

**FROM LOFTY AMBITION  
TO LIVED DREAM**

# **OUR SUSTAINABILITY STORY**

How Croke Park  
became a sustainable venue



**CROKE PARK  
MEETINGS  
& EVENTS**





# INTRODUCTION

## OUR SUSTAINABILITY STORY

**Considering how much is now written on the whole area of sustainability, it's hard to believe that over a decade ago there was comparatively little topical discourse on it or its importance in protecting the natural world and human life. How things have changed!**

Our sustainability story started in 2007 and since then, we have been on a learning journey that has brought rich and varied rewards. As home and headquarters of the GAA (Gaelic Athletics Association), a Dublin icon and venue for up to 1.5 million visitors a year, we realised that Croke Park had an important part to play.

In addition to Gaelic sporting events, we also stage concerts and in recent years had the Rolling Stones, Coldplay and U2 play to capacity crowds. When Ireland hosts large scale events like the Special Olympics World Summer Games and the International Eucharistic Congress, they usually happen at Croke Park.

The business of events has become an everyday activity at our venue. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, up to 2,000 business meetings and events were held every year ranging from multi-day international conferences and breakfast briefings, gala dinners and corporate sales meetings.

Just as sport is the common thread at the heart of Croke Park, our commitment and continuing innovation around sustainability is central to our operations and ethos.

We have championed sustainability, not just locally in Ireland, but on a global scale, and been accredited to international standards for sustainable event management and environmental management for over 10 years.

**This is the story of our sustainability journey, the key projects, the teams behind them, and why it matters.**

**2008**

Cúl Green - carbon emission reduction initiative launched

Energy monitoring system installed

Green waste management programme launched

**2009**

Building management system (BMS) installed

ISO 14001 certification in Environmental Management

Croke Park Community Fund launched

**2010**

First stadium in the world to achieve BS 8901:2009 certification in Sustainable Event Management

**2014**

Stadium achieves target 0% waste to landfill

**2012**

Transition to ISO 20121 certification in Sustainable Event Management

**2015**

First biodiversity project (Bug B&B)

**2017**

LED upgrades commence

**2018**

Croke Park turf farm launched

Kitchen garden polytunnel installed

**2020**

Habitat Mitigation & Creation projects

Water Stewardship Certification

Changing Places accessibility facility

**2019**

Beehives introduced on turf farm

Stadium Swift box installations

Match-day reusable pint glass pilot

**OUR JOURNEY**



# HOW IT STARTED

## OUR AMBITIOUS BEGINNINGS

**Our sustainability journey goes back to 2007 when the ESB (Electricity Supply Board) and the GAA started to explore how carbon emissions could be reduced in a large capacity venue like Croke Park.**

The *Cúl Green* (Irish for *Green Goal*) project came out of this collaboration and was launched in 2008. It put in place a state of the art environmental-improvement programme covering the stadium’s electricity, waste, and water management systems with the aim of reducing stadium emissions by two thirds.

The stadium’s iconic status had sparked the idea that actions taken by Croke Park would resonate with Irish people and help increase awareness of sustainability.

“Croke Park is an icon in Ireland and has a special place in everybody’s hearts and minds,” said ESB’s former chief executive Padraig McManus. “That’s why we felt there could be a statement made. If you could do it in Croke Park, then it would be a model for the rest of the country.”

Our aim was to reduce carbon emissions and offset the environmental effects of holding and attending events. To do this, we encouraged those attending games to reduce emissions in their own lives to help compensate for the environmental impacts of these events.



**Croke Park is an icon in Ireland and has a special place in everybody’s hearts and minds. If you could do it in Croke Park, then it would be a model for the rest of the country.**

# AMBITIOUS BEGINNINGS

We used the GAA's profile to inform clubs and communities about sustainability and the actions they could take to reduce emissions. Members were encouraged to register their daily sustainable actions on a dedicated website. This included everything from boiling the kettle to driving to a match.

Meanwhile, at the stadium, we installed energy monitoring and building management systems (BMS) and launched a green waste management programme. The initiative was very successful, and Croke Park secured ISO 14001 accreditation for Environmental Management in 2009.

