**University of Glasgow  
Sustainability Working Group**

**Minute of 6 June 2024**

Present: Jaime Toney (Chair) (JT), David Duncan (DD), Anna Brown (GUEST) (AB), Molly Davison (GUEST) (MD), Laila Elaasar (GUEST) (LE), Gioia Falcone (GF); Stewart Miller (SM), Chrissy Sanachan (CS), Peter Craig (PC), Christie Bone (CB), Roddy Yarr (RY), Inge Sorensen (IS), Mariama Bah (MB), Josephine Gallagher (JG), Craig Thomson-Gold (CTG), Charlotte Michel (GUEST), Scott Hilditch (SH), Chrissy Sanachan (CS), Natalie Welden (NW)

Apologies: Fabrice Renaud, Peter Haggarty, Alistair Thomson, Haillie Pentelton Owens, Ross Barker, Gordon MacLeod,

Attending: Scott Baird (SB), Viola Retzlaff (VR), Rhona Little (Clerk)

1 **Welcome and Apologies** The group welcomed Scott Hilditch to the group; Scott will replace Ross Barker.

2 **Previous Minutes and Actions**The draft minute was approved as an accurate record

Transparency of funding and donations  
  
The open letter calling from transparency over university funding in the UK had been circulated to the group. DD had contacted Fran Shepherd and shared the link with the Gift Acceptance Policy.

Divestment update

DD provided an update following student concerns about divestment, particularly from the UK defence sector, prompted by events in Gaza. The main student demand was for divestment from defence sector companies, along with related issues like campus presence of such companies, university banking choices and what practical support the University can provide to people affected by the war. A committee chaired by Lay Member of Court Jonathan Loukes advised the Finance Committee and a paper will be presented at the meeting of Court on 18th June. The approach might involve consulting the university community and retendering that part of the fund management arrangements that portfolio manager still invests in defence. The completed divestment in fossil fuel as been internally communicated and there are plans to update the website for external awareness.

**Action**: SM to update the website

Clarity for researchers and academics

JT provided an update on concerns regarding guidance for researchers collaborating with certain organisations. These concerns had been discussed with VP Chris Pearce, who agreed to take it to the University's Research Planning and Strategy Committee. VP Pearce will report back on the discussions. JT and GF have expressed their willingness to be involved in further conversations on the matter.

KPMG Audit Sustainability Response

DD suggested RB consider the possibility of having an intern to assist the team and offered to secure funding.

**Action**: RB/SH to discuss with Head of Comms

SMG Strategic Risk Register on Sustainability

There will be an update following agenda item 5

3 **Keystone Building Presentation**

Scott Baird, Head of Major Projects attended to give a presentation about the specification and scope for the Keystone Building part of the campus development of the western site. The building is currently going through stage 4 design with a full business case governance cycle in August/September and hopefully presenting to Court. The project aims to create an excellent learning and research environment. The largest building since the Gilbert Scott building, it will have multiple entrances, six storeys, a basement, and various dedicated areas for research, teaching, and student activities.

The project aims for world class sustainability standards, including BREEAM Excellent certification, RIBA 2030 climate and biodiversity goals, and the use of renewable energy sources such as ground source cooling and rooftop solar panels. Efforts are made to minimise operational and embodied carbon emissions, with a target of 75% reduction in energy use compared to 2011 baseline levels and maximising passive design elements. Plans include efficient water use and promoting sustainable transport with extensive cycling facilities. The project emphasises the use of low-carbon and sustainable materials, minimalistic design to reduce unnecessary materials, and ensuring the building’s design maximises natural light and ventilation. SB concluded with detailed plans for further development, sustainability benchmarks, and stakeholder engagement for successful project completion.

NW enquired about the proposed 30-40% increase in green space and the 20% net gain for biodiversity and about the planning and planting strategies for achieving these goals, noting that while existing developments look nice and have some benefits, they could be improved.

