

Beyond Net Zero: A Broader Sustainability Agenda for Small Businesses

Small business owners
in conversation

An insight report from
Novuna Business Finance

Tomorrow. Together

Introduction



Welcome to the first sustainability insight report for 2025 from Novuna Business Finance.

At Novuna Business Finance, sustainability is at the heart of our business. Over the past few years, we have supported small business owners on their journey to Net Zero, helping them to integrate sustainable practices into their strategies and supply chains.

However, sustainability is about more than just reducing carbon emissions—it's about building businesses that are financially resilient, socially responsible and invest in their people and skills and development. For this edition, we look at this broader definition of sustainability, recognising that, for many small businesses, sustainability isn't just about reducing their carbon footprint or using renewable energy. It sometimes involves rethinking waste, leveraging technology for efficiency, and embedding long-term environmental and social responsibility into their business culture and operations.

The three business leaders featured in this report showcase diverse and meaningful approaches to sustainability. Their experiences

highlight that sustainability is not a one-size-fits-all journey but an evolving process tailored to their industry challenges and business goals.

We are also sharing full-length audio versions of these interviews through our Sustainable Business Podcast, offering deeper insights into their journeys. I encourage you to give these audio stories a listen, share your feedback - and do reach out if you'd like to get involved in future discussions.

I hope you find this report both insightful and inspiring. If you have any discussion points or requests for further information, we would love to hear from you.

Geoff Maleham
Managing Director
Novuna Business Finance

Sustainability in 2025: A changing landscape for small businesses

Before sharing our latest stories from small business owners, we first highlight some key findings from our recent nationwide research. This data provides valuable context to help us understand how small businesses across the UK view sustainability at the start of 2025. Full insight reports with detailed research findings from recent years can be found on the Novuna Business Finance website.

Our small business research for the start of 2025 shows that 88% of small business owners in the UK see sustainability as more important now than it was a year ago. While reducing energy use remains a priority, businesses are also focusing on broader sustainability goals. Many are reviewing water and energy consumption, heating systems, and opportunities for renewable energy, alongside other key areas.

Key priorities for 2025:

- Switching to greener transport (29%)
- Investing in sustainable equipment and infrastructure (18%)
- Improving working conditions for employees (27%)
- Creating local jobs (32%)
- Supporting local suppliers and communities (27%)

These priorities also reflect the experiences of the business owners featured in this report. From regenerative agriculture to circular fashion and tech innovation, their stories highlight how sustainability is no longer just about Net Zero—it's about building stronger, more resilient businesses.

Challenges and Opportunities

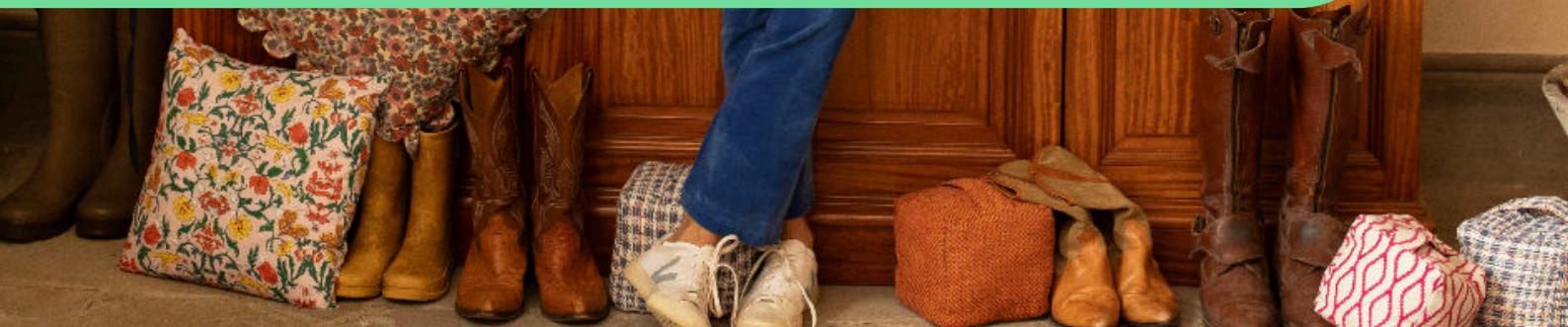
Despite a strong commitment to sustainability, financial barriers remain a key challenge for many enterprises. The small business owners surveyed cited high energy costs (55%), rising fuel prices (47%), and economic pressures (48%) as the biggest obstacles to investing in new sustainability initiatives.

