Royal London Sustainable World Trust

Quarterly Report 30 September 2022

ROYAL LONDON
ASSET MANAGEMENT

Top ten holdings

	Trust (%)
Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc	3.5
Microsoft	3.4
Visa	3.2
AstraZeneca	3.2
CSX Corp	2.9
Texas Instruments	2.9
Nordson Corp	2.8
Schneider Electric	2.8
London Stock Exchange Group	2.7
Agilent Technologies	2.6
Total	**30.0**

Source: RLAM, based on the A Inc share class.

Fund data

	Trust
No. of stocks	237
Fund size	£2,644.7m
Launch date	21.09.2009

Performance

	Trust (C Acc) (%)	Peer Group[1] (%)	Relative (%)
Q3 2022	**-0.44**	**-1.72**	**1.28**
Year-to-date	-20.30	-12.34	-7.96
Rolling 12 months	-15.66	-10.31	-5.35
3 years p.a.	5.32	1.48	3.83
5 years p.a.	9.18	2.62	6.56
10 years p.a.	12.16	5.86	6.30
Since inception p.a. 21.09.2009	11.85	5.78	6.07

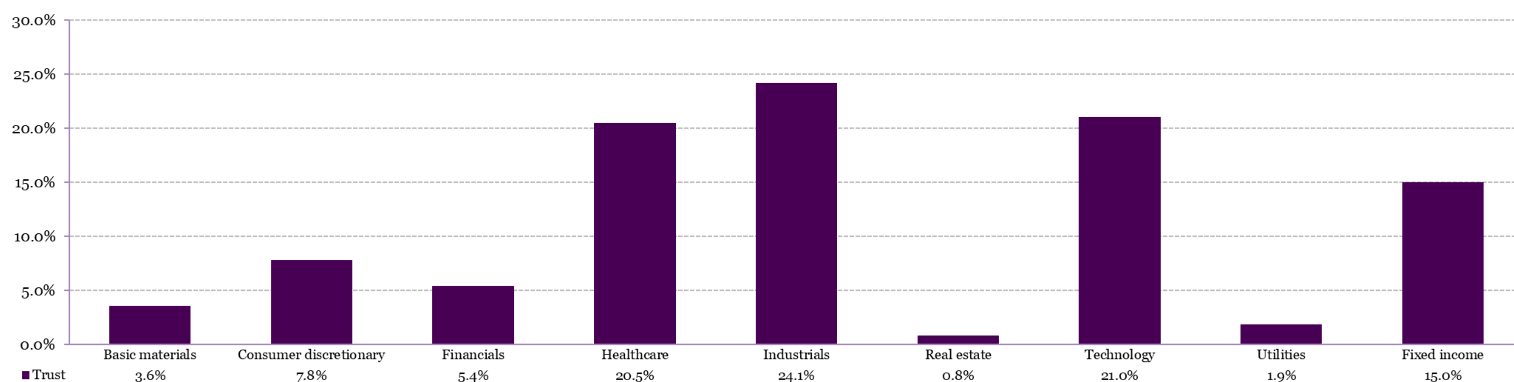
Past performance is not necessarily a reliable indicator of future performance. The value of investments and the income from them is not guaranteed and may go down as well as up and investors may not get back the amount originally invested.

All performance figures stated gross of fees and tax unless otherwise stated. The impact of fees or other charges including tax, where applicable, can be material on the performance of your investment. The impact of fees reduces your return.

Source: RLAM, gross of fees.

[1]Peer Group: IA Mixed Investment 40-85% Shares sector median.

Sector breakdown



Source: RLAM. Figures in relation to your portfolio exclude the impact of cash held.

