**A Guide to implementing the**

**Eco-Friendly Business GREENMark**

Tourism by its nature generally consumes natural resources and can be quite destructive to natural environments. In Ireland the majority of our overseas tourist arrive by plane and use various forms of transport to access the locations and sights around the country. They eat, drink and sleep and all this activity adds to the environmental impact on Ireland.

At GreenHospitality.ie we recognise that this flow of visitors is not going to stop and that more and more visitors are equally concerned about their environmental footprint. Our visitors still want to visit but want to do it in a more responsible way.

At the same time most tourism businesses are also concerned about the environment and emissions, the associated costs and our visitors desire to be less impactful, whilst still enjoying the scenery, environment, welcome and people of Ireland.

Our approach is that there is a shared responsibility between tourism businesses and our visitors for their environmental footprint. When visitors are engaging with your business, you should be doing the most you can to minimise their impact and they are responsible for the impact of their transport element.

The Eco-Friendly Business GREENMark was developed to enable smaller tourism businesses promote their responsible tourism approach to visitors and deliver a number of benefits – More satisfied visitors, reduced impact on the environment, reduction in costs and the long-term protection of our greatest asset – our environment.

***Responsible Tourism vs Eco-Tourism***. It is important to understand the difference between these 2 frequently used terms.

**Responsible Tourism** is about “*making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.*” Responsible Tourism requires that operators, hoteliers, governments, local people and tourists take responsibility, take action to make tourism more sustainable. *(*[*Responsible Tourism Partnership*](https://responsibletourismpartnership.org/what-is-responsible-tourism/)*)*

**Ecotourism** embraces the principles of sustainable tourism, concerning the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism. It also embraces the following specific principles, which distinguish it from the wider concept of sustainable tourism: contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributes to their well-being; interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors; lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to tours for small-size groups." *(*[*Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism*](https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/quebec-declaration.pdf)*)*

Ecotourism is a niche part of the broader Responsible and Sustainable Tourism approach and focuses on the natural environment almost exclusively. There are a number of national and international programmes that can offer Ecotourism certification and recognition.

What is important to note is that both have similar pillars – economic, environmental and social impact of tourism. They both promote minimising environmental impact, supporting local communities and actively engaging to preserve the existing environment.

The **Eco-Friendly Business GREENMark** is not an Ecotourism mark nor an Environmental Certification Award. **It is a Responsible Tourism Eco-Label**. *(Our sister organisation –* [*Green Hospitality Programme*](http://www.greenhospitality.ie)*- offers an internationally recognised environmental certification award for larger tourism business)*

Our GREENMark is designed to allow smaller tourism businesses – 95% of all businesses – to adopt a responsible approach to their business and communicate it to their visitors.

This is a voluntary programme and we would warn businesses not to make any exaggerated claims as it is the visitor who will challenge you to stand up to your claims. If you fail to deliver you will damage your business and reputation. We generally advise businesses to understate but then overdeliver.

**So – What is a Responsible Business? What do you need to do?**

A Responsible Business is a business that has followed a process through which they choose to take responsibility for their actions and encourage positive impacts through their activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities and all other members of the public who may also be considered as stakeholders.

It is about you looking at all your actions and activities and adopting a plan that will enable you to be as responsible as you can and communicate those actions to all your stakeholders.

It has 3 main aspects – Your Business, Your Community, Your Local Environment. How are you impacting positively in each and how can you improve?

It is about communicating your actions to all stakeholders both to let them know that they are engaging with a responsible business but also to encourage them to be more responsible themselves.

**Your Business**

Step one is to consider the direct impacts of your business;

* Energy & Water consumption
* Waste – production, packaging, disposal
* Purchases – responsible, local
* Your employees
* Other impacts

This is probably the most important and impactful element. How can you operate your business more responsibly? The first step is to understand what impacts you directly control – this requires measurement. Included in our Green Track workbook are forms designed to measure your Energy & Water Consumption and Primary Wastes.

You then look closely at your operation and identify where you could make reductions or improvements – use less energy and water and reduce waste. These improvements will deliver 2 benefits – reduced environmental impact and reduced costs – a win-win.

