

A Community-Based Circular Economy in Carlow:

Establishing a Community-Based Circular Economy - Baseline and Pathways for Future Development

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List of Acronyms

ADI	Anti-Dumping Initiative
CCDP	Carlow County Development Partnership
CCEN	County Carlow Environmental Network
CE	Circular Economy
CEAP	Circular Economy Action Plan (European Commission)
CE-IRE	Circular Economy Ireland
CLECP	Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
CSO	Central Statistics Office (Ireland)
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Ireland)
DIY	Do It Yourself
DMC	Domestic Material Consumption
DRS	Deposit Return Scheme
EEA	European Environment Agency
EIB	European Investment Bank
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (Ireland)
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ESB	Electricity Supply Board (Ireland)
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FRC	Family Resource Centre
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
LGFA	Ladies Gaelic Football Association
MFAs	Material Flow Accounts
MSD	Merck Sharp & Dohme
PAT-tested	Portable Appliance Testing
PPN	Public Participation Network
SBCI	Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland
SDG / UNSDG	Sustainable Development Goal / United Nations Sustainable Development Goal
SETU	South East Technological University
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UN	United Nations
WEEE	Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment
WERLA	Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities

Foreword



I am delighted to welcome this community-based circular report for Carlow, which provides a valuable opportunity to highlight the crucial role our communities play in advancing circularity.

A circular economy is about making the most of what we have—keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible instead of throwing them away. It's about people working together locally to make the system effective and inclusive. It means repairing, reusing, sharing, and recycling so that less ends up in landfill and more stays in our community. It also starts with smart design—creating products that last longer, can be easily repaired, and are made from materials that can be reused again and again.

Carlow County Council's commitment to community-led circularity not only enhances local quality of life but also plays a vital role in delivering Ireland's national Circular Economy Strategy. By grounding policy in local reality, these initiatives help meet legal obligations under the Circular Economy Act, advance targets set in the Waste Action Plan and contribute to Ireland's ambition to close the circularity gap by 2030. This collaborative approach ensures that national goals are achieved through practical, community-driven action.

Across Carlow, communities are quietly shaping a brighter future by practicing circular economy principles—like repairing, reusing, and sharing—often without realising these everyday actions are part of a bigger circular system. This study was conducted to capture what is happening across Carlow, celebrate these efforts, and create opportunities for everyone to get involved. By learning from each other, identifying gaps, and working together to fill them, we can build a stronger, more connected circular community.

The real strength of a circular economy lies in the power of our community. Community circular economy is all about working together in ways that feel fair and practical for everyday life. When we share ideas, resources, and skills, we create solutions that fit our own community, find innovative outcomes that are fair, practical, and rooted in local life and make sustainability something everyone can be part of. Community involvement ensures that everyone has access, including vulnerable groups, older people, and those with limited resources. It's not just environmental—it's social.

A circular economy helps Carlow achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals by reducing waste, protecting resources, and creating fair opportunities for all. When our community repairs, reuses, and shares, we're not just cutting waste—we're building a healthier planet and stronger local connections.

The journey toward a circular Carlow is more than a policy—it's a shared promise. Every repair, every act of reuse, every idea exchanged brings us closer to a future where nothing is wasted and everyone belongs. Together, we have the power to turn ambition into action and create a community that thrives—fair, resilient, and sustainable for generations to come.

Cllr Ken Murnane, Cathaoirleach of Carlow County Council

1. Introduction

County Carlow is home to a growing wave of community action focused on sustainability, reuse, and reducing waste. In summer 2025, Carlow County Council commissioned this research to map these efforts, celebrate their success, and plan for a more circular future. The aim of this research is to compile an inventory of community activities that support the circular economy. These can include repairing, sharing, reusing, and recycling. The research also seeks to document best practices and learnings in County Carlow.

The specific objectives of this research are to:

- Establish a baseline of community circular economy in Carlow, including who is involved, what is being done, where it is happening, and how it is resourced;
- Identify best practices in communities that are effective and sustainable;
- Explore public perceptions and understanding of the circular economy;
- Assess opportunities and barriers to expanding circular economy activities in communities; and
- Recommend strategies and actions to support, develop, and promote community circular economy practices across Carlow.

Carlow County Council is already supporting the circular economy through its policies, funding, and initiatives. It is envisaged that this research will provide Carlow County Council and other agencies with clear signposts to further support and promote these vital local activities.

In order to establish the practices that currently pertain across the county, this report includes a map (with a hyperlink to an interactive interface) that shows the range and distribution of community-based circular economy projects and initiatives. This report also presents four case studies that showcase good practices and contribute to a sharing of learnings and other insights. In addition, this report includes findings from a survey, among community groups, in relation to their knowledge and perceptions of the circular economy, their experiences to date and the policies, activities and supports they would like to see.

1.1 Rationale

Although many individuals, households, groups and organisations have been engaged in circular economy activities for many years, the term ‘circular economy’ is not universally understood, and there are shortcomings in relation to information about it. According to the Government of Ireland, “The circular economy is an alternative to today’s ‘take-

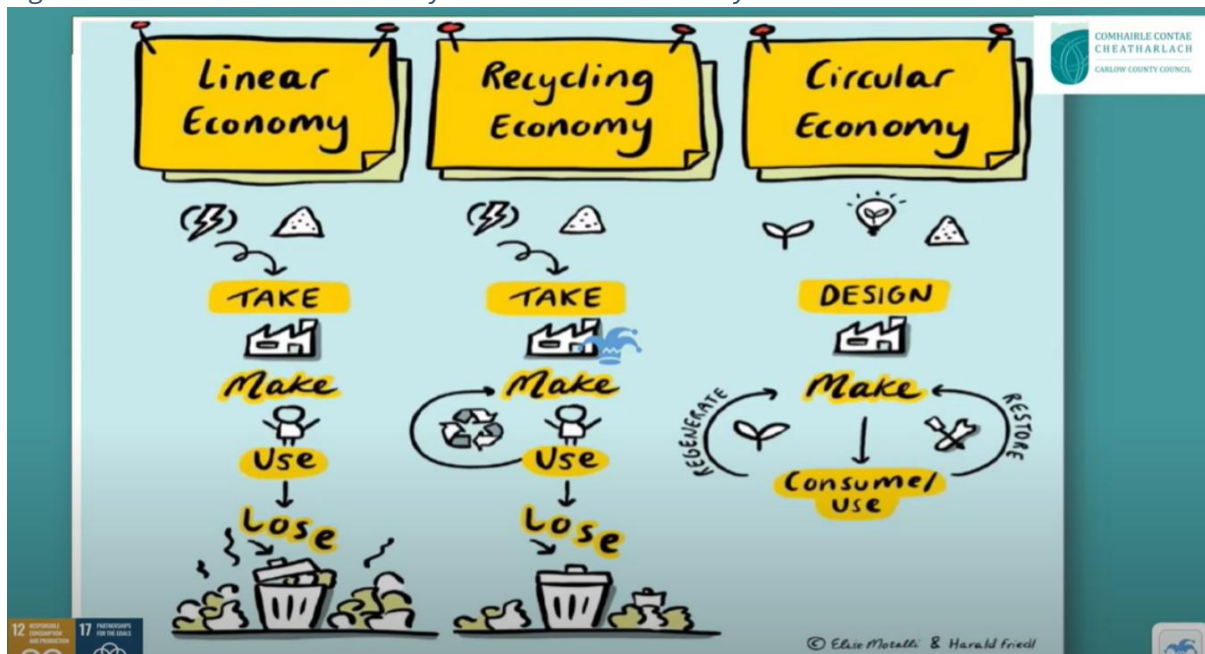
make-waste' economy where great quantities of natural resources are extracted to make things that may be used only once before being thrown away.¹” The government also states that policy is moving towards achieving a 'circular economy', where resources are re-used or recycled as much as possible, and the generation of waste is minimised.

Carlow County Council recognises that the circular economy is integral to the county’s sustainability. It complements and adds value to the local authority's wider agenda in respect of

- waste reduction and minimisation;
- local supply chains and local economic development;
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other degradation of the environment;
- and
- positive community-level and individual action.

A recent webinar hosted by Carlow County Council outlined how circular economy practices represent progress away from the traditional linear economy, and the associated resource exploitation and excess waste. Moreover, the circular economy goes beyond the recycling economy, as that also generates waste. Instead, the circular economy avoids resource loss, and it ensures that materials are re-used and / or repurposed, as the following image (Figure 1) illustrates.

Figure 1: From the linear economy to the circular economy



¹ [Policy Information on the Circular Economy](#). Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment. Updated on: 30 June 2025.

Source: Carlow County Council

As this webinar and other initiatives by Carlow County Council attest, the development of the circular economy represents local-level delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), most notably Goals 12 and 17:

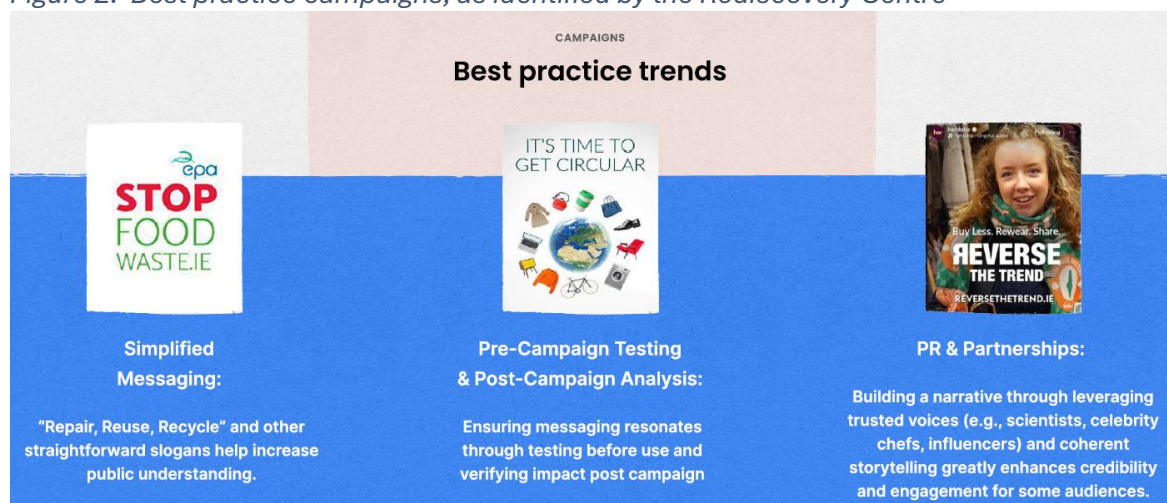
- UNSDG 12, "Responsible Consumption and Production," focuses on achieving sustainable patterns of consumption and production by using services and products efficiently, reducing waste, and minimising use of toxic materials.
- UNSDG 17, "Partnerships for the Goals," aims to revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development by bringing together governments, the private sector, civil society, and the multilateral system to achieve the other sixteen goals.

1.2 Providing essential data

To support this local action, national bodies have identified a critical need for more data and insight. Ireland's National Circular Economy Communications & Public Engagement Hub has highlighted the need to share best practices and produce cutting-edge research on barriers and opportunities.

Furthermore, the Rediscovery Centre—Ireland's National Centre for the Circular Economy—has identified the importance of communicating effectively with citizens and communities. Its recent research outlines best practices for engagement, which this report applies to the Carlow context. The Rediscovery Centre also emphasises the need for practitioner insights to advance an effective circular economy, a need this report directly addresses. Its most recent (2025) research report on the circular economy identifies the following (Figure 2) best practices in that regard.

Figure 2: Best practice campaigns, as identified by the Rediscovery Centre



Source: The Rediscovery Centre (2025: 21)

The Rediscovery Centre recognises also highlights the need for data and practitioner insights in advancing effective circular economy. This report, by Carlow County Council, gives effect to the Rediscovery Centre's recommendations.

Recent key publications from Ireland's government and research agencies also and consistently identify a significant lack of data and insights as a major barrier to advancing the circular economy (CE). The National Circular Economy Strategy 2023-2025 (DECC, 2023) explicitly lists 'Strengthen the Evidence Base' as a core objective, highlighting the need for robust metrics, life cycle assessments, and research on viable business models and consumer behaviour. This strategic need is operationally confirmed by the EPA's Circular Economy Programme Progress Report 2024, which details knowledge gaps in measuring national circularity and understanding sector-specific challenges in construction, plastics, and textiles.

Further analysis from the academic consortium project CE-IRE ("D4.2 Report on Policy Measures", 2023) strongly reinforces this, concluding that effective policy is hindered by significant gaps in data on material flows and socio-economic impacts. It specifically calls for more research tailored to the Irish context, such as the capacity of SMEs. Finally, the priorities set out in the EPA's Circular Economy Innovation Grant Scheme 2023 serve as a direct response to these gaps, by funding urgently needed innovation in data tools, business models, and behavioural change.

1.3 Structure of this report

This report begins (in Chapter 2) by examining definitions of the circular economy. Chapter 2 establishes the conceptual and practical context for the circular economy (CE), with a specific focus on community-level implementation. It traces the evolution of CE thinking from a technical, industrial model towards a more nuanced understanding that incorporates critical social, cultural, and place-based dimensions. Drawing on Irish and international literature, it outlines how community-scale initiatives are a crucial but under-researched aspect of circular transitions, serving as testing grounds for innovation and mediators between individual behaviour and systemic change. Key enabling factors identified include leadership, physical infrastructure, institutional support, and strong social capital. However, significant research gaps persist regarding the effectiveness, scalability, and appropriate support mechanisms for such initiatives, particularly within the Irish context. The chapter concludes that empirical research is needed to understand how CE principles translate into practical action in specific local settings like County Carlow.

Chapter Three analyses the multi-level policy landscape governing the circular economy and upcycling in Ireland, from international frameworks to local County Carlow plans. It details how Ireland has developed a comprehensive, all-of-government strategic approach through the ‘Living More, Using Less’ strategy and the landmark Circular Economy Act 2022, which is further operationalised by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). However, a December 2024 European Environment Agency assessment reveals a significant implementation gap, noting Ireland’s high per capita waste generation and over-reliance on landfill and export. The review outlines a sectoral implementation strategy and highlights the pivotal role of local authorities and civil society organisations in translating national policy into local action. The chapter establishes the policy context within which local implementation, challenges, and innovations will be examined.

Chapter Four looks at the circular economy in County Carlow. It presents a map – showing the distribution of circular economy activities by type, and it elaborates four case studies that illustrate circular economy projects. These case studies are as follows:

- Carlow County Development Partnership’s BeKind Project;
- Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Facility; and
- Carlow County Council Community Composting Project;
- County Carlow Environmental Network (CCEN).

In line with the research objectives, Chapter Four presents the results of a survey among community and voluntary groups in County Carlow. The survey captures data in respect of community leaders’ perceptions and experiences of the circular economy, and it documents their recommendations in respect of its future development.

The report concludes, in Chapter Five, with a stocktake of the circular economy in County Carlow, and it presents a set of actionable recommendations for Carlow County Council and other agencies – to enable them to advance the circular economy.

This research provides more than just a snapshot; it provides a foundation. By mapping the vibrant landscape of community-led circular activities in County Carlow, celebrating the ingenuity of local groups, and clearly identifying the barriers they face, this report offers a crucial evidence base for action. The stories and data contained within are a testament to the power of local initiative and a call to arms for supported, strategic development. Ultimately, nurturing this circular ecosystem is not just about waste reduction or economic efficiency—it is about building a more resilient, connected, and sustainable County Carlow for all. The journey from a linear to a circular economy is underway, and this report provides the essential signposts to accelerate that transition.

2. Literature Review: Circular Economy at Community Level in Ireland

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the context in which circular economy activities have evolved and are evolving. It provides key definitions, identifies good practices and enabling factors that are relevant to the further development of the circular economy in County Carlow.

The circular economy has emerged as a pivotal concept in contemporary sustainability discourse, representing a fundamental departure from traditional linear economic models (Kirchherr *et al.*, 2018; Stahel, 2019). At its heart, the circular economy is about making sure we get the most value out of everything we use. It means moving from a culture of 'throw away' to one of 'make do and mend,' 'share,' and 'repurpose. The initial design is integral to successful upcycling; as Bofylatos (2022; 600 states), “decisions made early in the product, service and system development influence the majority of the environmental impact and social consequences.”

This literature review examines the evolution of circular economy thinking, with particular emphasis on community-level implementation. A growing body of Irish and international research demonstrates a growing academic and practitioner engagement with circular economy concepts, whilst emerging research explores the nexus between circular economy and communities, moving beyond purely technical and economic considerations to examine social dimensions of transition processes (Forde, 2022).

2.2 Defining the Circular Economy

The conceptual foundation of the circular economy has evolved considerably since its emergence in academic literature. There is a growing consensus among researchers, policy-makers and practitioners that the circular economy encompasses organisational planning processes, customers and society, utilisation of ecosystems, and economic resource flows (Purushothaman *et al.*, 2025). This multi-dimensional understanding reflects the complexity of circular systems that extend beyond simple waste management to encompass fundamental restructuring of production and consumption patterns.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation defines the circular economy as follows:

“The circular economy is a system where materials never become waste and nature is regenerated. In a circular economy, products and materials are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, reuse, refurbishment,

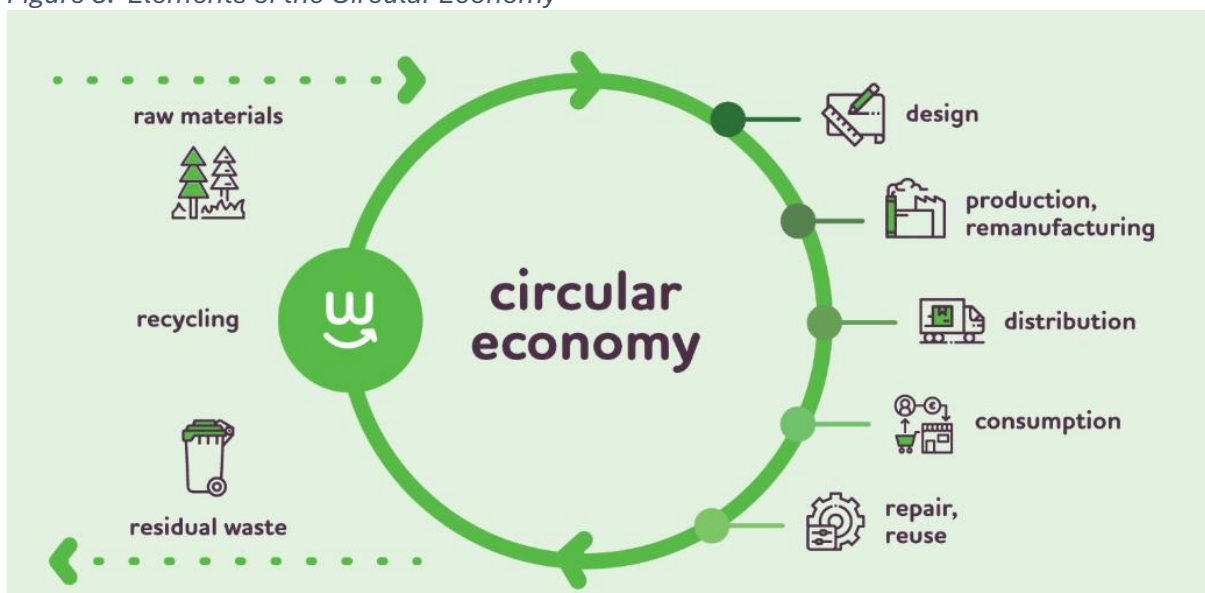
remanufacture, recycling, and composting. The circular economy tackles climate change and other global challenges, like biodiversity loss, waste, and pollution, by decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources.”

The Foundation’s influential framework conceptualises the circular economy through three core principles:

- designing out waste and pollution;
- keeping products and materials in use; and
- regenerating natural systems.

This framework has gained widespread adoption in policy circles, including within Ireland’s national strategy development. Ireland’s Regional Waste Management Planning Offices use a clear and accessible definition. They state that “the circular economy is like a big recycling system where we try to use things over and over again instead of throwing them away,” and they use the following diagram (Figure 3) to represent the various stages in design, production and consumption stages in which circular economy principles ought to be brought to bear².

Figure 3: Elements of the Circular Economy



Source: Regional Waste Management Planning Offices website

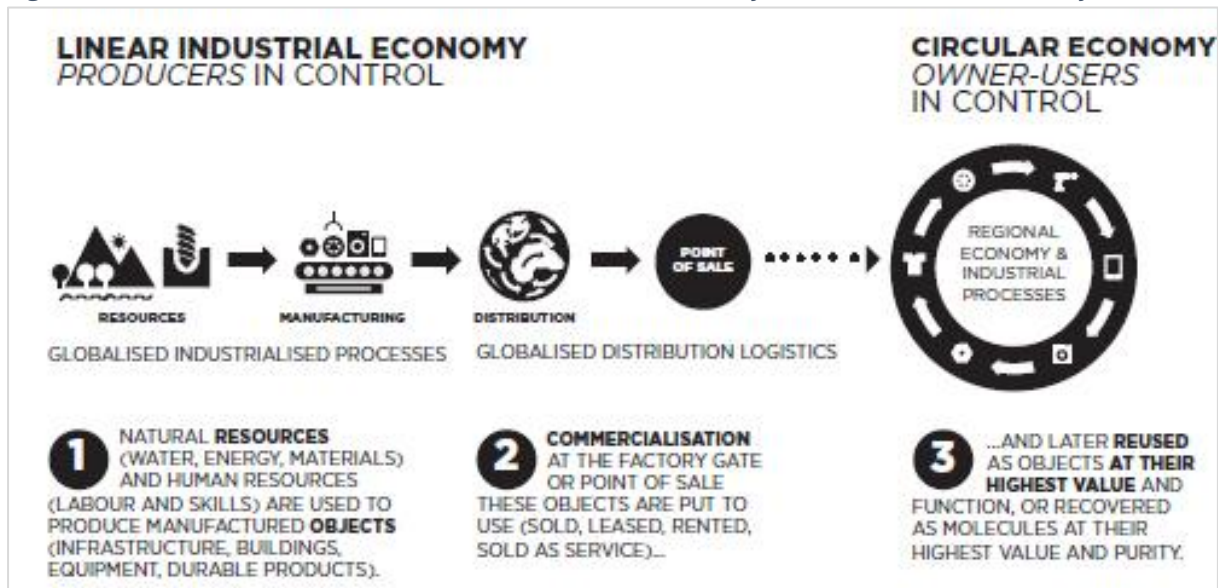
Academic literature increasingly critiques techno-optimistic approaches, arguing for greater attention to social, cultural, and political dimensions of circularity. Proponents of the circular economy also emphasise how it distinguishes itself from the linear economy – the latter being a wasteful consumer of finite resources, with the former giving

² For further information see: Circular Living. <https://mywaste.ie/sustainability/circular-living/>

owners and users (rather than producers) increased agency, power and responsibility. In proposing the following model (Figure 4), Stahel (2019) contends that the circular economy's objectives are:

- to maintain value (not to create value added);
- to optimise stock management (not flows); and
- to increase the efficiency of using goods (not of producing goods).

Figure 4: The contrast between the linear industrial economy and the circular economy



Source: Stahel, W.R. (2019) *The Circular Economy: A User's Guide*. Taylor & Francis Group.

