

LEEDS 2023 Environmental Sustainability

Evaluation Document



LEEDS
YEAR OF
CULTURE **2023**

SAIL

Table of contents

Introduction	3
Overview of Leeds 2023	4
Overview of Leeds 2023 Programme	5
Leeds 2023 Sustainability Aims and Objectives	6
Leeds 2023 Impact	7
Combined Carbon Footprint of Leeds 2023 Signature Events	8
Carbon Footprint Methodology	9
Energy	10
Waste	12
Single Use Plastic	14
Travel and Transport	15
Water	17
Funding and Procurement	18
Food	19
Local Community	21
Community and Engagement	23
Biodiversity and Nature	25
Legacy	27
Conclusion	28

Introduction

LEEDS 2023 was a yearlong cultural programme which embedded sustainability into its planning, delivery and evaluation methodologies.

With support from Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL), LEEDS 2023 aimed to deliver sustainable solutions for major events and contribute new tools, resources, and methodologies for the regional cultural sector.

SAIL collaborated closely with project delivery teams, advising on sustainable solutions for transport, power, materials, and waste management, and fostering an internal culture of sustainability within LEEDS 2023.

This report focuses on LEEDS 2023's approach to sustainability within a challenging context - establishing an organisation and building a programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impact of Brexit, war and the cost-of-living crisis.

We hope the report is useful for those seeking to implement more sustainable solutions in how they design and deliver cultural events.



Hibiscus Rising, LEEDS 2023. Image credit: David Lindsay.

Overview of LEEDS 2023

LEEDS 2023 Year of Culture was born from a bid to compete for the title of European Capital of Culture. The city began this process in 2015, following a city-wide consultation, and over the following two years the bid secured strong backing from Leeds City Council's Executive Board and a wide array of businesses, cultural partners and institutions.

After the UK's referendum to leave the EU and the subsequent announcement that the UK could no longer compete, Leeds City Council decided to proceed regardless. They maintained their financial commitment and established Leeds Culture Trust in 2019 to deliver the Year of Culture.



Neighbourhood Hosts at the 100 Days to go Programme Launch, LEEDS 2023. Image Credit: JMA Photography.



SAIL

Sustainable Arts in Leeds (SAIL) is a not-for-profit organisation committed to supporting environmental sustainability within the creative and cultural industries of West Yorkshire. Operating as a membership network, SAIL offers expertise, training, and advocacy support, aiming to instil a culture of sustainability throughout the cultural and creative industries.

In November 2022, SAIL embarked on a partnership with LEEDS 2023 to support in the delivery of their sustainability plan, this spanned from planning and development to delivery, implementation, and legacy creation.

Overview of LEEDS 2023 programme

The LEEDS 2023 programme was delivered across three strands:

1

PRODUCE

12 signature projects delivered in house by the LEEDS 2023 team. Signature Events were accompanied by a diverse range of community engagement, creative learning, skills development and capacity building for the sector.

2

PARTNER

A grant and co commissioning programme delivered by external cultural partners locally, nationally and internationally.

3

PROMOTE

A communications and storytelling campaign aiming to generate new profile for the city and its cultural offer.

73%

of Leeds households engaged with Leeds 2023

80%

of audiences for Signature Projects were Leeds residents

The primary focus of this report is the LEEDS 2023 Signature Programme, as LEEDS 2023 exerted the greatest degree of oversight and control over these projects.

For a complete overview of the LEEDS 2023 programme go to <https://leeds2023.co.uk/programme/>

2,302,808

in-person engagements across Produce and Partner strands

257,473

engagements with digital content

3,256,752

engagements with broadcast content

823,071

video views from X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube

LEEDS 2023 Sustainability Aims and Objectives

LEEDS 2023's mission was to 'deliver a transformational year connecting and benefiting people now and into the future'. This included prioritising environmental sustainability.

As part of the Year of Culture, the Trust committed to researching and acting in the following key areas:



TRAVEL & TRANSPORT

Work with Leeds City Council and travel operators to improve transport options and reduce the emissions associated with travel.



FUNDING & PROCUREMENT

Consider the ethical and sustainable nature of all materials and resources sourced, as well as where we receive our funding from and the partners we work with.



ENERGY

Research green energy options and alternatives to diesel generators and communicate with venues to assess their energy consumption and how it can be improved.



BIODIVERSITY & NATURE

Evaluate the impact of events on the natural environment and develop mitigation methods to reduce this.



COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

Work with venues, artists and suppliers to ensure environmentally friendly practices across every event.



FOOD

Consider the carbon footprint of any food served across the year of culture and prioritise local traders and locally sourced, more sustainable food.



SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

Work with venues, artists and partners to remove single use plastic from events throughout 2023.



WASTE

Identify methods to reduce waste to landfill as much as possible. Place an emphasis on reducing, reusing and recycling.



LOCAL COMMUNITY

Identify ways to maximise the involvement of the local community in the year of culture.



WATER

Promote the efficient use of water and monitor our usage to prevent waste.

