

Visit Belfast Sustainability Action Plan Performance and Impact Report

2023-2024

May 2024

**visit
Belfast**



Introduction

This performance and impact report charts Visit Belfast's 23-24 progress against our sustainability policy and the 10 commitments we prioritised in 2021 to help Belfast become a leading sustainable tourism and events destination. This was the final year of Visit Belfast's 3 year Rebuilding City Tourism 2021-24 strategy, and in that time the city's visitor economy has re-emerged stronger, more dynamic and with a better understanding of the how tourism can drive inclusive and sustainable growth.

The collaborative efforts led by Visit Belfast, Belfast City Council and our industry partners to accelerate sustainable performance have improved Belfast's competitive position as a renowned sustainable destination. This report highlights our key achievements in the 23-24 financial year and sets out our priorities for 24-25 and beyond.



Gerry Lennon
Chief Executive
Visit Belfast

visit Belfast

Visit Belfast Sustainability Policy

The importance of tourism to the city economy and Belfast to the regional visitor economy cannot be underestimated. Twenty years of tourism growth has welcomed millions of visitors to the city and been a catalyst for the regeneration of Belfast. It has established hundreds of new enterprises for our economy, thousands of jobs for our residents and created opportunities for our communities and neighbourhoods. Tourism has played an important part in enriching the culture, vibrancy of the city and the quality of life for all the people who call Belfast home.

With the launch of Belfast's first resilience strategy and climate plan, the city has set an ambitious goal 'to transition to an inclusive, zero emissions economy in a generation.' The plan sets out thirty transformational programmes to future-proof our city for generations to come, a commitment to inclusive and sustainable growth and a plan to make Belfast climate resilient.

As the city's Destination Marketing and Management Company, Visit Belfast recognises that it has an important role to play in supporting Belfast's ambition. In partnership with Belfast City Council, we have committed to the development of a sustainable tourism plan as one of the resilience strategy transformational programmes. It is within this context that Visit Belfast is launching its first sustainability policy.

Visit Belfast – a renewed sense of purpose

Visit Belfast's three-year recovery plan Rebuilding City Tourism 2021-24 sets out a new direction of travel, illustrating a step change in our approach to our marketing and visitor servicing activity, and the generation and measurement of tourism success for the betterment of our businesses, our employees, our residents, our city and its ecosystem.

This is reflected in our renewed purpose:

"To create and service visitors for Belfast and Northern Ireland in order to generate economic benefit and inclusive growth, creating jobs and prosperity for the city region, enabling Belfast to become a more sustainable place to visit, meet and live in."

Belfast

VISIT BELFAST

visit Belfast

Our Commitments

Our ten commitments are aligned to eight of the 17 UN sustainable goals

- 1 Reduce the environmental impact of our business and look for better, greener and more sustainable ways of working
- 2 Build sustainability capacity within Visit Belfast and empower our employees
- 3 Support and improve employee health and wellbeing
- 4 Procure goods and services more sustainably
- 5 Champion sustainability within our industry – encouraging collaboration, catalysing innovation and improvement
- 6 Promote sustainable choices and experiences and positively influence the actions of visitors
- 7 Work with our B2B clients (event organisers, tour operators and cruise lines) to make sustainable business easy
- 8 Generate and manage year-round visitors to Belfast in a way which is sensitive to the environment and communities
- 9 Maximise the social and economic impacts of Visit Belfast's activities – to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth
- 10 Promote and develop Belfast as an accessible, inclusive and welcoming destination for all

VISIT BELFAST

23-24 Key Achievements

Testament to the collaborative efforts of the Belfast tourism and events industry, Belfast currently ranks 11th out of 100 destinations in the Global Destinations Sustainability Index (GDS 2023) with an overall score of 86%. Visit Belfast is the joint second best performing DMMO on the Index, scoring 96% in the Destination Management category.