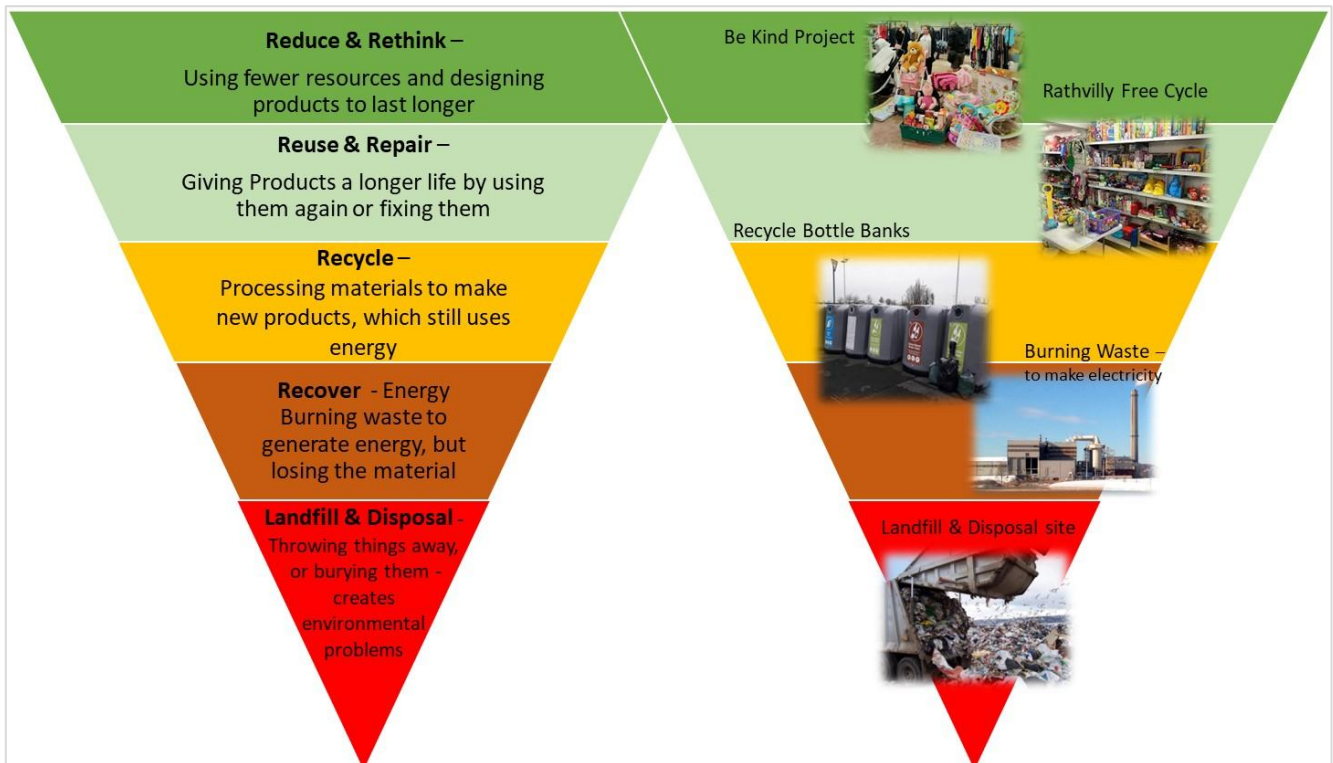
Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notes that the circular economy and the bioeconomy are closely inter-related, and they are central to climate action and the aim of using resources more sustainably in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The EPA (2025) noted that they can also deliver wide-ranging economic and societal benefits. Yet, the EPA notes that they have distinctive features, and applies the following definitions (2025: vii):

- In a circular economy, products and materials are kept in circulation through processes such as maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling and composting. The objective of the circular economy is to decouple economic activity from the consumption of finite resources.
- The bioeconomy involves using renewable biological resources sustainably to produce food, energy and industrial goods. It also exploits the untapped potential stored within biological waste and residual materials.

As the following inverted pyramids illustrate, (Figure 5) the circular economy is preferred over other forms of dealing with waste. In fact, it involves eliminating waste, by re-using

and repurposing goods / products. The circular economy also has a social dimension, as social economy activities provide a mechanism that enables communities to come together to generate financial resources, promote social capital, and improve the quality of their local environment.

Figure 5: The circular economy represents the optimum approach to eliminating and dealing with perceived ‘waste’



The aforementioned Carlow County Council webinar outlined that the circular economy incorporates, but is not confined to the following types of activities:

- Clothing swaps – Events where people exchange clothes to extend their lifespan;
- Community libraries – Community-run systems where parents can borrow books³, toys or other items - instead of buying new ones, reducing plastic waste;
- Bicycle repair cafes – Workshops where people learn to fix bikes, promoting reuse over disposal;
- Library expansions – Some local authority / public libraries now lend not just books but also musical instruments, seeds (for gardening), and digital media via platforms like BorrowBox; and

³ The *Little Free Library Movement* is a community-based book exchange scheme. Working on the principle of ‘leave a book, take a book’, the scheme aims to promote community arts programmes, positive mental health, and literacy, particularly amongst children. The movement began in Wisconsin, USA in 2009, but has spread worldwide since then, with now over 25,000 little libraries spread across over 70 countries. For further information, please see: <https://littlefreelibrary.org/>

- Upcycling fashion & furniture – Workshops teach mending and repurposing textiles, while second-hand furniture markets (e.g., Facebook Marketplace, eBay) help reduce demand for new items.

Recent definitional work emphasises the circular economy as a regenerative system that maintains resource value whilst minimising waste generation and environmental impact. This perspective recognises that circular transitions require coordinated action across multiple scales, from individual behaviour change to systemic industrial transformation. The emphasis on regeneration rather than merely sustainability represents an important conceptual evolution, suggesting that circular systems should actively restore rather than simply maintain environmental and social capital:

- For community groups: This means the trust, relationships, and networks that groups like men's sheds or community councils have already built—your greatest asset in starting new projects; and
- For local authorities: Investing in circular projects is an investment in social cohesion and community resilience, delivering benefits beyond environmental metrics.

The most sophisticated understanding of the circular economy takes this regenerative, systems-based thinking a step further, focusing on the synergies between its parts. This is encapsulated in the concept of 'complementarity,' as explained by Girard (2021: 762),

“The concept of complementarity becomes essential. It expresses the relationship of mutual benefits between different components: the presence of an element leads to an increase in value for the benefit of other components, due to the specific interdependencies. It is not enough to reduce, repair, recycle for the implementation of the circular economy. The essential aspect of the circular economy is the successful search of the systemic complementarities: between different functions/activities/subjects on the basis of reciprocal exchanges of benefits. Thus, in the circular economy approach, single elements should be transformed into “components of a system”.

Ultimately, these definitions converge on a single, powerful idea: doing more with less, together. The circular economy is not an abstract theory but a practical, community-powered reality. It is the bicycle repaired at a local café, the clothes swapped at a community hall, and the furniture given a new life in a local workshop. It is a system that creates value not just by conserving materials, but by strengthening the social fabric—turning waste into wealth and consumers into active citizens and community wealth builders.

2.3 Evolution of Circular Economy Thinking

The evolution of circular economy literature demonstrates progression from theoretical concepts to practical sustainability transitions, with increasing recognition of implementation challenges and contextual factors. Early circular economy discourse focused primarily on technical solutions and industrial applications, drawing heavily from industrial ecology and cradle-to-cradle design principles. This phase emphasised material flows, technological innovation, and economic efficiency as primary drivers of circular transformation.

The second phase of circular economy development has witnessed greater integration with broader sustainability agendas. Research examining connections between circular economy, bioeconomy, and sustainable development goals demonstrates increasing understanding of circular systems as contributors to multiple sustainability objectives rather than isolated environmental interventions. This recognises that circular economy implementation must address social equity, economic justice, and environmental protection simultaneously.

Contemporary circular economy literature increasingly acknowledges the importance of place-based approaches and community engagement (Howard *et al.*, 2022). This shift reflects growing recognition that successful circular implementations require deep understanding of local contexts, cultures, and capabilities (Clifton *et al.*, 2024). The movement from universal solutions towards contextualised approaches represents a significant maturation in circular economy thinking, with implications for both research methodologies and policy development.

2.4 Community-Level Circular Economy Implementation

Community-scale circular economy initiatives represent a crucial but under-researched dimension of circular transitions. Local communities serve as testing grounds for circular innovations, spaces for social learning, and mediators between individual behaviour change and systemic transformation. Community-level implementations often demonstrate greater flexibility and responsiveness than large-scale industrial approaches, enabling experimentation with diverse circular strategies and adaptation to local conditions. Ireland's Rediscovery Centre (2025: 14) notes that "The circular economy applies to almost all sectors and connects deeply with social systems. It is focused on designing out waste, keeping materials in use, and regenerating natural systems."

Research on community circular economy initiatives reveals several characteristic features. These include emphasis on social cohesion and collective action, integration

of environmental and social objectives, reliance on volunteer labour and community resources, and focus on local material flows and waste streams. Community initiatives often prioritise repair, reuse, and sharing activities that extend product lifespans whilst building social capital and local skills.

The literature identifies particular strengths of community-level approaches, including ability to address market failures in repair and refurbishment services, capacity to engage hard-to-reach populations through trusted community networks, and potential to develop context-specific solutions that respond to local needs and opportunities. However, community initiatives also face significant challenges including resource constraints, dependence on volunteer commitment, difficulties achieving scale, and competition with convenient linear alternatives. Forde (2022: 96) observes that

“In the Irish context, more and more social enterprises are diversifying into circular enterprises, and new ventures often integrate sustainable or circular processes into their business models. This is no accident; it is becoming a sine qua non for effective and sustainable business.”

2.5 Enabling Factors for Community Circular Economy

Research identifies several critical enabling factors that support successful community-level circular economy implementation. These include:

- Leadership and social entrepreneurship;
- Infrastructure and space provision;
- Institutional and policy support; and
- Social capital and community networks.

Leadership and social entrepreneurship emerge as fundamental requirements, with individuals or organisations capable of mobilising community resources, navigating institutional barriers, and sustaining long-term commitment (Borrero and Yousafzai 2025). Effective circular economy champions possess combinations of technical knowledge, social skills, and institutional understanding that enable them to translate circular principles into practical community action.

Infrastructure and space provision represent essential enabling conditions for community circular economy initiatives. Physical spaces for repair activities, storage of materials awaiting reuse, and community gatherings facilitate practical implementation whilst creating visible focal points for circular activities. Access to tools, equipment, and

technical resources reduces barriers to participation whilst enabling skill development and knowledge sharing.

Institutional support and policy environments significantly influence community circular economy success. Supportive local authority policies, funding availability, and regulatory flexibility can accelerate initiative development, whilst institutional barriers and policy contradictions can undermine community efforts. The literature emphasises the importance of multi-level governance approaches that coordinate national frameworks with local implementation support.

Social capital and community networks provide crucial foundations for circular economy initiatives. High levels of social trust, existing collaborative relationships, and shared environmental values facilitate collective action around circular objectives. Communities with strong social infrastructure demonstrate greater capacity to sustain circular initiatives through challenges and adapt approaches based on experience and changing circumstances.

Those who seek to promote the circular economy also face challenges. The term is not widely used or understood, although it is becoming better known. The predominant economic policies, in Ireland and in most western countries, prioritise the traditional industrial economy, and sustainability, resilience and the circular economy are generally after-thoughts or add-ons (Morrisey and Heidkamp, 2022).

There are also challenges associated with the neglect of the circular economy's social dimension and with variable perceptions thereof (Liu, 2024). As the Rediscovery Centre research (2025) notes, cost and accessibility perceptions can be significant, and people in low-income households are more likely than are others to be reluctant to engage with the circular economy. Meanwhile, people in medium- and high-income households are more likely to waste food and to have excess textiles and household goods. It should be noted however, that any associations between the circular economy and social class, household income, gender, geography among other socio-economic characteristics are complex and multi-variate, and as the Rediscovery Centre points out further work is needed to better understand baseline consumption patterns between socio-demographic cohorts" (2025: 12).

2.6 Irish Context and Developments

Ireland's approach to circular economy development has evolved from initial policy adoption to comprehensive strategic framework implementation. The 'Living More, Using

Less' strategy represents a high-level, all-of-government approach to transition across all sectors and levels of government towards circularity, with policy coherence designed to align all governmental levers towards sustainable objectives.

The Environmental Protection Agency's *Circular Economy Programme* envisions an Ireland where circular economy ensures everyone uses less resources and prevents waste to achieve sustainable economic growth. This vision acknowledges Ireland's significant waste generation challenges, including millions of tonnes of construction, demolition, and municipal waste produced annually. The emphasis on prevention and resource efficiency reflects growing recognition that Ireland's high-consumption economic model requires fundamental restructuring.

Recent policy developments demonstrate increasing attention to community-level implementation. Government funding initiatives aim to advance initiatives that rethink waste, restore environmental balance, and empower communities to shape climate solutions, suggesting recognition of community agency in circular transitions. However, the literature reveals limited systematic research on Irish community circular economy initiatives, their effectiveness, and enabling conditions. There is a need, as articulated by policymakers, for more research on the circular economy in Ireland (EPA, 2024, University College Cork, 2025).

Irish circular economy development occurs within particular geographical, cultural, and economic contexts that influence implementation patterns. The prevalence of rural communities' strong tradition of community organisation, and cultural values around resourcefulness and repair provide potential foundations for circular initiatives. However, rapid economic growth, urbanisation, and cultural shifts towards convenience consumption create countervailing pressures that challenge circular adoption. Research by the Rediscovery Centre (2025) reveals that while people in rural Ireland are more likely to 'repair where possible', they are less likely than are people in urban areas to have heard the term 'circular economy.'

2.7 Good Practices and Case Studies

International literature identifies numerous examples of successful community-level circular economy implementation that offer insights for Irish contexts. Repair cafés, originating in the Netherlands and spreading across Europe, demonstrate effective models for community-based product life extension. These initiatives combine practical repair services with social interaction, skill sharing, and environmental education, creating multiple value streams that sustain community engagement. According to the

international Repair Café website, “Repair Café is all about taking care of clothes, appliances and other items you use so you can enjoy them longer. In doing so, they reduce production and consumption and stimulate degrowth⁴.”

Figure 6: *Stitching repair café in the Netherlands*



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/StichtingRepairCafe/>

Community-supported agriculture and local food systems represent well-established circular economy applications that integrate waste reduction, local production, and social connection. These initiatives demonstrate potential for circular approaches to address multiple community needs whilst creating economic opportunities and environmental benefits.

The emphasis on seasonal production, minimal packaging, and short supply chains exemplifies circular principles applied to essential needs. Flintshare in Wales shows (Figure 7) a great example of community led agriculture, seeding, growing and sharing.

⁴ For further information, please see: <https://www.repaircafe.org/>

Figure 7: Flintshare Wales – Community sharing Agriculture

A HORTICULTURAL CSA IN RURAL WALES

CSA NETWORK UK
www.communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk

CASE STUDY: FLINTSHARE



Established: 2010
Type: Community-led
Legal Structure: Asset locked Ltd Co
Paid staff: 0
Trainees: 0
Volunteers: 1 FTE
Produce: Vegetables, fruit, honey
Members: 106 members
Member radius: 30 miles
Shares: Produce exchanged year-round with members for cash or labour
Buy in to supplement produce: No

CSA turnover: £4,600
Land: Total of 1 hectare cultivated on three sites; one with a free annual lease, one with a letter of consent and one owned by a college with a Memorandum of Understanding
Infrastructure: Six tunnels, container, four sheds and a greenhouse
Approach: No-dig
And... they are one of the few entirely voluntary CSAs

The seed...

Nikki Giles lamented the lack of locally grown, organic veg and had learnt about the CSA model while training as an organic horticulturist. She won the contract from a local rural regeneration agency specifically to start a CSA and given just four months of funding to do it. This paid for her salary, flyers and public meetings. These meetings supplied the ideas, the core group, the land and some further donated funding. The range of skills attracted to the initial core group was pivotal to the future resilience of FlintShare: they met weekly and the meetings were euphoric, great fun and involved a lot of cake.



Grew...

Taking on three sites at once was a challenge but also provided a wide choice of opportunities to pioneer members: wilderness at Cilcain, under cover at Northop or a more manageable site at Hawarden. It was decided early on to charge a modest membership fee and introduce the VegAccount allowing members to pay for produce with either labour or cash. This proved very popular and membership quickly grew. A grower was employed 18 months in but a year later FlintShare reverted to a volunteer only model. FlintShare strives to develop volunteer skills and has facilitated career moves through this.



And...

FlintShare now manages tunnels, orchards, field fruit and veg, raised bed areas, bee hives, willow beds, new coppice, and have access to a conifer plantation. The VegAccount model is regularly reviewed and based on trust with members able to crop when and where they want. Management is by a core group. The pandemic highlighted the absolute resilience of the model. FlintShare are now creating better disabled access and building a covered space for social gatherings. Nikki says she wished she'd known that the CSA would take over her life for quite so long!



Photo credits: Flintshare

www.communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk

Cloughjordan Eco-Village (in County Tipperary) also operates a successful CSA scheme (Community Supported Agriculture), in which over seventy members participate. Established in 2008, the eco-village's member-owned Cloughjordan Community Farm produces fresh fruit and vegetables in season. Produce is delivered twice a week to a central collection point. Members pay a monthly fee, for which they receive a regular supply of fruit and vegetables. They can also participate in on-farm activities, and they organise regular farm walks, community meals and educational events. The crops include over sixty heritage varieties, and the farm is completely biodynamic. The farm operates within the ecovillage's three-fold ethic of social, ecological, and economic sustainability. It is about more than organic food production. It integrates with:



- **Renewable Energy:** The village's district heating system uses biomass, and the overall carbon footprint is low;
- **Land & Biodiversity:** The 67-acre site includes not just the farm but orchards, woodland, and green spaces managed for biodiversity; and

- Waste & Water: Village systems for composting and water management align with the farm's circular ethos (Kirby 2020).

Many tool libraries and sharing initiatives also illustrate circular economy applications to durable goods that are used infrequently by individual households. These initiatives reduce resource consumption through increased utilisation rates whilst building community networks and reducing individual financial burdens. Successful tool libraries demonstrate importance of accessible locations, effective management systems, and integration with broader community activities. In countries with well-developed social economy sectors, such as Spain and Italy, tool libraries are prevalent in many communities. Swap shops are also popular in Germany, and the country's main phone network Deutsche Telekom has supported the development of a social network through which neighbours can swap tools and services (Figure 8) and set up communal "toy boxes" in playgrounds around Berlin.

Figure 8: Fix Point Biblioteca de herramientas A Berlin Swap Shop and Tool Library Solidaria / Tool Library (Soria, Spain)



<https://www.economiasolidaria.org/noticias/la-biblioteca-de-herramientas/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/17/berlin-borrowing-shop-benefits-share-leila>

Urban agriculture and composting initiatives provide examples of circular approaches to organic waste streams that create community benefits. These initiatives transform waste streams into productive resources whilst providing opportunities for environmental education, social interaction, and local food production. The integration of waste management with food system development demonstrates potential for circular approaches to address multiple community objectives simultaneously.

In Ireland, local development companies have been the fore in promoting the circular economy – generally in conjunction with social enterprises. IRD Duhallow, (Figure 9) operates a Furniture Revamp initiative and paint recycling programme called "Relove Paint".

Figure 9: IRD Duhallow - Circular Economy Initiatives



www.irdduhallow.com/community-services-duhallow-revamp/

www.paintreuse.network/

Duhallow REVAMP accepts unwanted furniture of a reasonable standard from people who wish to kindly donate items such as chairs, tables, lockers, chest of drawers, mirrors, wardrobes, shelving, unwanted flat packs, clean pieces of timber and selected household goods, kitchens and beds are also welcome. Furniture is collected directly from the public for a nominal fee. The donated items are brought into the Duhallow REVAMP workshop where they are then inspected and screened before restoration and repair is carried out by the REVAMP team in order to ensure that they meet health and safety and cleanliness standards. They also provide a refurbishment service for those who wish to have their old pieces restored and refurbished and then returned to them. The project is currently operating through the Tús Community Activation Scheme with participants learning new skills in furniture repair and upcycling.

Relove Paint involves collecting unwanted paint from civic amenity sites, then filtering, remixes, and repackaging the paint for resale at a lower cost. The initiative aims to promote the circular economy and reduce waste, while also supporting local jobs and communities.

There are several more organisations, including Carlow County Council⁵, participating in the National [Reuse Paint Network](http://www.paintreuse.network/) - a community-based initiative that collects leftover,

⁵ The Powerstown Civic Amenity Site is a collection point for paint:
<https://carlow.ie/environment/recycling/civic-amenity-sites>

unused paint from households and businesses, reprocesses it at a central facility (blending and filtering), and redistributes it at low cost to community groups, charities, and individuals. Its core goals objectives:

- Waste Reduction: Diverts paint from landfill and incineration;
- Circular Economy: Gives a quality resource a second life; and
- Social Benefit: Provides affordable paint for community projects and low-income households.

The initiative is supported by the Government of Ireland, the Rediscovery Centre and the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices.

In Ireland, the Community Resources Network Ireland (CRNI) is the representative body for community-based reuse, repair and recycling organisations. Its aim is to provide a range of practical supports to its members, and to promote-community based, sustainable waste management as a practical and effective way of tackling Ireland's growing waste problem. The Network's [website](#) lists forty-three member organisations. They cover a wide range of up-cycling activities, and they deal with a wide range of materials including furniture, household goods, electronics, and textiles. CRNI members also promote repair and skill sharing, the distribution of bicycles, food waste prevention, and they create social enterprise employment opportunities.

These case studies, and the others that are showcased later in this report, incorporate economic, social, community and environmental gain. The circular economy is also significant in the context of relations between the Global North (western and industrial countries) and the Global South. For many decades, countries like Ireland have been exploiting the resources of the Global South and dumping surplus produce, used products and waste there – sometimes under the guides of 'charity' e.g., second-hand clothes / textiles and office equipment / computers⁶, although some countries are now using circular economy approaches to recovering products and the environment⁷.

2.8 Research Gaps and Future Directions

The literature reveals significant gaps in understanding community-level circular economy implementation, particularly within Irish contexts. Limited research exists on the effectiveness of different community circular economy models, their scalability potential, and appropriate support mechanisms. The relationship between community

⁶ RTÉ News: Report indicates electronic waste from Ireland and Europe is being dumped in developing countries. [13 February 2019](#).

⁷ Al Jazeera: Chile battles textile waste with new producer recycling law. [August 2025](#).

initiatives and broader circular economy transitions remains under-theorised, with insufficient attention to how local actions contribute to systemic change.

Methodological approaches for studying community circular economy initiatives require further development. Most existing research relies on case study approaches that provide rich contextual understanding but limited basis for generalisation. Longitudinal studies tracking community initiative development over time remain rare, limiting understanding of sustainability factors and evolution patterns.

The role of digital technologies in enabling community circular economy initiatives represents an emerging research area with significant potential. Online platforms for sharing, repair coordination, and resource matching could transform community circular economy possibilities, but research on their effectiveness and appropriate design remains limited.

While international research provides a foundation, the specific ways circular practices succeed in Irish towns and rural counties like Carlow are less understood. This makes the findings from our case studies and survey (presented in Chapters 4 and 5) not just a local report, but a valuable contribution to the national conversation on how to make the circular economy work in practice.

2.9 Implications for Primary Data Collection

This literature review reveals several important considerations for primary data collection activities examining Irish community circular economy initiatives. The emphasis on contextual factors and place-based approaches suggests that qualitative research methodologies will be essential for understanding local implementation experiences and identifying enabling conditions.

The literature's identification of diverse circular economy models and approaches indicates the importance of examining multiple initiative types and scales within data collection activities. Community repair initiatives, sharing schemes, local food systems, and waste reduction programmes may operate according to different logics and face distinct challenges, requiring differentiated research approaches.

The significance of social capital and community networks highlighted in the literature suggests that data collection should examine both formal organisational structures and informal social relationships that support circular economy implementation. Understanding how community initiatives emerge, evolve, and sustain themselves over

time requires attention to both structural factors and social processes. Indeed, recent research indicates that there has been a dearth of emphasis on the social and community dimensions of the circular economy, and researchers argue that this deficit needs to be addressed (Hossain *et al.*, 2024; Zavos *et al.*, 2024).

2.10 Chapter Conclusion

The literature reveals circular economy as a concept that has evolved from technical industrial applications towards more nuanced understanding of social, cultural, and community dimensions. Community-level implementation represents a crucial but under-researched aspect of circular transitions, with particular importance for understanding how circular principles translate into practical action within specific contexts.

The Irish policy framework (which is outlined in the next chapter) provides supportive conditions for community circular economy development, but limited research exists on actual implementation experiences and outcomes. The literature emphasises the importance of enabling factors including leadership, infrastructure, institutional support, and social capital, whilst identifying significant research gaps around effectiveness, scalability, and appropriate support mechanisms.

This literature foundation establishes the need for empirical research examining Irish community circular economy initiatives, their development patterns, challenges faced, and contributions to broader circular economy objectives. Such research would contribute both to academic understanding of community-level circular economy processes and to policy development supporting effective circular transitions.

3. Policy Review: Upcycling and Circular Economy in Ireland

This section examines the policy landscape for upcycling and the circular economy in Ireland, including international frameworks (UN Sustainable Development Goals), European Union directives, and national-level initiatives. It also looks at the policy frameworks and supports that pertain in County Carlow.

Over the past decade, Ireland has gradually developed an all-of-government approach enabling circularity. Ireland has demonstrated a growing commitment to circular economy principles through strategic frameworks, legislative measures, and financial incentives. While much progress has been made, some deficits persist, and there is still scope to further progress and enable the realisation of a more circular economy.

3.1 International Framework: UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs)

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide the overarching global framework for circular economy initiatives, with several goals directly supporting upcycling and circular economy practices. The following are perhaps the most relevant of the UNSDGs to the circular economy:

- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production - The primary framework for circular economy initiatives
- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation - Resource efficiency and waste reduction
- SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy - Energy recovery from waste
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth - Green jobs and sustainable economic models
- SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure - Sustainable industrialisation
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities - Urban waste management
- SDG 13: Climate Action - Waste reduction's role in climate mitigation
- SDG 14: Life Below Water - Marine plastic pollution prevention
- SDG 15: Life on Land - Terrestrial ecosystem protection through reduced resource extraction

Ireland's circular economy strategies seek to align with these global targets, particularly SDG 12's emphasis on sustainable consumption and production patterns.

