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Edinburgh International Festival: Sustainability Strategy 2025

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Foreword



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The Edinburgh International Festival is a global gathering unlike any other — a celebration of the world's finest music, theatre, opera and dance, and a meeting point for cultures, ideas, and artistic excellence. Each August, we bring together extraordinary performers and audiences from around the globe in a festival that is both deeply rooted in Edinburgh and truly international in its outlook. But we know that with such scale and ambition comes responsibility — not just to our artists and audiences, but to the planet we all share.

Environmental sustainability sits at the heart of how we now plan and deliver the Festival. Since introducing our Sustainability Policy and Carbon Reduction Plan in 2021, we have worked to reduce our environmental impact and reach the bold targets we have set. At the halfway point in this decisive decade, we are taking stock, reviewing our progress, and aligning our work with best practice across the cultural sector.

As part of that, we are now following the British Standards Institution's (BSI) Net Zero Pathway. This internationally recognised framework brings clarity and rigour to our sustainability efforts — helping ensure that our carbon accounting, methodologies, targets, and governance are robust, transparent, and genuinely capable of moving us towards Net Zero by 2045.

We're under no illusions: meaningful change takes time, and the transition will be complex. But we remain firmly committed to doing what it takes — not just to reduce our environmental impact, but to show what a sustainable future for the performing arts can look like.

Francesca Hegyi OBE, Chief Executive

Introduction



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Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) has been committed to environmental sustainability for many years. We are aware of our position as a global brand within the Arts and Culture sector. That position enables us to hand-pick a selection of leading international and local artists for each festival, but it also brings a responsibility to represent Scotland and our stakeholders in a positive light. This includes action on climate issues, ensuring people can enjoy the festival for generations to come.

We were founding members of the Festivals Edinburgh Sustainability Environmental Working Group in 2008 and have worked on reducing emissions ever since. This mission has become more integral to our organisation over the years as our knowledge on the subject increased and is now a strategic priority. We published our first Sustainability Strategy and Carbon Reduction Plan in 2021. These documents have given direction to our work over the last 4 years. Achievements in this time include the creation of the artist residency model, showcasing incredible performance related to climate issues, reducing our gas and electricity usage by 26% and 56% respectively, and appointing an environmental sustainability manager. We know that we have a lot of work to do to continue to reach our net zero goals. We are also aware that the international nature of our work comes at an environmental cost.

Objectives

To achieve our ambitious objectives, we have set the following actions:

- Reach net-zero carbon emissions across **Scope 1 & 2 emissions by 2030** and across our **Scope 3 emissions by 2045**.
- **Work with our partner venues, companies, orchestras and individual artists** to instil sustainability best practice from the inception to delivery of our festival.
- **Embrace new models of working with companies and orchestras** to reduce carbon impact, recognising that our artistic programme and associated travel and freight is our biggest impactor.
- Ensure we have a **carbon management system that is rigorous** and enlightening, supporting and monitoring our sustainability actions.
- **Report annually.**
- Create an **operating structure that promotes sustainable practices** and has buy in from each department.
- Our approach to sustainability will be based upon **three principles: Action; Education; and Advocacy.**
- **Support the wider Arts sector to take action** to minimise their environmental impact.
- **Use our Programme to provide leadership on issues regarding climate** and sustainable development, provoking wider discussions, challenging perceptions and showcasing international experiences.

Our Sustainability Journey

In 2021, the Festival published a [Sustainability Action Plan](#), [Sustainability Policy](#) and a [Carbon Reduction Policy](#). The policies aligned themselves to the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#), alongside the [City of Edinburgh Council](#) and [Scottish Government's Net Zero ambitions](#). This created the structure to refining our work within the field of sustainability. Having been guided by the policies for several years, we feel the time is right to review them, ensuring that they align to best practice in the sustainability field and the relevant sectors net zero pathway. It also ensures that we have a net zero trajectory that is achievable and realistic.

Since 2021, we have developed thorough reporting systems and employed an Environmental Sustainability Manager to lead on our work in the area. This understanding has led to the identification of other areas of our material footprint that we now have a methodology to evaluate

Due to the development of international, national and local strategies and increased expertise on the subject we are in a strong position to identify where we can make meaningful changes in the pursuit of Net Zero. Our approach identifies where we can realistically achieve change in the short-term, sets targets for longer-term goals and acknowledges that we will need support from external sectors in some areas. It also identifies 2030 as a realistic target to decarbonise areas of our footprint whilst building in review periods every 5 years from 2030 to evaluate our progress and realign our strategy if necessary.

It is evident that some operational categories (waste, water and business travel (air/land)) that we identified a target of 2030 for, are now likely to be decarbonised after that date. Whilst water and waste are a small percentage of our overall footprint, business travel is a larger part of it. We will continue to work on all areas that we can influence but it is prudent to align the decarbonisation of business travel with wider policy areas and identify a target date of 2045. We will continue to manage this and all other areas we have direct control of to minimise emissions.

We also feel that by identifying 2035 targets we can intensify action in these areas and reach net zero ahead of 2045.

Our Targets



Our approach:

- **We will report annually on GHG emissions to ISO 14064-1 standard**
- **We will have a 3-phase approach- 3 target dates**
- **We will implement 3-year evaluation periods, whilst tracking annually**
- **We will monitor our artistic travel using a 3-year average to support a diversity of programming**
- **We will evaluate our progress against our Strategy objectives every 5 years**

Three Phased Approach

This acknowledges that the changes that we now need to make will not necessarily be incremental but will often come about in batches as resources and investments are made in new technologies, external infrastructure advances, supplier collaboration and implementation of new internal processes. It aligns to the relevant industry decarbonisation trajectories and aims to ensure targets are realistic and achievable.

