



St John's College  
Oxford

## **STATEMENT**

The President and Principal Bursar of St John's College have sent the attached letter in response to an open letter received on 3 February from the Oxford Climate Justice Campaign.

6 February 2020

### **Notes to Editors**

All enquiries should be directed to Ms Iris Burke, Bursary Manager ([bursary.manager@sjc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:bursary.manager@sjc.ox.ac.uk);  
(01865) 277321

### **St John's College**

Established in 1555 as a constituent college of the University of Oxford, St John's College fosters excellence in education and research and is committed to equality and diversity. It is one of the largest among Oxford Colleges and offers tuition in nearly every subject studied at the University. Today, St John's is home to approximately 390 undergraduates, 250 graduate students, 100 fellows and 25 College lecturers. A vibrant international community, it fosters intellectual rigour, creativity, and independence in its students, teachers, and researchers. The College supports a range of research activities including discussions, seminars, workshops, public lectures and visiting scholar schemes. While scholarly publication is naturally at the heart of the College's research endeavours, the Fellowship is also committed to informing policy and public debate, and to teaching that is informed by research findings.

Through the College's work on access to all aspects of its day-to-day activities, the College has due regard for its legal commitments under the Equality Act to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.



**Professor Margaret Snowling**  
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6 February 2020

## **To all signatories of the open letter from the Oxford Climate Justice Campaign**

Thank you for the open letter concerning the recent demonstration in the Front Quad of St John's College.

In response we would like to tell you what we are currently doing with regard to the College's investments, to detail the actions we are taking to lessen the environmental impact of the College's activities, and to explain what we did in relation to last week's demonstration.

You will appreciate that we have received a lot of correspondence following on from last week's protest at St John's and, it is fair to say, the views expressed have been varied on both sides of the debate. We can assure you that, like many of our students, the President, Bursar and Fellows of St. John's are deeply concerned about climate change – indeed some are directly working on aspects of the subject.

The College is conscious of many calls for divestment. We are, of course, asking ourselves how to move in the right direction and to identify the resources necessary to bring about change. We hope to be able to apply those skills that we do have to ensuring incremental progress towards a better future for the College, its students and, we hope, the wider community.

We set up a working group in autumn 2019 made up of Fellows and students. This is conducting a wide-ranging review of current policies, sustainable finance and 'intentional' investing – how trustees might reflect their charity's aims and values in their investment policies. This work will, of course, continue and we expect to bring recommendations to Governing Body by the end of the academic year.

The College is working with all the colleges in the University of Oxford on sustainability. We take environmental concerns seriously, both in the refurbishment of our existing buildings (the oldest of which date back to the fifteenth century) and in the planning of new buildings, such as our newly opened Study Centre. You can read more here:

<https://www.sjc.ox.ac.uk/discover/about-college/environment/>.

More than fifteen years ago, during the planning of the Kendrew Quadrangle, a decision was made by the then-Bursar, Tony Boyce, to design this building to be carbon-neutral. This was implemented by installation of a wood-chip-burning boiler, whose carbon cost is offset from the new planting of trees in Bagley Wood and by installing the photovoltaic technology of the day. The building opened ten years ago. It received the David Steel Sustainable Building Award from Oxford City Council and an RIBA award in 2011. The citation for the RIBA award states: 'The environmental agenda – building orientation, excellent insulation, solar and geothermal energy, biomass boilers, heat recovery, and low-energy lighting and controls – is achieved without compromising the architecture.'

For the more recent Study Centre, the College went even further and set a target of zero-carbon in its use. This means that there is no requirement for offsetting the building's carbon production against other activities. This has been achieved by using the College's Great Lawn to install ground-source heat-pumps, the latest generation of photovoltaics on the roof and an air-flow handling system that blends elements from classic architecture with modern technology. It is particularly appropriate for the Study Centre to house the College's main scholarly archives in a building where no combustion takes place.

The College is in a similar position to much of the UK and many other countries in that it is not immediately possible to move all the College's buildings to combustion-free sources of heating. There are other changes that the College is implementing which will make important incremental carbon-reducing contributions, notably the replacement of existing gas boilers by modern energy efficient boilers, better glazing and better insulation all contribute. These are routine steps in every building or maintenance project and the College is very grateful to the workforce in planning and implementing these improvements.

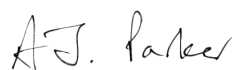
It is absolutely crucial in our view, that divestment does not become a divisive debate. Responding specifically to your comments about the College's approach last week, the majority of the demonstrators who occupied the College were not members of St John's and could not be in a position to speak on behalf of the entire student community of the College. We would like to assure you that the protesters were treated courteously whilst camping in Front Quad and that the only security measures taken were to protect the safety of College and its members.

We will continue with our working group review, always mindful of people's views on all sides of the debate, and our role and responsibilities to both our community and the wider world.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Maggie Snowling".

Professor Maggie Snowling CBE, FBA, FMedSci  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A.J. Parker".

Professor Andrew Parker PhD ScD  
Principal Bursar