3.2 European Union Policy Framework

The European Union has established a policy architecture for the circular economy, which directly influences the approaches being taken in Ireland and other member states.

The European Commission's Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), launched in March 2020 as part of the European Green Deal, sets the strategic direction for all member states. CEAP is one of the main building blocks of the European Green Deal. It aims to reduce the EU's consumption footprint and double its circular material use rate in the coming decade, while boosting economic growth. The following are its key components:

- Right to repair legislation;
- Sustainable product policy framework;
- Circular electronics initiatives; and
- Sustainable textiles strategy.

The Commission action plan sets down seven key areas essential to achieving a circular economy. It specifically identifies the following: plastics; textiles; e-waste; food, water and nutrients; packaging; batteries and vehicles; buildings and construction.

The revised Waste Framework Directive (2018/851/EU) establishes binding targets for member states. Therefore, Ireland is obliged to:

- Increase municipal waste recycling or preparing waste for re-use to 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030, and 65% by 2035;
- Increase packaging waste recycling to 65% by 2025; and
- Reduce landfill waste to 10% by 2035.

From January 2025, producers of beverage containers up to three litres in size will have to ensure that each container contains a minimum of 25% recycled plastic, increasing to 30% from January 2030. This directive drives demand for recycled materials and supports upcycling initiatives.

In addition, the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive promotes design for circularity and establishes extended producer responsibility schemes that incentivise upcycling and material recovery.

3.3 National and Local Policy Frameworks

3.3.1 National Policy - Ireland

Ireland's legislative framework for the circular economy has evolved significantly, with landmark legislation now in place and additional measures under development. The legal architecture combines transposition of EU directives with innovative national approaches to waste prevention and circular economy promotion. Locally, Carlow County Council is responsible for the implementation of specific elements of EU and national policies, and the council has incorporated circular economy principles and practices into forward planning, including the [Carlow County Development Plan \(2022-2028\)](#), the [Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan \(LECP\) \(2023-2029\)](#), and the [Carlow Local Authority Climate Action Plan \(2024-2029\)](#).

The [Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023](#): 'Living More, Using Less' represents Ireland's comprehensive policy framework in respect of the circular economy transition. The strategy emphasises policy coherence across all government departments and establishes Ireland's circular economy vision. The strategy encompasses the following key strategic pillars:

- Resource efficiency across all sectors;
- Waste prevention and circularity;
- Sustainable consumption patterns;
- Innovation and research support; and
- International cooperation.

In September 2020, the Government of Ireland published the national [Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy](#). This strategic plan covers a wide range of areas and sectors, including households, businesses, education providers, food producers, construction, and textiles. It introduced mandatory extended producer responsibility (EPR) on all packaging producers (achieved in 2024), as well as the deposit-and-return scheme for plastic bottles and aluminium cans. Many single-use plastic items (e.g., cotton-bud sticks, cutlery, stirrers, straws) and polystyrene containers have been banned. Standardised bin colours (green for recycling, black for residual, and brown for organics) have been introduced across local authority areas. A [Textiles Advisory Group](#) has been established, and it is working with producers and consumers to promote more uptake of durable, repairable and recyclable clothing, while also boosting repair and reuse activities. The Group is also working with stakeholders to ensure Ireland implements the EU-wide Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes for textiles, which will make producers financially responsible for the end-of-life of their products

Ireland’s [Circular Economy Programme 2021-2027](#), which is led by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) envisages is an Ireland where the circular economy ensures that everyone uses less resources and prevents waste to achieve sustainable economic growth. This initiative provides the operational framework for circular economy implementation.

The [Green Public Procurement Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2027](#) was published in April 2024. The Strategy will play a key role in driving the implementation of green and circular procurement practices across the public sector.

In line with the aforementioned EU directive, Ireland has introduced a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for the collection and re-cycling of single-use plastic

Legislation has also been enacted that is relevant to the circular economy. The Circular Economy Act, which was signed into law in 2022, allows Ireland to tackle the proliferation of single-use disposable items and improve processes for allowing the use of secondary raw materials. This legislation establishes the statutory foundation for Ireland's circular economy transition. Its key provisions are as follows:

- Establishment of the Circular Economy Fund;
- Statutory requirement for circular economy strategies;
- Powers to address single-use items through economic instruments;
- Enhanced enforcement mechanisms for waste regulations; and
- Provisions for secondary raw materials utilisation.

The circular economy in Ireland is also governed by pre-existing legislation, as outlined in the following table (Table 1):

Table 1: Main elements of the legislative framework in respect of the circular economy in Ireland

Legislation	Main Provisions
Waste Management Act 1996 (as amended)	The foundational waste legislation, extensively amended to incorporate EU directives and circular economy principles. Recent amendments include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme provisions • Enhanced enforcement powers for local authorities • Integration of circular economy objectives into waste planning
European Union (Waste Directive) Regulations 2020	These regulations transpose the revised EU Waste Framework Directive into Irish law, establishing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binding waste prevention and recycling targets • Waste hierarchy implementation requirements

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended producer responsibility frameworks • Separate collection obligations for specific waste streams
Packaging Waste Regulations	<p>Comprehensive regulations addressing packaging waste management, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producer responsibility obligations • Recycling targets for different packaging materials • Requirements for minimum recycled content in beverage containers (25% from January 2025, increasing to 30% from January 2030) • Design for circularity requirements
WEEE Regulations (Electrical and Electronic Equipment)	<p>Regulations addressing waste electrical and electronic equipment, incorporating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection and recycling targets • Producer responsibility schemes • Right to repair provisions • Restrictions on hazardous substances

The current Programme for Government provides for additional legislative provisions. The forthcoming **Circular Economy Bill** will introduce moves to reduce waste and influence behaviour, including provisions for CCTV use to detect and deter illegal dumping and littering. This legislation is expected to significantly strengthen Ireland's circular economy framework. It is anticipated that it will provide for the following:

- Enhanced enforcement mechanisms including technology-based monitoring;
- Expanded powers for waste prevention measures;
- Strengthened circular economy planning requirements; and
- Integration of behavioural change mechanisms.

Further legislative changes are anticipated in respect of regulations to fully transpose the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive. These include the following:

- Market restrictions on specific single-use plastic items;
- Marking and labelling requirements;
- Awareness-raising obligations for member states;
- Extended producer responsibility for certain plastic products

Revised Packaging Regulations are also in the pipeline, whereby manufacturers / producers will be required to apply more sustainable packaging design, use more recycled material and sign-up to digital passport requirements for packaging. Ireland's regional assemblies and local authorities have significant policy and practice leverage in respect of the circular economy. They shape the milieu in which other agencies, as well as enterprises, communities and households operate; and they can affect the circular economy through planning permission conditions, public procurement policies,

community grant schemes, local economic development plans, waste collection by-laws, and public awareness campaigns among other functions and activities.

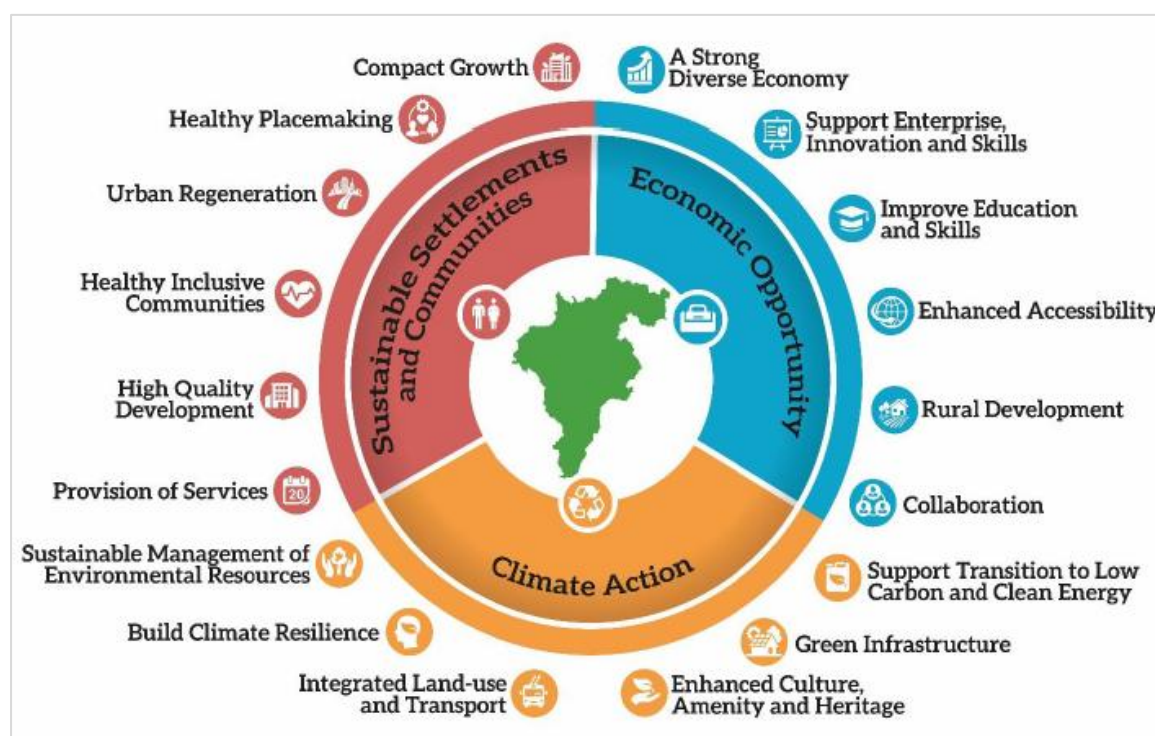
3.3.2 Carlow County Council – Policies and Frameworks

At county level, Carlow County Council has elaborated policy frameworks that relate to, and impact on, the circular economy. **The Carlow County Development Plan (2022-2028)** Explicitly supports national & regional waste policy (including the Circular Economy Act 2022), prioritising waste prevention, reuse, recycling, and recovery over disposal. The plan aims to reduce landfill dependency and improve recycling infrastructure (e.g., supporting development of appropriate waste facilities like civic amenity sites). It also advocates sustainable construction through the use of sustainable and recycled materials in construction and demolition projects, and the plan specifically encourages design for deconstruction and waste reduction on building sites. The County Development Plan states (in its introductory chapter),

“The Vision for County Carlow is to champion quality of life through local employment provision, high quality development, healthy placemaking and transformational regeneration, to grow and attract a diverse innovative economy, to support the transition from a linear to a circular economy, and to a low carbon climate resilient environment, to embrace inclusiveness and enhance our natural and built environment for future generations” (2022: 14).

Through the county development plan, Carlow County Council envisages working with communities, other statutory bodies, the productive sector and citizens to deliver its sustainable development vision in respect of the following (Figure 10) three themes.

Figure 10: Thematic foci of the Carlow County Development Plan (2022-2028)



Chapter 7 ‘Climate Action and Energy’ of the Carlow County Development Plan identified the circular economy base being integral to the Carlow’s sustainability, as the following image (Figure 11) illustrates.

Figure 11: The Circular Economy’s embeddedness within the Carlow County Development Plan (2022-2028)

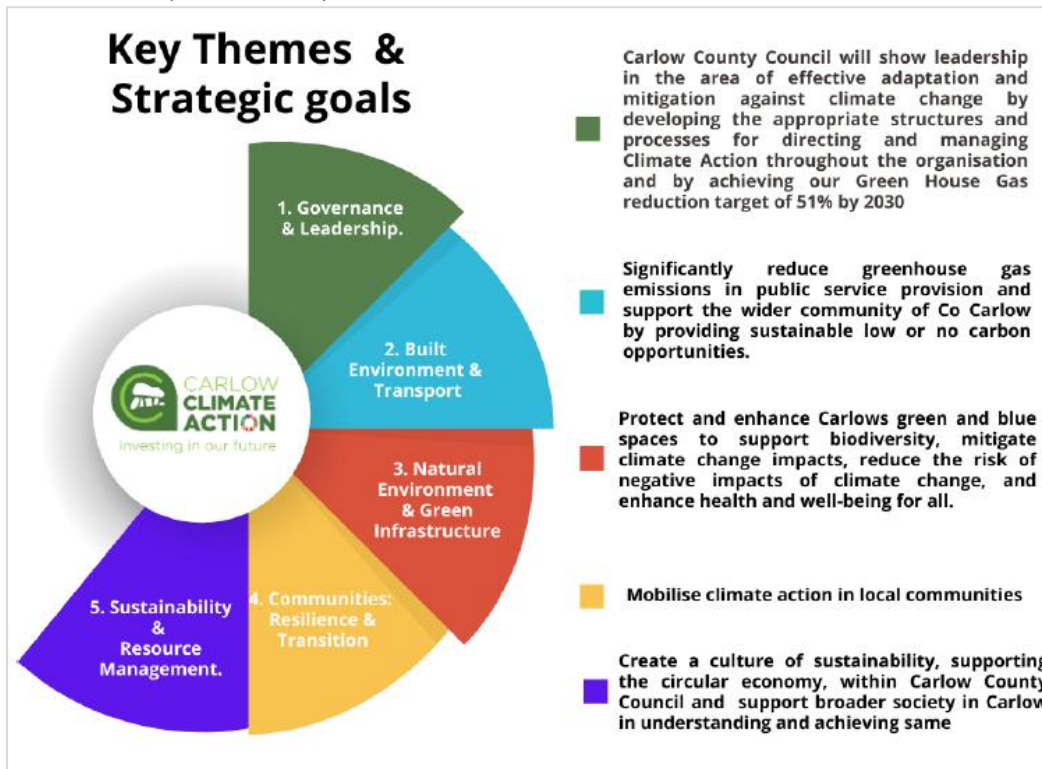


The Carlow **Local Authority Climate Action Plan (2024-2029)** provides an important framework for, and impetus towards, the promotion of the circular economy. The plan's climate adaptation and mitigation objectives inherently promote resource efficiency and reduced consumption, along with core circular principles. It encourages renewable energy and sustainable design. The plan’s vision is that Carlow County Council would be a climate resilient and low carbon organisation that inspires, leads, and facilitates ambitious and just climate action across the county. Its mission is:

“To realise the ambitious targets set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 while influencing and supporting positive climate action throughout the community, ensuring that County Carlow remains an attractive and sustainable place to live, visit, study and do business in, for present and future generations” (2024: 51).

In order to realise this mission, the Climate Action Plan puts forward five inter-related and mutually re-enforcing key themes and strategic goals as follows:(Figure 12)

Figure 12: Key Themes and Strategic Goals of the Carlow Local Authority Climate Action Plan (2024-2029)



While these key themes and strategic goals are all important, Goal 5 ‘Sustainability & Resource Management’ is the most directly relevant to the promotion of the circular economy, and the plan notes that the circular economy is integral to a ‘culture of sustainability’. Moreover, the plan outlines how a society-wide approach is required – involving citizens, communities, businesses, organisations and agencies – including local authority leadership, in driving the circular economy. The plan refers to changing consumer expectations and behaviours, and to the potential economic and employment benefits that can derive from the circular economy. Thirteen strategic actions are included (in respect of Goal 5) – covering adaptation and mitigation – and these include the following:

- Awareness raising – through multiple channels and modes;
- Developing guidelines;
- Increasing regulation, inspection and enforcement;
- Business sector engagement and capacity building;
- Supporting research and reviews; and
- Incorporating climate action into local authority planning and other functions.

In respect of adaptation / mitigation, Goal 5 includes an action to ‘develop and Implement an annual environmental awareness campaign incorporating the objectives of the National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy.’

Strategic Goal 4: *Communities’: Resilience & Transition* also includes provisions that are directly relevant to the promotion of the circular economy. This goal focuses on fostering active participation (among communities / citizens) and the development of collaborations with other agencies, businesses, civil society and education providers. Its over-arching objective is that ‘Carlow County Council will inform, influence, and empower the community of County Carlow to develop and implement their local climate action measures’, and the following are among the most pertinent actions, in respect of the circular economy:

- Develop countywide climate-related educational and awareness programme to include information events, communication campaigns and guidance documentation;
- Implement the Community Climate Action Fund to engage communities in localised Climate Action Projects; and
- Include ‘Sustainability and Climate Change’ assessment on applicable grant assessments to ensure that community groups/stakeholders consider and incorporate Climate Mitigation and Adaptation in all their grant funded activities.

Under the Climate Action Plan, Carlow Town has been designated as a Decarbonising Zone⁸, and it provides a living testbed of positive and demonstrable climate action. As a result, investments have been made in active travel and green infrastructure, public transport, energy efficiency – of buildings and settlements, improved air quality, waste management, and community activation.

The Carlow **Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023-2029** presents six high-level goals, the first of which is “Carlow is a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient society - with affirmative climate and biodiversity actions and environmental sustainability at the heart of all decision-making.” The LECP notes how this goal relates to UNSDGs 7, 11, 12 and 13, along with five of the objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the South-East Region. It provides a framework for strategic actions in respect of reducing the ecological footprints of businesses and households as well as awareness-raising, education and training supports – in the context of the *Just Transition*⁹.

⁸ This designation is response to Action 165 of the Government’s Climate Action Plan 2019.

⁹ The Just Transition is "securing a better, healthier future in the context of climate action, by helping workers and communities to move from high-emission or unsustainable activities to sustainable enterprises and sectors, while protecting livelihoods and supporting local and community development". Source: Government of Ireland,

The following figure (Figure 13) illustrates the policy framework in which the circular economy in Ireland operates – showing provisions from the global to the local.

Figure 13: The policy bridge from global goals to local action



The Framework Policy for a Just Transition in Ireland (2021: 5), Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

3.4 Financial Support and Investment

This year's circular economy funding continues to advance initiatives that rethink waste, restore and protect environmental balance and empower communities to shape climate solutions. The government has allocated €27 million to accelerate Ireland's circular economy transition.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is the lending arm of the European Union. It is the world's largest multilateral lender and the biggest provider of climate finance. The EIB provides significant funding for circular economy projects across Ireland. Examples include the following: (Table 2)

Table 2: Examples of projects, with a circular economy focus, supported by the European Investment Bank (EIB) in Ireland

Project	Circular Economy Focus	Links to Project Details
The National Water Conservation Project (Irish Water)	Water Resource Efficiency & Reuse	https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2020-086-eib-provides-eur300-million-to-irish-water-for-investment-programme
Cork Lower Harbour Main Drainage Project	Water Pollution Reduction & Nutrient Management	https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2017-097-eib-supports-major-cork-wastewater-project-with-eur50-million-loan
Panda Green's Bioenergy Facility	Waste-to-Energy & Recycling	https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2021-172-european-investment-bank-backs-irish-bioenergy-and-recycling-with-eur75-million-panda-green-investment
ESB's National Smart Metering Programme	Energy Efficiency & Demand-Side Management	https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2019-193-eib-provides-eur200-million-for-esb-smart-meter-rollout-in-ireland
Strategic Investment Fund in Sustainable Agriculture	Sustainable Agriculture & Bioeconomy	https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2022-057-european-investment-bank-and-sbci-launch-eur100m-fund-for-irish-farmers-to-invest-in-climate-action-and-environmental-sustainability

3.5 Sectoral Implementation

The implementation of policies in respect of the circular economy is strongly associated with the delivery of other policies and actions in respect of climate action. Since 2021, local authorities have begun tracking their outputs in respect of ten key performance

indicators (KPIs) – across three themes namely: mainstreaming; mitigation and adaptation; and internal behavioural change and capacity building. The most recent (September 2025) *Climate Action Key Performance Indicators* report reveals that:

- The Local Authority Retrofit Programme upgraded 2,634 social houses, achieving major energy savings and 10,360 tCO₂ annual emission reductions;
- Local authority emissions fell 9.6% (thermal/transport) and 33.9% including electricity;
- The first Climate Action Plans set 3,951 actions, with 50% underway or recurring;
- Emergency responses were activated 133 times, mostly for wind events; and
- SME engagement surged, with 1,016 businesses participating in the Green for Business programme, while 683 community projects received funding, reflecting broad climate action momentum (O'Donoghue-Hynes *et al.*, 2025)

The implementation of circular economy principles across different sectors represents a critical component of Ireland's transition strategy. Each sector faces unique challenges and opportunities in adopting circular practices, requiring tailored approaches that address specific material flows, business models, and regulatory requirements. The sectoral approach recognises that effective circular economy implementation requires deep understanding of individual industry contexts whilst maintaining coherence across the broader policy framework.

Ireland's sectoral implementation strategy encompasses six priority areas identified in the Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022: construction, agriculture, retail, packaging, textiles, and electronic equipment. Each sector must develop specific targets and strategies as part of the national circular economy framework, with regular review cycles to ensure continued progress and adaptation to emerging challenges.

3.5.1 Construction and the Built Environment

The construction sector represents one of Ireland's most significant circular economy opportunities, given its substantial material consumption and waste generation. The sector consumes approximately 50% of extracted materials and generates about 35% of total waste in Ireland.

Practices in the construction sector have gradually been embracing and applying circular economy principles and best practices. Major construction projects are subject to mandatory environmental impact assessments, and waste management protocols have been strengthened. Standardised procedures for waste segregation and recovery are generally in place across the sector, while firms increasingly participate in green

building certification schemes and sustainable procurement requirements. Across Ireland, there are improved practices in respect of the salvage and reuse of structural materials.

The construction sector faces challenges, however, as builders are obliged to ensure that recycled materials meet building standards and safety requirements. They can also face challenges associated with increased costs and supply-chain coordination. The industry has also noted a need for skills training and CPD in respect of circular construction practices.

3.5.2 Textiles and Fashion

Over recent years, there has been considerable media coverage and public-awareness campaigns (including on social media and in schools) in relation to ‘fast fashion’, and the need to reduce the amount of textile waste that goes to landfill. While the fashion / textile industry has been slow to change its practices, community groups have been to the fore in establishing charity and community shops and in re-purposing textiles.

The textile sector is likely to have to embrace more circular economy practices, not least because of changing consumer sentiment and the evolving legislative context. There are challenges, however, as Ireland’s textile industry is small, and most clothes are imported – often from distant locations where work practices are precarious. Therefore, the textile sector’s embrace of upcycling will involve changes at the global, as well as the local, scale.

3.5.3 Electronics and WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment)

As noted earlier, the electronics sector benefits from established collection and recycling infrastructure. Nevertheless, the sector faces challenges from increasing product complexity and shorter replacement cycles.

In Ireland, there are regulatory requirements for repairability and spare parts availability, and Ireland has an extensive collection network through retailer take-back and civic amenity sites. There are also supports in place for electronics refurbishment businesses and social enterprises, and the evolution of digital platforms for electronics sharing and resale is facilitating the application of circular economy principles and good practices.

As is the case in other industries, those involved in the production and sale of electronics are challenged by short product lifespans driven by technological advancement and marketing strategies. They also face challenges in respect of increasing miniaturisation and integration - hampering repair and recycling. Electronics also extract significant quantities of rare earth elements and conflict minerals. In some cases, there are

consumer concerns about data protection in device reuse and recycling. As Ireland is a relatively small market for electronics and other electrical goods, there is limited domestic manufacturing, and this reduces circular economy opportunities. Ireland also has to face legacy issues associated with the dumping of electronic goods in the Global South – sometimes under the pretext of donations to educational institutions. Currently, Irish universities are undertaking research in relation to upcycling and re-purposing of electronic components, and there is a growing interest among consumers in online platforms for electronics resale and circular consumption.

3.5.4 Plastics and Packaging

The packaging sector represents a critical focus given consumer visibility and environmental impact. Ireland's approach increasingly emphasises prevention, reuse, and recycling whilst maintaining food safety and product protection requirements, although the Covid-19 pandemic and the pervasiveness of disposable cups (and plates) over recent years represent clear disrupters.

3.5.5 Agriculture and Food Systems

The agricultural sector represents a unique circular economy opportunity given its biological material flows and potential for bioeconomy development. Food producers are increasingly using anaerobic digestion and new technologies are emerging (thanks in large part to Teagasc research) that are enabling farmers to reduce input requirements. The EU is providing support to the bioeconomy, including for agricultural waste valorisation and bio-based products, and many industries and workplaces have put in place comprehensive food waste prevention and recovery programmes.

Food producers will need support to overcoming some of the challenges their sector faces in mainstreaming circular economy approaches. Due to seasonal variability, food producers face challenges in managing fluctuating waste streams and material availability. They are also obliged to maintain and ensure food safety and quality throughout circular processes, while the shifting geography of food production in Ireland means that some rural areas are better equipped and have better facilities, of an appropriate scale, to ensure the viability of circular economy practices. As in other sectors, training and up-skilling will require ongoing investment.

