

# A Guide to Organising Sustainable Events in Manchester



# Introduction

Welcome to the Guide to Organising Sustainable Events in Manchester. This guide will help you think about the sustainable choices you can make when organising an event, conference, or meeting (referred to holistically as ‘events’ from herein), enabling you to deliver a more climate-friendly event which minimises the effect on the environment in Greater Manchester, whilst increasing the social and financial impact it has on the local community and economy.

Events have the ability to create a positive impact on a destination’s communities and economy, both of which can be maximised through considered choices when an event comes to a city – this guide can help you leave a positive impact on Greater Manchester. However, events by their very nature have a negative impact on the climate and environment, using resources, increasing waste, and contributing to carbon emissions, particularly through travel. You can help minimise this impact by following some easy-to-implement strategies to help mitigate these effects.

The guidance in this document is not meant to be a checklist of everything you must do when organising an event; rather, it is a guide to help you consider as

many sustainable decisions as possible. You might not have control over every aspect covered here, and not every event will be able to enact everything in this document, but it’s important to remember to not let perfection get in the way of progress – every sustainable action you can implement helps, and you can benchmark those that you can implement and improve on them for your next event.

It takes collaboration between many parties to make an event more sustainable, and we must all do our part. [Greater Manchester](#) has ambitious, science-based targets to be a Net Zero region by 2038, 12 years before the UK target of 2050, so the sustainable choices you can make when organising your event will help us to achieve this target. Integrating sustainability into your event planning is part of this collaboration. Together, we can help improve the way we think about the impact of events here in Greater Manchester for the better.





# Planning

First, you need to have a robust plan in place. Use resources such as the [VisitBritain & isla event planning guide](#) and set your aim with SMART objectives to achieve it. Try to align them with the 17 [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) SDGs. Then, you can start to consider which areas of your event you can target to help you achieve your objectives. Work out what is in your power to change and where you need to collaborate with others to achieve change.

Use our handy checklist to track what you need to monitor and who is responsible. Always bear in mind that it doesn't have to be exhaustive – pick areas where you can make the biggest difference, and work towards reducing the impact there. It is better to have four achievable objectives that really make a difference rather than twenty that you struggle to deliver. You can build on a solid start for your next event.

There are three main areas that need to be considered when starting to address the sustainability of your event: environmental, social, and economic.

## 1. Environmental

Environmental considerations are all about reducing the impact of your event on the environment and climate as much as possible. It's important to measure travel carbon emissions, energy and water usage, material usage, and waste from all aspects of the event. Measuring your carbon footprint is an easy way to do this. There are many online

tools that can help (such as this one from [My Climate](#)). Once you have your event footprint, you can then work on benchmarking and reduction.

## 2. Social

Social considerations mainly fall into two areas: the people working at your event and the local community of the destination you are holding it in. For the people side, ensuring all work is done for the real living wage, hours are fair, working conditions are excellent, and support is in place for staff are all essentials. A diverse range of speakers, including ones from the local area, is also essential, as is a diverse and inclusive delegate cohort. For the local community, consider how you can make a lasting positive impact on the destination – can you be involved in a secondary education programme, fund a local community project, or work with the university on a research programme? Giving back to the destination community ensures your event is helping sustain the local area.

## 3. Economic

There are two facets to the economic side of sustainability: the local destination economy and the return on investment for your organisation. For the local economy, consider how you spend your money for your event. Can local suppliers in the destination be employed, putting money into the local economy and supporting jobs, as well as reducing transport mileage? For your ROI, consider how

implementing a sustainable event can be used to produce positive comms and marketing messages both internally and externally, and how helping the local community will increase brand perception in the area.

Over the following pages, we'll look at the main areas of an event where these three sustainability pillars can be employed to help make your event more sustainable. These include travel, accommodation, the venue, food and drink, event materials, communication and measurement. Once again, this is not a list of absolute must-dos; it is more a list of considerations to help you craft a list of areas where you can employ sustainable actions tailored to your capabilities.

