The Show Must Go On Edition 3 Quick read

State of the Industry Report and Climate Transition Plan 2030 for the UK Live Outdoor Events Industry

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Acknowledgements

This report and climate transition plan has been led by Vision for Sustainable Events. It is the result of a collaborative and committed effort from across the UK live outdoor events industry.

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- **Data & Solutions Working Groups**, with leading experts: Richard Phillips (Julie's Bicycle) Alex Fintoni (A Greener Future), Luke Howell (Hope Solutions), Vikki Chapman (Live Nation / Festival Republic).
- **Event Promoters Working Group**, providing guidance and feedback: AEG Presents, Boomtown, DF Concerts & Events, Festival Republic, From the Fields, Hay Festival, Kilimanjaro Live, Team Love, Shambala and Superstruct.

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- Livvy Drake (Sustainable Sidekicks): Industry Waste Taskforce Coordinator / Materials and Waste chapter
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FOREWORDS

Millions of young people around the world have dedicated much of their childhood to campaigning for climate action. My message to the leaders in live events is; please support their efforts and amplify their voices as the generation who inherits our decisions and their impacts.

Frances Fox, Founder & UK Director of Climate Live / Intersectional Youth Climate Justice Activist

This report offers a clear, concise assessment of where we can achieve progress and where we need external support and resources to create that change, clarifying a role for the Government to accelerate and stimulate positive change in matters such as power infrastructure, integrated transport, and reskilling and educating our workforce.

Jon Collins, CEO, LIVE (Live music Industry Venues & Entertainment) and Carol Scott, Chair, LIVE Green

As event promoters and organisers, we are uniquely placed to influence positive change. Our industry brings millions of people together every year, and with that comes both a responsibility and an opportunity. The road ahead won't be without challenges, but as promoters, we're no strangers to those. This report is not just a snapshot of where we are—it's a call to action. The show must go on, but it must go on sustainably.

Melvin Benn, Managing Director, Festival Republic

As the world changes, so too does our understanding of what it means to put on a show. Sustainability is no longer an optional extra or a noble ambition, it's the measure of whether our industry truly has a future.

John Rostron, CEO, Association of Independent Festivals

Exec Summary

THIS THIRD EDITION OF THE SHOW MUST GO ON (SMGO) REPORT REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIVE EFFORT ACROSS THE UK'S OUTDOOR LIVE EVENTS INDUSTRY TO UNDERSTAND CURRENT PRACTICES AND IMPACTS AND PRESENT A ROUTE MAP FOR LOWER EMISSIONS.

The report establishes that UK music festivals are responsible for at least 170,000 tonnes CO2e per year, and sets a benchmark of **15.9kg of CO_2e created per person per day.**

To realise a **50% reduction in emissions**, the whole industry, audiences and regulators, all need to play our part, building on current sustainability practices and supporting change with policy levers.

Festivals are a force for good – economically, culturally and societally. The rise of social prescribing—where doctors refer patients to community arts and music for wellbeing— is a clear recognition of live music's beneficial impact on our mental health. At a time when the debate on climate policy can be all too polarising, festivals bring people together, deliver a wonderful, shared experience and tap into our audiences' increasing desire for green options.

Generating **£1.7 billion** in annual revenue, the UK Live Outdoor Events Industry makes up a significant part of the UK's **£6.7 billion** music industry. Despite profound financial challenges affecting grass roots culture, the industry is adopting better environmental practices year on year.

The modelling in this report outlines the potential for operators to reduce industry-wide emissions by up to **37%**. It highlights that individual events can reduce their footprint by focusing on areas within their direct control, such as procurement, materials management, reusable cup systems, food choices, energy efficiency, and influencing travel choices. It also reveals that 91% of live music events across the UK are classified as 'micro' or 'small' cultural events, underscoring the need for solutions to be actionable for all, and for a nationally consistent understanding of best practices and reporting to increase awareness and track progress.

