

The SUSU Sustainable Lifestyle Guide



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Introduction

What is sustainability?

Sustainability is a modern-day [buzzword](#), but what is it, really? The original definition is: **"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"**. This is incredibly important to consider in the current times. Unfortunately, the development of humankind so far has [not been sustainable at all](#), and the result is that we are living in an [environment and climate emergency](#), which UK Parliament has now declared nationwide following protests and strikes by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Youth4Climate.

Why does it matter?

The declaration of a crisis couldn't come soon enough. With the [current rates of climate change](#), our planet is likely heading for an ecological and social collapse, which could displace millions of people from their homes and result in [drought, starvation and war](#) - which would not leave behind [even wealthy countries like the UK](#). In fact, [it is already affecting us](#). In 25 years UK might [not have enough water to meet demand](#), and extreme weather, dying insects and diseases could [threaten UK food security](#).

It also has effects on our mental health. In addition to university stress, many students suffer from "[eco-anxiety](#)": feeling overwhelmed, anxious and powerless about the prospects of life on earth in the wake of runaway climate change.

And these fears are far from unfounded: according to the latest IPCC report, major [reductions in carbon emissions](#) must be made within [the next 11 years](#) worldwide in order to **lower the risk for extreme heat, drought, poverty and food insecurity for hundreds of millions of people**.

What needs to be done?

It is no wonder so many of us are feeling overwhelmed and anxious about the prospect of the future of our planet. It may be tempting to accept defeat and give up trying. But a better solution to eco-anxiety is [turning your fear into action](#). Our house is on fire, but it is too early to give up yet.

To stop the imminent environmental collapse getting out of control, we need **systemic change in how societies operate around the world**. We want to encourage you to use your voice whenever you can to speak out about these issues. In addition, since societies are made up of individuals, your personal actions can also make a big difference - especially when they add up with many other people doing the same.

The below guide by SUSU offers some tips on **how to modify your lifestyle in a more sustainable direction** through individual choices. It also provides an overview of **local opportunities for activism, volunteering and - crucially - using your voice whenever you can** to speak out about these issues, to create pressure for systemic change.

Useful resources

- [Southampton Sustainability Directory](#) - a regularly updated online resource for finding environmental and community initiatives in Southampton.
- [Global Action Plan](#) - ideas on how to work out and cut down your environmental footprint.
- The Southampton Collective ([website](#), [Facebook](#)) - a social enterprise aiming to encourage sustainability, grassroots movements and creative projects in our city.
- [Green Hampshire](#) - a page to find and promote sustainability-related events.
- [The Environment Centre](#) is a local Southampton charity that helps people live more sustainably, including providing energy-efficiency help. Their website has a lot of helpful resources.
- [Energy Saving Trust](#) - energy efficiency advice.
- [Sust-it](#) - a website and service to help you find efficient appliances and explore energy providers.
- [A guide to carbon offsetting](#) by The Guardian.
- [Giving What We Can](#) - a website analysing the effectiveness of different charities.
- [Olio](#) and [Freecycle](#) - websites to share unwanted items for free: food, clothes, furniture, toiletries, etc.
- [Depop](#) or [Vinted](#) - an app used to sell your unwanted clothes, shoes and accessories.
- [Veganuary Starting Kit](#) - help for those wishing to try a plant-based/vegan lifestyle.
- [The Carbon Footprint of the Internet](#) - an infographic on the rarely-thought about impact on computing and how you can reduce it.
 - [Ecosia search engine](#) is free and plants trees when you use it!
 - [Tab For a Cause](#) is a free browser extension that raises money for charity each time you open a new tab. You can pick a charity out of their partners, including environmental ones. They're also about to launch Search For A Cause, which is similar in principle to Ecosia.
- [The Greenpeace Guide to Greener Electronics](#) - a useful comparison of different electronics manufacturers in terms of sustainability.
- The following guide!

The SUSU Sustainable Lifestyle Guide

This guide to sustainability was created by SUSU with Southampton students in mind. It is by no means a complete guide to sustainability, but it is intended to provide a fairly comprehensive overview of some of the actions one can take to reduce their impact. We recognise that different things will work for different people, so we would like to encourage you to think about what you would be comfortable trying out. Let's get started!

Energy

In this particular section we will focus on **the use of energy**. This may sound complicated for a student just starting to live on their own, but worry not - we've got you covered!

