

Leisure and Culture Trusts' Role in Tackling Climate Change

As significant partners to local government and anchored in their local communities, leisure and culture trusts have a key role in supporting the drive towards net-zero by 2050.

It is essential¹ that there is joint working across local authorities and their partners to achieve climate targets, with resource and support through National Government to enable this.

ADAPTATION

Leisure facilities can produce up to 40% of Council's direct carbon emissions², therefore it is vital that any local strategic action against climate change is done in consultation with leisure operators.

As nearly two thirds of the leisure building stock is past its replacement date, a £1bn capital investment scheme into leisure facilities is critically needed to refurbish old, carbon-intensive facilities, and existing decarbonisation schemes need to be accessible to leisure and culture providers.

A prime example of collaboration can be seen in Hyndburn, where Hyndburn Borough Council declared a climate change emergency and is working with leisure trust Hyndburn Leisure to reduce its carbon footprint. Through their partnership, most of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme investment is going to Hyndburn Leisure Centre that will see the installation of new heat pumps, solar panels, and replacement of pool handling units, leading to a projected 73.9% reduction in CO₂ emissions.

Work done in the culture sector demonstrates that significant decarbonisation efforts can be made, with the right support and leadership from national public bodies. For example, Arts Council England's National Portfolio Funded organisations decreased their total energy use emissions by 12% in 2019-20³.

¹ The climate change good practice guide for local government recognises collaborative working with the third sector as a "initial adaptation" activity, which is "the basic level of action required by local authorities to meet statutory commitments". More information: <https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/climatepgp>
² <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/assets/File/Securing%20future%20%28summary%29%20with%20links.pdf>

MITIGATION

The health contribution of participation in physical activity and leisure are well-understood, yet climate change is hindering participation, threatening our health and wellbeing⁴. Just like leisure, the cultural sector is increasingly seeing events cancelled, due to extreme weather conditions.

The leisure and culture sectors therefore need to mitigate the impact of climate change by ensuring their practices are resilient and in support of wider environmental targets.

Engaging their audiences, leisure operators are uniquely positioned to educate the public about the effects of climate change and to encourage sustainable lifestyle changes such as embracing active travel and supporting the use and development of active environments.

For example, Tees Active took over the Tees Barrage in 2012 and work in partnership with the Canal and Rivers Trust and Stockton Council to increase access for the local community to the River Tees and improve the environment for local wildlife. They promote the mental and physical wellbeing benefits of being outdoors while also producing c. 112 kWh of green energy annually through the Archimedes screws at the Barrage.

Arts and culture have the unique ability that they influence the way we perceive the world. It brings people together, describe what we find normal, but also creates spaces and opportunities for people to explore alternative futures⁵.

For example, ONFife, a culture trust in Scotland, is facilitating the Leven Programme as part of Scotland's Climate Beacons. Their work focuses on Fife's industrial heritage and showing how the world can transform to a resilient low carbon community.

³ <https://juliesbicycle.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ACE-JB-annual-report-2019-20.pdf>

⁴ <https://basis.org.uk/game-changer-report>

⁵ <https://www.creativecarbonscotland.com/project/adaptation-cultural-sector/>

Let's work together

Leisure and culture trusts are already making significant investments and changes to their operations to contribute to net zero targets and become resilient organisations.

Many leisure and culture trusts are moving away from using single-use plastics and are increasing their recycling efforts.

To illustrate, libraries in the Royal Borough of Greenwich managed by charitable trust GLL have introduced fully biodegradable library cards that are made from ethically sourced materials. The scheme is part of a series of initiatives undertaken by libraries within the Royal Borough to minimise their environmental impact. Other initiatives include the recent refurbishment of Eltham Library, which included installing energy efficient lighting, using water-based paints which emit minimal VOCs, and upcycling furniture where possible.

But trusts go further than that, embedding environmental sustainability in their business plans and operations. For example, Edinburgh Leisure have a dedicated Energy and Sustainability Department which focuses on increasing energy efficiency across the estate through building improvements and investment in technology.

Through this work, Edinburgh Leisure has achieved:

- 43% reduction of direct CO2 emissions on baseline year
- 50% increase in recycling rate since 2011
- 100 staff in the Collective Green Team
- 3.8m single-use plastics removed from venues per year
- 10m kWh generated onsite since 2015

However, leisure and culture trusts cannot do this work alone and will need support from the national public bodies, local government, and National Government to achieve economies of scale.

"We need the right conditions to maintain peak performance. For too long we've treated the planet as if we're in a sprint – using all our energy and resources in one short blast. We must understand that far from a sprint, we are, together, in the longest of marathons. The more of us run together, the better our future will be and one in which every man, woman and child can win."

- Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change⁶

About us

Community Leisure UK is the members' association that specialises in representing charities and social enterprises delivering public leisure and culture services across England, Scotland and Wales.

We:

- provide a nationwide platform enabling members to meet peers and access strategic partners to find best practice solutions to common problems and recommendations to tackle future industry developments; and
- use the power of the collective membership to represent, reach, influence and promote the charitable trust model benefits at a national level, to inform policy and increase understanding of the trust model.

Our Values



⁶ See footnote 4.