SB explained the project's focus on biodiversity and the specification of various species with LUC (Land Use Consultants). The plan aims to enhance biodiversity and will involve careful consideration of procurement and maintenance processes throughout the project and its lifecycle. Drawing from lessons learned in past infrastructure projects, there is an emphasis on regular contractual reviews and maintenance practices to ensure spaces are well-maintained without over-maintaining, thus maximizing biodiversity. LUC will develop a species and biodiversity plan, which will become the operational plan moving forward.

The group thanked SB for his interesting presentation.

4 **Terms of Reference Review** (Paper 1)

RY discussed the review of the terms of reference, initially prompted by a recommendation from the KPMG Internal Audit Report. He conducted the review with DD and JT and sought feedback from the group on the proposed changes. The changes aim to enhance the group's direction and delivery focus, possibly including a name change to reflect this. RY emphasised the importance of aligning the group's work with the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2030. Feedback from the group will be used to finalise the terms of reference which will be presented at the next meeting. RY highlighted that many actions could stem from the changes to the terms of reference. These could include better tracking of the Carbon Management Plan, presenting a dashboard and consolidating various plans (carbon management, climate adaptation, biodiversity management, travel planning and training) into one space. This consolidation aims to provide more focus, improve visibility of activities, and address issues more effectively.

DD noted that over the summer the Court Office will review the disposition of committees following the Court meeting on 18th June. This review will consider the relationship of the SWG to other committees and the Court itself, aiming to give more prominence to sustainability issues in relevant forums. DD emphasised the importance of establishing proper linkages across various spheres such as finance, estates and academics to ensure the sustainability agenda is effectively highlighted.

RY suggested that the next steps involve endorsing the changes identified by NW and DD as well as any others submitted via email and proposed ratifying these and either bringing them back to the next meeting or circulating them for sign-off to avoid delays. DD agreed recommending that the approval be done by correspondence and then taken to SMG for sign-off and possibly to the next Court meeting to expedite the process.

**Action:** the group agreed to approve changes by correspondence and then take to SMG/Court.

5 **SMG Strategic Risk Register Sustainability Review**

JT provided a verbal update on the SMG strategic risk register sustainability review. A small group reviewed the register and agreed that it needed updating, particularly the critical (red category) risks. Specific risks laid out by RY were discussed at the previous meeting, included the need for a time-bound action plan for the climate change strategy. JT emphasised the importance of preparing for both achieving and not achieving net-zero by 2030, readiness for offsetting and scope 3 emissions reporting and incorporating adaptation risks. There was also a discussion about the need to understand how risks in the climate change and sustainability space overlap with other areas like estates and health and safety.

RY emphasised the need to inform Craig Chapman-Smith (CCS) about the discussion outcomes to meet the required schedule. He noted that additional work is needed to sign off the wording of the review which had been partially pre-populated to facilitate progress. RY suggested sharing these responses with the group via correspondence and expressed interest in DD’s perspective on how this aligns with the broader risk review covering all other areas.

DD informed the group that there will be a discussion on risk at an upcoming SMG workshop where input from others will be considered. DD believes sustainability should have its own risk but should also be reflected across other risk areas, such as financial, educational and reputational. The goal is to ensure sustainability receives adequate prominence in the overall risk management framework.

GF suggested acknowledging the dependencies between different risks and making these explicit. She proposed discussing the temporal sequence of events to understand how one risk might affect others in different registers. GF agreed that sustainability should have its own risk but emphasised the need for interconnectedness with financial and other risks. She recommended ensuring that the risk registers evolve in an integrated manner incorporating a timeline to revisit and assess associated risks across registries.

JT mentioned that the EAUC has a new toolkit to help address climate change risks and noted discussions with Sniffer and EAUC about cascading risks, aligning with GFs earlier points.

RY emphasised the need to review and reflect on the notes from their recent meeting, which had only taken place the previous day and would discuss the importance of understanding timelines with CCS. He highlighted that the need to review the risk register at an appropriate frequency is already reflected in the terms of reference.

**Action:** the group agreed that RY would send a brief note of the meeting along with the PowerPoint slides to the group and would touch base with CCS to clarify the timescale.

