Establishing the UK as a global leader in event sustainability
A British event industry that leads on sustainable practices would differentiate the UK. We still have the potential to build on the legacy of events like London 2012, where sustainability was a central theme, but the window of opportunity is closing rapidly.

David Stubbs, Independent sustainability expert and former Head of Sustainability at London 2012

With special thanks to the following roundtable discussion participants:

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Events are a tool for business growth, help support regional development and can enhance cultural awareness and social cohesion. Sustainability considerations in planning, delivery and legacy mean that the impact of aspects like travel to events and waste produced by events can be planned for and minimised. There are leaders in best practice, but it is not yet as widespread as it needs to be for the UK to maintain a globally leading position in sustainable events.

Recent events like the London Olympics and Glasgow Commonwealth Games have created a legacy of sustainable event practice that have shown the UK to be leading in this area. But not all events must be Olympic-sized to position the UK as a leader. The corporate, public, charitable and other sectors in the UK host events regularly – from conferences to in-house trainings – and these events have the potential to use existing or develop new sustainable event best practice. If done well, events are great vehicles for spreading awareness on sustainability and developing sustainability practices among stakeholders and the supply chain.

The Government has recently undertaken a consultation to inform its spring 2015 launch of a Business Tourism Strategy. We believe that the UK has an opportunity to lead on sustainable event practice, and that this would signal a commitment to responsible business practice at a national and regional level. This supports Britain's position as a global leader in innovation and knowledge creation. It also has the potential to create competitive advantage for the UK as a destination of choice for events.

However, this ambition can only be achieved in partnership by organisations in a range of sectors. For that reason, a panel of leaders from the event industry gathered over breakfast at the House of Commons in December 2014. This paper summarises their discussion and gives recommended next steps for Government and the event sector to take to establish the UK as a leader in sustainable event practice.
MAKING SUSTAINABLE EVENT PRACTICE
THE NEW NORMAL

The UK has shown leadership in establishing approaches to sustainable event practice, like the development of BSI 8901, ISO 20121* and ground breaking practice at the London 2012 Olympics. When those who deliver UK events continue to develop and use integrate sustainability, the UK becomes a more attractive, competitive destination for events.

Sustainability practice in the UK is not commonplace as demand is largely lacking. However, global expectations are changing and put the UK event industry at risk. If we do not keep up with the changing global context, the UK event industry will not only miss a vital opportunity to lead sustainability, but will have to catch up to competition elsewhere.

Other barriers to making sustainable event practice more common include perceptions that sustainability is a peripheral issue, driven by ‘the usual suspects.’ It is seen as largely irrelevant to the day-to-day business of planning and delivering corporate training, exhibitions or conferences, and adds to cost, time needed and general workload.

These real and perceived barriers are largely fuelled by a lack of understanding of what is required to make an event more sustainable, what the value is and what resources and support are available to learn and implement sustainable in events.

Approaches to addressing these barriers could include establishing ways to measure performance and impact, like reducing general waste or sending food waste to landfill. Measurement is not yet commonplace, but data that can show financial savings or reduced environmental impact can strengthen the argument for a change in practice.

*ISO 20121 is based on BSI 8901 and was developed with global experts to specify the requirements for an Event Sustainability Management System.

The Global Reporting Initiative’s Event Organisers Sector Supplement (referred to as GRI EOSS and included in the Recommendations in this report) provides guidance that enables event organisers to report their sustainability performance in a comparable way. This enables easier learning and sharing of best practice across the international event sector.
Getting the conversation started and raising the issue of sustainability is important to moving people on from 'old fashioned events planning', and keeping the UK event industry competitive.

Fiona Pelham, MD Positive Impact Events

The economic, environmental and social impact of travel to events is an uncomfortable discussion for many, but collaboration by the event industry, business and Government could result in more sustainable approaches that would make the UK a more attractive event destination.

Developing responsible policies to assist in event, client and supplier communication and reducing lead times of events could reduce costs and improve service delivery. Developing good long-term relationships with clients and suppliers will be key as current practices become outdated and the UK industry is required to evolve to keep up or, ideally, to lead the world on sustainable event practice.

Using sustainable standards is still not commonplace. Yet they are a tool to benchmark current practice and should be seen as a resource. Raising awareness across the event industry should be a priority.

Any approaches to establishing best practice and addressing barriers to make events more sustainable must be championed and better communicated through partnership between Government, business and the event industry. Their combined leadership and resources can ensure the long-term sustainability of the UK event industry, by inspiring and supporting all players to take part and to lead together. The following Recommendations would help the UK Government and event industry to do just that.
RECOMMENDATIONS

01 In its upcoming Business Tourism Strategy, the Government should emphasise sustainable event management standards like ISO 20121 and GRI EOSS and other best practice to make the UK a global event leader and event destination.

02 Government and the event industry should work together to convene and support an ‘event think tank,’ where national associations, event industry leaders and others can establish and share best practice to position the UK as a leader in sustainable events practice.

03 To complement this ‘event think tank,’ the UK event industry should establish a national sustainable event forum to up-skill workers in the industry and share best practice to maintain and grow UK leadership on sustainable events.

04 The UK event industry should implement and promote sustainable event practice at their national industry and other events, using ISO 20121 and GRI EOSS as essential tools to drive improved sustainability performance and looking to build on these.

The opportunity is clear: the UK Government and anyone involved in running events in the UK can make sustainable event management the new normal. Genuine partnership between business, education and government is vital for success in this area. By showing leadership together, we can make Britain a destination of choice for events and ensure we are having a positive economic, social and environmental impact at the same time.

Nick de Bois MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Events
ABOUT POSITIVE IMPACT

Positive Impact is a not for profit that has been working since 2005 to provide education and collaboration to create a sustainable event industry.

We have provided sustainability training to those who deliver events, served as environmental sustainability advisor for England’s FIFA World Cup 2018 bid and created the online Share a Positive Impact campaign to enable anyone anywhere to share and promote good sustainable event practice.

We believe that by 2020 a sustainable event industry, where all people consider the economic, environmental and social impact of all their decisions is entirely possible.

We are passionate about the event industry leading the way to show other industries how they can take action on sustainability to make the world a better place.

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