



Environmental sustainability strategy

2025 – 2030

Environmental sustainability strategy
2025 – 2030

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Foreword

Sustainability is the defining issue of our time. It is now more certain than ever, based on many lines of evidence, that humans are changing Earth's climate and destroying its life.

From rising sea temperatures, disappearing glaciers, devastating loss of habitat and keystone species, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events, the impact of these changes is already being felt. As these patterns intensify and overlap, they will present major challenges to the global population, disproportionately affecting the lives and livelihoods of those least able to adapt.

The social, economic and ethical implications of climate change and biodiversity loss are profound. It is imperative that we act. Science has played a key role in establishing these phenomena as human-made. It has identified the causes, as well as the nature and scale of the challenge that climate change and biodiversity loss present for humanity. Science will also be crucial to the development of the new technologies and methodologies that will enable us to shift away from carbon-intensive modes of production and to develop the tools and techniques to help us adapt to increasingly volatile climatic conditions whilst giving nature enough space to sustain itself, and us.



Sir Adrian Smith,
President of the Royal Society

The Royal Society, founded in 1660, has seen its share of challenges. Climate change, destruction of biodiversity and unsustainable use of natural resources are amongst the most urgent challenges of the 21st Century, increasingly recognised as requiring global transformation if humans and other species are to live within Earth's capacity to support life. True to our motto – *Nullius in verba* or 'take nobody's word for it' – the Society will approach this challenge with facts, rigour, and the scientific method.

In this strategy we present a challenging, but achievable, vision for playing our part as an organisation to meeting the challenge of our times. The reality of this vision is that significant change is required by the Society; the evidence shows that small tweaks or business-as-usual will not be sufficient if we are to reach our headline ambition of being a net-zero organisation by 2040, with clear biodiversity actions set out by 2027.

During this journey we aim to be transparent about the limitations and assumptions of our data and about progress towards our ambitions; we will learn, iterate and improve. To help us do that, we will implement this strategy using five guiding principles of action: science-based; comprehensive; iterative; transparent; and inclusive.



Dame Julie Maxton,
Executive Director of the Royal Society

Executive summary

This document sets out the vision for an environmentally sustainable Royal Society and a set of strategic priorities, high-level actions and ambitions, as well as considerations for delivery of the strategy between 2025 and 2030.

Vision: The Royal Society is committed to using its profile, reach and convening power to pursue an environmentally sustainable future, whilst at the same time reducing the environmental footprint of its own activities and building resilience to the impacts of environmental change on the people, infrastructure and activities related to its operations.

To deliver this vision the Society aims to address three strategic priorities: 1) to reduce the impact of our operations; 2) to adapt to risks, and 3) to champion scientific contributions for societal transformation. Each of these priorities will be addressed through the three cross-cutting lenses of climate, biodiversity, and resource use. We aim to:

1. **Reduce the impact of our operations on climate, biodiversity and resource use by:**
 - a) reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from all our operations with the aim of reaching net zero by 2035 for Scope 1 and 2 (covering our direct use of energy and fugitive refrigerant gases, subject to feasibility studies) and net zero by 2040 (for Scope 1, 2 and core Scope 3 emissions, ie those where we have more control including purchasing and procurement of goods and services, business travel and catering);
 - b) working with stakeholders to influence actions that promote environmental sustainability, in particular for the wider Scope 3 emissions, where we only have indirect control, such as research grant funding and investments;
 - c) improving the quantification of greenhouse gas emissions arising from the Society's operations between now and 2030;
 - d) reaching a considered position on the use of carbon sequestration or carbon offsetting as part of our net zero ambitions by 2027;
 - e) demonstrating how our actions are reducing impacts on biodiversity for selected impact areas, actions and drivers of biodiversity by 2027; and
 - f) improving our understanding and quantification of our impacts on biodiversity and other material impacts related to our consumption of natural resources and pollution, with a view to adopting more specific actions and key performance measures by 2027.
2. **Adapt to climate, ecological and transition-related risks by:**
 - a) assessing, monitoring and reviewing at regular intervals the climate, ecological and transition-related risks to the Society's operations; and
 - b) identifying the priorities and options for actions to reduce and adapt to the risks to the Society, prioritising those aspects that are most vulnerable and within the Society's direct control or influence, and the risks that are most significant and urgent, making progress on this by 2027.
3. **Champion scientific contributions for societal transformation:**
 - a) We will continue to harness the expertise of the Fellowship to inform debate around the science of climate change, biodiversity loss and solutions to a range of threats to environmental sustainability.
 - b) We will work with global scientific institutions, policy-makers and other stakeholders to make the case for change.
 - c) We will continue to fund and publish high quality research that advances both the understanding of our world, and the solutions we need to address the problems it faces.
 - d) We will bring together world-class researchers and industry leaders to share knowledge and collaborate on the innovations that will be crucial to securing a sustainable future.
 - e) We will engage with the public to ensure that they are informed about the realities of climate change and biodiversity loss and work with schools and universities to inspire the next generation of environmental scientists.

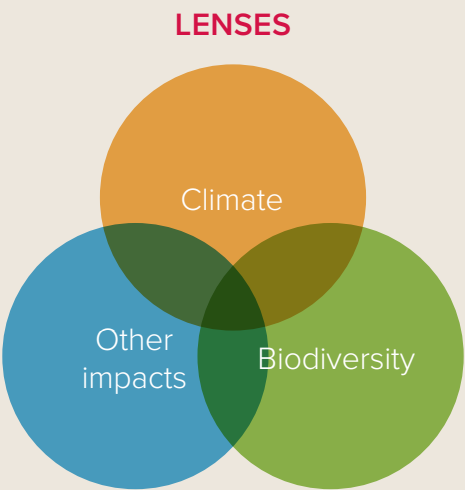
The scope of the strategy is designed to cover a broad range of the Society's activities. We pick out seven impact areas where actions to address the strategic priorities will focus, either due to the large contribution they make to greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity impacts, or due to the strategic importance of addressing them. These are energy and waste, investments, research funding, purchasing and procurement, digital and IT, business travel, and food and beverage.

We have assessed our baseline greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity footprint across our activities for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Total emissions for the year were estimated as 107,000 tonnes CO₂e. The initial baseline data shows that areas where we have less direct control within Scope 3 (investments and research funding) account for over 90% of our total greenhouse gas emissions and 87% of the biodiversity footprint, whilst other areas of Scope 3 including purchased goods and services and business travel account for around 8% of our greenhouse gas emissions and 11% of the biodiversity footprint. In contrast, Scope 1 and 2 emissions (direct emissions from fossil fuel burning, fugitive refrigerant gases and indirect emissions from purchased electricity) represent only 0.35% of our greenhouse gas emissions.

This document outlines how the Society will work with key stakeholders including the fellowship, employees, grant recipients, our landlord and suppliers to deliver the strategy and monitor progress, in a way that is science-based, comprehensive, iterative, transparent and inclusive. The framework for this strategy is illustrated on page 7.

This strategy will be reviewed in 2029.

Environmental sustainability strategy framework



Vision

Royal Society mission

The Royal Society's mission – to promote excellence in science and the application of science for the benefit of humanity – remains unchanged since its creation in the 1660s.

The Society has three roles that are key to performing its purpose. It is a Fellowship of many of the world's most eminent scientists and is the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence. It is a registered charity, undertaking a range of activities that provide public benefit either directly or indirectly. As a national academy, it represents the UK and collaborates with international partners to advocate for science and its benefits.

Environmental sustainability vision

Throughout its long history, the Royal Society has fostered debate around some of the most pressing challenges of the day and sought to champion science for the benefit of humanity.

As part of this continued legacy, the Royal Society is committed to using its profile, reach and convening power to pursue an environmentally sustainable future, whilst at the same time reducing the environmental footprint of its own activities and building resilience to the impacts of environmental change on the people, infrastructure and activities related to its operations.

Through the funding of cutting-edge research and informing and inspiring the public to act, by investing in and promoting change both within and without the organisation, and by integrating tangible change into our daily activity, we will play our part in safeguarding our planet for generations to come.