Even greater reductions, aiming for **50%** and beyond, could be achieved if the government works with us to introduce larger, systemic changes such as accelerated access to sustainable energy solutions, improved grid connectivity, more coordinated transport and clearer, more consistent waste management infrastructure. Specific asks to the government include:

- Support the national adoption of the Green Events Code of Practice (GECoP).
- Convene a task force to accelerate installation of grid connections in public outdoor spaces
- Consult on a date for a national ban on the sale of water and drinks (hot and cold) in single-use plastic bottles/cups at festivals
- DCMS and DEFRA to work with the industry to adapt the Simpler Recycling for live outdoor event sector, increasing awareness and accountability.
- Establish a joint DfT–DCMS–Defra taskforce on sustainable cultural sector transport, and a strategic role(s) within GBR to improve access for live events audiences. .

We hope the government will recognise outdoor events as essential testing grounds for climate-positive technologies and behaviours. Beyond mere recognition, however, the sector requires tangible support: accessible climate funding, a 'Festival Tax Relief' for grassroots organisations, and a regulatory framework built on partnerships.

This report provides a strategic pathway for the entire sector, defining the roles and actions required to reach our climate goals. Together, we can maintain a coordinated front in reducing emissions and serve as a catalyst for a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON, FOR GENERATIONS AND GENERATIONS TO COME.

The Report in Numbers

BENCHMARKS PER PERSON PER DAY FOR AN AVERAGE UK MUSIC FESTIVAL:

0.36 LITRES OF FUEL
use per person per day

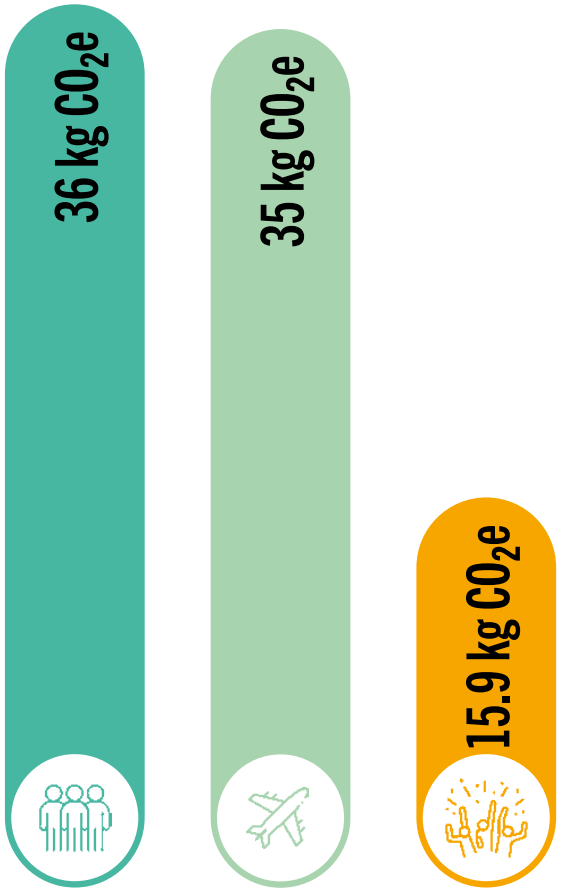
0.68 kg OF WASTE
is generated per person per day

