

Inspiring Ideas That Change the World: EICC's Holistic Approach to Sustainability

Overview

The Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) is leading the way in sustainable conferencing, demonstrating that environmental responsibility, economic growth, and social impact can go hand in hand. Since opening its doors in 1995, the EICC has been guided by a clear vision: to create an environment that inspires ideas that change the world. This ethos underpins its ongoing commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation in the events industry.

With a triple-bottom-line approach at the heart of its operations, the EICC's sustainability strategy is not only about reducing its own environmental footprint but also about empowering clients, delegates, and the wider community to be part of the change. As a signatory to the Net Zero Carbon Events pledge, the EICC aims to achieve net zero emissions by 2030 and is already seeing significant results.

Opportunity

The EICC recognised early on that climate action required both internal transformation and external influence. Its sustainability goals go far beyond compliance and into creating meaningful environmental, economic, and social value. Through its award-winning *Step Change* programme, the EICC has developed a range of tools and partnerships designed to reduce carbon emissions, promote responsible resource use, and enhance the social value of events.

The venue continues to build on its long-standing carbon reduction strategy, which is regularly reviewed and refined to reflect the latest data, innovations, and collaborations. This dynamic approach ensures the EICC remains aligned with the City of Edinburgh's 2030 net zero ambitions while maintaining flexibility to adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Actions

Energy and Emissions

- 100% of the venue's electricity is supplied by renewable sources through EDF and backed by Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO).
- Energy consumption is monitored in half-hour intervals, allowing the team to identify inefficiencies and target areas for improvement.
- The EICC is actively upgrading its back-of-house lighting to energy-efficient LED fixtures with occupancy sensors, and plans are in place to extend these upgrades to front-of-house areas.
- Following an in-depth feasibility study conducted by a respected local building services company, the decarbonisation of the heating system will begin next year with the installation of air source heat pumps. This marks the first phase of a broader plan to connect to a proposed local heat network.
- A Building Management System regulates heating, ventilation, and cooling, ensuring energy is only used when necessary.
- Since 2013, Scope 1 and 2 emissions have dropped by 60%, despite a 98% increase in events hosted.

Waste and Circularity

- Zero waste is sent to landfill. Waste is sorted at a local facility, where recyclables are extracted and residual waste is turned into Refuse Derived Fuel.

- Organic waste is processed via anaerobic digestion, generating energy for the grid.
- Glass is repurposed into building materials, and cooking oil is converted to biodiesel.
- Surplus materials from events such as flowers, furniture and décor are donated to local charities and community groups.
- These efforts have led to a 41% reduction in waste from 2013 levels.

Food and Beverage

- The on-site caterers focus on seasonal, plant-forward menus using local ingredients.
- A root-to-tip, nose-to-tail approach ensures minimal waste in food preparation.
- Foodsteps software is used to present the carbon impact of each menu, helping clients make lower-impact choices.
- Non-dairy dessert options have been added to reduce the carbon footprint without sacrificing quality.
- Surplus food is redistributed through a partnership with Olio, providing over 700 meals to the local community in 2024.

Transport and Delegate Travel

- The *Desk to Door* programme, in collaboration with You.Smart.Thing, helps delegates plan low-carbon journeys to events.
- Delegates can receive real-time travel updates and carbon impact comparisons for their journey options.
- Analysis of delegate data shows that 85% of those using the system choose low-carbon travel options, supported by the EICC's central location and strong public transport links.

Client Tools and Reporting

- The EICC's bespoke *Event Impact Reports* offer clients detailed data on carbon emissions, waste, social impact, and economic contribution.
- These reports are based on actual utility usage, menu selection, and material consumption, and they help clients set sustainability targets for future events.
- The venue also supports organisers through its *Exchange Initiative*, a collaborative effort that brings together leaders from academia, NHS Lothian, and local government to attract conferences focused on tackling real-world challenges. By targeting events aligned with local and national priorities, the initiative ensures that conferences held at the EICC contribute lasting value to the community.
- The *Impact Network*, a free online hub developed by the EICC, equips organisers with practical resources to plan more sustainable, inclusive, and community-focused events. This includes supplier guides, carbon tracking templates, social legacy planning tools, and accessibility resources.
- As part of its commitment to inclusion, the EICC promotes neurodiversity awareness in event planning. Organisers are encouraged to use tools such as the *Neurodiversity in Events Checklist* to create welcoming and accessible experiences for neurodivergent attendees. This includes advice on signage, sensory environments, quiet spaces, and communication styles.

Engagement and Advocacy

- Every new staff member receives a sustainability induction, and ongoing training is provided across the organisation.
- The Green Team, made up of representatives from each department, ensures sustainability is

embedded in every function of the business.

- EICC staff regularly speak at national and local industry events, including Event Sustainability Live and sessions with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, sharing best practices.
- The EICC is a founding partner of the *Business Events Shaping Tomorrow* (BEST) tool, a practical framework created to help business events deliver meaningful contributions to society. Developed in collaboration with Edinburgh's tourism and business communities, the tool helps organisers design events that align with six of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, including Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education, and Sustainable Cities and Communities. BEST offers structured guidance for embedding legacy and impact planning from the earliest stages of event design.
- Through initiatives like the *Exchange Initiative*, *Impact Network*, and *BEST*, the EICC actively builds a more sustainable, inclusive and socially conscious business events sector—locally and globally.

Results

- 60% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions from 2013 levels
- 100% of waste diverted from landfill
- Over £125,000 raised for peatland restoration in partnership with RSPB Scotland
- 85% of participating delegates choosing low-carbon travel options
- More than 700 surplus meals donated to the community in 2024
- ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certified since 1998 and 2005 respectively
- Gold accreditations in Green Tourism and Green Meetings
- Multiple national awards, including SEAL Sustainable Services Award and Edinburgh Chamber Net Zero Champion

Conclusion

The Edinburgh International Conference Centre is redefining sustainability standards within the events industry through its strategic, transparent and collaborative approach. By combining operational excellence with ambitious environmental targets, the EICC not only reduces its own carbon footprint but also empowers clients and partners to make more responsible choices. Its ongoing commitment to innovation and continuous improvement ensures the venue remains at the forefront of sustainable conferencing.

Beyond environmental stewardship, the EICC's focus on social impact and inclusivity demonstrates a deep understanding of the broader role a modern venue must play. Through inspiring leadership and meaningful partnerships, it sets a powerful example for others in the sector to follow.

With an unwavering dedication to climate action and community benefit, the EICC truly embodies what it means to lead by example, inspiring ideas that change the world.