Belfast's sustainable performance is translating into international recognition that Belfast is a sustainable tourism destination. In 2023-24 both Tripadvisor and Forbes listed Belfast as a leading sustainable destination to visit in 2024. Likewise Belfast's reputation as a sustainable destination to host a conference or event continues to grow with industry body ABPCO awarding Visit Belfast the Best Impact and Legacy Award for Changing The Menu, For Good - our social initiative that has generated £44,500 for local food banks and homeless charities throughout 23-24.

Visit Belfast also achieved Gold status with Green Tourism for the work carried out by the organisation across all areas of the business. This accolade shows the huge progress made since Visit Belfast's Bronze award in 2021.



Joint 2nd highest performing global DMMO

GDS Index 2023



11th most sustainable global destination

GDS Index 2023



Top 10 sustainable travel destination for 2024

2024 Travellers' Choice Awards



Visit Belfast awarded Gold Green Tourism accreditation

Green Tourism 2024



Best Impact and Legacy Award

ABPCO 2023



£44,675 raised for local food banks and homeless charities

Changing The Menu. For Good

Our 10 Commitments

Our Organisation

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- 3 Support and improve employee health and wellbeing
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- 5 Maximise the social and economic impacts of Visit Belfast's activities – to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth

Our Industry

- 6 Champion sustainability within our industry – encouraging collaboration, catalysing innovation and improvement

Our Clients & visitors

- 7 Promote sustainable choices and experiences and positively influence the actions of visitors
- 8 Work with our clients (event organisers, tour operators and cruise lines) to make sustainable business easy

Our City

- 9 Generate and manage year-round visitors to Belfast in a way which is sensitive to the environment and communities
- 10 Promote Belfast as an accessible, inclusive and sustainable destination for all



Our 10 policy commitments are aligned to 8 of the UN SDGs.



Our Organisation

Commitment 1

Reduce the environmental impact of our business and look for better, greener and more sustainable ways of working



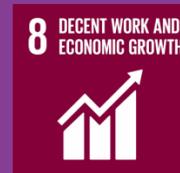
23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Secured funding and approval for a pioneering project to calculate the carbon footprint of tourism and events in Belfast and develop a decarbonisation strategy for the industry. This will be conducted with support from BCC and Danske Bank.
- Calculated the full carbon impact of two conferences in the city using TRACE by ISLA software and used the information to identify changes that can be made to reduce the impact of events.
- Calculated annual staff travel and associated carbon footprint - 66.27 tonnes Co2e.
- Installed a more energy efficient digital wall in the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre.
- Taken part in a project to understand the business case for a Belfast Heat Network, with the view to our offices joining a network of public buildings that utilises geothermal energy.
- Supported a scoping project to find a solution to Single Use Plastic (SUP) in venues across Belfast.
- Conducted an audit of all single use items the business uses and created an action plan to reduce or eliminate these items.
- Hosted the first Visit Belfast 'Swap Shop' as part of Business in the Community NI's Sustainable September campaign, aiming to reduce waste and increase life cycle of clothing and homeware items.

Commitment 2

Build sustainability capacity within Visit Belfast and empower our employees



23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Has provided sustainability training to all new employees, including seasonal staff on the company's sustainability commitments and future priorities and goals.
- Worked with the Green Tourism team to learn from best practice examples in the industry.
- Conducted a sustainability round table discussion at the annual staff conference to engage staff in the future planning of company wide sustainability work.
- Added sustainability as a standing agenda item on the monthly Manager Meeting, increasing all teams understanding and awareness of the work being carried out across Visit Belfast.
- Supported staff members from Marketing & Partnership teams to attend the Global Destinations Sustainability Forum in Valencia to increase cross departmental understanding of sustainable destination management.
- Provided two business events sales managers with 'Isla - Foundations for Event Sustainability' training.

Commitment 3

Support and improve employee health and wellbeing



“ I’m delighted, I wasn’t even doing 6000 steps a day before this challenge, now I am up to 9000 steps a day average. Great motivator. ”

ANDREA IRVINE

Director of Finance & Corporate Services, Visit Belfast
Following the January Steps Challenge.