Here's some things you can do:

- Check the [Energy Performance Certificate](#) for your current or prospective house. If the report identifies some problems, talk to the landlord about how they could improve it. **(Read below for how The Environment Centre could help you.)**
- Likewise, don't be afraid to question prospective landlords on the energy efficiency of the home you are considering moving into. Ask them about insulation in the house. There may be [grants](#) available to install it.
- Set your thermostat to **18°C** - for most people, this temperature is optimal for the body and the wallet.
- **Switch to a green energy provider.** [Ecotricity](#), [Good Energy](#) and [Green Energy](#) offer 100% renewable gas and electric. (Yes, you can absolutely switch if you're renting!) While you're at it, request a **smart meter**.
- **Put on a Jumper!** This is free and can make a big difference without having to crank up the heating.

[The Environment Centre](#) is a local Southampton charity that provides free sustainability support to anyone who lives here and contacts them. You may have met them on campus under the name of **Southampton Healthy Homes**, one of their projects aimed to help people stay warm for less money and energy.

If you contact them, they can come to your house and give advice on how to improve its energy-efficiency - even if you are renting! For example, did you know that **some people qualify for free insulation work to be done in their house?** Even your landlord might get behind that, if they don't have to pay for it.

They can also give you some free tools to improve your energy/water efficiency, such as shower savers, save-a-flush devices and energy-efficient lightbulbs.

Other things you can do:

- **Use the off switch**
 - Lighting accounts for about 19% of your electric bill, so consider **switching off the lights** in rooms no one is currently using.
 - Many devices consume power even when not in use - such as televisions, computers, microwaves, printers, etc. This is known as "**phantom load**". It adds up, so consider unplugging these/switching the socket off when not in use.
- You can identify the worst offenders using a Kill A Watt meter or other **energy consumption analyser**, which you can purchase for about 10-15 pounds - or **Buy efficient devices**
 - When buying appliances, look for the **Energy Saving Trust's certification**. This allows you to look past the cost of the device alone and also consider how much it will cost you to use over time.
 - You can use online resources to explore different energy-efficient appliances, such as [Energy Saving Trust](#) and [Sust-it](#).
- **Save energy when cooking**
 - Turn the heat off just before your food is ready and let latent heat finish the job.
 - Turn your gas cooker off while you are not using it/in between tasks.
 - Using a lid on your saucepans to help keep heat in and save gas.
 - Only fill the kettle with the required amount of water



Water

Water is a very precious resource, which we should try to save if we want to avoid [water scarcity](#) in the UK within the next couple of decades. We get high quality drinking water in our taps, but less than 20% of that is used for drinking and cooking. 33% is used for personal washing, a similar percentage for flushing the toilet, around 13% for laundry, and 7% is used outside.

Some tips to save you water and money:

- Install a flush-saving device in the toilet cistern - such as [Save-a-Flush](#), which you can get for free!
- Run your washing machine with full loads.
- Only boil as much water as you need – this saves energy too
- Don't leave the taps running and get leaks fixed.
- Check your water meter/bill to see how much you are using and consider a target to reduce it.
- Use a shower timer - four minutes is a good, efficient shower time.
- Saving hot water means saving energy, too!
- Here's [some more tips](#) from Southern Water. (And [some more!](#))
- Check the [Virtual Water](#) website to see the "hidden" water footprint of different products.

Southern Water now offer [free home visits](#) to give you personalised water-saving tips.

Additional tip: think about your **drains** and what goes into them. Everything that goes into your sink, toilet and shower drains ends up in our waterways with a stopover at the sewage treatment systems. One way to reduce your impact is by using eco-friendly washing and laundry products and avoiding flushing anything that isn't toilet paper (even supposedly "flushable" things can be detrimental).

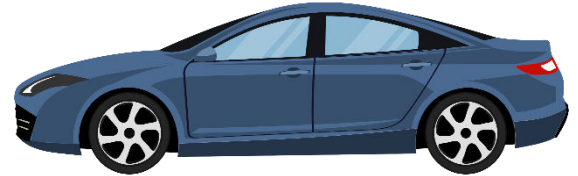
Road drains go straight to the sea without any processing, so watch out for litter on the street.

Transport

Transportation is one of the biggest sources of carbon emissions, so it pays to consider how you travel as part of a sustainable lifestyle.

