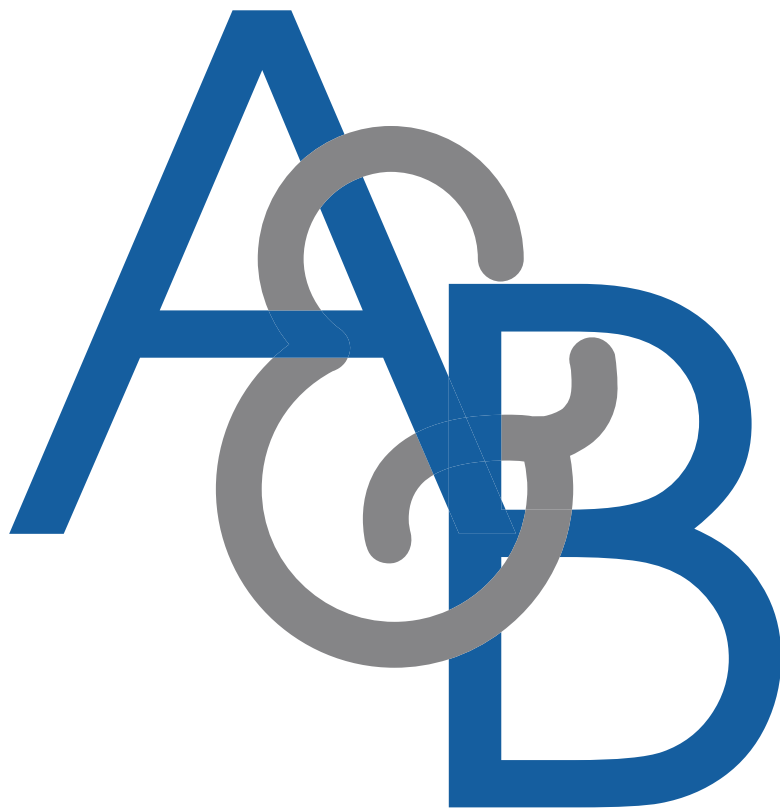


SUSTABILITY

NOT JUST A TICK-BOX EXERCISE



CLEANING UP YOUR ACT

Sustainability is not just a slogan – a closer look at Sustainability in Hospitality

Scotland and Wales have introduced legislation to ensure national best practice in recycling, and England follows suit next year. Sustainability has moved from being a sentence in a brochure to being a lifelong project for most businesses and this means taking a holistic view; it's not just what you are doing within your four walls but what your suppliers are doing, too. Choose like-minded suppliers or they will take down your reputation with theirs.

The Celtic Collection sent pre-qualification questionnaires to suppliers, asking about environmental management and reporting on Scope 3, i.e. indirect emissions, such as those from suppliers and from the use of the organisation's products. Many have a dedicated policy: "Long-term, we want to ally ourselves only with organisations that have the same attitude as we do, so that everyone we are associated with is doing the right thing," says energy & sustainability manager at The Celtic Collection Fitzroy Hutchinson.

Try to understand what your impact is as defined by Scope 3 and that includes using local suppliers. Part of the sustainability principle is for organisations to look after each other; if your suppliers have not yet defined the measures they are taking, help them get there – educate them, rather than cutting them out immediately. Look into their suppliers, too.

CLEANING UP YOUR ACT

The Scottish and Welsh recycling regulations include use of colour-coded bins for specific products. Inherent in the success of this is staff training, to ensure both commitment to the cause and understanding the legislation; this should take account of the fact that the human race is inherently resistant to change.

However, the technicalities are complicated. "We changed our packing last year to 100% recycled plastic," says Will Sowerby, content and communications lead for ethical coffee company Pact. "It's a minefield, particularly in England, where it is not clear what you can recycle in which borough, so when we worked it out, we shared the facts with our customers."

Recycling at home and at work are not separate endeavours; they will generally fall under regulations laid down by one council, so the requirements will be the same. "Hopefully the culture is changing so that recycling is becoming habitual, and people understand that we are no longer a disposable society with everything going to landfill. It is about seeing waste as a resource," says managing director of Keenan Recycling Grant Keenan.

Consumers have been recycling at home for decades, so educating them to separate waste at work should not be difficult; it is down to businesses to convey the message. Sustainability is increasingly important to customers, and they will lead the way.

Children are the biggest champions because they learn it at school, and they expect their parents and businesses to comply. "People didn't understand why they should recycle food waste but when they realise it can be turned into green energy – electricity or gas – there is a motive. Why would we squander it?" says Keenan.

RULE BOOK

The Welsh authorities launched recycling regulations, followed by guidelines, leaving businesses having to do a handbrake turn without much support. And it's expensive; it is costing The Celtic Collection some £200,000 to get the correct bins, educate staff and manage government audits: "So we're not going to get it right immediately, although there is some leeway for the audit while we make the transition," says Hutchinson.