However, our research also suggests a clear link between sustainability and business growth, particularly in regions such as the East Midlands, West Midlands, and the North, where companies investing in sustainability are also those more likely to report strong growth forecasts for the months ahead. This suggests that whilst investing in sustainable projects can be a financial challenge, the result is worthwhile and makes sound business sense. Our stories from small business leaders will substantiate this in the pages that follow.





Sewing a new future: Sustainability, Empowerment, and the Remnant Revolution



A conversation with Pinky Laing, Founder of Remnant Revolution

The fashion industry is at a crossroads, with increasing awareness of its environmental impact pushing designers and brands toward more sustainable solutions. Pinky Laing, founder of The Remnant Revolution, is at the forefront of this change, championing a movement that transforms textile waste into luxury home fashion. From her background in heritage

tailoring to launching a brand that redefines sustainability, Pinky shares her journey, the challenges of breaking industry norms, and the future of upcycled fashion.

The idea for The Remnant Revolution didn't come from a business plan or a carefully crafted strategy—it came from a hospital bed. As Pinky explains; "I was in hospital for a while in mid 2023, and during that time, I met incredible women from different backgrounds and cultures—and the common denominator and thing that united us, was that we could all sew," she shares. "We would talk for hours about their lives and how we could use these

skills as a force for good.” She continues; “From my hospital bed, on the back of a piece of paper, I scribbled down the business plan and it was the seed of an idea. When I had previously worked with luxury tailors and saw first-hand how much high-quality fabric was discarded, beautiful, unused remnants were ending up in landfills or being incinerated. I knew there had to be a better way”, Pinky recalls.

As she recovered and returned home, that idea slowly began to take shape. Surrounded by a group of women—many of them refugees—she noticed something remarkable. “We would sit together, and I’d watch them sewing, just effortlessly creating these beautiful things with their hands. Their skill was extraordinary, but they had no way to use it professionally.”

At the same time, she was learning more about the shocking levels of waste in the fashion industry. “I started looking into textile waste and was horrified. Fashion brands discard mountains of fabric—perfectly good, high-quality material—just because it’s surplus or slightly misprinted or off-season. It made no sense. And I kept coming back to that note I had written in hospital. That was the answer.”

With that, The Remnant Revolution was born. As Pinky says, “It was never about creating just another homeware brand—it was about solving two problems at once: rescuing discarded textiles and giving skilled women, particularly refugees and disempowered women, a way to earn a living.”

But turning an idea into reality wasn’t easy. Living in the countryside near Swindon, far from the fashion hubs of London, Pinky had to start with what she had: her local community. A conversation at her children’s school led her to a group of Afghan refugee women living on a nearby army base. “Someone mentioned that these women were incredible seamstresses, so I went to meet them. I explained what I wanted to do, and at first, they were just silent. Then one of them looked at me and said, ‘We’re in.’ That was it. That was the moment I knew

this was going to work.”

There were immediate hurdles. The women had the skills, but they had no sewing machines. “Most of them had only ever used hand-cranked machines, which are common in Afghanistan and India. They had never worked with electric machines before, so we had to start from scratch to teach them.” Pinky reached out to her friends for help, and within days, donated sewing machines started arriving. “It was incredible to see the community rally around us. Once the women got used to the machines, their skills were impressive.”

Soon after, she met Tamara, a Ukrainian refugee who had worked as a tax consultant before the war. “Tamara was completely different—she was meticulous, mathematical, measuring everything down to the last millimetre, while the Afghan women worked in this beautifully instinctive, fluid way. At first, I wasn’t sure how those styles would fit together, but then



I realised—that was our strength. It was two completely different sewing traditions coming together to create something unique.”

At first, they worked around Pinky’s kitchen table. “It wasn’t just about making homeware,” she says. “It was about creating a space where these women could rebuild—financially, emotionally, and socially. Many of them had lost everything, but here, they had something of their own. They were earning, they were contributing, they had dignity.”

At the heart of The Remnant Revolution is a commitment to waste nothing. “The textile industry is built on a culture of overproduction. Brands make far more than they need, and the excess gets discarded. But why do we need to create more when there is already so much in circulation?”