If you drive, there are ways to reduce your footprint by **saving fuel**:

- Keep tyres pumped to the correct pressure
- Drive at a steady speed
- Avoid short journeys
- Switch off the engine when stationary (this also helps air quality!)
- Open a window before you consider AC
- Get your car serviced regularly



There are also some **alternatives to petrol/diesel fuel**:

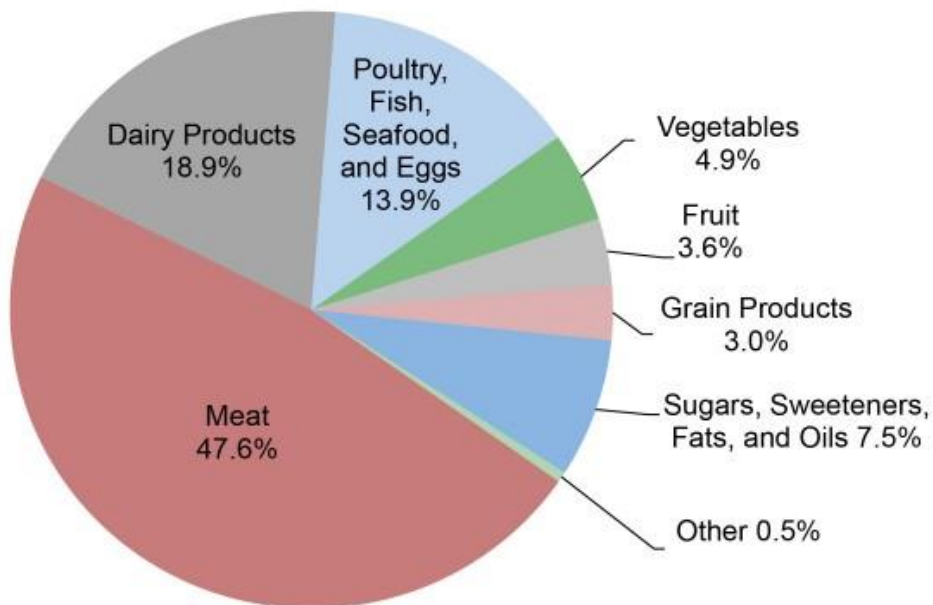
- Diesel cars cause significant [air pollution](#), which is a particularly big problem in Southampton.
 - It is possible, however, to convert them to using waste vegetable oil: vegoilcar.co.uk
- **Electric cars** have half the carbon footprint than petrol/diesel cars. This falls to 0 if they are charged using 100% renewable energy!
 - Southampton City Council are currently giving electric vehicle holders [a 90% reduction](#) in city parking season tickets. Visit their [Electric Vehicles page](#) for more information.

Other ways to reduce your footprint:

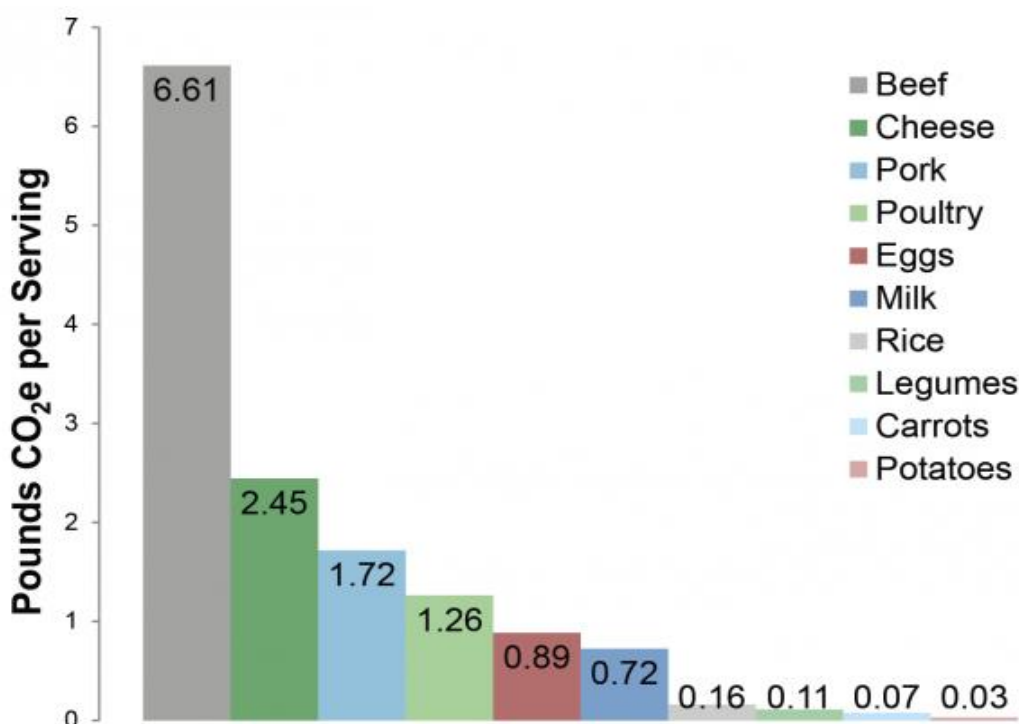
- Try **carpooling** - the more people in the vehicle, the more efficient it is (since there are less emissions per person).
- Half of the carbon emissions over a lifetime of a car come from its production. This makes **carpooling, car hire or buying a used car** an effective reduction measure. (However, do consider the type of engine of the used car and whether it would be more polluting).
- Take the **bus** instead of private transport.
- Consider **taking the train instead of flying**, especially within the UK.
- Having **local holidays** is good for reducing transport footprint.
- Try **cycling!**
- There are more transport and travel tips in the **Southampton Sustainability Directory** [here](#), including local resources for new and continuing cyclists.