3.5.6 Retail and Consumer Goods

The retail sector plays an important role in circular economy implementation through its direct consumer interface and supply chain influence. Circular business models, where they are in place, allow for the development of product-as-a-service and sharing

economy platforms. Many retailers implement circular procurement criteria in retail supply chains, while several have in-store and on-line educational programmes promoting circular consumption. Retailers, including many in County Carlow have partnered with civil society organisations (e.g., St Vincent de Paul) to support collection and processing systems for end-of-life products.

As is the case with the electronic industry, those in retail face challenges in breaking and challenging established consumption patterns and expectations. They are also obliged to balance circular economy investments with competitive pressures and to deal with supply chain complexities e.g., coordinating circular practices across complex global supply chains

3.5.7 Community and Voluntary Groups

Ireland's [National Social Enterprise Policy](#) *Trading for Impact* and the [National Volunteering Strategy](#) (2021-2025) provide relevant frameworks that intersect with circular economy objectives.

The National Social Enterprise Policy defines social enterprises as organisations that trade for a social, societal, or environmental purpose, with profits primarily reinvested to achieve their mission rather than distributed to shareholders. The policy establishes a comprehensive support ecosystem including funding mechanisms, capacity-building programmes, and measurement frameworks for social and environmental impact. It recognises social enterprises as operating across diverse sectors including environmental services, community development, and social inclusion, with many engaged in activities that align with circular economy principles such as waste reduction, repair services, and resource recovery.

The policy framework establishes formal recognition and measurement systems for social enterprises. It also outlines specific support structures (including the Social Enterprise Development Fund, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), and LEADER) that provide entry points for understanding how circular economy initiatives are being supported at local level.

The National Volunteering Strategy (2021-2025) outlines government commitment to strengthening volunteering infrastructure and recognising volunteer contributions to Irish society. The strategy identifies volunteering as contributing to community resilience, social cohesion, and addressing societal challenges including environmental sustainability. The strategy emphasises the role of volunteer organisations in community education, behaviour change initiatives, and grassroots innovation. It recognises that

many environmental and sustainability initiatives depend heavily on volunteer input, from community gardens and repair initiatives to educational programmes and awareness campaigns.

Both policies emphasise the importance of local-level implementation and community engagement, indicating that county-level research should examine how these national frameworks translate into practical action within specific geographical areas. The policies also highlight the significance of examining partnerships and collaboration between social enterprises, volunteer organisations, local development companies, and local authorities, as both frameworks emphasise multi-sectoral working and community engagement as essential components of effective implementation.

3.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

In December 2024, the European Environment Agency published [Ireland's Circular Economy Country Profile](#). This external review identified Ireland as having one of the EU's highest levels of material consumption and waste generation per capita - largely driven by sustained economic growth and a persistent reliance on a linear economic model. Consequently, progress towards greater circularity remains sluggish, with material reuse and recycling rates staying relatively low.

The EEA noted significant concern in respect of Ireland's continued heavy reliance on exporting waste for treatment and its "alarming" rate of municipal waste landfilling, which substantially exceeds the EU average. The revised stated that while Ireland has established strategic frameworks, notably the Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy and the Circular Economy Act 2022, a considerable implementation gap exists. It argued that concrete measures, particularly concerning crucial upstream actions like waste prevention and fostering eco-design, require significant acceleration, as current approaches still lean too heavily on end-of-pipe waste management solutions. The report highlighted substantial untapped opportunities for enhancing circularity within key sectors such as construction and demolition (a major waste source), food and bio-waste (where avoidable waste is high), plastics (suffering low recycling rates), and textiles. Ultimately, the findings underscore that achieving Ireland's circular economy ambitions necessitates a fundamental systemic shift, moving beyond mere waste management to transform production processes, consumption models, and business innovation.

The EEA put forward the following recommendations:

- **Accelerate Upstream Measures:** Prioritise and implement robust waste prevention programmes, eco-design requirements, and extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes more effectively, especially for key waste streams like packaging, textiles, and electronics.
- **Boost Domestic Recycling & End Landfilling:** Urgently invest in domestic waste collection, sorting, and reprocessing infrastructure to increase recycling quality and quantity, reduce reliance on export, and phase out landfilling of recyclable and biodegradable municipal waste.
- **Scale Circular Business Models:** Provide stronger incentives and support (financial, regulatory, knowledge-sharing) for businesses to adopt circular models like product-as-a-service, repair, reuse, and industrial symbiosis.
- **Enhance Data & Monitoring:** Improve the quality, coverage, and accessibility of circular economy data (material flows, consumption footprints, circular activities) to better track progress and inform policy.
- **Foster Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:** Strengthen collaboration between government departments, local authorities, industry, and consumers to create a coherent and supportive ecosystem for the circular transition.

The report concludes that Ireland faces substantial challenges but possesses clear opportunities. Accelerating the implementation of its circular economy framework, particularly focusing on prevention and domestic capacity, is essential for reducing environmental pressures and achieving sustainability goals.

The European Environment Agency's findings present significant opportunities for local authorities, civil society, and small businesses. The findings point to the importance of local authorities embedding circular principles into spatial planning, public procurement, and economic development strategies, so that councils can stimulate local markets for reused materials and recycled products. Local authorities will have to make further investments in upgrading domestic and commercial waste collection, sorting, and reprocessing infrastructure in order to boost local resilience, create skilled jobs, and reduce reliance on expensive landfill and export. Proactively supporting community reuse and repair networks, facilitating industrial symbiosis (where one business's waste becomes another's resource), and pioneering circular solutions in key sectors like construction and bio-waste can deliver substantial cost savings and environmental benefits for the community. Viewing waste as a resource stream unlocks potential for local economic development.

Among civil society (communities, NGOs, and citizens), there is potential to pioneer community-led initiatives such as repair cafés, tool libraries, clothing swaps, and sharing schemes – fostering skills, reducing waste, and strengthening social bonds. Civil society organisations can champion awareness-raising actions and education, and they can encourage the wider public to take steps towards sustainable consumption choices like choosing durable goods, embracing repair, and reducing food waste. By collaborating directly with local authorities and businesses, communities can help co-design accessible recycling systems, advocate for better reuse facilities, and hold stakeholders accountable, ensuring the circular transition is inclusive and meets community needs.

For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the circular economy represents a significant opportunity for innovation, differentiation, and cost efficiency. SMEs can lead by developing new circular business models such as product-as-a-service, offering repair and refurbishment services, or designing products for longevity and easy disassembly. Utilising locally sourced secondary materials can reduce costs and supply chain risks. There is growing market potential in servicing the circular economy – from specialised logistics for reuse networks to innovative recycling technologies. Collaborating with other local businesses (e.g., through industrial symbiosis networks) or partnering with community groups can open new markets and enhance your social licence to operate. Support exists to help you seize these opportunities and thrive economically while contributing positively.

National data and monitoring systems are in place in respect of guiding Ireland’s transition to a more mainstream application of the circular economy. These include the following:

- EPA Waste Statistics and Reporting: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) collects, compiles, and publishes detailed [national statistics](#) on waste generation, treatment (including recycling, recovery, energy recovery, and landfill), and movements. This includes mandatory data from waste operators and facilities.
- CSO Environmental Accounts (Material Flow Accounts - MFAs): The Central Statistics Office (CSO) develops and publishes Environmental Accounts, including Material Flow Accounts ([MFAs](#)¹⁰). These accounts track the physical flow of materials (biomass, metals, non-metallic minerals, fossil fuels) into the Irish economy (Domestic Material Consumption - DMC), through it, and out of it (as exports or back to the environment as emissions/waste).
- Progress Reporting to the European Commission: Ireland (primarily through the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, supported by the

¹⁰ Navigate to "Material Flow Accounts")

EPA and CSO) compiles and submits legally required data and progress reports to the European Commission. This includes reporting on waste targets (e.g., municipal waste recycling, landfill diversion), packaging waste, and broader circular economy indicators under frameworks like the [Circular Economy Monitoring Framework](#).

The aforementioned Climate Action KPIs report provides useful metrics in respect of local authorities' activities and outputs with respect to climate action, but it is worth noting that the most recent report (based on 2024 data) makes no mention of the circular economy.

3.7 Chapter Conclusion

Ireland has established a multi-layered policy framework for upcycling and circular economy development that encompasses international commitments through the UN Sustainable Development Goals, EU regulatory requirements, and national legislative initiatives. The Circular Economy Act 2022, alongside the 'Living More, Using Less' strategy, provides the statutory foundation and strategic direction for Ireland's transition towards greater circularity.

However, the December 2024 European Environment Agency assessment reveals a significant implementation gap between policy ambition and practical delivery. Ireland maintains one of the EU's highest levels of material consumption and waste generation per capita, with continued heavy reliance on waste export and municipal waste landfilling rates that substantially exceed EU averages. The EEA findings highlight that whilst Ireland has established comprehensive strategic frameworks, concrete measures—particularly concerning upstream actions like waste prevention and eco-design—require acceleration. This gap between national ambition and current reality underscores the critical importance of empowering local authorities and community groups. It means there is significant, low-hanging fruit to be captured, and that projects in Carlow have the potential to make a measurable impact on our national performance.

The sectoral approach, addressing construction, agriculture, retail, packaging, textiles, and electronics, recognises the diverse challenges across different economic domains. Each sector faces distinct barriers to circular economy implementation, from technical constraints in construction materials to complex global supply chains in textiles and electronics. The policy framework provides the regulatory architecture, but practical implementation varies considerably across sectors and geographical areas.

This policy landscape creates both opportunities and challenges for local government and civil society organisations. Local authorities occupy crucial positions as service providers, planners, and policy makers, whilst civil society organisations serve as innovators, advocates, and service deliverers. The effectiveness of Ireland's circular economy transition will largely depend on how these actors interpret, adapt, and implement national policy frameworks within their specific contexts.

This chapter establishes the regulatory and strategic context within which primary data collection will explore the practical experiences, challenges, and innovations of local government and civil society organisations in advancing circular economy principles and good practices. Understanding how national policy frameworks translate into local action—and identifying gaps between policy intent and implementation reality—forms the foundation for examining Ireland's circular economy transition at the local level. The following chapter examines how this multi-level policy context is being put into practice on the ground in County Carlow right now. The case studies of County Carlow Environmental Network (CCEN), the BeKind Project, Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Facility, and Carlow County Council Community Composting Project are living examples of how national strategy translates into local impact.

4. The Circular Economy in County Carlow: Overview of current practices

The circular economy represents a fundamental shift from the traditional linear ‘take-make-dispose’ model to one that emphasises regeneration, reuse, and resource efficiency. County Carlow has emerged as a progressive leader in Ireland's transition towards circular economy principles, demonstrating how rural and semi-urban communities can successfully implement sustainable practices whilst fostering economic development and social cohesion.

There are many well-established and successful circular economy projects in County Carlow. In addition, there are numerous new, emerging and fledgling initiatives that continue to expand the county's commitment to sustainable development. This chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of current and emerging activities, examining the diverse stakeholders involved and mapping the interconnected network of circular economy initiatives across the county.

Although this report focuses primarily on community-based circular economy projects, it is important to acknowledge that other actors, including Carlow County Council, statutory bodies, private companies, farmers, and education providers, among others, are all playing a crucial part in the circular economy. The success of Carlow's circular economy initiatives stems largely from the robust partnerships and collaborations among these diverse actors, creating a synergistic ecosystem that amplifies individual efforts and maximises collective impact.

4.1 Private Sector Engagement - Corporate Leadership in Circular Practices

The private sector's involvement in the circular economy is evidenced through various innovative approaches, demonstrating how businesses can integrate sustainability into their operations whilst maintaining commercial viability. Many private companies not only engage in circular practices but encourage their employees to adopt circular approach to their daily lives.

Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD) (a leading pharmaceutical and healthcare company, and one of Carlow's largest employers) is a prime example of a company that advances the circular economy. MSD hosts an annual sustainability week, at which it undertakes environmental awareness campaigns among its teams – thereby enabling them to understand the environmental impact of their daily lives. MSD encourages the growing of

food at home or at work, they donate their office furniture and unused equipment to local community centres, and they engage in ambitious biodiversity programmes. The firm also hosts clothing swap shops - creating what employees describe as an 'internal marketplace' that reduces consumption costs for workers, whilst diverting significant quantities of materials from waste streams.

The following businesses are among the other local firms that have incorporated circular-economy principles and practices into their operations:

- [O'Toole Composting](#) is based in Ballintrane (on the outskirts of Carlow Town). They specialise in the management of bulk food waste, which is fed into an in-vessel composting facility – known as a *Gicom In-Vessel Tunnel Composting System*. It uses state-of-the-art technology that helps to break down organic matter aerobically, and it can produce larger quantities in a relatively small area more quickly than windrow composting. Furthermore, it can accommodate animal by-products, and it stores carbon dioxide. Depending on the input material and the requested compost output, O'Toole's composting process takes between two and four weeks.
- [Doyle's Deli & Food 2 Go](#) is located in the village of Royal Oak, close to Bagenalstown. Like any food business, Doyle's operators have had to replace equipment over time. Following their attendance at the [Green Summit](#) (an annual information event, convened by Carlow County Council's Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and Economic Development & EU Projects Office), and thanks to support from the LEO's *Green for Business Programme* and an energy-efficiency grant, Doyles were enabled to install energy efficient models. Moreover, they sourced pre-moved furniture and other items (including a cabin) and they laid floors made from upcycled materials¹¹.
- [Declan Byrne & Sons](#) are a long-established timber suppliers based in Graiguecullen. Having participated in the LEO's *Green for Business Programme*, they sourced a wood-briquetting machine that has enabled them to transform sawdust and other bi-products into a starter / kindling briquette. This new product is on sale to the general public.

Other manufacturing companies have also embraced circular principles through industrial symbiosis arrangements, whereby waste materials from one process become inputs for another. For instance, biomass residues from food processing facilities are

¹¹ Doyles' green journey is outlined here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYQwSoCUiSU>

now being utilised by local heating companies, creating closed-loop systems that benefit both environmental and economic outcomes.

'[Together Towards a Greener Carlow](#)' is a targeted business support programme delivered by Carlow Chamber and funded by the Government's Green Transition Fund. Its primary objective is to guide and equip small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in County Carlow to adopt more sustainable and circular business practices, thereby future-proofing them against evolving environmental regulations and enhancing their competitiveness.

The programme is designed to translate the principles of the circular economy into practical, actionable strategies for local businesses. Its core offerings include providing participants with a Green Charter (Figure 14) to formalise their commitment, conducting comprehensive sustainability audits to identify key areas for improvement, and delivering tailored mentoring from sustainability experts. This structured support helps businesses to systematically reduce waste, improve energy efficiency, and integrate circularity into their operations. Among the many participants are: ARC Construction Solutions; Hickson's Super Valu; BEAM Services; Carlow Toolmaking Services; Blacknight Solutions; CustomPC; Burnside Autocyl; The Talbot Hotel; and Detail Menswear, among others.

The initiative has yielded significant, tangible outputs. Specific examples include the installation of solar panels and voltage optimisers by several businesses to reduce energy consumption and generate renewable power. Other notable outputs involve companies conducting detailed resource mapping to minimise waste and implementing robust recycling schemes.

Figure 14: Carlow Chamber Alliance is promoting several green initiatives



Source: [County Carlow Chamber website](#)

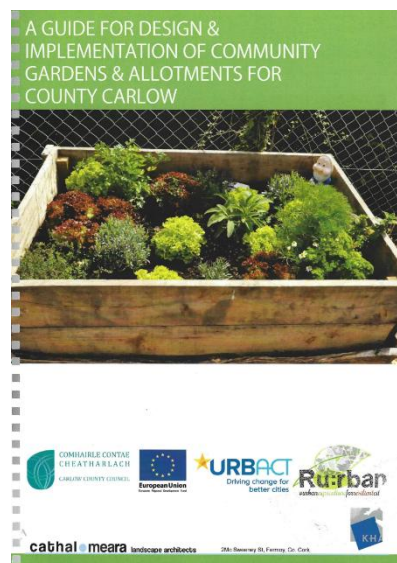
4.2 Community Gardens & Allotments

In May 2025, Carlow County Council became the first local authority in Ireland to [launch](#) a policy on community gardens and allotments. Across the county, community gardens and allotments are flourishing. They are transforming underutilised plots into vibrant hubs of growth and sustainability. Community gardens in County Carlow, include those in:

- Tullow (operated by Forward Steps, Family Resource Centre);
- [Bagenalstown](#);
- [Hacketstown](#); and
- Carlow Town, including [An Gairdín Beo](#), the Elderflower Garden Club, and Irish Wheelchair Association [sensory garden](#).

Some community gardens focus on food production, while others focus on biodiversity, training, awareness raising and / or education. In their own ways, they are practical, local embodiments of the circular economy, actively reducing waste and regenerating resources.

The core principle of a circular economy is to eliminate waste and keep materials in use, a model these gardens exemplify. A primary contribution is through composting: Garden members and volunteers divert garden clippings, and other organic waste from landfill, where it would generate harmful methane gas. Instead, this material is composted on-site, creating a rich, nutrient-dense soil amendment. This closes the nutrient loop, eliminating the need for synthetic fertilisers and transforming local ‘waste’ into a valuable resource that nourishes new growth. These principles and practices are described in a dedicated guidebook, published by Carlow County Council.



The circular principles of reuse and regeneration are evident across the county’s community gardens and allotments. An Gairdín Beo (Figure 15), for instance, demonstrates impressive multi-functionality, serving not only as a productive food garden but also as an educational facility and a social space that fosters community well-being. This integrated approach is key to a sustainable circular model. Seeds are often saved from one season's harvest for the next, preserving local biodiversity. Water butts collect rainwater for irrigation, and common features include upcycled materials, such as pallets transformed into raised beds, giving new life to items that would

otherwise be discarded. An Gairdín Beo operates a café during the summer months, where excess food from the garden is ‘sold’ for donations.

Figure 15: An Gairdín Beo Source: [An Gairdín Beo](#)



The social and educational aspects of community gardens provide another valuable layer to their circular function. The gardens function as community centres where knowledge about sustainable gardening, composting, and cooking is shared. These and other gatherings foster a culture of environmental stewardship, encouraging participants to adopt similar practices at home. By providing access to fresh, local food, they also reduce food miles and associated packaging waste. In these ways, they are cultivating a more resilient, connected, and truly circular local economy from the ground up.

Carlow County Fire & Rescue Service – Urban Fire Station Gardens Initiative

Carlow County Fire & Rescue Service has developed urban fire station gardens across all County Fire Service stations, (Figure 16) delivering an innovative project that supports firefighter wellbeing while advancing biodiversity, sustainability, and the circular economy.

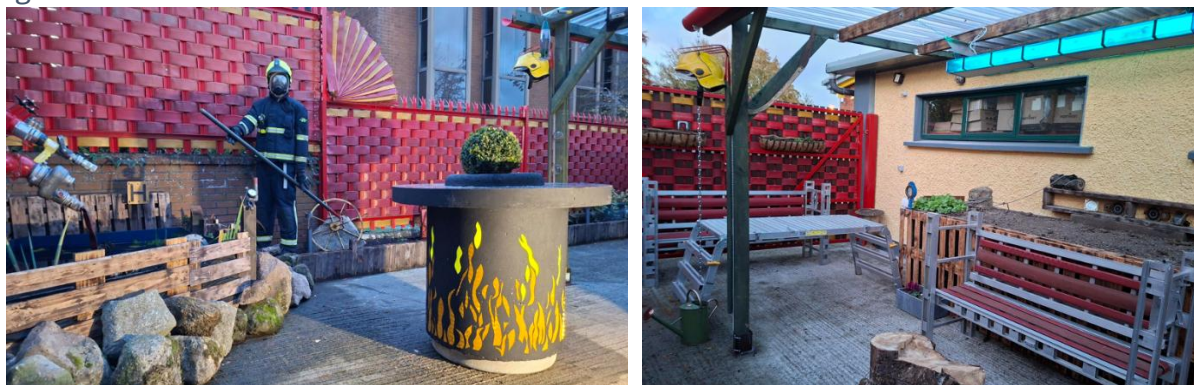
The gardens provide dedicated outdoor spaces where firefighters can decompress and recover after attending traumatic incidents. Each garden has been uniquely designed, with end-of-life fire service equipment originally destined for landfill creatively reimaged and upcycled. Repurposed equipment is used to form seating areas, water features, insect hotels, decorative elements, and weather protection for plants, demonstrating practical, circular economy solutions in action.

Each project was led by a designated Green Firefighter in every station, ensuring strong ownership and sustainability of the initiative. Community engagement was central to the delivery, with active involvement from local schools, businesses, and gardening clubs throughout the design and build process.

The gardens also incorporate on-site composting systems, using compostable fire station waste to produce nutrient-rich compost. This feeds raised vegetable beds that grow fruit and vegetables for consumption by firefighters and fire service staff, further reinforcing sustainable practices and local food production.

Collectively, the urban fire station gardens promote mental wellbeing, environmental responsibility, community collaboration, and climate-conscious resource use—embedding sustainability at the heart of Carlow County Fire & Rescue Service operations.

Figure 16: Fire Station Gardens



4.3 Community Sports and Recreation

Sporting organisations are also heavily involved in the circular economy, with grassroots initiatives that demonstrate the power of community-led sustainability efforts. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Camogie Association, and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) enable members to circulate (pass on) hoodies and other sporting gear through well-organised exchange systems that ensure equipment remains in active use throughout its functional lifetime.

The [GAA Green Club Programme](#) is a nationwide initiative that supports clubs to become more sustainable and environmentally responsible. It provides resources, guidance and recognition for clubs working to improve in areas such as waste management, energy use, water conservation and travel. The programme encourages community engagement and promotes climate action through sport. Many local GAA clubs, nationally and in County Carlow, host gear-swap evenings, which have become popular social events that combine community building with sustainable practices.

Carlow Town Hurling club runs a well-established ‘Boot Bin’ for their young players, who are affectionately known as the ‘little puckers.’ This community-driven scheme allows families to donate and exchange boots. In addition, the club offers an informal lending library helping to make hurling and camogie more inclusive by providing essential gear to players regardless of financial circumstances. The club frequently takes donations of unused or damaged adult hurls and work with a local hurley maker to remake them into new hurls suitable for their junior players.

Rugby and soccer clubs have adopted similar approaches, with Carlow RFC’s ‘Second Chance Sports’ opening the door for individuals who may have missed earlier opportunities to play rugby, regardless of background or experience. The programme provides access to refurbished or donated gear and includes professional equipment assessment services to ensure safety standards are maintained whilst maximising utilisation rates. The programme reduces financial barriers to participation and encourages reuse of equipment, aligns with environmental goals.

Carlow Lawn Tennis club provided a tennis ball recycling scheme, through which so-called ‘dead¹²’ or worn-out tennis balls are collected and used for sports shoe soles.

¹² This term implies that the ball has lost its internal pressure, and it no longer bounces sufficiently to make it suitable for use in matches.

4.4 Education, Upskilling, Knowledge Sharing and Expanding Access to Information

Education, training and up-skilling are essential to advancing the circular economy, and Carlow-Kilkenny Education and Training Board (KCETB) has developed a comprehensive course in Sustainable Supply Chain Procurement. This practical, workplace-focused programme incorporates key principles and practices in respect of the circular economy, and it is delivered using blended methods.

The South East Technological University (SETU) has made sustainability a core principle of its strategic vision, operations, and academic mission. The University has integrated circular economy principles throughout its curriculum, with particular emphasis on engineering, business, and environmental science programmes. The university's 'Living Laboratory' initiative allows students to develop and evaluate circular economy solutions within the campus environment, creating real-world impact whilst providing valuable learning experiences.

The university has established partnerships with local businesses and community organisations that provide internship opportunities focused on circular economy projects. These placements have resulted in significant innovations, including waste reduction strategies that have been adopted across multiple organisations and resource sharing platforms that have enhanced collaboration among local enterprises.

The Green Campus Programme (Figure 17) at South East Technological University (SETU) is a student- and staff-led initiative aimed at embedding sustainability into every aspect of university life. The Green Campus Committee is comprised of students and staff who volunteer to promote sustainable citizenship, circular economy practices and environmental awareness across all campuses.

Figure 17: SETU Green Campus – awareness raising



Source: [SETU](#)

[The Green-Schools Programme](#) is Ireland’s leading environmental education initiative for schools, run by An Taisce (the National Trust for Ireland), in partnership with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and supported by local authorities. Green-Schools encourages students, teachers, and the wider school community to take action on environmental issues through a structured, student-led approach. The programme is based on a seven-step framework that helps schools work toward earning Green Flags in various themes. There are fifty-six primary and secondary schools in Carlow registered for the green school programme (Figure 18) who are supporting the circular economy by promoting sustainable practices that reduce waste, reuse materials, and encourage recycling—core principles of circularity.