Executive summary

- The macroeconomic factors that disrupted financial markets in the first half of 2022 continued to dominate in the third quarter – higher-than-expected inflation and interest rate increases were the key influences, along with growing fears of recession in the UK, Europe and the US. Central banks have responded to the continued strength of inflation by further tightening monetary policy and reiterating that they will do whatever it takes to suppress rising prices.
- Normally, one might expect equity-market weakness to be mitigated by positive returns from sterling credit, but our mixed-asset funds (**Sustainable World** and **Sustainable Diversified**) were negatively impacted in the first half of 2022 as both asset classes were hit by the unusual combination of macroeconomic and geopolitical factors. The main driver of the negative returns in sterling credit has been the weakness in UK government bonds, with an additional negative impact from widening credit spreads. These factors continued in the third quarter: the UK gilt market was the worst performing major government bond market, returning -12.85% as the 10-year gilt yield rose by 186bps to 4.09%. As a result, the year-to-date return for gilts is -25.1% (FTSE Actuaries UK Conventional Gilts All Stocks Index), while the return for sterling credit is -22.2% (-11.01% for the third quarter). With such poor absolute returns, we appreciate that it will be scant comfort to clients that our sustainable credit portfolios have outperformed the iBoxx Sterling Non-Gilt All Maturities Index over the first nine months of 2022 as well as over one, three and five years, or that for both mixed-asset funds the equity portfolio outperformed its benchmark on a relative basis in the third quarter, delivering a positive absolute return because of currency effects. However, relative performance is important and we expect the funds to perform well again once we get back to more normal market conditions.
- There is still considerable uncertainty about the outlook for the rest of 2022 and 2023 and many investors fear that higher interest rates will cause a recession. We believe the current equity bear market will be two-legged: the first leg – the interest rate-induced derating of equities, particularly growth stocks – is probably over unless inflation is genuinely out of control. The second leg is being driven by the increasing likelihood of a recession and earnings downgrades. This could still have some way to go as corporate earnings for 2022 and 2023 still feel overly optimistic. However, it feels like we're nearer to the end of the bear market than the beginning, not least as sentiment is really quite negative. In such an environment, markets can turn quickly. A key factor will be the outlook for inflation: if price rises start to slow and fewer interest rate increases are needed, equities will bounce sharply.

Market overview

- The macroeconomic factors that disrupted financial markets in the first half of 2022 continued to dominate in the third quarter – higher-than-expected inflation and interest rate increases were the key macroeconomic influences, along with growing fears of recession in the UK, Europe and the US. Inflation first surfaced in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, but was exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February and retaliatory sanctions that sharply increased the prices of oil & gas and other commodities. Although they have fallen back slightly, energy prices remain high and geopolitical events continue to affect sentiment as winter approaches. The apparent sabotage of the Nordstream gas pipelines from Russia to Germany suggests that energy will remain a key pawn in relations between NATO countries and Russia.
- Central banks have responded to the continued strength of inflation by further tightening monetary policy and reiterating that they will do whatever it takes to suppress rising prices. The US Federal Reserve (Fed) led the way, increasing rates by 1.50% over the quarter. Since March, the Fed has raised rates five times by an aggregate of 3% – its 0.75% increases in June, July and September were the biggest increases for nearly 30 years. Its commitment to do more has led markets to price in further hikes in 2022. The European Central Bank (ECB) has so far been slower to react, partly due to a more fragmented backdrop with a gap between Germany and 'peripheral' economies. However, ended its bond buying programme in July and increased rates by 0.75% (its first increase in 11 years and a bigger increase than the 0.50% expected by economists). A further increase of 0.75% followed in September with a clear commitment of further increases to follow. The Bank of England (BoE) increased rates by 1.00% over the quarter to 2.25%, taking its tally to six increases so far in 2022 and seven in this cycle.
- The level of activity in the UK economy is still only slightly above where it was pre-pandemic. The composite PMI business survey indicator of economic activity deteriorated from March and by August signalled only relatively weak rates of activity growth in the economy and, as with the eurozone, it continues to deteriorate as does consumer confidence. UK economic policy is in a state of flux following the new Chancellor's 'mini Budget' in late September. As expected, he outlined details of programmes to limit domestic and corporate energy bills as well as the reversal of his predecessor's increases in corporation tax and National Insurance. However, other measures such as scrapping the top rate of income tax (since abandoned) and the cap on bankers' bonuses came as a surprise, leading to further weakness in gilts and sterling. In the last week of the quarter, after comments to support the currency, the BoE was forced to intervene in the gilt market as problems with levels of collateral in the 'liquidity-driven investing' (LDI) part of the pensions industry pushed down the prices of long-dated gilts.
- The third quarter saw further weakness in equities as interest rates continued to rise and investors increasingly factored in central bank-induced recession in the next six to 12 months. In local currency terms (i.e., without the impact of the strong dollar), nearly all major stock

