

No climate action without us

How to include disabled people
in live event sustainability

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Foreword

By Suzanne Bull MBE

I came up with the idea for the collaboration between Attitude is Everything, Julie's Bicycle and A Greener Future, because during lockdown, I feared for the disabled community being left behind in sustainability solutions because disabled people weren't part of the conversation.

Solutions that enable access and support environmental sustainability can often oppose one another. But it doesn't have to be this way, and thankfully, the two leading organisations for climate change solutions in the UK, Julie's Bicycle and A Greener Future agreed. More than that, we know that we've reached a point where this work to make access to live events environmentally sustainable is inevitable, and it has to be done.

There are more than 1 billion disabled people in the global population. Disabled people will experience the impact of climate change more than other groups – they are twice as likely than other groups to die in disasters. They find it harder to leave their homes if they're evacuated due to climate dangers. Yet they are never included in the climate change conversation. The slogan is, 'there's no music on a dead planet.' There's no access on a dead planet either, and that's why we must act.

This toolkit brings together ideas, conversations and some solutions from disabled people and the sector. It's about doing things differently and learning from each other, collectively learning what is the most accessible but also environmentally-friendly.

This is only the start of the conversation. You'll see in this toolkit that we don't have all the answers or the solutions. We need you to help us build on the foundations here, and pledge to make access and environmental solutions equal partners.



**Suzanne Bull MBE, Founder,
Attitude is Everything.**



“ As a touring artist with my band Mystery Jets, I have witnessed huge changes in the live music industry over the past 20 years – both good and bad. Climate Justice is perhaps the most important conversation of our time, and from a grassroots level to the mainstream I feel that solutions around the environmental impact of our industry need to feel inclusive to all. ”

Blaine Harrison, Mystery Jets, Attitude is Everything Patron and joint Attitude is Everything and FAC Artist Ambassador.

Research results

We shared a public survey to understand some of the barriers and opportunities for disabled people engaging with sustainability initiatives at live events and festivals, followed by two roundtable discussions to explore some of the issues raised and practical responses for the sector. These roundtables included perspectives from event organisers, disabled artists and producers, and sustainability and access coordinators.

We received 107 survey responses from people who self-identified as disabled

70% are audience members

30% are volunteers, artists, or events professionals

Many survey respondents struggled to identify environmental initiatives they had come across that were accessible.

We've drawn out the key themes that we've identified through this process to explore further through this toolkit.

- Food and water
- Travel and transport
- Accessible facilities
- Communications and participation

“ We shouldn't have to choose between what's best for the planet and what's best for us. ”

Anonymous survey response

What we found out...

68%

of respondents said sustainability is a consideration when choosing which events to go to.

46%

feel excluded from participating in environmental efforts at live events and festivals.

34%

feel that environmental solutions are not easy to navigate and do not meet their access needs.*

46%

feel excluded and unable to participate in events and festivals that align with their climate values.

*Some solutions may be more accessible than others.

Food and water

Many events and festivals are embracing a move away from meat-heavy diets and plastic packaging. Refillable water points are now common within venues and at festival sites. But without careful planning, these can present additional issues for disabled people.

The challenges:

- Many water stations are not low enough for wheelchair users to access.
- Water points might be too far to access easily, and the ground beneath them can get too muddy for people with mobility impairments to navigate.
- The design of taps can be inaccessible for people with dexterity impairments.
- Plastic-free, organic food tends to be more expensive, but disabled audiences often have a lower budget.
- Dietary campaigns, such as meat and fish-free events, mean that people with serious food allergies, some chronic illnesses, and neurodivergent people with specific food requirements are restricted.

What can we do differently:

- Flooring that can be kept dry at and around water points.
- Make sure the tap design is easy to use.
- Ensure there are water points next to accessible camping facilities and viewing platforms.
- If you are committed to a specific dietary campaign, include a space for people to share their dietary needs or pre-order specific meals on the registration page or through other pre-event communications. Alternatively, allow people to bring in their own food.
- Emphasise a commitment to flexibility and inclusion.
- Engage with suppliers to see how water points can be tailored to meet different access requirements.