Figure 18: Examples of Green-Schools Activities in County Carlow



Source: [Presentation College Carlow](#)

[Steadfast Creations](#), among others, are ensuring that children and young people are equipped to undertake circular economy activities. Steadfast Creations has noted a *Textiles Repair Café* offering:

- Patching holes in clothing and textiles
- Fixing zips (repairs only, not full replacements)
- Taking up hems on skirts, tops, or trousers
- Replacing buttons

The team also provides advice and guidance for upcycling and home alterations. It fosters welcoming space that encourages people to repair rather than discard.

4.5 Social Economy and Charity Retail

Over recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of 'charity shops' in County Carlow. These establishments provide essential spaces in which individuals can source affordable housing items and clothing whilst supporting charitable causes. Charity shops serve as important income sources for social justice organisations such as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Trócaire, and local community development associations.

The sector has experienced remarkable growth, with the number of charity retail outlets increasing by 60% over the past five years. This expansion reflects both growing awareness of sustainable consumption practices and increasing demand for affordable goods in response to economic pressures. Charity shops now collectively process over 150 tonnes of donated materials annually, with diversion rates from landfill exceeding 85%.

Recently, charity shops have been rebranding themselves as 'sustainable retail centres' and 'community resource hubs,' reflecting their evolution beyond simple second-hand sales to become comprehensive circular economy facilitators. Many now offer repair services, upcycling workshops, and educational programmes that help customers extend the lifespan of their purchases.

Figure 19: An Siopa Glas



Source: [An Siopa Glas](#)

[An Siopa Glas](#) in Ballon (Figure 19), plays a meaningful role in supporting the local community circular economy through several grassroots initiatives. As a volunteer-run community shop, An Siopa Glas offers second-hand clothes, books, toys, furniture, and more. This business model promotes reuse and reduces waste, making sustainable shopping accessible to all. Proceeds from the shop go directly toward maintaining Ballon village, supporting the local school, and funding community charities. Events like seed and plant swaps encourage biodiversity and sustainable gardening practices, while also strengthening local social capital.

4.6 Other Community-Led Initiatives

Men's Sheds (including those in Tullow, Carlow Town, Bagenalstown, and Borris) have been particularly innovative in promoting the circular economy through practical projects that combine social engagement with resource recovery activities. They have established comprehensive workshop facilities where members restore furniture, repair household items, and create new products from salvaged materials.

The Tullow Men's Shed has developed expertise in electronic equipment refurbishment, processing over 200 devices annually that would otherwise have been discarded. Their 'Digital Inclusion' programme provides refurbished computers and tablets to students and elderly residents, bridging the digital divide whilst demonstrating the value of repair-focused approaches to technology management.

Carlow Town Men's Shed operates a popular 'Restoration Station' that accepts furniture donations from throughout the county. Skilled volunteers assess, repair, and refinish items that are then sold at affordable prices or donated to families in need. The initiative has diverted over 15 tonnes of furniture from waste streams whilst providing meaningful activity for participants and valuable resources for the community.



*Tullow
Men's Shed*

The network has established inter-shed collaboration systems where specialised skills and equipment are shared across multiple locations. This approach maximises the utilisation of expensive tools whilst ensuring that complex restoration projects can be undertaken regardless of the specific capabilities of individual sheds.

The establishment of women's sheds are part of a growing movement across Ireland to provide women with spaces for social connection, empowerment, and lifelong learning. Programmes for several newly established groups in Carlow include D.I.Y and waste minimisation and management workshops.

Many communities have established mini-free libraries, whereby members of the public (residents and visitors) can take a book and bring a book, creating informal knowledge sharing networks that promote literacy whilst reducing the environmental impact associated with book production and distribution. These initiatives have grown throughout County Carlow over recent years. The following images (Figure 20) show the official opening of a mini-free library in Carlow Town (July 2025)

Figure 20: Mini-Free Library in Carlow Town



Above: Representatives of Carlow County Council (including former mayor of the Carlow Municipal District, Cllr Fintan Phelan), members of An Garda Síochána, young people and leaders from Carlow Regional Youth Services' Comhairle Na nÓg and students from the Tempe Sister Cities Twinning Programme at the launch of Carlow's first pocket library at Carlow Garda Station Community Garden

Photos: michaelorourkephotography.ie

[Carlow County Development Partnership](#) (CCDP) is a key enabler and promoter of the circular economy, strategically using community development approaches to embed its principles within local civil society. The organisation leads by example, as demonstrated by the refurbishment of its own newly acquired offices using pre-loved and second-hand

furniture and equipment. This commitment to the 'use longer' principle authentically underpins its wider external work.

This community-led model is clearly demonstrated through its specific social enterprises. The [Care & Repair](#) project is a prime example of circularity in action, focusing on the 'use longer' principle. By facilitating the repair and re-use of furniture, appliances, and other household goods, the project diverts significant waste from landfill while providing affordable items to families. This service, delivered within a community development and social inclusion framework, actively educates participants on the value of repair and reuse, shifting mindsets away from a disposable culture, while also alleviating poverty.

Similarly, the [Be Kind](#) project, which redistributes surplus clothing and household goods, directly embodies the circular economy principle of 'eliminating waste.' By creating a formal channel for redistribution, it prevents quality products from being discarded. The project also raises public awareness about over-consumption, encouraging more conscious habits. In recognition of the Be Kind's achievements, Carlow County Development won the Sustainable Initiatives Award at the Carlow Chamber Business Awards 2025.

Through these projects and through its animation and capacity-building work, CCDP provides the tools and support that allow local people to lead and participate in circular activities. This approach ensures that the transition to a circular economy is not just an environmental policy but a bottom-up effort, building community resilience and fostering a culture of resourcefulness across County Carlow.

4.7 Social Justice and Environmental Motivation

Those who participate in circular economy activities in County Carlow generally emphasise the social justice dimension of their projects, recognising that sustainable practices must be accessible and equitable to achieve lasting impact. They prioritise initiatives that address poverty, social exclusion, and inequality whilst simultaneously advancing environmental objectives.

Community leaders consistently articulate the connection between environmental sustainability and social wellbeing, arguing that circular economy practices can simultaneously address multiple challenges facing rural communities. This holistic approach has proven particularly effective in securing community buy-in and maintaining long-term engagement with circular economy initiatives.

Circular economy promoters are also deeply cognisant of the environmental and ecological gains associated with their activities, often citing specific metrics related to waste diversion, energy savings, and carbon footprint reduction.

The [County Carlow Environmental Network](#) (CCEN) actively promotes the community circular economy through grassroots initiatives, partnerships, and public engagement. They have documented positive ecological impacts associated with circular economy practices, including habitat creation through composting initiatives, wildlife corridor development along shared transport routes, and native species recovery in areas where circular farming practices have been implemented. Since 2020, CCEN has hosted an Autumn and Winter Film Series, to inform and educate the general public about the positives of the circular economy, screening documentaries and facilitating discussions that highlight successful circular economy implementations from around the world whilst exploring their relevance to local conditions. In May 2025, the CCEN hosted a textile repair cafe (from Steadfast Creations), knitting & crochet pop up, and clothing swap (Figure 21).

Figure 21: World Textile Day, 2025, in Carlow

World Textile Day
Free Exhibition

Get Creative!
Style Repairs

- Browse in the Swap Shop
- Sewing Maching Demonstration With Steadfast Sewing Group
- Learn to Crochet a Square Patch for Your Favourite Worn out Clothes
- Join us in conversation about the Impacts of Fast Fashion on our Environment

Where:
An Gairdín Beo
Dublin Road,
Rathnapish, Carlow
R93E1HF

When:
1pm - 4pm,
May 3rd

CountyCarlow Environmental Network | An Gairdín Beo a living garden for Carlow | CARLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

Source: CCEN page: Swap, Repair and Create

<https://ccen.ie/swap-repair-and-create-celebrate-textile-day-in-carlow/>

The CCEN regularly hosts climate cafés that provide informal venues for sharing information, discussing challenges, and coordinating collaborative projects. These events have become important networking opportunities for individuals and organisations involved in circular economy activities.

4.8 Local Government Leadership and Integration

Carlow County Council is among the statutory bodies that play a key role in supporting and enabling the circular economy through policy development, infrastructure provision, information dissemination, capacity-building and partnership facilitation. The local authority's promotion of circular economy principles complements the delivery of the Carlow Climate Action Plan, and it adds significant value to the work of the biodiversity officer through integrated planning and resource allocation.

Among the synergistic activities are the development of circular economy indicators that are incorporated into county-level monitoring and evaluation systems, ensuring that progress towards sustainability goals can be measured and reported effectively. The Council has also established green procurement policies and procedures that prioritise circular economy considerations, creating market demand for sustainable products and services whilst demonstrating leadership in public sector sustainability.

Local authority initiatives are strategically delivered through a combination of direct programming, competitive funding, and partnerships with national environmental agencies. A cornerstone of this effort is the annual Carlow County Council Climate Action Fund. This competitive grant scheme provides crucial financial support to community groups, schools, and non-profit organisations for projects that align with local and national climate and circularity goals. Funded projects are tangible demonstrations of circularity in action, including community gardens that reduce food miles and compost organic waste, "repair and share" schemes that extend product lifespans, and initiatives focused on habitat restoration and biodiversity. This fund effectively seeds grassroots circular economy practices by empowering communities to implement their own solutions (Carlow County Council, 2024).

Carlow County Council also offers members of the public possibilities to clear out bulky furniture items and to recycle mattresses – by bringing them to the Powerstown Civic Amenity Site. While these are not exactly circular economy activities (for those bringing the items), Carlow County Council ensures that materials are either recycled or upcycled; the council has engaged with Cirtex Ltd. Upcycled Insulation & Textile Products (a private company engaged in upcycling activities¹³), which ensures materials are used in construction or in the manufacture of other products. The county council also

¹³ Based in Co. Longford, Cirtex is an upcycling company and a member of Government Initiative [CIRCULÉIRE](#), the first cross-sectoral industry led network committed to accelerating the net-zero carbon circular economy in Ireland. For information about Cirtex, please see the company's website: <https://cirtex.ie/about-cirtex-ireland-insulation-upcycling>

offers citizens the opportunity to dispose of old electronic equipment through drop-off events in partnership with Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment ([WEEE](#)) Ireland.

As noted in Chapter 2, circular economy activities dovetail with climate action. In October 2024, Carlow County Council hosted its first annual Climate Action Week (Figure 22) – to inspire conversations, promote innovation, enable networking and showcase positive actions that can be taken for climate, biodiversity and the circular economy. The county council envisages hosting this event on an annual basis.

Figure 22: Carlow County Council Climate Action Week Activities 2024 and 2025

The figure displays several promotional posters for Carlow Climate Action Week. The main posters are for 2024 (October 14th-20th) and 2025 (October 6th-13th). The 2024 posters list various activities:

- Thursday 17th October:** Clothing Swap Shop (11am-2pm, Carlow College, St. Patrick's), FREE Energy Clinic (12:00pm-2pm, Carlow Central Library).
- Friday 18th October:** FREE Energy Clinic (12:00pm-2pm, Carlow Central Library).
- Saturday 19th October:** Storytime for under 5's (10:30am, Carlow Library), Tree Planting workshop (10:30am-11:30am, An Gairdin Beo, Carlow Town).
- 14th - 20th October 2024:** Climate Action Week, featuring a central graphic with icons for wind turbines, solar panels, a bicycle, a car, and a recycling symbol.

 The 2025 poster for October 6th-13th features a similar central graphic. A separate poster for 'Whats Up With The Weather?' on Wednesday 16th October (7pm-7:45pm Online) features Alan O'Reilly. Another poster for 'Climate Conversations for over 60's' on Thursday 17th October (10:30-11:30am, Askea parish centre) features Jozinta Barris. A poster for 'Business Breakfast' on Wednesday 16th October (7:30am-8:30am, Seven Oaks Hotel) is also included. A poster for 'Carlow Junk Kouture exhibition' (14th-18th October) and 'Information workshop in Community Energy Grant Funding' (Monday 14th October) are also present. A poster for 'From Early Adopters to Everyone: The Psychology of Community Change' (Friday 10th October, 10am Online) features Dr. Shane Timmons. Logos for Carlow County Council and Climate Action are visible throughout the posters.

Source: [Carlow County Council](#)

Complementing these activities, the Council provides ongoing environmental education through its various departments (e.g., Community, Local Enterprise Office) as well as promoting education and awareness-raising in partnership with the Carlow County Public Participation Network (PPN). The PPN regularly circulates resources and hosts workshops and information sessions on topics such as waste prevention, composting, and sustainable living. These sessions are designed to build capacity within community

groups, equipping them with the knowledge to minimise their environmental footprint and operate in a more resource-efficient manner.

Furthermore, the Council actively promotes and supports the national 'Rediscovery Centre' model, which is a flagship for the circular economy in Ireland (See Chapter 3). By championing the principles of reuse, repair, and upcycling, the Council encourages residents and communities to move beyond a disposable mindset. This is operationalised through support for local charity shops, promotion of 'Waste-Free Living' campaigns, and by providing information on how to access repair services, thereby embedding circular economy thinking into everyday community life.

4.9 Innovation and Expansion

Carlow County Council's Economic Development Unit plays a central role in advancing economic development through circular economy innovation in its Local Enterprise Office, Economic Development and EU Programmes. By supporting small businesses to adopt sustainable and resource-efficient models, the unit helps strengthen competitiveness and resilience across the local economy. Programmes such as *Green for Business* and *Lean for Business* provide tailored mentoring, training, and implementation support to help enterprises integrate circular practices, reduce waste, and unlock new market opportunities.

Complementing these activities, Carlow Community Enterprise Centre is a social enterprise which develops co-working hub and enterprise spaces providing the opportunity for social and circular enterprises by fostering collaboration and innovation. The Centres regularly hosts events and showcases at which local enterprises highlight practical examples of waste reduction, resource sharing, and community-based economic growth, reinforcing Carlow's commitment to building a sustainable, inclusive, and future-ready economy.

Emerging initiatives continue to expand the scope and impact of Carlow's circular economy activities. Digital platform development is creating new opportunities for resource sharing and collaboration. Mobile applications connect individuals and organisations with surplus resources to those with identified needs, facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges that maximise resource utilisation whilst building community connections.

Youth engagement programmes are ensuring that circular economy principles are embedded in the next generation's thinking and behaviour. School-based initiatives,

youth enterprise programmes, and environmental education projects are creating awareness and skills that will support long-term sustainability transitions.

Research and development partnerships with third-level institutions are generating new knowledge and innovations that can be applied locally whilst contributing to broader understanding of circular economy implementation in rural and semi-urban contexts.

4.10 Mapping Circular Economy Activities in County Carlow

The following maps (Figure 23) show the distribution of many circular economy activities across County Carlow. The data presented in these maps is based on survey work undertaken in August and September 2025. As noted earlier, however, the circular economy is gathering considerable momentum, and the maps will need to be updated, as new activities emerge, evolve and grow. Nevertheless, these maps provide a useful and informative snapshot of activities. Moreover, they represent an acknowledgement of achievements to date, and they should inspire other communities and organisations to embrace and promote circular economy activities.

The maps show the following:

- 9 Second-chance / charity shops;
- 9 Community gardens;
- 4 Public Libraries¹⁴;
- 13 Community centres and family resource centres;
- 22 Events, training and workshops; and
- 22 other groups that are actively promoting the circular economy.

An open-source interactive map, which includes all of these activities can be accessed via this link:

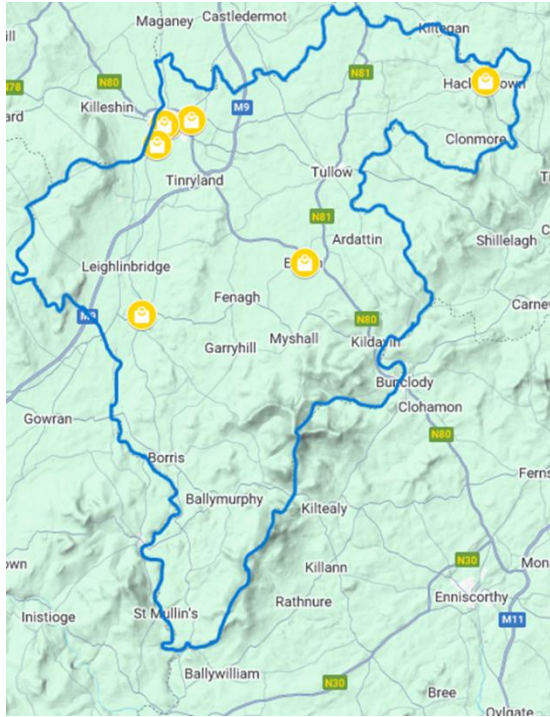
[Carlow Circular Economy Map](#)

This map can be edited and updated as need be, as the information presented here is valid as of October 2025 – based on the survey results that are presented in Chapter 6. Carlow County Council looks forward to adding other groups and projects over time.

¹⁴ As noted already in this report, several community (mini, free) libraries have come on stream, across Carlow, in recent years. The number of such facilities is growing. At the time of writing, we were advised of the following, all of which have been included in the following maps: In front of the Garda Station in Carlow Town: R93 W983; Tullow Men's Shed: R93 V259; Myshall Parish Hall: R21 P797; New Oak Community Centre: R93 DK06; and Rathvilly Community Garden (behind the Parochial House): R93 DR53. As with all items included in the maps, this list can, and should, be expanded as new services and activities come on stream.

Figure 23: Maps of circular economy activities and promoters in County Carlow, 2025

Second-chance / Charity Shops



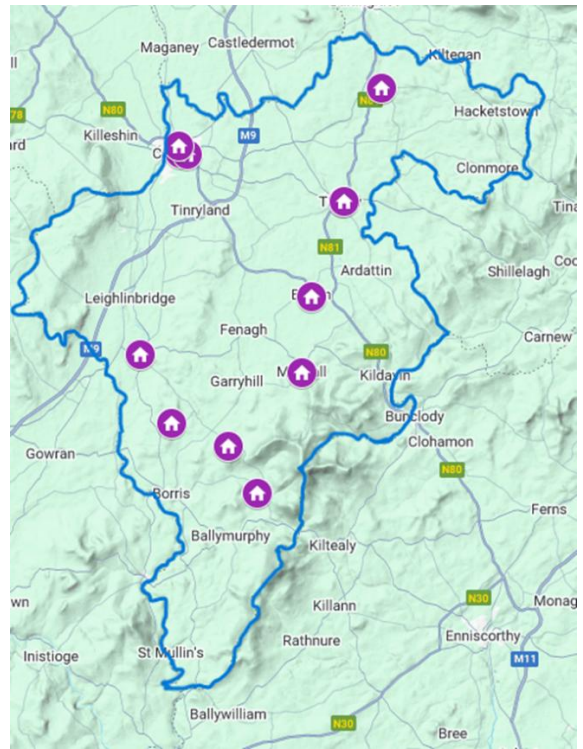
Community Gardens



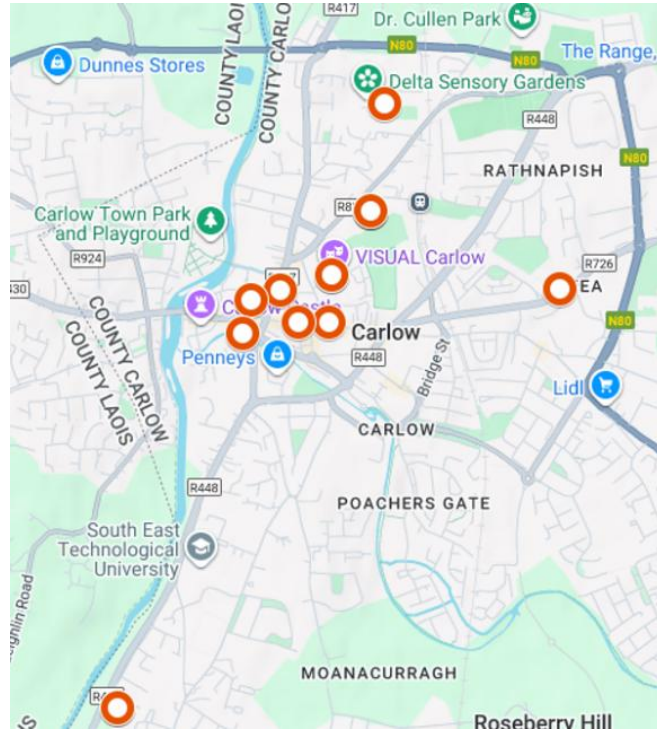
Local Authority Libraries (Carlow County Council)



Community Centres and FRCs



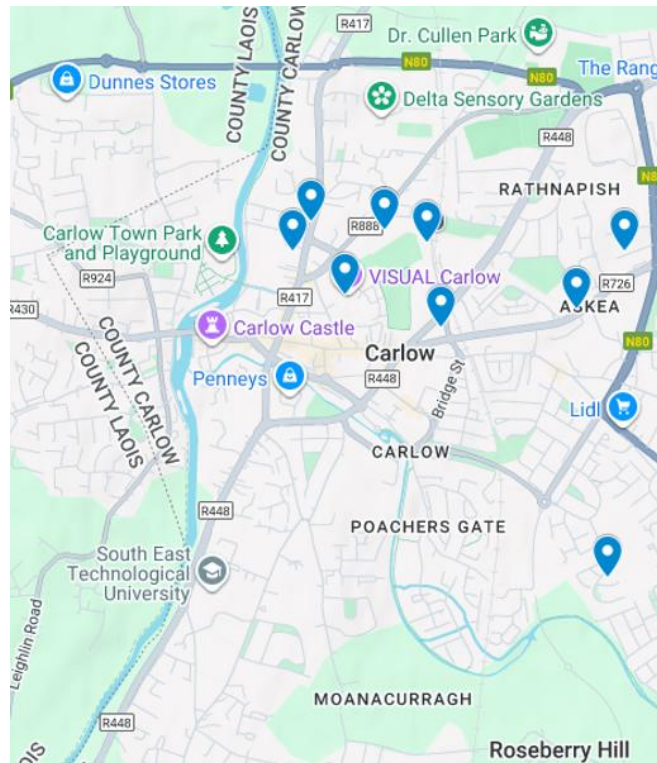
Events, Training and Workshops – Carlow Town County



Community Groups promoting the



Circular Economy Activities



4.11 Chapter Conclusion

County Carlow's circular economy landscape demonstrates the breadth and depth of sustainable practice that can be achieved through collaborative, multi-sectoral engagement. From major employers like MSD, Doyles (Royal Oak), Declan Byrne & Sons and O'Toole Composting Ltd. Taking sustainability initiatives, to grassroots initiatives such as community gardens and Men's Sheds restoring furniture, the county has developed a robust ecosystem of circular economy activities that span the private, public, and community sectors.

The chapter has documented diverse examples of circular economy practice across multiple sectors. Private sector leadership through programmes such as 'Together Towards a Greener Carlow' is complemented by community-led projects like Care & Repair and Be Kind, whilst Carlow County Council provides essential infrastructure, funding, and policy support through initiatives including the Climate Action Fund. Educational institutions, from the 50+ primary and secondary schools registered for the Green-Schools Programme to SETU's Living Laboratory, are embedding circular economy principles in the next generation whilst generating practical innovations for current application.

The mapping exercise, which was undertaken in August and September 2025, reveals significant activity across the county: 9 second-chance and charity shops, 9 community gardens (among the survey respondents as well as many others), 4 public (local authority) libraries with exchange programmes, 13 community centres and family resource centres, 22 events and training workshops, and 22 community groups actively promoting circular practices. Yet these figures represent only a snapshot of a dynamic and expanding movement. New initiatives continue to emerge, existing projects evolve and scale, and the momentum behind circular economy principles grows stronger. For example, over the course of 2025, new free, mini-libraries have come on stream – including one outside the Garda Station in Carlow Town (Figure 20).

The material presented throughout this chapter shows that participants and leaders in circular economy activities have consistently emphasised both the social justice and environmental dimensions of their work. Community leaders articulate the connection between environmental sustainability and social wellbeing, whilst practitioners cite specific metrics related to waste diversion, energy savings, and carbon footprint reduction. The County Carlow Environmental Network has documented positive ecological impacts including habitat creation through composting initiatives, whilst projects such as Care & Repair and Be Kind explicitly operate within community development and social inclusion frameworks. This dual focus on environmental

sustainability and social equity has proven essential in securing community buy-in and maintaining long-term engagement.

The following chapter (Chapter 5) presents five detailed case studies that showcase the circular economy in action across County Carlow, providing in-depth examination of specific initiatives and their impacts. Chapter 6 then presents the results of a comprehensive survey that captures stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of circular economy activities in the county. Together, these chapters build upon the overview presented here to provide a fuller understanding of how circular economy principles are being implemented and experienced in County Carlow.

5. Case Studies in Community-Led Circularity

5.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 4, there are many circular economy initiatives in County Carlow. The circular economy is driven by grassroots community action and supportive local governance.