markets fell globally, although currency movements offset this weakness and boosted the sterling returns from overseas equities. For the third quarter the FTSE-All Share, MSCI World and MSCI All Countries World Index (ACWI – which also includes 26 emerging markets) returned -3.4%, +2.2% and +1.5% to sterling investors, respectively. Regional returns were particularly widely dispersed. According to MSCI regional data, the US and Japan delivered the only positive returns (to sterling investors) at +3.7% and +0.6%, respectively. Otherwise, Europe ex-UK returned -2.0%, while the UK and emerging markets returned -2.9% and -3.6%, respectively. The Far East ex-Japan region was a notable outlier, returning -9.8%.

- Within equity markets, the significant inflation-related rotation out of 'growth' and into 'value' that dominated the first half of 2022 switched back, albeit to a limited extent. The MSCI World Growth Index returned +3.4% versus +1.1% for the MSCI World Value Index, outperformance of 2.3%. Unusually, for the MSCI World (in sterling), energy was only the second strongest sector: consumer discretionary returned +9.1%, with energy and industrials returning +7.6% and +2.6%, respectively. The laggards were consumer services, real estate and utilities at -5.3%, -3.7% and +0.3%, respectively.
- The UK gilt market was the worst performing major government bond market over the quarter, delivering a return of -12.85% as the benchmark 10-year gilt yield rose by 186 basis points (bps) from 2.23% to 4.09%. However, all major government bond markets were impacted as the ongoing interest rate rises and hawkish commentary from central banks drove bond yields higher globally (prices move inversely to yields): the 10-year US treasury yield rose by 82bps to 3.83%; and the 10-year German bund yield rose by 77bps to 2.11%. Longer-dated bonds performed worst in the period due to their greater sensitivity to interest rates (duration risk). In the UK, for example, gilts with 5 years to maturity or less provided negative returns of just -4.93%, whereas the 15 years or more to maturity segment returned -18.77%.
- These gilt market returns took a heavy toll on the sterling investment grade credit market, which returned -11.01%. Although it appeared to outperform the gilts market, at around seven years the duration of the sterling credit is lower than for the gilt market: corporate bonds underperformed gilts of an equal maturity as the average sterling investment grade credit spread (the average extra yield available from a corporate bond compared with government debt of equal maturity) widened by 25bps to 1.99% (iBoxx).
- In credit markets, defensive sectors continued to outperform on a relative basis, albeit still providing negative returns – supranational, covered and senior banks bonds outperformed, while the real estate, utilities and asset-backed securities sectors underperformed the wider market. Credit quality had a mixed impact on relative returns in the period – although bonds in the AAA ratings band outperformed their investment grade peers, the high yield market outperformed investment grade credit and BBB rated bonds outperformed AA and A rated bands.
- The price of Brent crude oil fell by 16.9%, but remains over $90 a barrel, and copper futures fell another 8.0% in dollar terms on fears of a slowdown in China and recession in the US, UK and Europe. Currency movements had a notable impact in the quarter, following the volatility in the first half of the year. The Fed's more aggressive approach to raising interest rates compared to other central banks has pushed the dollar higher. It was again the strongest major currency: it appreciated by over 6% against the yen and euro, and over 8% against sterling. On a translational basis, sterling's weakness benefits sterling investors in overseas assets as it boosts the returns over the quarter. However, these movements will impact global trade over coming months, and dollar strength will also be a risk for any emerging markets countries and companies that have borrowed in dollars.

