Article

Environment, climate and nature insights, UK: 2026

Explores UK progress on environment, climate, and nature, and brings together our environmental and natural capital accounts with other official statistics.

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Release date:
9 July 2026

Next release:
To be announced

Notice

9 July 2026

Previous editions of this article were published as part of our Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK series. Recent editions include:

- our Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK, 2024 article
- our Beyond GDP insights – environment, climate and nature, UK, 2025 article

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1 . Main points

- Provisional Met Office statistics show that June 2026 was England's warmest June on record based on average mean temperature (17.1 degrees Celsius), while Wales and the UK as a whole recorded their second warmest June in a series dating back to 1884; Spring 2026 was also the warmest on record for both England and Wales.
- Between 1988 and 2022, an estimated 51,670 deaths in England and 2,186 in Wales were associated with the hottest days (above 25 degrees Celsius).
- Enclosed farmland habitat covers the majority of UK land: 52% in 2024; however, this habitat's coverage has fallen by 555,301 hectares, an area larger than Northumberland, since 1990, when it covered 54%.
- Between 1990 and 2024, the intensity of UK greenhouse gas emissions fell by 72%, from 500 to 140 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e) emitted per £1 million of gross value added (GVA).
- The output of the UK environmental goods and services sector was estimated at £128.7 billion in 2023, more than doubling in cash terms from £61 billion in 2010; it provided £54.2billion of GVA in 2023, just over 2% of the UK total.
- Around 53% of adults in Great Britain reported climate change and the environment as an important issue for the UK, when asked between 6 and 31 May 2026, through our Opinions and Lifestyle Survey; around 84% of adults reported making at least some lifestyle changes to help tackle environmental issues when asked in October 2025.

2 . Overview

This article provides an overview through economic, environmental and social statistics of the UK's environment, climate and nature, helping identify areas of progress and pressures. It draws on official statistics and analytical outputs from across the Government Statistical Service (GSS), including our UK Environmental Accounts bulletin and UK natural capital accounts bulletin, to support decision making, provide coherence across these topics, and aid public understanding.

This work aligns with:

- the GSS environment, climate and nature theme workplan and the coherence work programme for 2025 to 2026
- our Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP bulletins and our UK measures of national well-being dashboard

3 . UK’s changing climate and environment

Provisional Met Office statistics show that June 2026 was England's warmest June on record, based on average mean temperature (17.1 degrees Celsius), while Wales and the UK as a whole recorded their second warmest June in a series dating back to 1884. Daily UK maximum temperature records for June, which had stood for 50 years, were exceeded on a number of days.

Before this, the weather in the UK during spring was warm and dry. It was provisionally the warmest spring on record for England and Wales (10.41 degrees Celsius and 9.73 degrees Celsius mean temperature average, respectively), and the third warmest for the UK (9.33 degrees Celsius). The three warmest springs on record have been 2026, 2025 and 2024.

The UK's climate has been changing over the long term, with increasing temperatures and rainfall extremes. Since the 1980s, average temperatures have risen steadily at a rate of around 0.25 degrees Celsius per decade up to 2024.

The UK has also become wetter: the decade from 2015 to 2024 was around 2% wetter than 1991 to 2020, and 10% wetter than 1961 to 1990. The Environment Agency have reported that "with climate change the total number of properties in areas at risk from rivers and the sea or surface water could increase to around 8 million by mid-century." In 2024, around 6.3 million properties in England were in areas at risk of flooding, including homes and businesses.

Climate change and factors, such as land-use change and pollution, continue to place pressure on biodiversity. Substantial long-term declines are observed in several UK species abundance indicators published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). According to the JNCC's Status of priority species indicators, in 2023, the indicator for priority species abundance was around 62% lower than its 1970 baseline, although it has remained broadly stable in recent years.

Long-term declines are also evident across several UK breeding bird indicators shown in Defra's Wild bird populations in the UK and England, 1970 to 2024 report. In 2024:

- the farmland bird indicator was 62% lower than its 1970 baseline
- the woodland bird indicator was 32% lower than its 1970 baseline
- the seabird indicator was 37% lower than its 1986 baseline
- the upland bird indicator was 11% lower than its 1994 baseline

The farmland bird indicator also showed a decline of 11% between 2019 and 2024.

