



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

SUSTAINABLE CATERING PLAN AND TARGETS

2025 - 2030

Version 4 (approved)
May 2025



CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Sustainable Food and Catering	4
Sustainable Development Goals	7
Commitments	8
Responsibility	9
Timeframe	9
Scope	10
Monitoring, reporting and governance	10
Glossary of Terms	11
Appendix 1 Sustainable Catering Targets	12

Document Control	
Version:	4
Date last reviewed:	29/05/2025
Author Name and Job Title:	Deborah Phelpstead, Head of Sustainability
Approved by:	Sustainability Committee
Review Date:	May 2027

INTRODUCTION

As part of our Environmental Plan, Birmingham City University (BCU) is committed to embedding sustainability across institutional frameworks, processes and activities. We are also committed to improving our environmental performance annually as part of our ISO 14001:2015 accredited Environmental Management System (EMS). We have a responsibility to address the sustainability and carbon intensity of our food supply chains and deliver healthy, sustainable food. In support of the University's Strategy 2030 and Beyond, environmental sustainability is one of our core enablers to achieve this vision, monitored through key performance indicators to ensure we achieve our targets.



SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND CATERING

Providing sustainable, healthy, ethically sourced, seasonal and local food for students, staff, and visitors is an important aspect of BCU's drive to manage its environmental impacts and be a responsible institution. Our catering outlets, services and products must reflect the University's sustainability values.

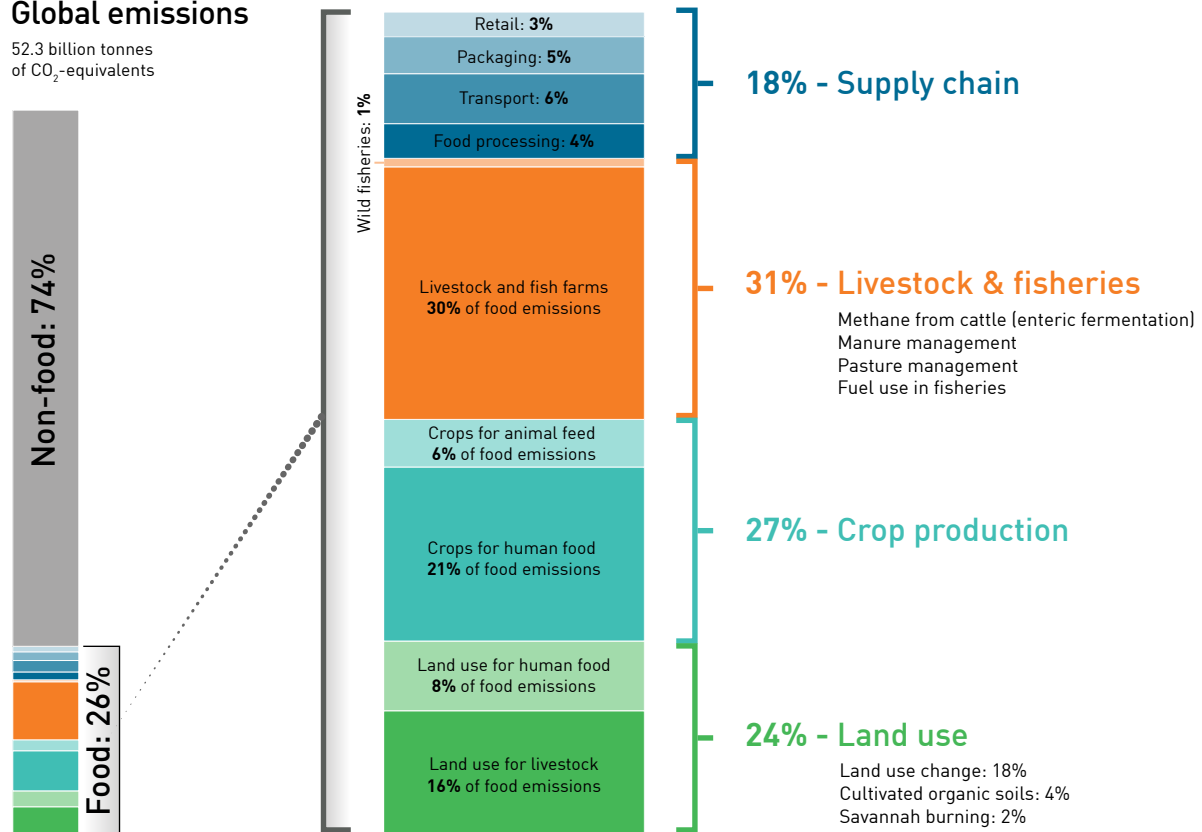
Food has the potential to engage individuals and groups from all areas of the University, regardless of background and interests, and help translate 'sustainability' into a meaningful and practical concept. However, the food we consume is a major contributor to global carbon emissions and habitat destruction. The global food system, which encompasses production, and post-farm process such as processing, and distribution is also a key contributor to emissions. Food production and consumption account for over a quarter of the world's emissions (Our world in Data, 2022).