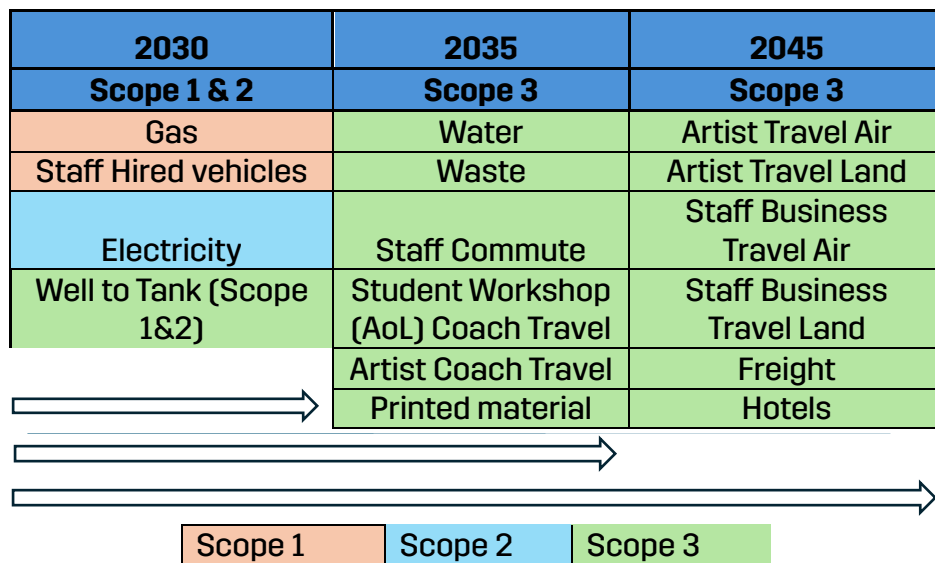


Figure 1- GHG category grouping 2025

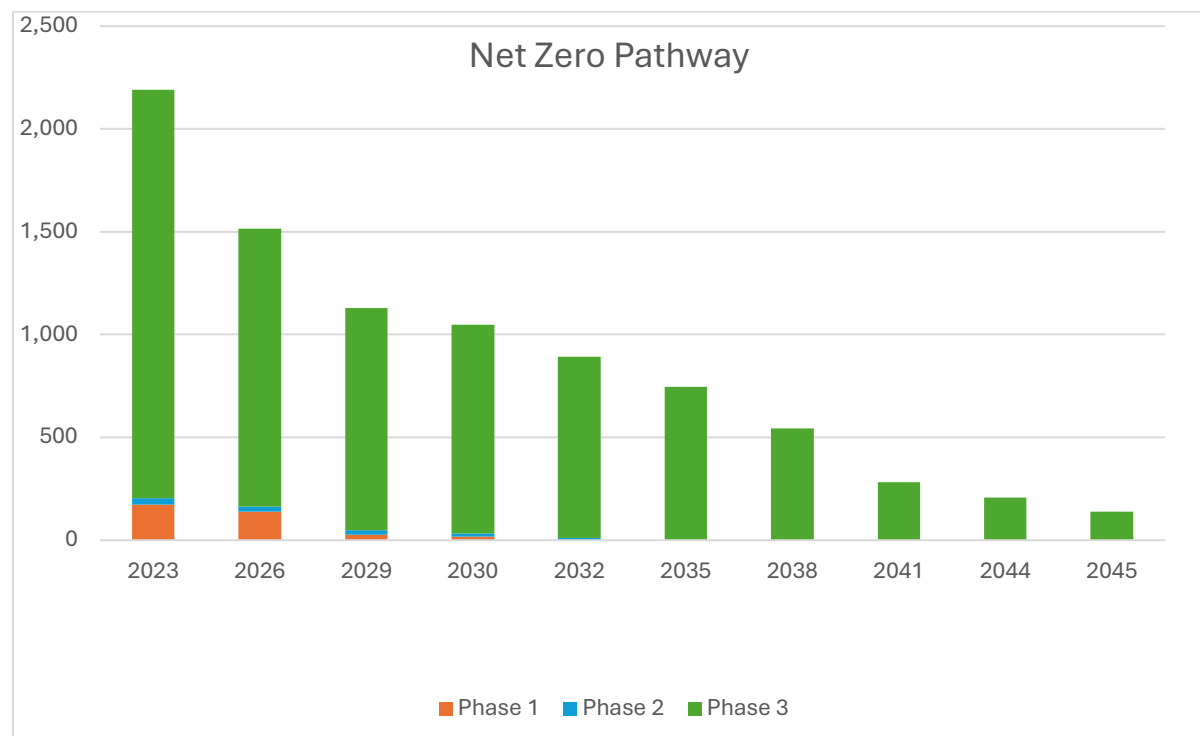


Figure 2- Net Zero Pathway

Scope 1&2 (Phase 1: 2030)

We plan to achieve net zero across our scope 1 & 2 emissions by 2030. This will require a shift to green electricity from the grid and a change of heating infrastructure in the Hub (head office). It will also require a fully electric fleet to be rented for the festivals from 2030.