Figure 1: Indicators for birds and butterflies on enclosed farmland have declined, plants have remained stable, bees have fluctuated, and bats have increased in abundance

Compositional species indicators on enclosed farmland for birds, butterflies, bees, bats, and plants, Great Britain or UK

Downloac

Our UK natural capital accounts show changes in extent, physical flows, and annual and asset value of ecosystem services, and our habitat accounts also look at condition. The enclosed farmland habitat covers the majority of UK land: 52% in 2024. However, the area covered by enclosed farmland has fallen by 555,301 hectares since 1990, when it was 54% of the UK (this is an area larger than Northumberland). During the same period, areas of urban and woodland habitat have increased.

In 2023, ecosystem services provided by UK enclosed farmland had an estimated annual value of £5.9 billion. There has been a 23% decline in the value of air pollution regulation provided by these ecosystems, between 2005 and 2024. This is because of the decrease in air pollutants for this habitat to remove.

Defra air quality monitoring data show that pollution levels vary across different parts of the UK. In 2024, the number of days with moderate or higher air pollution was nearly twice as high at rural sites (11.0 days) compared with urban sites (6.2 days), with the number of such days in urban areas falling from 15.6 in 2010, as shown on our UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard.

Defra also report there has been a long-term decrease in estimated emissions of key air pollutants between 1990 and 2024. Many factors are responsible for the long-term decrease, including the decline in coal use for domestic heating and power generation.

Figure 2: There was a long-term decrease in emissions of key air pollutants in the UK between 1990 and 2024

Trends in UK annual emissions of particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), nitrogen oxides, ammonia, non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs), and sulphur dioxide, 1990 to 2024

Notes

1. The index line shows the level of annual emissions if they had remained constant at 1990 levels.
2. The values of the y-axis represent the percentage of 1990 levels.

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In line with the 2025 System of National Accounts, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) aims to develop estimates of depletion of natural resources, such as coal, oil and gas, to be included in Net Domestic Product. These measures will estimate how the extraction of natural resources can lead to the long-term depletion of natural resource stocks.

4 . The environment, the economy and businesses

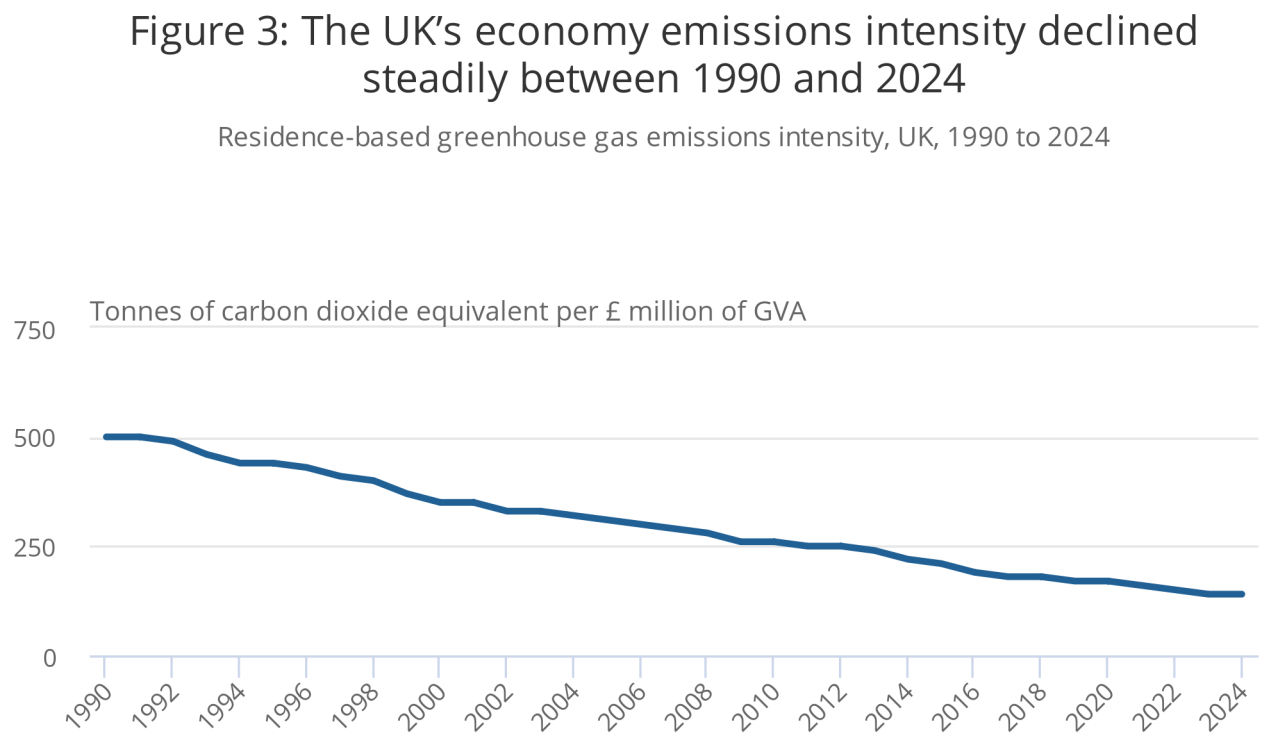
We estimate the annual value of ecosystem services to the UK economy and society across all habitats at around £41 billion in 2023 (in 2024 prices), with a total asset value of £1.6 trillion. Recreation and tourism (expenditure) made the largest contribution to the annual value, at £10 billion in 2023. By contrast, the net annual value of the greenhouse gas (GHG) regulating service was negative £330 million, reflecting that some habitats emitted more greenhouse gases than they removed.