DF Concerts and Events have recycling and water points either on or around viewing platforms, which are only available to disabled customers. These water points are set lower down. A squeegee or brush is kept nearby to keep the water points and floor area of the platform clean and dry.

Travel and transport

Audience travel makes up a significant portion of the carbon footprint of live events and festivals. There are many fantastic initiatives to encourage a reduction in driving and increase the use of public transport and active travel, or shared coach and shuttle services. How can these initiatives be more accessible for audiences, artists, event workers and volunteers?

The challenges:

- Public transport may not be close enough to the venue or site.
- Disabled people might require additional equipment which means that they need to drive and park close to the site.
- Public transport and shared transport, like shuttle buses, can be inaccessible for people who require a wheelchair space or support with additional equipment.
- Neurodivergent people may also struggle with busy or unfamiliar public and shared transport options.
- Initiatives to make tickets cheaper for people using public transport inadvertently penalise disabled people who may be unable to use public or shared transport options.
- There are few suppliers for electric wheelchair accessible shuttles and coaches, or buggies to help people cover large distances on-site. They may not be available for hire in all parts of the country.

“ There is a lack of accessible train stations so collectively, we need to put the pressure on local councils and authorities to make those changes. Sometimes it feels like it is beyond our control, but continuing to put that pressure on and continuing to share the voices of our audience where possible is so key. ”

Alex Covell, Live Events Access Manager, Attitude is Everything

“ If there is an initiative to reduce driving to/parking at the event, it is often not accessible to me e.g. I would need to carry too much stuff with me and there is no assistance, or the bus stop is too far away. ”

“ Shuttle buses are rammed and standing room only. No hope getting on with crutches let alone a wheelchair, forcing you to always take a car. ”

Anonymous survey responses

What can we do differently:

- Work with local authorities and councils to implement accessible public transport routes which better serve your venues and events.
- Offer “quiet” shuttle options.
- Make sure that any transport initiatives do not make it more expensive for disabled attendees who need to drive.
- Discuss with suppliers how accessible transport options can be used as standard.
- Connect with other events and festivals locally to collectively drive demand for better electrified accessible buggies, shuttles, and coach services in your area.

Accessible facilities

Many of the festivals we spoke to have seen a huge increase in the number of disabled attendees feeling confident to attend their events. As the number and complexity of requirements increases, we have to find more nuanced sustainability solutions to ensure that disabled people are comfortable, safe, and able to fully participate.

The challenges:

- Many viewing platforms don't have appropriate recycling bins, creating issues with litter, or require family, friends, Personal Assistants, Support Workers, Companions to leave for long periods of time.
- Litter and other items left on the ground present an obstacle for disabled people as this can be a trip hazard for visually impaired people and people with mobility impairments, and items can get stuck in the wheels of a chair.
- Waste and plastic free aims and recycling sorting systems do not adequately account for single use or disposable items which are a medical necessity for some disabled people.
- Huge increases in more complex requirements means that aids like hoists, mobility scooters, CPAP machines (which help clear the airways) and medical refrigerators require a lot more power.
- There is a lack of accessible compost toilets available in the UK.
- Cleanliness and the ability to wipe down and disinfect surfaces is important for people at high risk of infection, so compost toilets may not always be suitable.

What can we do differently:

- Make sure all viewing platforms and accessible camping areas have recycling facilities which are clearly signposted.
- When working on your plans to reduce your energy use, factor in constant power for medical equipment and mobility equipment at different times of day.
- Provide a range of toilets and Changing Places units so that people can be in sanitised environments if required.
- Share your plans for accessible provisions, e.g. compost toilets, to support market demand.

“ For everything else you try to decrease every year, but more accessible campsites require more power demands. There isn't a huge amount of thinking going into that by the power companies that service the larger venues.