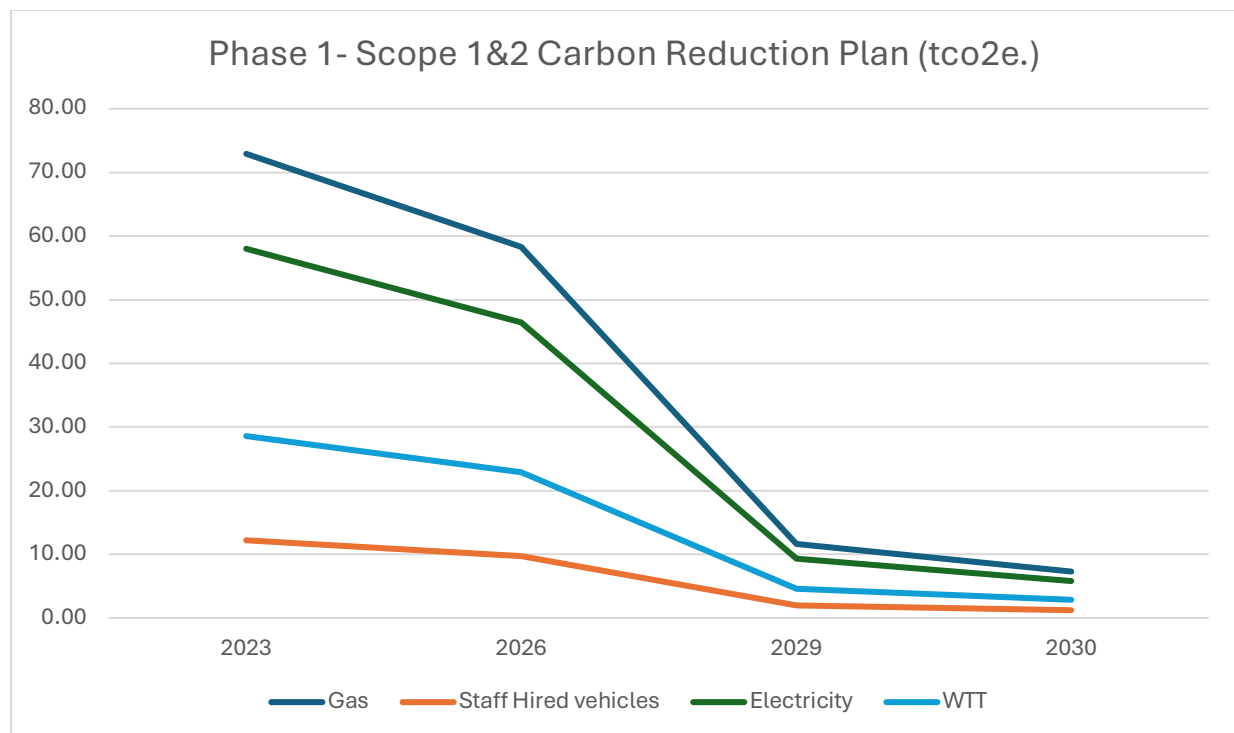


Figure 1- Phase 1 pathway- graph

Phase 2 (Scope 3- 2035)

We have identified 2035 as a realistic target to achieve net zero in some categories within our scope 3 boundary. We will evaluate the progress towards these goals in 2030 and ensure this still feasible. Achieving net zero will require working with suppliers or developing new practices that reduce emissions. We understand that the commute target is ahead of the UK Government for transport, but we feel due to our city centre location that achieving net zero by 2035 is achievable and will offset residual emissions, if necessary, after this date.