Consider getting a sustainability expert to come in and conduct an audit for you. Micro-businesses should engage with your Local Authority (LA) first and ask them if they can assist – most LA’s have an environmental officer who could assist you

***Commencing in 2021 Local Enterprise Offices are offering a Green for Micro scheme for businesses employing under 10 full time equivalent employees – this is a free service and provides a consultant for 2 days – if applying ask for HSC Ltd as your consultant – that’s us!*** [***Link Here***](https://www.localenterprise.ie/green)  ***)***

***SEAI – Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland – from 2022 are offering Energy Audit Vouchers valued at €2,000 for businesses that spend more than €10,000 pa on energy –*** [***Apply for one of these here***](https://www.seai.ie/business-and-public-sector/small-and-medium-business/supports/energy-audits/)

Larger businesses may employ a consultant – do your measurement and cost analysis first and work out how much you spend annually to see if it will be worth it. Typically, most businesses could reduce costs by between 15-30% with little or no expenditure. Contact us if you require this support – it pays for itself.

***Energy Consumption***. There are many actions you can take to reduce energy consumption which reduces your carbon footprint – Upgrade lights to LED, make sure your timers and thermostats are working properly, upgrade your timer controls and thermostats, upgrade your boiler, turn things off, monitor consumption regularly, install renewable heating system, etc… there are some good case studies in the further resources guide.

***Water Consumption***. Monitor regularly to check for leaks. Install flow reduction devices across the business – taps, toilets, urinals, showers. Use rainwater to flush toilets. Install low water consumption equipment – dishwashers, washing machines, etc. Train staff, ask visitors to be Water Smart.

***Waste Packaging***. This is a scourge but can be tackled over time. Engage with your suppliers and encourage them to reduce the packaging they provide. Consider joining the Green Hospitality Plastic Smart GREENMark programme and eradicate single use plastics.

***Waste Disposal.*** Make sure you have an excellent separation system and look at the potential for reusing some waste streams. They may not be useful for you but others might be able to use them. Consider a local reuse day where all the businesses can bring their unwanted items to a central point for the local community to see – items left can then be properly disposed by the local waste company.

***Responsible Purchasing.*** Consider where you are buying your goods and supplies. Do you actively support local businesses and services? It can be cheaper to use national companies but consider the impact on local tradespeople and service providers. If you use them then they will use you.

It can be all too easy to use the internet for purchases but if you want your community to survive and thrive you need to support it – even for a portion of your purchases.

Food purchases. The international trend now is towards locally produced food. Support local farmers and suppliers and make sure you inform your visitors where the food is from – its Provenance – don’t hide this as if you do you are only trying to fool your customers – if your chicken is imported tell your customer – if you don’t want to tell them – buy Irish produced chicken! Where foods must be imported do you specify Responsibly Sourced certified items – Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, etc.

***Your Employees.*** These are the backbone of your business. Do you treat them fairly? Do you train them? Do you ask them for their opinions? Do you get them engaged in your responsible actions? They are your ambassadors – engage with them.

**Your Community**

How are you supporting your local community in being more resilient? Do you actively employ locals first?

There are many ways you can do this – buying locally and employing locally are 2 key initiatives. But look beyond these – is there a Tidy Towns committee and do you support it – Are your local schools Green Schools and can you support them – are there community projects that would benefit from your additional support?

Don’t wait to be asked – it’s your community – be active and engage

**Your Local Environment**

What are you doing to protect your local environment? Can you provide additional resources – be it money or time? Do you contribute towards protecting and enhancing local biodiversity?

Leave no Trace. Are you a member? If not, why not? Do you actively encourage your visitors to Leave no Trace?

**Communication**

How do you let all your stakeholders know about your responsible actions? How do you encourage your visitors to adopt responsible behaviour?

***We all have websites*** – use yours to communicate your responsible actions. Create a link from your home page. It could be a drop down from the menu bar or a Green Logo link on the home page. Create a Responsible Business page(s) and tell your story there. Don’t hide it and don’t just give “Fluffy” messages – deal in facts and specific quantifiable actions – report results.