9 LITRES OF WATER
per person per day

1.64% OF WASTE
is reused on average

36% OF MEALS SERVED
are vegetarian or vegan

40.5% OF WASTE
is recycled

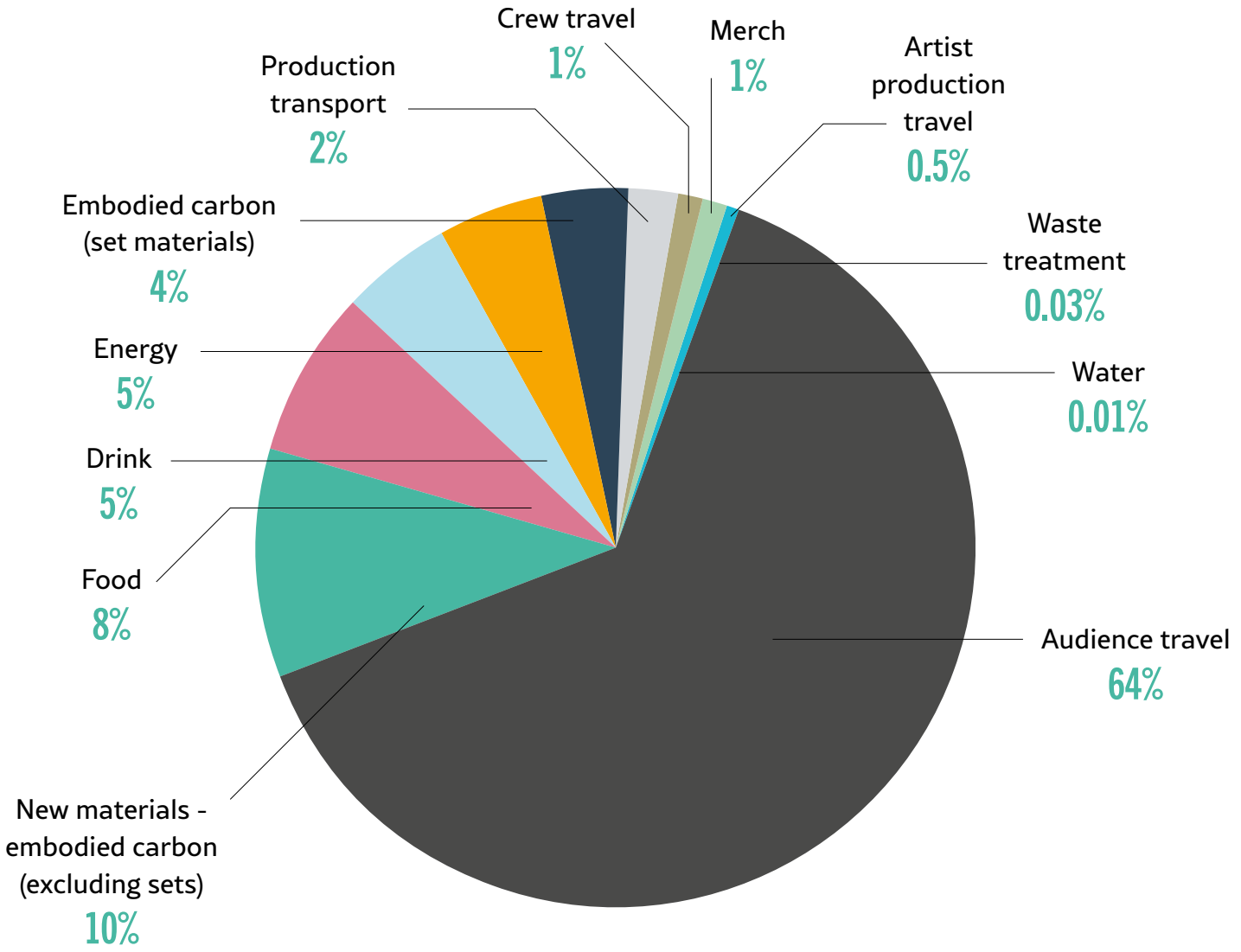


Average carbon footprint of a UK citizen per day[1]

Typical European flight (return)[2]

