



Office for  
**Environmental  
Protection**

# Sustainability Policy and Action Plan

December 2023



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## Contents

About the OEP .....	4
Our mission .....	4
A sustainable OEP .....	4
Our commitment to sustainability .....	4
Our approach .....	4
Understanding our most important issues.....	5
Our priorities and action plan.....	5
Good governance .....	5
Sustainable offices .....	6
Sustainable procurement.....	7
Measurement, reporting and review .....	8
Targets.....	9
Responding and adapting to climate change .....	9
Annex A - Biodiversity Statement .....	10

## About the OEP

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) was established by the Environment Act 2021. We are a public body with powers to advise ministers and government departments and to hold them and other public authorities to account against their environmental responsibilities and the law. Our independence is protected in law.

Our work covers England and Northern Ireland, and UK-wide environmental matters where reserved to the UK Parliament.

### Our mission

Our mission is to protect and improve the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account.

## A sustainable OEP

### Our commitment to sustainability

Our commitment to sustainability is set at the highest level of the organisation. Our Board has agreed that:

In pursuing our mission, we will hold ourselves to account for the impact we have on the environment through our operations.

Our ambition is to be an example to others for the good management of our environmental impact, and for our wider sustainability.

We are committed in the long-term to the culture and actions necessary to achieve this.

### Our approach

We are an independent public body and are relatively small. We have around 70 staff and operate from two offices. Our total expenditure is less than 1/400<sup>th</sup> of the expenditure of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) who provide our funding in England.

We can achieve more if we work with others in government to achieve our sustainability aims, so we can benefit from their learning, and the opportunities of working at greater scale than we can alone.

As a new organisation, we have had the opportunity to embed a strong foundation for sustainability in how we operate from day one – for example, through considered choices on our buildings, our travel approach, and our purchasing – and we do not have legacy operations to transform.

Our strategic approach to sustainability is therefore to:

- build better understanding of our environmental impacts
- build stronger foundations for our sustainability approach in governance, measurement and reporting
- take advantage of government's wider sustainability actions and play our full part to deliver government's sustainability goals and targets relevant to us
- define our own priorities, targets and actions to achieve them so we can go beyond that ambition where we can and communicate lessons learned to others when appropriate

## **Understanding our most important issues**

Sustainability considerations have been at the heart of the decisions we have taken as we have established our operations and how we fulfil our role.

To target this strategy and our future actions effectively, we undertook a materiality assessment to identify the most important issues for us next.

This identified a range of topics in the realm of sustainability that were most relevant to current environmental issues and the role and activities of our organisation. Interviews were then held with key internal and external stakeholders to explore the relative significance of each and highlight any other areas. From this process, we identified the most important areas to address as a priority. These are:

- Setting a net zero goal
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Tackling waste and water in our organisation
- Embedding sustainable procurement practices

## **Our priorities and action plan**

### **Good governance**

Our policies and processes govern how and why we operate. By embedding sustainability into how we work, we set out our expectations for employees, suppliers and other stakeholders. As we develop our future sustainability plans, we will ensure our policies remain aligned to our ambitions.

For example, our travel policy asks our employees to consider if there is an alternative to travel and to consider environmental impacts when planning meetings and journeys. In the near future, we will be able to see our impacts through improved travel reporting.

Similarly, our IT estate is designed for sustainability. We have taken a cloud first approach to our technology infrastructure, and made sustainable choices on its implementation where possible. Our primary provider is already certified carbon neutral, with an ambition to be carbon negative within a decade. We lease energy efficient devices from a supplier

with a commitment to manage the repair, reuse, and recycling of devices based on a principle to maximise use through their lifecycle.

We will embrace sustainable choices where we can in our work to deliver our mission, and embed this in the policies which govern our work. We will engage our teams so that the small actions we can each take in our everyday activities are clear to all.

Activity	Date
1. <b>Build awareness of our foundations and commitment to sustainability:</b> Communicate how sustainability has been embedded into our ways of working and the small steps we can all take to improve	Q4 2023
2. <b>Sustainable policies:</b> Review all policies with a bearing on sustainability and update as required	Q2 2024
3. <b>Travel:</b> Improve our understanding of our impacts from business travel and implement changes to make lower carbon business travel options easier for staff to choose	Q2 2024
4. <b>Travel:</b> Review sustainable travel options for our staff travelling between England and Northern Ireland and monitor and review the purpose and benefits of this travel, over time	Q2 2024
5. <b>IT:</b> Formalise sustainability considerations in our IT strategy on its next review	Q1 2025
6. <b>Continuously improve our approach:</b> Appoint a sustainability champion to gather information and suggestions from our staff and others, and report to our Executive and Board annually on progress	Q4 2023

### Sustainable offices

Our premises have been chosen with environmental criteria in mind. Our office space in Worcester and Belfast was each the most sustainable and value for money choice available to us at the time they were chosen.

Our new premises in England have a 'B' energy rating, is supplied with 100% renewable energy and has its own solar generation. We designed our office layout with regard to energy use. For example: the location of working spaces makes good use of natural light; our meeting rooms are placed in a central spine and benefit from transparent walls to enhance light flow, and; motion-sensitive low-energy LED lighting is implemented throughout. To reduce waste, we have pass-controlled printing and communal recycling stations.

We will work with our landlords to assess and review environmental performance and encourage them to implement changes that bring about further environmental benefits.

We will make it as simple as we can for our staff and visitors to our offices to make sustainable travel choices. In Belfast, our office is centrally located for all public transport routes. In Worcester, we provide cycle racks and showers and cycle and walking route maps for our employees from all key public transport hubs to encourage low-carbon travel choices. Electric vehicle charging points are also onsite and we are piloting approaches to encourage car-sharing for staff.