### Key

 Environmental consideration

 Social consideration

 Economic consideration



# Venue

The venue where you host your event is a key consideration when implementing sustainable practices. It will be responsible for the majority of your non-travel impact, so making the right decision on where to have your event is vital.

Our [Venue Location Service](#) can help find the right venue for your event.



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| Does the venue use renewable energy sources? Heating, lighting and air conditioning use a lot of energy, so energy-efficient appliances should be installed, too  |  |
| Does the venue conserve water, have water-efficient appliances, and implement water-saving initiatives?   |  |
| Has the venue signed up to the Greater Manchester <a href="#">single use plastic pact</a> ?   |  |
| How does the venue collect waste? Do they have sufficient recycling schemes in place? Are there clearly signposted recycling bins for delegates to use? Do they compost food waste?                               |  |
| Can electronic signage be utilised to update delegates and direct them around the event?  |  |
| Is the AV equipment plug-and-play, reducing the need to import your own equipment? Is it energy efficient?  |  |
| Does the venue have a sustainability policy, and a third-party sustainability accreditation (i.e ISO 14001, Earthcheck, Green Tourism or Green Key?)  |  |
| Is the venue within easy reach of your accommodation options and near an active or public transport route?  |  |
| Does the venue employ staff on the <a href="#">real living wage</a> ? Does it adhere to the <a href="#">Modern Slavery Act</a> ?  |  |
| Are diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies in place?  |  |
| Is the venue fully accessible to all disabilities, and are there adequate provisions in place for physical, deaf, blind, and neurological disability delegates?   |  |
| Manchester’s convention centre, Manchester Central, adheres to the <a href="#">ISO 14001 standard</a> , has a <a href="#">full sustainability policy</a> in place, and is <a href="#">fully accessible</a> to all |  |






# Accommodation

Where your staff and delegates stay is an important consideration when it comes to sustainable choices. Choosing hotels with sustainability policies and initiatives, and ones that adhere to social inclusion policies, will all improve the sustainability of your event.

You can use the [Meet Manchester accommodation booking service](#) to identify hotels with sustainable practices.



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| Encourage delegates to book hotels with third-party sustainability accreditation such as Green Key and Green Tourism  |    |
| Look for accommodation that talks about their sustainability credentials in their communications – do they have an energy-efficient building, do they implement a towel reusage scheme, do they avoid single-use plastics?                  |    |
| Book hotels that are within walking distance of the event venue, or are on an active or public transport route to the venue   |    |
| Encourage delegates to stay for longer than one night to contribute to the local economy and reduce turn arounds for beds   |     |
| Use hotels that serve locally sourced food and drinks   |    |
| Ensure there are plenty of fully accessible rooms on offer at your hotel choices, and that accessible rooms with hoists are available to book. <a href="#">AccessAble</a> is a great resource for accessible accommodation options and more |    |
| Communicate your preference for delegates to stay in hotels with sustainable practices  |   |
| Use accommodation that pays staff the real living wage, and that adheres to the Modern Slavery Act  |     |
| Consider booking hotels that are independent and run by local businesses  |     |



# Travel

Travel to an event can account for up to 80% of an event’s total carbon footprint, so it’s incredibly important to consider how to reduce this impact where possible. There are two main areas to consider: getting to Manchester and travelling around the city when delegates arrive.



## Getting to Manchester

It is sometimes unavoidable for delegates to use air travel. That said, there are some things to consider to reduce the impact:

- Fly direct – take-off and landing, and routes that take longer through detours account for an increase in a flight’s footprint – flying direct reduces both of these
- Use airlines that offset some of a flight’s carbon emissions responsibly
- Can delegates take trains all or some of the way? If a delegate lands in London and uses the train to get to Manchester rather than another flight, it would save 88% of the carbon emitted - The Sustainable Travel International Travel Carbon Calculator: [Carbon Footprint Calculator for Travel](#) can help you calculate the savings
- Manchester Airport has been certified carbon neutral since 2016, has a strong [sustainability policy](#), and has an ISO 14001 international environmental standard, making flying into Manchester one of the more sustainable air travel options