6 **Travel Policy working Group update** (Paper 3)

Viola Retzlaff (VR), Travel and Transport Co-ordinator updated the group on the outcome of a working group that was formed to review the university's guidance on academic and business travel. A proposal was developed which was reviewed by another focus group involving college representatives for further comments. Key points discussed included the significant carbon output from business travel, second only to gas and oil consumption at the university. Data indicated a spike in travel emissions post-COVID, highlighting the urgency to meet reduction targets by 2030. The working group's recommendations focused on rethinking unnecessary travel, emphasising justification for trips, and making decisions based on available data. They identified frequent travel reasons (mainly conference participation) and types (particularly long-haul air travel) that needed attention.

The group proposed several measures, including:

1. Accountability: Schools and Colleges should develop and publish their travel reduction plans, focusing on high-emitting travellers and utilising available data for decision-making.
2. Communication: Develop engagement events and materials to inform staff about proposed changes and gather feedback.
3. UK and European Context: Encourage train travel for trips of up to 8 hours and limit intercontinental air travel to essential trips, considering the additional costs covered by the university.
4. Incentives: Review promotion and reward criteria to align with sustainable travel goals.
5. Information: Provide detailed travel behaviour and emission data to inform decisions.
6. Assessment: Regularly evaluate the impact of implemented recommendations.

VR concluded with a brief on the focus group's discussion, emphasising the importance of these measures and the need for timely implementation.

GF expressed appreciation for the thorough review and the innovative ideas presented but raised a few concerns:

1. Approval Process: Implementing flight-by-flight approvals may be challenging and could cause delays, increasing costs due to fluctuating ticket prices. She suggested integrating a streamlined approval process to ensure decisions are made within 24 hours to avoid complications with flights and hotel bookings.
2. Equitability of travel caps: Setting a maximum number of trips may not be fair, as different academic roles and ranks have varying travel needs. She stressed the importance of ensuring an equitable distribution of travel allowances based on specific requirements and questioned whether the proposed caps are based on calculated CO2 savings.
3. Promotion Criteria: GF highlighted a concern that limiting travel could negatively impact networking and career progression for some academics. She worried that those who are already less active in networking might see this as an opportunity to further disengage while still being considered for promotions, potentially leading to unintended consequences.

GF advised for practical and equitable solutions that we consider the diverse needs and impacts on all academic staff.

NW praised the document, especially its focus on Early Career Development Programmes (ECDP) and early career researchers and highlighted key points:

1. **Carbon Reduction and Costs**: The train trip reduced carbon expenditure by over four times compared to other modes, though it doubled the cost of some trips and could triple the travel time.
2. **Workload Models**: She emphasised the importance of accounting for travel time in workload models due to the significant increase in travel hours.
3. **Trip Limits:** Concern was expressed about the proposed limit of one essential trip per two years for UK-European travel, and suggested averaging the allowed trips over longer periods, like a grant cycle, to allow academics to plan strategically.

NW found the proposal positive but recommended flexibility in trip planning to enhance its acceptance among academics and emphasised the importance of transparency in the recommendations, suggesting that departments should have access to dashboards showing aggregate travel data to inform decisions about what constitutes essential travel.

RY commended the group's efforts and highlighted several key points:

1. **Focus on Conferences**: The main target is reducing the impact of long-haul conference travel rather than eliminating travel entirely.
2. **Prioritisation and Choices**: The aim is to prioritise and make choices to reduce the biggest impacts with minimal disruption.
3. **Departmental Efforts**: Some Schools, like one in MVLS, are already developing business travel reduction plans, which can serve as examples for others.

RY acknowledged the complexity and challenges involved but emphasised the importance of these initiatives.

DD expressed strong support for the proposal and suggested taking it to SMG and have VR and others present to reinforce the message. He acknowledged the need for flexibility and believed that with SMG endorsement and the suggested amendments, the proposal would significantly advance their goals.

GF raised a clarification question about the recommendations, highlighting unresolved issues and emphasised the need to flag these caveats when presenting the information, noting the need for further brainstorming to address potential implementation risks, downsides, and equity issues. She stressed the importance of balancing emissions reduction goals with the practicalities and unintended consequences for staff.