23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Established a staff engagement and wellbeing committee responsible for the development and delivery of the staff events calendar, with Health & Wellbeing being one of the key focus areas.
- Conducted a staff survey to better understand what support employees would like to see in terms of health & wellbeing. As a result of the feedback, Wellbeing is one of the key themes of the People Strategy Action Plan that has been developed.
- Established a Health and Safety committee responsible for ensuring staff and client safety, whilst in the office, working offsite and working remotely.
- Took part in the Active Travel Challenge for the month of June and came 2nd in our category group.
- Entered 5 x relay teams in the Belfast City Marathon Relay and raised £2084 for Changing The Menu. For Good.
- Organised a January steps wellness challenge motivated 20 staff members to start the year off well and the winner averaged more than 20k steps a day throughout January.
- Competed in the Belfast Business Fives - Visit Belfast’s first 5 a side football competition.

Commitment 4

Procure goods and services more sustainably



23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Requires tenderers to complete information on the sustainability of their goods or services as part of procurement.
- Conducted a review of items sold in the gift shop at Visit Belfast Welcome Centre and Cruise Hub and increased the number that are sourced on island of Ireland.
- Reviewed other areas of retail operations for environmental improvements. An example is plastic bubble wrap has been swapped for biodegradable and compostable bubble wrap which also requires less carbon to manufacture.
- Reviewed suppliers of uniforms for welcome centre staff and sourced a company producing uniforms from 100% recycled material. We will use this company to purchase uniforms moving forward as current staff uniforms need replacing.

Commitment 5

Maximise the social and economic impacts of Visit Belfast's activities – to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth



“ Volunteering gives me the opportunity to address my mental and physical wellbeing and gives me the opportunity to socially interact and connect with people from all around the World. ”

AUSTIN MCCRACKEN
Cruise Welcome Volunteer

23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Generated £133m economic impact (107% of target).
- Delivered 570,000 bed nights, 130 conferences and 159 cruise ships calls bringing 323,000 passengers and crew.
- Managed a volunteer programme that gives students an opportunity to get on the ground experience and offers others an opportunity to give back whilst serving and promoting their community.
- Volunteered 18 hours at a local food bank.
- Raised £44,675 through our 'Changing The Menu. For Good' social impact project which will support Belfast food banks and homeless charities. £30,000 was kindly donated through the Titanic Belfast Community Impact Fund.
- Supported 475 industry partners with sales and marketing of which 43 are charities/not-for profit.
- Provided opportunities for 675 students to take part in educational programmes as part of a conference or business event, including Primary school students, Secondary School, Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.

Impact: Our Organisation



£133m Economic Impact
+£23M YoY



475 partners
supported



Funding secured for
carbon footprint project



25 new & seasonal staff took
part in sustainability training



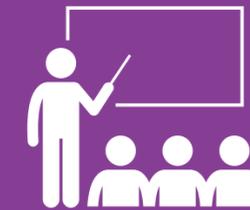
1335 volunteer hours
+190% YoY



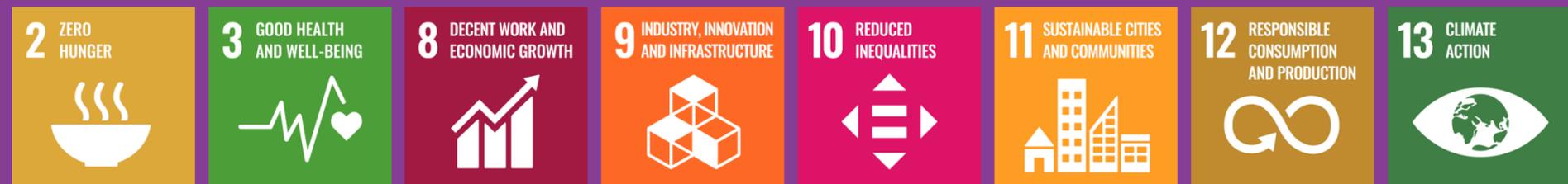
£44,675 funds raised
for charitable causes