Delivering the vision

Below we set out how the Society aims to deliver the strategy for three strategic priorities, through the following ambitions (further detail is given under the section on the strategic priorities):

Reduce the impact of our operations

- We will aim to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the direct use of energy and fugitive refrigerant gases in the premises occupied by the Society to net zero by 2035 (Scope 1 and 2 emissions), subject to a detailed feasibility study of a range of options.
- We will work to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from all our operations with the aim of reaching net zero by 2040 (to include Scope 1, Scope 2 and core Scope 3 emissions).
 - To do this we will work on an action plan to reduce emissions and other environmental impacts for those areas we have direct control over (core Scope 3 emissions) including purchasing and procurement of goods and services, business travel and catering.
 - For those areas we have only indirect control over (wider Scope 3 emissions) such as research grant funding and investments, we will work with stakeholders to influence actions that promote environmental sustainability through reducing emissions and other environmental impacts.
- We will work to improve the quantification of both the core and wider Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions arising from the Society's operations between now and 2030.
- We will reach a considered position on the use of carbon sequestration or carbon offsetting as part of our net zero ambitions by 2027.
- We aim to demonstrate how our actions are reducing impacts on biodiversity for selected impact areas, actions and drivers of biodiversity by 2027.
- We will improve our understanding and quantification of our impacts on biodiversity and other material impacts related to our consumption of natural resources and pollution, with a view to adopting more specific biodiversity related actions and suitable key performance measures related to indirect biodiversity impacts, resource use and waste management by 2027.

Adapt to climate, ecological and transition-related risks

- We will assess the climate, ecological and transition-related risks specific to the Society's operations and incorporate these into the Society's risk register.
- We will identify the priorities and options for actions to reduce and adapt to the risks to the Society's premises and infrastructure, assets and archives, operations, fellowship, employees, visitors and other stakeholders, prioritising those aspects that are most vulnerable and within the Society's direct control or influence, and the risks that are most significant and urgent. We aim to make progress with this by 2027.
- We will monitor the changing nature of climate, ecological and transition-related risks and review these at regular intervals.

Champion scientific contributions for societal transformation

- We will continue to harness the expertise of the Fellowship to inform debate around the science of climate change, biodiversity loss and solutions to a range of threats to environmental sustainability.
- We will work with global scientific institutions, policy-makers and other stakeholders to make the case for change.
- We will continue to fund and publish high quality research that advances both the understanding of our world, and the solutions we need to address the problems it faces.
- We will bring together world-class researchers and industry leaders to share knowledge and collaborate on the innovations that will be crucial to securing a sustainable future.
- We will engage with the public to ensure that they are informed about the realities of climate change and biodiversity loss and work with schools and universities to inspire the next generation of environmental scientists.

Implementing this strategy

- We will work with our Fellowship, employees, landlord, grant recipients and suppliers to implement this strategy in a way that is science-based, comprehensive, iterative, transparent, and inclusive.
- We will develop a set of Key Performance Indicators to monitor our progress in implementing this strategy.
- We will review this environmental sustainability strategy in 2029.

Introduction

The case for change

The science is clear. The climate is changing at an unprecedented rate, primarily driven by human activities. This rapid change poses a significant challenge for all life on Earth, including humanity, which will struggle to adapt if fragile ecosystems are allowed to collapse and conditions for life become increasingly inhospitable.

We are already witnessing the consequences of climate change through increased wildfire incidences, extreme heat, rising sea levels, and more frequent and severe rainfall and storms. Alongside these climate impacts, biodiversity loss is a critical issue that demands urgent attention. The primary drivers of biodiversity loss – land use change, climate change, overexploitation, invasive species, and pollution – are all linked to human activities.

Moreover, our current patterns of resource consumption are unsustainable. As a society, we are living beyond the planet's capacity to regenerate and support future generations, pushing the boundaries of what our planet can endure.

To mitigate these negative outcomes, we must address the root causes of these issues. This requires a collective effort to rethink and change our behaviours and policies to ensure a sustainable and thriving future for all.

We see efforts to address these challenges on a global scale, such as through the Sustainable Development Goals, international forums like the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and international treaties such as the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Nationally, the UK Parliament declared an environment and climate emergency in 2019, and the UK Government set a target for net zero emissions by 2050, and a 78% reduction from 1990 levels by 2035 across all sectors. In 2022, the UK Government set a series of targets for halting declines in species populations in the UK by 2030 and restoring the quality of UK biodiversity, water bodies, air quality, and Marine Protected Areas, as well as reducing waste.

We must all play our part. As the Royal Society, we have been actively involved in informing this debate through our policy and engagement work. Now, we are in a position to enact evidence-based organisational changes that reflect robust scientific advice.

In keeping with its founding principle of promoting science for the benefit of humanity, the Royal Society is committed to supporting solutions that will help to slow the rate of climate and environmental change and minimise its impact on communities. At the same time, the Royal Society will work to reduce the environmental footprint of its own activities and accelerate the steps it is already taking towards more sustainable and resilient modes of working.

Lenses

Climate change, biodiversity and resource use are not only significant in their own right, but they are also intrinsically linked through complex relationships. Action in many areas, particularly those which relate to upstream and downstream value chains, will reduce climate, biodiversity and resource use impacts due to their interlinked nature.

Practically however, wherever possible, it is helpful to approach addressing the impacts that our activities are having through each of these three lenses, as it allows for a more nuanced and targeted, and ultimately more successful approach to be taken.

- **Climate:**

a more mature reporting area driven by global policy initiatives, reporting standards and regulation. This strategy details our approach to measuring our impact on the climate through greenhouse gas emissions, guided by globally-standard approaches.

- **Biodiversity:**

a nascent consideration for organisations due to a focus that is only recently beginning to gain traction in global and national policy. The development and implementation of this strategy necessitates a more research-based approach to understanding our impact on global biodiversity.

- **Other impacts:**

We will consider our material consumption of resources and contribution to pollution. Our initial areas of focus will be: our overall levels of material consumption and management of waste; use of rare elements – for example in IT and other electronic equipment; use of single and short-term use-plastics; water consumption, and emissions of combustion particulates that contribute to reduced air quality and health impacts.

Scope

As a Fellowship, charity and national academy, the Royal Society undertakes a broad and varied range of activities. This strategy is designed to be comprehensive and, as such, its scope is correspondingly large. The parameters for this ambitious strategy on environmental sustainability are outlined below.

The focus is on environmental sustainability. Social aspects of sustainability are not covered in this strategy except where they specifically overlap with environmental sustainability. An example of this is the principle of inclusivity in the development and implementation of the strategy, which draws on the Society's work under its diversity and inclusion strategy.

Activities

All Society-delivered activity is within the scope of this strategy. This includes activities that further the mission of the Society, such as awarding grants to fund scientific research, providing scientific advice for policy, promoting scientific education and engagement, supporting scientific collaboration, recognising scientific excellence, scientific publishing, as well as trading and support activities such as conferencing activities, facilities management, procurement, information technology, digital communications, fundraising and financial management of investments. We acknowledge that progress in some areas will move at significantly different speeds to others, and have factored that into our approach. We will endeavour to have a positive impact both on activities that we have direct control over, such as the energy used in heating and cooling the building, purchasing of goods and services, and business travel paid for directly by the Society, and those activities we can influence only indirectly, such as the activities funded by research and collaboration grants.

Time

This strategy sets direction and empowers environmental sustainability activities across the Society from 2025 – 2030 and will feed into the development of the Society's next organisational strategic plan. While it presents longer-term goals beyond this, it is expected that this environmental sustainability strategy will be reviewed and updated before 2030.

Uncertainty

This strategy, and the implementation plans that will be developed to deliver it, are reliant on a range of data, assumptions and methods of analysis. For some elements we have higher confidence in the accuracy and precision, whilst other aspects will be much less certain but are nevertheless useful for indicating the order of magnitude difference between the impacts of different activities. We acknowledge that we may need to revise estimates of greenhouse gas emissions, resource use and impacts on biodiversity, as data and methodologies are refined.

Principles

The Society undertakes to apply the following five principles to our environmental sustainability approach:

1. **Science-based:**
a commitment to base decisions on the best available evidence.
2. **Comprehensive:**
a commitment to consider the entirety of our activity and resultant impacts, both positive and negative, on the climate, biodiversity and other important areas of resource use and pollution, as well as changes to the risks to the organisation from climate and environment-related threats.
3. **Iterative:**
a commitment to a process of 'analysis – planning – implementation – review – revision' to ratchet up activity, starting with early actions to build confidence and capability.
4. **Transparent:**
a commitment to be open and honest in our data collection, analysis and decision-making, and to not shy away from stating assumptions and highlighting uncertainties or inconsistencies.
5. **Inclusive:**
a commitment to implementing this strategy in an inclusive and collaborative manner that ensures positive interlinkages with the Society's social sustainability agenda and strategy for diversity and inclusion.

Strategic priorities

The Royal Society is committed to an environmentally sustainable future and will tackle the three-fold challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and resource management in a combined, holistic manner. To address these issues, we will pursue three complementary approaches:

1. Reducing the negative impacts of the organisation's operations;
2. Adapting to a changing world; and
3. Acting as an advocate for science that facilitates a swift and equitable transition.