We have had a 40% increase in people on site with CPAP machines in the last five years, part of it is connected to long COVID. People need those machines through the night. We have an increase in the number of families with children with really complex requirements and people who have specific medications who need to have the ability to keep it cold.

We have quite a few individuals that need to access hoists, scooters and electric wheelchairs. Sometimes it works well when you are charging things at night, when nothing else is on. The trickier point is the daytime where you might have a popular act on – everyone has gone up the hill in their scooters and they need to top up the power, there are lots of people in one space and using lots of power at the same time. That can definitely be a challenge. ”

Mary Corfield, Event Consultant

Communications and participation

For many of our survey respondents, pre-event communication formed a key part of their decision whether or not to attend. Communication during the event also influenced the ability of people to engage in sustainability initiatives. Knowing what to expect, in clear language, and with well trained staff, contributes to the feeling of being welcome in a space. However, for many people, this is missing in sustainability information.

The challenges:

- Access and sustainability information are often on different parts of the website or in other resources. Sustainability information is often used in marketing, so it's idealistic and often uses jargon. In comparison, access information is practical. The two don't reference one another.
- Information is shared too late, can be confusing or use too much jargon.
- Information is sometimes only provided on an app, which is not accessible to everyone.
- Sustainability staff are not trained in accessibility, and vice versa.
- Disabled people are not included in the planning of sustainability initiatives.

What can we do differently:

- Share clear, simple sustainability information alongside access information.
- Consider creating additional space on your website to “demystify” your access and sustainability initiatives.
- Provide as much information as possible at the point of booking so disabled attendees have the agency to make an informed decision about their ability to attend.
- Provide information in a variety of ways, at different points of the attendee experience, online and in person.
- Use distance measurements instead of “walking time”, as this can be difficult to plan for disabled people.
- Engage with disabled people throughout the whole planning process.

“ Communication is so important for how welcome people feel and if they feel the festival is a place for them. ”

Chris Johnson, Co-founder and Operations Lead, Shambala Festival

“ I’m going to a festival next weekend and have already been informed of reusable cups, water points and recycling plans. I know what to expect. ”

Anonymous survey respondent

“ Cheltenham Festivals engage with local specialist communities both in terms of accessibility and sustainability, who help on plans and do walk-rounds. For the next literature festival, they have planned a walk-through of accessibility and sustainability teams together to focus on this intersectionality. They are also partnering with Visit Gloucestershire and Visit Cheltenham, so they can provide information throughout their testing process. Their aim is to do sustainability with the accessibility community rather than to them! ”

Andrew Lansley, Innovation Manager, Cheltenham Festivals

Case Studies: Forwards Festival

Case studies prepared by Teresa Moore

About Forwards Festival

Where: Durham Downs, Clifton

Number of days: 2

Camping: No

Audience: 25-30,000 people daily,
from late 20s to 50s.

Genre: Diverse, from punk to electronic.
Also features talks, panels, workshops with
a social and political emphasis.

Forwards Festival and the Environment

The festival has ambitious plans to reduce its carbon emissions through a joint approach between the attendees and the festival whilst supporting and collaborating with local businesses. Forwards Festival took the Vision 2025 pledge to reduce their entire environmental footprint by 50% by 2025, with the aim to be at net zero by 2030.

Accessibility

Forwards Festival are seeing an increase in the numbers of disabled people attending. In 2022 they sold 104 companion tickets whilst 2023 saw the number increase to over 130 tickets.

They introduced an innovative technology partnership in 2023 aiming to provide people with visual impairments the chance to experience the festival via headsets, delivering streamed real-time content from the stage. This technology enables content to be tailored to each individual's needs.

Other measures introduced include British Sign Language (BSL) to accompany acts, a diverse sensory space created with low stimulation and light for those with autism, anxiety and other health issues, high dependency toilets with water hoist or sling, and changing facilities on viewing platforms and elsewhere.

The topology of the site does, however, present some access issues. Whilst the main festival site is flat, getting to the main site is over quite hilly ground. The heavy tracking around the perimeter of the site aids accessibility, although there is no tracking used on the flat main site.