LEEDS 2023

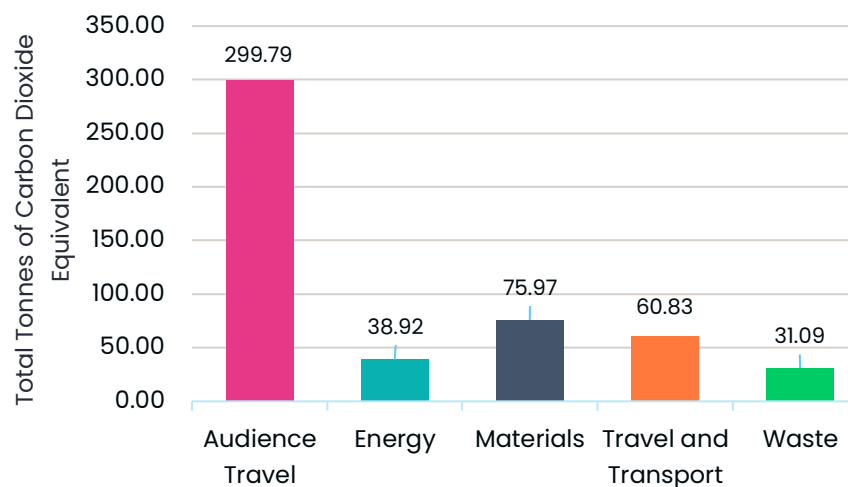
Environmental Impact

Aligned with Leeds City Council's commitment to becoming a carbon neutral city by 2030, LEEDS 2023's environmental ambitions were both operational and creative – recognising the power of storytelling to increase climate confidence in communities.

This commitment ensured environmental sustainability was integrated into the vision and legacy of the year of culture. As such, sustainability became a central guiding principle that shaped the organisation's approach.

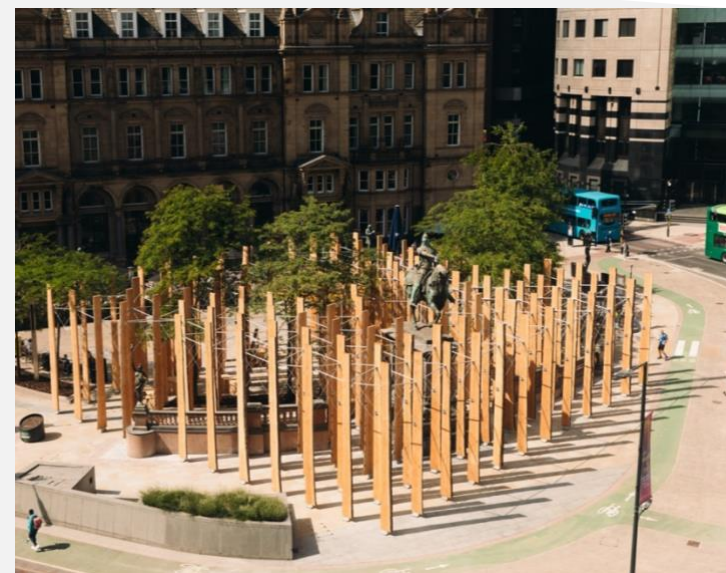
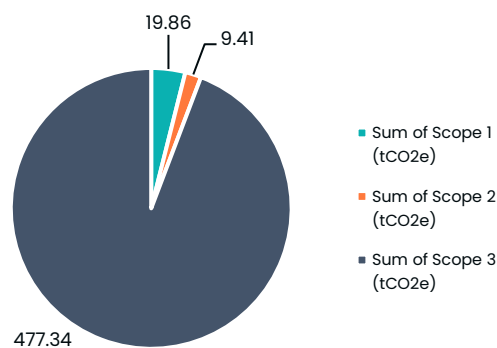
This included raising awareness of environmental issues and solutions in surprising ways. Such as focusing on supply chains and circular economies through 'Making A Stand' and imagining a world without wildlife through 'Nest'. The programme sought to raise audience awareness and engagement in climate change.