Reducing negative impacts on the climate, biodiversity and resource use

Measuring the baseline

We have selected our environmental baseline as 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, which aligns with our financial reporting period. For this period, we calculated the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the Society's activities. We also estimated the indirect impacts of our activities on biodiversity and conducted a preliminary qualitative assessment of the importance of other impacts in relation to resource use and pollution. We were supported in this work by consultants from SUMS Consulting, the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education (EAUC) and Wild Business. Appendix 3 shows the baseline data and further information on how we measured the baseline is included in Appendix 4.

Climate: greenhouse gas emissions of our operations

Greenhouse gas emissions are split into Scope 1 (direct emissions from burning of fossil fuels and fugitive refrigerant gases), Scope 2 (indirect emissions from the purchase of electricity) and Scope 3 (indirect emissions from upstream and downstream activities), as described in Figure 1.

We calculated our total 2023 – 2024 greenhouse gas emissions to be 107,000 tonnes CO₂e (see figure 2 (top) and Appendix 3). This is dominated by our Scope 3 emissions, primarily the impact of our financial assets within our investment portfolio and spending through our grants programme to fund scientific research and collaboration, which together add up to just over 90% of the total emissions. The emissions we have most direct control over are our Scope 1 and 2 emissions, which represent 0.35% of our total emissions (see lower part of Figure 2).

Our Scope 1 emissions of 185 tonnes CO₂e arise from the premises the Society currently occupies in central London, 6 – 9 Carlton House Terrace, a Grade 1 listed building leased from the Crown Estate. It is equipped with six gas boilers providing heat and hot water to the building and cooled with air conditioning units which emit small amounts of refrigerant gases. Gas is also used for cooking.

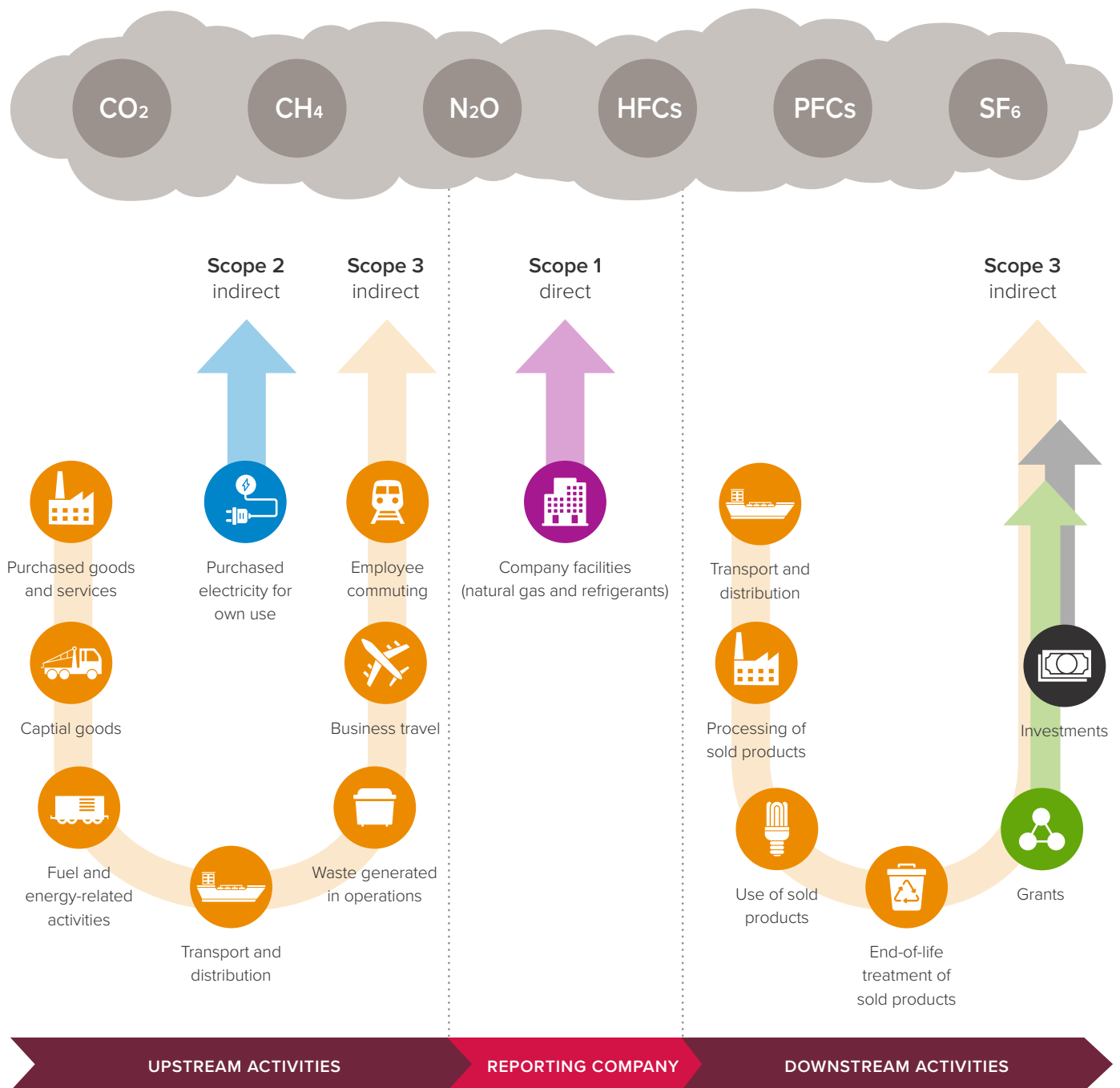
Our Scope 2 emissions are 190 tonnes CO₂e from purchased electricity, calculated using the location-based method stipulated for reporting by the GHG Protocol, which uses average emissions per kWh for the entire UK grid. Under a market-based method these emissions would be considered to contribute 0 tonnes since they are purchased under a 100% renewable energy tariff, if supported by appropriate certification.

Our Scope 3 emissions, which represent 99.65% of our emissions are considered indirect in that they arise either upstream, in the production of supplied goods and services, or downstream, in the use and disposal of assets, goods and services supplied by the Royal Society (see figure 1). Given the Society can influence some of these emissions through organisational decisions, we consider some of these emissions as 'core' to the Royal Society's activities whilst others can be considered as part of the 'wider' carbon footprint of the Society, as shown in the upper part of figure 2.

The largest of the 'core' Scope 3 emissions arise from purchased goods and services (5.83% of 2023 – 2024 emissions, 38% of which arise from information and communications technology and services); and business travel (1.74% of 2023 – 2024 emissions). In the 'wider' carbon footprint we include the Scope 3 emissions associated with grants for research and collaboration given by the Royal Society (62% of 2023 – 2024 emissions) and the share of the Scope 1 and 2 emissions of the companies invested in (29.9% of 2023 – 2024 emissions). These are both areas where the Society is further from direct control over the emissions and the estimates of their magnitude are least certain. An estimate of the Society's share of the Scope 3 emissions of the companies invested is shown in figure 2 (top), but not included in the total carbon emissions estimate of 107,000 tonnes CO₂e due to the large uncertainties associated with the estimation and concerns over double counting (see Appendix 3 and 4 for further detail).

FIGURE 1

Sources of greenhouse gas emissions across the value chain for the Royal Society¹

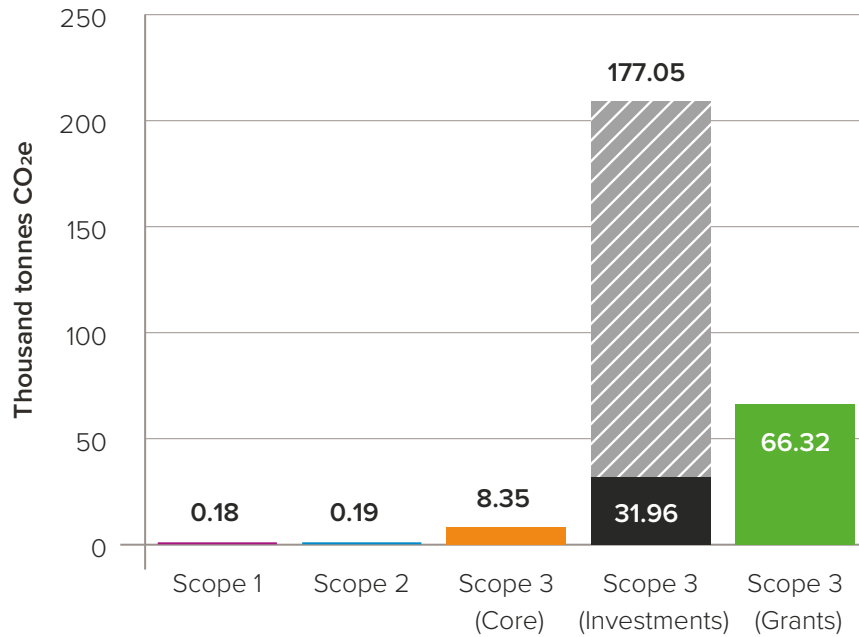


¹ Figure adapted from WRI/WBCSD GHG Protocol. Corporate Value Chain (Scope 3) Accounting and Reporting Standard, figure 1.1, September 2011, See <https://ghgprotocol.org> (Accessed 8 April 2025).