This chapter presents four detailed case studies that exemplify circular economy dynamics in practice. From a social enterprise redistributing essential goods and a council-led clothes swap kit fostering sustainable fashion, to a community-wide composting programme and an environmental network building collective knowledge, these initiatives demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the circular economy. Together, they illustrate that circularity is as much about strengthening social fabric and building community resilience as it is about diverting waste from landfill. These stories showcase the practical application of circular principles—reduce, reuse, repair, and recycle—and provide a replicable blueprint for other communities and organisations that are seeking to build a more sustainable and inclusive local economy.

5.2 Case Studies

The four case studies presented in this chapter are as follows:

- The BE Kind project – Carlow County Development Partnership;
- The Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Kit – Weaving a Circular Fashion Community;
- The Carlow County Council Master Composting Programme – Closing the Loop on Organic Waste; and
- The County Carlow Environmental Network.

Case Study 1: The BE Kind Project – Weaving a Circular and Caring Community in Carlow

1. Project Profile

Organisation Name: Be Kind Carlow

Legal Status: The Be Kind project is operated by Carlow County Development Partnership (CCDP), which is the local development company covering Carlow Town and County.

Established: May 2020

Location: The project’s hub is in Carlow Town, but its activities are countywide.

Contact: Carlow County Development Partnership

Email: reception@carlowdevelopment.ie

Website/social media: [Facebook](#)

Key Features:

Approach: The project addresses social, environmental, and economic challenges through a sustainable warehouse model, and it is an integral component in the suite of integrated supports and services provided by CCDP.

Beneficiaries: 3,000+ through various activities and direct support.

Personnel: Tús¹⁵ support workers (and supervisors) and SICAP specialists

Main Funding Sources: Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), local business and individual donations, and proceeds from pop-up shops (4 times / year) and 1-day events (depending on stock).

Figure 24: Outputs up to end-2025



¹⁵ The Tús initiative is a community work placement scheme providing short-term working opportunities for unemployed people. The work opportunities are to benefit the community and are provided by community and voluntary organisations. Participants work 19½ hours a week and the placement lasts 12 months. Local Development Companies manage Tús schemes.

2. Circular Economy Activities

Be Kind has grown significantly in response to local needs over the past five years. The project provides vital supports to individuals / households; it supplies essential household and personal items (e.g., clothes, furniture) to people in need due to circumstances such as poverty / low income, mental health or psychological challenges, and homelessness (including fleeing from domestic violence) or other circumstances. The project began operations in the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it proved to be an important lifeline to many of those who were housebound (e.g., older persons) or unable to leave home (due to caring duties and / or health concerns). Subsequently, since 2022, it has represented a cornerstone of the community response to the arrival of displaced people from Ukraine, and it proved to be hugely successful in enabling people to establish themselves and set up homes and lives in Carlow. In essence, Be Kind supports a diverse cohort of people, and it represents an effective local, innovative, and agile community service – delivering economic, social and environmental gains.

Be Kind's base is a large warehouse building in the centre of Carlow Town. This hub is a hive of activity. Members of the public (private individuals, companies, organisations) can bring items they wish to donate. Alternatively, members of the Be Kind team can collect items e.g., clean out a premises / home (if somebody passes on or is going into a nursing home). Once items are received, the first step (in their journey) is to sort them:

- Some items can be recycled
- Some items can be repurposed.
- Some items need to be repaired – subject to health & safety standards.
- Some items can be prepared for passing on (to individuals / households).

Once items are sorted, those that can be repurposed and/or passed on are stored in designated parts of the hub. Here, they can be viewed and selected by those receiving them.

Most of those who receive items through this system are referred to Be Kind by organisations such as the HSE (public health nurses), Focus Ireland, St Catherine's Resource Centre, St Vincent de Paul, Good Shepherd and others who promote social inclusion and who engage in anti-poverty work. These and other partner organisations may also arrange for items to be delivered to a beneficiary and Be Kind drivers will oblige. Delivery vans are unmarked, in order to respect the recipient's dignity and privacy. On some occasions, a staff member or a volunteer from a partner organisation will bring the beneficiary to Be Kind, introduce them to the BeKind team, and help them to select their items.

Individuals are also welcome to access Be Kind services directly themselves. A robust administrative system has been put in place in order to ensure fairness in the distribution of items. Moreover, staggered appointment slots allow individuals the time and privacy to access the services they need without feeling rushed or exposed.

As well as supporting individuals and families who come to Be Kind and those referred by agencies, the project supplies items to community and voluntary groups who are working to alleviate poverty, promote social inclusion and give individuals / families dignity, stability and an improved quality of life. Items are also supplied to approved housing bodies and those in temporary protection, direct provision or emergency accommodation.

Resources Handled: The project manages a significant flow of materials, including textiles (clothing, linens), books, toys, small household items (any electrical items are tested for safety before distribution), furniture, and bicycles, as the following photos illustrate:

Figure 25: A selection of the items handled by BeKind



Circular Economy Principles: Be Kind actively demonstrates core circular principles:

- Reuse (via swapping);
- Repair (where possible and absolutely safe);
- Reduce (preventing waste from going to landfill); and
- Share (sharing both skills and physical resources within the community).

The project contributes to each of the following:

Waste Reduction: The project focuses on minimising waste generation through robust recycling programmes and the efficient management and redistribution of donated items.

Resource Conservation: By repurposing sustainable materials and giving them a second life, Be Kind promotes the conservation of natural resources and reduces environmental impact.

Social Responsibility: The project emphasises supporting vulnerable individuals and families in Carlow while creating employment skills opportunities with the Tús and other labour market supports and activation measures.

3. Community Context & Motivations

There is a high level of socio-economic disadvantage in Carlow, and Be Kind is at the forefront of promoting social inclusion and of supporting individuals and families who have significant levels of need. It is clearly an anti-poverty and social inclusion project – in line with CCDP’s core mission: enhancing community life, combating disadvantage & social exclusion, and enabling individuals and communities to improve their circumstances, and realise their social and economic potential. Moreover, it gives effect to CCDP’s developmental approach – based on capacity-building, addressing new and emerging needs, empowering individuals and communities and enhancing quality of life.

CCDP has been working with communities across the county for seventeen years, and it has built up a strong reputation as a reliable and trustworthy community-focussed organisation. Consequently, there is a steady supply of donations to Be Kind, and CCDP’s periodic appeals for items have sparked overwhelming responses. The project

is also advertised on social media¹⁶, but referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations ensure the project reaches out to those who are most in need.

Be Kind is unique in the Carlow context, and it is filling a gap; there is no other service of this type locally. The project partners with, and receives referrals from, a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations.

The project's outputs make notable contributions to social inclusion, quality of life and the environment. It aligns strongly with national and local policies' sustainability goals (see Chapter 3), as it diverts several tonnes of material away from landfill.

4. Operations & Partnerships

CCDP has a voluntary board of directors, who oversee the company's operations. Membership is drawn from community, voluntary and statutory organisations and from the social partners – a tri-partite partnership model. Be Kind fits within an integrated and complementary set of programmes, initiatives and projects that CCDP delivers, across the county, through the bottom-up approach and by empowering communities and individuals.

CCDP works with a range of other agencies, several of which have already been mentioned as making referrals to Be Kind. In addition, Carlow County Council provides support in the form of the building in which the hub is based. Illegal dumping and / or unsolicited donations of materials (left outside the warehouse door) can be problematic, and CCDP has installed notices and cameras to deter such activity. When dumping happens, CCDP sends the evidence and any images of the perpetrators to Carlow County Council.

About half of the Tús workers on the Be Kind team have come to Ireland from other countries. The diversity of the staff members ensures that a multi-lingual service is provided, and the current staffing complement can serve service users in English, Irish, Ukrainian, Russian, French and Spanish. Thus, Be Kind is making a tangible contribution to migrant integration and to the strengthening of local social capital.

The project also receives donations (e.g., from Ballon Eggs), and the food and household items it receives are distributed to community groups or directly to individuals / households in need.

¹⁶ A video about the project can be viewed through the following link:
<https://vimeo.com/1129030205>

5. Impact & Achievements

The impact of Be Kind is profound, spanning environmental, social, and economic objectives and deliverables:

Environmental Impact: The project has diverted several tonnes of material from landfill annually. A visit to their warehouse and consultations with donors and beneficiaries confirm that thousands of items have come in and gone out, and 90% of those items would previously have ended up in landfill. Therefore, Be Kind not only saves landfill space, it also reduces the carbon emissions associated with manufacturing new products and waste processing.

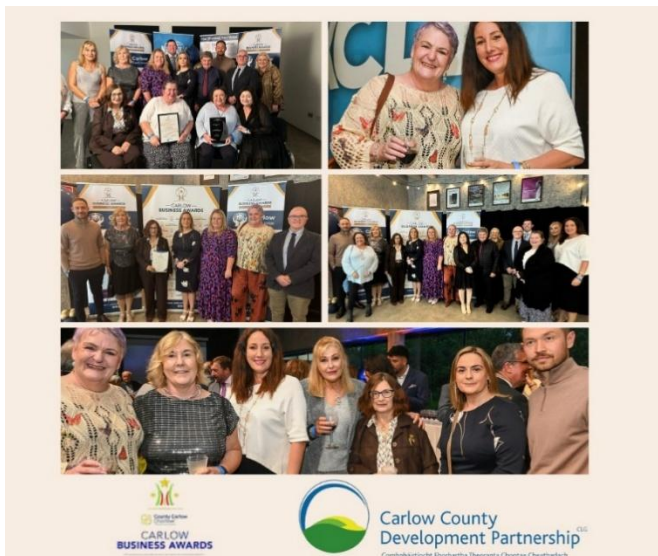
Social Impact: Be Kind fosters social cohesion, alleviates poverty, improves households' circumstances, enhances personal dignity and well-being, improves health outcomes, fosters social capital, promotes migrant integration, and enables social inclusion. It connects people from diverse backgrounds, and it breaks down barriers and reduces isolation. For recipients, it provides dignity and essential support. It is also contributing to enhanced inter-agency collaboration, as it provides a distinctive set of services that complement and add value to the work of other service providers.

Economic Impact: Be Kind illustrates how a circular economy model dovetails with anti-poverty and social inclusion work. The approach promoted by CCDP ensures that support is targeted to those who are most in need, and Be Kind is part of a holistic set of supports and services. The pop-up shops, selling excess stock, generate funds that are reinvested into the project, sometimes converted into food or fuel vouchers for those in acute need.



Recognitions: Winner of the Sustainable Initiatives' Award at the Carlow Chamber Business Awards 2025.

Figure 26: Due recognition at the 2025 Carlow Chamber Business Awards



Source: CCDP [Facebook Page](#)

6. Success Factors

Several key factors underpin Be Kind's success. These include the following:

- **Integration:** This is not a standalone project; it is firmly underpinned by CCDP's ethos and values of equality, inclusion, social justice, environmental sustainability, and community development.
- **Dedicated Personnel:** The project is powered by a dedicated and passionate team whose can-do attitude and commitment to social justice make people feel welcome and respected. The project operations are highly efficient. Materials are carefully sorted, and items are well presented in clearly labelled parts of the building.
- **Collaborative Relationships:** CCDP works well with the other organisations mentioned in this case study – not just through Be Kind, but in the delivery of other initiatives, and Be Kind serves to cement relationships, facilitate collaborations and ensure joint-working, so that individuals and families benefit from holistic (rather than *silo-ed*) supports.
- **Community Trust:** Be Kind is an integral part of CCDP's community-based activities, and it is local and accessible.

- Enabling Conditions: Support from the wider CCDP teams, the availability of a physical hub (despite its limitations), and growing public awareness of environmental issues have all been positive enablers.

7. Challenges & Adaptations

The persistence of poverty and disadvantage in many parts of Carlow and among certain population cohorts is driving a need for projects such as Be Kind. The most recent (September 2025) ESRI report on child poverty in Ireland notes that high inflation and the increased cost of living are adversely affecting low-income families. The report’s authors stress the importance of taking additional steps to address inter-generational and childhood poverty.

Like any community initiative, Be Kind has faced hurdles, and the CCDP team is working to address them. The following are among the challenges:

- Funding and Resource Uncertainty: The project operates on a year-to-year basis with no definitive long-term funding stream, and while this indicates a deficit in top-down support, CCDP is resolutely committed to sustaining the project.
- Waste Management and Donation Quality: Staff work hard to manage the volume and type of donations, and it can be time consuming to sift through some donations to ensure high-quality products are provided to service users.
- Illegal dumping outside the premises is a drain on resources, and while video evidence has been recorded, there have not been any prosecutions to date.
- Infrastructure: CCDP is most grateful to Carlow County Council for the use of the building, but stakeholders agree that the current premises are not fit for purpose—being cold in winter and lacking adequate staff facilities and storage. As CCDP does not own the building, it is not possible for them to make physical alterations to it.
- Personnel: It can be difficult to recruit people with driving licences for delivery vans, and the time limitations of Tús can lead to loss of key skillsets when people are obliged to exit the scheme.
- Awareness Raising: CCDP is working to increase awareness of Be Kind – to encourage more members of the public to make donations, and to ensure all potential beneficiaries are aware of the supports it offers. Be Kind offers a model from which other organisations and individuals can learn about up-cycling.

CCDP operates a strategic plan for Be Kind, and it envisages that the project will progress to become a fully-fledged social enterprise. The strategic plan provides for innovation and an ability to be flexible, agile and responsive – so that staff members can respond to spikes in demand and new & emerging needs, and they can pivot as need be.

The Be Kind team members are proud of the project’s achievements, and they are committed to addressing the challenges, in order to grow the project and increase its resilience through:

- Securing long-term, sustainable funding;
- Continually monitoring the quality of donations; and
- Finding a more suitable, permanent premises with better storage and facilities.

Figure 27: Be Kind – appeal for donations

BE KIND - URGENT APPEAL

This is a community-based initiative to support those who may need a helping hand in these difficult times including older people, vulnerable families, and anyone struggling. It also reduces waste and encourages reusing, upcycling, and the circular economy.

We need your donations urgently!

- School Uniforms and children’s clothes & shoes
- Men’s Clothes & Footwear & nightwear
- Women’s Clothes & footwear, pyjamas & dressing gowns
- Kitchen items - pots and pans, delph, cutlery, kettles, toasters, microwaves, etc.
- Appliances such as fridges, washing machines, etc. in working order
- Bedding, duvets, sheets, blankets, also sleeping bags
- Furniture, wardrobes, beds, chests of drawers, etc
- Any good quality items that we can redistribute in the community

Open 10 to 1, Monday to Friday every week
Open Saturday, 14th June 10 to 3
Open Saturday, 21st June 10 to 3
 Old Perry’s Building, Kennedy Avenue, Carlow, Ireland

Please call Niamh on 0860418554 if you require further information
YOUR SUPPORT IS VITAL TO THIS PROJECT – THANK YOU!



Source: [Carlow Development LinkedIn](#)

8. Lessons Learnt & Recommendations

The Be Kind journey offers valuable insights for other communities / organisations:

- **Start Small and Prove the Concept:** Be Kind has grown incrementally over recent years, and, at the same time, it has had to respond quickly to major needs and demands. Therefore, there is a need to be both strategic and flexible.
- **Invest in a Solid Staff Structure:** The personnel work as a team, and people’s skills are harnessed and nurtured.
- **Community development and social inclusion are core principles,** and they underpin Be Kind’s approach: Be Kind does not operate on the basis of traditional ‘charity’ models. Instead, it is underpinned by a rights-based approach that empowers the individual / family, by providing a service and offering targeted supports, in a respectful and dignified manner that is associated with the first

steps on Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* i.e., Physiological Needs (including clothing) and Safety Needs (including household items).

Be Kind shows the merits of ensuring that circular economy projects operate in a supportive policy and funding environment. It also demonstrates how community-based action and the promotion of social inclusion are complementary to wider public education campaigns about the circular economy and tackling 'throw-awayism'. Be Kind has given people (donors) an alternative to landfill that is ecologically sound.

9. Future Directions

Be Kind has ambitious plans to deepen and broaden its impact. The overarching goal is to develop a more permanent 'Circular Economy Hub' with expanded and more functional spaces – thereby further embedding circular-economy principles in Carlow, and increasing awareness of the complementarity between economic, social, community and ecological objectives.

The Be Kind model is highly replicable in other towns of a similar size. The key to successful replication lies not in copying the model exactly, but in adapting it to the local context and, most importantly, finding the right community champions to drive it forward.

10. Conclusion

The Be Kind project is a powerful testament to how circular economy principles can align with community development principles and thereby deliver transformative results. It has become a cornerstone of Carlow's sustainability and social infrastructure, demonstrating that practical ecological action—reusing, re-purposing and distributing—can simultaneously build a more connected, resilient, and inclusive community.

The project's success, as summarised by Dee Sewell of Carlow County Council, lies in "keeping things in circulation for longer." But it is more than that. As Jannette O'Brien adds, it's "about building connections and interweaving it in the fabric of our community." The key takeaway is that this success is built on a foundation of an anti-poverty, inclusive model, powered by passionate, dedicated people, and strengthened by robust local partnerships. Be Kind is not just a project; it is a vibrant, living ecosystem of social inclusion and circularity.

Case Study 2: The Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Kit – Weaving a Circular Fashion Community

1. Project Profile

Organisation Name: Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Initiative

Legal Status: Public Service Initiative (Operated by the Local Authority)

Established: Initiative launched in 2024, following a pilot event in collaboration with [Change Clothes](#) - a community-based clothing reuse hub, founded in Crumlin in 2022.

Location: Various locations across County Carlow, Ireland (e.g., Carlow Town, Tullow, Muinebheag/Bagenalstown). Hosted in public libraries, civic buildings, community centres, schools, businesses, colleges and private homes.

Contact: Dee Sewell, Environment Section, Carlow County Council

Email: environment@carlowcoco.ie

Website/Social Media: Carlow County Council website (carlow.ie), and social media channels (Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram).

Key Features:

- **Staff/Volunteers:** The Swap Kit is held by, and occasionally demonstrated by, the Environmental Department of Carlow County Council. Events are primarily run by community volunteers.
- **Community Members Served:** Hundreds of residents across County Carlow have participated in swap events. The pilot event alone attracted over 100 visitors.
- **Items Circulated:** An estimated 1,500 items of clothing have been kept in circulation (in the first year) since the first event.
- **Annual Turnover/Budget:** Funded as part of the Council’s environmental and waste prevention initiatives.
- **Main Funding Sources:** Carlow County Council budget, potentially supported by national waste prevention grants.

2. Circular Economy Activities

The Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Initiative tackles the environmental crisis of textile waste through a simple, empowering model: a portable **clothes swap kit** that enables any community group, business, or individual to host their own swap event.

The Council’s Environment Department hosts periodic flagship swap events and, more innovatively, operates a library-style system where the public can borrow a professional-grade kit to run their own swaps. Community members bring good-quality, clean clothes they no longer want and exchange them for items brought by others. The initiative actively

promotes pre-loved fashion as a stylish and sustainable alternative. As Dee Sewell notes, the ambition is “to help to change the narrative... We have a lot of preloved shops in Carlow... they’re amazing. They’re full of amazing bargains, things and stories.” The focus is on pre-loved clothing, accessories, and other textiles, keeping them in active use and out of landfill.

Circular Economy Principles Applied: The initiative directly embodies core circular principles:

- Reuse (extending the life of garments through swapping);
- Reduce (preventing textile waste and reducing demand for new fast fashion); and
- Share (creating a platform for sharing resources and fostering a community around sustainable fashion).

Figure 28: Clothes Swap– what’s involved

Clothes Swap
Thursday, 17th October
11am to 2pm
Carlow College,
 St Patrick's
 College Street, Carlow

Bring: ✓
 Clean clothing you no longer wear with no rips, stains or holes.

Please Don't Bring: ✗

- Anything you wouldn't wear yourself.
- Household textiles.
- Pyjamas
- Jewellery
- Underwear

How it works:

- Bring up to 5 items of clean clothing in great condition.
- Each item is worth 1 token.
- Items on the rails are also worth 1 token.
- 'Shop' the rails.
- Take away 'new to you' items with your tokens.

Logos: CARLOW CLIMATE ACTION, COLAISTE CHEATHARLACH, CARLOW COLLEGE, ST PATRICK'S, CHANGE CLOTHES, COMHAIRLE CONTAE CHEATHARLACH, CARLOW COUNTY COUNCIL.

FREE TO BORROW CLOTHING SWAP KIT
 COMHAIRLE CONTAE CHEATHARLACH, CARLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

CARLOW CLIMATE ACTION
 Investing in our future

INCLUDES:
 Adult clothes
 Mirror
 4 x clothing rails
 Mannequin
 Tokens
 Chalk board & pens

Chalkboard:
 I clean + I borrow
 I wear up to 5 items from 5 swaps

CLOTHES THAT DON'T COST THE EARTH!

Contact: environment@carlowcoco.ie or 059 9136334 for info

Source: [Carlow County Council](https://www.carlowcoco.ie)

3. Community Context & Motivations

The initiative is a direct response to a pressing national issue: Ireland is the second highest producer of textile waste in Europe, with an average of 53kg of textiles consumed per person annually. Alarming, Oxfam Ireland reports that half a tonne of clothing is landfilled every minute in the country. County Carlow, aligning with national policy, needed practical solutions to meet its waste reduction and climate action goals.

The project was also driven by the urgent need to tackle textile waste, promote sustainable fashion choices, and raise public awareness about the devastating environmental impact of fast fashion. It was also motivated by a desire to provide a social, cost-effective, and attractive alternative to buying new clothes, making sustainable living accessible to all. Dee Sewell emphasises this inclusive approach: “I can’t afford to buy new clothes. Well, here’s an alternative... So it’s providing alternatives to what’s currently there.”

The swap kit taps into a growing community interest in sustainability, frugality, and building a more resilient local economy. It supports the Council’s broader Climate Action Plan and provides a tangible, positive action that residents can take part in.

4. Operations & Partnerships

The Council’s Environment Section manages the kit’s logistics and booking system. Decision-making is handled within the council structure, but the model is deeply community-led in its execution, and it operates on a not-for-profit basis. Events typically operate on a trust-based swapping system, often using a token-based exchange (one item for one token) to ensure fairness.

The professional kit empowers communities to host successful events and includes:

- 4 x heavy-duty, foldable clothes rails;
- Clothes hangers and mannequins;
- A foldable table and freestanding mirror;
- Tokens for exchange and Q&A Fast Fashion cards; and
- A chalkboard for signage and a starter stock of around 75 adult-sized clothes.

Figure 29: Offering a pleasant ‘retail environment’



Source: [South East Technological University \(SETU\)](https://www.setu.ie/) Carlow Campus

While this is a council-run initiative, it thrives on collaboration. It partners with local community groups, businesses, schools, and public libraries who host events. Furthermore, it creates a symbiotic relationship with the local circular economy; leftover clothing from swaps is often donated to local charity shops or the County Carlow Development Partnership BE Kind project (Case Study 1), thereby ensuring nothing goes to waste.

5. Impact & Achievements

The impact of the initiative is multifaceted, demonstrating how a simple idea can generate significant benefits.

Environmental Impact: While exact tonnage is difficult to measure per event, the initiative has already kept an estimated **1,500 items of clothing in circulation**, directly diverting them from landfill or incineration. Each swapped garment saves the carbon emissions, water, and resources required to produce a new one, contributing to the county's carbon reduction targets.

Social Impact: The swaps have achieved high levels of engagement, fostering social interaction and community cohesion. They are designed to be “great fun,” making sustainability an enjoyable social activity. The initiative also serves as an educational tool, raising awareness about the realities of fast fashion in a practical, hands-on way.

Figure 30: social Engagement and Interation



Source: [South East Technological University \(SETU\) Carlow Campus](#)

Economic Impact: The project provides free clothing to participants, offering direct cost savings for families and individuals. It also supports the local pre-loved economy by acting as a “gateway” for people who may not typically use charity shops, thereby keeping value circulating within the local community.

The project’s achievements include the following:

- Contributing to a positive shift in public perceptions and wider acceptance and appreciation of the value of pre-loved clothing;
- Successfully launching and sustaining a novel, community-empowering resource;
- High participation rates at events, including strong uptake from schools for uniform swaps; and
- Establishing a scalable model that other local authorities can replicate.

6. Success Factors

The model’s simplicity and accessibility are among its greatest strengths. The backing of the local authority provides credibility and resources for promotion. The project taps into a clear public interest in sustainable fashion, saving money, and participating in community events.

Project stakeholders have identified the following success factors:

- Council Leadership and Organisation: Efficient management of the kit and booking system is essential;
- Effective Communication: Marketing the kit’s availability and the concept of swaps ensures good turnout and utilisation;
- Community Empowerment: Putting the tool directly into the hands of the community fosters ownership and wide participation; and
- Positive Event Atmosphere: Creating a fun, welcoming environment is key to repeat participation.
- Enabling Conditions: Supportive national policy on waste prevention, a growing public awareness of environmental issues, and the existing network of community infrastructure (like libraries and schools) have been vital enablers.