Carbon Footprint of LEEDS 2023 Signature Programme



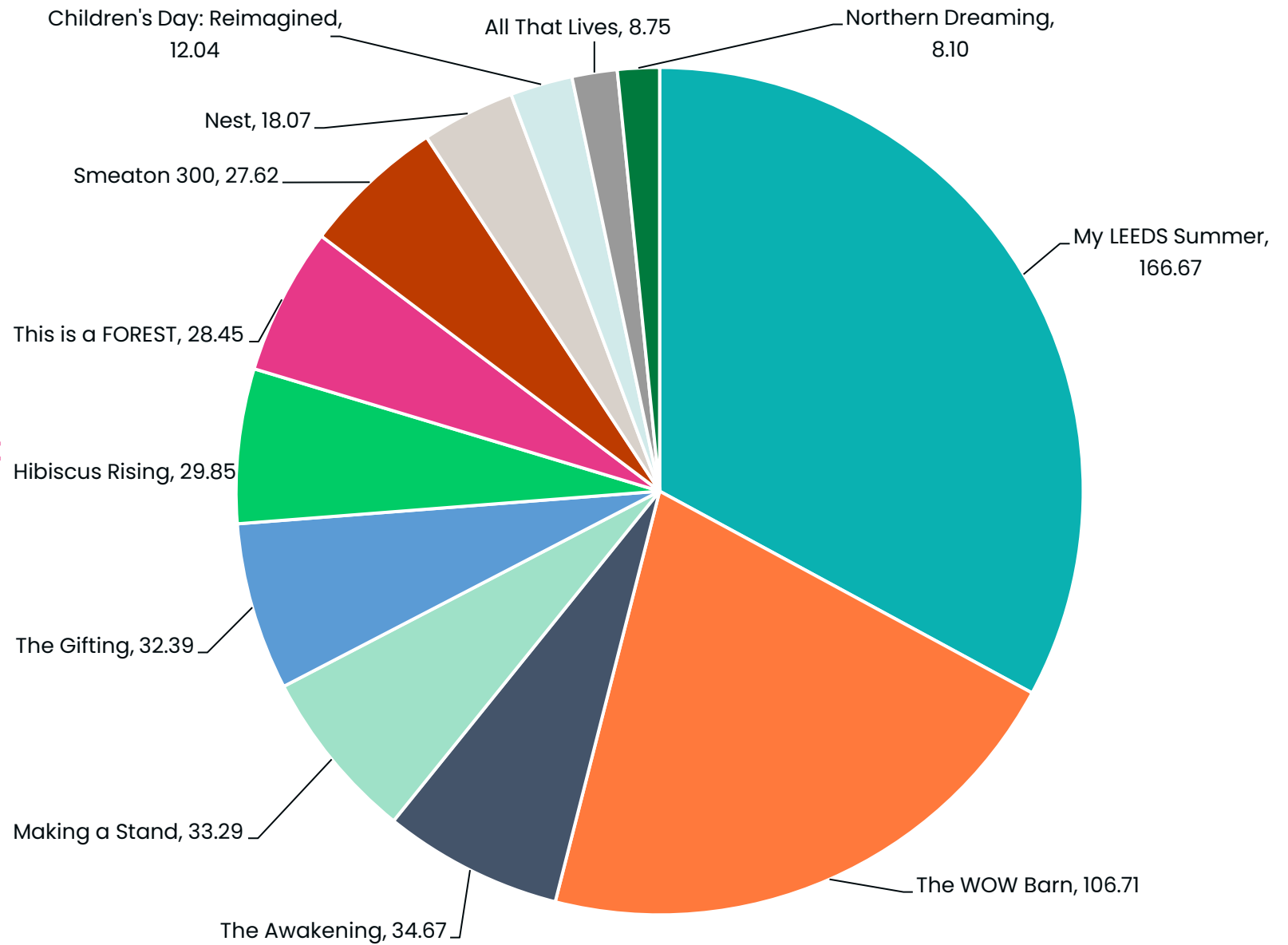
506.60tCO₂e
Carbon Footprint
of Signature
Programme

Emission Scopes for LEEDS 2023 Signature Events



Making a Stand, LEEDS 2023. Image Credit: Tom Joy Photo

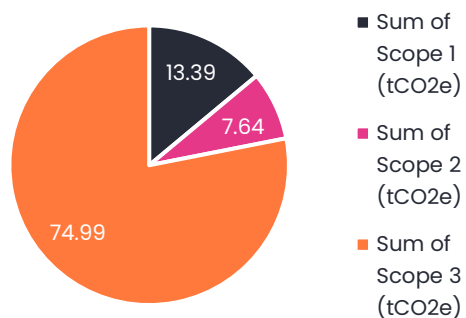
**Combined
Carbon Footprint
of LEEDS 2023
Signature Events**
(tonnes, carbon dioxide
equivalent)



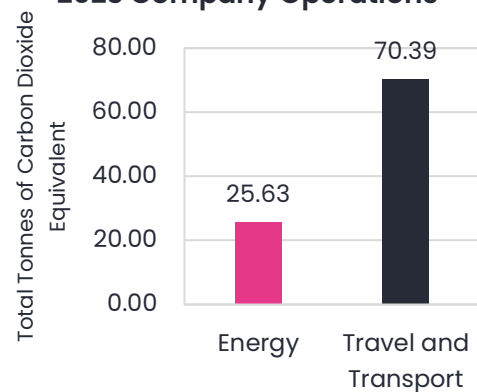


100 Days to go Programme Launch event, LEEDS 2023. Image credit: JMA Photography.

Emission Scopes for LEEDS 2023 Company Operations



Carbon Footprint of LEEDS 2023 Company Operations



96tCO₂e

Carbon Footprint of
LEEDS 2023 Company
Operations

Carbon Footprint Methodology

To calculate the carbon footprint of the year, SAIL gathered data on energy, travel and transport, materials, audience travel and waste and utilised available and relevant greenhouse gas conversion factors from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ.)

In some instances, verifiable data wasn't available, so benchmark or proxy data has been used. Whilst every effort was made to capture as much data as possible and to verify the accuracy of the collected data, carbon footprinting is an inherently inaccurate process, and these figures shouldn't be taken as an absolute figure, but instead an approximation of the true carbon footprint.



Energy consumption is of vital importance for events, and energy consumption is the second biggest carbon emitter in the UK.

LEEDS 2023 focused on reducing the carbon footprint of its energy consumption by exploring different approaches, such as connections to the national grid, solar/hybrid systems, batteries and using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil in place of regular diesel.

Achievements

- Prioritising grid connections across 75% of signature events. Including installing a new grid connection and substantial power supply in City Square for Making A Stand, which will go on to support future events.
- Utilising Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) and solar/hybrid systems for 100% of signature events where grid connections were not possible. For The WOW Barn, a solar hybrid system was used which resulted in an approximate 2tCO₂e reduction in carbon emissions.
- Working with local supplier Production Light and Sound who invested in a portable battery electric energy system (Voltstack) which was used throughout the LEEDS 2023 programme and will go on to be a resource for the events sector in the region.
- Delivering workshops and events through partners SAIL that targeted venues. Such as the Arts Green Book event with National Theatre and Buro Happold which was attended by representatives from 15 venues in Leeds.
- LED lighting and low energy equipment was prioritised across all events to reduce energy consumption as much as possible.