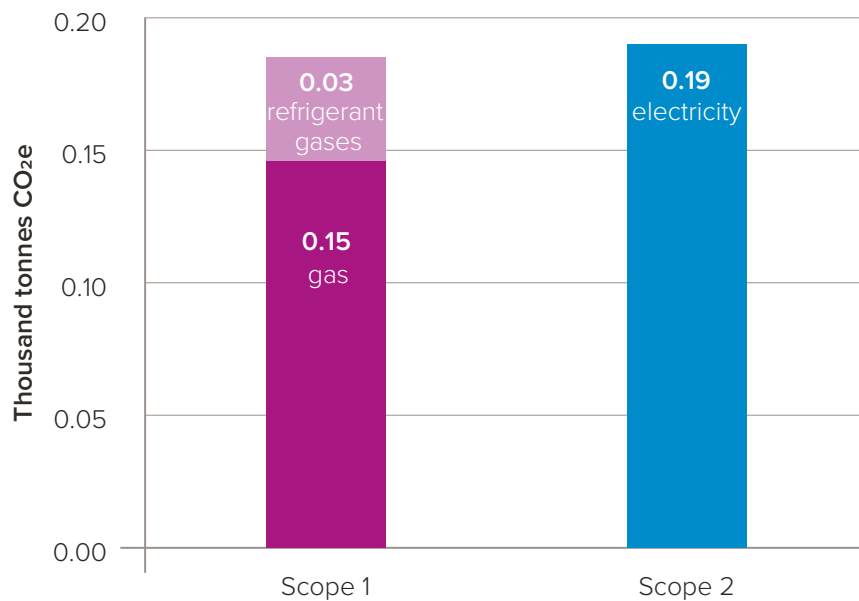
FIGURE 2

The Royal Society greenhouse gas emissions (2023 – 2024)

Total emissions for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 are estimated as 107,000 tCO₂e. This total includes core emissions from Scope 1 and Scope 2, core strands of Scope 3, as well as the estimated wider emissions from grants and Scope 1 and 2 emissions associated with investments. It excludes the wider carbon emissions associated with Scope 3 from investments (an estimate for which is shown in hatched grey).



Scope 1 and 2 emissions for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 are estimated as 375 tCO₂e.



Climate: reduction of greenhouse gas emissions

The Society will aim to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the direct use of energy and fugitive refrigerant gases in the premises occupied by the Society to net zero by 2035 (Scope 1 and 2 emissions). This ambition will be subject to feasibility assessments that will include a range of options to improve energy efficiency and decarbonise the energy supplies for the premises the Society occupies, taking into account constraints such as leaseholder and listed building status.

Additionally, we will aim to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from all our operations to reach net zero by 2040, to include Scope 1, Scope 2 and the core strands of Scope 3 emissions. Some emissions reductions will result from decarbonisation in the wider economy, however the extent and pace of this is difficult to predict and the Society's own efforts towards decarbonisation will remain important.

To reduce core Scope 3 emissions, we will work on an action plan to reduce emissions and other environmental impacts for those areas we have a higher degree of control over including purchasing and procurement of goods and services (5.83% of 2023 – 2024 emissions); business travel (1.74% of 2023 – 2024 emissions) and catering (0.93% of 2023 – 2024 emissions).

For those areas we have only indirect control over (wider Scope 3 emissions) such as research grant funding (62% of emissions) and investments (29.9% of emissions), we will work with stakeholders to influence actions that reduce emissions and other environmental impacts.

To support this ambitious aspiration, between now and 2030 we will seek to continuously improve the quantification of the both the core and wider Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions arising from the Society's operations.

Whilst we will prioritise efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our operations, the Society recognises that it is likely it will not be able to fully meet its aspirations towards net zero without some activities to support carbon sequestration, for example through funding offsetting activities. We will work towards reaching a considered position on the use of carbon sequestration or carbon offsetting by 2027 and take decisive steps towards implementation, capturing value as soon as meaningfully possible.

Biodiversity impacts of our operations

The Royal Society does not own or manage any land and therefore its impact on biodiversity is indirect, through the goods and services supplied to the Society and through the use and disposal of funding, goods and services supplied by the Society to others. Despite its indirect nature the Society considers it important to understand and reduce its impact on biodiversity and show leadership on tackling the global biodiversity crisis.

We recognise the relative level of immaturity in biodiversity-impact reporting when compared to climate and that, by necessity, biodiversity impact reporting is currently more of a scientific research project. Methods, models and data availability are thus constantly evolving.

A life cycle impact assessment approach has been used to estimate the indirect impacts of our activities on biodiversity. This utilised data analysis and modelled relationships to understand the magnitude of impacts on the key drivers of biodiversity loss, such as land and water use, water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. These were then combined to estimate resulting changes in a global measure of species diversity. Further details of the method can be found in Appendix 4.

The assessment reveals broad correlation between our high-carbon activities and those with a large biodiversity impact. Around 87% of our total biodiversity impact can be assigned to our grants operations and investment activity combined. Despite running a large catering business delivering around 600 events per year, only a little over 1% of our biodiversity impact comes from food, whereas business travel contributes 3.6 % of the total.

Given the uncertainty around the data and lack of scientific consensus on accounting approaches, we do not believe we can currently adopt a meaningfully specific biodiversity ambition beyond aiming to ensure the actions we take to reduce carbon emissions will also reduce impacts on biodiversity. We also aim to collect evidence for some of the more material impacts, related actions, and drivers of biodiversity loss, such as land use, to be able to demonstrate how our actions can contribute to reduction in biodiversity loss. We aspire to make progress on this by 2027. Beyond that, to address this lack of knowledge, we commit to improving the understanding and quantification of our impacts on biodiversity and other material impacts related to our consumption of natural resources and pollution, with a view to adopting specific biodiversity related actions and suitable key performance indicators or ambitions by 2027, drawing on emerging guidance in this area.

Other impacts: natural resource use and pollution

Other impacts not covered by greenhouse gases and biodiversity, have been explored using a materiality-based assessment with reference to the concept of Planetary Boundaries (see figure 3). This is a widely accepted framework for understanding the biophysical boundaries of humanity's impact on Earth, to which we have added the element of resource consumption to reflect our role as a consuming organisation.

The materiality assessment reveals several hotspot areas already covered in this strategy through other lenses – climate change, biosphere integrity, and land system change. It also reveals three new areas where we are likely to be having an unsustainable impact, namely use of single-use plastics, emissions of combustion particulates, and material consumption of resources including rare elements.