The UK continues to reduce GHG emissions across official measures (explained in our Measuring UK greenhouse gas emissions explainer article). These emissions are measured in million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO2e). Provisional estimates from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) indicate that net territorial emissions fell to around 367 MtCO2e in 2025, representing a 54%, or 424 MtCO2e, reduction from 1990 levels.

Emissions intensity measures the amount of GHG emissions produced relative to economic and industry output. Between 1990 and 2024, we estimate that residence-based emissions intensity fell by 72%, from 500 to 140 tonnes of CO2 equivalent emitted per £1 million of gross value added (GVA). These capture emissions generated by UK residents and UK-registered businesses both domestically and overseas.

Figure 3: The UK's economy emissions intensity declined steadily between 1990 and 2024

Residence-based greenhouse gas emissions intensity, UK, 1990 to 2024



Source: UK Environmental Accounts from Ricardo Energy and the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Greenhouse gas emissions intensity is calculated by dividing the level of greenhouse gas emissions by gross value added (GVA). GVA is the difference between output and intermediate consumption for any given industry. This means the difference between the value of goods and services produced (output) and the cost of raw materials and other inputs that are used up in production (intermediate consumption). GVA are chained volume measures, in constant prices with 2023 as the base year. All emissions intensity figures are calculated excluding consumer expenditure (often referred to as "households" in the article accompanying this dataset).

While emissions intensity reflects changes in the UK's economic production, Defra produces consumption-based "carbon footprint" estimates. These account for GHG emissions through the supply chain emissions of goods and services consumed in the UK, wherever they are produced in the world. Between 1990 and 2023, total UK consumption-based GHG emissions fell 222 MtCO2e (about 24%) to an estimated 699 MtCO2e. Despite fluctuations peaking in the mid2000s and falling sharply around 2009 and 2020, the overall trend shows a long-term decline in the UK's carbon footprint.

Indicators such as the UK's material footprint provide a complementary perspective on the environmental pressures associated with the production and consumption of goods and services. This measures the total amount of raw materials, from both domestic and overseas sources, required to meet UK demand for goods and services. This declined to around 1.20 billion tonnes in 2023, down from a peak of approximately 1.45 billion tonnes in 2004.

These trends can be observed alongside a growing UK environmental economy, measured by the Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy (LCREE) Survey and Environmental Goods and Services Sector (EGSS) statistics.

