



Department for the  
**Economy**  
[www.economy-ni.gov.uk](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

**Draft**

# **Circular Economy**

**Strategy for Northern Ireland**

**Response Template**

## Draft Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland

### Response Template

#### Overview

We are consulting on the draft Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland which aims to transition our Linear Economy to a Circular Economy, where business, people and planet flourish. Adopting a circular mindset throughout society and business will be essential to a successful transition. This draft Circular Economy Strategy is a key enabler of the Department for the Economy's 10X economic vision for a decade of innovation, facilitating a sustainable, innovative and inclusive approach to economic growth, making the most of new opportunities and possibilities presented by the 4th Industrial Revolution.

We especially want to hear from those across industry, education and the public sector who will be vital in making the change happen, as well as private individuals who we want to embrace this change.

#### Why your views matter

We want you to tell us if we have accurately assessed the situation and if our proposals are right to kick start the transition to a truly Circular Economy, using a whole system approach. Feedback from this consultation will inform the final Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland and help to shape the design, remit and function of future delivery.

#### Responding to our Consultation

We would ask that you respond to the consultation using the online survey which can be accessed at the [Circular Economy Consultation page on the nidirect website consultations.nidirect.gov.uk](https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/circular-economy-consultation)

If you are unable to respond using the online consultation survey, please complete this response template and send it to: [ces@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:ces@economy-ni.gov.uk)

Before you submit your response, please read the **Privacy Notice** published along with the Consultation Documents, which explains how we will use personal information as part of the processing of responses.

## Draft Circular Economy Strategy Consultation Questions

### Personal Details

**1. Name**

Karl McGowan

**2. I am responding as**

**An individual**

**On behalf of an organisation**

**3. Name of your organisation**

Mid Ulster District Council

**4. What sector are you from?**

Agriculture

Bioeconomy

Central Government

Construction and Built Environment

Education

Local Government

Manufacturing

Representative Body

Research & Development

Services

Social Enterprise / Third & Voluntary Sector

**Other**

## Vision

By 2050 Northern Ireland will have an innovative, inclusive and competitive economy where business, people and planet flourish, with responsible production and consumption at its core.

### 5. Is this vision the right vision?

Yes

No

#### Any other comments?

Our Council is supportive of this vision and of the need to move towards a circular economic model.

It will be up to Government to put the necessary drivers in place to make this vision reality with appropriate legislation, raising awareness and making funding available for improvements in infrastructure, processing capacity, technology and skills.

## Target

According to the Circularity Gap Report, each person in Northern Ireland is consuming c.16.6 tonnes of resources per year. This is our individual material footprint. With the earth's finite supply of resources and our current production and consumption patterns, we must start to rethink our relationship with resources and reduce our demand for them. To live sustainably, the United Nations (UN) recommends that we should only be using an average of 6-8 tonnes of resources per year.

Within this strategy we have included a target to reduce our annual material footprint to 8 tonnes per person by 2050.

### 6. Do you agree with this target to halve our material footprint by 2050?

Yes

No

#### Any other comments?

Our Council is supportive of the target to reduce our annual material footprint to 8 tonnes per person by 2050. However, reducing the material footprint to 8 tonnes per person by 2050 will be a challenging target to meet and will necessitate a significant level of funding to ensure that the smooth transition towards a circular economy.

Targets will need to be underpinned by robust legislation and penalties or incentives. Social innovations and technological developments will also be required to reduce material resource use to sustainable levels.

## Proposals for Change

### Develop and implement a programme to support and promote behaviour change

Our behaviours and individual choices about what, where and how we purchase stuff, how long we use it for, whether we can reuse or repair it, and when and how we dispose of it, will ultimately determine if Northern Ireland can successfully transform to a Circular Economy.

A recent report issued by the House of Lords 'In our Hands' urged Ministers to lead a public campaign using all government levers to guide public behaviour change in order to stop biodiversity loss and achieve net zero.

Changing mindsets, business models and developing new products and services is going to be a complicated task, especially for Northern Ireland, which has many SMEs with limited time and resource.

This level of intervention is required to transform our relationship with resources.

#### 7. What efforts do you think government should make to promote behavioural change?

**Please put the following in order of priority.**

**(Ranking scale 1 = most preferred / 4 = least preferred)**

Provide greater transparency and clarity on what government is doing to show commitment and create momentum.

Provide information and tools to increase awareness and help change attitudes.

Use regulatory and financial incentives to increase affordability and availability of sustainable options.

Provide or adapt physical infrastructure to help make it easier for people to change behaviours e.g. recycling centres, refill stations in supermarkets and bottle banks.

## Create clusters and networks to raise awareness and facilitate collaboration

Many of the barriers to circularity will not be addressed without the utilisation of existing and new clusters and networks which will support industry to research, design, test and deliver transformative solutions.