DD proposed two approaches to address these concerns: amending the document before it goes forward based on the comments or flagging the potential for unintended consequences and negative impacts on particular groups in the discussion. He suggested sharing the main points from this discussion with the SMG and possibly combining both approaches to ensure a comprehensive presentation.

GF suggested that the document should be presented as it was originally created by the working group, respecting their effort and input and proposed taking the document as is but incorporating comments from the current discussion to show how the process has evolved and to provide additional context.

PC emphasised the importance of presenting a unified and consensus-based document to SMG rather than highlighting potential flaws and suggested resolving any outstanding issues within the group before submission. He highlighted the need to address equity concerns, ensuring that the implementation of travel recommendations does not create inequalities but rather reduces them. He also stressed that most carbon emissions from business travel are due to long-haul flights for conferences and reducing these would not significantly impact essential research activities.

JT pointed out that the document does reference measures already implemented by other European and Russell Group universities which are more restrictive than the proposals in the current document.

CS emphasised that the document addresses equality concerns and offers recommendations rather than mandates. She stressed the importance of managing carbon budgets fairly at local levels and reminded everyone about the global impact of travel on communities. CS urged the group to consider these equity issues alongside internal equality concerns, emphasising the broader impact of their decisions on global communities affected by the climate crisis.

JT proposed two types of recommendations to move forward: firstly, to seek consensus among the group which seemed challenging without extensive modifications; and secondly, to proceed by presenting the current document to SMG while incorporating verbal and chat-based comments received.

**Action**: The group agreed to the second recommendation acknowledging efforts made in compiling the document.

7 **Invest to Save Fund**

RY discussed the ongoing efforts of his team to implement projects aimed at reducing costs and carbon emissions. The Project Sustainability form has been updated to embed sustainability more comprehensively across new builds and refurbishments. A million-pound energy challenge will be launched over the summer to optimise building operations using existing resources. We are also seeking funding routes, particularly with the Crichton Trust and Salix Funding, to invest in building improvements, especially for the Dumfries campus, which lacks sufficient insulation. Additionally, we are incorporating the cost per ton of carbon into investment strategies to better assess and reduce the impacting emissions despite current financial challenges.

The group noted these points and looked forward to future updates.

8 **Sustainability Manager Policies Update** (Paper 4)

SM presented a paper summarising the market response to the carbon offsetting initiative discussed in the last sustainability meeting. In total, 26 organisations either expressed interest or provided a detailed response to the supplementary questions included in the PIN. The standout responses were from RSPB Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust offering partnerships for peatland and woodland restoration. Other notable responses included Woodland Trust and Forest Carbon Limited which offered offsets from existing projects and PNZ Carbon which proposed housing retrofit projects for quick offsets. SM highlighted the cost of offsets, estimating minimum £50-£60 per ton, which could result in significant annual costs. He expressed concerns about the availability of offsets at the required scale and proposed further site visits and discussions with key organisations. He also sought guidance on progressing a tender and securing internal funding.

JT noted the interesting paper and highlighted that the University has academics who could provide the consultancy services mentioned and suggested considering setting up a consultancy or spin-out from the University to leverage their expertise as they are frequently asked to use it. This could support both the initiative and the academics' interests.

DD clarified that since he is no longer on the EUAC board so did not need to declare a conflict of interest. He mentioned that the Carbon Coalition did not tender but his understanding was that they could be used under a framework agreement.

RY emphasised that the discussion is ongoing and not yet at the tender stage and due diligence based on the PIN notice findings is necessary. He highlighted efforts to collaborate with academics to focus on local projects for social cohesion and academic research in a local environment. While acknowledging the Carbon Coalition as a current offsetting option he reiterated that more work is needed.

NW suggested that instead of relying on a single tender, diversification of projects could minimise risks. Given concerns about regulation and the success of individual projects, she proposed a mix of local and large-scale projects. This approach would allow the University to point to successful areas even if some projects underperform, reducing overall risk and avoiding potential reputational damage.