## Getting around Manchester

- Encourage delegates to use public transport from the airport or train station to the venue/accommodation. Manchester has the largest light railway system in the UK in the [Metrolink](#), which is entirely powered by renewable electricity. The Metrolink and [local trains](#) run from the airport to the city centre in under 20 minutes
- Encourage delegates to use active or public transport to get around the city. Manchester is a very walkable city, with the majority of hotels, restaurants, and attractions within a 20-30 min walk of the main convention centre, Manchester Central. Ensure delegates know that walking and public transport are the easiest and most sustainable options to use when navigating the city in your event comms. Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) has a useful [journey planner](#) which shows the carbon impact of a journey



# Travel



A [free bus route](#) runs across the city, and there are many local bus and train routes that can connect delegates with other regions across Greater Manchester



The [Starling bike scheme](#) enables delegates to rent a bike to explore the city, with more than 1200 bikes across the centre. Why not combine this with a tour of the city?



If there is more than one location for the event and, for instance, evening hospitality, ensure both venues are within walking distance or on a public transport route. Organise a group walk or group public transport between the venues



Consider negotiating a deal with the local transport operator, TfGM, to reduce the cost of public transport passes for delegates to get around the city



Display public transport times and information at the event on digital screens



Consider the start and end time of your event so that it matches up with key public transport options. [Avanti West Coast](#) shows the Manchester to London train service, with first and last trains between the cities



Organise a walking tour of the city to familiarise delegates with city’s districts – [Invisible Cities](#) employ people affected by homelessness to give unique city tours



If private cars do need to be used, then consider car sharing schemes, and use electric or hybrid vehicles only
























# Catering

The food and drink you serve at your event and the food and drink consumed by delegates around the destination can have a large impact on your carbon footprint.

With some smart choices, this impact can be minimised and can have a positive impact on local communities and the local economy. Educating your attendees about the sustainability of your food and drink offering can also have an impact on delegates beyond the event.



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| Prioritise locally sourced, seasonal food to cut down on food transportation. Manchester has some brilliant local caterers that can work with your team to provide a menu with a local flavour, including <a href="#">Open Kitchen</a> and <a href="#">Cracking Good Food</a>   |          |
| Prioritise organic, fair trade food options to ensure that pesticide use is eliminated and that the food has come from producers who have been paid a fair price  |          |
| Offer more vegan and vegetarian options than meat options. If possible, offer only vegan and vegetarian food – as long as you explain your choice, delegates should understand  |    |
| Minimise food waste as much as possible. Ensure that all attendees fill out a meal requirements form and state that no-shows equals food waste. Provide meal requirements forms for all meals served across the event, including any welcome breakfast  |    |
| If possible, avoid serving breakfast. Many of your attendees will have eaten either on the way or at their hotel, so a lot of breakfast items tend to go to waste. Consider donating the money you would spend on breakfast to a local food charity, such as <a href="#">Eat Well Manchester</a> or <a href="#">Manchester Central Food Bank</a> , and explain to your delegates why you have done this |          |
| Join the <a href="#">Menu for Change</a> scheme and support long term food security through local growing projects whilst minimising food waste   |    |
| Ensure there is a scheme in place to redistribute food that is not eaten/over ordered if safe to do so. Local schemes such as <a href="#">Fare Share</a> and <a href="#">The Bread and Butter Thing</a> can help make sure your food goes to people who need it most  |    |
| Ensure reusable cutlery and crockery are used throughout the event – don't use single-use plastic or even 'recyclable' items if possible – reuse is better than recycle!  |    |
| Work with your caterer to reduce packaging and recycle anything that can be; ensure recycling is separated as appropriate   |    |



# Catering



Make sure that water is provided in jugs or glass bottles (or other refillable containers) for all delegates and that there are plenty of water refill stations in the venue. Tell your delegates to bring a refillable bottle with them for the event and do not provide plastic bottled water. Share [Refill Greater Manchester](#) with your attendees – it shows where you can get free water refills across the city for when they are out and about



Encourage delegates to take part in the [Borro](#) reusable coffee cup scheme if they are getting coffee out and about around Manchester