Instead of producing new materials, the brand sources surplus fabric from deadstock fabric suppliers, mills and designers. “Every piece we make is unique because we never know what fabrics we will get. We work with what’s already available. It’s not about mass production or seasonal trends—it’s about making something beautiful, sustainable, and meaningful.”

Breaking away from the traditional fashion system has had its challenges. “We don’t follow

fashion or homeware cycles, and we don’t churn out thousands of identical items. Everything we make is handmade, and that takes time. So, we’ve had to educate our customers about slow fashion—helping them understand that when you buy something crafted with care, it’s worth the wait.”

Despite the obstacles, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. “People love knowing the story behind what they’re wearing or using for their home. They love that their homeware items aren’t just another product—they represent something bigger. They’re supporting disempowered women, reducing waste, and changing the way the textile industry is done.”

Looking to the future, Pinky hopes to expand The Remnant Revolution by working with more women across the UK. “This is just the beginning,” she says. “There are so many women out there with incredible skills who just need a chance. If we can keep growing, we can prove that fashion doesn’t have to exploit people or the planet. There’s a better way.”



About Remnant Revolution

Remnant Revolution is a premium sustainable homeware fashion brand dedicated to transforming luxury textile waste into exclusive, handcrafted garments and accessories. By blending heritage craftsmanship with innovative upcycling, the brand ensures that every piece is both environmentally responsible and uniquely stylish. Committed to ethical and sustainable production, Remnant Revolution is redefining the future of homeware — one remnant at a time.

Contact details: remnantrevolution.co.uk
Instagram: @remnantrevolution





Creating sustainable success by investing in talent development and retention

A conversation with Mark Robertshaw, Director at Oxford Information Labs

Oxford Information Labs is one of the world's leading cyber intelligence companies that advises the world's biggest brands and policymakers worldwide. The organisation monitors the latest developments in global policy issues and delivers market-leading client solutions - ranging from cyber security to domain name protection. In addition to publishing benchmark industry research and

speaking at conferences worldwide, Oxford Information Labs also provides tailored C-suite coaching programmes to its growing roster of growing clients.

Despite its global footprint, Oxford Information Labs is an Oxford-based small business and its greatest asset is its people. Mark Robertshaw, is a founding Director and he shares his reflections on how the management team has attracted and retained the best people in the industry.

Sustainability is at the core of its operations, in terms of how the business supports its people, creates opportunities for leadership, and ensures financial resilience in an

unpredictable market. Mark's approach highlights the importance of a clear vision, strong leadership, and a commitment to long-term growth.

Mark explains that Oxford Information Labs was founded over 20 years ago and initially comprised of just three people – Mark working alongside founders, Emily and Lucien Taylor. "We started out as three people. In fact, I was the first employee," Mark recalls. Over the years, the organisation has grown organically, particularly in the last few years, and today has a team of around 20 people. Mark believes this growth has been possible because of a strong focus on sustainability—not just in the traditional environmental sense but in terms of creating a stable and supportive working environment for employees. "People are the lifeblood of your business in every sense. When you're a smaller company, you invest more in people, you demand more from them, and they inevitably contribute more," he says. Retaining staff in a small business is particularly crucial, as everyone plays a vital role. "When someone leaves, it's like a limb being cut off. Unlike larger companies - where there's more room for people to come and go - for a smaller business it's a much bigger challenge."

Retaining talent in a competitive industry is not always easy. Mark believes that playing to people's strengths and ensuring they are engaged in their work is key. "You want people to be doing what they enjoy as much as possible. People need to feel a sense of achievement and purpose. If someone is bored or doesn't feel like they are succeeding, they won't stay." This philosophy is reflected in the organisation's approach to leadership development – Mark adding "our people are given opportunities to take ownership of projects and shape aspects of the business. Growing and sustaining your talent builds stability, financial strength – all key elements of sustainable business."

However, even with strong leadership and engagement, small businesses must compete

with larger companies that can often offer higher salaries and more perks. "You have to work harder to keep people as a small business," Mark acknowledges. "You need to pay well—above the going rate if possible—to keep people. But beyond that, providing leadership opportunities is essential. If people feel they have a stake in the business and a real role in shaping its direction, they are more likely to stay."