Our World in Data highlights the contribution of food production to global greenhouse gas emissions, which account for 26% of the total 52.3 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalents emitted annually. Within food-related emissions, the largest share comes from livestock and fisheries (31%), followed by crop production (27%) and land use (24%). The remaining 18% is attributed to supply chain activities such as transport, packaging, processing, and retail. Notably, livestock and fish farms alone are responsible for 30% of food emissions, highlighting the significant environmental impact of animal-based food systems.

GLOBAL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM FOOD PRODUCTION

Global emissions

52.3 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalents



Source: Hannah Ritchie, Our World in Data, 2022. Licensed under CC-BY. Data source: Poore & Nemecek (2018).

At BCU, and in partnership with our catering contractor, we are committed to providing sustainable and ethical food that does not cost the planet and is affordable for our students, staff, and visitors.

The most impactful decision to make is the food choices you make. Data shows that the majority of greenhouse gas emissions stem from land use change and farming processes. For example, animal-based foods tend to have a higher carbon footprint than plant-based food. Lamb and cheese both emit more than 20 kilograms of CO₂-equivalents per kilogram. Poultry and pork have lower footprints but are still higher than most plant-based foods, at 6 and 7 kg CO₂-equivalents, respectively. The production of animal and poultry products places significant pressure on the environment, particularly through the intensive use of land, water, soil, and natural habitats. Livestock farming is also a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, especially methane, cattle alone are responsible for an estimated 16% of global methane output. Additionally, nitrate run-off from manure can contaminate water bodies, leading to ecosystem disruption and harm to aquatic wildlife.

In the UK, we eat twice the amount of the global average of meat and dairy, and twice as much as is considered optimal for our health. The intensification of livestock production in a bid to reduce emissions leads to negative consequences for food security, animal welfare, water pollution, biodiversity, antibiotics use and more frequent disease in intensive livestock production. Importing large amounts of feed, including soy from South America means intensive UK meat and dairy has high food miles. Instead, the Committee on Climate Change advise a switch to agroecological farming and sourcing protein from a diverse range of sustainable crops. A switch to more plant-based products is more sustainable. A switch to agroecological farming in the UK could reduce emissions by 38 per cent and offset the remaining 60 per cent of emissions through afforestation.

While a transition towards more plant-based diets (such as vegan, vegetarian, or flexitarian/pescetarian) is recognised as a key measure in reducing emissions, it is important to consider global dietary diversity and cultural context. In the UK, promoting plant-based options should be balanced with awareness of our role in international supply chains. The increased demand for certain imported plant-based foods can contribute to environmental degradation and social impacts in other regions. Additionally, dietary choices are shaped by cultural, religious, and individual factors. This plan supports the provision of locally sourced, seasonal, and culturally inclusive plant-based options, while recognising the need for a respectful and globally responsible approach.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, has 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership. As part of this plan, the following goals have been aligned to the targets in appendix 1 to ensure our targets are impactful and aligned to the UN's SDGs.