Diet

One of the biggest ways to reduce your carbon footprint lies in what goes on your plate. The most important point to note is that most **meat and dairy production is, by nature, highly inefficient**, and is one of the largest contributors to **greenhouse gas emissions** and **deforestation**. A [plant-based diet](#) is significantly [better for the planet](#) than a meat-heavy one - less land and water is needed to grow plants. So here are some ways to tweak your diet in order to preserve our home.



Greenhouse gases from average food consumption. [University of Michigan](#)



Pounds of Co2 per serving. [University of Michigan](#)

- **Eat more plants**

- There is a multitude of resources to help you swap meat and dairy for plants: try [Veganuary](#), [Vegan Society](#) or [Healthline](#) to get started.
- While we won't stop you from going fully vegan (and, in fact, wholly support it!), you don't have to be one to start making a difference. Even simple swaps can have a lot of impact: for instance, just [swapping beef for beans](#) drastically reduces your carbon footprint.
- Dairy-free milk alternatives have a [smaller footprint](#) than dairy products - and there are so many types that you can have some fun switching it up.
- Why not try some of the vegan options in SUSU shop, The Cafe or The Stags? Or the Plant Pot which is a vegan and vegetarian café on campus.
- You can also **try [eating seasonally](#)** - it can save you a bunch of money and make you more aware of where your food comes from.
- **Avoid ready meals** - cooking your own saves money, emissions and plastic.
- **Grow your own** - foods such as salad greens, onions or even strawberries can be grown on your windowsill or in your garden. **Southampton Seed Swap** ([FB](#), [website](#)) is a resource to get seeds and advice on saving and growing them.
- Check out this [food carbon footprint calculator](#) to learn more.



Plastic & waste

While it is difficult to fully avoid plastic packaging, there are many things you can do to limit the amount you end up using (and throwing away).

Reduce, reuse, recycle

Everyone must have heard of the "Three Rs". Recycling our rubbish is the least we can do. It is important to remember, however, that **putting the wrong things in recycling [does more harm than good](#)**. And some things that are recycled in one place are not recycled in another. This can even vary between the area of the city where you live, as is the case with Southampton.

What you can do

- Check the [Southampton recycling guide](#) by the City Council.
- Make sure your recycling is properly separated and clean (dirty recycling can ruin the entire bin).
- Consider how you can **reduce your waste** - the City Council lists some ideas [here](#).

Our of the "Three Rs", **recycling is the last solution - ideally, reducing waste and reusing materials should come first**. There is also [a case to be made](#) for pressuring governments and organisations to stop producing single-use plastics entirely.

As for individual actions, here are some things you might want to consider.