***Within your business***. Whatever your business type you will have flyers, brochures, menus, in-room cards, etc. Over time incorporate your Responsible message into them and let your customer know what positive actions you are taking to minimise their impact when they spend time with you.

***Encourage visitors to be responsible also***. It is important to recognise that our visitors are paying to use our product/service. The primary responsibility to minimise their environmental footprint when using your business is yours – not theirs. However, many visitors want to be responsible and you should give them ideas and encouragements to do so.

Encourage them to adopt the Leave no Trace approach when outdoors. Encourage them to buy locally and visit local attractions and activities. Make it easy for them. When using your facilities encourage them to consume less – energy, water, waste.

**What is your Vision / Policy**

The most important message – ***Why/How are you Responsible*** - ***what is your Vision/Plan*** – this is a section we assess closely – followed by a close review of your website where we would expect a Responsible Business to have included their responsible ethos and set out their vision and actions delivered and planned – in your own words but easily visible.

If you are just starting out and all your actions are in the planning stage then you are not ready to be listed as an eco-friendly business. Remember, a primary reason for engaging is for your visitors – don’t over-egg your achievements, don’t greenwash *(making claims that don’t stand up)* Set a date when you plan to have implemented the minimum standards required and when done then apply for your GREENMark.

Be realistic – if you are engaged in an activity that is clearly bad for the environment you should not be seeking GREENMark recognition. *(e.g.; If you burn coal to heat your building and water– if you have no waste separation – if all your lights are tungsten/halogen – if you have extensive single-use packaging in use throughout your business, etc.)*

**How the Eco-Friendly Business GREENMark works**

You will receive access to our Online Resources where you will find the key tool to track and monitor your performance in implementing the GREENMark standards – **Green Track**. This is an Excel Document – it is very important that you read through it before you start, along with this document.

The Online Resources also includes access to lots more information, guides, other resources – all of which can support your environmental actions. Don’t allow the amount of information to overwhelm you – rather, as you progress through the GREENMark standards use these resources to support each standard, as you get to it.

We recommend that you create a folder on your PC/Laptop and store all the documents and information you pull together to enable you to implement the standards

**The Eco-Friendly Business GREENMark – Standards**

Within each box we have given some additional guidance **– If you have more backup information you should save it in your GREENMark folder (Create one on your PC) and when you become a GREENMark member you will have it to hand if we have specific queries**

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| **Environmental Assessment Survey.** Each business must complete the survey before starting the programme and after they reach 100% on the Green Track Summary Score |
| Login to our [Environmental Assessment Survey](https://greenhospitality.ie/free-greensurvey/) and complete it – request a report at the end – Repeat this after programme implementation.  Record your Scores on the Green Track Assessment sheet |
| **Sign our Eco-Friendly Business GREENMark Charter.** This is committing your business to being operated in a sustainable and responsible manner. |
| By signing our Charter you are recognising that the Eco-Friendly Business GREENMark is a responsible business programme with minimum requirements that you are committing your business to implementing.  You must date and sign the **Charter in Sheet 1**. |
| **Responsible/Sustainable/Environmental Policy & General Targets**. Businesses that are serious about sustainability will have a vision/plan that they communicate to various stakeholders. |
| **This Responsible Business Policy (Sheet 2.)** should be in your own words and be reflective of your business. It is not a corporate statement – it should easily communicate to your stakeholders where you stand and should have quantifiable targets that can be either yearly or cover multiple years. *(Sheet 2 includes a sample policy and sample targets)*  Ideally your policy and targets should be linked to your business impacts on the environment. Your focus should be on reducing this impact which often means using less energy and water which results in lower costs and reducing waste – especially Food and Packaging Waste and Single Use Plastics  Example: [Hazelwood Lodge](http://www.hazelwoodlodge.ie/our-green-journey/) [Django’s Hostel](https://www.djangoshostel.com/responsible-tourism.html) [Loam Restaurant](https://loamgalway.com/sustainability/) |

