

Sustainable Events Guide

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WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

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Introduction

Sustainability means ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.’¹

A core aspect of this is the environment: acting responsibly to reduce environmental impacts, conserve natural resources, and protect nature. In declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019 and an Ecological Emergency in 2023, Westminster Council committed to improving nature, reducing carbon emissions, and delivering a Fairer Environment across the borough- both now and for generations to come.

As part of this broader commitment, it is crucial to minimise the environmental impacts of council supported and funded events. Meetings, conferences, and other events can leave a significant environmental footprint, through consuming energy, water and other natural resources, generating waste, and contributing to air pollution.

However, truly sustainable events go further than simply being ‘eco-friendly’ - they aim to have a positive impact on all people and communities involved, as well as the local economy. Events provide an opportunity to build community, support local traders, and contribute to a Fairer Economy through ensuring local people are paid the London Living Wage.

We can lead by example in considering how the planning, delivery, and aftermath of an event impacts the wellbeing of attendees, workers, volunteers and suppliers, as well as the natural and local environment.

How to use this guide

Sustainability should be considered as a priority at the earliest stages of event planning and in all aspects of decision making. This guide has been developed to encourage best practice and help organisers of events make more sustainable choices, upholding our commitment to Fairer Communities and a Fairer Environment. Each section relates to a particular aspect of how to organise a sustainable event and should be adhered to as fully as possible. Please use the [sustainable events checklist](#) to assist you in following this guidance.

¹ UK govt: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-definitions-of-sustainability>

Venue



Sustainable City Charter launch event 2022

Choose a venue that has strong sustainability credentials, including:

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** ensure the venue is accessible with step-free access and all lifts are working and clearly signposted.
- **Transport:** choose a venue situated in a location easily accessible by public and sustainable transport (bike, walking routes).
- Ensure the venue has technology for supporting virtual and distant participation.
- **Waste Management:** ensure the venue has recycling and sustainable **food waste options** available.
- **Energy Efficiency:** ensure the building is energy efficient and/or uses renewable energy sources.
- **Resilience:** choose a venue with working options for cooling and heating in extreme weather.
- Ensure the venue pays their employees the **London Living Wage**.

Most venues will provide this information readily on their website, but if they don't **you can ask for this information.**

Transport



Westminster Wheels community bike shop

Travel is one of the main sources of carbon emissions generated during an event. Vehicles release pollutants, negatively affecting air quality and creating traffic which impacts local people and the environment.

As event organiser, ask: is it necessary for participants to meet in person or is an online event also possible? The pollution caused by travelling to and from events is reduced by moving an event online.

If you are holding an in-person or hybrid event, select a venue that is **easily accessible and well connected by public transport**. This will make the event more accessible and reduce transport emissions. Other ways to reduce transport pollution include:

- Promoting environmentally friendly modes of transport for commuting to and from the event, including public transport, bikes, scooters, and walking routes.
- Promoting the [Clean Air Route Finder](#) so participants can plan journeys with less exposure to harmful air pollution.
- Provide and advertise safe cycling and scooter facilities if possible (e.g., bike racks, bike storage).
- Only provide parking spaces for those that require cars (e.g., for those with mobility needs/disabilities).
- If public transport and/or sustainable transport is not possible (e.g., if the event is outside Westminster), provide a shuttle service for attendees.
- Consider how catering will be transported to the event and prioritise local caterers who have less far to travel or who already use low-impact transport like cargo bikes.
- If possible, choose vendors and speakers who live locally and do not need to travel long distances.

Waste



Community Mobile Recycling Centre event 2024

Events can generate large amount of waste through catering, packaging, paper waste (e.g., flip charts and name badges), and promotional material (e.g., roller banners).

To reduce waste at an event, organisers can implement the waste hierarchy:

The Waste Hierarchy



The most sustainable options are to **prevent** and **reduce** waste. Where that is not possible, **reuse** products. Where reducing or reusing are not possible, **recycle or recover** the waste produced by an event. Disposal should be the last option.

Prevent/Reduce

Organisers are encouraged to remove all single-use plastics from events. This includes supporting the existing UK-wide restriction on plastic straws, plastic bottles, foil balloons, plastic bags, and polystyrene cutlery, plates, bowls, and food/drink containers. Alternatives to single-use plastics include reusable glass bottles and ceramic or metal tableware.

For digital inclusion reasons, materials may need to be printed, and leaflets may need to be placed in public spaces. However, **go paperless if possible**. This means electronic dissemination of the following activities:

- Informing, inviting or confirming (RSVP) participation
- Promotional materials and registration
- Preparation and dissemination of agendas
- Maps, background materials and/or other necessary logistic details
- E-ticketing

Reuse

Proactively encourage attendees to bring reusable coffee cups and water bottles or provide reusable receptacles at the event.

Provide water bottle refilling stations to avoid the use of plastic water bottles.

Reduce the number of print outs and reuse promotional material (flyers, banners, brochures) between events. Ensure the items used in promoting the event are reusable, sustainably produced, and durable. When paper is used, ensure it is kept to a minimum through printing double-sided.