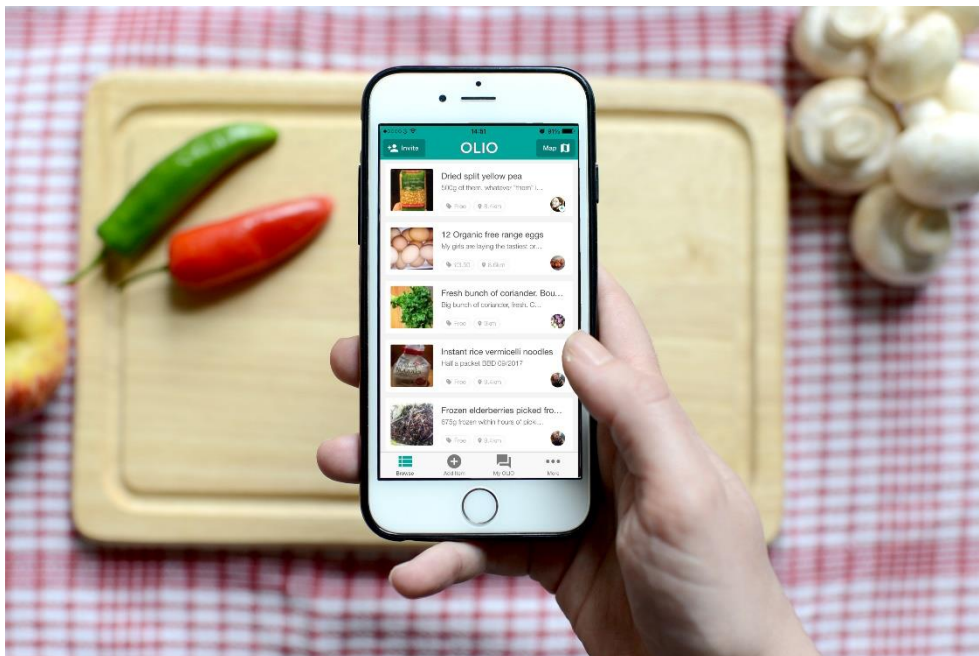
Reusable swaps

- Pick up a reusable mug and start saving money on your coffee in University and Union outlets, such as KeepCup, sold in SUSU shop.
- Reusable water bottles are another great swap to make, with plenty of water refill stations located across campus.
- Get one reusable metal straw instead of buying disposable plastic ones.
- Re-use plastic bags or get a sturdy shopping bag such as the cute Eco Chic ones available in SUSU Shop. (Or one of the many tote bags you no doubt have been given at one point or another on campus.)
- For personal hygiene, try a bamboo toothbrush and plastic-free, solid shampoo and soap bars - also available in SUSU Shop.
- Opt for loose veg and say no thanks to extra plastic bags.
 - There are lots of loose veg at **SUSU market, Portswood Sainsbury's** and **International Foods in Portswood**.
 - If you like to be surprised, as a house or flat you could sign up for a weekly **veg box**? There are lots of options that will be delivered straight to your house.
- For present wrapping, try brown paper or newspaper. You can still make it look pretty! Most wrapping paper isn't recyclable.

Food waste

Did you know that [30 to 50% of all food is wasted](#)? This means that all of the resources like land, water, money and labour that went into producing it, as well as the greenhouse gases emitted in the process, were for naught. With increasing food demands due to growing population and climate change, this clearly isn't sustainable. So let's start eating more mindfully.

- Use the [Olio](#) app/website to share your unwanted food items and/or help other people share theirs. (Non-food items are allowed too!)
- Plan your meals and shopping trips - this helps to avoid buying too much food that ends up spoiling.
- Practice portion control - don't over-serve yourself or others.
- Save leftovers from your own cooking as well as from going to restaurants.
- Remember that expiration and sell-by dates are only guidelines. Trust your sight, smell and taste more than the numbers.
- Sign up to the student-led [BioCycle](#) food waste scheme to have your food waste composted!



Fashion

Another perhaps rarely discussed source of pollution and carbon emissions is the "**fast fashion**" industry. Fast fashion brands are characterised by a rapid turnover of clothes, with styles being brought into stores very quickly and changing often to capture trends. This leads to an abundance of cheap but low-quality clothes, which are often thrown away after as little as one wear. The result of this business model is [waste](#), [pollution](#) and [sweatshop labour](#).