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| **Action Plan**. Your action plan should list the specific actions you are implementing that will deliver on the targets. |
| **This Action Plan (Sheet 3.)** can be as long/short as you wish but should cover each area of impact – Energy, carbon, water, waste – and can include green procurement, biodiversity and local engagement actions.  The plan can cover a number of years but should always aim to be quite specific on the expected outcomes – and quantified as much as possible |
| **Environmental Regulations and Legislation**. Complete the **Declaration of Compliance in Sheet 4.** |
| Any business that promotes itself as being Responsible must follow the environmental laws in place. Most businesses will simply sign the declaration.  If you sign the declaration and later find out that you are required to take some action you must inform us. If your local authority, or other state agency, has asked you to make changes to your operation to be compliant with specific local or national environmental regulations you will need to tell us how you have implemented those changes.  *(Should GREENMark identify that a business is failing to be legally compliant or is being prosecuted for breaches of environmental or sustainability legislation the GREENMark will be immediately cancelled)* |
| **Consumption Information.** Every business needs to know what their consumption/production levels are for - Energy, Water, Waste Disposal and Food Waste *(where applicable).* |
| Use the **Waste Tracker – Sheet 5** and the **Emissions Tracker – Sheet 6** – to monitor consumption/production levels for Waste, Water and Energy and related emissions  At the very least you should be reviewing these costs/consumptions monthly.  *GREENMark members will have access to an Environmental Tracker that will assist I creating Key Performance Indicators and convert volumes to weights etc.* |

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| **Communicating with your Customers/Guests/Visitors.** Tell us how you communicate your environmental practices with guests/visitors **– Sheet 7** |
| Create a Green Page on your website – without this you are not communicating properly – it should be easy to find  How do you “talk” to your customers when they are in your business? Do you include your responsible message in flyers, brochures, guest information guides, etc.  Do you tell them on your menus the source and provenance of your foods – highlighting the local producers  For accommodation providers how are you encouraging guests to be more responsible when staying over – in the bedroom, in the bathroom, in the guest directory – asking them to think about using less water, hanging up towels for reuse, separating waste, etc.  Could a visitor stay with you and not know you operate as a responsible business? What a waste! |
| **Green Team & Training** |
| Create a list of your **Green Team** – the larger the business the larger the team. Micro businesses may only have 1 in-house person but include advisors/consultants for specific information. **Sheet 8**  **Green Training** – all employees should receive environmental training at induction and refresher training at least annually. There are third party training services available or you could develop your own in-house. They should be relevant to your business operation. The GREENMark can assist you here.  **Sheet 9** allows you to identify what type of training is delivered and record who has been trained |
| **Energy Management.** What steps have you taken to be more energy efficient and what are you planning to do? |
| Keep a list of the Actions you have already taken, the actions you are planning and keep a list of the major energy using equipment in your business *(An SEAI audit would deliver a lot of this information to you)* **Sheet 10**  Have you upgraded your lighting to LED’s, have you timers on your heating and hot water system, have you thermostatic valves, do you have any renewable energy, have you installed any energy efficient equipment, etc…The Sheet includes some suggested actions  Do you have a list of the major energy using equipment in your business – and how you manage it?  How do you monitor Energy Consumption – if you do not have online real time metering you are not at the races. |
| **Lighting.** Are at least 90% of your light bulbs LED and 100% that are on for more than 5 hours a day LED? |
| Use **Sheet 11** to make a declaration.  If no – an upgrade to LED should be on your action plan – LED’s reduce running costs by up to 95% compared to tungsten/Halogen – with very quick paybacks – They also reduce your carbon footprint. |
| **Waste Management.** What steps have you taken to minimise waste and what are you planning? |
| Tell us what actions you are going to take to improve waste separation and your reduction targets for this year **– Sheet 12**  Have you switched from single-use to bulk supplies, do your supplies come in reusable containers? Focus on the really important waste streams – Food Waste, Single Use Plastics, Packaging Waste. |
| **Single Use Plastics (SUP):** You haveeliminated/minimised, or have a plan to eliminate/minimise, consumer facing single use plastics from use. ***Sheet 12*** |
| This is an area that more and more customers are demanding from tourism and hospitality businesses. The key SUP’s to eliminate/minimise include;   * **Drinks bottles, cotton buds, wet wipes, straws, coasters, balloons and sticks, cutlery, cups, plates, food wrapping/packaging** * [**Plastic Smart** GREENMark](https://greenhospitality.ie/?page_id=16780) is available as an additional programme and is aimed at eliminating single use plastics from consumer facing areas. |
| **Water Management**. What steps have you taken to be more water efficient and what are you planning? ***Tell us what you do.*** |
| Keep a list of the Actions you have already taken, the actions you are planning and measure the flows from key devices and assess how efficient they are when compared against the recommended flow rates **Sheet 13**  Have you reduced the flows from Showers and Taps? Are your public toilets low-flow? Are public urinals managed so that they do not flush at night? Do you use rainwater for any purpose? Are dishwashers and laundry washing machines only turned on when full?  Use the checklist, guide, information provided in the Online Folder to provide us with more information.  How do you monitor Water Consumption – if you do not have online real time metering you are not at the races. |