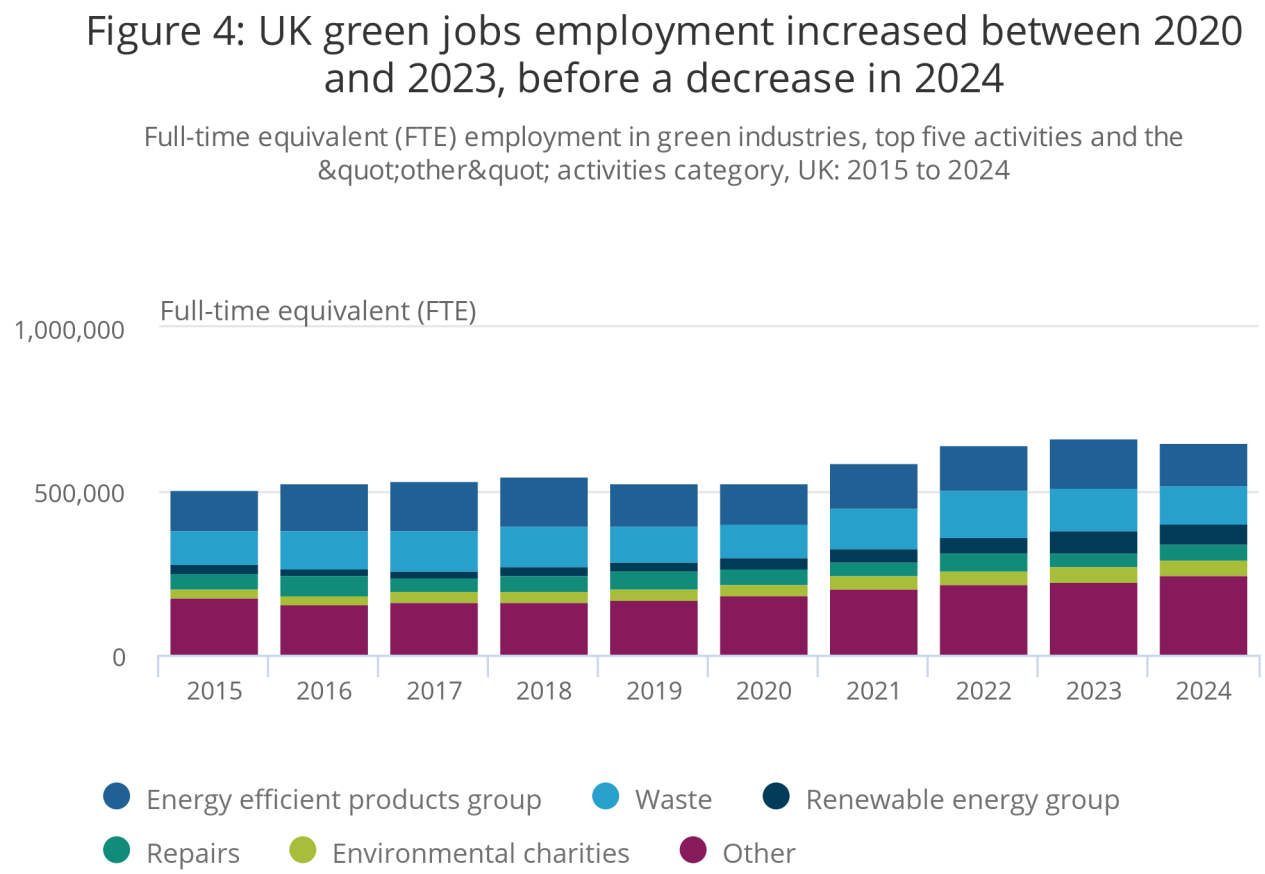
LCREE captures economic activity associated with reducing GHG emissions from businesses and in 2024 the UK's LCREE recorded £77 billion in turnover, the highest level (in cash terms) since measurement began, increasing by around 91% since 2015.

The EGSS measures a broader range of activities, including environmental protection and resource management, in line with the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting. The output of the UK's EGSS was £128.7 billion in 2023, more than doubling in cash terms from £61 billion in 2010. The sector contributed £54.2 billion in GVA in 2023, representing just over 2% of total UK GVA.

Employment estimates from LCREE and EGSS contribute to our industry-based measure of "green jobs" in the UK. In 2024, an estimated 652,100 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees were in green jobs, an increase of around 142,000 FTEs (28%) since 2015. These jobs are concentrated in areas such as renewable energy, waste management and energyefficient products.