Clusters are a geographic collection of interconnected companies producing similar or related goods/services that are innovation-orientated, seeking to benefit from integration across businesses.

Networks are an alliance of organisations (public/private or other) seeking to work together to achieve an economic goal, this could be within or outside a cluster. Networks may involve organisations within the same sector or across sectors which belong to the same value chain.

### 8. What existing clusters and networks could be utilised to deliver transformative solutions for increased circularity?

The Sustainable Development Forum is a network of public body officers working to promote and achieve sustainability in Northern Ireland. This network, managed by Sustainable NI, could have a significant role in setting the framework of needs, challenges, opportunities and solutions that the public sector can encounter across the transition to a zero-carbon economy and circularity. It could also establish a linkage with the private sector by facilitating and promoting regional partnerships to support and enhance local goods and internal manufacturing to be adopted, used and reused across the country.

### 9. What clusters and networks do you think will need to be established to maximise resource use?

The reuse potential within Northern Ireland, is still underdeveloped. Reuse clusters can help promote reuse uptake by having an online 'one stop shop', making the process of finding and procuring suitable reuse products straightforward and easy. It would also be beneficial to establish a network of 'Libraries of tools' and 'Repair Cafes', charities and social enterprises similar to the Circular Communities Scotland.

The Reuse Consortium hosted by Circular Communities Scotland offers local authorities and housing associations easy access to a range of quality assured reuse furniture and household goods from local providers, without having to go through a tendering process. Benefits of the Consortium model are: - cost savings to the purchaser, a reduction in landfill and carbon emissions by keeping products within a closed system, and supporting community wealth building.

## Embed Circular Economy principles in public procurement

In Northern Ireland, public sector procurement has buying power in excess of £3 billion per annum. This provides strong potential to shape markets and behaviours through the development of specifications and contract management clauses to retain the value of materials for example purchasing refurbished computers or supporting leasing business models. This creates opportunity to influence the maintenance of the public estate, supply contracts including food and waste as well as delivery of infrastructure and capital projects.

### 10. How do you think public sector procurement can best influence the behaviours of industry to increase circularity of resources?

Public sector procurement can influence the behaviours of industry to increase circularity of resources by embedding circularity principles within the contract specification and perhaps include a separate scoring criteria specifically for 'circularity'.

If the contract is for goods rather than services, then the percentage of recycled materials used in production could be considered or establish a 'take-back' agreement with suppliers taking the product back at the end of its use to reuse, remanufacture, or recycle it.

A standard for 'circularity' which considers energy use etc might be one way of enabling the commercial sector to comply with circular economy principles. Organizations will require authoritative guidance on circular economy (CE) principles, strategies, implementation, and monitoring.

## Create and support platforms and hubs to share goods and materials

To improve the use of resources and retain their value, people and businesses need to know what is available, where it is and what condition it is in. Information is required for people and business to make choices about what they want to access. This can be provided through online platforms for typical fast moving consumer products e.g. the Olio platform which is dedicated to helping stop food waste within the UK. It can also be provided for industrial materials through established platforms such as International Synergies. We want to create more platforms and hubs to share products and materials.

### 11. What sorts of platforms do you think would be most useful in the future to enable people and business to share and reuse products and materials?

A collaborative, digital platform to share reuse products and materials which is well designed and easy to use.

Such a system could be developed based around the experiences and lessons learned of existing platform providers, including those from within the commercial, public and third sectors. The quality of the products and materials available would have to be of a sufficiently high standard and therefore robust quality control is essential in building confidence within the market of those looking to acquire products / materials. Pricing of products / materials would have to be competitive.

## **Maximise the value of materials locally**

When products and materials are kept in use, it retains the maximum value of those materials and components, reducing the overall demand for material extraction to make new products. We can do this by increasing the repair and reuse sector, doing more with natural bio-based materials locally available as well as growing our reprocessing sector.

The European Commission established the 'right to repair' for consumers and similar regulations have been introduced for GB.

The 'right to repair' regulation requires manufacturers of household appliances such as dishwashers, washing and drying machines, refrigerators and televisions to ensure their products are repairable for at least ten years through providing repair manuals and making parts available.

### **12. What are the most effective tools that government could use to encourage and facilitate business and society to extend the life of products and services to keep materials and resources in use for longer?**

The 'right to repair' law in the UK has excluded many appliances from the list of repairable items, and the NI government could work to expand this list to more items. New devices now must have repair manuals so that consumers can fix their appliances. However, only professional repair companies can access some manuals and spare parts. The NI government could support and implement community initiatives allowing these items to be available to repair cafes after an approved certification or basic training. There is no cap on how much manufacturers can charge for spare parts, and VAT still needs to be removed to reduce the cost of professional repairs, so the new law does not make the repair more financially attractive to consumers. It also allows 'bundling' multiple components together so that the whole bundle must be bought, even if only one small part is needed. The NI Government should support professionals and non-professionals to learn new skills by investing in vocational training and CPD.