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| **Local Community.** Tell us if/how you engage with your local community to promote and support sustainability locally. *(Tidy towns, Clean Coast, Green Schools, etc****…****)* |
| A responsible business does not only look inwards – they look out and support their local community in environmental actions and supports. If there are none happening in your location – why not start one. **Sheet 14** |
| **Green Procurement.** Have you taken any steps to support local producers – food, drink, services, etc.? Do you have a “Buy Irish” policy and look to source products of Irish Provenance? ***.*** |
| Supporting local suppliers is a key part of maintaining a local community and its long-term viability and resilience. Food and drink should be actively sourced locally and from Ireland and when imported – responsibly sourced.  It is also important to tell your visitors about provenance – especially great local food – Let us have a copy of your Green procurement Policy – we have provided a sample  **Sheet 15**  *(GREENMark members will be required to show us how this policy is implemented in practice)* |

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| **Code of Practice.** If there is a Responsible/Environmental code of practice applicable to your activity you should be implementing it. ***If Applicable tell us what it is and if you are applying it.*** |
| Some activities have codes of practice that include responsible environmental actions. If yours has a code of practice let us know and confirm that you are implementing it – don’t forget to tell your customers about this as well. **Sheet 16** |
| **Leave no Trace.** Outdoor activity providers must promote the Leave no Trace philosophy. *All businesses should promote the Leave no Trace principles*. ***Tell us how you do this and tell us if you are a member of Leave no Trace*** |
| We encourage **all tourism businesses** to be members of the [Leave no Trace](http://www.leavenotraceireland.org/) programme. All businesses must promote its ethos and principles to all their visitors.  **Sheet 16** |
| **Biodiversity/Natural Environment.** Tell us if your business specifically impacts on local biodiversity and how you are minimising this impact and any other activities you engage in that preserves or protects local biodiversity. |
| Do you plant flora that supports bees, do you have bee hives, are you engaged in any local biodiversity activity – have you looked? Most visitors come to Ireland for our natural environment – what are you doing to protect and preserve it?  Are you a member of the All Ireland Pollinator Programme  **Sheet 16** |

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| **Other Impacts.** Some businesses have a specific biodiversity impact – if yours does tell us about it and what actions you are taking to protect it. **Sheet 17** |
| **Other Actions.** There are many environmental actions a business can take – keep a list of them |
| Use **Sheet 18** to list the additional actions your business is implementing to protect/improve the environment. You can also complete **Sheet 18a** or copy opportunities listed there onto Sheet 18 as you progress through them  It is important to always keep good records and backup about each action you implement – especially if you want to go for recognition later.  This section can complement your overall Action Plan |
| **Environmental Assessment Survey.** Each business must complete the survey before starting the programme and after they reach 100% on the Green Track Summary Score |
| Login to our [Environmental Assessment Survey](https://greenhospitality.ie/free-greensurvey/) and complete it – request a report at the end – Repeat this after programme implementation.  Record your Scores on the Green Track Assessment sheet |