## CÚL GREEN

- **Joint initiative with ESB to achieve internationally recognised best - practice environmental standards at Croke Park**
- **Winner of Green Project of the Year Award (2008 Inspired IT Awards)**
- **Winner of eGovernment Award for marketing (2009)**
- **Supported and audited by the Carbon Reduction (CRed) Programme (University of East Anglia, 2003)**



# STAFF

## OUR PASSIONATE AND COMMITTED TEAMS

**But how is sustainability organised at Croke Park? Within the stadium operations team, our Sustainability Officer is responsible for co-ordinating projects focused around energy, waste, water and nature & biodiversity. We also have a Community Liaison Officer who works on community outreach and engagement.**

Our Environmental, Sustainability & Safety Management Group (ESSMG) is made up of members of all stadium departments including Meetings & Events, GAA Museum, Stadium Events, Operations & Community along with managers from all stadium contracting partners (cleaning, electrical and mechanical services, catering, and security). This team meets monthly to set and monitor sustainability objectives and practices.

This group is supported by a Green Team of staff volunteers who act as ambassadors among stadium teams. The Green Team co-ordinates the stadium 'Sustainability Day' and organises activities designed to engage teams around sustainable initiatives across the Croke Park campus.

The Croke Park Community Team works on stadium event days to assist our neighbours and support the operations team in monitoring local community activity. The team is entirely community-focused and made up of residents who work closely with stadium operations, local guards, and waste services.

Training also plays an important role for us. All new staff undergo sustainability induction training and participate in initiatives such as the Interactive Waste Awareness training.

## OUR TEAMS

- **ESSMG - Environmental, Sustainability & Safety Management Group**  
Sustainability monitoring group made up of representatives from all stadium departments and service teams.
- **Green Team**  
Staff volunteers who act as 'Green Ambassadors'.
- **Community Team**  
Community-focused team made up of local residents.



# ENERGY

## OUR EFFICIENCY ENDEAVOURS

**Energy efficiency is an area of major focus for the sustainability team. After the launch of the Cúl Green project in 2008, we introduced a range of energy efficiency measures and reduced energy usage by 20% over three years.**

These measures included a building management system (BMS) for the efficient management of energy use within the stadium, a programme of manual energy audits and a cloud-based monitoring system that allows for near real-time monitoring of energy usage.

Network management software was later installed to power down computers when not in use and a lighting LED retrofit project was undertaken. The stadium upgraded the pitch heating system linked to a soil temperature probe which resulted in a 19% saving in gas.

By continuing our investment in technology to drive efficiencies and, more importantly, getting the entire team on board, we have achieved a further 5% reduction in energy usage in recent years. This was achieved despite increases in staff numbers, meeting and event activity and the deployment of extra services such as 4G coverage throughout the stadium.

### ENERGY PROJECTS

- Building Management System
- After-hour energy audits
- Ongoing LED lighting retrofit
- Passive Infra-Red (PIR) light sensors
- Network management software
- Pitch heating system upgrade
- Cloud based energy monitoring and sub-metering systems



# WASTE

## NO LONGER A DIRTY WORD

**In 2014, Croke Park achieved the landmark of full waste diversion from landfill, a record that the stadium has maintained since. 100% of the waste produced is recycled, reused or recovered as solid fuel. Not only is 0% of stadium waste sent to landfill but there has also been a 12% reduction in the amount of waste produced in the past five years.**

This exceptional standard of green waste management is achieved through close co-operation with our waste service partners Thorntons Recycling. Waste management initiatives include:

- Continuous training of operations, maintenance, cleaning and catering teams to ensure proper waste segregation across departments and events.
- A member of the Sustainability team visits Thornton's waste facilities after each major event to oversee waste handling and disposal and ensure effective segregation.
- Single-use plastics reduction programme:
  - 160,000 plastic-lined disposable cups replaced with biodegradable cups
  - Plastic disposable straws and cutlery replaced with compostable options
  - Plastic bottles replaced with refillable glass bottles at meetings and events
  - Plastic packaging reduced on GAA Museum shop merchandise - team are working towards eliminating unsustainable packaging such as polystyrene in the supply chain.
  - Stadium catering contractors Aramark working with all major suppliers to avoid plastic pallet wrap on stadium deliveries.
  - 23 new water-fill stations installed to provide drinking water to staff and visitors and discourage use of single use plastic bottles.





NO LONGER A DIRTY WORD

## SINCE 2014 0% OF STADIUM WASTE IS SENT TO LANDFILL

- Paperless Meetings promoted - 100% sustainable stationary used on request only.
- Recreate Ireland partnership ensuring material left by event organisers finds a second life in artistic and creative projects.
- Compost from stadium food and grass waste is made available to local residents and community groups.
- The turf farm polytunnel and native trees and shrubs in the stadium are planted with compost from stadium food and grass waste
- Post-Christmas recycling scheme with Dublin City Council and WEEE Ireland for staff and the local community to dispose of Christmas trees, household electrical items and heavy cardboard.