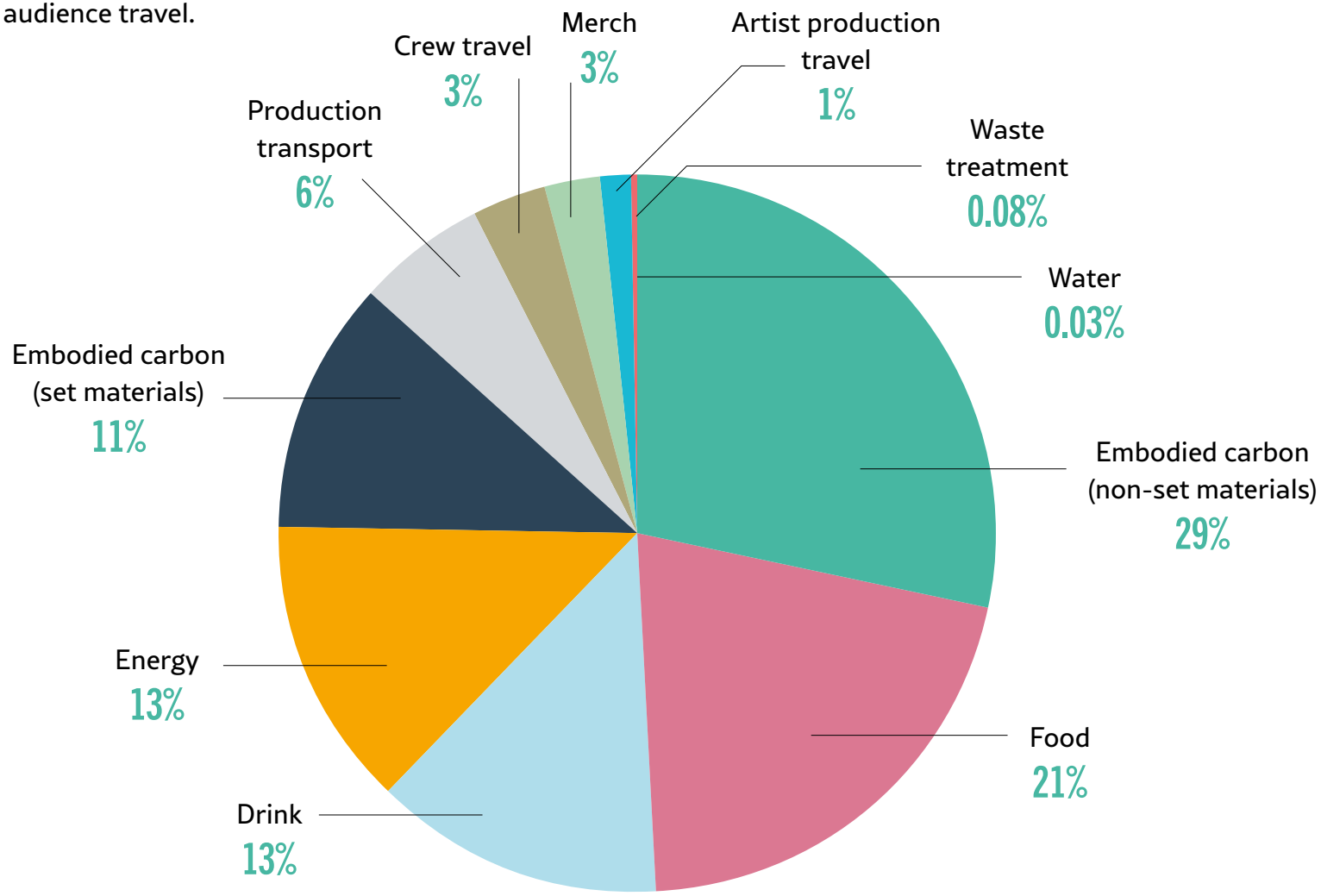
Average carbon footprint of a music festival attendee per day

AVERAGE FOOTPRINT BREAKDOWN OF UK MUSIC FESTIVALS
15.9 KG CO_2E PER PERSON PER DAY



AVERAGE FOOTPRINT BREAKDOWN OF UK MUSIC FESTIVALS
OPERATIONAL IMPACTS ONLY

i.e. Emissions resulting from festival delivery excluding audience travel.



SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS FROM KEY INITIATIVES

A 32% reduction in audience travel emissions, could reduce overall sector emissions

BY NEARLY 20%*

Halving virgin material use within sets and elsewhere onsite could reduce overall sector emissions

BY 8%

Replacing all fossil fuels with renewable electricity sources could reduce overall sector emissions by

OVER 5%

Removing red meat from menus could reduce overall sector emissions

BY 3.5%

*Shown to be possible by Massive Attack's Act 1.5 gig in Bristol in 2024.

Climate Transition Plan 2030 for Outdoor Live Events

The aim of this 'Climate Transition Plan 2030' (CTP) is to provide direction for the outdoor events sector towards a 50% emissions reduction. It aims to galvanize and focus effective sector action by setting out what is currently achievable and what is needed from key stakeholders to unlock further change.

The CTP is based on data from 84 music festivals to understand current impact benchmarks and model potential emissions reductions that could be realised from actions that are practically achievable. The modelling suggests that 37.1% reductions are achievable by the sector, leaving a gap of 12.9% towards the goal of halving emissions by 2030.

This plan does not, however, include interim targets to 2030, or detailed timelines for specific actions. This is because pathways are unique to each event, depending on size, type, location, and available resources. We need more time to advocate for potential solutions and understand the feasibility of industry-scale changes, many of which will be determined by factors such as supply chain shifts, access to infrastructure, and government investment.