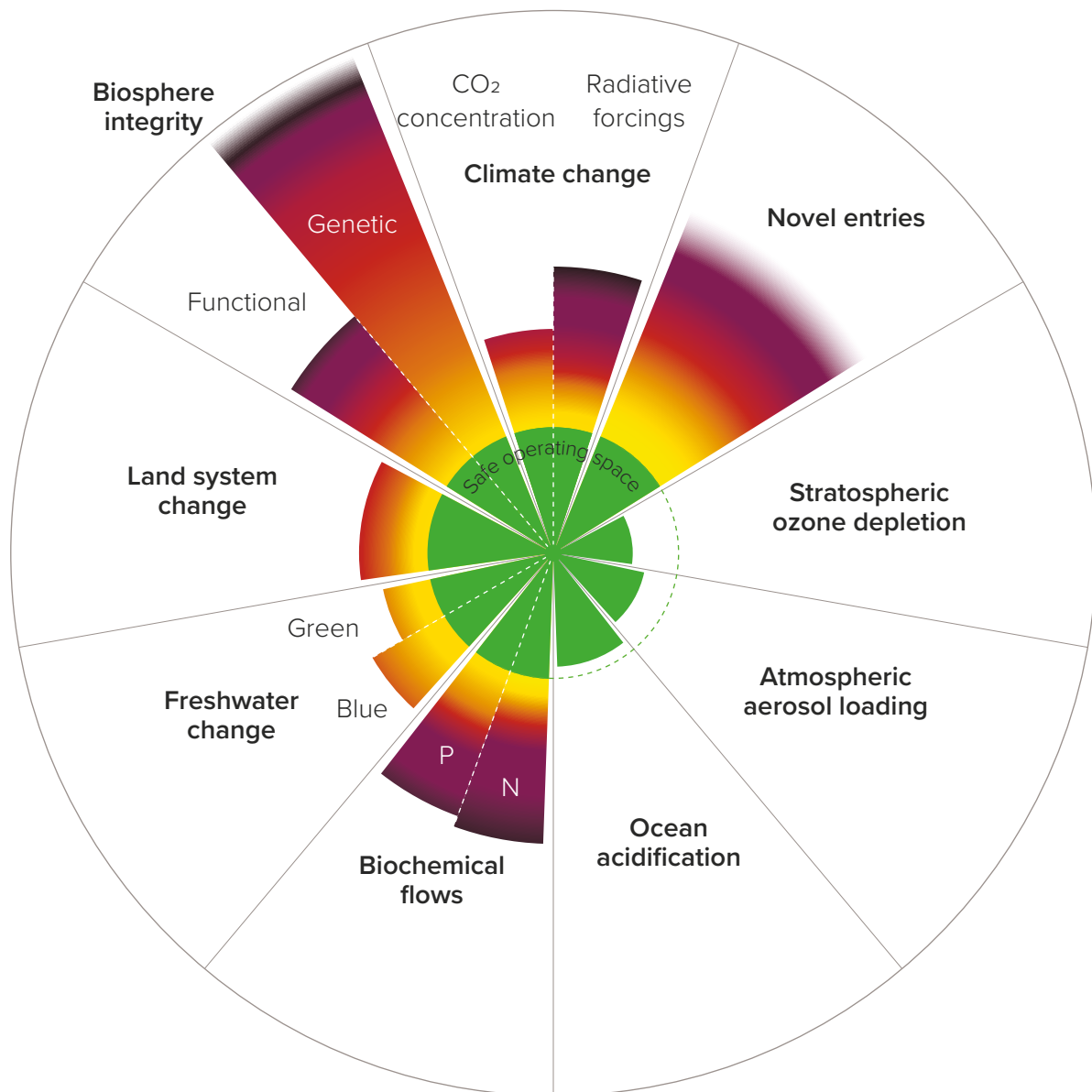
Similarly to our biodiversity approach, we do not believe we are currently in a position to adopt a meaningful ambition on resource-impacts, but rather we aim to improve our understanding and the quantification of our material impacts related to our consumption of natural resources and pollution, with a view to adopting relevant key performance indicators or ambitions by 2027.

In the meantime, we will work to identify relevant stakeholders and work with them to address these impacts within our relevant impact areas, for example by applying the waste hierarchy set out in figure 4. Examples include improving monitoring of waste, removing any remaining single-use plastics from our catering operations, working with other funders to ensure research funding recipients consider alternatives to single-use plastics and extending the lifetime of purchased electronic equipment and ensuring recovery of rare elements through good practice on re-use and recycling.

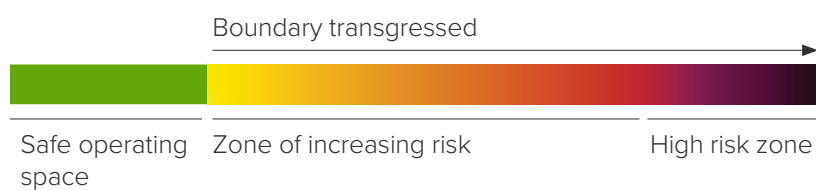
FIGURE 3

The planetary boundaries framework²

This figure indicates that the planet's capacity to provide a safe operating space for humanity has been crossed for six of nine processes that are critical for maintaining the stability and resilience of the earth system, including those related to climate change, biosphere integrity, land system change, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows and novel entities.



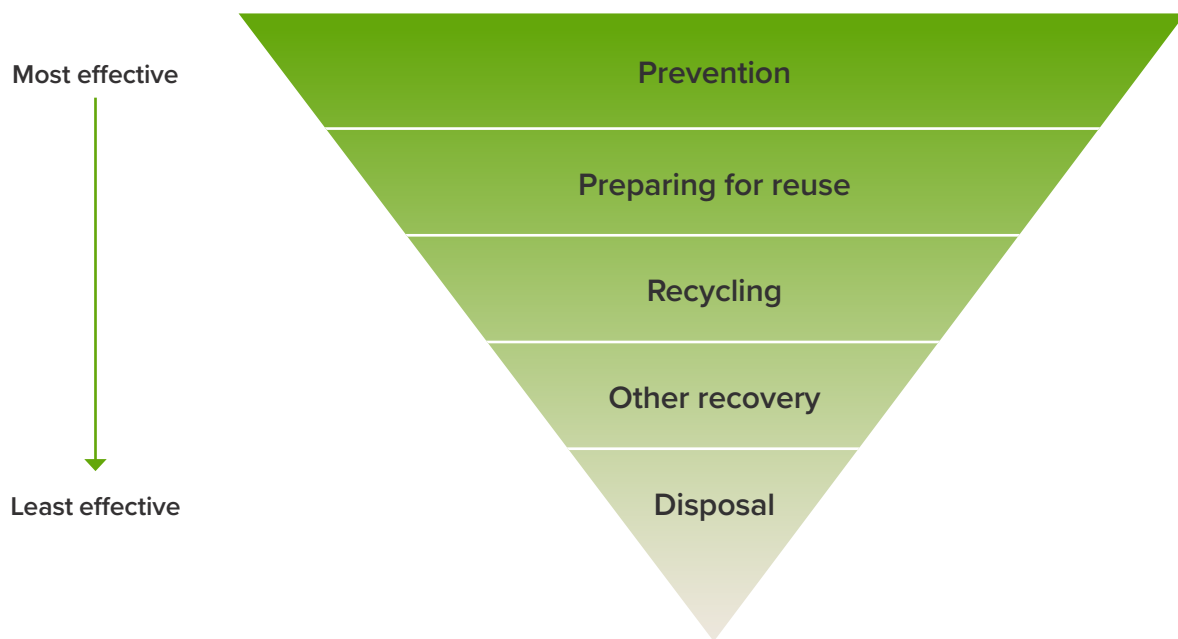
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² Katherine Richardson et al, *Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries*. *Sci. Adv.*9,eadh2458(2023). DOI:10.1126/sciadv.adh2458

FIGURE 4

Waste hierarchy for effective management of resource consumption and waste



Adapt: to climate, ecological and transition-related risks

As an organisation we will be subject to risks associated with a changing climate, ecological destruction and biodiversity loss, and degradation and overuse of resources, as well as risks associated with the transition to a more sustainable economy. We carried out an initial assessment of the climate risks and vulnerabilities that are likely to be most significant to the organisation and its operations as well as to its infrastructure, assets, employees, fellowship, visitors and other stakeholders. Examples of key risks include impacts of extreme heat on the health and wellbeing of employees, risks to the preservation of the Society's archives and collections of artwork, rare scientific books and artefacts from water ingress due to extreme rainfall and increased levels of humidity, and risks to food supply chains due to regional drought and ecological collapse.

In order to manage these risks, we commit to improving our understanding of the climate, ecological and transition-related risks specific to the Society's assets, operations and people and incorporating these into the Society's risk register. We will also monitor the changing nature of climate, ecological and transition-related risks and review our responses to these at regular intervals.

As part of the implementation of this strategy, we will identify priorities and options for actions to reduce risks to the Society's premises and infrastructure, assets and archives, operations, fellowship, employees, visitors and other stakeholders, prioritising those aspects that are most vulnerable and within the Society's direct control or influence, and the risks that are most significant and urgent. Work to support this will need to include assessments of the benefits, costs and feasibility of the more complex actions. We acknowledge the uncertainty around the timing and magnitude of many of the impacts associated with these risks and recognise that the costs of not acting may outweigh the costs of taking action. We aim to make progress with this by 2027.

Champion: scientific contributions for societal transformation

As the UK's national academy of science and the oldest scientific organisation in continuous existence, our scientific contributions are authoritative, respected, and influential. The Royal Society will leverage this position and continue to provide vital scientific contributions to effect positive societal transformation on environmental sustainability issues.

Scientific research and dissemination

We will continue to fund research and collaboration meetings that advance both the understanding of our world, and the solutions we need to address the problems it faces. Our focus on early and mid-career researchers in the UK and internationally positions us well to support research into emerging areas relevant to future generations. Our work for greater equality, diversity and inclusion in the scientific workforce supports our environmental sustainability 'inclusive' principle, whilst our suite of journals publishes high-quality, cutting-edge research and support open science, allowing wider and faster dissemination of crucial research findings. Recognising the role of academic institutions, we will engage with them and the wider sector on debates and best practice in research sustainability, as well as convening and influencing on R&D performed in industry and other places outside of academia.