### Establish a Circular Economy funding programme

To unlock benefits at scale, we need to create economic incentives that enable Circular Economy solutions to succeed.

#### 13. Which of the following interventions should be a priority focus for government funding?

**Please put the following in order of priority.**

**(1= highest priority and 9 = lowest priority)**

- |                                |   |                                   |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="text" value="1"/> | ▼ | Research and development          |
| <input type="text" value="6"/> | ▼ | Secondary material markets        |
| <input type="text" value="2"/> | ▼ | Circular supply chains            |
| <input type="text" value="9"/> | ▼ | Digitisation and technology       |
| <input type="text" value="7"/> | ▼ | Job creation                      |
| <input type="text" value="4"/> | ▼ | Waste reduction                   |
| <input type="text" value="5"/> | ▼ | Carbon emissions reduction        |
| <input type="text" value="3"/> | ▼ | Reuse and repair                  |
| <input type="text" value="8"/> | ▼ | Environmentally focused solutions |

**Further comments? Please enter response in box below**

The 'Right to Repair' law and other upcoming new regulations will embed some of these interventions throughout and across society, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), Deposit Return Scheme (DRS).

**14. What funding instruments do you consider would be most appropriate in years 1-3? Please put the following in order of priority.**

**(Ranking scale 1 = most preferred / 3 = least preferred)**

3	Loans
1	Grants and subsidies
2	Blended finance (i.e. a mix of repayable and non-repayable finance)

**15. Do you have any further comments to make on funding instruments that could be used to enable Circular Economy solutions to succeed?**

A balanced, fair approach is required that does not negatively impact upon local authorities in promoting circular economy principles on the journey to a circular economy.

A significant level of funding will be required for this to happen. The public sector alone cannot fund the climate transition, and it should encourage any interest in capital investment from the private sector within public control.

**Create a regulatory framework that enables circular solutions to become the norm**

Regulations, taxation and enforcement can further reduce waste and improve resource efficiency.

For example, the European Commission rules to establish the 'right to repair' for consumers. These regulations will affect the design, manufacturing and distribution of all applicable goods in Northern Ireland and will facilitate greater reuse and repair of such products.

**16. Considering the EU right to repair regulation, what other regulatory tools do you consider government can use to stimulate greater circulation of materials?**

The promotion of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) across all waste streams and not just for packaging or WEEE (for example - textiles in fashion design) .

Economic incentives - encourage the production of goods which use a defined minimum level (%) of recycled materials, similar in scope to the current plastics packaging tax: -

Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT) came into force in the UK on 1 April 2022. It applies at a rate of £200/tonne on plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled plastic, manufactured or imported into the UK (including packaging on goods which are imported).

## Deliver a Skills programme to support a Just Transition

Unless we plan, anticipate and resource for the transition to a Circular Economy, skills shortages could derail long-term goals for circularity and jobs growth.

As we progress into the 4th Industrial Revolution, some jobs will be lost in traditional sectors and the demand for new skills will increase, for example the demand for diesel engineers will decrease while the demand for those skilled in electric vehicles will increase.

### 17. What three skills do you consider will be most critical to supporting the Circular Economy?

#### Skill 1

Transition phase - a 'circular economy expert' could assist companies in analysing their processes and identify closed-cycle opportunities like the reduction of raw materials, use of renewable energy, and recycling of byproducts. This will require a broad skillset range, including knowledge of life cycle analysis principles, energy systems, sustainable development, production and resource management.

#### Skill 2

Specific skills that could be critical are engineering, environmental and design skills to ensure new product design embeds relevant circular economy principles within the product. For example, the use of less carbon intensive materials, more robust materials or utilising recycled materials for production.

#### Skill 3

Recycling and repair skills to enable the large increase in this industry essential to the circular economy transition.

## Future delivery

### Delivery of Circular Economy Strategy

**18. Do you consider that government should play a role in assisting the transition to greater circularity through a dedicated Circular Economy delivery body?**

Yes

No

Don't Know

**19. What do you think a Circular Economy delivery body should look like? e.g. government led or a public-private partnership.**

A separate public body may give greater focus to the delivery of the circular economy strategy but is likely to increase the costs to the public purse. A separate unit within an existing government department would have the necessary governance and oversight procedures to be able to adequately assist with the transition to greater circularity.

The establishment of a network of delivery partners (private and voluntary sector) supporting the government may also be beneficial.

**Please provide a rationale for your answer.**