Figure 4: UK green jobs employment increased between 2020 and 2023, before a decrease in 2024

Full-time equivalent (FTE) employment in green industries, top five activities and the "other" activities category, UK: 2015 to 2024



Source: Environmental Accounts, Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy Survey, and Business Register and Employment Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Estimates are subject to revision and to survey-based sampling uncertainty, as definitions, methods, and data sources are reviewed; this should be considered when comparing estimates over time.

2. The "other" category is obtained by combining the remaining 16 activities, data for which can be found in our green jobs datasets.

We also provide data on how businesses are responding to environmental challenges via our Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) across selected industries. See Section 6: Data sources and quality, of our Low carbon and renewable energy economy, UK: 2024 bulletin section, including the Limitations subsection, for more detail.

When asked between 15 June 2026 to 28 June (Wave 159) nearly a third (32%) of businesses reported being very or somewhat concerned about the impact climate change may have on their business, as shown in our Business impact on the UK economy dataset. In the same period, around 23% expressed concern about the impact nature or biodiversity risks may have on their business.

Approximately 36% of respondents indicated there were no barriers to taking action to tackle such environmental issues, and around 23% said they were not sure, with other responses including:

- being unclear on what actions to take (15%)
- high upfront costs (13%)
- limited capital (13%)
- limited time or capacity to act (11%)

For more on climate adaptation see the Climate Change Committee's A Well-Adapted UK report.

5 . Environment and society

Our Opinions and Lifestyle Survey found that between 6 and 31 May 2026, around 53% of adults in Great Britain reported that climate change and the environment was an important issue for the UK.

Around 4 in 5 adults in Great Britain (84%) reported making at least some lifestyle changes to help tackle environmental issues when asked between 1 and 26 October 2025. Among the 16% of adults that did not report making any lifestyle changes, the most commonly reported reasons given were:

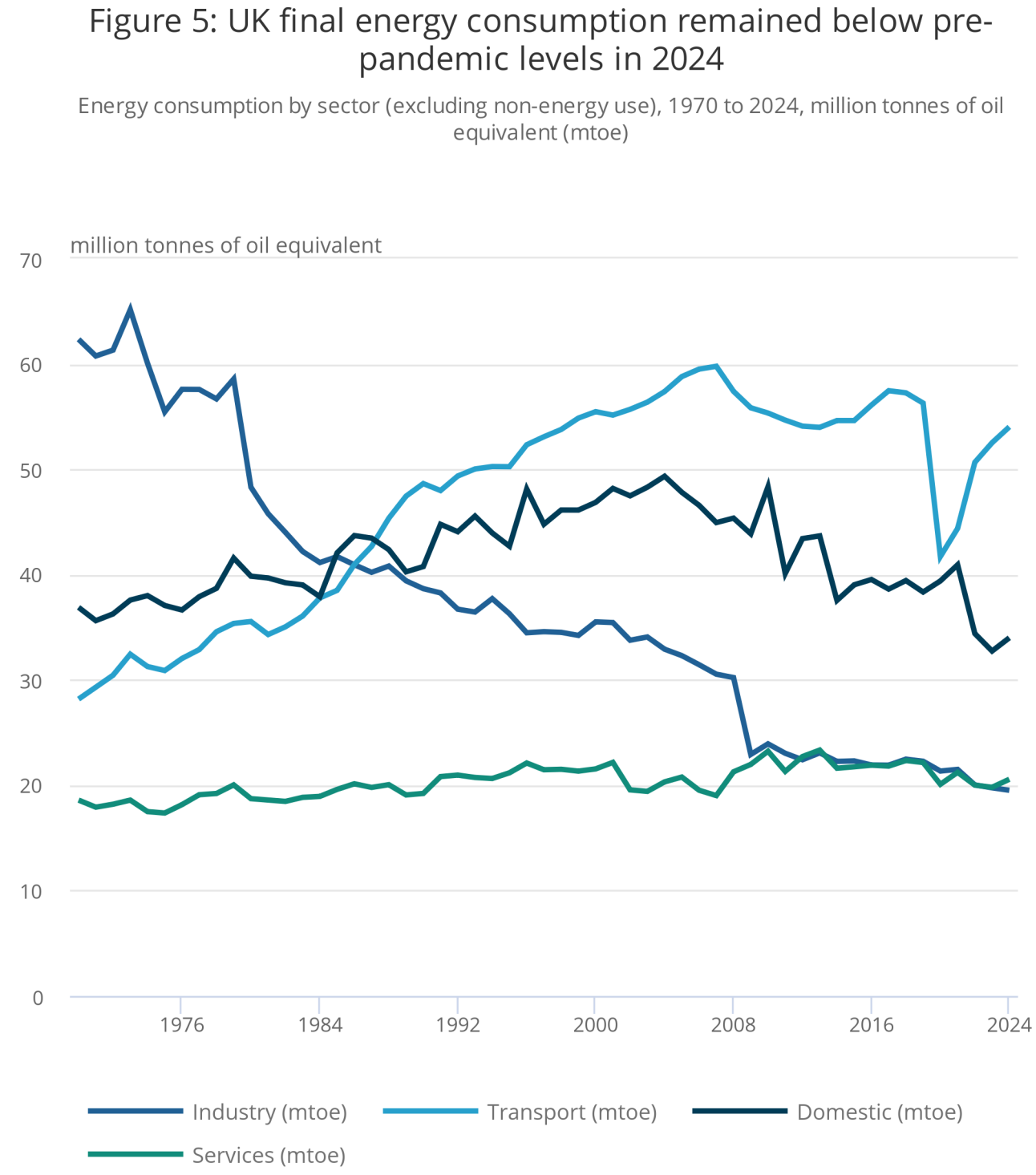
- thinking large polluters should change before individuals (34%)
- not thinking that changes would have an effect on environmental issues (32%)
- it being too expensive (24%)