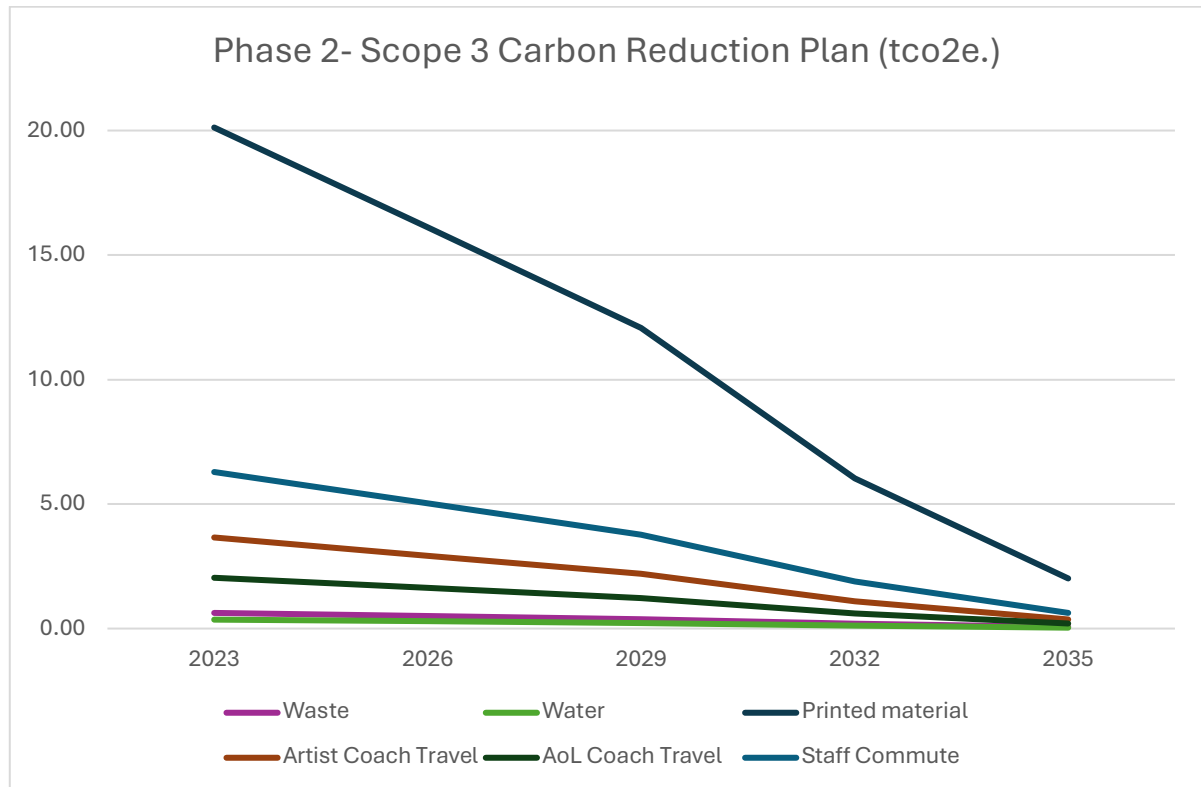


Figure 42- Phase 2 pathway- graph

Phase 3 (Scope 3- 2045)

Phase three is the biggest part of our GHG footprint. It contains difficult to reduce emissions and requires industry to make changes in the way that they currently operate. We will manage the areas that we can impact to reduce emissions as much as possible. Transport is the biggest contributor to phase 3 emissions, mainly aviation.

We will review progress in 2030 and every 5 years afterwards to ensure our goals remain valid as technology and policy develops.

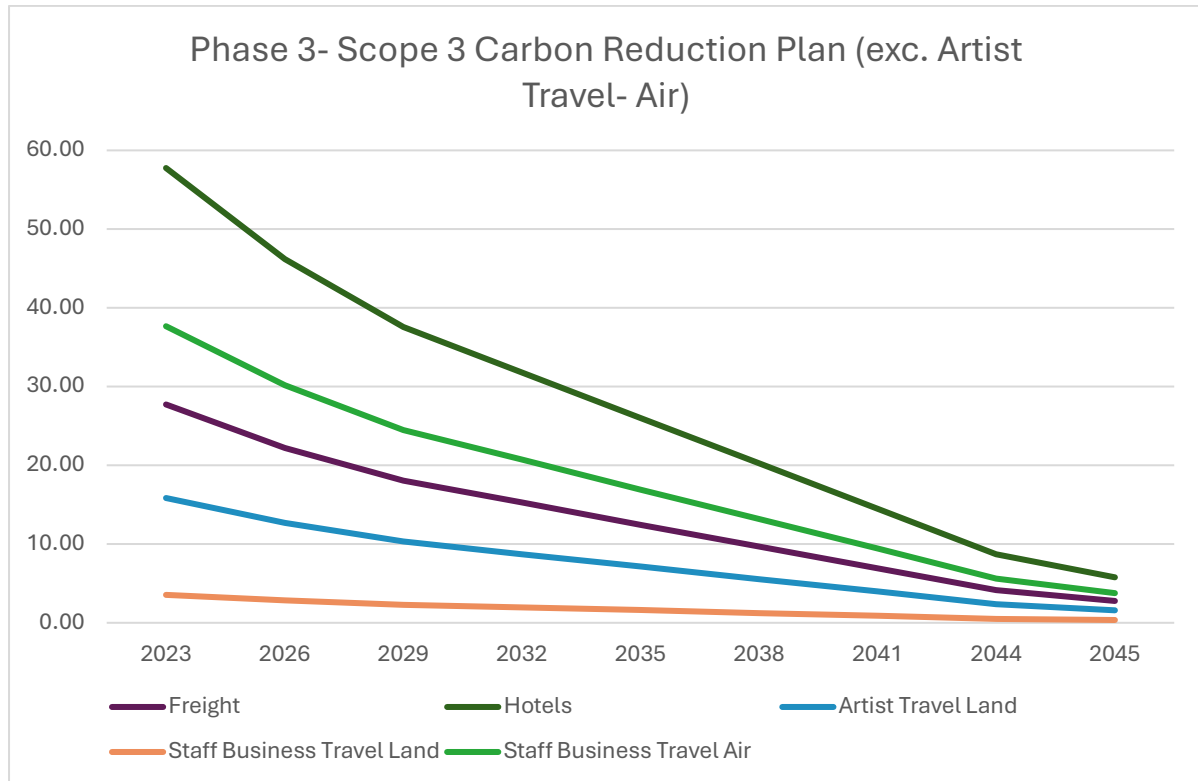


Figure 5- Phase 3 pathway- graph (exc. Artist Travel Air)

Three-year average emissions for Artist Travel

Artist travel is our biggest GHG emitting area. Due to the emissions in this area relating directly with the distance travelled we have decided to take a three-year average approach to quantification of emissions (i.e. 2024, 2025 and 2026's emissions divided by 3). This means that we can ensure we are true to our strategic aims, ensure the programme remains diverse and continues to showcase the best of worldclass talent in Edinburgh. However, it will do so in a controlled manner with a plan to reduce emissions over the period to 2045. Any residual emissions after 2045 will be offset, with the necessary funding made available. This is likely to be necessary as the aviation industry has net zero targets of 2050. More information on our approach to offsetting will be developed in our 5 yearly reviews.