Definition of a music festival for this report:

The Association of Independent Festival's definition of a music festival:

A single event offering a series of music performances or music and other entertainments which is marketed as a festival. It may be held at a predominantly outdoor site using temporary infrastructure which is:

(i) erected for the purposes of that festival (including as a minimum all of the following: the construction of infrastructure relating to performance areas, the presence of temporary perimeter fencing or controlled access by other temporary means and the provision of toilet facilities and a clean water supply).

(ii) used mainly for the purposes of that festival, and

(iii) substantially dismantled after the festival.

Or it may be held across more than one stage in a single, indoor, fixed venue or across more than one venue (i.e. a 'multi-venue' festival).

A qualifying festival may take place over a single day or over consecutive days (but no more than ten in any calendar year), with at least twenty unique music performances in the official line up (or at least ten if the event is held over no more one day).

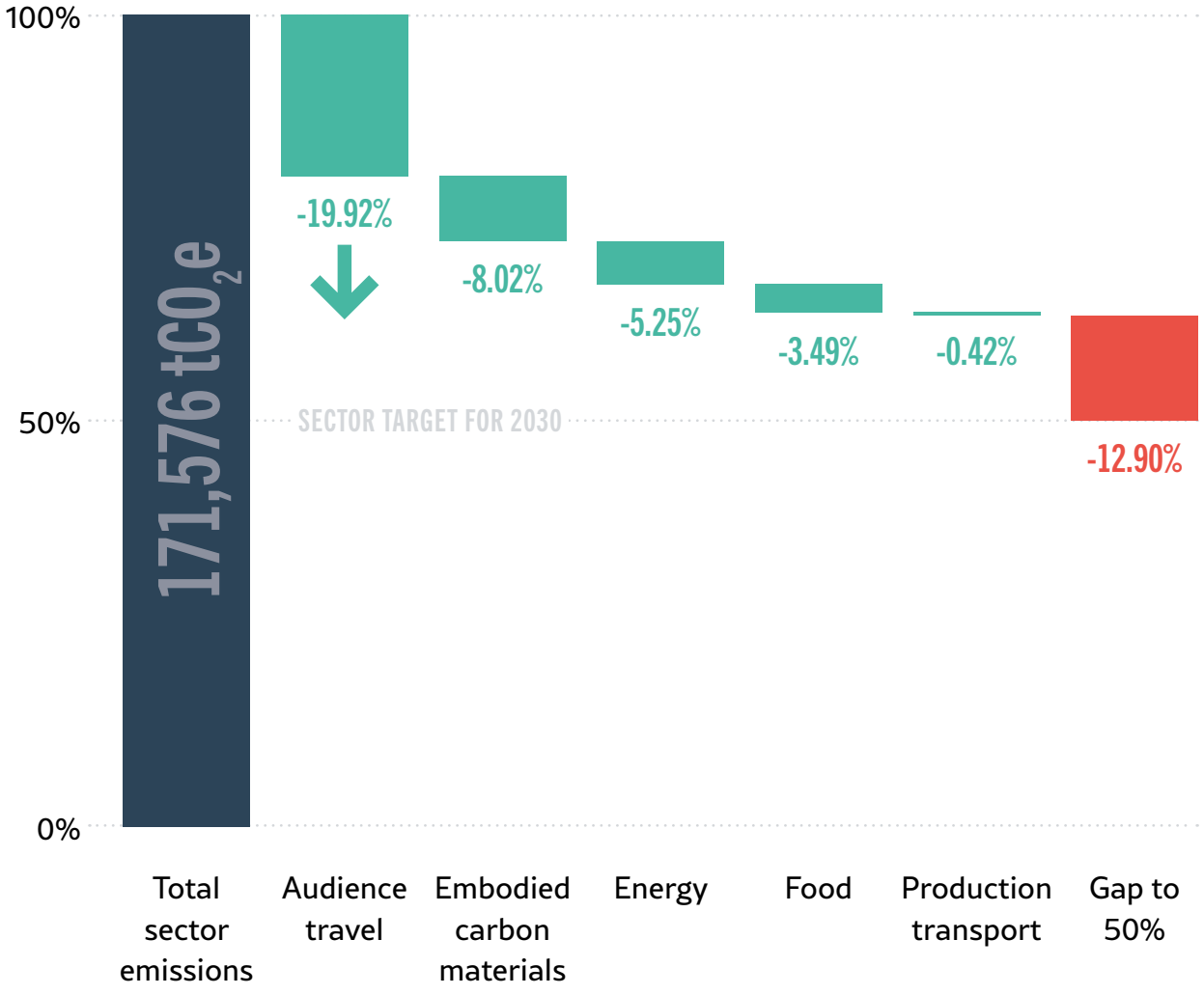
A charge is usually, but not always, made for admission which allows entry to any performance areas holding performances of artists listed in the official line up. There may also be some elements of separated charging to access parts of the site.[3]