Being Green and Accessible – Particular Challenges

Toilets

The coded padlocks on the accessible toilets were found to be difficult to use and sometimes had to be cut open with bolt cutters resulting in waste every year. The festival introduced a different type of padlock, Radar Padlocks which is a universal key access scheme to accessible toilets and reduced the number of padlocks purchased.

Compost toilets have a bigger capacity than plastic bowl. A member of Team Love worked with a supplier to design a compost toilet unit suitable for wheelchair users. It provided a bigger space and incorporated handles, a frame and additional light.

Food and drink

To eliminate single use plastics the festival provides water in cans instead of bottles however they've found that the ring pulls create challenges for those who have dexterity impairments. They are also mindful that whilst sustainable packaging is important it needs to be easy to use and this isn't always the case.

Audience travel

The festival advocates green travel options including green coach travel to the festival site. However, at the moment, with few green coach companies there is a lack of supply which addresses accessibility issues.

Future plans

Forwards Festival have in their short history addressed many issues to do with both the environment and accessibility in innovative ways such as the design of an accessible compost toilet. They recognise however that there is still work to do and identify a number of areas for focus: -

- An appraisal of waste management measures to focus on accessibility such as issues with bin height, signage, shape and colour (to account for colour blindness) of waste separation schemes.
- The height and ease of use of water points.
- Whilst already providing an access information pack in a digital and downloadable printable pdf, they feel that they should do more to talk about what they are doing to make their festival more accessible in their programme of talks and workshops.

Case Studies: Green Man Festival

About Green Man Festival

Where: Bannau Brycheiniog

Number of days: 4

Camping: Yes

Genre: a wide-ranging programme including music, literature, comedy, cabaret and cinema

Audience: 25,000 attendees, a diverse audience of young families, teenagers and older people

The Green Man team also runs an event called Settlement for the few days before the festival starts which allows a smaller number to, well, settle in and have time to explore and enjoy the surrounding countryside before the main event.

Green Man Festival has a loyal audience with around 80% returning annually. In 2023 the festival was sold out in just over 2 hours before any line-up was announced.

Green Man Festival's Environmental Ambitions

As its name suggests being green is at the heart of the festival and influences everything they do. Initiatives to encourage more sustainable travel options, reusable cups, the use of HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) and solar to replace fossil fuel sourced power and compost toilets to name just a few have been adopted to reduce the festival's environmental impact. They are a founding supporter of Vision 2025 and have pledged to reduce the festival's environmental impact by 50% by 2025. To further support their green goal, they have undertaken the A Greener Future certification in 2023. The results will provide an independent assessment of how they are doing and those areas where more could be done to reduce the festival's environmental impact.

Providing Accessibility for All

Not only is the festival focused on being as green as possible, it also works hard to make it as accessible as possible so that everyone can enjoy the festival. They are proud of their Gold Charter accreditation from Attitude is Everything. The numbers attending the festival and using the facilities is gradually increasing each year. In 2023 they sold over 150 companion tickets.

As part of their mission to make the festival as accessible as possible, the organisers have introduced many facilities. There is a dedicated accessible campsite which is located in the middle of the festival site to make access to the main stages and transport points as easy as possible. The facilities include accessible showers and toilets, viewing platforms, BSL, trackway and mobility scooters. There are ramps onto stages, not just for customers but for staff, crew and artists. They have a support team many of whom are disabled people themselves which includes their onsite Accessibility Manager.

Being Green and Accessible – Particular Challenges

Being green and at the same time providing accessibility is not without its challenges and at times the measures to provide access can conflict with their ambition to be as green as possible. There are a number of areas that the festival and this research highlight as being problematic.