Performance and activity

- Our sustainable strategies are orientated to those companies that have a net benefit to society and create value for investors through access to long-term growth markets and innovation. Areas such as healthcare and technology remain at the core of the equity portfolios, complemented by engineering, utilities, selected financial services, and companies that lead their industries in environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance. This means that we do not invest in some sectors, such as oil & gas, extractive industries or tobacco. We believe that the exposure to those sectors which offer a net benefit and/or ESG leadership is consistent with outperformance over the medium term. While the sustainable funds have different mandates, risk profiles, asset mixes and geographical exposures, equity exposure is driven by the same underlying team, philosophy and process. Many of our key stocks will be held across several portfolios.
- Normally, one might expect equity-market weakness to be mitigated by positive returns from sterling credit, but the fund was negatively impacted in the first half of 2022 as both asset classes were hit by the unusual combination of macroeconomic and geopolitical factors. The main driver of the negative returns in sterling credit has been the weakness in UK government bonds, with an additional negative impact from widening credit spreads. These factors continued in the third quarter: the UK gilt market was the worst performing major government bond market over the quarter, delivering a return of -12.85% as the benchmark 10-year gilt yield rose by 129bps to 4.09%. As a result, the third-quarter return for sterling credit was -11.01%. With such poor absolute returns, we appreciate that it will be scant comfort to our clients that our sustainable credit portfolios have outperformed the iBoxx Sterling Non-Gilt All Maturities Index over the first nine months of 2022 as well as over one, three and five years, or that the equity portfolio outperformed its benchmark on a relative basis in the third quarter, delivering a

positive absolute return because of currency effects. However, relative performance is important and we expect the fund to perform well again once we get back to more normal market conditions.

- In our equity exposure, nearly all of our underperformance against the wider market in 2022 can be attributed to two distinct factors: the majority of it has been due to the derating of longer-duration growth stocks, with the bulk of the remainder from the repricing of oil and gas and other commodities following the invasion of Ukraine. By their nature, sustainable funds tend to have minimal (if any) exposure to oil and gas production and industrial commodities, and relatively high allocations to long-duration, growth companies – many of which are found in the technology and healthcare sectors and offer longer-term solutions to the sustainability challenges that the world faces. In the third quarter, the derating of growth stocks (which arguably accounted for the first leg of the bear market) seemed to stop – and growth stocks again outperformed their value stock peers. Similarly, the sharp rises in oil and gas prices reversed, albeit they are still at very high levels, and the outperformance of the energy/oil & gas sectors was more muted.
- Other than the impact of equity sector weightings, the fund performed reasonably well in a particularly difficult environment and outperformed many sustainable peers. The technology and healthcare sectors comprise lots of innovative companies that are a good fit for our investment framework. However, we favour more established companies with proven products and significant revenues – we very rarely, if ever, invest more speculatively in IPOs or early-stage tech or biotech companies as the risks are simply too great. We believe that over the medium to long run you can generate attractive above-market returns without taking such risks. Some other investors take a different view – the 'spec tech' rout that started in the fourth quarter of 2021 will have dramatically impacted them in 2022. In contrast, our funds haven't suffered permanent capital impairment: while more-established tech holdings may have been derated in the interest rate-driven rotation, they continue to be viable revenue- and profit-generating investments. We have so far seen few problems with the individual companies that we own, which are well-established and profitable businesses. Our performance has not been because we bought 'bad' companies.