37,150 meals provided
to vulnerable people



675 Students involved
in educational outreach

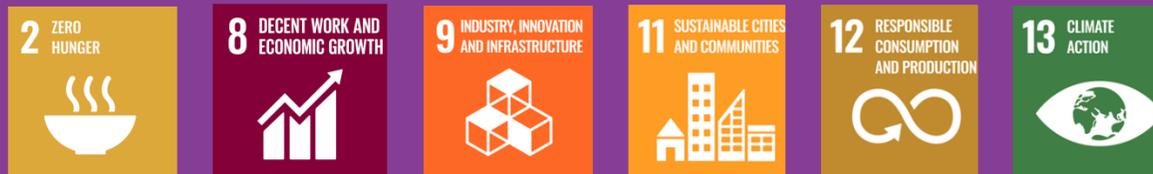




Our Industry

Commitment 6

Champion sustainability within our industry
– encouraging collaboration, catalysing
innovation and improvement



23-24 Key Highlights:

Visit Belfast:

- Led the delivery of the Green Tourism certification programme, in partnership with BCC, to accelerate sustainable action across Belfast tourism providers.
- 80% of all Hotel bedrooms in Belfast are now sustainability certified and 10 venues are now accredited.
- Supported 108 industry partners on their sustainability journey.
- Co-authored an industry White Paper with Green Tourism and GDSM on how destinations can transition to become more sustainable and address climate change challenges.
- Developed our second annual Cruise Sustainability Action Plan with Belfast Harbour as part of the Cruise Belfast partnership.
- Assisted 'Meet Cambridge' with implementation of a social initiative similar to Changing The Menu. For Good, generating funds for people experiencing food insecurity in the city.
- Galvanised industry support for a project to find a solution to Single Use Plastic (SUP) in venues across Belfast.

Belfast & Green Tourism White Paper



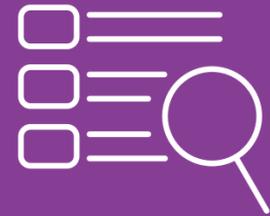
Click [this link](#) to read the industry white paper written in collaboration with Green Tourism and Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDSM).



Impact: Our Industry



80% of Belfast hotel bedrooms hold a sustainability certification



86% supplier score on GDS Index +13% YoY



Supported 108 industry partners on their sustainability journey +28% YoY



62 businesses certified +47% YoY



20 accredited venues +100% YoY





Our Clients & Visitors

Commitment 7

Promote sustainable choices and experiences and positively influence the actions of visitors



“ Visit Belfast have been nothing short of incredible, and are the main reason that EV RALLY LIVE will happen on the Titanic Slipways. ”

COLIN BOYTON
Greenfleet, EV Rally & Evolution

23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Supported Belfast City Council to develop and promote the first three accessible video itineraries of Belfast featuring people with lived experience.
- Featured sustainable suppliers and green itinerary ideas in blogs, social media content and ezines.
- Increased the promotion of our neighbourhood products to help visitors spread the social impact of tourism.
- Secured discounts for greener travel options for visitors, such as ferry discounts for business events and public transport discounts for visitors getting around the city using the Belfast Visitor Pass
- Increased content on ‘Sustainable Belfast’ webpages to include new sustainably accredited products.
- Visit Belfast were a partner sponsor of the EV Rally when it came to Belfast in July. The key objective of the event was to help showcase the charging infrastructure in Northern Ireland for locals and visitors alike.