Thankfully, there are ways to reduce your impact. **Here are some steps to greener fashion:**

- **Take good care of your clothes**
 - Take care of your favourite items, and they will last you many years. Many things can be repaired. [Southampton Repair Cafe](#) volunteers can happily mend things for you - for free!
- **Choose sustainable fabrics**
 - Linen, hemp, silk, ramie, organic cotton, sustainable wool and recycled fabrics are much better choices than nylon, polyester or cotton, [according to](#) Sustain Your Style.
- **Go second hand**
 - There are plenty of charity shops to choose from in Southampton. Portswood has a whole chain of them on one street. They have high-quality items and do good work. (perhaps research the charities to pick one that aligns with your beliefs.)
 - There are also second-hand shops available online such as [Depop](#) or [Vinted](#).
- **Swap it**
 - [Southampton Clothes Swaps](#) run regularly in various venues around Southampton. You can bring your unwanted clothes and upgrade your wardrobe for free!
- **Donate unwanted items rather than throwing them away**
 - Identify your unwanted items. **If they are in good condition**, you could donate them to a charity of your choice - such as local charity shops or homeless shelters.
- **Reduce, reuse, upcycle**
 - **If the items are not in good condition**, there are ways to give them a new life. For example:
 - Donate fabric scraps, buttons and other items to [Southampton Scrapstore](#).
 - If you are feeling creative, you can make old clothes into something new!

More information:

- [The "slow fashion" movement](#)
- [Fashion4Climate](#)
- [Eco-friendly fiber index](#)



Biodiversity

Let's come back to why we are doing all of this: to preserve the stability of our nature. Biodiversity refers to the variety of different species of animals, plants and other organisms. Diversity is stability in the natural world, which is why the loss of it is so detrimental. Without biodiversity, humans will not be able to survive, as we rely on nature to supply us with food and other [ecosystem services](#).

All of the above suggestions are useful for improving the habitat for the many useful and beautiful living creatures that we share this home with.

Some biodiversity ideas:

- Plant wildflower seeds in your garden to help pollinators.
- Don't keep the garden too tidy - flowers, tall grasses and many different plants encourage diversity (except from invasive species).
- Join [Beekeeping Society](#) to help raise bee colonies on campus.
- Install a bird feeder in your garden.
- Buy some hedgehog food and sprinkle it around your garden at night. Leave some water as well - hedgehogs get dehydrated easily.
- Build a bug hotel - insects are very important for ecosystems.
- Volunteer as part of [Conservation Volunteers](#), [BioBlitz](#) or other similar nature-related activity! (See more links and resources in the next section.)

You can find out more about creating a home for wildlife in your garden on the [RSPB website](#). You can make a personal plan suited to your home and explore different activities [here](#).



Using your voice

While individual actions are all well and good, there is no doubt that systemic change is needed - and in order to achieve that, it is best to act together. Speak up, rise up, volunteer - your actions and your voice matter!

- Vote in any elections you are eligible to vote in.
- Southampton City Council sometimes hold public consultations on important issues, such as air quality and other things. They can also help if you would like to organise a litter pick or similar. [Follow them on FB](#) to stay in the loop.
- For internal SUSU matters, use our [You Make Change](#) platform to anonymously submit changes you would like to see in the Union.
- Join one of the local sustainability initiatives to make a difference!

Local opportunities

SUSU Societies / University projects

- [Southampton University Conservation Volunteers](#)
- [Marine Conservation Society](#)
- [Campus Collective](#)
- [Beekeeping Society](#)
- [BioCycle](#) (part of Southampton Hub)
- [UoS Public Engagement Hubs](#): Nature & Biodiversity, Health & Wellbeing, Future Cities. You can join them for outreach/science communication volunteering.
- [Southampton BioBlitz](#)
- [Meliora student research journal and symposium](#)



Other opportunities

- [Transition Southampton](#)
- [Southampton Repair Cafe](#) - get various items fixed by volunteers!
- [Southampton Common Forum](#) - gives an opportunity for anyone who uses Southampton Common to have a voice in how it is managed. They also run fortnightly litter picks!
- [Southampton Cycling Campaign](#)
- [The Southampton Collective](#)
- [Southampton Clothes Swaps](#) run regularly in various venues around Southampton. You can bring your unwanted clothes and upgrade your wardrobe for free!
- [Greenpeace Southampton](#)
- [Friends of the Earth Southampton](#)
- [Woodcraft Folk](#)
- [Southampton Scrapstore](#)
- [Extinction Rebellion](#) - the protest movement that convinced the UK government to declare a climate emergency.

- [The Art House](#) - a non-profit vegan/vegetarian cafe mostly staffed by volunteers. They support many local environmental initiatives and can always use some help.
- [Food Not Bombs](#) - cooking surplus food and giving it out on the street; campaigning for world peace.
- The Southampton Collective ([website](#), [Facebook](#)) - a social enterprise aiming to encourage sustainability, grassroots movements and creative projects in our city.