Serve culturally sensitive menus that cater for religious and dietary needs



If you must serve a fish course, ensure that the fish is sustainably caught



Use local caterers, suppliers, kitchen and serving staff



Ask the venue if their staff are employed from the local area, that they are paid the real living wage and if they adhere to the Modern Slavery Act



Explain your choices to delegates – showing you’ve thought about the sustainability of the food and drink offering will inform and educate your attendees and could help generate a positive PR story for your organisation





# Legacy & Impact

The economic value to Greater Manchester of bringing your event to our region is incredibly valuable for us and incredibly appreciated. The hotels, restaurants, attractions visited, and transport used, all benefit from you being here. However, there is also the longer-term impact of your event on the local community and/or environment to consider too.

Your event can leave a lasting legacy in our region if you partner with us to provide expertise, finance, or resources to local community projects and schemes, helping improve the lives of our residents.



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| Partner with local community projects that align with your organisation’s core values. If you prioritise education, we can partner you with schools, colleges, and universities. If you are interested in protecting the environment, many projects around Greater Manchester would be delighted to work with you. Download our <a href="#">Legacy &amp; Impact Guide</a> for inspiration, which contains many organisations you can work with |   | ♥ |
| Let us know what expertise or resources you can offer – we can put you in contact with the right people  |   | ♥ |
| If you don’t have the time or resources to dedicate to providing bespoke sessions or partnerships, consider making a donation to one of the projects in our guide  | £ | ♥ |
| Involve the community – invite them to sessions at your event, or provide the event materials to them for free online  |   | ♥ |
| Work with local projects and charities to organise volunteering opportunities for your delegates whilst they are in Manchester, and make room in your programme for them   | £ | ♥ |
| Consider offering activities for your delegates like a walking tour organised by <a href="#">Invisible Cities</a> , who work with people affected by homelessness in Manchester to offer bespoke guided tours of the city  | £ | ♥ |
| If you invite students to work at the event in any capacity, pay them for their time. Yes, they get some great experience, but they are also providing their labour and should be paid fairly for it   | £ | ♥ |



# Event Materials

Event materials such as display stands, programmes, handouts, and gifts often go to waste and are not recycled (even if the item is recyclable). Organisers must carefully consider the materials used during their event and how they will be reused/recycled post-event.

If in doubt, stick to the Reduce – Reuse – Recycle ethos: reduce the use of materials where possible, reuse existing materials where possible, and recycle anything that cannot be reused.



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| Don't print anything. Try to make the whole event digital, from signage to programmes to menus to brochures. Explain to delegates that this is a paper-free event and all material will be accessible only digitally  |     |
| Ensure online materials are accessible to all, providing speak-text for blind or partially sighted delegates for example  |    |
| Showcase programmes and signage on digital screens – if the venue does not have these, hire them in from a local company. Not only are they kinder on the environment (if the electricity is from renewable sources at the venue), but they are easier to update with last-minute changes |    |
| Only use reusable exhibition stands, and require it from your exhibitors  |     |
| If you have exhibitors, ban single-use plastic handouts, or anything that cannot be reused or recycled. If they must provide gifts, encourage them to go for more sustainable ones like seed packs or reusable water bottles/coffee mugs  |    |
| Distribute any programmes or brochures digitally, and include a page on the sustainability credentials of the event   |     |
| If something must be printed use recycled paper and sustainable ink from a local Greater Manchester supplier. Do not print dates on anything so they can be reused if required. Ensure there are recycling points for any paper materials   |   |
| Do not provide pens and paper for each delegate. Again, tell your delegates to bring their own before they arrive and state that all event materials will be available online post-event. Do not email these big files individually; send them by a single link that everyone can access  |     |
| Use existing venue furniture and fixtures or hire them in – do not buy new or custom-made. Work with your venue on repurposing existing items to suit you   |     |
| Use the venue's plug and play AV system rather than transporting something bespoke  |     |
| Collect and reuse name badges/passes, and ensure that they are made with recycled materials from a local supplier   |     |
| Donate any leftover event materials to a local charity for redistribution. <a href="#">A Good Thing</a> or <a href="#">Invisible Cities</a> can work with you to make sure they go where they are needed  |    |



# Communication

When you have implemented some of the sustainable options from across the previous areas, it's important to make sure you communicate your decisions to your delegates, staff, business community, and the local community, so that people understand why you have made those choices. So they can participate in them (i.e. bring their own refillable water bottle).