CS supported engaging in schemes that do not involve private landowners, particularly favouring collaborations with RSPB and the Wildlife Trust. She was surprised by the PNZ Carbon scheme which strengthened her preference for internal offsetting schemes and suggested creating an internal programme to raise funds for capital investments or refurbishments, thereby demonstrating coordinated efforts and avoiding external complications.

DD agreed this was an interesting idea and suggested involving accountants to evaluate it. He noted a similar comment about combining this with discussions on travel recommendations to assess offsetting costs.

The consensus was for SM to continue discussions without proceeding to a tender yet. GF emphasised a joined-up approach linking travel emissions estimation with offsetting costs. There was agreement to explore building a carbon cost into funds returned to the University. Future steps include updates from SM after further conversations and considerations about funding for offsetting within the university's budget.

**Action:** the group agreed that SM should go back to RSPB Scotland and the Woodland Trust to gather more accurate cost estimates in preparation for future tender processes and emphasised the need for greater certainty regarding costs before approaching finance colleagues for funding approval.

9 **Centre for Sustainable Solutions update**

JT gave a verbal update on the activities of the CfSS. These included:

* continuing green recovery dialogues on food systems, collaborating with the Scottish Alliance for Food to run a series of small community events in Glasgow for feedback on system-level changes.
* co-organising an October panel event with the German Consul in Edinburgh in conversation with the German Embassy in London.
* GALLANT, the CfSS and the UofG were represented at the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce with a talk by the Principal and have engaged with them on the futures event that was geared towards young people on the 1st day of climate week on 13 May.
* Centre researchers have been successful in leading the Scottish spoke of a £5 million UKRI and DEFRA funded hub for climate change adaptation and are planning a research project bid to connect various university centres, including the National Centre for Resilience and Public Policy, Sustainable energy and sustainable solutions.
* The SFC upskilling program has been cut for next year so the Centre is looking at redeveloping courses in collaboration with the ASBS and also an opportunity to redevelop a systems thinking summer workshop for Scottish government towards the end of August.

RY raised a point about upscaling of staff and students, particularly focusing on staff access to existing training courses and embedding the sustainability agenda across the institution. He emphasised the huge opportunity to develop effective solutions that raise awareness among all staff about sustainability issues for both personal and institutional needs.

JT and SM have had conversations with James Hamilton, Director of Organisation Development about implementing this but a dedicated person is needed to develop the content, as current availability is limited. Having a dedicated resource has been included in the strategic plan and there is a need to emphasise collaboration and leadership across the entire institution as Estates alone cannot manage this alone.

CS informed the group that they had unofficial sustainability champions and a local network in the School of Computing Science but when a new head of school instituted a sustainability committee, the existing knowledge was not utilised and the lack of workload allocation made it unreasonable to participate formally. CS asked for resources or someone to manage staff training and provide administrative support for the process.

**Action:** DD agreed to speak to James Hamilton although it is likely that budgets will have been set for next year.

10 **GUEST update** (verbal update)

Anna Brown, provided a brief update on activities of GUEST which included:

* The new coordinators are undergoing induction sessions
* Interviews will be held soon for new promoters with appointments expected to begin in early August.
* Organising of student essentials drop-offs at various accommodations will take place over the next couple of weeks.
* Plans are underway for events in August in preparation for the Eco Hub, including promoting sustainable businesses across the University. The team now has the keys for the Eco Hub and is focusing on furnishing and decorating the space. The graphic designer is finalising designs for window panels and external cladding pending approval from External Relations. Integration efforts among teams, led by the new Eco Hub Coordinator, have commenced smoothly.
* Handovers are being managed for outgoing contract staff.

The group thanked the GUEST co-ordinators for all their hard work over the last year and looked forward to meeting the new appointees at the next meeting.

11 **AOB**

CS confirmed she will step down as the UCU Environmental Representative and will hand over to Sophie Renaud. The group thanked CS for all her contributions to the discussions.

12 **Date of next meeting**

15 August 2024 - 2pm