Croke Park works closely with Dublin City Council (DCC) in litter-control planning and on-the-ground operations for events.

DCC and the Croke Park litter pickers have some unusual assistance in keeping the area litter-free after big events. We work with a team of Harris's Hawks, supplied by Wildlife Management Services, to stop seagulls and other birds from raiding food and litter within the stadium and dropping it onto local streets and into neighbouring gardens.

### MAIN WASTE INITIATIVES

- **Continuous training**
- **Oversight of waste handling, disposal, and segregation**
- **Single-use plastics reduction programme**
- **Paperless Meetings initiative**
- **Recreate Ireland partnership**
- **Waste composting, planting, and food production programmes**
- **Community recycling scheme**



# WATER

## OUR SAVING MEASURES

**We are members of the Water Stewardship Programme, run by Irish Water. The programme, accredited to European Water Stewardship Standards (EWS), is designed to help reduce water consumption and introduce more efficient water management and monitoring across the facility and operations. Water management initiatives include:**

- Solenoid valves installed in all exterior toilets, saving up to 300,000l of water per day.
- Low-flush toilets and urinals are in place throughout the event facilities.
- All washroom consumables are eco-certified, and we are working with cleaning contractors to ensure use of eco-certified products across the venue.
- Future projects include a solenoid valve install extension and electronic water metering to allow near real-time monitoring of usage and the identification of inefficient water usage.



## MAIN WATER PROJECTS

- Solenoid valves
- Low-flush toilets
- Eco-certified consumables and cleaning products
- Electronic water metering



# NATURE & BIODIVERSITY

## OUR RETURN TO NATURE

**Believe it or not, Croke Park is a wonderland of hidden urban habitats. Our biodiversity programme started in 2015 with the installation of a Bug ‘Bee & Bee’ for the insect population. Our sustainability team also worked with bird experts from Wildlife Management Services to install blue tit, swift and sparrow nesting boxes throughout the stadium campus. Swift boxes provide much needed nesting space for the local population of this amber-listed bird.**

We have a ‘mitigation and creation’ policy at the stadium to ensure all stadium building projects not only replace any affected habitat, but create new spaces for local insect, bird, and wildlife. The first project, an extension of the Cusack car park, included extensive planting of native trees, shrubs, and flowers. Bee bricks were added to provide a home to solitary species such as Red Mason and Leafcutter bees.

Creating habitats can sometimes involve doing nothing at all and letting Mother Nature simply get on with it! We have started to allow native meadow flowers bloom in existing grass verges and on the stadium’s turf farm. Areas of under-appreciated nettle have also been preserved on our farm providing vital nesting habitats for a variety of butterflies such as Peacock, Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral.

We also host some surprising visitors such as a family of bats resident in the stadium upper level steelworks and a peregrine falcon who regularly visits the upper levels.

## HIDDEN HABITATS – OUR OTHER RESIDENTS

# OUR RETURN TO NATURE

## **CROKE PARK TURF FARM PRODUCING MORE THAN JUST GRASS**

In 2018, we purchased a farm in North County Dublin to grow our own turf for pitch maintenance and replacement. Growing the turf locally benefits both pitch quality and control and reduces carbon emissions associated with importation.

We have enthusiastically embraced the opportunities offered by having access to our own farmland by installing a polytunnel for growing our own herbs and fresh vegetables, which are served to meetings and events guests.

## **FARM HONEY AND APPLES OUR SEASONAL BOUNTY**

Our sustainability team partnered with beekeepers from Fingal Super Foods and we now have ten beehives on the farm producing honey. The catering and pitch teams are co-operating on the development of an orchard on the turf farm, with native varieties chosen not only to supply the stadium kitchens but also to support bee and pollinator activity in the local area.



## **FARM & SUSTAINABLE SOURCING OUR LOCAL SUPPLIERS**

Our catering team prioritises seasonal produce and regional sourcing in all menu options. Menus for matches, concerts and meetings feature over 85% local and regional produce.

By 2021 we will be showcasing a 100km menu, with all major produce sourced from within 100km of the stadium.



# COMMUNITY

## OUR PART OF IT

**Our relationship with our neighbours is important to us and we work on lessening the impact of our events and helping our local area thrive with a calendar of special initiatives & events. Our Community Liaison Officer manages an extensive community engagement programme including multichannel communications, the event-day Community Team and the Croke Park Community Fund.**

The fund celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2019 and supports local projects that directly benefit those living within 1.5km of the stadium. Since 2009 over €1 million has been allocated to 200 local voluntary groups, resident associations, and sports clubs.