SDG Goal 1 -

End poverty in all its forms everywhere



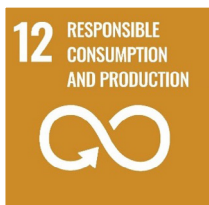
SDG Goal 2 -

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



SDG Goal 3 -

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



SDG Goal 12 -

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns



SDG Goal 14 -

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



SDG Goal 15 -

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

COMMITMENTS

The plan establishes clear goals and aspirations for progress in this area for the period 2025 - 2030 as well as targets that can assist in monitoring its implementation.

The framework ensures catering decisions are based on strong ethical, social and environmental responsible principles and delivers progress against the following key commitments:

1. Ensure that all University catering offerings meet current best practice benchmarks, standards and certifications.
2. Promote social justice and equity through widespread availability and use of ethically sourced products.
3. Enhance the welfare of animals and sustainable agricultural environment through the use of free range and organic products, phasing out industrially produced meat and dairy.
4. Minimise environmental impact and resource use by reducing waste, rationalising transport and reducing energy and water consumption.
5. Promote equality and diversity by expanding the range and cultural variety of all University menus.
6. Create an ethos of healthy eating and optimum nutrition by promoting healthy foods and avoiding the promotion of unhealthy options.
7. Provide and promote plant-based and reduced meat options.
8. Support the local economy, strengthen community links and reduce food miles by using local and seasonal products.
9. Enhance student and staff engagement with regular and appealing communication on sustainable and ethical food issues.
10. Deliver fair and ethical catering operations by ensuring staff are paid at least the real Living Wage, receive appropriate training, and by prioritising suppliers with responsible labour, environmental, and supply chain practices, where feasible.

RESPONSIBILITY

The plan will promote community engagement through collaboration with the University Gardening Club, Green Impact teams, and other sustainability networks to foster ownership and participation. The Sustainable Catering Plan has been developed in collaboration with BCU and the University's catering contractor. All students, staff and visitors involved in BCU activities are encouraged to support the implementation of the plan wherever possible.

TIMEFRAME

This plan will support the University's sustainable catering from 2025 - 2030. This plan will be reviewed biennially to ensure continual improvement and support BCU's EMS.



SCOPE

The Sustainable Catering plan covers all food outlets and hospitality food and drink served by Birmingham City University delivered in partnership with the approved catering contractor. This plan applies to the University restaurants, coffee shops, hospitality operation and vending machines. BCUSU food is excluded from this plan, for which the University does not have responsibility. University food suppliers must comply with commitments outlined in this plan and support achieving designated targets.

MONITORING, REPORTING AND GOVERNANCE

The University, in partnership with our catering contractor, will monitor and manage costs associated with sustainable catering, including the provision of organic options, to ensure value for money and financial viability. Updates on progress of the Sustainable Catering Plan and Targets are reported through the Sustainability Committee. Progress is also included and tracked in the Annual Environmental Report, which is presented to the University's Board of Governors annually. Regular communications also take place between the University's caterer and BCU's Sustainability Team to monitor progress against the targets and actions, with progress against targets being updated at least biannually.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Sustainable food – Food that is produced, processed, and consumed in ways that support human health and wellbeing, protect the environment, promote animal welfare, and contribute to fair livelihoods and thriving local and global economies.
- Local Food – Typically defined as food that is grown, produced, processed, traded, and sold within a geographic radius of up to 70 miles from its point of origin.
- Greenhouse gas - A gas with the potential to contribute to a greenhouse effect, leading to climate change. Globally, all measures are based on carbon dioxide (CO₂) as the baseline. Methane and nitrous oxide are two of the most important GHG in agriculture. The global warming impact of methane is calculated as 25 times that of CO₂.
- Sustainable procurement - The practice of sourcing goods and services in a way that minimises environmental impact, supports ethical practices, and promotes social responsibility throughout the supply chain.
- Vegan - A vegan diet is a way of eating that excludes all animal products, including meat, poultry, seafood, dairy, eggs, and honey. Vegans primarily consume plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes. This dietary choice is often motivated by ethical, environmental, or health concerns.
- Vegetarian – Vegetarians do not eat any food products made from meat, fish, shellfish, crustacea (such as prawns or crab) or animal by-products (such as gelatine or rennet).
- Flexitarian - A flexitarian diet is one that focuses on whole, plant-based proteins and other minimally processed foods, while enjoying meat, dairy, eggs and fish in moderation.
- Pescetarian: A vegetarian diet that includes seafood.
- Fairtrade - According to [Fairtrade International](#), “fairtrade changes the way trade works through better prices, decent working conditions and a fairer deal for farmers and workers in developing countries” than those supported by ‘free trade’. “Fairtrade’s approach enables farmers and workers to have more control over their lives and decide how to invest in their future.”
- Fairly Traded - This concerns companies/products which are not officially registered as Fairtrade by the certification standard but that do take into account their environmental and social impact.
- Organic - Low intensity farming that using traditional methods seeks to work, “in harmony with nature,” says charity and certifying body the Soil Association. Certified organic producers must follow strict, legally defined rules covering many aspects of animal welfare and cultivation.