One way to understand household activity is through patterns of energy use. DESNZ's Energy Consumption in the UK 2025 statistics show that final energy consumption in the domestic sector has generally been decreasing since the early 2000s.

In 2024, UK final energy consumption (excluding non-energy use) was 128.1 million tonnes of oil equivalent (mtoe), 7.9% lower than pre-pandemic (2019) levels.

Figure 5: UK final energy consumption remained below pre-pandemic levels in 2024

Energy consumption by sector (excluding non-energy use), 1970 to 2024, million tonnes of oil equivalent (mtoe)



Source: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), Energy Consumption in the UK (ECUK) 2025, Table C1: Final Energy Consumption by Sector and Fuel, 1970 to 2024

However, short-term changes in energy consumption highlight continued variability in demand. Between 2023 and 2024, final energy consumption in the UK increased by 2.6%, including an increase of 3.8% in the domestic sector to 34.0 mtoe. DESNZ attribute this to slightly cooler temperatures in 2024 relative to 2023, and some easing of previously high energy prices.

Our latest UK environmental accounts show that household activities, mainly domestic travel (particularly driving) and home heating, have been the largest single source of UK residence-based GHG emissions in every year since 2015, accounting for 25.9% of the total in 2024 (124 MtCO2e). Household emissions have declined particularly since the mid2000s, and were around 15% lower in 2024 than in 1990.

The latest DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker reports that, in Spring 2026, 84% are aware of the need to change the way homes are heated to reach Net Zero targets. Among owner-occupiers, the likelihood of installing or already having a heat pump has increased for both air source and ground source heat pumps between Winter 2021 and Spring 2026; from 19% to 26% for air source heat pumps and from 13% to 17% for ground source heat pumps.

Separate transport data also suggest a shift in household behaviours. According to Vehicle licensing statistics from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, new registrations of zero emission vehicles have risen steadily, reaching 473,000 in 2025. This accounts for 22.8% of all new car registrations, up from 11.4% in 2021. Hybrid petrol registrations (659,000) also exceeded petrol registrations (610,000) for the first time.

Environmental taxes, which aim to discourage environmentally harmful activities, have increased in current price terms since 1997. However, environmental taxes as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) fell from 1.9% in 2024 to 1.8% in 2025, the lowest proportion since 1997, further information is available in our Environmental Accounts bulletin.