7. Challenges & Adaptations

Like many circular economy projects, the Clothes Swap Kit faces challenges, and stakeholder have identified the following:

- Managing Donation Quality: Ensuring only good-quality, wearable items are swapped is an ongoing task;

- Logistical Communication: Dee Sewell identifies this as a key hurdle: “I think one of our biggest challenges is communication. We have so many channels open to us that we're overwhelmed and then we miss so much.”
- Balancing Supply and Demand: Encouraging a balance of items brought and taken to avoid a surplus can be difficult; and
- Quantifying Impact: Measuring the precise quantitative environmental impact (e.g., exact CO₂ savings) remains a challenge.

Carlow County Council has sought to meet these challenges through the following sets of interventions and strategic approaches – all of which are transferable to other projects:

- Clear communication of guidelines for participants (clean, good condition items only) is paramount;
- Having a plan for leftover items, such as donation to local charities or the BE Kind project, ensures a zero-waste outcome; and
- Using a token system helps manage the flow and fairness of the swap.

Personnel are proud of the project’s achievements, and they are committed to promoting its resilience through:

- Ensuring long-term funding and resources within the council for the kit’s maintenance and promotion;
- Maintaining high levels of participant engagement and kit usage over time; and
- Scaling the model to reach an even broader demographic across the county.

8. Lessons Learnt & Recommendations

The Clothes Swap Kit journey offers invaluable insights for other communities / organisations:

- The community appetite for circular fashion initiatives is high and ready to be tapped.
- A simple, well-executed concept can be far more effective than a complex one.
- Empowering the community to run events themselves leads to greater reach and innovation (e.g., Halloween, school uniform, and fundraising swaps).
- “One-off” events are excellent for awareness, but providing a reusable resource enables deeper, ongoing impact.

The project personnel recommend other communities and organisations to:

- “Start small, partner with an established organisation (like a council or community group), promote clearly, and make it a fun social event.”
- Invest in a high-quality, portable kit to lower the barrier to entry for hosts.

- “Have a plan for leftover items” to ensure a circular outcome.

Stakeholders’ reflections on the project point to the following recommendations:

- Local and national government should provide dedicated funding and technical support for such tangible circular economy projects; and
- Initiatives like the swap kit should be formally included as key actions in local authority waste and climate action plans.

9. Future Directions

According to the project stakeholders, the future vision involves promoting the kit more widely to increase its usage across the county. There is potential to host more council-led flagship events and explore integrating educational workshops on mending and upcycling alongside swaps, teaching skills to further extend the life of clothing.

The initiative is inherently sustainable, using existing council resources and community assets. Its long-term future relies on continued political and financial support within the council structure, and its success makes a compelling case for that continued investment.

The model is highly replicable and scalable. Any local authority or large community group can adopt it. A network of such kits across counties could be developed, creating a powerful regional movement against textile waste.

10. Conclusion

The Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Kit is an excellent example of practical, community-centred circular economy action. It successfully diverts waste, saves precious resources, and builds community spirit around a shared, positive goal. By providing the tools, personnel and goodwill, the council has empowered citizens (individually and in organisations) to become active participants in the circular economy. The initiative’s key strength lies in its empowering simplicity and the direct, tangible benefit it provides to every participant. It stands as an exemplary, easily replicated template for other local authorities aiming to implement projects that are both environmentally positive and socially resonant, proving that the most sustainable fashion is the garment already in our wardrobes.

Case Study 3: Carlow County Council Master Composting Programme– Closing the Loop on Organic Waste

1. Project Profile

Organisation Name: Carlow County Council Master Composting Programme

Legal Status: Public Service Initiative (Operated by the Local Authority)

Established: Programme launched in Summer 2025

Location: Multiple locations across County Carlow, including Carlow Town, Tinryland, Bagenalstown, and associated community gardens and schools.

Contact: Dee Sewell, Environment Section, Carlow County Council

Website/Social Media: Carlow County Council website (carlow.ie), and social media channels (Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram).

Key Features:

- **Trained Participants:** 22 people from 11 community groups completed the core Master Composter training.
- **Community Reach:** Engagement with over 100 additional residents through the establishment of six community composting sites.
- **Sites Established:** 7 new community composting hubs created across the county.
- **Compost Produced:** 26 tonnes of finished compost redistributed to participants – in collaboration with Enrich.ie.
- **Annual Turnover/Budget:** Funded as part of Carlow County Council’s waste management and environmental education budget. The Council leveraged the funding from the National Anti-Dumping Initiative – a competitive process through which local authorities apply.
- **Main Funding Sources:** Carlow County Council budget, delivered in partnership with Composting Ireland.

2. Circular Economy Activities

The Carlow County Council Master Composting Programme is a strategic initiative designed to tackle organic waste at a community level, transforming a problematic waste stream into a valuable agricultural resource.

The programme combines theoretical education with hands-on practical action. It features a series of training sessions on the principles of home and community composting, food waste reduction, and soil health. This is followed by practical workshops where participants built and managed composting systems. The council

supported six community groups to establish their own composting sites, providing them with the necessary tools, infrastructure, and signage.

Resources Handled: The programme manages organic waste streams, including fruit and vegetable scraps, garden trimmings, and other compostable materials, diverting them from landfill.

Circular Economy Principles Applied: This initiative is a quintessential example of closing the loop. It applies the principles of

- **Recycle** (transforming waste into a valuable resource);
- **Reduce** (diverting waste from landfill and reducing methane emissions); and
- **Return** (returning nutrients to the soil to support local food growth and enhance biodiversity).

Figure 31: Advertising composting training

SUMMER 2025
Master Composting training & multiple community site set ups

Carlow Communities!
Let's make a healthier planet

Carlow County Council are pleased to invite Tidy Towns, Community Gardeners, Residence Associations and Allotmenters to join "Dr Compost" **Craig Benton of Composting Ireland**, for an action packed training programme, teaching you how to reduce food waste & compost at home, or with your community group.

Training consists of **4 in person classroom sessions in the Town Hall, Carlow Town on Tuesday evenings between 7pm & 9.30pm on 1st, 8th, 15th & 22nd July**, and **Saturday, 19th July** for a practical build & create session **between 1pm & 5pm**.

- Training is free, 3 or 4 people are invited to attend from each group, and volunteers are expected to attend all sessions (get in touch if this is a problem).
- Spaces are limited and groups will be allocated on a first come first served basis.
- Once training is complete, **up to 10 tidy towns, resident association, allotment & community garden groups** will have the opportunity to work with Craig during August to create master composting areas in their towns & villages.
- Signage, tools and some kit will be provided.

To book a place:
Email: dsewell@carlowcoco.ie or
call 059 9136334 for more information.

This project has been possible thanks to funding by the Waste Enforcement Lead Authorities under the Anti Dumping Initiative

Source: [Carlow County Council](#)

3. Community Context & Motivations

Local and National Context: The programme addresses a critical national issue. In Ireland, households are responsible for 221,000 tonnes of food waste annually, costing the country €1.29 billion and contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. For

Carlow, this initiative is a key action in meeting the targets of its Joint Waste Management Plan and reducing landfill levies.

The primary motivations were to reduce the environmental and economic cost of organic waste, meet regulatory targets, and empower communities with practical skills. The programme aimed to move beyond simple waste disposal to creating a circular system where waste becomes a resource, enriching local soil and supporting community gardens.

The project aligns perfectly with a growing community interest in gardening, sustainability, and local food production. It directly supports the work of established groups like Tidy Towns, community gardens, and residents' associations, providing them with a tangible tool for environmental action.

4. Operations & Partnerships

This is a council-led initiative, managed by the Environment Section, but its execution was profoundly collaborative. The council has provided the funding, coordination, and overall framework, while expert partner, Craig Benton of Composting Ireland, delivered the training and technical oversight.

Figure 32: Knowledge sharing with Craig Benton



The success of the programme hinged on robust partnerships. The collaboration with Composting Ireland provided the essential expertise. Furthermore, partnerships with active community groups such as Carlow Tidy Towns, Tinryland Tidy Towns & Park, and Bagenalstown Community Garden were crucial, as these groups have become the long-term stewards of the composting hubs.

Funding was secured, from Central Government, through the [Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities](#)¹⁷ under the [Anti-Dumping Initiative](#)¹⁸. The most valuable mobilised resources were community goodwill and expertise. The programme provided groups with physical tools, composting systems, and signage, but it was the participants' time and effort that brought the project to life.

5. Impact & Achievements

The programme's impact is demonstrable across environmental, social, and economic spheres.

Environmental Impact: The project demonstrated how households and organisations can divert organic waste from landfill, directly reducing methane emissions—a potent greenhouse gas. Additionally, such practices reduce the need for peat-based or commercially produced soil conditioners, further cutting the carbon footprint associated with their transport and manufacture.

Social Impact: The programme fostered remarkable community engagement and knowledge sharing. Craig Benton observed the collaborative spirit: “We had a really great group of people... very engaged... it did sort of bring people together and give them a tool that they could use.” Dee Sewell highlighted the unexpected social benefit, “finding out how much they enjoyed talking to each other and learning from one another,” indicating the programme's role in strengthening community bonds.

¹⁷ Three Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLA), covering the Connacht-Ulster, Eastern Midlands and Southern (which includes County Carlow) Regions, were established in 2015 with responsibility for co-ordinating the waste enforcement actions of local authorities, setting priorities and common objectives for waste enforcement and ensuring consistency of enforcement of waste legislation while leaving local authority personnel as first responders on the ground.

¹⁸ The Anti-Dumping Initiative (ADI) is a government programme that provides funding for local efforts to combat illegal waste dumping through enforcement, public awareness, and innovative clean-up/reuse projects, working with councils and communities to tackle fly-tipping by repurposing waste and supporting waste enforcement personnel.

Figure 33: Community gardens provide ecological and social spaces



Source: [Carlow County Council](#)

Economic Impact: The initiative saves the council money on landfill levies and provides free, nutrient-rich compost for community gardens and participants, reducing their need to buy commercial products. This supports the productivity of local food-growing projects, offering secondary economic benefits to the community.

Key Achievements:

- Successfully training 22 community champions and engaging over 100 residents;
- Establishing 7 new, operational community composting hubs;
- Providing 26 tonnes of finished compost, to encourage and promote the use of local composting initiatives; and
- Creating a scalable model for community-led waste management.

6. Success Factors

The combination of expert-led education and immediate practical application proved highly effective. The ‘train-the-trainer’ model, focusing on group representatives rather than individuals, ensured knowledge was embedded within community structures for long-term sustainability.

Stakeholders refer to the following as critical success factors:

- **Expert Knowledge and Ongoing Support:** As Craig Benton emphasised, ongoing training and troubleshooting are essential to overcome the “lack of knowledge within Ireland about how to compost.”
- **Council and Community Partnership:** The synergy between the council’s resources and community groups’ grassroots energy was vital.
- **Tangible Incentives:** Providing groups with finished compost, as Dee Sewell did, motivated participation. Craig noted, “It helped that Dee was also giving away finished compost... so that it motivates and encourages them to make their own.”
- **Enabling Conditions:** Supportive national policy, the presence of active environmental groups in the county, and an innovative approach from council officers were key enabling factors.

7. Challenges & Adaptations

There have been challenges – mainly associated with mis-perceptions and the ‘image’ of composting. These include the following:

- **Knowledge Deficit:** The single biggest challenge, as identified by Craig Benton, is a widespread lack of composting knowledge, which historically led to poorly managed systems that became “goopy and stinky and rat infested.”
- **Contamination:** Ensuring only correct materials are composted is an ongoing issue – bus especially for ‘newcomers’ to composting;
- **Long-Term Engagement:** Maintaining momentum and ensuring the community sites are managed effectively over time.

Figure 34: Community composting area, Carlow Town



Source: [Carlow County Council](#)

Working collaboratively, Carlow County Council and Composting Ireland have sought to address these challenges:

- The programme was designed specifically to address the knowledge gap through structured, expert-led training.
- Clear signage and ongoing support visits were built into the model to troubleshoot problems and prevent contamination.
- Focusing on established, motivated groups (like Tidy Towns) rather than individuals ensured a higher level of long-term commitment.

The Council and Composting Ireland are keen to:

- Ensure the sustainability of the community sites without constant council oversight;
- Secure funding for follow-up programmes and expansion to other areas; and
- Maintain the quality of the composting process across all sites.

8. Lessons Learnt & Recommendations

The promotion of community composting is ongoing, and from this particular set of initiatives, stakeholders note that:

- Knowledge is foundational: Comprehensive, accessible training is non-negotiable for success;
- Partnerships are key: Community groups are the engine for long-term, grassroots action; the council can act as the facilitator; and
- Support must be ongoing: A one-off training session is insufficient. Continuous support is needed to ensure systems work effectively.

They proffer the following advice for communities and others with an interest in composting:

- Start with a pilot project in partnership with a keen community garden or residents' association;
- Invest in expert guidance from the outset to build confidence and ensure correct techniques; and
- Ensure there is a clear plan for the use of the finished compost - to demonstrate the closed loop.

With respect to public policy and other supports, the stakeholder feedback suggests that:

- Local authorities should (where this is not already the case) formally integrate community composting into their Waste Management Plans and allocate dedicated annual funding; and

- National bodies should continue to provide grants for start-up costs for infrastructure and expert partnerships.

9. Future Directions

The future vision includes expanding the number of community composting hubs across the county and integrating the programme more closely with food waste reduction campaigns. There is also potential to develop more advanced educational programmes and workshops for schools and other community groups.

The project is inherently sustainable, reducing waste management costs and creating value from waste. Its long-term viability depends on continued council prioritisation and the ongoing passion of the community champions who were trained. The ‘Master Composter’ model is highly replicable in any county in Ireland. The scale can be adapted, from a small cluster of community gardens to a county-wide network of hubs, making it a powerful blueprint for national rollout.

10. Conclusion

The Carlow County Council Master Composting Programme is a resounding success story in community-powered circular economy action. It effectively addresses the urgent issue of food waste by empowering residents with the knowledge, tools, and support to transform it into a resource. The programme goes beyond waste diversion, fostering community spirit, enhancing local soil health, and building resilience. It stands as a powerful model for how local authorities can effectively catalyse and support grassroots environmental action, proving that the most sustainable solutions are often those that are grown within the community itself.

Case Study 4: County Carlow Environmental Network – Weaving the Fabric of a Circular Community

1. Project Profile

Organisation Name: County Carlow Environmental Network (CCEN)

Legal Status: Voluntary Community Organisation / Network

Established: 2018

Location: Countywide

Contact: Bernadette Power (Secretary)

Email/Phone: 087-9031791

Website/Social Media:

- **Website:** www.ccen.ie
- **Facebook:** @CountyCarlowEnvironmentalNetwork
- **Instagram:** @carlowenvironmentalnetwork
- **Bluesky:** @CCEN1.bsky.social

Key Features:

- **Staff/Volunteers:** Entirely volunteer-run. A core committee of approximately six dedicated members, supported by a wider network of active volunteers.
- **Community Members Served:** Serves the entire population of County Carlow and surrounding communities (approx. 65,000+ people) through its events, resources, and outreach.
- **Event Attendance:** Regular events such as film screenings and climate cafés attract between 50-100 participants.
- **Annual Turnover/Budget:** Operates on a small budget. Funding sources include grants, raffles at events, and support from Carlow County Council.
- **Main Funding Sources:** Community Foundation Ireland Fund, Carlow County Council Climate Action Week, Elected Members' discretionary funding.

2. Circular Economy Activities

The County Carlow Environmental Network (CCEN) plays a unique and critical role in the county's circular economy: it acts as a type of 'central nervous system', fostering awareness, facilitating connections, and building the social capital necessary for circular activities to thrive.

Rather than operating physical projects, the CCEN's primary activity is education and network facilitation. This is achieved through a diverse and accessible event programme, including:

- An annual **Environmental Film Festival** featuring documentaries on topics like water, soil, and the circular economy, followed by community discussions;
- **Climate Cafés** that provide a safe, informal space for people to discuss climate change, share anxieties, and explore actionable solutions;
- **Practical Workshops** such as the ‘World Textile Day’ (featuring repair workshops and clothes swaps) and a series of fermentation workshops (e.g., Sauerkraut, Pickling), which teach hands-on skills for reducing waste; and
- **Community Gatherings** with talks from experts, such as the session on the Earth Charter, which help to frame local action within a global context.

Figure 35: Various activities by the CCEN Source: [CCEN website](https://www.ccen.ie)

Eco Film Series
At the Visual Carlow: book online! visualcarlow.ie
Exclusive Chat with Film Director and Executive Producer

OUR BLUE WORLD
A WATER ODYSSEY
Directed by U2M REPSON

CountyCarlow Environmental Network | VISUAL
Our Blue World: September 10th At 7pm

World Textile Day
Free Exhibition

Get Creative!
Style Repairs

- Browse in the Swap Shop
- Sewing Machine Demonstration With Steadfast Sewing Group
- Learn to Crochet a Square Patch for Your Favourite Worn out Clothes
- Join us in conversation about the Impacts of Fast Fashion on our Environment

Where:
An Gairdín Beo
Dublin Road,
Rathnapish, Carlow
R93E1HF

When:
1pm - 4pm,
May 3rd

CountyCarlow Environmental Network | An Gairdín Beo | CARLOW

Meet your Local Food Producers
Friday 10th October
7PM -9PM TINRYLAND COMMUNITY HUB

County Carlow Environmental Network (CCEN) invites you to connect with Carlow’s growers, makers, and farmers committed to sustainability and reducing food miles. Hear their stories, taste their produce, and discover how local food supports a healthier planet and resilient economy.

Email info@ccen.ie or call 085 7260278 for further details

CountyCarlow Environmental Network | Carlow Climate Action Week 2025 | CARLOW CLIMATE ACTION

Summer Community
Get Together: Earth Charter Talk

CountyCarlow Environmental Network | 18 JUN | TIME: 5.30 - 8.30 pm
WHERE: An Gairdín Beo Carlow Town R93E1HF

Food, Talk, Cosmic Garden Walk & Networking - ALL WELCOME

- ✓ 5:30 Pizza from wood-fired An Gairdín Beo Cob Oven, walk in Cosmic Garden
- ✓ 7:00 Guest talk with visiting Earth Charter US Professor Peter Blaze Corcoran
- ✓ A community event to be inspired, meet others working for a better world

“Turning Conscience into Action”

An Gairdín Beo a living garden for Carlow | DUBLIN NATURE PROJECT | NATURE ECONOMY

Resources Handled: The network primarily deals in the currency of information and knowledge. It connects people to resources and ideas for handling physical materials like textiles, food waste, and plastics by promoting reduction, reuse, and repair.

Circular Economy Principles Applied: The CCEN's work strongly emphasises the higher levels of the waste hierarchy. Its core principles are:

- **Reduce** (preventing waste through education);
- **Reuse and Repair** (via skill-sharing workshops and swap events); and
- **Rethink** (fostering a fundamental shift in how the community views consumption and waste).

3. Community Context & Motivations

As noted earlier in this report, County Carlow has a strong base of existing environmental voluntary groups, such as Tidy Towns committees and community gardens. However, these groups have often worked in isolation, and there is potential for synergies between them.

The CCEN was established to promote synergies and collaborations. As Molly Aylesbury (from CCEN) explained, the goal was to “make Carlow more sustainable,” which evolved into a “signposting role, where we’ve kind of gone into educating people about various environmental issues.” The motivation was to create a cohesive, collaborative platform that could support, amplify, and connect the efforts of disparate groups and individuals.

The network aligns perfectly with local citizens’ desire to volunteer and with national policy objectives in respect of promoting volunteerism and the circular economy. It leverages benevolent community spirit, channelling it into a structured forum for cooperation that builds community pride, shares best practices, and empowers citizens to live more sustainably.

4. Operations & Partnerships

The CCEN operates on a **network-based, volunteer-driven model**. It is governed by a voluntary steering committee, and decision-making is collaborative. Its strength lies in its flexibility; as Molly notes, “We’re all volunteers, so it’s very drop in, drop out,” though this is supported by a core of highly committed members.

Collaboration is the cornerstone of the CCEN’s model. Key partners include:

- **Carlow County Council:** A crucial partner for funding, co-hosting events (like the fermentation workshops), and providing logistical support;

- **Local Community Groups:** Including Tidy Towns, Steadfast Sewing group, and An Gairdín Beo, with whom they run joint events; and
- **National Experts:** Such as Cathy Fitzgerald of Haumea Ecovercity, to bring high-quality educational content to the county.

Figure 36: Food fermentation workshops in Lambert's (Carlow Town)

Source: [CCEN website](#)



The network mobilises resources through:

- **Funding:** Secured via grant applications and small fundraising activities like raffles;
- **Volunteers:** Recruited through the network's communication channels, though finding consistent volunteers is a noted challenge; and
- **Knowledge:** Sourced from its members, partner organisations, and external experts.

5. Impact & Achievements

The CCEN's impact is noteworthy, though often measured in social and behavioural changes rather than pure metrics.

Environmental Impact: While indirect, the network drives tangible environmental benefits by increasing participation in recycling and composting, promoting waste reduction through repair and reuse, and enhancing collaborations between local biodiversity projects.

Social Impact: This is the CCEN's most significant area of achievement. The network fosters high levels of community engagement and social cohesion. Bernadette highlights the importance of their events as an "outlet to talk about climate issues... It's good for mental health when you're suffering from climate anxiety." Furthermore, Molly observes tangible growth in participants: "they've become really confident, they've started to contribute... they're learning and they're becoming more confident to do it."

Figure 37: Film evening by CCEN



Source: [CCEN website](#)

Economic Impact: The CCEN supports a local circular economy by educating households on cost-saving measures like waste reduction and repair. Its events also promote local sharing economies and can support small, sustainable local businesses.

Key Achievements to date include:

- Successfully establishing itself as the main and trusted environmental network for the county;
- Creating a recurring, popular programme of events that consistently engages the community; and
- Sparking new community initiatives and building the confidence and capacity of local activists.

6. Success Factors

Stakeholders identify the network's collaborative, non-competitive model as its greatest strength. It leverages existing community energy rather than replacing it, acting as a facilitator and amplifier. They identify the following as drivers of its success:

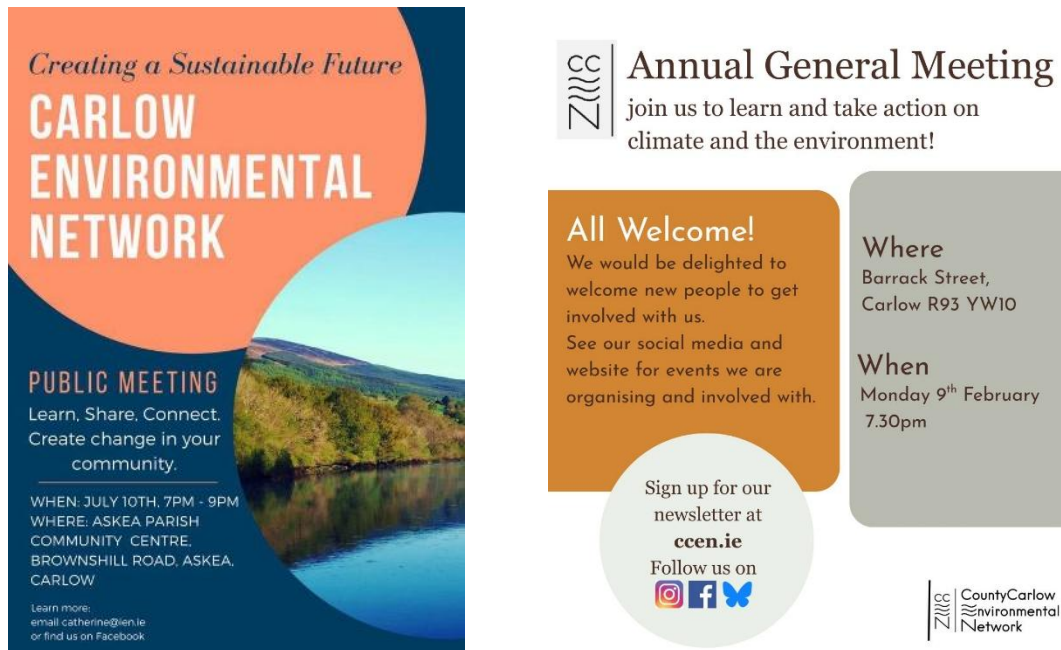
- **Dedicated Volunteer Core:** A small group of passionate and organised individuals who provide continuity;
- **Accessible, Diverse Events:** Offering a mix of film, discussion, and hands-on workshops ensures broad appeal;
- **Strong, Positive Partnerships:** A cooperative relationship with the local authority and civil society groups is essential for reach and resources; and
- **Enabling Conditions:** Support from Carlow County Council, a pre-existing culture of community volunteering, and a growing public interest in environmental issues have been key enablers.