We also partner with An Garda Síochána on the Garda Youth Awards in the local area. Further youth engagement includes the annual Croke Park Community Cúl Camps and the CoderDojo classes and we host an annual Christmas Party for our elderly residents.

We work with the North-East Inner-City group on the physical environment of the local area and our first project is the adjacent land around Croke Park, the canal and the railway line.

A Croke Park Sustainable Transport Working Group is chaired by the national Transport Authority (NTA) and includes representatives of major transport operators, the local business community, and the stadium. Initiatives include increased provision of bike parking at Croke Park, the development of a Real Time Information (RTI) public transport screen for meetings & events and the piloting of a combined match-train ticket scheme.

## COMMUNITY

- **Community Team**
- **Croke Park Community Fund**
- **Croke Park Sustainable Transport Working Group**
- **Youth Initiatives - Garda Youth Awards, Community Cúl Camps and CoderDojo classes**
- **North-East Inner-City Group**



**PRESS  
TO OPEN**

# ACCESSIBILITY

## OUR PLACE FOR ALL

**We have been working to improve accessibility in Croke Park to make the stadium a welcoming space for all.**

The GAA has a full-time Inclusion and Diversity Officer and recently completed a new Changing Places facility to enhance the health, safety, comfort and dignity of stadium visitors who may need extra support and access equipment.

In 2020, Croke Park is installing a sensory space for event days designed as a pod located within a wider sensory space. This will be open on match-day and supervised by a dedicated accessibility team. At the GAA Museum, we also adapt all our tours and museum experiences for those with accessibility needs or intellectual disabilities.

# CERTIFICATIONS

## OUR TIME TO CELEBRATE

**Croke Park is certified to three international standards.**

- **ISO 40001 in Occupation Health & Safety**
- **ISO 14001 in Environmental Management**
- **ISO 20121 in Sustainable Event Management.**

The ISO 20121 standard was introduced with the London Olympics and its values of stewardship, integrity, inclusivity and transparency are at the heart of all match and meetings and events planning in Croke Park.

The stadium is audited annually by a team of external auditors to ensure compliance with the standards and to verify that it sets and maintains an ambitious programme of continual improvement across all areas of Health & Safety and Environmental and Sustainability Management.



# MEETINGS & EVENTS

## LIVING THE DREAM EVERY DAY

**When it comes to meetings & events, we have been at the forefront in delivering sustainable events and working with others to highlight Dublin and Ireland as desirable sustainable destinations**

The stadium wide sustainability culture is embraced across all aspects of Croke Park Meetings & Events with sustainable practices applied in the hosting of all events. Clients are encouraged to consider sustainability in all elements of their pre-event, event, and post-event planning.

### SUSTAINABILITY AT CROKE PARK MEETINGS & EVENTS

- **PIR sensors in event rooms to manage efficient light usage**
- **Light and heat only fully powered up when events begin**
- **'Power Walks' conducted daily to check power down of all event equipment**
- **All event waste segregated for recycling and composting**
- **100% compostable single use coffee cups**
- **Recreate Ireland salvage of reusable materials to repurpose - reuse - redistribute**
- **Menu focus on local suppliers and Croke Park farm produce**
- **Paperless Meetings promotion - 100% sustainable stationary on request only**
- **Venue LCD signage screens minimise disposable branding and signage use.**



# EVENT SUSTAINABILITY RESOURCES

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Organising successful meetings and events requires more than most meeting planners are given credit for and now you're adding in a further filter - make it sustainable! Thankfully help is at hand. Here are some great resources and check lists to help ensure your event is sustainable from start to finish.

### Fáilte Ireland

Ireland's National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland, has been highlighting Ireland as a green destination for many years. You'll find some great resources on both the [Fáilte Ireland](#) and [Meet in Ireland](#) websites but, in particular, check out Fáilte Ireland's [Guide to Running Green Meetings & Events](#).

### MeetGreen

[MeetGreen](#), another ISO 20121 certified organisation, works with progressive global organisations to integrate leading sustainability practices to produce events that deliver targeted business results. You'll find useful surveys, checklists, best practice guidelines and contract information on this website. Check out the resources tab [here](#).

### GDS-Index

[The Global Destination Sustainability Index](#) is the leading sustainability benchmarking and improvement programme for meetings and events destinations around the world. Check out their excellent site for relevant whitepapers, reports, videos and webinars.

### Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

This provides a non-competitive platform for hospitality industry leaders to share ideas, build relationships and work collaboratively to make this one of the world's most responsible industries. Find more on sustainable meetings and events [here](#).

**Our story continues - Follow it on @CrokeParkEvents**