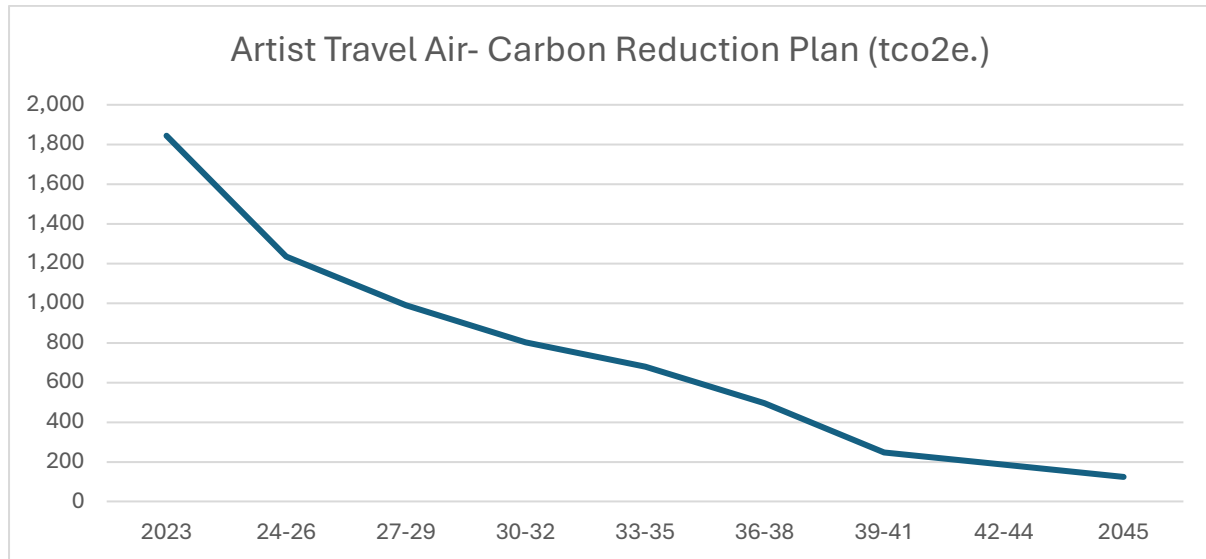


Figure 6- Phase 3 Artist Travel- Air- pathway- graph

3-year evaluation periods

The Edinburgh International Festival has a complex carbon footprint. We are unlikely to experience yearly incremental decreases due to wider influences such as the Programming, technology advances and infrastructure change. With this in mind, we have identified targets for a three-year period that we will monitor ourselves against. This aligns to Festival cycles and ISO 14064-1 reporting requirements. However, we continue to report our emissions annually to Culture for Climate Scotland and every effort will be made to achieve a downward trajectory in annual emissions.

Evaluate stages every 5 years

In 2025, we are in a period of time that is experiencing rapid change. Technologies, policies and political landscapes are changing rapidly. We believe creating a policy that will steer us through to 2045 is unwise. Therefore, we are building in review periods where we will assess our work over the previous five-year period and ensure we are on track to achieve our objectives. If necessary, we will refresh our strategy and adjust our boundary to ensure that we remain on track towards our objectives. This is not to say that we cannot act outwith the review periods if it is necessary to readjust to internal or external events

How we will achieve this



The strategy aims to be both challenging and achievable. It is developed from the Carbon Reduction Plan published in 2021 but seeks to reflect the internal and external development of Net Zero policy and infrastructure since then.

It is written to IWA 42:2022(E) Sustainability Strategy standard and aligns to the British Standards Institutions (BSI) Net Zero Pathway.

Transparency, Integrity and Accountability

- We will report to Creative Scotland and City of Edinburgh Council annually (through Culture for Climate Scotland)
- We will publish our emissions annually in our Financial Report
- We will present our progress, both in carbon reduction and climate leadership
- We will do so in a Just manner, led by our Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- We will follow international best practice (ISO 14064-1) in accounting for emissions.
- We will review our progress in 2030 and refresh the strategy based on further learning or best practice if necessary.

Our Boundary

We have established what is within our level of influence and material to our organisation at the time of writing. This is reflected in the boundary we have established below. We will evaluate this annually and adjust the boundary and re-baseline if appropriate.

Current boundary

Scope 1

Direct GHG emissions and removals

- Gas for heating (Hub and Stores operations)
- Vehicles leased during the festival

Scope 2

Indirect GHG emissions from imported energy

- Electricity

Scope 3

Indirect GHG emissions from transportation

- Business Travel
- Artist Travel
 - To and from Edinburgh
 - In Edinburgh
- Student Workshops Travel (Art of Listening)
- Employee Commuting
- Upstream transportation- Artistic freight

Indirect GHG emissions from products used.

- Waste generated in operations.
- Water used in operations.
- Well to Tank emissions associated with scope 1 & 2 Emissions

Indirect GHG emissions from other sources.

- Hotel stays
- Printed materials

Currently out of boundary

Purchased goods

At present purchased goods are not included in our GHG reporting. We are looking at methods to capture this information in the future.

In the procurement process we request organisations provide sustainability information on their operations and we are committed to reducing emissions within our supply chain.

Venues

During the festival, EIF rents several venues across Edinburgh. The venues are run by the owners, and while we cannot be prescriptive on how they run their operations, we do use our influence to push for change. Venue energy and waste is not currently included in our reporting of GHG. However, we do account for all artist travel and freight related to festival performances in these venues. In 2024 we worked with the following venues:

- Church Hill Theatre
- Church Hill Theatre Studio
- Edinburgh Playhouse
- Festival Theatre
- The Lyceum
- The Queen's Hall
- The Studio
- Usher Hall
- St Giles Cathedral
- George Heriots School

Each of these venues is an entity in its own right, operating as a standalone business outside of the festival period.