Commitment 8

Work with our clients (event organisers, tour operators and cruise lines) to make sustainable business easy



23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Provided a sustainability & impact support service to 65 B2B clients across business events, travel trade and cruise.
- Further developed the Sustainability toolkit for conference organisers including expanding the Belfast Sustainable Events Framework.
- Developed bespoke Legacy & Impact plans for four strategic citywide business events including One Young World, UK Space, Cyber UK and ICCM.
- Supported 13 events to commit and deliver at least one Impact & Legacy goal.
- Supported 27 business events to commit and deliver a sustainability goal.
- Launched a [Belfast Legacy & Impact guide](#) to support all other business events to minimise their negative impact and increase the positive impact of the event.
- Further developed and increased content on the 'Sustainable Belfast', 'Getting Around' & 'Accessible Belfast' pages of the Visit Belfast website that clients can link to including sustainable itineraries, toolkits, green travel information and blogs.

Belfast Legacy & Impact Guide

Events with Purpose

Visit Belfast Business Events
Impact & Legacy Guide
2023



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Click [this link](#) to read
Events with Purpose:
Visit Belfast Business
Events Impact & Legacy
Guide 2023



Impact: Our Clients & Visitors



65 Clients supported through sustainability & impact service
-13% YoY



4 bespoke legacy & impact plans delivered for major city events



70% visitors interested in sustainability



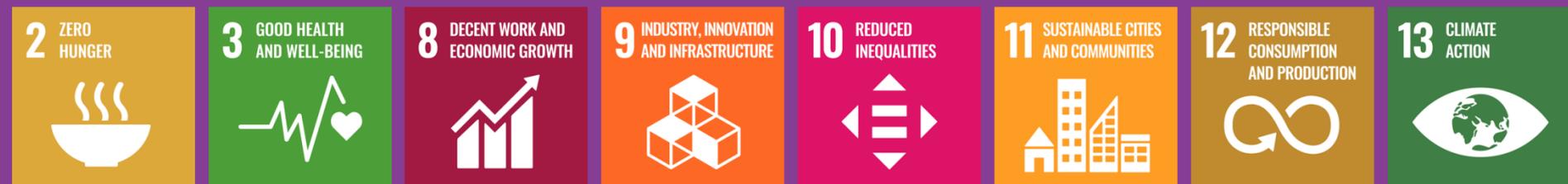
26 business events committed to at least 1 sustainability goal
+41% YOY



13 events committed to at least 1 legacy & Impact goal
+1% YoY



3762 Belfast Visitor Passes sold to encouraging travel by public transport





Our City

Commitment 9

Generate and manage year-round visitors to Belfast in a way which is sensitive to the environment and communities



23-24 Key Highlights

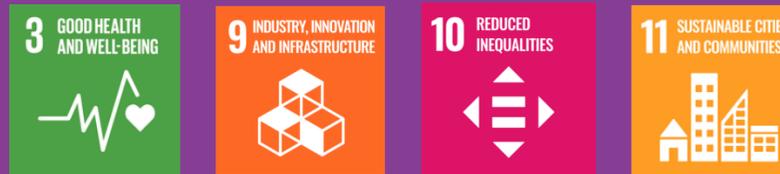
Visit Belfast:

- Increased our stewardship role as a DMMO to manage the destination and ensure tourism is a force for good across Belfast.
- Managed capacity across the destination - across inbound conferences, cruise calls and leisure visitors through our tourism barometer.
- Prioritised neighbourhood tourism development, working with area partnership boards including Fáilte Feirste Thiar, EastSide Partnership and the businesses within these communities to increase and share tourism prosperity across Belfast.



