our strategies for the sustainable procurement of goods and services over the coming years.

Consultation and Engagement

We have communicated our biodiversity projects with our staff and students through newsletter stories and discussions with our students, staff, local environment groups, and relevant contractors.

The topic is introduced in staff inductions and wider sustainability discussions. The BNU Student Union recently completed a Green Impact Survey which asked students for their opinions on our grounds. The data has been helpful and shows that the greening of sites is important to students, and they would like to see more green social spaces.

Greening projects offer us an ideal opportunity to offer our students and staff volunteering activities that can provide them with new skills, and opportunities to meet new people and help with well-being. Our Student Union is eager to be able to provide students with biodiversity-focused volunteering opportunities.



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