Providing scientific advice for policy

Our ongoing emphasis on the importance of evidence-based policy builds on our history of providing expert scientific advice to policymakers. Climate change, biodiversity loss and resource management are global issues. As such, international collaboration is required to understand their causes and combat their effects. Such collaboration must be grounded in a shared understanding of the science involved. We will use our existing connections and depth of expertise to equip decision makers in the UK and internationally with scientific insight and innovative solutions. This includes the industrial base, regulators, and other professional areas such as the legal and financial sectors.

Promoting science education and engagement

Science as an endeavour has always been concerned with the future and the next generation of scientists will play a crucial role in helping to tackle our global challenges. Through our schools engagement programme, we support young people to learn about environmental sustainability and the scientific principles that underpin it. Our long-running programme to promote excellence in STEM subjects and our regular public engagement events help to inspire and empower people to engage with the environment and the science behind it. We will continue to engage widely through various channels, and using different formats, to explain the science and impacts, and to dispel dis- and misinformation.

Impact areas

In this section we focus on seven areas of our operations within which we aim to reduce our impacts and adapt to risks. These have been selected either because we have significant direct control over them, or they contribute a significant proportion of our greenhouse gas emissions or biodiversity impacts. In addition to these seven impact areas we will also apply this strategy to other areas of our operations.

Table 1 shows the estimated emissions, percentage of total emissions and percentage of total biodiversity footprint associated with each impact area. It also indicates for each impact area the lead decision making committee who will be tasked with delivery of the strategy and the most relevant priorities.

It is envisaged that progress across the whole set of impact areas will require a broad suite of actions. The Society recognises that some areas of impact make a much larger material contribution to impacts but may be harder to tackle. It is important to start addressing these as a priority, whilst also making progress on the easier to address areas.

TABLE 1

Emissions, biodiversity footprint and priorities for delivering the strategy for the key impact areas.

Impact area	Emissions (tonnes CO ₂ e)	% of total emissions	% of biodiversity footprint (from ReCiPe model)	Lead decision making entity	Relevant priorities for delivering the strategy
Investments	31,958 (not including Scope 3 of financed emissions)	29.87	25.0	Investment Committee	Work to improve the quantification of wider Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions arising from the Society’s investment portfolio between now and 2030. Work with investment managers to influence actions that promote environmental sustainability, emissions reductions, and reductions in other environmental impacts
Research funding (grants)	66,323	61.98	62.3	Grants Committee	Work to improve the quantification of wider Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions arising from the Society’s grant funding between now and 2030. Work with other funders and stakeholders to influence actions that promote environmental sustainability, emissions reductions, and reductions in other environmental impacts. Bring together world-class researchers to share knowledge and collaborate on the innovations that will be crucial to securing a sustainable future
Energy and waste	375 (Scope 1 and 2)	0.35	1.75 (energy) 0.05 (waste, water and wastewater)	Planning and Resources Committee	Aim to reduce emissions associated with the direct use of energy and fugitive refrigerant gases to net zero by 2035 (Scope 1 and 2 emissions), subject to a detailed feasibility study of a range of options. Reach a considered position on the use of carbon sequestration or carbon offsetting as part of our net zero ambitions by 2027
Purchasing and procurement	6242 (purchased goods and services including digital and IT, catering (food) and water)	5.83	7.15 (purchased goods and services including digital and IT, and catering)	Planning and Resources Committee, Audit Committee	Work on an action plan to reduce emissions and other environmental impacts for areas of direct control including purchasing and procurement of goods and services, business travel and catering, with the aim of reaching net zero by 2040. Reach a considered position on the use of carbon sequestration or carbon offsetting as part of net zero ambitions by 2027. Improve understanding of impacts on biodiversity and other material impacts, with a view to adopting more specific actions and suitable key performance measures or ambitions related to indirect biodiversity impacts, resource use and waste management by 2027.
Digital and IT (including AV and telecomms)	2376	2.22	1.05	Planning and Resources Committee	Demonstrate how our actions are reducing impacts on biodiversity for selected impact areas, actions and drivers of biodiversity by 2027.
Business Travel	1863	1.74	3.63	Audit Committee	Identify the priorities and options for actions to reduce climate, ecological and transition-related risks. Bring together world-class researchers to share knowledge and collaborate on the innovations that will be crucial to securing a sustainable future.
Food and beverage (catering)	992	0.93	1.03	Planning and Resources Committee	

Delivery

Given the scale of our ambition, the Royal Society will need to harness all the operational capabilities at its disposal to deliver the transformational change it seeks, as well as developing new tools, mechanisms, and adaptive behaviours.

Governance

Council, whose members are the Trustees of the Society, owns this environmental sustainability strategy and has a central role in championing its delivery.

The Executive Director will be accountable for delivering the strategy, supported by the Senior Leadership Team. Responsibility for delivery will lie with the relevant Committees of the Society, supported by an appropriate lead and staff from across the organisation.

Staff have been instrumental in shaping the Royal Society's environmental sustainability strategy and will play an equally vital role in helping to deliver it. The Royal Society will encourage and support teams to incorporate delivery of the strategy into their roles, applying its principles and priorities as they plan, design and deliver their work.

The Fellowship is highly engaged on the issue of sustainability and includes many world-renowned authorities on climate change, biodiversity loss and resource management amongst its members, and will continue to guide the work of the Society on this.

Action planning

Council will empower relevant governance Committees within the Society with the authority to make decisions that support delivery of this environmental sustainability strategy, ensuring that sustainability is at the heart of decision-making. Thus, detailed action planning will be conducted by the appropriate team and approved by the relevant Committee within the Society. Action plans and approaches are likely to be bespoke to the impact areas, but it is expected that all will include some core elements including:

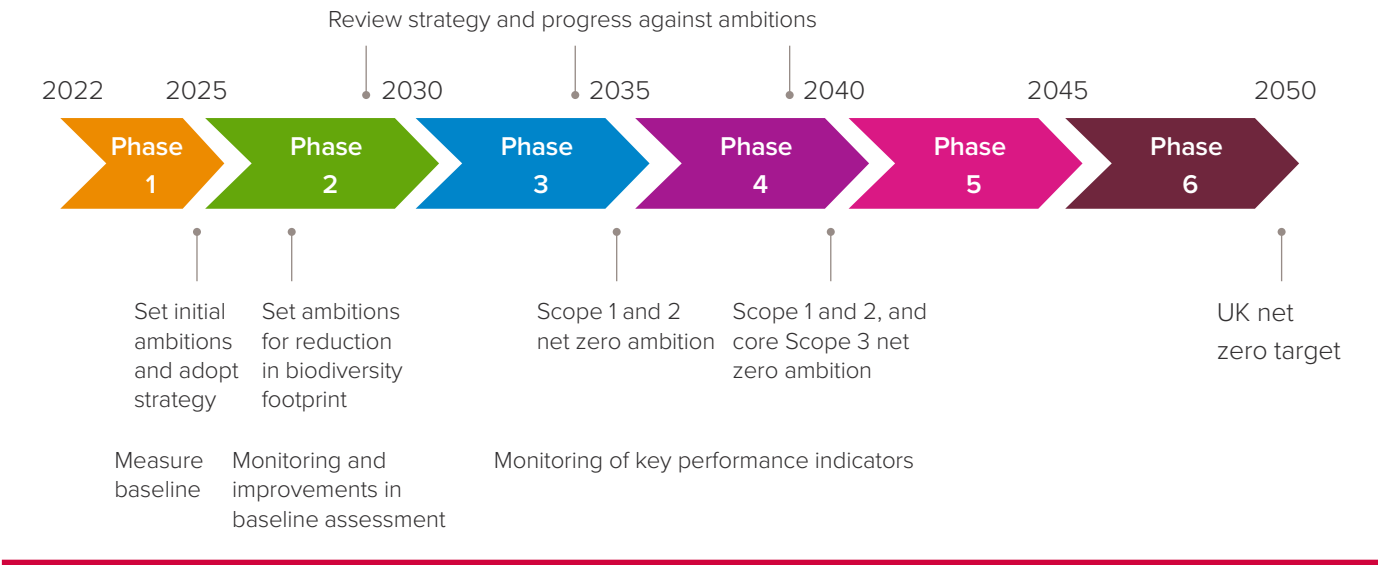
- consideration of appropriate resourcing and clarity on governance;
- operational, infrastructure, and functional changes including an assessment of risks, benefits, costs and savings;
- data collection, improvement and reporting plans;
- communication approaches; and
- identification of training needs for upskilling staff and relevant stakeholders.

