

CIH Northern Ireland response to consultation on the Draft Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland

This is a response to the consultation by the Department for the Economy, regarding how we transition our linear economy to a circular economy.

Comments

CIH Northern Ireland welcomes the circular economy strategy as a way of addressing the imbalance between societal, environmental and economic concerns for current and future generations. As we elevate sustainability, a just transition means that meeting people's housing needs must not fall behind.

CIH is the professional body for people who work in housing. We have a diverse membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world. We have over 500 individual members in Northern Ireland.

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.

Q. Is this the right vision?

Yes

No

Any other comments?

None.

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.

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

Yes

No

Any other comments?

Moving to a more circular economy will help to address the imbalance between societal, environmental and economic concerns and will therefore provide a sustainable future for current generations and those who follow. However, to ensure a just transition, meeting people's housing needs must not fall behind. Progress will need to be seen across all of the strategy's proposals and, importantly, the strategy must be sufficiently funded to take it forward.

The housing sector can make a valuable contribution by providing a pipeline of work that facilitates green skills development. It can also work to retain the value of resources, for example by tackling empty houses, retrofitting homes and placing greater emphasis on heritage-led redevelopment over demolition.

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.

Q. 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)

- 3 Provide greater transparency and clarity on what government is doing to show commitment and create momentum.
- 2 Provide information and tools to increase awareness and help change attitudes.
- 1 Use regulatory and financial incentives to increase affordability and availability of sustainable options.
- 4 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.

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

Existing networks that can be utilised in pursuit of circularity include planning, construction, architects, the built environment and housing management. All these disciplines have well established networks in Northern Ireland.

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

A cluster involving advanced manufacturing and engineering will be essential in driving the re-use of building materials and components, thereby decreasing our material footprint. Access to more, high quality secondary and regenerative materials that are cost-competitive will help to reduce demand for virgin materials. Designers, manufacturers, suppliers and contractors will all need to be involved from across the supply chain.

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.

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

The scale of public sector procurement provides an opportunity to drive circularity. A criterion for circularity in public procurement could be introduced to help create

demand for more circular products and purchasing arrangements. In the context of the built environment, it could help to support the renovation of more older buildings in the public estate, instead of demolition.

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.

Q. 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?

We would support platforms incorporating material passports, containing data on production, maintenance, reprocessing, refurbishing or recycling of the materials and giving them a value for future recovery and reuse.

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.

Q. 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?

Consumer protection should be applied to manufacturers, suppliers, and installers of low-carbon home technologies and installations. There has been little customer support or parts availability for many low/zero-carbon system installations. This limits the opportunity to roll out the technology at scale, and in some cases has contributed to their removal and return to traditional systems. Furthermore, it creates difficulty in maintaining systems long term. Systems of concern include heat pumps and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR), but also affected is whole house retrofit including internal and external wall insulation.

Establish a Circular Economy funding programme

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

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

- 2 Research and development
- 1 Secondary material markets
- 6 Circular supply chains
- 7 Digitisation and technology
- 5 Job creation
- 4 Waste reduction
- 3 Carbon emissions reduction
- 9 Reuse and repair
- 8 Environmentally focused solutions

Further comments? Please enter response in box below

Access to more, high quality secondary and regenerative materials that are cost-competitive will help to reduce demand for virgin materials.

Q. 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)

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

Funding will be central to stimulating system change and also maintaining social progress. Requiring the use of secondary materials in construction that are neither quality nor cost-competitive will adversely affect the safety and affordability of people's homes.

The fiscal framework should also facilitate change. We would support the introduction of some tax relief for retrofitting existing buildings or using recycled content in buildings.

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.

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

The greatest contribution of the built environment to the circularity agenda will be through better use of existing homes, namely retrofitting stock and bringing empty houses and derelict buildings back into use, plus prioritising restoration and redevelopment over demolition. This will reduce the amount of pressure on the need for new homes, which is already increasing due to our growing and ageing population and falling household sizes. That said, building regulations could play a role in stimulating greater circulation of materials in new homes.

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.

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

Skill 1

Demand planning / supply chain management

Skill 2

Engineering

Skill 3

Marketing

Future delivery

Delivery of Circular Economy Strategy

Q. 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

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

The important thing is ensuring there is a senior responsible owner, and that work is carried out across various parts of the public and private sectors with appropriate buy-in and enabling support of law, policy and finance. It could be delivered through an existing body or through a dedicated body, provided there is appropriate rationale for doing so.

Please provide a rationale for your answer.

As above.



About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple - to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support, and knowledge they need to be brilliant. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world. Further information is available at: www.cih.org.

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