Downstream transportation and distribution- Audience travel

Audience travel is a hugely complex area to quantify as it is a multifaceted issue, with people attending Edinburgh for the festival period for many different reasons. Due to these complexities and the inconsistency in the data that we currently have, audience travel has been excluded from this report. However, we know that 44% of people who purchased tickets came from the City of Edinburgh, 27% from the rest of Scotland, 17%

from the rest of the UK and 12% were international (86 countries) ([Annual Review 2024 by Edinburgh International Festival - Issuu](#)).

We are aware of the large emissions associated with audience travel and we are working to promote sustainable transport where we can.

Digital

Currently we do not have a mechanism to capture the digital emissions associated with our operations and webpage. Therefore, digital emissions are not captured within this report.

We have had initial conversations with our website host and have started to quantify the emissions related to our website. We will develop this further in 2025 and look to create a management system to quantify emissions from our digital output.

Working from Home (WFH)

We operate a policy of Smarter Working, which allows staff to work from home up to two days a week. We do not currently collect information on this area and therefore it is excluded from this report.

We offer working facilities to staff Monday to Friday in the Hub and WFH is not mandatory.

Our Progress to Date



Our Baseline

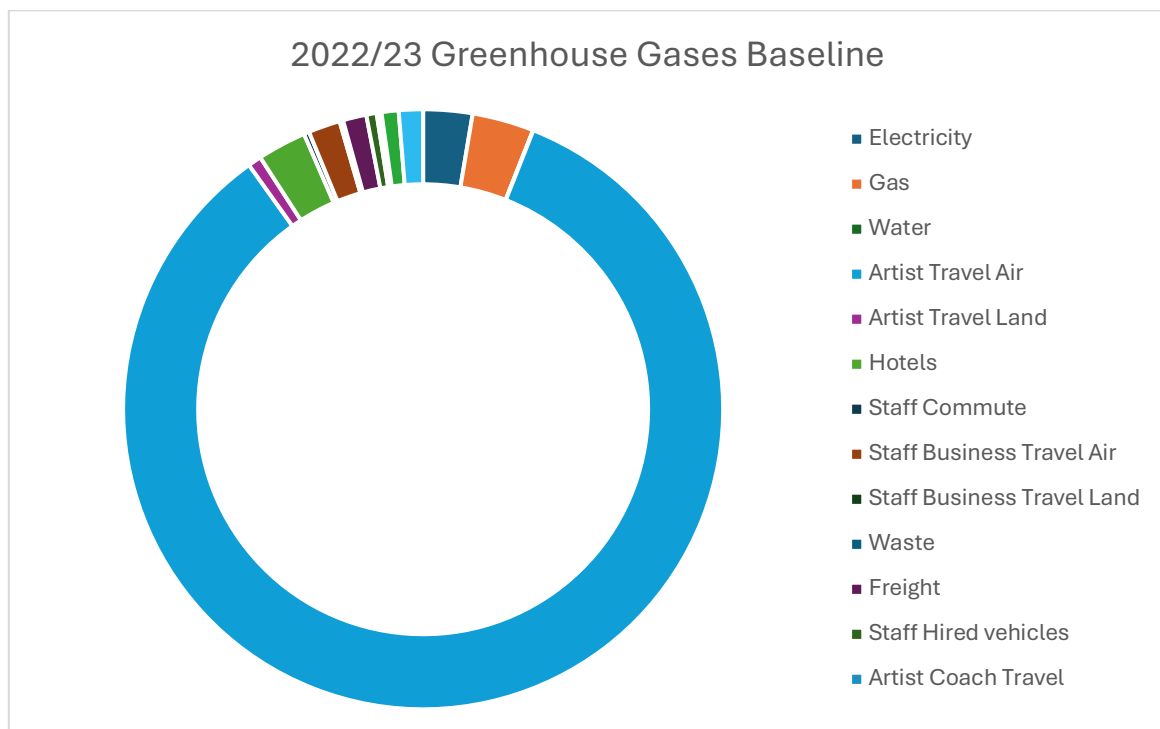


Figure 7- Edinburgh International Festival GHG Boundary 2022-23

We are confident that we now have data that represents our material footprint. If this changes we will adjust our boundary to ensure we present a true and accurate picture of our annual operations.

We have identified quantification methodologies for GHGs that are suitable to our organisation and sector. We are aware of the complicated makeup of our footprint, underlining how intertwined the festival is with the local and national community/economy. The methodology for each GHG emission area has been approved by BSI. We will review and amend our processes if a more suitable method is identified.

We may see some increases within certain categories as data capture improves and some categories are displaced to other areas e.g. air travel to land travel.

Our overall footprint is hugely impacted by the Festival Programme (artist travel) presented each year.