At the same time, Mark recognises that some employees will inevitably leave to explore opportunities at larger firms. "It's a bit like with your own children—you sometimes have to let them go and see the other side. But what often happens is they realise that in a big company, they are just a small cog in a large machine, and they end up coming back. There's something inherently attractive about smaller businesses—there's a sense of involvement and impact that's harder to find in a corporate environment."

Beyond people sustainability, Oxford Information Labs also considers environmental sustainability in its operations. "In the UK, recycling and eco-consciousness have become the norm, which is great," Mark notes. However, the tech industry presents unique challenges when it comes to sustainability. "We looked into the impact of digital technology—things like how much energy is used when you send an email or store data in the cloud. The reality is that some data centres are much greener than others, and there is definitely a responsibility on businesses like ours to choose the most sustainable options where we can."

One area where Oxford Information Labs has made significant improvements is in equipment recycling and upcycling. "We've become much better at ensuring old equipment is reused rather than discarded," Mark explains. "It's a small step, but it's an important one."

Sustainability also extends to financial stability, which is critical for winning contracts, particularly in the public sector. "Government and major

clients often assess financial sustainability when awarding contracts," Mark says. "Many public sector contracts require businesses to meet certain financial thresholds to be considered. That means ensuring we have a strong, diversified client base so that we are never too reliant on one revenue stream."

Oxford Information Labs' expertise lies in the field of cyber security to domain name protection. "We help shine a light on those that facilitate online crime" Mark explains. "Many people don't realise how these scams operate or who is enabling them. Our job is to provide the cutting edge data and insights to help businesses and policymakers make informed decisions."

"Cybercrime is on the rise, and every business is affected in some way—whether it's through phishing attacks on employees or more sophisticated cyber threats," Mark warns. "It's becoming standard practice for companies to take out cybercrime insurance, but prevention is always better than cure. Businesses need to invest in security testing and ensure they are not vulnerable to attacks."

"Despite being a relatively small business, we work with some of the world's largest technology companies and governments. It's exciting to have that level of influence," Mark says. "Many big tech firms have huge internal teams, but they still come to us because we offer something different. Being a smaller, independent company allows us to position ourselves in a way that larger firms sometimes can't."

Ultimately, Mark sees the role of Oxford Information Labs as one of providing trust, expertise, and long-term sustainability—both in the way it supports its people and in the way it helps protect businesses, governments, NGOs and individuals from cyber threats. "We're here to do good work, to support our team, and to make a real impact in the industry," he says. "That's what sustainability means to us."



About Oxford Information Labs

Oxford Information Labs is one of the world's leading cyber intelligence companies that advises the world's biggest brands and policymakers worldwide. The organisation monitors the latest developments in global policy issues and delivers market-leading client solutions - ranging from cyber security to domain name protection. In addition to publishing benchmark industry research and speaking at conferences worldwide, Oxford Information Labs also provides tailored C-suite coaching programmes to its growing roster of international clients.

Oxford Information Labs is also the home of the DNS Research Federation which, since 2023, has championed a full understanding of the Domain Name System's impact on cybersecurity, policy and technical standards. The organisation also founded the world's first Global Signal Exchange platform, working in partnership with Google the Global Anti-Scam Alliance - as the three brands roll out a game-changing global platform to tackle online scams, fraud and abuse.

Contact Information:

<https://oxil.uk>

For an insightful and light-hearted take on the Internet world, follow their weekly Podcast 'The Internet Seriously' every Friday at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCFVPyxecr2DAQrB0lO-C9A>



Cultivating a sustainable future: Balancing tradition and innovation in olive oil production

A conversation with Philippine Mignot, Director of Tierra Viva

The olive oil industry is undergoing a shift as small producers seek sustainable practices that ensure both economic viability and environmental stewardship. Philippine Mignot, Director of Tierra Viva, is leading this transition with her in-laws family's olive groves in Jaén, Andalusia—the world's largest olive oil-producing region. Philippine shares her journey in launching Tierra Viva, moving towards regenerative agriculture and overcoming the challenges of breaking away from the traditional cooperative model.

Tierra Viva was born out of necessity when droughts in 2022 and 2023 left the family questioning the future of their olive groves. "My father-in-law has always taken care of the

olive groves, but the economic model was no longer working. The droughts were devastating, in 2023 our production was 70% below average and we were operating at a loss for the second year in a row. He was considering renting or selling the land, which would have meant losing a family legacy," Philippine explains.