In 2023, businesses paid 64.5% of environmental taxes, while households accounted for 34.6%. The average tax paid per household rose by 6.2% to £666 in 2023, up from £627 in 2022.

Figure 6: Environmental taxes as a percentage of GDP in 2025 were at their lowest since 1997

Environmental taxes as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), UK and EU-27, 1997 to 2025

Notes

1. All data are presented in current prices and not adjusted for inflation.

2. [z] = Data are not available.

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According to UN Secretary-General's High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP report: "environmental degradation directly affects health, livelihoods and life satisfaction". The ONS has led the development of the Standards for Official Statistics on Climate Health Interactions (SOSCHI), establishing a framework to measure the impacts of climate hazards on human health.

One such indicator is temperature-related mortality. Between 1988 and 2022, an estimated 51,670 deaths in England and 2,186 in Wales were associated with the hottest days. Further results are expected later this year, with an improved method and updated data sources. Both very low and very high temperatures were associated with increased mortality risk, with temperatures below negative 5 degrees Celsius and above 25 degrees Celsius, posing the greatest risk across England and Wales.

These risks are projected to increase. The Fourth Climate Change Committee Risk Assessment Independent Assessment (CCRA4-IA) Technical Report estimates that heat-related deaths could rise to between 1,500 and 4,000 each year in the 2030s, 3,000 to 10,000 in the 2050s, and around 9,000 in the 2080s.

Further evidence highlights this relationship. The extreme heat SOSCHI indicator estimates that between 2001 and 2023, extreme heat could be linked to 614 suicides in England and 48 in Wales, around 1 in every 179 suicides in England and 1 in every 159 in Wales. As average temperatures rise, the proportion of suicides linked to extreme heat is also increasing.

These climate and health indicators demonstrate the links between these topics in the UK, alongside other related statistics to support user understanding.

6 . Glossary

Abundance

The relative quantity or frequency of a species within a given area or ecosystem.

Annual and asset values

Annual valuations look at flows in a given year. Asset values measure the stream of services from, or stock of, a natural resource in terms of the future expected supply and use over a reasonably predictable time horizon.

Depletion

The decrease in the quantity of the stock of a natural resource because of extraction exceeding rates of regeneration, affecting the asset's ability to deliver continued flows of services.

Domestic consumption

Refers to consumption by households (the residential sector) rather than non-domestic consumption from all other sectors, for example, commercial, industrial and the public sector.

Ecosystem services

Ecosystem services estimate the contribution of biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) aspects of nature to the economy and society, in either physical volume or monetary value.

Enclosed farmland

Enclosed farmland is composed of arable and horticultural land, primarily used for crop production, and improved grassland, heavily modified for maximising forage production for livestock.

Environmental goods and services sector

Compiled in accordance with the United Nation's System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) to produce internationally comparable statistics on the environment and its relationship with the economy.

Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)

Territorial emissions estimates, produced by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), cover greenhouse gas emissions within UK borders. They are used to monitor progress in reducing UK greenhouse gas emissions and inform reporting against UK emissions reduction targets.

Residence (production) emissions estimates are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and cover GHG emissions by UK residents and UK-registered businesses wherever they are in the world. They are aligned with the UK National Accounts, enabling GHG emissions to be linked to economic sectors and activity in them.

Consumption "carbon footprint" emissions estimates are produced by theDepartment for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). These account for all GHG emissions through the supply chain of goods and services consumed in the UK, wherever they are produced in the world. This includes emissions from UK imports of goods and services and excludes emissions arising from UK-produced goods that are exported. It also excludes emissions from land use, land use change and forestry.

For a comparison between all three official measures of UK GHG emissions, see our Measuring UK greenhouse gas emissions explainer article.

For a list of greenhouse gases, please see Section 6: Definitions in our UK Environmental Accounts: 2026 bulletin.

Green jobs

We define green jobs as "employment in an activity that contributes to protecting or restoring the environment, including those that mitigate or adapt to climate change". We outline how we measure green jobs, including a list of activities that underpin the definition, in our Estimates of green jobs, UK: March 2026 bulletin. The data in this bulletin form an extension of our labour market statistics.