APPENDIX 1 SUSTAINABLE CATERING TARGETS

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Certification	University caterers to maintain minimum Bronze Food for Life catering accreditation.	Feb 2025	Annual audit – accreditation awarded and certificate displayed.	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15
	University caterers to review Silver Food for Life catering accreditation for 2026-27 and implement actions where feasible.	Feb 2026		
	University caterers to review Gold Food for Life catering accreditation for 2029-30 and implement actions where feasible.	Feb 2029		
	University caterers maintain ISO 14001 accreditation and apply ways of working to the BCU contract.	Continuous	Certificate supplied to BCU.	12, 14, 15
	All fish to be purchased from Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified suppliers ensuring that no seafood featured on the MSC red list is included within menus in line with MSC Chain of Custody.	Continuous	Audited by way of the Food for Life, Soil Association accreditation.	14
			Request sample invoices for seafood items 1–2 times/year, cross-check for MSC certification. Spot-check menus against MSC red list once per term.	

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Certification	All tuna used to be pole or line caught only. These methods do not have a high bycatch of vulnerable species like seabirds, turtles and sharks.	Continuous	Controlled via company supply chain. Once a year, randomly sample a tuna product invoice or specification sheet to verify the catch method.	14
	Use of rapeseed oil only in frying and food production due to its nutritional benefits and its UK production.	Continuous	Delivery notes held on file for inspection when and if required.	3, 12, 15
			Biannual spot check of delivery notes or purchase records.	
			Request a short supplier product list that includes oil types used.	
	All chicken, beef, and pork products must meet at least Red Tractor assurance standards, in line with UK legal baseline requirements.	Continuous	Licence on file and delivery notes/supply chain cross reference to ensure	12, 15
	The University caterers will join the Red Tractor assurance scheme and maintain a licence for internal use of the logo.			
	Where possible, sourcing should go beyond this baseline by prioritising products that are RSPCA Assured or certified free-range, in line with best practice for animal welfare.		Each year, spot-check a sample of 3–5 delivery notes for meat items against Red Tractor assurance.	

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Certification	All meat sourced certified free-range, or RSPCA Assured as a minimum.	Continuous	Ensure delivery notes/ supply chain cross reference to ensure compliance.	12, 15
			Each year, spot-check of 2–3 meat product delivery notes to verify RSPCA Assured and free-range status.	
	Introduce carbon labelling on food products and menus to help staff, students, and visitors make informed, sustainable choices. These labels will provide a clear, accessible indication of each item's carbon footprint, supporting our wider goals of transparency, education, and emissions reduction.	April 2026	Sample menus displaying carbon labels (digital copies).	12, 14, 15
Fairtrade, fairly traded and ethically sourced products	Ensure that a good and varied range of Fairtrade and ethically sourced goods are available at all University outlets.	Continuous	Compare product mix against prior periods and ensure that range is built upon as a result.	1, 12
			Spot-check delivery notes or supplier product list for Fairtrade logo or product codes.	
			Every year Visual check of counters/ vending areas to confirm Fairtrade logo visibility.	