You can also showcase your sustainable event as a case study via your own comms, the venue's comms, and the Convention Bureau's comms too – spread the success of your sustainability credentials as far as possible.



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| Use every opportunity possible to shout about your sustainability initiatives. Even if it is something as simple as letting delegates know the furniture, name badges, and signage have been reused, make sure they know! This can change attitudes and may help delegates take such initiatives onto other meetings they organise and attend | ♥️ 🌿 |
| Send a digital information pack to all delegates explaining how the event is trying to be as sustainable as possible, and what they can do to help. Make sure to mention initiatives like bringing your own water bottle, pen and paper, etc  | 🌿    |
| Include information about transport options for arriving in Manchester and getting around, stating the least carbon-intensive options first in the information pack. Consider gamifying the use of active and public transport – can there be a prize for the delegate with the most steps or cycle kilometres?                               | 🌿    |
| Include information about hotels and restaurants with sustainable credentials. Point them to the <a href="#">Visit Manchester Well</a> hub, where they can get all the information they need on how to be an environmentally conscientious visitor to our region  | 🌿    |
| Ensure that all delegates tell you which meals they will require and explain how your menu works – seasonal, local, non-meat, no breakfast etc. They will then know beforehand what to expect   | 🌿    |
| If you have a buffet-style arrangement, make sure to label all your food with its sustainable credentials – even include information like the amount of carbon emissions it has cost to produce the food and the reduced carbon of local, non-meat dishes for example   | 🌿    |
| Clearly label recycling points and encourage all delegates to use them. Put them in handy places – near exits, toilets, etc, where there will be heavy footfall   | 🌿    |
| Consider getting your chef/caterer/serving staff to announce the positive implications of the menu before the meal to explain their choices to diners   | 🌿    |
| Work with our <a href="#">Convention Bureau team</a> to put together a case study about the sustainability of your event. Distribute this to delegates, clients, local press, industry press, and your business networks  | 💰 🌿  |



# Measurement & Reporting

The key to a successful sustainable event is measurement and reporting. Whether it’s your first attempt at reducing the impact of your event or the tenth, measurement and reporting will help you take stock, benchmark and continue to improve going forward. It will also give you an asset to distribute to stakeholders showcasing your work on event sustainability.



Use our [sustainable event checklist](#) to assess which areas you want to measure and report on



Survey delegates on their experience, the travel they used when they arrived in Manchester and when they were in the city, the restaurants they ate at, the hotels they stayed at, if they used a refillable water bottle, etc. Get as much information from them as possible that will help you assess the sustainable initiative you put in place



Work with the venue, caterers, and supplier to assess the carbon footprint of your entire event



Set benchmarks for each area and devise objectives to reduce the impact in these areas next time you organise an event



Produce a full report showcasing the work done and be honest and transparent – if you struggled to achieve something, include the reasons why and come up with a solution to try again next time – don’t let perfection get in the way of progress, and don’t hide results that weren’t what you expected



Distribute the report to stakeholders and delegates and make it publicly available. Shout about your successes and indicate where you are looking to improve in the future





# Need more help?

We hope this guide has given you some ideas of how to start assessing the environmental, social and economic of your event in Manchester.

If you require any help or have any queries, please contact Richard Walker, our Tourism Sustainability Manager, [here](#).

## Useful links

- [Visit Manchester Well hub](#)
- [Manchester's Legacy and Social Impact Guide](#)
- [Sustainable Events in Manchester Checklist](#)
- [VisitBritain x isla sustainable events guide](#)
- [VisitBritain event sustainability checklist](#)
- [My Climate event carbon calculator](#)
- [Carbon Footprint Calculator for Travel](#)
- [Greater Manchester Carbon Market](#)
- [Trace x IMEX Carbon Reduction Starter Pack](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)