Faced with this reality, she and her partner decided to act: "We thought—why don't we try something new? We wanted to see if we could make olive farming sustainable, both financially and ecologically." In October 2023, they launched Tierra Viva, a brand focused on producing high-quality, organic extra virgin olive oil while regenerating the land.

One of the first decisions Philippine and her father-in-law made was to eliminate pesticides and herbicides, a common practice in conventional farming. "I was shocked when I learned how much land is sprayed with

chemicals in Jaén. These are ancient trees that have been here for generations, but the soil is being depleted. We knew we had to stop using pesticides and start giving back to the land.” She describes how the reliance on chemicals had created a cycle of dependency, where the soil became weaker over time, requiring even more intervention. “It was a wake-up call. If we continued like this, there wouldn’t be much left for future generations.”

To guide this transition, Tierra Viva brought in experts in organic and regenerative farming. “It was challenging for my father-in-law, he was sceptical at first as he had to unlearn lifelong practices. But he is a man of faith, and his desire to be at peace with Mother Nature helped him gradually embrace this new philosophy. He started to see that healthy soil is the foundation of everything.” She explains how regenerative practices, such as cover cropping and natural composting, are now being introduced to restore the health of the groves. “We’ve started to experiment with autochthonous seeds to protect the soil and encourage biodiversity. The idea is to work with nature, not against it.”

Most small-scale olive farmers in Jaén rely on cooperatives, where olives from different groves are mixed together, producing an extra virgin olive oil of an average quality sold mostly in bulk. This system ensures stability but limits quality control and profit margins. “In a cooperative, you have no idea what’s happening with your olives. You don’t know when they’re being pressed or if they’re being mixed with lower-quality fruit. We wanted to prove the worth of Andalusian extra virgin olive oil and promote the local traditions.” Leaving the cooperative meant finding an independent mill that would manage the whole process, from pressing to bottling, and accept a small batch process only of Tierra Viva’s olives. “It was hard to find a mill that would work with us. Most mills are set up to process big volumes, and many don’t accept organic olives as the quantities in the region are too low. But we eventually found the perfect partner in

Mergaoliva, a small family-run mill near our groves, that shares our values of soil regeneration.”

This decision was a turning point. “For the very first time, we were able to taste the extra virgin olive oil from our land—our own trees, and no one else’s. It was a huge moment for the family.” Philippine describes how this shift also gave them control over harvesting. “Most large producers harvest olives late in the season because they get more oil that way, but it’s lower quality. We decided to harvest early, at the start of November, when the olives are still green, vibrant and packed with antioxidants.” This approach results in a lower yield but produces a much higher-quality extra virgin olive oil.

The transition to independent production was not just a business decision; it was an emotional experience for the entire family. “My partner’s grandfather is 100 years old. He has lived his whole life with these olive trees, yet he had never tasted his family’s very own extra virgin olive oil. When we gave him a bottle of Tierra Viva, he got really emotional. That moment made everything worth it.”

Tierra Viva’s olive oil has a bold and complex flavour, different from mass-market oils found in supermarkets. “Our oil is from Picual olives, which have a strong peppery, slightly bitter taste. At first, we weren’t sure how people would react because it’s not the mild, neutral oil most supermarkets sell.” However, consumers in the UK have responded enthusiastically. “We’ve had customers message us saying they’re obsessed with it. Some say they never realised olive oil could taste like this. It’s amazing to see people truly appreciating the real flavours of high-quality extra virgin olive oil.”

Marketing the oil has been another challenge. Without the cooperative system, Tierra Viva had to build its own customer base. “At first, we weren’t sure how to sell it. We knew we wanted to go direct to consumers, but we had

no experience in marketing.” Social media, word of mouth and support from local gourmet stores were key. “We started sharing our story—showing people the trees, the land, the way we harvest. People love knowing where their food comes from.”

Looking ahead, Philippine hopes to expand Tierra Viva’s impact by working with other small producers who share the same vision. “We know we’re not alone in this. There are so many small farmers who want to make a change but don’t know where to start. We want to show that it’s possible to break away from the old model and do things differently.”

While Tierra Viva is still in its early stages, Philippine is optimistic about the future. “This

first year has been a learning experience, but it’s also shown us that there’s a real demand for what we’re doing. And we’re at the stage where we need to invest in the future. Access to funding for things like new equipment can be a challenge for many small businesses but we plan to steadily evolve step by step.”