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Fairtrade, fairly traded and ethically sourced products	Eliminate the use of palm oil in catering. Where palm oil cannot be eliminated, use palm oil certified to the RSPO (Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil) accreditation standard or Greenpalm certified oil. All palm oil used for cooking is certified organic.	Continuous	RSPO certification. Organic accreditation or other certification evidence.	12, 15
	Reduce the environmental impact associated with soya consumption in the catering contract by increasing the availability and promotion of plant-based menu options that use alternative protein sources with lower deforestation and carbon footprints (see 'Diversity and Choice').	Continuous	Reported by catering contractor.	12, 15
			Food EQ programme, Humane Society training and coaching and pop-up events.	
Free range and organic	Only free-range eggs used in all University catering.	Continuous	Measured by way of annual Food for Life audit which requires that these be adhered to.	12, 15
	Specify free range, freedom foods and Defra certified eggs from our main supplier in products containing eggs as a main ingredient such as mayonnaise, quiche, flans, cakes etc.			
	Increase the year-on-year use of free-range and organic ingredients, including vegetables, meat, fruit, and juices. Aim to achieve a minimum of 15% of total ingredient spend on certified organic produce, subject to financial viability and value for money considerations.		By retaining and improving on our level of accreditation from Bronze up to Gold, caterer will be demonstrating increases in the use of these.	

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Local, seasonal and fresh	Reduce the food miles associated with food transport and support the local economy by ensuring that local produce accounts for a significant percentage of ingredients on all menus.	Update annually	List of local suppliers updated every three months.	12, 15
	Ensure that at least two items of seasonal produce are available on all menus throughout each academic year.	Continuous	Monitored through Soil Association accreditation.	
	Continue to grow herb ingredients on campus in the main restaurant areas of Curzon and Seacole Buildings to be used in the kitchens and promote grow your own.	Continuous	Herb planters in place.	
Healthy food	Include the positive promotion of healthy food, healthy eating options and benefits at least once a week during term time – including reduction in red meat, high fat, high sugar and processed foods in line with Department of Health guidelines.	Continuous	Healthy ME roadshows to feature every quarter plus highlights visible on counters in restaurants.	3, 12, 15
	No promotion of non-healthy foods including soft drinks, high sugar foods, high salt foods, high fat foods and highly processed food.	Continuous	Evidence of these not featuring on any promotional materials or as part of any 'deals'.	

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Diversity and Choice	Ensure that at least 40% of offerings are plant-based.	Continuous	Quarterly menu review and percentage calculation of qualifying items.	3, 12, 14 and 15
	Ensure a minimum of 10% of offerings are gluten-free.	Continuous	Quarterly menu review and count gluten-free options vs. total offerings	3
	Ensure that 10% of offerings are halal certified.	Continuous	Audit halal-certified options (with verification) through menu review (must meet UK welfare standards and must be farm assured to RSPCA standard).	3
	Increase plant-based offerings at restaurants and outlets year-on-year. Have at least two plant-based vegan offerings at each main meal.	Annually	Reported by catering contractor.	3, 12, 14, 15
			Quarterly menu review and percentage calculation of qualifying items.	
			Spot check weekly menus and physical counters for compliance.	
	Meat-Free Lunch Menus Introduce at least two fully meat-free lunch menus per week across main outlets, in line with Food for Life Standard, with meals based on beans, pulses, eggs, and non-meat proteins such as mycoprotein or nuts. Dishes must not be based on cheese or fish, and cheese may only be used as a garnish. Progress will be monitored against Food for Life criteria and reviewed termly to assess feasibility.	Continuous	Quarterly menu review	3, 12, 14, 15

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Waste	No plastic utensils for use in events, forums and conferences.	Annually	Purchasing to be recorded, comparisons provided for review every year.	12, 14, 15
	Non-disposable options available and clearly advertised for all takeaway food at University outlets.	Continuous	Evidence provided and fed back in Client Review.	12, 14, 15
	All waste/used oil to be collected and used in the production of biofuel.	Ongoing	R-Oils collection certificates retained for reference.	12, 15
	Reduction year on year of disposable cups used day to day at BCU.	Annually	Number of discounts for non-use recorded and reviewed plus purchase levels of disposable cups.	12, 14, 15
	Catering contractor own brand disposable cups move to single wall.			
	Used coffee grounds to be made readily available at all coffee outlets for customers to use in their gardens.	Continuous	Can be viewed at all coffee outlets.	3, 15
			Weights measured.	