VOLTstack 5k 230V Portable Battery Units supplied by Production Light & Sound for LEEDS 2023's Children's Day: reimagined. Image Credit: Production Light & Sound

"In 2023 we were interested in portable battery energy storage systems, but we weren't entirely sure if it was something that the sector would want!"

We spoke with SAIL, who connected us up with LEEDS 2023 and that gave us the confidence to invest, with the system going out on 3 LEEDS 2023 productions alone, and it now being an asset that the rest of the region can take advantage of"

Sarah Buckmaster

Company Director and Technical Manager,
Production Light and Sound



7340 Litres
of Hydrotreated
Vegetable oil used



2.2tCO₂e
Carbon Footprint
from using HVO
(including well to tank)



23.3tCO₂e
Equivalent Carbon
Footprint of using the
same amount of diesel
(including WTT)



91% Reduction in
carbon emissions
by using HVO rather
than standard
diesel



Solar Panels used at the WOW Barn, LEEDS 2023. Image credits: SAIL

- Whilst HVO can be used in existing diesel engines without any modification, making it a potential alternative to regular diesel when grid connections can't be established, there are challenges to determining its overall environmental impact as this depends on factors such as feedstock production practices and land use change.
- Grid connections can come with high price tags as well as long wait times for installation, and more sustainable mobile power generation systems often come with higher rental costs, and are not as readily available due to lack of supply.
- Access to equipment where previously there was not local demand was an ongoing challenge in the first half of the year. By collaborating with local suppliers and demonstrating need, new resources were secured that will benefit the broader event delivery sector.



WASTE

Waste is an industry wide issue across all levels of event delivery.

LEEDS 2023 focused on reducing waste both in company operations (e.g., office waste) and in programme-generated materials.

Achievements

- Building waste reduction into the artistic vision of signature projects. Such as Childrens' Day, where the concept included children building event infrastructure such as seating out of found materials which were then returned to their original purpose. Or This is a FOREST, where artists Invisible Flock based the entirety of their exhibition build as a 'collaboration' with a fallen tree nearby their studio.
- Returning 127 wooden fins back to the supply chain following their temporary use as part of Making A Stand.
- Donating the wooden frame structure built for The WOW Barn to a social enterprise who will rebuild and repurpose the frame as an outdoor community classroom.
- Considering sustainability before purchasing – for example all office furniture was reclaimed and / or second hand and was sent to a charity to be refurbished and sold on after LEEDS 2023 was over.
- Selling, donating and ethically disposing of 100% of office and programme materials following conclusion of the year, ensuring that nothing went to landfill. Much of this material went into the local community, to be used in educational and cultural settings.
- Moon Palace, the mobile touring observatory was a second-hand bus given a new lease of life. Timber from an ancient woodland in Wales, owned by artists Heather Peak and Ivan Morison, clad the inside. This woodland, suspected to be part of an ancient Celtic Forest significant to the region, underwent replanting post-war with non-native species, primarily Hemlock and Grand Fir. The wood sourced for Moon Palace is from these invasive species, which required clearing for both historical preservation and the protection of endangered species identified in the woodland. Also inside the bus, the original bus seats were reused and repurposed into new seating.
- Children's Day: Reimagined exemplified waste reduction by using reclaimed materials for seating, adopting a "hire, don't buy" approach for all event materials, and ensuring that all materials were either returned, repurposed, or recycled at the end of the event.



Moon Palace, LEEDS 2023. Image Credits: JMA Photography.

Learnings

- Tackling audience waste was an ongoing issue. LEEDS 2023 tried multiple approaches to improving waste management on site for audiences, including utilising different contractors, employing different streams to maximise potential recycling rates, and using data collected to understand and reflect on what could be done differently. However, additional mitigations could have been put into place on site such as increasing staffing to monitor audience waste, but this was challenging financially.
- To mitigate potential challenges, event organisers should plan as far in advance as possible on what potential waste might be generated and how this could be removed from the event ecosystem all together. This should be twinned with a robust communications plan to educate audiences on what is expected of them and what provision is available both ahead of the event and during.

“Our approach to waste for Children’s Day: Reimagined was to rethink how we could obtain the materials we required for the project, and instead of buying things new, using them for the project and then disposing of them, our approach instead was to interrupt materials on their journey through the supply chain.

For example, we sourced new concrete blocks, tyres which were heading for recycling and second-hand timber. We then used these materials for the event, and once the event was over, we sent the concrete blocks back into the construction industry, the tyres went on to be recycled, and the wood was used in future LEEDS 2023 events.”

Jacob Gough

Director, DerynCoch Creative Production and Consultancy



All 127 wooden fins from Making a Stand were returned back to the supply chain following their temporary use as part of the sculpture, LEEDS 2023. Image Credits: Tom Joy Photography.



SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

Single-use plastic has become one of the greatest waste challenges of our time, with geologists now of the opinion that we have created so much plastic it will enter into the fossil record.

The LEEDS 2023 team attempted to mitigate this as much as possible, with the Visitor Experience and Marketing & Communications team leading in this area.

Achievements

- Conducting an audit of signage expected across the programme and creating one set that could be reused across multiple event sites.
- Ensuring most site branding was generic to ensure it could be reused in different locations. Where branding did require site specificity, ensuring it would be in use for a minimum of four weeks.