Gross domestic product (GDP)

GDP is the total value of output in an economic territory. Domestic product can be measured as gross or net. It is presented in the accounts at market (or purchasers') prices.

All estimates of gross value added (GVA) and GDP are subject to revisions. For more information, please see Section 8: Revisions to GDP in our GDP quarterly national accounts, UK: April to June 2025 bulletin.

Gross value added (GVA)

GVA is the difference between output and intermediate consumption for any given industry. This means the difference between the value of goods and services produced (output) and the cost of raw materials and other inputs that are used up in production (intermediate consumption).

All estimates of GVA and GDP are subject to revisions. For more information, please see Section 8: Revisions to GDP in our GDP quarterly national accounts, UK: April to June 2025 bulletin.

Low carbon and renewable energy economy (LCREE)

Economic activities that deliver goods and services that are likely to help the UK generate lower emissions of greenhouse gases, predominantly carbon dioxide.

We produce annual estimates of LCREE activity in the UK and constituent countries for turnover, employment, exports, imports, acquisitions, disposals, and number of businesses, with data collected from our annual LCREE Survey.

7 . Data sources and quality

This article provides wider context for Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistics, including our environmental accounts, to help explain how the environment contributes to the economy, the impact that the economy has on the environment, and how society responds to environmental issues.

It also supports, but does not form part of, our wider work on Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK.

Data coverage, strengths and limitations

These statistics include accredited official statistics (previously called National Statistics), official statistics, official statistics in development (previously known as experimental statistics) from across the GSS. The Office for Statistics Regulation's blog, What does it mean to be an accredited official statistic? and the Code of Practice for Statistics gives further detail on the official statistics standards.

As this release brings together statistics across different geographies, sampled populations and time periods, caution should be used when making comparisons and drawing conclusions. Figures and percentages may also not sum because of rounding.

Each statistic is linked to its source publication or dataset, enabling users to access the underlying data and methodology, and better understand its coverage, strengths, and limitations.

Comparability and uncertainty

Our surveys use a sample of a population, and so are subject to measurable sampling uncertainty. Confidence intervals are used to assess the statistical significance of the differences, explained in our Uncertainty and how we measure for it for our surveys web page.

This should be considered when looking at changes in the estimates over time. There is also the potential for respondent bias from self-reported data, which may lead to differences from other data sources.

For the indicators that are not based on survey data, confidence intervals are not available. In those cases, change over time has not been assessed or has been assessed based on guidance from the data owner.

Differences in methodology may affect data comparability. For example, indicators where the UK-wide data are not available, alternative data sources may exist for England and/or the devolved nations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

8 . Future developments

We plan to continue with related work, including:

- making updates and improvements to the UK environmental and natural capital accounts
- releasing new research and development estimates of the UK's low carbon and renewable energy economy for 2020 to 2024, on 26 August 2026
- annual updates of the Government Statistical Service's Environment, Climate and Nature workplan and coherence work programme
- the development of beyond GDP related outputs, including the UK measures of national wellbeing and UK Inclusive Income and Wealth accounts

These developments will support better measurement of progress and ensure that environmental sustainability is reflected in UK statistics.

If you have any feedback on this bulletin, please email environmental.economy@ons.gov.uk.

9 . Related links

UK environmental accounts
Topic page | Updated regularly
How the environment contributes to the economy, the impact that the economy has on the environment, and how society responds to environmental issues. This page also hosts the development of natural capital accounts.

UK Environmental Accounts: 2026
Bulletin | Released 5 June 2026
Measuring the contribution of the environment to the economy, the impact of economic activity on the environment, and responses to environmental issues.

Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP
Topic page | Updated regularly
Exploring progress in the UK using statistics on economy, environment and society.

Enclosed farmland natural capital accounts, UK: 2026
Bulletin | Released 8 July 2026
Natural capital accounts including estimates of the economic and social value of enclosed farmland natural resources to people in the UK.

Low carbon and renewable energy economy, UK: 2024
Bulletin | Released 25 February 2026
Estimates of the size of the UK's low carbon and renewable energy economy, including turnover and employment.

10 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 9 July 2026, ONS website, article,Environment, climate and nature insights, UK: 2026