- Some other fund managers have made a virtue of running very high cash levels during 2022. This is a more nuanced issue than speculating in earlier-stage companies. With hindsight it could seem wise to stay in cash and not invest in falling markets, but it's not our role to act as asset allocators. Clients give us their money to invest sustainably, and many studies show that better long-term returns are achieved by being fully invested in the market, rather than trying to beat it through timing. Furthermore, we believe that sitting in cash is poor from a sustainable perspective as it isn't being invested in companies that are offering sustainable solutions to the world's problems.
- Looking at the third quarter, its notable how few 'winners' there are across the market – particularly outside the oil & gas, commodities and tobacco sectors in which our sustainable funds don't invest. Despite the challenges, however, some of our holdings performed well in the period with **London Stock Exchange Group** a notable example as it had good results and continued to make progress with the integration of its Refinitiv acquisition. Elsewhere, **Texas Instruments** reported better-than-expected results and the share price was boosted by a large buyback; **Mercado Libre**, the South American ecommerce and payments platform, recovered after reporting strong results following a difficult second quarter; and **Trane Technologies** benefitted as its leadership in heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) technology will benefit from companies upgrading their HVAC systems to benefit from energy efficiency.
- Other than not owning key outperformers, such as BP, Shell and Glencore, for sustainable reasons, the weaker performers in our equity portfolio were driven by stock-specific factors. **Adobe**, the US creative software leader, announced the acquisition of Figma, a leading web-first collaborative design platform, for approximately $20bn in cash and stock. Although this may turn out to be a strategic positive in reinforcing Adobe's leadership in creative software (and in keeping Microsoft out of its core market), the acquisition price is high, and the announcement wasn't well received. Otherwise, **Ball Corporation**, the world's leading provider of sustainable aluminium packaging reported a decline in demand for cans, which was a surprise to the market – it may be driven by stock build-up from a slowdown in the US economy, but we will watch carefully over the next quarter or so. Lastly, German sportswear and 'althleisure' specialist **Adidas** was affected by the rise in the cost of living as consumers will have less disposable income. However, the company has been affected by a series of disappointments over the last two to three years and, despite its undoubted quality and sustainable leadership, we must re-examine our investment thesis.
- Otherwise, we remain comfortable with our investment process and most of our holdings – the turnover rates for our sustainable equity portfolios are around 15%, which implies a seven-year average holding period. However, we have taken advantage of market volatility to add to holdings at attractive levels and to reduce some relatively higher risk holdings such as **Google** and **Amazon** into strength. Otherwise, we bought contract caterer **Compass Group.** The company is an ESG leader in its sector and has a very different business model from many of our other holdings in these funds.
- In our credit exposure, despite being negatively impacted by the significant underweight to supranational bonds (the sector offers a very low yield premium that we believe can be materially improved elsewhere in the market without taking excessive risk), we slightly outperformed the broader market over the quarter. Despite the negative absolute returns, our emphasis on sector and issuer diversification and the bias towards secured debt generally counteracted the low exposure to supranational bonds. Credit sector allocation was the most significant performance detractor, reflecting the underweight allocation to supranational bonds, while our main overweights, such insurance, social