Learnings

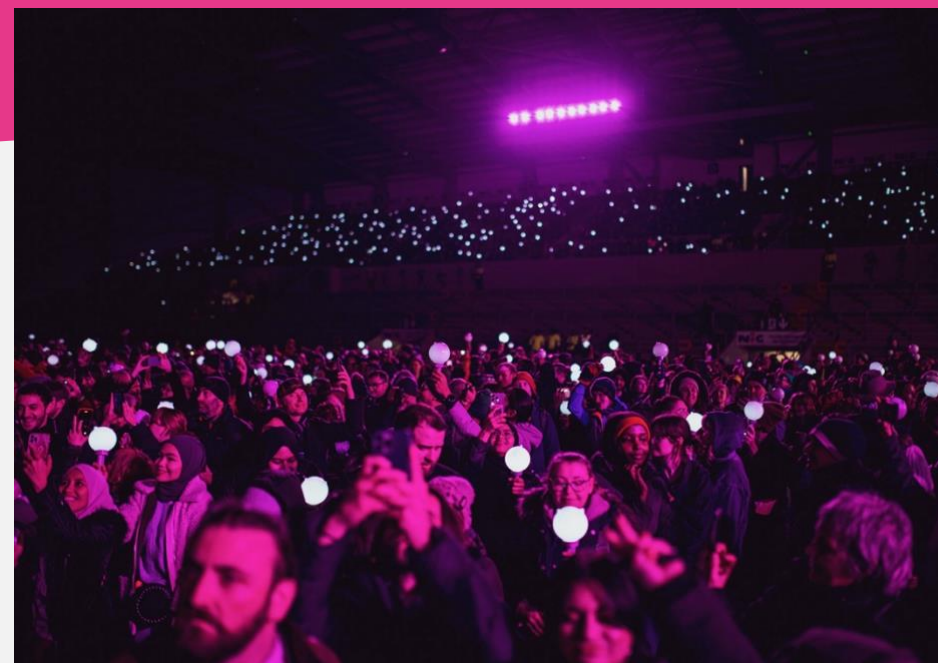
- Pallet wrap is an issue when trying to remove single use plastic from a supply chain. Whilst all efforts were undertaken to discuss transport and packaging with suppliers, there were still moments where deliveries arrived wrapped in plastic unexpectedly.
- When working with 3rd parties or external event leads, it became impossible in some scenarios to manage control over food suppliers use of single use plastics.



100% of branded
heras scrim
recycled at the end
of LEEDS 2023

"Single-use plastic is still unfortunately everywhere, but LEEDS 2023 made a concerted effort to reduce single-use plastic as much as possible throughout the year. They achieved this through simple, but effective actions, like standardising event signage for use across multiple events and minimising event-specific branded items to maximise reuse. Additionally, they planned how items could be reused throughout the year to avoid single-use scenarios"

Jamie Saye
General Manager, SAIL





TRAVEL & TRANSPORT

Travel and Transport is considered to be the biggest carbon footprint for live events, with the [2022-23 temperature check report \(Isia\)](#) finding that travel and transport accounts for approximately 75% of an event's total carbon footprint. Audience travel is the single biggest contributor to the carbon footprint of live events, accounting for approximately 34% of an event's total emissions.

LEEDS 2023 aimed to tackle this by experimenting with free alternative transport options for audiences, as well as providing detailed information on public transport, walking and bike routes as part of its audience communications.



Across the programme, 63% of miles travelled by attendees were by car



24% of miles travelled for Nest were by LEEDS 2023 shuttle bus



Total carbon footprint of audience travel = **300tCO₂e**



Average car occupancy = 2.63

Achievements

- Sites for events were chosen due to their preexisting transport infrastructure wherever possible.
- Active travel/wheeling and public transport were prioritised in all pre-event communications to audience members.
- Working with First Bus as a partner on signature projects where sites were out of the city centre, primarily The Awakening opening ceremony located at Headingley Stadium, and NEST at RSPB St Aidan's Nature Park. For RSPB St Aidan's, approximately 24% of the audience used the shuttle bus service, with an approximate carbon reduction of 1tCO₂e.
- Procuring hire equipment and staffing locally wherever possible, primarily through the implementation of a Preferred Suppliers List which ensured a sustainability audit had been undertaken prior to tendering of what was available in the region.

Learnings

- One of LEEDS 2023's KPIs was to increase the city's international cultural relations and profile, which included generating partnerships with Embassies, Consulates and international agencies such as the British Council as well as working with international artists and cultural partners. With this comes the requirement for international travel, with a predominant focus by funders on ODA countries which often resulted in further travel distances. Where possible alternative routes to flying were explored and encouraged, but international travel represented approximately 70tCO2e of LEEDS 2023's carbon footprint.
- Rail strikes were a regular challenge throughout the year, and during the delivery of larger events this increased reliance on car transport for staff and audiences. It was challenging to mitigate this as strikes were called on relatively short notice, and alternative transport provision would be costly to provide for free. Accommodation for staff was sourced locally and offered wherever staff members were implicated by the strikes to reduce travel needs.

"Right from the outset we identified that audience transport was the biggest contributing factor to CO2 emissions for our events, and we therefore took steps to evaluate sustainable transport solutions for all our activities, including putting on Shuttle Buses and working with Leeds City Council to identify suitable pick up and drop off locations for public transport options.

Tying into existing infrastructure such as the park and ride locations and public transport hubs, meant the audience members were able to travel with ease, and on routes that were familiar to them, in turn incentivising sustainable and affordable travel options.

