



The Royal Society
of Ulster Architects

The draft response of the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) to the consultation on the draft Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland.

13 March 2023

Introduction

The Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) is the professional body for architects based in Northern Ireland. We have 870 chartered members and over 300 student members. RSUA strives to enhance the region's built environment for the benefit of all through the promotion of architecture.

RSUA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for the Economy consultation on the draft Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Vision

5. Is this vision the right vision?

Yes

No

Any other comments?

RSUA agrees with the vision of the Draft Circular Economy Strategy but believes it is something policy and people should be aiming for now and not just in 2050. RSUA believes that the vision as presented is quite broad and a pleasant aspiration. Instead, RSUA recommends that the vision would benefit from providing specific commitments or goals.

Target

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

Yes

No

Any other comments?

RSUA agrees with the target to halve our material footprint by 2050. Figure 2 (pg7 of the main report) is vague regarding what exactly contributes to the current material footprint estimate and what changes to reduce the current material footprint to the recommended means for individuals. As a result, it is difficult to consume the information properly. RSUA requests a clearer breakdown of what contributes to the current material footprint, a breakdown of what changes are needed to reduce the current material footprint to the recommended and what these changes mean for individuals. This information helps the reader understand their role and will be beneficial in changing underlying behaviour.

Proposals for Change

7. What efforts do you think government should make to promote behavioural change? Please rank. (Ranking scale 1 = most preferred / 4 = least preferred)

- Provide greater transparency and clarity on what government is doing to show commitment and create momentum **4**
- Provide information and tools to increase awareness and help change attitudes **3**
- Use regulatory and financial incentives to increase affordability and availability of sustainable options **1**
- Provide or adapt physical infrastructure to help make it easier for people to change behaviours eg. Recycling centres, refill stations in supermarkets and bottle banks **2**

Create clusters and networks to raise awareness and facilitate collaboration

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

Please enter response in the box below

RSUA recommends utilising a service ran by Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland called ReStore which upcycles and recycles new and used building and home improvement materials received from donations by selling these at a lower cost (<https://www.habitatni.co.uk/joinus/habitat-restore>). Items accepted include hardware and tools, timber, bring, doors, flooring, paint and wallpaper, kitchens, bathrooms, and much more. RSUA believes that the service Habitat for Humanity provides could grow if advertised to a mainstream audience and different sectors with support from the government. For example, upscaling the existing services to allow donations of excess materials from a wider range of sectors such as the construction sector will provide opportunities for both individuals and companies of varying sizes to reuse a wider range of materials.

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

Please enter response in the box below

It is not uncommon for recycling sites and redistribution sites in Northern Ireland to not be located close to each other. RSUA recommends that clusters and networks should be established that locates recycling sites nearer the redistribution sites or provide these facilities onsite at recycling sites. If

recycling collected is transported just once to a site that can sort and redistribute the recycling it will remove the need to transport recycling collected and cut out the 'middle man'.

RSUA believes that the government would benefit from providing greater transparency on what happens to the waste we recycle. Establishing greater transparency and providing these facts would improve public opinion on the benefits of recycling. For example, Belfast's 'City Matters' magazine could be an outlet that Councils can adapt for their individual area to disseminate and update their residents on this information.

Embed Circular Economy principles in public procurement

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

Please enter response in the box below

RSUA believes that a way public sector procurement can influence the behaviours of industry to increase circularity would be to insist or give preference to tender bids that include circularity resource measures in the PQQ or ITT stages of public sector tenders. This means if industry wants to win tenders for public sector procurements, they will have to display increased circularity resource measures otherwise they will not be considered.

Create and support platforms and hubs to share goods 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?

Please enter response in the box below

Online platforms are a very effective and widely used method of getting information, products, and news advertised to a large population.

RSUA mentioned above in the answer to Question 8, that the existing business model run by Habitat for Humanity called ReStore incentivises the reuse of DIY materials and furniture to people by selling these items at a reduced cost. Restore currently uses word of mouth and limited online platforms to reach an audience. RSUA recommends that such existing networks which add value to materials typically seen as waste would benefit from increased advertising on online and media platforms.

RSUA believes if this idea was adapted and advertised to a larger business scale encompassing the construction industry it will encourage companies to donate extra materials or excess materials which are otherwise being thrown out. RSUA believes this will enable and encourage businesses and individuals to reuse a range of products and materials with the incentive of lower costs.

Maximise the value of materials locally

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?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Environmentally focused solutions

14. What funding instruments do you consider would be most appropriate in years 1-3? Please rank. (Ranking scale 1 = most preferred / 3 = least preferred)

- Loans **3**
- Grants & Subsidies **1**
- Blended finance (i.e, a mix of repayable and non-repayable finance) **2**

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

Please enter response in the box below

As seen in a pilot study in the Republic of Ireland, RSUA recommends that the use of building passports could be a useful way to help Circular Economy solutions succeed. As a form of tracking existing building stock progress. Similarly, RSUA believes the increased electrification of building fuels as a solution to move away from traditional oil and gas, will help support Circular Economy success. As it creates an easier and efficient way to monitor housing levels usage and carbon emissions.

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

Please enter response in the box below

RSUA recommends government should go beyond 'right to repair' to 'presumption of repair'. RSUA recognises it can be difficult to apply to the private market but could be applied in the public sector. For example, where an item may have previously been replaced the government could introduce the 'presumption to repair' where it must be demonstrated that an item is irreparable before it can be replaced with a new one.

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

Skill 1 Construction skills in relation buildings, both new and retrofit using greater circularity.

Skill 2 Electrical and digital repairs

Skill 3 Large and small scale recycling logistics, sorting and reuse e.g. construction waste recycling

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

RSUA agrees that the government should play a role in assisting the transition to greater circularity. Northern Ireland already has a dedicated Climate Act champion and potentially in the future the One-Stop-Shop Implementation Plan. Meaning if the government were to introduce a dedicated Circular Economy delivery body it would be essential to see an organogram of how these bodies sit and work alongside each other. RSUA believes if there is a dedicated Circular Economy delivery body it should be one that should focus on how to make greater circularity happen in Northern Ireland.

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

Please enter response in the box below

RSUA recommends that if there was a Circular Economy delivery body it must be government led.

Please provide a rationale for your answer.

RSUA believes private delivery will likely not happen without a personal passion on the part of the directors or an effort to extract maximum profit. RSUA believes that government should view the move towards a circular economy as an opportunity to grow sustainable development. RSUA recommends focusing on using tax and financial incentives, legislation, and enforcement to ensure compliance. Government must ensure that any goal of the Circular Economy delivery body is considered within wider UN and Global strategy because Northern Ireland is too interdependent to make effective change alone.

To view the consultation document, click [here](#).

To view the consultation survey questions, click [here](#).

Contact

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