Modelling the sector-level impact of currently achievable emissions reductions across key impact areas

The table outlines the realistic, albeit challenging, actions that could be taken by the festival sector before 2030 and the resulting emissions reductions that could be achieved at sector level.

Impact area	Modelled reduction	Total sector emissions savings (tCO_2e)	Percentage reduction to sector emissions
Audience travel	32% emissions reduction, as shown to be possible by Massive Attack's Act 1.5 gig on Clifton Downs through a variety of initiatives	34,183	-19.92%
Production transport	20% emissions reduction, achieved through a variety of initiatives	717	-0.42%
Food	Removing all red meat from menus	5,993	-3.49%
Energy	Replacing all fossil fuels with renewable electricity sources	9,012	-5.25%
Embodied carbon	50% reduction in virgin material use (general materials onsite & set materials)	13,758	-8.02%
Total % reduced			**-37.1%**
Gap to 50% by 2030			**-12.9%**

Pathway to the sector target of 50% emissions reduction by 2030



The chart on the left illustrates the relative contribution that realistic actions across each impact area could make towards the goal of halving sector emissions by 2030.

It shows that most emissions savings can be made with interventions on audience travel, given its significance as an impact area. A focus on reuse and minimising virgin material use can also achieve large emissions reduction from embodied carbon.

The chart also highlights the 12.90% gap we need to close to reach the target of halving our emissions. This must be achieved by working with key stakeholders to unlock further emissions reductions.

Making it Happen: an Industry Blueprint for Action

Event Organisers

Events are unique in their type, size, location, audience profile etc. and so there is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, this research has **identified 30 practices that most events can typically implement**, which can be used as a menu for meaningful action.

These solutions have been assessed as:

(a) The most impactful in terms of carbon reduction, and other environmental benefits.

(b) Realistic for a typical UK event to implement in terms of factors such as availability and affordability.

A full version of this list which includes comments of feasibility, additional benefits and challenges is available on the Vision for Sustainable Events website as the Climate Action Checklist 2030 for Live Outdoor Events.

Find out more

Industry bodies

Industry bodies include Live Green, Vision for Sustainable Events, the Association of Independent Festivals and others. Actions they can take are to:

- Continue to prioritise the environment and facilitate collaboration.
- Formally adopt and support the Climate Transition Plan and Green Events Code of Practice 2025.
- Collaborate on funding the Climate Transition Plan.

Supply Chain

- Industry trade bodies: Engage with environmental solutions at strategic sector level, and support members to adopt them.
- Suppliers: Put plans in place to align with the Climate Transition Plan.

Environmental organisations

Environmental organisations include A Greener Future, EarthPercent, Music Declares Emergency and Julie's Bicycle.

- Work toward alignment on minimum best practices and greenhouse gas (GHG) reporting.
- Contribute data annually to enable sector progress tracking.
- Align with and support the Climate Transition Plan.

A Greener Future Certification Scheme

AGF certification helps organisers to improve their resource efficiency, reduce their environmental impact, and ultimately become more sustainable.

Find out more

Local Authorites

- Work across departments to bring live events into net zero planning, and develop stratgey to decarbonise live events.
- Align with and impement the National Green Events Code of Practice

Liverpool UN Accelerator City: five 'city blueprints'

- Grid Connections: Cities and the Creative Industries
- Integrated event and transport ticketing
- Sustainability Best Practice: Major Outdoor Festivals
- Sustainability Best Practice: TV & Film Drama
- Minimum Better and Best Sustainability Framework for Liverpool's Land Use Agreements.