Commitment 10

Promote and develop Belfast as an accessible, inclusive and welcoming destination for all



“ It was really useful to see accessible solutions from another perspective. ”

CLAIRE CRERAND

McConnell's Distillery, Belfast Distillery Company

Following the Living Library industry session

23-24 Key Highlights

Visit Belfast:

- Supported Belfast City Council's first inclusive tourism conference and helped galvanised widespread industry support and awareness of key challenges and opportunities for accessible & inclusive tourism.
- Partnered with AccessAble to promote 'Your Accessibility Guide' portal which is supporting businesses to provide accurate accessibility information for people with disabilities.
- Facilitated a level 2 Deaf Tour Guiding course to increase the number of signed guided tours available to visitors.
- Conducted 'Living Library' sessions with our industry to drive forward accessible solutions.
- Partnered with IFA in a drive to promote women's football to new audiences.
- Provided a platform to promote six free inclusive tourism training modules on how to confidently communicate with people with disabilities. Across the 6 modules there have been 400 views to date by industry partners.
- Facilitated 27 delegates to visit four integrated schools to learn how Northern Ireland bring together children and staff from different faiths and provide integrated education.
- Six organisations dedicated to supporting DEI topics have been promoted in the Legacy & Impact Guide.

Impact: Our City

83%

Conferences are midweek +2% YoY

32%

Regional visitor enquiries outside Belfast 0% YoY



400 inclusive tourism online modules completed +33% YoY

119

Neighbourhood tourism businesses partnered with Visit Belfast



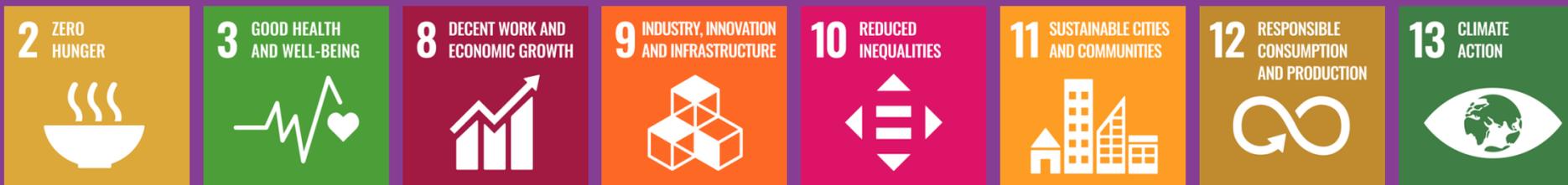
60% conferences took place during shoulder season +5% YoY



42% of cruise shore excursions travel outside of Greater Belfast



27 delegates visited integrated schools to learn how NI bring together children and staff from different religions and educate them together



HELLO & WELCOME



Our 24-27 Plans

3 Year Strategy 2024–27

GROW

the value of tourism to the Belfast City region and its communities

POSITION

the Belfast City region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out

ENHANCE

the experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast City region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer

SUSTAIN

its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives and celebrating Belfast's story

VB Outcomes 24-25: Triple Bottom Line

ECONOMIC

- 780,000 Visits
- 445,200 Bednights
- 766,000 enquiries
- £133m economic impact

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Visit Belfast Carbon baseline
- Belfast Tourism Carbon footprint baseline
- No. VB partners adopting sustainable practices
- No of clients supported on sustainability

SOCIAL

- Neighbourhood tourism referrals & 10% increase in neighbourhood partnerships
- Funds raised by VB and partners for social/charitable causes
- Baseline resident sentiment towards tourism and its value for the city
- No of residents taking part in tourism activities in Belfast



SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

- Baseline VB and Belfast's tourism carbon footprint – BCC & Danske Bank
- Development of a decarbonisation strategy – BCC & Industry
- Increase funds raised for social causes including Changing the Menu. For Good
- Increase the number of travel trade, event, cruise clients supported on sustainability
- Increase the number of events with sustainability and/or legacy goal
- Year 2 - Cruise Belfast sustainability plan
- Resident sentiment survey and engagement plan
- Continue to support the green tourism programme
- Neighbourhood tourism impact
- Industry survey and impact report to understand and promote the work being done in our industry – Tourism as a force for good



Rachael McGuickin

Director of Business Development,
Sustainability and Transformation
Visit Belfast

rachaelmcguickin@visitbelfast.com



Jac Callan

Sustainability and Impact Manager
Visit Belfast

jaccallan@visitbelfast.com

visitBelfast