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Waste	Bottled drinks/water not to be used or provided to meetings and events unless they are supplied in re-usable containers.	Continuous	Reflected in offer by way of the hospitality brochure and adhered to.	12, 14, 15
	Volume and cost of food wastage to be recorded weekly, monitored and reduced year on year.	Annual reduction	Detailed in annual progress report. Reported monthly.	1, 2, 12, 14, 15
	Collaborate with University colleagues to align catering services with the academic timetable, supporting efficient planning and delivery. This coordination will help ensure accessibility while also reducing surplus and limiting food waste across campus operations.			
	Review the waste produced through the catering contract and any opportunities to reduce this further. All packaging used must be reusable, recyclable, or compostable wherever possible. Single-use plastics and non-recyclable packaging to be phased out across all catering provision by 2030.	Continuous	Review packaging from deliveries and purchasing of disposables.	1, 2, 12, 14, 15

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Energy and water consumption	Catering outlets responsible for consumption of electricity, water and gas. Point of contact provided for each concession to report on utilities consumption to the Energy Manager.	Ongoing	Ability to report on energy and water consumption.	12
	Implement submetering in any outlets currently unmetered.	Ongoing	Submetering and developments monitored by Energy Manager.	12
	Always purchase a minimum of A+ rated, high efficiency appliances and equipment for catering purposes. Aim for Energy Efficiency Class A+++ (on a scale from A+++ to G in the EU/UK system).	Continuous	Evidence through purchasing and labelled on equipment.	12
	F-Gas Management and Refrigeration Efficiency Phase out high Global Warming Potential (GWP) refrigerants in catering and refrigeration equipment in line with F-Gas regulations. Prioritise the procurement of systems using natural refrigerants (e.g., R290, R744) and ensure all equipment is subject to regular leak checks, maintenance, and environmental compliance to minimise emissions and improve energy efficiency.	Ongoing	Catering contractor to provide evidence through maintenance service documents/ purchasing evidence.	12, 14, 15

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Communication	Clear labelling and regular promotion of sustainability offerings with a focused and positive message. Communicate sustainable catering highlights as and when achieved. Review the Environmental Sustainability Communications and Engagement Strategy to support the launch and ongoing promotion of the Sustainable Catering Plan and Targets, including visibility of sustainable choices, staff/student engagement, and free water availability across campus.	Continuous	Communications such as staff and student newsletters. Messages to be reflected at least once a week in menus.	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15
	Catering staff fully briefed on the food being served and background to sustainability issues.	Annual/ Continuous	Training to be initiated and will be audited as part of the Food for Life Soil Association application.	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15
	Training and toolbox talks delivered to catering staff on reducing the environmental impacts of catering including reducing food waste, correct waste management, reducing energy consumption through cooking.			
	Ensure high level of catering involvement in initiatives such as Fairtrade fortnight, Go Green Week and any other relevant events to promote sustainable catering.	Continuous	Proposals submitted in support of initiatives and results reviewed at client reviews.	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15

Area	Target	Date	Evidence	SDG
Cleaning products	Continue to ensure that only environmentally friendly cleaning products are used in the catering facilities.	Continuous	All cleaning products sourced via Zenith - ISO 9001:2008 standard. With accreditations including ISO 9001	12, 14, 15
Procurement and suppliers	Ensure that local and smaller suppliers are not discriminated against in the procurement process and in specifications.	Continuous	Evidence of local/ smaller suppliers submitted and then tracked against.	1, 12
	Always include sustainability specifications in new supply contracts and tenders in line with this action plan.	Continuous	Evidence to be provided when required.	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15
Events and corporate catering	Reintroduce a sustainable and plant-based menu for catering offerings.	Sept 2025	Evidence of this being promoted by hospitality team.	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15
	5% of meeting and event catering requests choosing plant based and sustainable menu.	Continuous	Sales recorded and reviewed annually. Reviewed and measured annually.	1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15