Reporting, evaluation and review

The Royal Society will set up a cycle of regular monitoring and reporting against appropriate key performance indicators to track the impact of this strategy and progress against ambitions and high-level actions. This reporting will be overseen by Council and the Executive Director, ensuring that insights directly inform future strategic decision-making, and that actions can be taken to keep delivery on track. We note that progress over time may not always be measurable or comparable due to changes in calculation methodologies and improvements in data quality, but these changes will be reported appropriately. An indicative timeline for this activity is shown in figure 5.

FIGURE 5

Indicative timeline for setting and review of net zero ambitions.



APPENDIX 1:

Acknowledgements

The Royal Society wishes to thank the many colleagues who were involved in the development of this strategy, the members of the Environmental Sustainability Committee and the consultants who provided guidance and expertise.

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Dr Marisa Goulden, Environmental Sustainability Programme Manager
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Environmental Sustainability Committee
Professor Jon Keating FRS, Vice President and Treasurer of the Royal Society and Chair of the committee
Members of the Committee

Consultants
SUMS Consulting
Wild Business
Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education (EAUC)

APPENDIX 2:

Glossary

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things. This includes the range of ecosystems, the number of different species and the genetic diversity within species. This variety is important for the resilience of ecosystems, because having a range of species playing similar ecological roles helps maintain ecosystem functioning if the population of any one species declines, whilst genetic diversity enables organisms to evolve in response to environmental changes. Biodiversity is a powerful proxy for understanding the wider state of nature and the two are often used synonymously.

Biodiversity footprint

A biodiversity footprint is the impact on global biodiversity from the production and consumption of goods and services and is measured in terms of biodiversity change. Biodiversity footprints can show the main causes of impact from an organisation's operations including the upstream and downstream value chains, and can be used to help organisations to prioritise mitigating actions.

Carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (CO₂e)

The amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions that would cause the same radiative forcing or temperature change, over a given time horizon, as an emitted amount of a greenhouse gas (GHG) or a mixture of GHGs.

Decarbonisation

Reducing or eliminating CO₂ emissions associated with energy by replacing fossil fuel energy with carbon-free, renewable energy sources.

Environmental sustainability

Sustainability was defined by the Bruntland Commission in 1987 as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Environmental sustainability refers to one of three pillars of sustainability, the others being social and economic sustainability. The focus of environmental sustainability is on avoiding the depletion and degradation of natural resources and reducing the production of waste and pollution, including emissions of greenhouse gases.

Greenhouse gas emissions

The release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, nitrous oxide and water vapour. The term is used interchangeably in this document with 'carbon emissions', 'CO₂ emissions' and 'emissions'.

Life cycle (impact) assessment (LCA)

An established approach to evaluating and comparing environmental impact over the life cycle of a product or process.

Nature

Nature refers to living organisms and their interactions among themselves and with their environment including non-living things (water, climate, geology).

Net zero

Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions balanced by anthropogenic removals over a specified period.

Planetary boundaries

The planetary boundaries concept describes the safe limits for human pressure on nine critical processes that together maintain a stable and resilient Earth. Seven planetary boundaries were first defined by Johan Rockström and colleagues in 2009 and subsequent work by Katherine Richardson and colleagues has extended this to 9 planetary boundaries that relate to climate change, biosphere integrity, land-system change, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows of nitrogen and phosphorus, ocean acidification, atmospheric aerosol loading, stratospheric ozone depletion and novel entities.

Scope 1 emissions

Direct emissions from operations controlled by the reporting entity. This includes emissions related to the combustion of fossil fuels to produce energy (such as from gas boilers or liquid fuels used for transportation in vehicles owned by the reporting entity). It also includes direct emissions from land or livestock and physical and chemical processing, and fugitive emissions arising from refrigeration and cooling equipment or methane leakages.

Scope 2 emissions

Upstream indirect emissions associated with use of purchased electricity. These can be calculated using a location-based method, where the average emissions intensity for the electricity grid in the country of purchase is used. In addition, a market-based method for calculation of Scope 2 emissions can be used, where emissions intensities reflect the contractual arrangements of electricity purchase. Specific types of energy source might be specified by the electricity provider as 'low-carbon' or 'renewable' sources. The Greenhouse Gas Protocol, which provides guidance for reporting on emissions, specifies that entities should report Scope 2 emissions using both location and market-based methods.

Scope 3 emissions

Scope 3 encompasses indirect emissions associated with the upstream and downstream purchase and use of goods and services. Upstream Scope 3 emissions include purchased goods and services, business travel and waste generated in operations. Downstream Scope 3 emissions arise from transportation, use and end-of life disposal of produced goods and services that have been supplied, sold or transferred by the reporting entity, including financial resources transferred to others such as through investments and grant funding.

APPENDIX 3:

Greenhouse gas emissions data for 2023 – 2024

TABLE 2

Data table for Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

GHG emissions category	Emissions (tonnes CO ₂ e)	% of Scope 1 and 2 emissions	% of total emissions	Value of spend in £M	GHG emissions intensity (tCO ₂ e / £M)	Description and how calculated
Gas for heating and cooking (Scope 1)	146.3	39.03	0.14	0.1518	963.58	Gas used in the building, based on meter readings and DESNZ conversion factors applied.
Refrigerants (Scope 1)	38.5	10.27	0.04	Not known	Not known	Fugitive gases from air conditioning units, calculated from kg of refrigerants added during the year. DESNZ conversion factors applied.
Electricity (Scope 2)	190	50.69	0.18	0.6306	301.28	Electricity used in the building, based on meter readings, calculated using grid average emissions for UK grid (location-based method) with DESNZ conversion factors.
Total for Scope 1 and 2	374.8	100.00	0.35			

TABLE 3

Data table for Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

GHG emissions category	Emissions (tonnes CO ₂ e)	% of Scope 3 emissions	% of total emissions	Value or spend in £M	GHG emissions intensity (tCO ₂ e / £M)	Description and how calculated
Purchased good and services	6242	5.85	5.83	12.74	489.8	Purchased goods and services calculated from spend data and expense data with travel spend removed. Coded by type of spend using HE-Proc codes and converted to DESNZ codes and DESNZ conversion factors applied.
Fuel and energy related activities	86.4	0.08	0.08	not applicable	not applicable	Emissions associated with extraction, transmission and distribution of gas and electricity in Scope 1 and 2 (well to tank emissions). DESNZ conversion factors applied.
Waste	46.6	0.04	0.04	not applicable	not applicable	Based on kg of waste processed for various waste streams. DESNZ conversion factors applied to data from Westminster Council and other waste removal suppliers.
Business Travel	1862.7	1.75	1.74	1.47	1270.6	All travel paid for by the Society, includes travel booked through TMC, claimed on expenses, or paid to suppliers. Excludes travel as part of grants. DESNZ conversion factors applied by distance, mode and class of travel.
Staff commuting and homeworking	88.2	0.08	0.08	not applicable	not applicable	Emissions associated with staff travel to work, use of IT equipment at home, and additional heating for homeworking, based on a survey of staff conducted in July 2024.
Downstream transportation and distribution	18.3	0.02	0.02	not applicable	not applicable	Visitor travel for public engagement events including Summer Science Exhibition. Based on estimated numbers of visitors and a survey of participants' mode and distance of travel.
End of life treatment of sold products (journals)	0.7	0	0	not applicable	not applicable	Disposal of journals. Calculated using estimated weight of printed journals.
Grants	66,323.20	62.2	61.98	98.4	674	Emissions calculated from spend data as recorded in Grants database, includes amount of award allocated to travel, equipment, consumables, animals, professional services and contribution to estates.
Investments – main fund (Scope 1 and 2)	29,392	27.56	27.47	292.8	100.4 (62.0 for corporate 403.0 for sovereign)	Based on Scope 1 and 2 emissions of corporates and sovereign funds invested in. Calculated by MSCI Barra One.
Investments – Faraday fund (Scope 1 and 2)	2,566	2.41	2.39	250.5	10.2 (1.5 for corporate, 139.0 for sovereign)	Based on Scope 1 and 2 emissions of corporates and sovereign funds invested in. Calculated by MSCI Barra One.
Investments – main fund (Scope 3)	119,485	N / A	N / A	292.8	408.1	Based on Scope 3 emissions of corporates invested in. Calculated by MSCI Barra One. Not included in the total for Scope 3.
Investments – Faraday fund (Scope 3)	57,567	N / A	N / A	250.5	229.8	Based on Scope 3 emissions of corporates invested in. Calculated by MSCI Barra One. Not included in the total for Scope 3.
Total Scope 3 (excl investments Scope 3)	106,625.90	100	99.65			
Total Scope 3 (Incl. investments Scope 3)	283,677.90					
Total (all scopes, excl. investments Scope 3)	107,000.70		100			
Total (all scopes, incl. investments Scope 3)	284,052.70					

APPENDIX 4:

Estimation of greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity impacts and sources of uncertainty

Assessment of greenhouse gas emissions

For greenhouse gas emissions we have used a reporting framework developed by EAUC for research and innovation institutes and organisations funding research and innovation, which is based on the Standardised Carbon Emissions Reporting Framework for the Higher Education Sector and the Greenhouse Gas Protocol. SUMS Consulting conducted the assessment using data collated by Royal Society staff.