We will remain a single-use plastic free office estate by providing mugs, plates and cutlery for our employees.

In Worcester, our energy use and waste collection is separately measured, allowing us to track and report on our energy consumption, recycling rates and related emissions. This will enable us to understand our impacts and identify areas to set reduction targets. In Belfast we will work with our landlord to implement similar approaches, as we occupy a flexible serviced office space which is not separate to others.

Activity	Date
7. <b>A sustainable office move in England:</b> Through good design choices and landlord engagement we will ensure that our new premises have strong sustainability elements in place	Q3 2023
8. <b>Sustainable choices for our staff and visitors:</b> Embed the sustainable choices available to our staff and visitors in the information and guidance about how we travel to and work in our offices	Q3 2023
9. <b>Work with our landlords to make space for nature:</b> We will actively engage with our landlords to encourage them to make space for nature in the wider estate of which we lease part	Q1 2024

### Sustainable procurement

We recognise that procurement has potential to support people, communities and the environment.

Our existing procurement policies and approach take account of sustainability considerations. We award many major contracts through frameworks where sustainability has been built into contracts, and the social and environmental impact has been considered.

Many of the services we procure relate to consultancy and professional services where the environmental impact depends on the approaches and management practices of those we contract. We will review our sustainable procurement approach, incorporating

good practice from across the public sector so we can identify and take steps to mitigate the impacts in our supply chain, as they arise.

Activity	Date
10. <b>Sustainable procurement:</b> Further embed sustainability into our procurement policies and approach aligning with good practice from ISO20400 where appropriate	Q2 2024
11. <b>Establish best practice:</b> Work with others in Defra group to establish best practice for sustainable procurement management, and adapt approaches accordingly	Q1 2025

### Measurement, reporting and review

This strategy is developed with the information about our environmental impacts available to us now.

Since being legally established, we have grown and our ways of working have evolved. Our office occupation has been changing, as we have identified the right offices, and as our ability to occupy has changed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. In this context we are now implementing a comprehensive measurement and reporting approach to our environmental impact.

We will measure all that we can now, and mature our measurement over time. We will measure our contribution to targets set for the Defra Group (who provide our funding in England) and take steps to reduce our impacts in line with these, taking a lead from the actions and plans Defra sets out until our understanding of our specific impact improves.

We aim to set our own target date for net zero in 2025, once we have completed a comprehensive carbon footprint assessment.

Activity	Date
12. <b>Measure and report on our sustainability impacts in 2023-2024:</b> Capture all information available to measure and report our contribution to Government's Greening Commitments, and Defra group's targets	Q1 2024
13. <b>Assess our carbon footprint for the full years 2022-2023:</b> Capture more granular data to assess our emissions under scopes 1, 2 and 3 <sup>1</sup> for this year, and annually thereafter	Q3 2023
14. <b>Set interim targets for scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions:</b> identify the most significant areas of impact and opportunity to reduce emissions	Q3 2024

<sup>1</sup> [https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards\\_supporting/FAQ.pdf](https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards_supporting/FAQ.pdf)



15. <b>Set interim targets for other areas of our environmental impact:</b> informed by our measurement	Q3 2024
16. <b>Set a target for net zero:</b> <sup>2</sup> Define a target for net zero scopes 1 and 2	Q3 2025
17. <b>Review this policy and action plan</b>	Q3 2025

## Targets

We aim to set our own targets to the timeline set out above.

In the meantime, we will play our full part to deliver Defra group's targets as follows:

### Responding and adapting to climate change

Target	Date
<b>Reducing Scope 1 and 2 Emissions:</b> Achieve a science-based target of 42% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions across Defra group compared with a 2017 baseline	2033

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<sup>2</sup> [www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition](http://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition)

## Annex A - Biodiversity Statement

This statement sets out our considerations for what we at the OEP can do directly to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England and how we will do it.

Biodiversity is the variety of life forms that can be found in an area; from the variety of genes to the species diversity of all life that make up the ecosystems which underpin our planet's ability to support life.<sup>3</sup> Biodiversity maintains the healthy functioning of our planet's ecosystems, which provide valuable services such as clean air and water, and soil fertility and climate regulation.

### How we can conserve and enhance biodiversity

The OEP contributes to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in how we fulfil our statutory functions to protect and improve the environment by holding government to account. We have set out separately, a Biodiversity Statement in this regard.

This Annex focuses on how the OEP, as an organisation can contribute directly to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. The principal ways in which we can do so are:

- Through our actions to mitigate any impact on biodiversity through our operations
- Through the support we provide our staff to conserve and enhance biodiversity

### Mitigating impact on biodiversity through our operations

This sustainability strategy sets out how we will mitigate the impact of our operations on the environment.

Specifically, we occupy part of two buildings alongside other tenants under commercial arrangements. We will work with our landlords to promote and encourage them to make space for nature in the sites we occupy.

We will support biodiversity by reducing the pressures our operations create on the environment. This includes how we plan to reduce our carbon emissions, our consumption of water and other resources, and the waste we create.

### Supporting our staff to conserve and enhance biodiversity

We are committed to engaging our staff closely in how their contribution helps to deliver our strategy, plans and mission. This includes in the implementation of our sustainability strategy, and work programme which supports biodiversity.

Our staff can volunteer for up to three days each year. This regularly includes in activities with partners to protect and improve the environment, including its biodiversity.

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<sup>3</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). Available at: [www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf](http://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf)