

MusicWeek

A breath of fresh air for the UK festival industry

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The recently-published Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report made for a sobering read, with research claiming the live industry is by far the biggest contributor to the music industry's carbon footprint. However, a wealth of music festival organisers are coming up with innovative and engaging ways to help reduce the impact of their events - and educate festival-goers in the process

Whether it is stages lit by pedal power, the use of hydrogen fuel cells or the distribution of thousands of biodegradable tent pegs, the festival industry is embracing an array of environmental initiatives this year, and not a moment too soon.

The recently-revealed results of the UK Music Industry Greenhouse Gas Emissions report commissioned by industry body Julie's Bicycle revealed the shocking fact that the live industry is responsible for no less than 75% of the overall music industry's carbon footprint.

According to the [Data](#) compiled by the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University the UK live music business generates 401,000 tonnes of CO₂, with 230,000 tonnes being emitted from audience travel alone.

More than 400 festivals will take place around the UK this year alone, the majority of which will see thousands of fans throw a tent in the boot of their car and take to the road.

Urban festivals are less of a problem as the majority of fans arrive by public transport, while the likes of Evolution in Newcastle are taking innovative steps such as using electric shuttle buses to reduce impact, but the majority of outdoor live music events use their often hard-to-reach, idyllic, pastoral locations as a key selling point.

Music industry lawyer and co-founder of non-profit organisation A Greener Festival (AGF) Ben Challis has made the challenge of tackling the problem of transport a key priority. The campaign group, which employs four festival assessors, runs a green festival award scheme via its agreenerfestival.com online presence and Challis says that audience travel is at the core of its efforts to encourage festivals to adopt an environmentally friendly approach.

Set up in 2006, AGF launched its a Greener Festival Award scheme last year which encourages event organisers to complete a 53-question self-assessment

questionnaire and a 26-point 'aspirational' list in an effort to be recognised as a green festival. So far 11 festivals have made the grade, a total which, according to Challis, could rise to 30 this year.

Recognising that travelling by public transport is not always practicable, Challis and his team are emphasising the importance of lift-share car schemes. Not only does the organisation offer simple solutions such as downloadable posters, for display at events, promoting lift sharing, but GFA also offers a practical safety guide and links to operations such as liftshare.org and Freewheelers where festivals can create bespoke car sharing pages.

A survey of 1,407 festival-goers across Europe, published by AGF in March and conducted by Buckinghamshire New University, found that 84% of respondents believed that travel had a negative environmental impact and 65% agreed or strongly agreed that they would travel to festivals by public transport if it were provided as part of the ticket price.

With Worthy Farm not being the most easily accessible of venues, Glastonbury has been trying hard to encourage around a third of its audience, some 47,500 people, to travel by public transport. Glastonbury has introduced 22,500 tickets linked to coach and rail travel, but unfortunately these tickets have proved the slowest to sell, much to the frustration of the festival's founder Michael Eavis.

"The most environmentally friendly thing that we could do would be to abandon the whole thing, but we just try to do the best we can," explains Eavis. "We are tweaking things and looking at it all the time." "We live in a car society," adds Challis, "and that is something that festival organisers are going to have to fight against." A key member of the Julie's Bicycle pressure group is Festival Republic managing director Melvin Benn, who is chairing a group dedicated to analysing and promoting transport initiatives to and from events.

"This is really the beginning of the music industry saying 'Let's establish what our carbon footprint is and let's see how we can begin to address the issue of reducing it'," says Benn. Key to the group's efforts will be identifying ways in which it can lobby the Government to making changes in transport policies with the aim of reducing the carbon footprint of people attending festivals.

Heading up Festival Republic, Benn oversees the Reading and Leeds festivals as well as Latitude in Suffolk which, along with initiatives such as its carshare scheme, is encouraging the use of public transport by creating a day ticket holder campsite to ensure that people can still use public transport to return home despite the lack of late night services from the area. Benn has also introduced thousands of bus-inclusive tickets for the Reading and Leeds events while reducing the number of single-day tickets available at the two festivals in order to minimise travel to and from the sites.

Challis cites Latitude as being among the most environmentally-proactive festivals in the UK, something borne out by activities this year including its link with London's Arcola Theatre whose team will be powering Latitude's Theatre Arena with a state-of-the-art low energy system incorporating LED lighting and a hydrogen fuel cell.

While the Green Man festival will be relying on solar power for its Milk Float stage, at Glastonbury the aim is to increase the use of generators using biodiesel while the festival's Green Fields are powered by solar and wind energy. The activity in the Green Fields has proved hugely influential over the years and has itself led to the creation of green-lifestyle festival The Big Green Gathering, which is billed as "Europe's biggest green festival", and regularly attracts up to 20,000 eco-conscious revellers.

"Green festivals are very difficult by the nature of what is being presented, but the festival guys were the early ones in the green area and I am blown away by how well they have been doing," enthuses Live Earth founder Kevin Wall.

Another festival that has won praise for its environmental efforts is The Big Chill which, as well as linking with National Express to create combined festival and coach tickets and providing festival goers with a "country code", is developing a project to get its Body & Soul area to run entirely on solar and pedal power.

"We are using the Body & Soul area to try out a number of green initiatives to see what works best before we consider rolling them out across the festival," says Big Chill organiser Katrina Larkin.

With festival generators pinpointed by the Environmental Change Institute as being responsible for emitting 20,000 tonnes of greenhouse gasses every year, these measure are imperative if the industry is to comply with the worldwide target of reducing emissions by 60-80% by 2050.

But, while Larkin says that festival promoters are increasingly sharing ideas and being supportive when it comes to green initiatives, she believes that with a greater number of festivals than ever the market has become more competitive and that as a result organisers will be tempted to take short cuts rather than invest in environmentally-sustainable methods.

A number of artists including Radiohead, KT Tunstall, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Coldplay have voiced concerns and are proving increasingly demanding when it comes to how tours and festivals are run, accessed and what suppliers are used. Without key headline acts onside it will prove difficult for a festival to compete in a market that is growing ever more crowded.

The Green Man festival is one of a dwindling number of independently-run UK festivals and attracts an environmentally-savvy clientele. One of the event's three organisers Fiona Stewart believes that festival-goers need to look beyond the green veneer of festivals and consider the environmental credentials of the organisers.

"When people are thinking about green issues at festivals they shouldn't just stop at considering transport and recycling, they should think about who runs those events. I'm seeing big statements that other festivals are putting on their websites and considering a lot of those events are run by venture capitalists, who no doubt invest in not particularly green issues, it seems a little hypocritical to me," she suggests.

Another serious consequence of entertaining thousands of people for days on end in a field is the mess that gets left behind. Glastonbury, for example, recently shipped

seven tonnes of Wellington boots which had been abandoned at the festival for re-use in Senegal.

The sheer volume of discarded items is, according to Challis, a sign of the times and something that must be effectively tackled. "What we had left on site at numerous festivals last year was appalling; seas of broken and abandoned tents and car parks riddled with neatly-positioned Wellington boots that had been left outside cars. Festivals need to engage with the audience and encourage better behaviour – but it is a matter of getting through to a generation that is clearly used to throwing everything away." At the Big Chill, all plates, cutlery and drinking utensils are recyclable, while at Latitude, campers' waste kits will be supplied so that rubbish can be separated tentside during the festival before being taken to recycle bins. Glastonbury is taking it one step further and under the slogan 'Love the Farm, Leave No Trace' the goliath of outdoor gigs will have more than 100 green police who will patrol the site in ³cosmic costumes² with the aim of encouraging people to respect the environment.

Given the organisation is an educational charity and a horticultural wonderland that promotes conservation and sustainable futures, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Eden Project's annual Eden Sessions concert series is, in many ways, leading the market in terms of its environmental approach.

"We are probably the cleanest festival or concert site you have ever been to because the Eden Project has a huge recycling remit. Everything we sell is recyclable and we have on-site recycling units," says Eden Project chief executive Tim Smit. "At the end of a gig the record is 17 minutes to have the entire site cleaned, because the audience participate." Much of the transport on the Eden Project's St Austell site is powered by electricity, the majority of which is supplied from renewable sources – even the majority of its water supply is recycled with 80% coming from water capturing devices. When it comes to using local suppliers and products the organisation has strong relationships with local farmers and its 2000 suppliers, meaning everything aside from coffee and tea - although some is grown in the Eden Project's biomes - is sourced locally. The result means that, while leaving the smallest of carbon footprints, the Project and its ethos also leave a lasting impression in the minds of the audience.

[Live Nation](#), which runs Hard Rock Calling, the O2 Wireless Festival and Download, is also being proactive, having recently established an environmental management team and seen Download declared most-improved festival by AGF.

Fronted by Live Nation environmental services manager Andrew Haworth, the team is looking to establish ³holistic waste management strategies² with the aim of moving toward a position of "zero landfill".

Live Nation has also joined forces with Emission Statement to offer audiences the option of paying an additional 40p or 50p for its festival tickets to offset their transport emissions. The money will also be used to back local and international environmental organisations.

Despite the festival industry's best efforts, the live industry's aim of reducing its environmental impact is reliant on audience participation and, while Challis is cheered by many of the findings of the AGF commissioned research, he is troubled

by the fact that more than 65% of respondents would go to any event if their favourite band were playing, regardless of the environmental impact.

"People aren't that green and there is definitely a hump of resistance, up to 25%, who have no interest in the environment at all and will not change," says Challis. "There is little point in engaging with them at the moment; it is far better to target the 50% who say they are 'interested but not committed', it's that middle block that we urgently need to engage."

Eden project's Smit believes that in many ways the festival business has a very positive part to play in helping build a wider culture of sustainability. "If we are going to be able to meet our carbon targets we are going to have to live differently and that is going to be heavily dependent on new economic models whereby we share ownership of things," he says. "Rock concerts can be a force for great good. One of the things that enable people to feel more positive about their fellow human beings is being together at events that make people feel larger than themselves."

Bearing in mind that festival audiences spend days on end living without home comforts under canvass, Benn believes that, once all participants have arrived, festivals could well be considered to be carbon neutral. "At Glastonbury you have the best part of 175,000 people camping out for the weekend - the equivalent of a town bigger than Swindon - who are not driving, not using electricity or gas; they are consuming very little," he says. "I don't have the scientific research to back it up but my assertion is that festivals will prove to be carbon neutral at worst and probably less than neutral at best. But that's not an invitation to ignore the issues and progress that we need to make. We are just one industry in the entire country that needs to start addressing these issues, but we are a very public industry and we need to be setting an example."

<http://www.musicweek.com/story.asp?storycode=1034363>