



THE RIPPLE EFFECT

SEA LANES BRIGHTON'S IMPACT ON COASTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sea Lanes Brighton, launched in June 2023, is the UK's National Open Water Swimming Centre. At its heart is a 50m outdoor heated pool, surrounded by 19 local businesses focused on fitness, wellbeing, food, and drink. The project transformed a previously neglected seafront plot into a vibrant, year-round hub for physical and mental wellbeing.

INITIAL CHALLENGE

During the Sea Lanes pop-up (2018–2021), the site lacked mains utility connections, which necessitated the use of single-use packaging for food and drink. While compostable materials such as Vegware were used, disposal required specialist waste services. The challenge was to transition to a sustainable solution which focused on reusables for the permanent Sea Lanes regeneration project.

SOLUTIONS & INNOVATIONS

Sea Lanes adopted a phased, collaborative approach to sustainability:

Reusable drinkware

- Hot drinks served in Huskee cups (made from coffee husks).
- Cold drinks and alcoholic beverages served in glassware.

Reusable tableware

- Food served on metal and durable crockery.
- Shared metal cutlery provided by all vendors.

Water access

- No plastic bottled drinks sold.
- Water refill station and canned water available.

Operational controls

- Sustainability standards embedded in lease agreements and operating handbooks.

FURTHER CHALLENGES

Despite progress towards the solution, several operational and environmental challenges emerged after the launch of Sea Lanes in 2023:

- Use of single-use plastic cups and lids for smoothies and juices.
- Free sauce sachets contributing to waste.
- Pre-made iced drinks in PET ‘cans’ and juices in plastic bottles.
- Inconsistent customer bin style, waste type and signage lead to contamination and low recycling rates.
- Seasonal business peaks put a strain on waste and recycling collection and segregation.
- Room hire customers using single-use celebration items such as balloons.
- Difficulty sourcing specialist services to compost packaging.

SUMMER 2025

A comprehensive review of the food and drink area and vendors at Sea Lanes, working with Leave No Trace Brighton led to targeted interventions:

Team and culture

- Hired two General Managers (responsible for Operations and Growth & Sustainability).
- Installed the Sea Lanes values to encourage the expected behaviours.

Packaging audit and improvements

- All vendors audited for single-use plastic.
- All remaining plastic bottled drinks replaced with glass or cans.
- Overnight oats served in glass jars instead of plastic pots.
- For instances where reusables weren’t possible (e.g. takeaway orders) plant-based compostable packaging used.
- Plastic sauce sachets replaced with chargeable compostable dip pots.

Recycling and waste

- 1.4-tonne hot composting system implemented to process compostable packaging and food waste onsite, reducing transport emissions and fostering a sustainability culture.
- Recorra appointed for all recycling and waste collections to ensure all waste produced on site is recorded and the data analysed to identify further improvements.

Service adjustments

- Coffee cart introduced for takeaway customers during peak times, helping separate eat-in and takeaway formats to stop takeaway cups being used by eat-in customers
- Food vender requires table numbers to discourage takeaway orders which require single-use takeaway packaging.
- Asking customers to avoid using single-use celebration items when booking a hire room and advising them on possible reusable and sustainable alternatives.

ONGOING IMPROVEMENTS

- Regular vendor audits and training to enhance recycling compliance.
- Exploring pricing strategies to incentivise reusable cup use (e.g.charging for takeaway cups).
- Improved communication to educate customers on waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting initiatives to raise awareness and understanding, reduce bin contamination and improve recycling rates
- Continued collaboration with vendors to reduce supply chain packaging.
- Reviewing site composting and using Reccorra for surplus compostables collection.
- Reviewing investment opportunities such as a bio digester and shredder to process heavy food waste and compostable packaging on site and distribute to communities as fertiliser.

CONCLUSION

Sea Lanes Brighton demonstrates how a coastal, multi-vendor site can successfully transition from single-use dependency to a circular, sustainable model. Its approach offers a replicable blueprint for venues balancing customer experience, operational feasibility, and environmental responsibility.

