

A People's Circular Economy for Wales

The initiative

Since 2012, the Welsh government have been working towards embedding Circular Economy (CE) approaches into policy and practice. Early activities included working with communities, businesses, and service providers to reduce household waste and increase rates of recycling. These schemes have been praised for contributing to high recycling rates in Wales (63%), which is the highest rate in the UK, second in Europe and 3rd globally in terms of proportion of waste recycled. From 2019, this has moved beyond recycling to embed CE into policy and practice in a range of settings and is now co-ordinated within a dedicated team within the Welsh Government with a national remit.

A joined up approach

The Welsh Government is partnering with a wide range of organisations across public, private and the third sector to lead this programme. The focus of activity over the past 18 months has been on:

- A wide scale consultation and awareness raising campaign;
- Connecting with and finding ways to underpin other national strategies (see figure 1);
- Making funding available to support CE projects; and
- Developing a dedicated national CE strategy, 'Beyond Recycling'.



Picture 1: Circular Economy Wales Community Fridge

The scale of the programme

In 2019/20 the national Circular Economy Fund was established to make over £43 million of funding available to businesses, community groups, publicly funded bodies including Local Authorities, universities and research groups to develop a diverse range of innovative CE projects. As part of this cross cutting national programme, £6.5 million was made available for businesses in 2019. This was bolstered in 2020 with additional funding and support for business and community projects as part of wider COVID relief and the country's plans to Build Back Better.

How a circular economy is being delivered

Engagement and consultation.

In December 2019, the Welsh Government launched a consultation on a new CE strategy called 'Beyond Recycling'. The consultation involved two main activities :

- Around 40 face-to-face events including workshops, open invitation sessions and regional events tailored to specific audiences such as young people, local authorities, businesses, the waste sector, environmental groups, regulators, and academics.
- Online awareness raising through social media and networks to ensure the engagement of citizens, communities, and stakeholders across Wales and beyond. The online consultation received 220 responses via a web survey platform.

As well as raising awareness of the potential for and benefits of CE approaches beyond increasing recycling, the consultation sought ideas and positive contributions to move Wales towards becoming a 'zero waste, net zero carbon nation that uses its fair share of resources and seizes the economic opportunities from the transition to a circular economy.'