“Above all, we’re not just selling olive oil—we’re restoring land, preserving a family tradition, and showing that another way is possible.” By embracing sustainability and direct-to-consumer sales, Tierra Viva is proving that small-scale, independent olive oil production can thrive in a changing world.”

The logo for Tierra Viva features the words "TIERRA" and "VIVA" in a large, serif font, stacked vertically. To the right of "VIVA", the words "EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL" are written in a smaller, sans-serif font.

About Tierra Viva

Tierra Viva is a premium olive oil producer dedicated to sustainability, quality, and tradition. Based in Jaén, Andalusia, Tierra Viva has its own carefully cultivated olive groves, the company oversees every step of the process—from tree to bottle—ensuring exceptional purity and flavour. By blending time-honored farming practices with modern innovation, Tierra Viva produces high-quality extra virgin olive oil that reflects a deep respect for nature and craftsmanship. Committed to environmental responsibility and authenticity, Tierra Viva brings the finest olive oil to those who appreciate excellence in every drop.

Contact details

<https://tierravivaoil.com>
Instagram: @tierravivaoil
LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/tierra-viva-oil/>



Assessment



Closing remarks by Jo Morris Head of Insight, Novuna Business Finance

I'd like to thank The Remnant Revolution, Oxford Information Labs and Tierra Viva for sharing their sustainability journeys with us. Their experiences demonstrate that sustainability is not just an ambition but a fundamental part of how businesses think and operate—driving innovation, resilience, and meaningful change within their industries.

What stands out is that sustainability is most effective when it is embedded into a business's culture rather than being treated as a special project or an add-on. The businesses we spoke to for this edition of the report are rethinking waste, talent retention, operations - and proving that responsible business can go hand in hand with commercial success. Their stories highlight the creativity and determination that small businesses bring to the challenge of building a more sustainable future.

At Novuna Business Finance, we believe these insights matter. Small businesses are at the forefront of this shift, often finding practical, resourceful ways to make sustainability work. By sharing their experiences, we hope to inspire others and support more businesses on this

journey—through research, funding, and shining a light on their business's story via the podcast.

If you have found these stories as motivating as we have, we invite you to explore the full audio versions available through our sustainability podcast. And if you are a small business committed to sustainability and would like to be part of our next podcast, we would love to hear from you. Your stories are essential to shaping the future of sustainable businesses.

Website: [NovunaBusinessFinance.co.uk](https://www.novuna.co.uk/business-finance/)

LinkedIn: [@NovunaBusinessFinance](https://www.linkedin.com/company/novuna-business-finance/)

Podcast

<https://www.novuna.co.uk/business-finance/resource-centre/the-sustainable-business-podcast/>

Research Insights

<https://www.novuna.co.uk/business-finance/resource-centre/research-insights/>

About Novuna

Novuna

Novuna is a trading style of Mitsubishi HC Capital UK PLC, a leading financial services company, authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). We have over 2,250 employees, £8.2bn of net earning assets and over 1.3 million customers across five business divisions; Novuna Consumer Finance, Novuna Vehicle Solutions, Novuna Business Finance, Novuna Business Cash Flow and our European division specialising in Vendor Finance providing innovative finance solutions to enable consumers and businesses to grow and prosper.

We are a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsubishi HC Capital Inc., strengthening our relationship with one of the world's largest and most diversified financial groups, with over 11trn yen (£57bn) of assets.

Novuna Business Finance

Novuna Business Finance provides business finance to SMEs and bigger corporations across the UK. This includes asset finance, stocking, block discounting and sustainable

project finance provided through brokers, vendor organisations, manufacturers and direct to the business community.

With an asset portfolio of more than £1.8bn, the business is active across multiple sectors from transport and agriculture to construction and manufacturing and was awarded Best Service from an Asset Based Finance Provider at the 2024 Business Moneyfacts Awards.

The business' Sustainable Project Finance team is also supporting the development and construction of sustainable energy and transport projects, which are critical to the decarbonisation of the UK's infrastructure.

Novuna Business Finance is a trading style of Mitsubishi HC Capital UK PLC, part of Mitsubishi HC Capital Inc., one of the world's largest and most diversified financial groups, with over 11trn yen (£57bn) of assets.

Methodology:

The interviews in this report were conducted in February 2025.