housing and real estate sectors also impacted returns. Conversely, duration contributed positively to performance as the average duration of our strategies was slightly shorter than the market over the quarter. Security selection was a small positive, with contributions, in particular, from the structured, banks, insurance and real estate sectors.

- While new issuance remained subdued for periods in the quarter, there were still opportunities to participate. We bought a 2025 supranational bond issue from **The International Finance Facility for Immunisation Company** (IFFIm), which will finance Gavi vaccination programmes, with bonds backed by aid pledges from countries such as the UK. We also increased exposure to **Sanctuary Housing** in a tap of a 2050 social housing issue – this issuer offers robust cash flows and strong net benefit through the provision of affordable housing.

Outlook

- There is considerable uncertainty about the outlook for the rest of 2022 and 2023. The Fed is continuing to raise interest rates and many investors fear that this could tip the US into a hard-landing recession. The picture is only marginally different in the UK and Europe, with energy prices remaining high and geopolitical events continuing to affect sentiment as winter approaches. Meanwhile, China is experiencing a slowdown in growth with particular problems in its over-invested property sector.
- We remain in an equity bear market, which started in late 2021. We believe it will be two-legged: the first leg – the interest rate-induced derating of equities, particularly growth stocks – is probably over unless inflation genuinely is out of control on a longer-term view. As an example, engineering specialist Spirax-Sarco, which has strong technical leadership in energy reduction for other corporates, has derated from c. 40 times earnings to c. 25 times over the last 12 months or so. The second leg started in June, driven by the increasing likelihood of a recession and earnings downgrades. It is unusual to get this type of bear market – with high inflation and rising interest rates coinciding with an economic slowdown. Usually into a recession, interest rates are falling, so decreasing profit expectations are offset by falling interest rates, which helps the future value of profits via lower discount rates – one offsets the other. Interest rates usually rise at a time of strong economic growth, so the negative valuation effect of rising discount rates is offset by rising corporate profits. The removal of this inverse relationship between interest rates and profit cycles is the key reason why equity markets and other classes have been weak; it is hard to make money at a time of rising interest rates and falling profitability.
- How long could this second, earnings-led bear market last? It could still have some way to go as it feels to us like companies and sell-side analysts are still overly optimistic about corporate earnings for 2022 and 2023. While some cyclicals have been hit badly by a generalised double whammy of expected lower demand and higher debt costs (e.g., Segro and Vistry), the market is still wrestling with forecasts. In the last week of the third quarter, two of our holdings (specialty chemicals producer Synthomer and retailer Next) reduced their full-year earnings guidance and their share prices were marked down by double the percentage cut. Such periods test the resolve of fund managers as you have to decide if the market is overreacting or whether your investment thesis has failed – and the time you have to decide can be very short. In general, we believe that it is better to be considered in such situations. We know the companies that we hold very well and, our investment process has been developed over many years, through different economic and market conditions.
- From experience, the impact of earnings downgrades won't be spread evenly across the market: growth stocks such as Spirax-Sarco, AstraZeneca and Rentokil feel relatively stable with more earnings certainty, whereas lower-quality value stocks may have considerable downside. Our equity portfolios should be relatively resilient as we favour high return on equity, unlevered larger-cap companies with good pricing power and strong earnings growth. We tend to eschew (for sustainable and/or financial reasons) stocks with more cyclical exposure to the global economy, such as energy, commodities and non-core cyclical manufacturing. Overall, we believe that there could still be more downside, but it feels like we're nearer to the end of the bear market than the beginning, not least as sentiment is really quite negative. In such environments, markets can turn quickly, which will favour those who are fully invested in high-quality companies. A key factor will be the outlook for inflation: if it feels that price rises are starting to slow and fewer interest rate increases will be needed, equities will bounce sharply.
- For sterling credit, the outlook is arguably more positive. We believe that the widening in credit spreads this year has taken valuations to attractive levels, on both a relative basis compared to government bonds and in absolute terms. Credit spreads discount significant bad news, and investors are being paid well to take credit over government bond risk. With gilts yielding over 4% and the sterling credit spread at nearly 2%, the 'all-in yield' on sterling investment grade credit is arguably at the most compelling level for nearly 10 years, particularly if inflation starts to fall. Although some further volatility is likely, we are more optimistic about the prospects for the sustainable credit portfolios.
- The BoE announced in May that it would begin the sale of its holdings of corporate bonds in mid-September, via a regular multi-stock auction. However, the sale was delayed by the adverse market conditions in the gilts market and it isn't yet clear if and when the sale will start. However, although its buy programme had a significant (if only temporary) impact on sterling credit markets, we do not expect the same for the sale. Although the holding is material in size, it is not a structurally significant portion of the market, and with the previously proposed sale's timescale of more than three years, it is unlikely that markets will see enough concentrated activity to generate large swings in pricing.

Find out more

- We are experiencing unprecedented times in markets. Inflation is at multi-decade highs, energy prices are rising and the latest Bank of England announcement created further uncertainty. Following on from the unsettling fixed income and currency markets of late September, RLAM hosted a webinar for RLAM's Head of Fixed Income Jonathan Platt, and Craig Inches, Head of Rates and Cash to discuss the situation and how central banks and policymakers might react. Investors can listen again via *Our Views* section of www.rlam.com, which also contains includes regular updates from Head of Fixed Income Jonathan Platt, Head of equities Peter Rutter, including the regular SustainAbility blog from Head of Sustainable Investments Mike Fox on key issues in equity markets and sustainable investing.

Additional information

- As we highlighted in our Annual Report, RLAM has ambitious targets for the next few years, notably in international growth as well as investment in infrastructure and people. This investment is to make sure that we continue to provide clients with the service they need and positioning us to for future regulation changes and market development.
- As part of that ambition, we are pleased to announce that we are moving to a new investment platform and have selected the industry leading 'Aladdin' platform. This decision has followed months of analysis and pre-implementation planning with the vendor BlackRock. Aladdin will help us improve our service offerings to our clients, as well as delivering operational efficiencies.
- As you would expect, implementation is an extended task, and the project is expected to complete in 2024, but we believe it is important to be transparent about such projects with our clients. Throughout the implementation, the project and management of your client portfolios will be closely monitored by our Board and Risk functions to ensure that this transition is achieved smoothly, and we will keep you updated on our progress. This is an important part of our long-term strategic goal to ensure that we continue to meet your needs today and into the future.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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