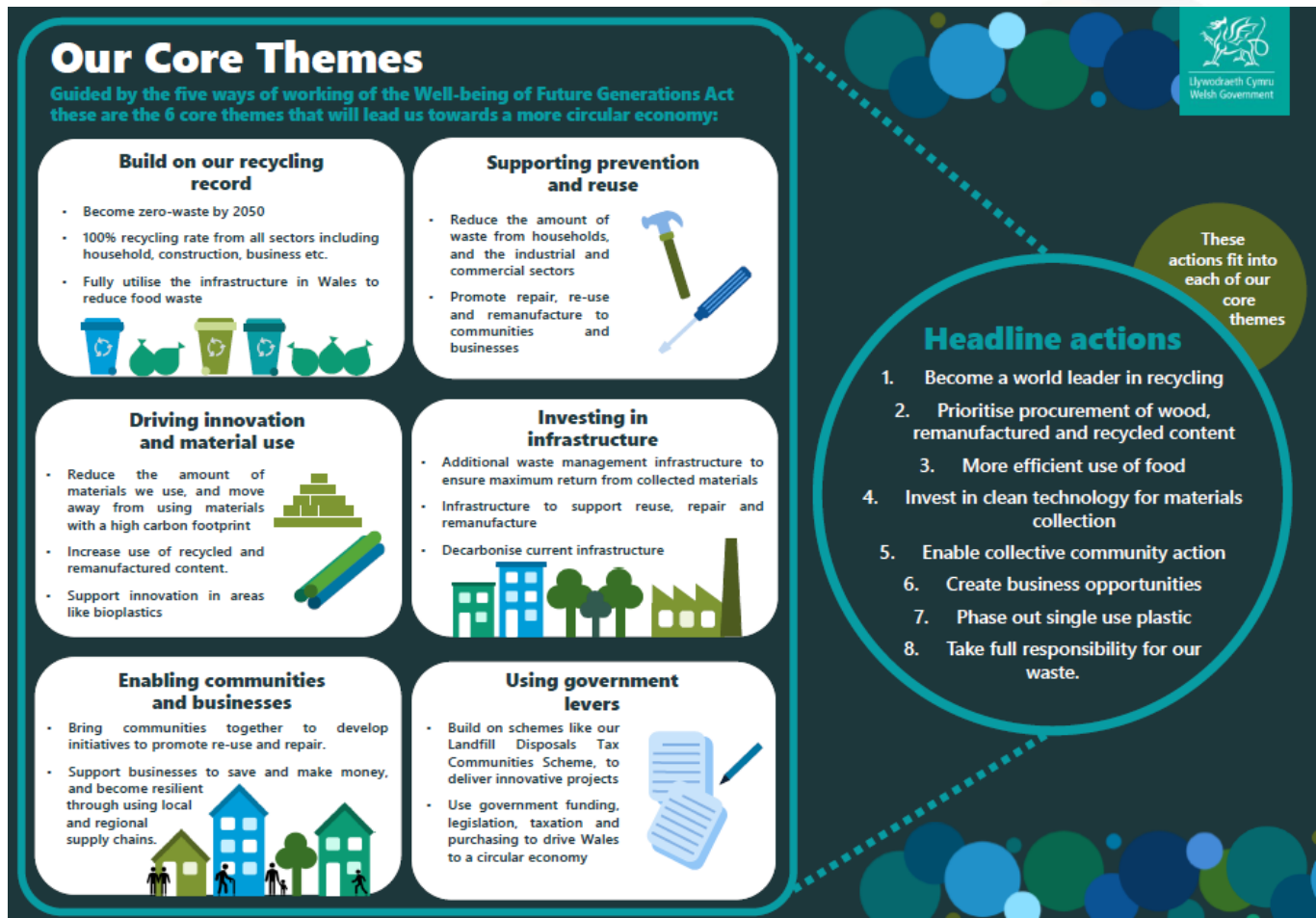


Figure 1: Beyond Recycling Strategy core themes

A number of recommendations emerged from the consultation which have been built into the Beyond Recycling strategy. These are:

- Actions towards a CE should be implemented consistently across Welsh regions, Welsh Government departments, and where practicable, integrated with wider action. Actions should be considered and embedded in all Welsh Government policy, rather than siloed in individual directorates.
- Improved access to necessary infrastructure, education, resource, guidance and specific CE support is paramount.
- Support should be offered across all sectors private, public, and voluntary - to alter current practices that are not in line with a CE approach, involving assistance developing solutions and innovative designs.
- Consistent monitoring and review of actions, including significant use of data, is needed, as well as definitive targets.
- Targets and guidance are insufficient on their own. Where necessary, new legislation

should be introduced to both encourage change and penalise non-compliance.

- The strategy must include details of how the necessary cultural shift towards a CE will be promoted., which works on road and transport optimization to cut greenhouse emissions .

The Beyond Recycling Strategy

'A People's Circular Economy is the best way of describing the Welsh Government's Circular Economy ambitions when the Wellbeing of Future Generations is applied, where people wellbeing and community resilience is furthered in the wake of COVID19.'

The strategic, national level approach in Wales is part of the country's commitment to fully becoming a CE and achieving a zero waste target by 2050. Figure 1 highlights the core themes developed in the strategy, and details actions (ongoing and future) designed to bring about the change.

A key feature of the strategy is that it is integral to Wales' wider economic and cultural plans and strategic priorities including:

- Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales;
- Prosperity for All: the national strategy;
- Natural Resources Policy;
- Well-being of Future Generations Act;
- Prosperity for All: Economic Action Plan;
- Innovation Wales;
- Third Sector Scheme;
- The Wales Procurement Policy Statement.