Ensuring these services were not just well designed, but also well publicised and integrated into the audience booking and communication journey, was essential to obtaining a good uptake from audiences"

Carl Foster

Head of Visitor Experience and Event Operations,
LEEDS 2023



Abigail Scott-Paul & John Godfrey at the First Bus & LEEDS 2023 Partnership Launch, 2023. Image credit: Jemma Mickleburgh.



Many scientists agree that the primary way in which we will feel the climate crisis is through water, with a projected increase in freak weather occurrences such as droughts and floods as global warming increases.

Water therefore was considered as a vital area of focus for LEEDS 2023, and strategies were implemented to reduce water usage wherever possible as well as prevent water wastage.

"Providing water for attendees in a sustainable way was something we were really keen to implement. Typical methods of providing water for attendees at temporary events would be to use single-use plastic bottles, and from the outset, that's something we really didn't want to do."

"I'm pleased we managed to find other ways to provide safe drinking water to our attendees, such as by providing the Aqubes and canned water"

Tom Reilly

Director of Production, LEEDS 2023



8092 Litres of drinking water provided across all the signature programme



150 tonnes of water ballast used for the Awakening (150,000 litres), which was then used to water the pitch afterwards

Achievements

- Utilising other methods for ballast other than water for events, such as concrete for The Barn and pegs for community events.
- Water ballast was required for The Awakening opening ceremony, resulting in 150,000 litres used to ensure the stage was stable. This was the single biggest use of water. An agreement was made with the venue to reuse the water for watering the pitch after the event to avoid wastage.
- Providing Aqubes for audiences and staff at greenfield sites as opposed to plastic bottles, which would have resulted in an increase in single use plastic.
- For smaller events, the use of canned water was introduced for staff and performers to avoid wasted water at the end of each event. Cans were more easily portable and the left-over cans were taken to the following events.



FUNDING & PROCUREMENT

Post-COVID-19, arts funding is tough and sustainable sourcing is hard.

LEEDS 2023 used ethical fundraising and worked with suppliers to reduce environmental impact.

Achievements

- Establishing an ethical fundraising policy from the outset of development activities ensured that funding was sought from ethical sources, and corporate partners were assessed at the point of donation. This included not accepting sponsorship from partners involved in fossil fuel extraction, arms sales or other unethical practices.
- Designing and operating a preferred suppliers scheme which prioritised local partners and included requiring their environmental policies and action plans.
- Setting a precedent for future large scale public artworks through Making A Stand, which advocated for designs to consider the end-of-life phase of materials from the outset.



76% of suppliers on preferred suppliers list provided environmental policies and action plans



51% of suppliers on preferred suppliers list within 50 miles of Leeds

Learnings

- Within procurement approaches value for money is a common assessment criteria. As a charity, balancing cost implication against environmental impact was an ongoing discussion.
- Ethical considerations when working in partnership often required negotiation. For example, some corporate partners wished to support LEEDS 2023 as a way to demonstrate their environmental credentials which had the potential to result in green washing. Each corporate partnership and its relationship to projects which focused on climate action had to be discussed and carefully considered with the artists and cultural partners involved. On some occasions this resulted in adaptations to wording in contracts and publicity relating to the partnership.

"LEEDS 2023 took an approach to funding and sponsorship that aligned with our ethical values, part of which was ensuring that sponsors weren't linked with the extraction of fossil fuels. This was outlined in our Ethical Fundraising Policy and every sponsor we engaged with underwent a rigorous due diligence check."

Kully Thiarai

Creative Director and CEO, LEEDS 2023



Approximately a quarter of all global greenhouse gas emissions come from food, with most of those emissions coming from the production of meat products.

To ensure that LEEDS 2023 wasn't contributing to high emissions from food, they prioritised vegetarian and vegan options for all events under their control, and ensured that vegetarian and vegan food vendors were selected for all of their signature events.

Achievements

- Working only with local F&B suppliers where events were solely produced by LEEDS 2023.
- Prioritising vegetarian and vegan options where events were solely produced by LEEDS 2023.
- Commissioning projects which explored food in the context of climate change. For example Leeds Sauce, which playfully demonstrated how food waste and working with local suppliers could encapsulate the flavour of Leeds in a bottle. Including the creation of a vinegar made with beer collected from every pub on the Otley Run.

"As well as having a lower carbon footprint due to vegetarian and vegan food choices being promoted at LEEDS 2023 events, the emphasis on using local food vendors also reduced the potential carbon footprint of food and supported the local economy."

Jamie Saye

General Manager, SAIL



Leeds Sauce, a Rhubarb Ketchup, created by Popeye Collective commissioned for Leeds Compass Festival, supported by LEEDS 2023.
Image credits: Eddie Blake, 2023.



Leeds WOW Festival, 2023. Image Credits: Lucille Moore

Learnings

- There were challenges with this in instances where venues had established food and beverage (F&B) suppliers. In some instances, such as The Awakening, LEEDS 2023 were not able to influence F&B suppliers due to the nature of the contract between the venue and their suppliers.
- A small number of complaints from customers were received due to a lack of variation in the food and beverage offer. This can be avoided by providing clear pre-event communications which outline the events approach to F&B and articulating where it has made the decision to provide vegetarian and vegan food only with clear sustainability messaging.



LOCAL COMMUNITY

As an event aiming to reach 75% of the city's households, LEEDS 2023 presented a unique opportunity to emphasise environmental sustainability within its community engagement and creative learning programmes.