Accessibility – the Infrastructure Supply Chain and Transport Emissions

The Green Man team identified issues to do with the lack of availability of key infrastructure provision across the supply chain. For example, accessible toilets. There are a limited number of suppliers of these toilets, and they are not local suppliers. This means that to provide accessible toilets the festival must use suppliers from further afield. As a result, providing accessible toilets increases the transport miles for the delivery and removal of toilets. Further, each accessible toilet is bigger than a standard toilet which means that fewer toilets can be delivered in one load resulting in more delivery and removal trips. On top of this the accessible toilets generally available are chemical toilets. There are few accessible compost toilets available for hire, as yet, and we know compost toilets are much better for the environment than chemical toilets.

Accessibility and the Provision of Water

To conserve water and limit the amount wasted the festival installs stop taps on tap tables. To make water more accessible the taps are set for 15 seconds. A Greener Future advises that this is longer than is normal which means that more water is being used. However, it's difficult for the festival to shorten the flow time to conserve more water as they recognise that where a festival goer has difficulty pushing the stop taps, they need a longer time for the water flow to stay on.

Conclusions

Making Green Man Festival as green as possible whilst at the same time making it as accessible as possible presents a number of specific challenges for the team, and by implication for other festivals with the same ambitions, however the team continue to look for new and more local solutions across the supply chain.

Case Studies: Shambala

About Shambala Festival

Where: Northamptonshire

Number of days: 4

Camping: Yes

Genre: Rock, pop, folk and world music

Audience: 18,000 - 20,000 Family

Requests for access facilities 2023: 280 people (2022, 156: 80% increase)

46 crew applied for Personal Assistant / Companion tickets 2023 (2022, 16: 300% increase)

Shambala Festival's Environmental Ambitions

Shambala Festival has sustainability embedded into every aspect of the festival and in 2022 they achieved the highest award "Outstanding" from A Greener Future certification.

Providing Accessibility for All

The festival is focused on being inclusive and has a dedicated member of staff who work year-round to organise the accessibility services. Onsite the Access Team is a crew of 16 who are all either disabled or with extensive lived experience of disability and who work in the sector. They have recognised a number of challenges.

Being Green and Accessible – Particular Challenges and Solutions

Travel

One of the biggest challenges in providing accessibility that is also green has been around the eco traveller packages sold by the festival to encourage green travel options. The eco traveller package is a coach/train ticket combined with a reduced-price festival ticket. Unfortunately, whilst the coaches do have wheelchair lifts, the take up for the service by disabled people has not been what was hoped for. It is thought that travelling by coach increases the complexity of the journey for disabled people, which is why it is not popular. The most favoured means of transport is still by car/campervan. The festival imposes a carbon balancing levy on car travel as well as charging for car passes/campervan tickets. This increases the price for those disabled people who have to travel by car and campervan.

The organisers have looked at the problem and for 2024 have introduced 2 free vehicle passes for any applicant who provides the same documentation that is required for a PA (Personal Assistant) / Companion ticket. The drawback is that the free campervan spaces are all in the accessible camping area, which means that people who wish to stay in the family field or elsewhere, have to pay for their campervan ticket. The festival hopes to find a workaround for this on a case-by-case basis.

Waste management

The festival has a recycling exchange where the audience take their rubbish. This was not accessible for all as it was away from the accessible campsite. In previous years the recycling team visited the accessible camping area at an allotted time and the access team also shuttled recycling for people. A more inclusive solution, found in 2023, was to move the exchange to a position in front of the accessible campsite. Disabled people camped elsewhere still have to move and sort their own recycling.

Water and toilets

In 2023 the festival had 15 wheelchair accessible compost toilets and 10 wheelchair accessible chemical toilets. The suppliers of the compost toilets are not local which does increase the transport miles to get them on site.

Food and food traders

Shambala emails all food traders in advance to request that they consider disabled customers when planning their stall. The access team walks around the festival to check that accessibility measures are in place such as lower counters and visible menus. They speak to food traders as well as crew about any potential issues. The festival is meat and cow milk free which means that there is more food containing nuts and seeds; this has created some problems for those with allergies who often need to bring their own food and mini fridges to keep it fresh. Food traders are asked to provide locally sourced and organic food, which is often more expensive and can directly impact disabled people.