Frugalpac received funding and business support as part of the Circular Economy Fund. They used this funding to accelerate their development of an innovative paper wine bottle made from recycled material, build a supply chain in Wales, and start to develop the marketing and business development plans for the product. The bottle is 400g lighter than a glass equivalent which makes it cheaper and less carbon intensive to produce and transport (Frugalpac.com).

The Circular Economy Fund for Businesses

WRAP Cymru is the Welsh Government's delivery partner for its £6.5million Circular Economy Fund. This funding is designed to provide finance, guidance and support for businesses across the country. It has supported a range of activities from the cutting edge 'Remakerspace' at Cardiff University which provides product design support for businesses to embed CE principles into their products, to a local community repair shed in Llangollen for people to extend the life of household goods.

The fund has been central to enabling more businesses and social enterprises to set up in Wales. This in turn is helping CE across Wales to grow, supporting innovation and creating good quality jobs.

Successes to date

The success of the approach to embedding CE in Wales is underpinned by three main factors:

- The National level, joined up, strategic approach with a Ministerial lead;
- High levels of public and community engagement through partnerships with different organisations. Communities are being supported with guidance and encouraged to build on their successes (e.g. in dramatically increasing rates of recycling) to realise place based benefits;
- Well-funded with opportunities for flexible funding through business grants as well as funding for public and third sector organisations who are well positioned to deliver change.

Emerging benefits

Over and above the specific positive impacts and benefits of individual projects supported by CE activity, a range of economic, social and environmental benefits are emerging as a result of this national, integrated approach. In summary these are:

- Increased awareness of CE with Wales being highlighted in national and international circles as an example of good practice;
- Businesses and social enterprises are supported to innovate across manufacturing, service, and community sectors (see Frugalpac and Circular Economy Wales examples);
- Drastically improved recycling rates in Wales (63%).



Economi Gylchol Cymru - Circular Economy Wales (CEW)

Circular Economy Wales CIC was set up with government funding, to raise awareness of CE, advocate for increased and strategic funding, provide support for businesses and communities, and connect organisations working across geographies and sectors in Wales. They work closely with partners across the country including CIWM Wales and Welsh Co-operatives to help 'build an economy where community is centre stage'. Two current programmes are:

- People's circular economy: Connecting businesses and community groups and public sector organisations to support Wales' communities to embed circular models around resources, food and community wealth.
- Community Fridge: Working with Hubbub, CEW is setting up Community Fridges to expand their role in reducing food waste and food poverty in Wales.

CEW report benefits include 24,687 tonnes of material collected by the Reuse & Recycling membership section, and 1,348 people in work or volunteering in CE roles. This shows the potential of the circular economy in reducing unemployment levels in Wales.

Challenges and how they are being addressed

The Beyond Recycling strategy notes two significant challenges which may impact the country's ability to meet its CE targets: Brexit and COVID. Measures are underway to reduce the impact of these issues, these are:

1. Brexit and the Internal Market Bill. The challenge here is twofold; the impacts of Brexit on the wider economy in Wales, and the mechanics of the Internal Market Bill which make some resource recovery activity with former EU partners more difficult. The Welsh Government is challenging the Bill in UK Parliament on environmental grounds.
2. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on communities and businesses across Wales, and moving forward, there will be competing needs for resources. Additional funding has already been made available to businesses and public sector bodies, and widespread public awareness of potential benefits of CE has sparked some innovations e.g. increase in online networking events (CEW).

Next steps

The Welsh Government and their partners including WRAP Cymru, recognise that shifting to a CE in Wales has the potential to:

- Make resource savings with a value of up to £2 billion for the Welsh economy.
- Create up to 30,000 good quality, green, and local jobs, especially in regions with high levels of unemployment.
- Make Wales more resilient to the rising costs and decreasing amounts of materials.

W: <https://circulareconomy.leeds.ac.uk/>

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