Scope 1 and 2 emissions are based on activity data from meter readings for gas and electricity and service records for air conditioning units. The majority of Scope 3 emissions estimates are based on spending data with the exception of travel, waste and water use where estimates were based on activity data such as mode and distance of travel, water meter readings and kg collected for different waste streams. Emissions are calculated using the conversion factors published by the UK Government Department for Energy Security and Net Zero³, and are measured in units of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e).

The total emissions figure of 107,000 tCO₂e includes the estimated share of the Scope 1 and 2 emissions of the entities invested in through the Royal Society's investment portfolio but excludes the estimated Scope 3 emissions of those entities, due to the uncertainty inherent in the estimation methods and concerns over double counting. With the estimated Scope 3 emissions from investments the total comes to 284,053 tCO₂e (see Annex 1).

Assessment of biodiversity impacts

The methodology used for assessing the biodiversity footprint of the Society's operations was developed and the analysis conducted by Wild Business, following earlier work conducted for the University of Oxford and described in a Nature paper by Bull et al. (2022)⁴. The methodology uses a life cycle impact assessment approach. Conversion factors derived from an input-output database called EXIOBASE are used to derive estimates from input data for mid-point impacts that arise through five pathways of impact on biodiversity: air pollution; greenhouse gas emissions; land use; water pollution / water use; and waste. Two different life cycle impact assessment tools, known as ReCiPe and LC-Impact, were then used to derive an estimate from the mid-point impacts of resultant change to a measure of biodiversity (potentially disappeared fraction of species per year).

The results provide an indication of the magnitude of impacts for the key drivers of biodiversity loss, such as land and water use, water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions as well as a combined estimate of resulting changes in a global measure of species diversity. They do not provide any location specific information on impacts on biodiversity since the input data did not include location specific information. The two models give largely similar results in terms of the order of magnitude of different activity areas. However, uncertainties are large and reflected in the differing results for the two models, which have different assumptions about the relative importance of different drivers of biodiversity loss.

3 Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2023>. (Accessed 8 April 2025)

4 Bull, JW, Taylor, I, Biggs, E, Grub, HMJ, Yearley, T, Waters, H, and Milner-Gulland, EJ. (2022). Analysis: The biodiversity footprint of the University of Oxford. *Nature*, 604(7906), 420–424. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-022-01034-1>

The estimate of the biodiversity footprint associated with the Society's investment portfolio is only derived from information on greenhouse gas emissions provided by the Society's investment managers. As such, it ignores other drivers of biodiversity loss due to a lack of information on the types of sectors invested in. This leads to a significant underestimate of the impact of the investment portfolio on biodiversity. Nevertheless, investments represent one of the largest contributors to the estimated biodiversity footprint. Future iterations of the assessment could seek to improve these estimates.

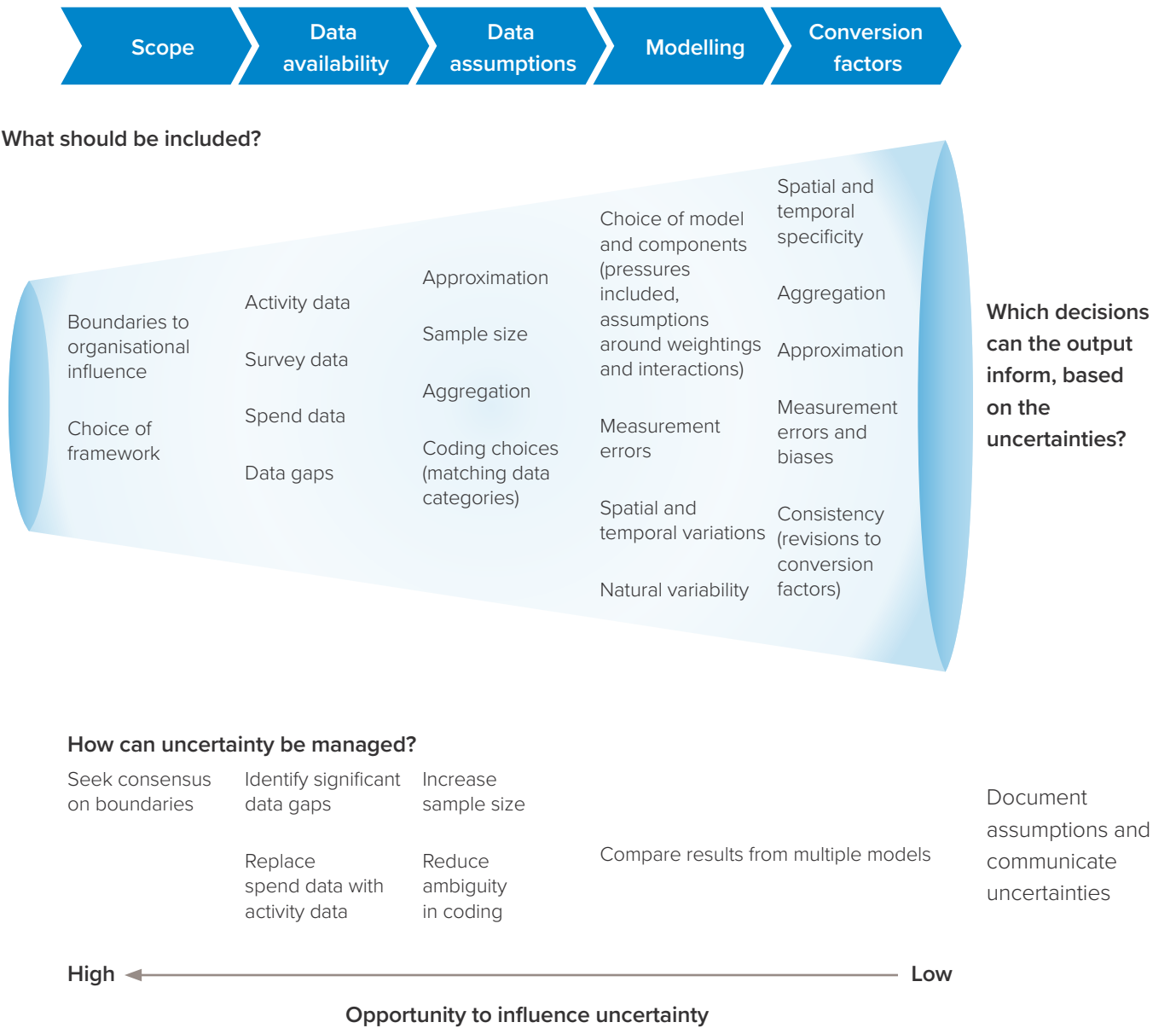
Sources of uncertainty

The methods used to calculate quantitative estimates of greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity impacts each have several sources of uncertainty (illustrated in 6). Due to the complexity of the sources of uncertainty, we do not have a quantitative estimate for the magnitude of the errors. Work to reduce uncertainty that is within our influence will focus on filling data gaps and replacing data based on spending (amount spent for each category of spending data multiplied by sector-based averages for emissions by pound spent) with activity data (emissions associated with specific item consumed multiplied by the quantity consumed and the relevant emissions conversion factor) where possible. This will require engagement with suppliers, some of whom will be further ahead than others in being able to provide such data. For a fuller discussion of uncertainties arising in the approach used for estimating the biodiversity footprint, see Bromwich et al. (2025)⁵

5 Bromwich, T, White, TB, Bouchez, A, Hawkins, I, zu Ermgassen, S, Bull, J, Bartlett, H, Bennun, L, Biggs, E, Booth, H, Clark, M, El Geneidy, S, Prescott, GW, Sonter, LJ, Starkey, M, and Milner-Gulland, EJ. (2025). Navigating uncertainty in life cycle assessment-based approaches to biodiversity footprinting. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 00, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.70001>

FIGURE 6

Sources of uncertainty in the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity footprint





The Royal Society is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists drawn from all areas of science, engineering, and medicine. The Society's fundamental purpose, as it has been since its foundation in 1660, is to recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity.

The Society's strategic priorities emphasise its commitment to the highest quality science, to curiosity-driven research, and to the development and use of science for the benefit of society. These priorities are:

- The Fellowship, Foreign Membership and beyond
- Influencing
- Research system and culture
- Science and society
- Corporate and governance

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