Power usage

Although all power on site is renewable, the use of mini fridges for food storage increases power requirements. CPAP (assisted breathing) machines at night are becoming more common and this too means a heavier use of power.

Communications

The festival website presents its many sustainability and accessibility initiatives, but the sustainability information is very wordy and not particularly accessible.

Conclusions

Shambala Festival's approach is to solve problems and does its best to recognise and provide solutions where access issues arise. A full review of the festival's sustainability policies in conjunction with their impact on accessibility is currently underway.

Next steps

We have an opportunity as a sector to approach access and sustainability more holistically, with connected policies and solutions across different focus areas.

Transport is a huge and complex barrier – local authorities, planners, events organisers and disabled people need to come together and find collective solutions.

We can examine our supply chains, supporting suppliers to make accessible and sustainable equipment, which can be scaled up across the country and re-used or recycled more efficiently.

We need new and creative solutions around accessible waste management, food and water use, and power supply.

We should also acknowledge that sometimes there might not be a solution available yet that is both accessible and environmentally-friendly. Disabled people sometimes might require the use of single use items, cars, or additional equipment but they should never be blamed or shamed for this.

What can you do?

- Test the suggestions throughout this toolkit for how we can work differently.
- Connect your sustainability team with your access team and work through solutions together.
- Engage with disabled people throughout every step of your planning process. Listen to disabled people and work with them to find solutions.
- Connect with other local events, venues and festivals to share ideas and resources, potentially creating a local access equipment store that can be shared across festivals and events.
- Connect with membership organisations and as a collective, find ways to increase the supply of sustainable, accessible equipment and facilities.
- Keep informed about the initiatives and resources that Julie's Bicycle, Attitude is Everything and A Greener Future have – someone, somewhere will have the solution!

This toolkit is part of a pilot programme. We want to hear from you about how your events and festivals use these suggestions to strengthen your commitments to sustainability and accessibility.

Pledges for the sector:

- To use the toolkit and to give us feedback – what has been missed, what can be included next time?
- To report back on up to three ways that you have made sustainability solutions accessible by September 2024.
- To come together with disabled people, industry colleagues and suppliers to design, create and then increase the supply of accessible, sustainable products and facilities.

Additional resources

Accessibility resources

- Attitude is Everything – resources covering access for artists, audiences, and professionals
- We Shall Not Be Removed – The Seven Principles for an Inclusive Recovery

Sustainability resources

- Julie's Bicycle Resource Hub
- A Greener Future Resources
- Vision 2025

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Attitude is Everything

Attitude is Everything connect disabled people with music and live event industries to improve access together.

Our vision is to see music and live event industries valuing disabled people as audience members, performers, professionals and volunteers.

Our work won't stop until this becomes the norm.

Through our work:

- Disabled people lead the change.
- Industry professionals learn from real-life experience and expertise.
- Barriers are identified and removed.
- Best practice is celebrated and rewarded.

Julie's Bicycle

Julie's Bicycle is a pioneering not-for-profit, mobilising the arts and culture to take action on the climate, nature and justice crisis.

Founded by the music industry in 2007 and now working across the arts and culture, JB has partnered with over 2000 organisations in the UK and internationally. Combining cultural and environmental expertise, Julie's Bicycle focuses on high-impact programmes and policy change to meet the climate crisis head-on.



Farah Ahmed, Climate Justice Lead, Julie's Bicycle

A Greener Future

AGF is a not-for-profit company helping organisations, events, festivals and venues around the world to be more sustainable and reduce environmental impacts. Pioneers in event sustainability since 2005, and founders of the world's first green event and festival certification, AGF provide training, expertise, support, carbon footprint and Net Zero strategy, and facilitate exchange through events and networking.



Teresa Moore, Director, A Greener Future

Charity numbers:

Attitude is Everything – 1121975

Julie's Bicycle – 1153441

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