Roller banners can be returned, exchanged, or upgraded [here](#). There is also [advice](#) on which part of banners can be recycled.

Recycle

Provide recycling bins at all events for paper and cardboard, can, glass and plastic bottles, and containers.

Ensure these recycling facilities are easily accessible to visitors, using **clear labelling** and **signage** on waste separation. It is important recycling bins are paired with general and food waste bins to avoid contamination.

Food waste

Food waste releases greenhouse gases such as methane, which contributes to climate change. All the human labour, energy and water used in the production of the food is also wasted, as well as transport emissions used to get ingredients to their intended destination.

As event organisers:

- Carefully plan food quantities to reduce food surplus at the event. Select the amount of pre-ordered goods in line with the number of attendees.

- Design a plan to deal with surplus food before the event. For example, donate leftover food to local community groups and organisation who can redistribute the food:
 - [City Harvest](#)
 - [The Felix Project](#)
 - [Trussel Trust Food Bank](#)
 - [Olio](#) is an app that helps reduce waste through local redistribution, and there are other similar apps available.
- Ensure a nominated person uploads the items and arranges collection on the day.

In office environments, refrigerate the food overnight and email teams to encourage them to eat the food for their lunch the next day.

[Download our free food waste guide.](#)

Key Westminster contact: ReduceReuseRecycle@westminster.gov.uk

Catering



Climate Champions Environmental Iftar event 2025

The type of food provided at events has an impact on people's health as well as the environment through production, processing, and transport. We encourage event organisers to provide low processed, plant-based, locally sourced food where possible.

Meat and dairy products have a high environmental cost, producing a large amount of greenhouse emissions. These emissions come from a variety of sources, including the methane in cow burps, as well as land use for animal feed and rearing, and the emissions and pollution from fertilisers.

Plant-based options not only benefit the environment can also be healthier and are increasingly available.

As event organiser, where possible:

- Provide plant-based and/or vegetarian catering
- Work with local caterers to ensure minimum transportation time for delivery

Choose caterers who:

1. Demonstrate sustainable practices through offering vegetarian, local, or fair-trade sourced food and drink (e.g., fair trade tea and coffee)
2. Avoid single use plastics, including food containers, cups, cutlery, stirrers, plates, straws, and takeaway packaging
3. Provide bulk dispensing of sauces, milk, and sugar to reduce the need for individual and plastic packaging

4. Separate oil and fats and correctly dispose of them to avoid water pollution
5. Pay their staff the [London Living Wage](#)

If you are unsure of the sustainability of credentials of a caterer, you can ask them whether they adhere to the 5 points above.

Café Victoria in City Hall offers a full plant-based catering menu upon request. The café is run in partnership with Unity Works, who combine high quality training and paid work for people with learning disabilities: cafevictoria@unityworks.org.uk

Energy and resource efficiency



Queens Park Avenues Healthy Homes Forum 2025

The amount of energy and resources used to prepare and conduct an event is an important element in ensuring sustainability. Events use power for lighting, sound and heat. Reducing the emissions of an event means looking for clean power sources, using energy efficient equipment, and using power efficiently.

As event organiser:

- Use energy-efficient equipment (sound systems, projectors, computers)
- Ensure suppliers have environmental and sustainability certifications (e.g., ISO14001)
- Turn off power and electrical equipment when not in use/the event has finished. Use mains power sources over generators wherever possible.
- For indoor venues: explore the building's environmental credentials. E.g., select a venue that is as energy as efficient as possible to minimise the amount of power to light and heat the event. You could find out whether the building is powered by renewable sources.
- For outdoor venues: prohibit the use of generators powered by petrol, or open framed generators whether diesel or LPG powered. We recommend using an electric generator.

Reducing impact on nature



Westbourne Green micro-forest tree planting 2025

For outside events, leave the site in the same condition as before the event by identifying important natural features and putting in place measures to prevent pollution. As event organiser:

- Identify water bodies on site and ensure they are not damaged or polluted (e.g., by run-off into water bodies from cleaning products).
- Use plant-based or environmentally friendly cleaning products
- Use [GiGL](#) to identify whether an outdoor event is in a biodiversity hot spot (where species could be sensitive to noise and light pollution, for example). Choose areas that are less nature/biodiversity rich when planning an event location
- Run a litter picking session after the event
- Try not to use items which are harmful to nature (e.g., paper lanterns, balloons, barbeques)

Preparing for extreme weather

It is important that events are organised to be resilient to extreme weather, with the safety and wellbeing of visitors and workers as paramount.

- Event planners can register to receive relevant weather alerts, including UKHSA Health Alerts (for extreme heat or cold), Met Office weather warnings, and UK Government flood alerts.
- Consider appointing a designated ‘weather warrior’ to monitor forecasts and provide regular updates to decision-makers, staff, and attendees. This individual should have clear plans in place to guide decisions on whether the event should proceed, be modified, or be cancelled, based on any issued weather warning.