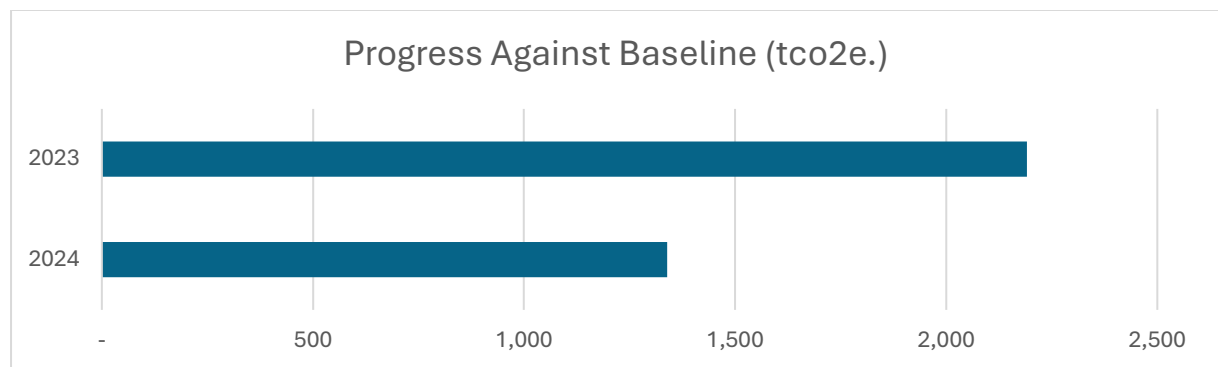


Figure 8: Progress against Baseline

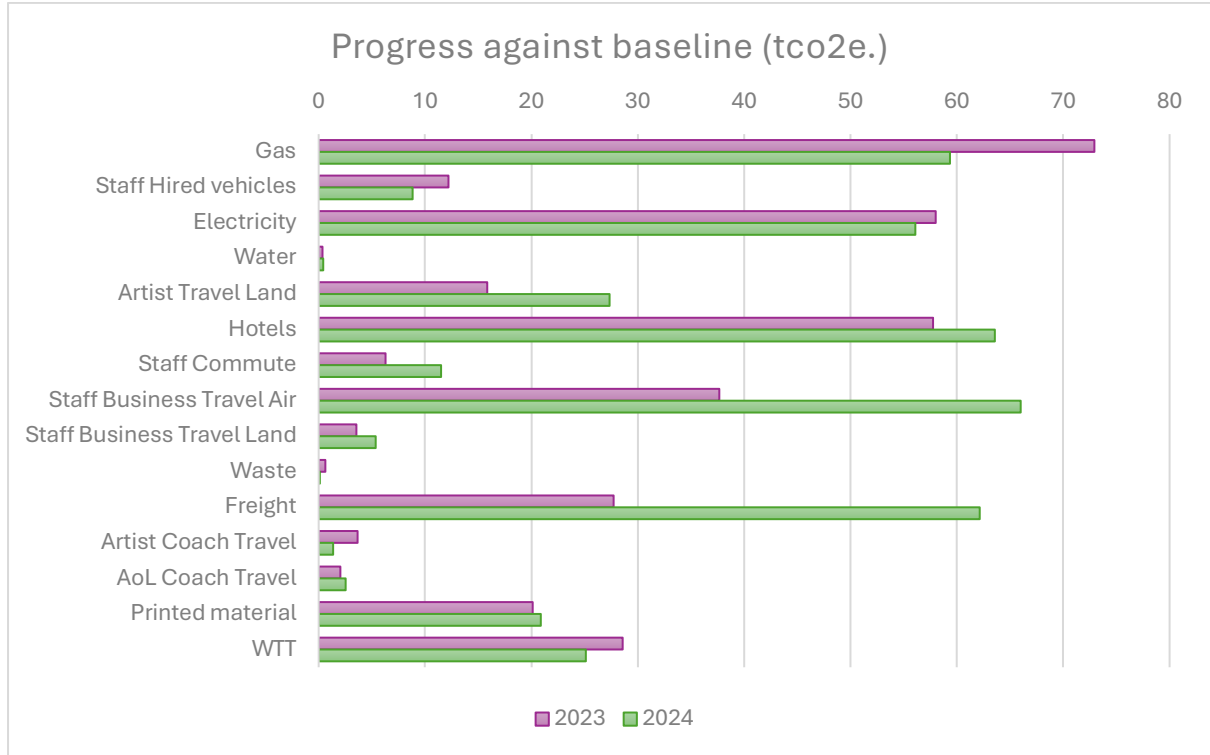


Figure 9: Progress against Baseline- Exc. Artist Travel (tco2e.)

As stated throughout the document, artist travel is our biggest emitting area, so we have excluded it from figure 4 to create visibility of the other categories.

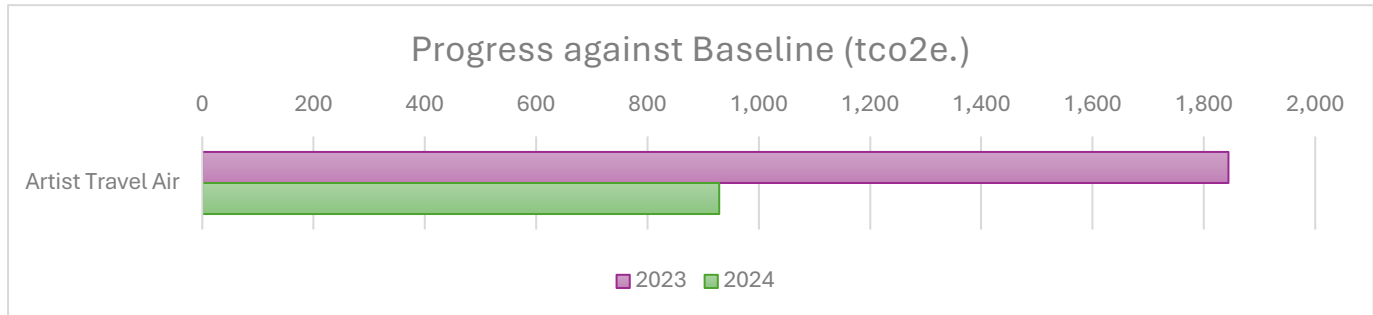


Figure10: Progress Against Baseline (tco2e.)- Artist Travel

Risk-Based Approach

There are risks related to our work on sustainability associated with both action and inaction. These are namely financial, reputational and operational. The risk factors can present themselves in various ways, such as national and international infrastructure changes; policy direction; narratives; accessing financing and skillsets; and are driven by both internal and external influences.