Find out more

Government

Recognise and celebrate the role of outdoor events as incubators for behaviour change, new technologies, and research and innovation related to the climate transition.

- **Decarbonising creative industries: a cross-government effort:** Foster a closer collaboration between key government departments, including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), to decarbonise the creative industries. As one of the UK's recognised growth sectors, this requires a coordinated approach with relevant bodies such as the Department for Transport and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) on all climate initiatives.

- **Improving access to climate funding for outdoor events:** Our current funding models often overlook the unique needs of the outdoor events and suppliers sector, most of which are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). To address this, we need to create a new way to help these businesses access funding for climate transition research and innovation from organisations like Innovate UK and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This approach could be based on successful models from other European countries that have already found ways to integrate these types of businesses into their national and regional climate funding schemes.

Summary of policy asks for Climate Transition Plan 2030:

The modelling in this report outlines the potential for operators to reduce industry-wide emissions by up to **37%.**

Even greater reductions, aiming for **50%** and beyond, could be achieved if the Government works with us to introduce larger, systemic changes such as accelerated access to sustainable energy solutions, improved grid connectivity, more coordinated transport and clearer, more consistent waste management infrastructure.

Each impact chapter of this report details policy suggestions and ways Government and Local Authorities can support the goals of the sector. We worked with LIVE, event promoters, industry bodies, and consultancy Blakeney, to develop a shortlist of Policy asks:

- Support the national adoption of the Green Events Code of Practice (GECoP).
- Convene a task force to accelerate installation of grid connections in public outdoor spaces
- Consult on a date for a national ban on the sale of water and drinks (hot and cold) in single-use plastic bottles/cups at festivals
- DCMS and DEFRA to work with the industry to adapt the Simpler Recycling for live outdoor event sector, increasing awareness and accountability.
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The role of Vision for Sustainable Events in leading the Climate Transition Plan 2030:

The following points outline how the Vision for Sustainable Events will lead the delivery of the Climate Transition Plan:

- **Lead the plan's delivery:** Coordinate the delivery of the Climate Transition Plan 2030, through the Vision for Sustainable Events Industry Forum, and task forces on key solutions.
- **Establish Task Forces:** Create working groups or 'task forces' for key impact areas, bringing stakeholders together to take ownership of the issue, and progress solutions.
- **Track sector progress:** Set up a framework to conduct an annual data-driven 'temperature check' of sector progress.
- **Share best practice:** Continue to build the existing 'knowledge hub' of resources, and engage with events through partnerships.
- **Ensure data consistency:** Work toward sector consistency for baselines:
  - Implementing the national Green Events Code of Practice.
  - Aligning with the Environmental Purple Guide's sustainability practices.
  - Contributing to and adopting the Carbon Accounting Alliance (CAA) review of best practices for GHG reporting in the music industry.
- **Pursue Policy and Investment:** Work with LIVE to engage with government and local authorities to advocate for and shape policy and investment.

Closing Remarks

We hope the government will take note of this report, recognising and celebrating the role of outdoor events and festivals as incubators for behaviour change, new technologies, research, and innovation. We urge them to support the climate transition by: improving access to climate funding; supporting grassroots operators through a ‘Festival Tax Relief’ to navigate challenging times; and enabling approaches to event licensing that include sustainability and a partnership approach to regulation.

For everyone in the sector, this report provides a pathway, roles, and actions, ensuring we remain focused, coordinated, and effective in our journey toward lower emissions. Together, we can continue to inspire changes for a better future for all.

The show must go on—for generations to come. Let us be the leaders we have been waiting for.

Endnotes

1 Based on annual total domestic UK emissions 2022 - https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint/carbon-footprint-for-the-uk-and-england-to-2022
2 Base on return flight London to Barcelona - https://skoot.eco/articles/the-true-co2-emissions-from-flying?utm_source=chatgpt.com
3 The Festival Forecast 2025, The Association of Independent Festival Organisers https://static1.squarespace.com/static/65f1906237072c2f174055e7/t/685ac8c428cd774314ec5264/1750780103575/AIF+FESTIVAL+FORECAST+2025.pdf

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