More widely, governments and councils may not consult widely when bringing in legislation, making the default a variety of standards across the hospitality sector, rendering a cohesive audit almost impossible.

However, food waste recycling should be an obvious sustainability win: food put into landfill costs around £130 / ton; putting it into an anaerobic digestion plant would cost £10 to £20 / ton and the result is biofuel. "It's a cultural change. We need everyone to understand that waste streams are resources, and it will take a while to achieve that," says Keenan.

Local buy-in is more likely where borough or city councils are outperforming their peers. Newport in Wales is an excellent example. Research undertaken by Every Can Counts in 2023 found Newport to be the top UK city when measuring recycling rates and consumer attitudes. The city council sends almost 70% of its household waste for reuse or recycling, which is impressive compared to the national average of 41%.

This reflects the impressive performance of the country: Wales comes in second in The Global Recycling League Table conducted by Eunomia Research and Consulting and Reloop, which assessed the municipal recycling performance of 48 countries; Wales recycles 65% of waste. As a result, when legislation was introduced, the population and businesses in and around Newport embraced the new regulations because the culture was already embedded.

RULE BOOK

England is limbering up to introduce regulations for bigger businesses in June 2025, local authorities have to provide a food waste collection service in 2026, and in 2027 SME hospitality businesses with 10 full time employees will have to follow suit.

But the introduction of recycling regulations in Scotland resulted in the law of unintended consequences. "It got off to a great start, but Edinburgh became an eyesore with bins everywhere. The council took action and then no bins were allowed on the street except within a designated period, and then businesses had to find somewhere to put the bins," says Keenan.

In addition, "As a contractor, when we are in the city and complying with the time slots, the software we use to manage the routes gets thrown out when some roads or postcodes fell within a later timeframe and disturbed the logical routeing," he says.

Councils also must consider whether it is worth policing adherence to the regulations. In Scotland, there was a potential £10,000 fine for non-compliance but no one got penalised by the full amount and a handful of businesses was charged £300 with the caveat that if they didn't meet the terms, the sum would escalate.

JOIN FORCES

Businesses should help each other and their supply chains to ensure that those with less knowledge or experience can be supported and encouraged towards Net Zero and sustainability. In Pembrokeshire, a number of organisations is collaborating to set up sessions with smaller local suppliers to help them learn how to measure their impact, what Net Zero means to them and what customers are looking for.

Scoring in tender documents has also changed and where things environmental used to take up a page, they now often extend to ten. Keenan Recycling has committed to decarbonising the business by 2030, it will not use diesel trucks, is running hydrogen vehicles and recently ordered 10 compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles. "We collect food waste, take it to the anaerobic digestion plant, where it is turned into liquid fuel and this powers our trucks," says Keenan.

"When we are pitching for business from the likes of the NHS, Nando's or KFC, they are not interested unless you are enroute to Net Zero or Scope 3. Our private equity backers sometimes tell us that at £200,000 each our trucks are expensive – they do cost 30p per litre more to run than diesel but, unless we differentiate ourselves from waste companies that are sticking to old diesel trucks, we aren't going to be able to get a conversation with these big guys," he says. "Although price is and will continue to be important, there is increasing weight on sustainability."

ESG reports and B Corp status support this argument; not only are they proof a business takes sustainability seriously, but they also show commitment to social governance and what an organisation is doing for its people and communities. This creates a legacy.

In Scotland in 2009, Keenan Recycling struggled to persuade businesses to act sustainably so it enlisted BP and Shell, which were on a mission to green up their supply chain. They told hotels in Aberdeen that they would only use them for functions or meetings if we could they were recycling food waste. They also told their suppliers that any organisation with kitchens or canteens must be doing that and as a result, more of the smaller businesses subscribed. Food recycling requires investment, but it is a powerful differentiating factor.

UPPING YOUR GAME

- Do avoid headlines and greenwashing; people will not be convinced. State clearly what you are doing and what you plan to do.
- Do educate employees about your commitment to sustainability and how that expresses itself, so that they comply and can convey that to customers. People do not like change, but enthusiasm is infectious.
- Do give people roles and responsibilities so that all parties are aiming for the same goal. People recycle at home, so they are halfway to doing so at work.
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- Do educate customers about how to recycle.
- Do make recycling easy; provide clearly labelled bins and bags.
- Do ask suppliers what their sustainability protocols are and if necessary, guide them in the right direction; and ensure their suppliers are subscribing to similarly high standards.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[The Sustainable Restaurant Association](#)

[Above & Beyond White Paper published on Sustainability](#)

[IoH confirms endorsement for WISE Sustainability](#)

[I'm In Podcast Episode 5: Sustainability](#)

[Level 4 certificate in environmental sustainability management in hospitality](#)

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