Achievements

Multiple projects were delivered which aimed to increase awareness and confidence in communities in relation to climate change. These included:

- Supporting Mafwa Theatre's Lincoln Greeners initiative, who established in 2018 at Leeds Refugee Forum. As part of My World My City My Neighbourhood, Mafwa created an eco-friendly community garden in Lincoln Green to provide a space for residents to engage in gardening and outdoor activities.
- Transforming a ginnel in Chapeltown through My World My City My Neighbourhood. The Ginnel Project aimed to revitalise a historic walkway by fostering community engagement through various activities, including walks, litter picking, and gathering residents' ideas for enhancing the space.
- Collaborating with Harewood House to commission Lucy & Jorge Orta to deliver "70 x 7 The Meal Act XLV" which celebrated the growth and life cycle of seeds and brought together diverse communities for a unique and shared dining experience.
- Delivering Under Our Feet: a creative learning programme as part of 'This is a FOREST' which explored land use and considered what would happen if we work with, not against, nature. The programme was delivered with Hyde Park Source and 15 schools took part to learn about nature, human geography, ecosystems and land use, developing a small plot of land on their school site. Teachers were funded to undertake Forest School Level 1 training to develop their teaching practice, and the resources used are now freely available online for more schools to engage with.
- Partnering with Thames Festival Trust to launch River of Hope, an international art and education project for key stage 3 students. Through workshops and online resources, students explored environmental themes using their local river as a focal point, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and artistic expression.
- Assessing 50 sites in the city which have the potential to be forests through 'This is a FOREST', creating a resource for the city to use in consideration of its plans for tree planting and site use.



70 x 7 The Meal Act XLV, Harewood House. Lucy & Jorge Orta.
Image credits: Lucy + Jorge Orta, 2023.



This is a FOREST by Invisible Flock & LEEDS 2023 involved the delivery of a programme of engagement with local communities and schools to learn about nature, human geography, ecosystems and land use. Image credit: David Lindsay, 2023.

“Working in partnership with cultural and community organisations is key to the legacy of LEEDS 2023, and the projects delivered by those partners gave us the opportunity to reach a huge amount of people locally, nationally and internationally.

Many of those projects and programmes will continue beyond 2023, and demonstrate the important role the arts needs to play in finding real solutions for tackling the climate crisis.”

Emma Beverley
Director of Programmes, LEEDS 2023

Learnings

- Many projects delivered through the Partner programme were led by communities who often struggled to consider environmental sustainability in their delivery plans due to the nature of their events: primarily due to a lack of resources and time, and being predominantly volunteer-led. It was therefore important to be sensitive about potentially alienating communities when discussing sustainable adaptations to their approaches.
- Working in partnership with organisations who will continue to deliver this work beyond the Year of Culture was integral to ensure legacy.
- A lack of confidence to engage with climate change was often cited by community partners and project participants. This required sensitive communication, avoiding criticising and using jargon, to ensure individuals didn't feel alienated or excluded.



As part of My World My City My Neighbourhood, Mafwa Theatre created an eco-friendly community garden in Lincoln Green to provide a space for residents to engage in gardening and outdoor activities.

Image credit: Mafwa Theatre, 2023.



COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

Effective communication of the climate crisis was something that LEEDS 2023 recognised the critical importance of, and explored through the way that they communicated their own environmental sustainability efforts, but also through the public programme.

“One hundred and thirty vertical wooden fins stand proudly in Leeds City Square. Each plank bears bark on its waney edge while exposing a clean, geometrical cut on the other. This mass of wood is organised in a strict grid, interrupting its regular pattern to accommodate existing sculptures, trees, and street furniture. The grid is superimposed on the square, out of sync with the surrounding architecture, as if dropped from outer space.

Within this artificial forest, voids are cut out and covered to offer spaces for reflection, performance, and gathering. Making a Stand 'borrows' wood from the supply chain. It takes the first roughly cut planks and weathers them for a year, adding financial value to the wood.”

Michael Pinsky, describing “Making a Stand”



Making a Stand, 2023. Image credits: Tom Joy Photo.

Achievements

- Designing creative campaigns such as 'Cut the Carbon Jargon' for Making A Stand, which aimed to demystify complex concepts surrounding climate change, carbon accounting practices and supply chains.
- Ongoing transparency through the delivery of online case studies and blogs produced by SAIL for the LEEDS 2023 website, which included key learnings and approaches.
- Producing and publicising a free online course for all partners in sustainable event delivery.
- Including an Environmental Promise on the website to clearly communicate LEEDS 2023's aims and values in relation to sustainability.
- Offering Carbon Literacy Training to all LEEDS 2023 staff and Trustees. 100% of the organisation were offered the training, with 72% of staff achieving Carbon Literate status and the entire board of trustees. Additionally, 41 Volunteers received sustainability training, and the 33 Neighbourhood Hosts received a 1 hour sustainability training course.
- A comprehensive and free training programme on sustainable event management and delivery was launched to benefit the wider cultural sector and act as a legacy tool to support SAIL's mission and ongoing activity in the region, at the time of writing the report, 287 professionals and students have enrolled onto the course.

Learnings

- Investing in the organisation's staff team to feel confident in communicating in relation to climate change is key. For many individuals, some of the concepts explored were new and more time could have been planned for staff education.
- Introducing a monthly 'beat' in ongoing communication planning that wasn't related to specific programme projects could be a useful way of ensuring ongoing messaging focusing on sustainability.
- Internal communication is as important as external communication. A company newsletter providing update on the organisation's approach to its Sustainable Action Plan and including any key learnings as a good way of keeping a larger scale organisation engaged in its progress.