For more information visit: [How are weather warnings categorised?](#)

- For outdoor events: provide safe and securely installed cover, such as tents and pergolas, to protect people from mild rain or sun

Preparing for heat:

- As event organiser, you can ensure the health and safety of event workers by conducting a heat stress assessment using the UK’s Health and Safety [heat stress checklist](#).
- Provide accessible, clearly signed, and free water to everyone.
- Plan to provide water and shade to vulnerable workers and attendees if the weather is 26°C degrees or above. People most at risk of extreme heat include those aged 65+ or younger than 5, pregnant people, people with underlying health issues, and people doing strenuous activity.
- Consider postponing an event if temperatures reach the mid-30s or above. Consider rescheduling your event to be held in early morning or late afternoon to avoid peak heat periods, which are usually 11 – 3pm.

For more information to help make a hot weather plan, follow the UK Health Security Agency’s [Hot weather advice for mass gatherings and planning events](#).

Preparing for heavy rain and flooding:

- Consider cancelling or postponing any events that are scheduled to take place in an area that is forecast to experience flooding.
- Consider having a wet weather plan.
- Have onsite waterproof storage solutions for electronics, equipment and valuables to ensure nothing can get damaged by the rain.

Diversity and inclusion



Westminster Citizens' Climate Assembly 2023

Events bring together a diverse crowd of people from different ethnicities, backgrounds, and abilities. Creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and represented is an essential step in creating a socially sustainable event.

When we talk about hosting diverse events, everything can be considered from a diversity and accessibility angle. You should:

- Ensure invited speakers and attendees are diverse and representative of the community we serve
- Ensure invites are sent to individuals and communities who face participation barriers (e.g., those without access to digital devices)
- Ensure the workforce is diverse and representative of the community
- Provide low cost or free options available to ensure accessibility

In addition to ensuring the venue has **step-free access**, and is located near **accessible transport routes**, you can:

- Present information in alternative formats (such as alt text, braille, easy-read, captions for videos)
- Use microphones for all speakers and questions
- Send pre-surveys to attendees to gather information about accessibility requirements
- Provide sign-language interpreters if appropriate
- Ensure the room set up has space for those in wheelchairs to move freely
- Ensure access to a disability friendly bathroom
- Ensure accessible entrances are clearly sign posted

More information on each protected characteristic, including data, community insights, and stakeholder maps of local groups across Westminster can be accessed on the [Community Equality Resource Hub](#).

Interpretation and translation services can be booked through WCC'S [Translation Service](#).

Useful tools and resources

[Accessible Events](#) is Autistic Advocacy's checklist for ensuring physical, sensory, and cognitively accessible events.

[Refill Guide for Events](#) offers guidance introducing a reusable cup scheme at events.

[Greener Event Certification](#) is a scheme offering an official accreditation for sustainable events.

[Net Zero Supplier Directory](#) provides a comprehensive list of net zero suppliers across the UK.

[Westminster Footways](#) provide a print map and interactive digital routes to help people switch a journey to walking and see Westminster differently.

[Clean Air Routes London](#) is a free interactive map designed to help people navigate the capital using routes with the best available air quality.

[Refill](#) is a free app designed to help people find local drinking water refill stations near them.

[Library of Things](#) in Pimlico Library allows people to borrow tools, save money & space. For events, they offer a rentable speaker + PA system (mic, amp, speakers), projector & screen, and park games.

Sustainable Events Checklist

Tick the actions you have completed.

Transport	
Online event	
Remote/virtual access provided	
Venue accessible by public transport	
Sustainable transport options promoted (public transport, walking/cycle routes)	
Bike and scooter storage facilities provided	
Sustainable transport modes used by vendors and organisers	
Parking spaces limited to those with accessibility needs	
Waste	
Waste management plan created	
Prohibit single-use plastics (balloons, plastic bottles, plastic bags)	
Go paperless	
Where printing required: recycled paper	
Promote attendees to bring reusable coffee cups	
Reusable banners and giveaways	
Recycling bins available and clearly labelled	
Food waste facilities available	
Food surplus distribution arranged	
Catering	
Plant-based catering	
Local caterers	
Caterers provide compostable or reusable service ware.	
Pay the London Living Wage	
Have sustainable credentials	
Power and Energy	
No generators (local/main power supply used)	
Ensure suppliers have environmental and sustainability certifications (e.g., ISO14001)	
Impact on Nature	
Sensitive natural areas protected	
Non-toxic cleaning products used	
No paper lanterns, balloons, barbecues	
Venue	
Step-free access	
Working lifts	
Easily accessible by public transport	
Energy efficient (through LED lights, renewable energy sources)	
Provides tap water/bottle refill option	
Pays staff London Living Wage	
Working cooling and heating systems	

Preparing for extreme weather	
Registered to receive weather alerts	
Weather Warrior delegated	
Shade and/or rain cover provided	
Hot weather plan created using the UK's Health and Safety heat stress checklist	
Wet weather contingency plan created	
Diversity and Inclusion	
Diverse range of speakers and attendees	
Diverse and representative workforce	
Free and/or low-cost options	
Braille, easy-read version of material	
Working microphones	
Sign-language interpreters	
Room set up with wide corridors for wheelchairs	