To navigate these risks, we have developed a climate change risk register (we acknowledge that this is not likely to be an exhaustive list, and we need to adopt agile approaches to climate related events).

Risk Register							
Risk	Severity High/ Med/ Low	Short	Med	Long	Description	Potential financial impact if no action is taken	Strategic response
Reduced staff, talent and donor/ benefactor/ partnership attraction and retention	Med		x		Performance on sustainability matters will affect the suitability of the festival amongst staff and stakeholders.	Increased costs relating to recruitment due to attrition rate and longer processes. Less income due to partners scarcity.	Adhere to best practice in sustainable development/ policy and ensure this is communicated effectively.
Unable to meet funding requirements	Med		x		Each funding round increases its expectation on sustainability commitments. As a major benefactor from public funding, expectations are for us to have strong leadership within all areas.	Diminished income from previously secure funding streams due to non-compliance.	Continue to show leadership in the Arts sector in Scotland. Develop practices to ensure the festival meets/ surpasses the requirements of funders.
Reputational risk	High	x			Public perception of mismatch between strong content within programme/ policy and actual performance against targets or chosen partnerships and suppliers.	Reduced income due to falls in ticket sales caused by audience reduction or weaker programme due to artist recruitment difficulties.	Ensure that progress is made against targets identified in the Sustainability Strategy. Communicating this information to audiences and stakeholders in a way that is effective and appropriate.
Weather risks affecting events, artist/ staff travel, supply chains and damaging equipment/ estates	High		x		Severe weather events are occurring throughout the world increasing in frequency and potency each year. This has the potential to affect the festival in logistics (international and national) and performances (local).	Loss of revenue due to cancellation/ disruptions to events. Extra cost associated with disruption to preparation for events. Extra costs for disruptions to supply chain and resultant delays or unfulfilled orders.	Contingency plans in place for extreme events, with management process should they occur. Contingency budgets to minimise disruptions. Effective adaption measures developed and enforced.
Target for activism and disruption at event	Med	x			Due to the nature of our brand and our events we are open to activist behaviours that can disrupt our business plans and performances.	Costs occurred due to disruptions resulting in delays, postponements and audience dissatisfaction.	Appropriate security at events with adequate training. Showing leadership on sustainability and making progress against targets to minimise the risk of being targeted and confidence in our sustainability progress/ decisions to justify our

							approaches in light of any accusations.
Increased costs associated with carbon pricing, offsets and taxation	Low			x	As we near national and international targets there is the expectation that cost associated with carbon will increase and become mandatory.	Increased costs to meet legislation requirements.	Reducing GHGs to reduce costs occurred. Monitoring of the political landscape and contingency funds developed over time if necessary.

Figure 11: Climate Change Risk Register

Wider Influence



Collaborations

We are aware that we will achieve very little on our own. We will therefore work in collaboration to achieve our objectives and to support the wider Arts sector, audiences, suppliers, staff and other stakeholders to become more sustainable.

At the time of writing, we are members of the following collectives:

- **Festivals Edinburgh Environment and Sustainability Working Group (ESWG)**
- **Culture for Climate Scotland's Green Arts Initiative and Green Arts Charter.**
- **Edinburgh Climate Compact**
- **Green Tourism Award (Silver)**
- **Cycling Friendly Employers (Cycling Scotland),**
- **Green Network for Business (Energy Saving Trust),**
- **Edinburgh Visitor Economy Partnership: Our Journey Towards Net Zero**
- **Edinburgh Climate Change Institute's Climate Springboard.**



Equity and Justice

The Edinburgh International Festival is proud of our nation's cultural and demographic diversity and aims to be an inclusive, welcoming environment for all visitors, artists and those who work at the festival.

Underpinning our Festival is a real [social mission](#) to create a growing impact through the performing arts. It's our ambition to enable enriching connections between the people and communities of Scotland with our core art forms as well as the artists we welcome on stage.

Our progress towards Net Zero will strengthen our commitment to this cause. We will continue to keep the Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of our approaches to sustainability and ensure they act as guiding principles.

Fair Share and Just Transition

Our Festival is built on the importance of bringing people of different cultures and viewpoints together. We will ensure that we integrate this understanding all the work we conduct, including our work in sustainability. Our values strengthen our support for Just approaches in our work, whilst aligning to the SDGs will help to guide our approaches. Furthermore, central to our Sustainability Action Plan is education and advocacy, meaning we are committed to increasing our sustainability ambitions beyond the organisation.

Fair Work

We are a [Fair Work employer](#) and have a Fair Work Working Group committed to best practice in the area.

Fair Trade

Edinburgh has been a Fair-Trade City since 2004, meaning it supports the Fair-Trade Vision to create a world in which trade is based on fairness, allowing producers to earn secure and sustainable livelihoods. We will endeavour to align to Fair Trade Standards. Currently all our famous yellow t-shirts and hoodies are all Fair Trade.