287 professionals and students enrolled onto sustainable events management course



77% of LEEDS 2023 staff achieved Carbon Literate



41 volunteers and 33 neighbourhood hosts received sustainability training



BIODIVERSITY & NATURE

The delicate balance of life on Earth, encompassing the myriad species of plants, animals, and microorganisms, is under threat as human activities continue to encroach upon natural habitats. According to a study conducted by London's Natural History Museum, the UK has lost half of its biodiversity since the industrial revolution.

Against this backdrop, LEEDS 2023 aimed to reconnect communities with nature and amplify the urgency of safeguarding biodiversity.

Achievements

- Supporting resident-led projects which focused on rewilding and offered educational opportunities for residents and young people.
- Working with experts, such as landscape architects, woodland managers and ornithologists to ensure mitigations were included in project planning and delivery to avoid impacting the natural environment and wildlife.
- Undertaking an ecological survey through This is a FOREST for a key site in Leeds which could become a large-scale forest in the future.
- Working with nature sites to increase awareness and encourage new visitors. Such as RSPB St Aidan's Nature Park, which was home for one week to NEST and has provided the RSPB with a blueprint for event delivery on their sites in the future.



This is a FOREST, Invisible Flock & LEEDS 2023.
Image credit: David Lindsay.

Learnings

- Involving experts in event planning as early as possible is critical. In hindsight, some key decisions such as scheduling, walking routes for audiences and public consultation about the nature of the events could have been made sooner had the right expertise been in place earlier.
- Preparing for the unexpected is critical when working in nature sites, including redesigning an event to protect new arrival of wildlife.
- Leaning into natural landscapes as backdrops for events provides audiences with some of the most special experiences.
- Many audiences were new to locations LEEDS 2023 activities took place in, and commented on their desire to return and explore them further after the events.



50 sites identified in
Leeds that could
become forests



Approximately
15tCO₂e biogenic
carbon stored in
Making a Stand

"The use of theatre as an engagement tool to connect audiences to nature and climate change issues was an extraordinary success for the conservation sector. The LEEDS 2023 team and the National Youth Theatre demonstrated that theatre has a place in our green spaces and can break down barriers in a unique way, it makes nature more accessible, inspires wider audiences, and can make meaningful emotional connections to green and climate change issues. NEST was a theatrical performance on this scale that has never been held before on an RSPB site.

The LEEDS 2023 team took great care to ensure there was no negative impact on habitat or wildlife. The entirety of their approach in delivering NEST on a nature park was done with great care and awareness of the extreme sensitivity of the site, and of every element throughout the event was delivered with precision. They demonstrated what is possible when working with the right partners"

Tom Harman

Senior Sites Manager, RSPB



The RSPB site St Aidans Nature Park was the site for LEEDS 2023 & National Youth Theatre's production of Nest. Image credits: JMA Photography.



The WOW Barn has become a new outdoor classroom for Kirkstall Valley Development Trust. Pictured: Barn Dance at the WOW Barn, LEEDS 2023. Image credit: Theia Photographic, 2023.

Legacy

The legacy of LEEDS 2023 with regards to sustainability exists in both tangible changes to event infrastructure, but also intangible shifts in attitudes and practice. One of the most significant legacies is the empowerment of SAIL, which will continue to build on the lessons learned during LEEDS 2023 across the region, alongside projects born during the year which will continue to develop and progress.

The legacy also exists in physical assets. Such as equipment distributed to educational and cultural organisations for future use, new power connections that can be utilised for future events, a new outdoor classroom for a local community development trust, or set items repurposed for a local nature park.

The sustainability legacy of LEEDS 2023 can also be found in positioning the city as a leader of best practice in sustainable cultural programme delivery, for example through initiating programmes such as [Sustainable Culture in Leeds and Lille \(SCILL\)](#) or more locally, through the [Spirit of 2012 funded knowledge transfer programme](#) for cultural organisations throughout West Yorkshire.

Creating sustainable major events is an ongoing and iterative process, where each event builds upon the previous. With other major events in the region planned over the coming years, LEEDS 2023 has provided a strong bedrock to build upon, and showcased what is possible when taking a holistic approach to sustainability.

The Birdhides produced for Nest were retained by RSPB on the site of the St Aidan's Nature Reserve. Image credit: JMA Photography, 2023.



Conclusion

LEEDS 2023's ambition regarding sustainability was to ensure it was integrated at every level of the organisation, across all key decision making. This evaluation demonstrates that reducing impact on the environment was a core guiding principle for each team working towards delivering the year, who made great progress and took creative risks to seek alternative solutions where an approach had not been tried and tested.

As a temporary event operating at scale, the challenges LEEDS 2023 faced were not unique – there are still significant developments which need to be made to ensure future cultural events are able to reduce their environmental impact as much as possible.

Importantly, LEEDS 2023 sought to bring their audiences along with them on their journey. By providing methods for sustainable travel, telling impactful stories of the climate crisis and by encouraging audiences to make as much use of the city's green spaces and natural environments as possible.

Through the partnership with SAIL, LEEDS 2023 has contributed towards a more sustainable future for the city's cultural industries. The lessons learnt from both successes and challenges will provide a blueprint for future events for years to come.



The Awakening, LEEDS 2023. Image credit: Tom Joy Photo, 2023.

With thanks to the LEEDS
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