7. Challenges & Adaptations

Networking takes time, and community networks are often vulnerable to challenges such as:

- **Volunteer Burnout:** Reliance on a small core team creates a risk of exhaustion. Bernadette explicitly identifies “volunteer burnout is a big one.”
- **Funding Security:** Securing consistent, core funding to cover administrative costs is a persistent challenge. This can be particularly time consuming, especially for volunteers; and
- **Engaging a Broader Demographic:** Attracting participants beyond the environmentally aware remains an ongoing effort.

Figure 38: Engaging the Community



Source: [CCEN website](#)

In response to these challenges CCEN has sought to:

- Maintain a flexible, “drop-in” volunteer model to accommodate availability;
- Use digital tools for efficient communication and organisation; and
- Focus on a diverse and appealing event programme to attract wider interest.

Stakeholders are keen to ensure an approach that focuses on:

- Ensuring long-term sustainability and leadership within the volunteer base;
- Managing the administrative burden of funding applications; and
- Maintaining engagement and momentum in the face of competing demands for people’s time.

8. Lessons Learnt & Recommendations

CCEN’s processes and outputs offer valuable lessons for other community networks:

- The power of a network lies in its connections and its ability to facilitate, not in centralised control;
- Education and creating safe spaces for conversation are critical first steps towards tangible action; and
- Partnering with, rather than duplicating, existing community structures is both efficient and effective.

CCEN members offer the following advice for other communities:

- “Start by mapping all existing environmental groups and initiatives to identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration.”
- “Facilitate, don’t dictate. Build trust and demonstrate value to potential member groups.”
- Prioritise clear, consistent communication from the very beginning.

The network contends that inter-community networking and bottom-up approaches to the circular economy would benefit from:

- Local authorities being able to provide core, unrestricted funding for network coordination, recognising its role as essential infrastructure for community climate action; and
- National government formally recognising and supporting umbrella environmental networks as key delivery partners.

9. Future Directions

The CCEN aims to expand its volunteer base, particularly among younger demographics. Plans include continuing its successful film festival, deepening its work on local food systems by building a food network hub, and exploring the development of more permanent circular economy projects.

The network’s long-term viability depends on diversifying its funding streams and actively recruiting and training the next generation of volunteer leaders to ensure continuity.

The CCEN’s network model is highly replicable in any county or region. It serves as an exemplary blueprint for how to build collaborative environmental capacity from the ground up.

10. Conclusion

The County Carlow Environmental Network demonstrates that the circular economy is not just about materials and processes, but about people and connections. By focusing on education, dialogue, and collaboration, the CCEN weaves the essential social fabric that enables all other circular initiatives in the county to emerge and grow. It builds the awareness, confidence, and community bonds necessary for a sustained cultural shift towards sustainability. The key takeaway is that investing in inter-community collaboration is not an optional extra; it is a foundational strategy that multiplies the impact of every other environmental and circular economy effort, thereby contributing to places that are not only more sustainable but also more resilient, informed, and connected.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

The case studies presented in this chapter collectively paint a compelling picture of County Carlow as a hub of circular innovation. The BE Kind project, the Clothes Swap Kit, the Master Composting Programme, and the County Carlow Environmental Network, though diverse in their operations, are united by a common thread: they transform environmental challenges into opportunities for social connection, economic saving, and community empowerment. They reveal that the most successful circular economy models are those that are deeply embedded within the community, responding to local needs while being underpinned by passionate individuals and strategic partnerships.

The key lesson from Carlow is that a circular future is not built by a single entity but is woven from a collaborative ecosystem where the local authority enables, social enterprises and community groups act, and an engaged public participates. The success of these projects offers not just a model of waste reduction, but a vision of a more resilient, connected, and resourceful community.

6. Communities' Perceptions and Experiences of the Circular Economy in County Carlow

As Chapters 3 and 4 have shown, there is burgeoning level of circular economy activity across County Carlow. Carlow County Council is keen to support communities and others in further promoting the circular economy. In that context, this research provided communities with an opportunity to put forward ideas and suggestions to Carlow County Council. Working with the Council, the research team devised a survey questionnaire that sought to enable communities to undertake the following:

- Outline their knowledge and understanding of the circular economy;
- Describe the ways in which they use materials that may be relevant to circular economy activities; and
- Suggest ways in which the circular economy could be advanced.

In August 2025, Carlow County Council issued a press release about this research, and the Council also undertook social media campaigns – using the following posters / adverts (Figure 39) – to invite representatives of community and voluntary groups to share their experiences and perceptions of the circular economy.

Figure 39: Promoting the survey research

We need YOU!!

Carlow County Council is developing an online platform to showcase and support Community based circular economy activities—and we want to hear from you

Do you know of any organisation /community group activities in your area that promote:

- Repair, reuse, or up cycling
- Sharing or swapping initiatives
- Composting or food waste reduction
- Sustainable living or zero-waste practices
- Environmental education or awareness events

Whether it's a one-off event or an ongoing project, we'd love to include it

Share your story, photos, or event details with us today by emailir
Name, Contact, Event, Eircode to oksocialresearch@gmail.com

Closing date for submissions is Friday 1st August.

Let's celebrate a support the amazing work happening in our area.

WIN €100 FOR YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP

Carlow County Council is developing an online platform to showcase and support local Community based circular economy activities—and we want to hear from you!

Just take this quick and easy survey

Closing date 15TH SEPTEMBER 5PM

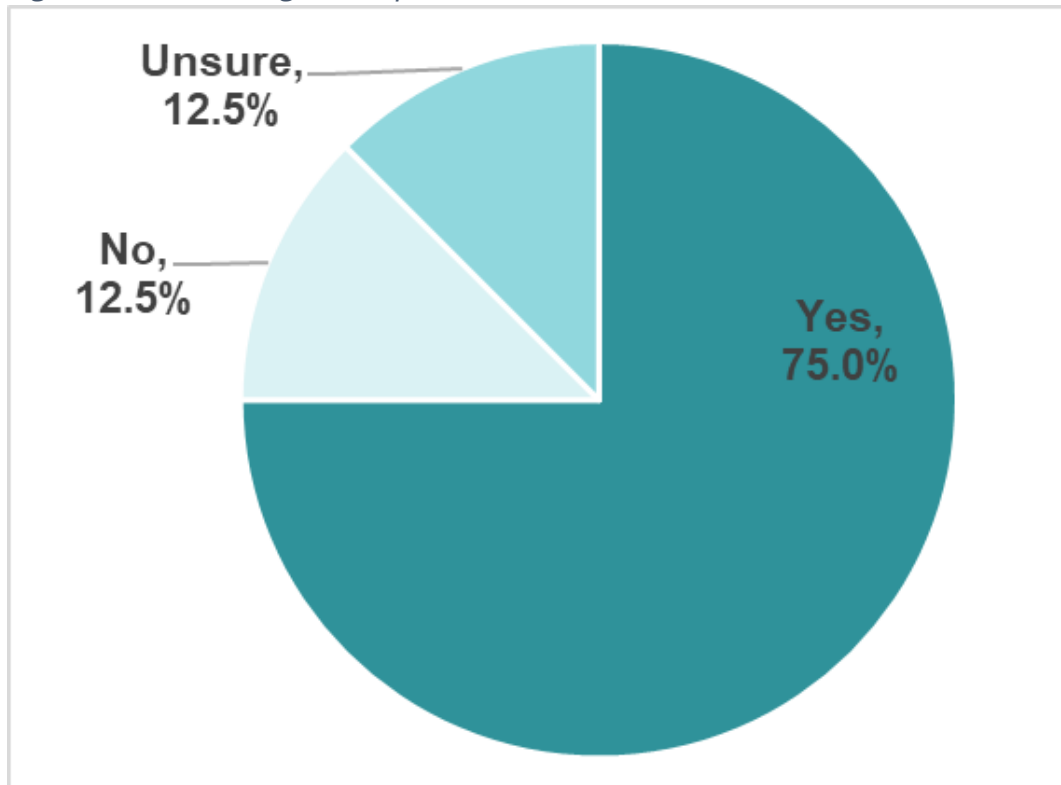
Source: [Carlow County Council](https://www.carlow.ie/)

Local organisations and networks including the Public Participation Network (PPN) promoted the survey questionnaire, and the link to the survey questionnaire was posted to the county council’s [Consult Carlow Platform](#)¹⁹. The data collector was open for three weeks, and thirty-two (n=32) organisations responded.

6.1 Awareness of the Circular Economy

The survey questionnaire opened by asking groups if they had heard of the term ‘circular economy’. As the following pie-chart shows (Figure 40), three quarters of respondents stated that they had heard of it, while the remainder were evenly divided among those who said ‘no’ and those who said ‘maybe’.

Figure 40: Percentage of respondents how have heard of the term ‘circular economy’



This question was followed by an open-ended question that asked those who had heard of the term to briefly describe what it meant to them. The following wordcloud (Figure 41) synthesises their responses. It reveals that they are most likely to associate the circular economy with eliminating waste, and with a wide range of personal and household behaviours that extend the lives of products through re-purposing, re-using and sharing them.

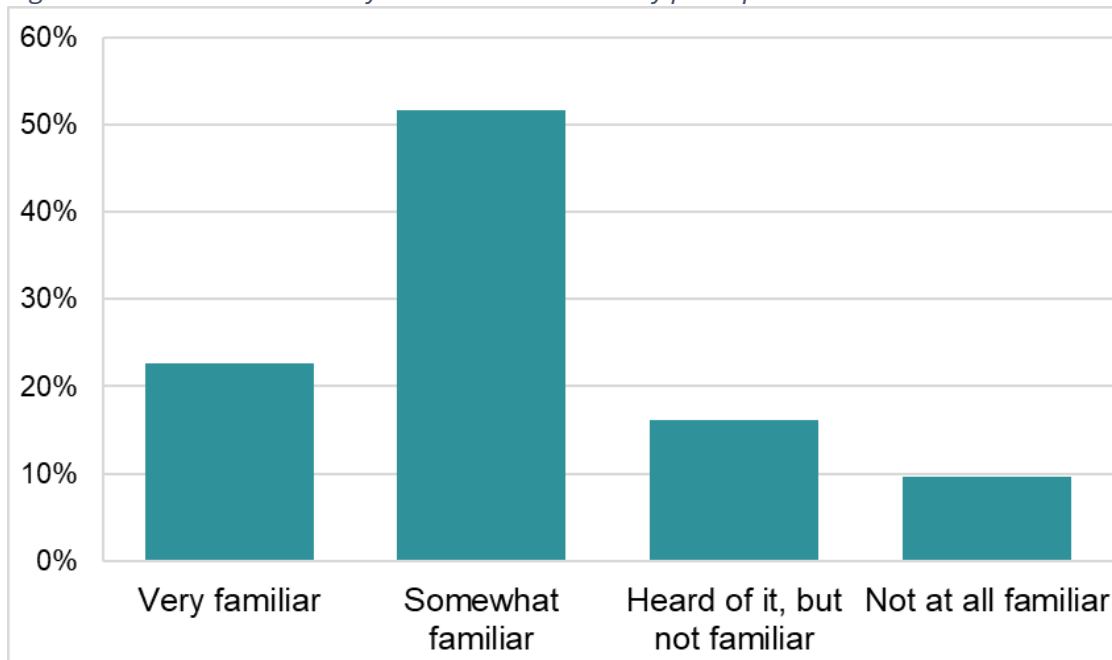
¹⁹ This online platform allows members of the public to make submissions and / or input into decision-making in Carlow County Council.

Figure 41: What the term ‘Circular Economy’ means to people



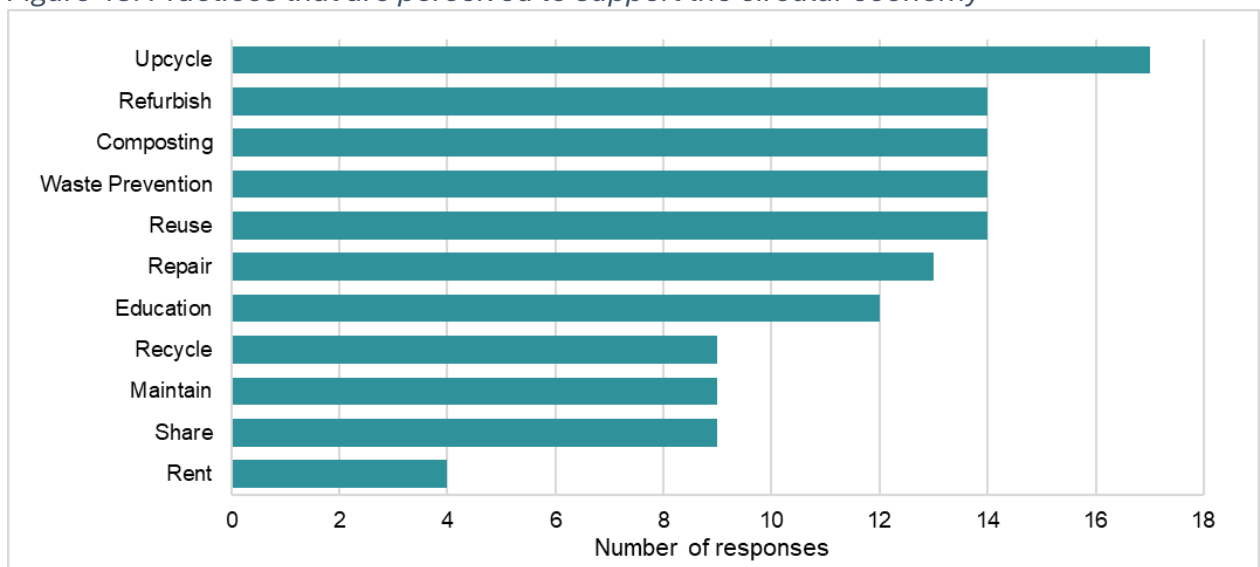
Respondents were also asked if they were familiar with the principles of the circular economy, and the questionnaire listed some of those principles i.e., designing out waste, keeping products/materials in use, regenerating natural systems. Just over half of respondents reported that they were ‘somewhat familiar’ with circular economy principles, while a further 23% stated that they were ‘very familiar’ with them. One in ten respondents stated they were ‘not at all familiar’ with circular economy principles. The following bar-chart (Figure 42) presents the findings in this regard.

Figure 42: Levels of familiarity with circular economy principles



In order to further probe respondents' levels of knowledge of the circular economy, the questionnaire presented a list of activities / practices, and it asked which of them could be considered as supporting the circular economy. As the following graph shows (Figure 43), 'upcycling' was the activity that was most frequently selected – followed by refurbish(ing), composting, waste prevention, and reuse. Renting was the activity that was least frequently selected.

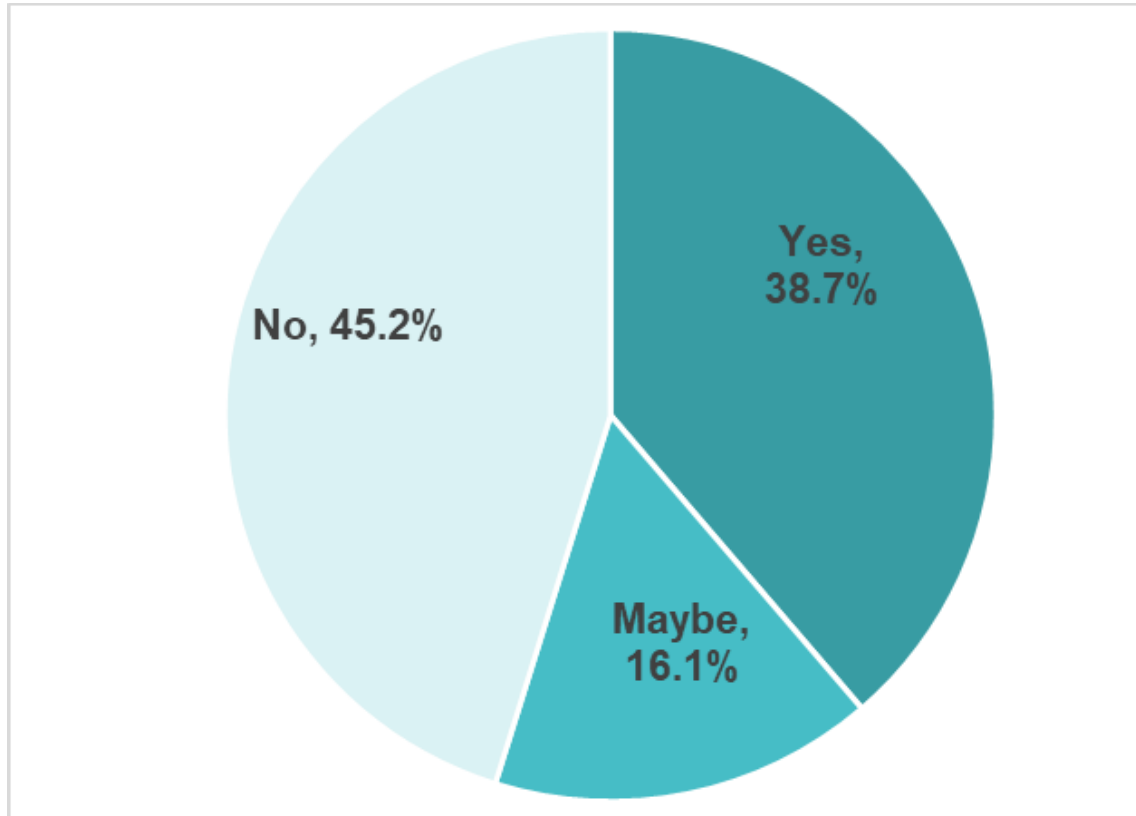
Figure 43: Practices that are perceived to support the circular economy



The survey results reveal that there is potential to increase the level of awareness of circular economy initiatives in County Carlow. The following pie-chart (Figure 44) shows

that almost half (45.2%) of respondents are not aware of any local initiatives or businesses that specifically promote the circular economy.

Figure 44: Awareness of local initiatives or businesses specifically promoting the Circular Economy



Those who indicated that they are aware of such businesses or initiatives were invited to list any of them. In response they referred to the Be Kind Project, men’s sheds, charity shops, community gardens, composting, farmers’ markets, and various tailoring projects.

Just over one fifth (22%) of respondents indicated awareness of national or county policies that support the circular economy. In this regard, they referred to work being done by Carlow County Council in respect of composting, and recycling bins, as well as the information initiatives promoted by the Council’s Environment Section.

The questionnaire listed five types of circular-economy activities, as follows, and it invited respondents to name any group / organisation that is involved in undertaking or promoting them:

- Activity 1 - Repair, Reuse, or upcycling
- Activity 2 - Sharing or swapping initiatives
- Activity 3 - Composting or food waste reduction

- Activity 4 - Sustainable living or zero waste practices
- Activity 5 - Environmental education or awareness events

The following table (Table 3) lists the types of activities and the practice examples identified by respondents.

Table 3: Circular economy activities, promoters and practices in County Carlow – as identified by survey respondents²⁰

	Promoters / Categories	Specific Practices, Projects, Initiatives
Repair, Reuse, or upcycling	Carlow County Council	Climate Action Week Swap shops Repair events Community Climate Action Programme (funding for composting hubs, bike repairs, libraries, and other items.) Repair Directory WEEE collection scheme for household electricals and batteries Bring Centres for recycling bottles, glass, plastic, textiles WEEE drop-off days in local communities
	Local Enterprise Office (LEO)	Green workshops, grants (up to €10k), and competitions for small businesses
	Reuse, Repair & Sharing Initiatives	Men’s Sheds (Various locations) Bicycle repair & resale Repair Shops (General) The Zip Yard (Tailoring) Expert Tailoring Steadfast Sewing Club Reuse & Second-Hand Be Kind project APA charity An Siopa Glas Charity and second-hand shops (Various) Wedding and event dress hire Sharing & Swapping Clothes swaps Communities sharing excess fruit & vegetable harvests Public libraries and community libraries

²⁰ Please note that the information presented in this table draws exclusively from the responses to the survey questionnaire. The authors recognise that the information is not exhaustive. The purpose of this table is to present the primary data garnered through the survey, thereby adding value to other sources, several of which have been referenced elsewhere throughout this report.

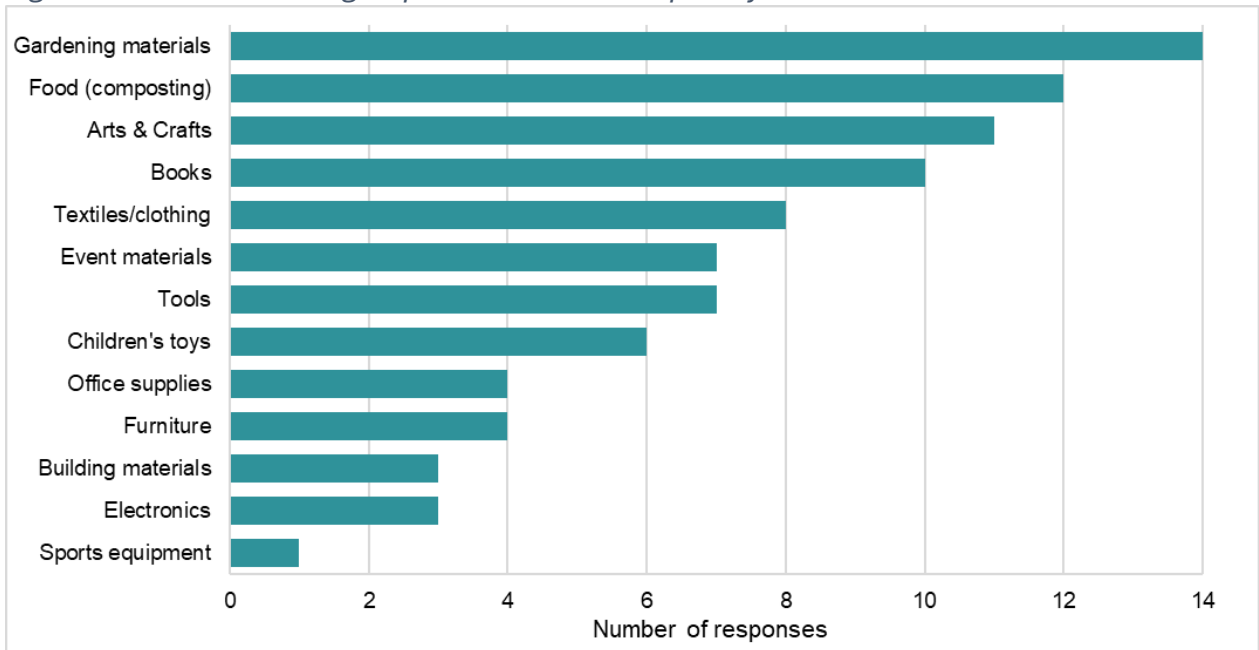
	Community & Environmental Projects	An Gairdín Beo (among many other community gardens and allotments) Master Composting Tinryland Tidy Towns composting initiative Forward Steps Community Garden (Tullow) Water Harvesting Keepers of the Flame
	Private Sector / Business Initiatives	Carlow Brewing Company (O'Hara's) Origin Green certification Carlow Toolmaking Services (CTS) Donating pallets to community groups for use as planters Promoting best practices regarding food waste (multiple supermarkets) Farmers Markets (various locations)
Reuse, Repair & Sharing Initiatives	Repair & Upcycling Hubs	Men's Sheds Tullow Men's Shed Clark's Bike Repair Johnson Tailors An Siopa Glas Be Kind Project Charity Shops all over Carlow Forward Steps' Garden Tinryland Community Hub
Sharing or swapping initiatives	Organised Swap Events & Projects	Plant and Vegetable Swaps (various locations) Tidy Towns Plant swaps Carlow County Council Swap Shop (various locations) Tullow Family Free Cycle Facebook Page Be Kind Project Leighlinbridge Knitting Club (skills and materials) Carlow County Council sharing initiatives Elder Flower Garden - sharing resources/produce
Composting or food waste reduction	Community Gardens & Centres	An Gairdín Beo Tinryland Community Hub/Cafe Community Plots (various locations) Food Cloud Cairdeas (learning centre) - Involved in composting/food waste reduction Local tidy town groups - Involved in initiatives. Local schools
	Commercial and Local Authority	Carlow County Council, Civic Amenity Site (Kernanstown and Powerstown) Powerstown Recycling Centre (Powerstown) - accepts compostable waste O'Toole's Waste Disposal (Ballintrane)

Sustainable living or zero waste practices	Educational Workshops & Awareness	Tidy Towns Groups (various locations) CCEN (Carlow County Environmental Network) An Gairdín Beo Tinryland Community Hub/Café Swop shops / Sewing skills Too Good-To-Go app at Apple Green Petrol Station Tesco evening offers (Carlow) - Special offers to reduce food waste, with high community participation Recycling and reusing garden pots - currently done through donations at An Gairdín Beo
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6.2 Community Group Practices

Groups were asked to identify the materials they most commonly handle. The following graph shows (Figure 45) their responses – in descending order of frequency.

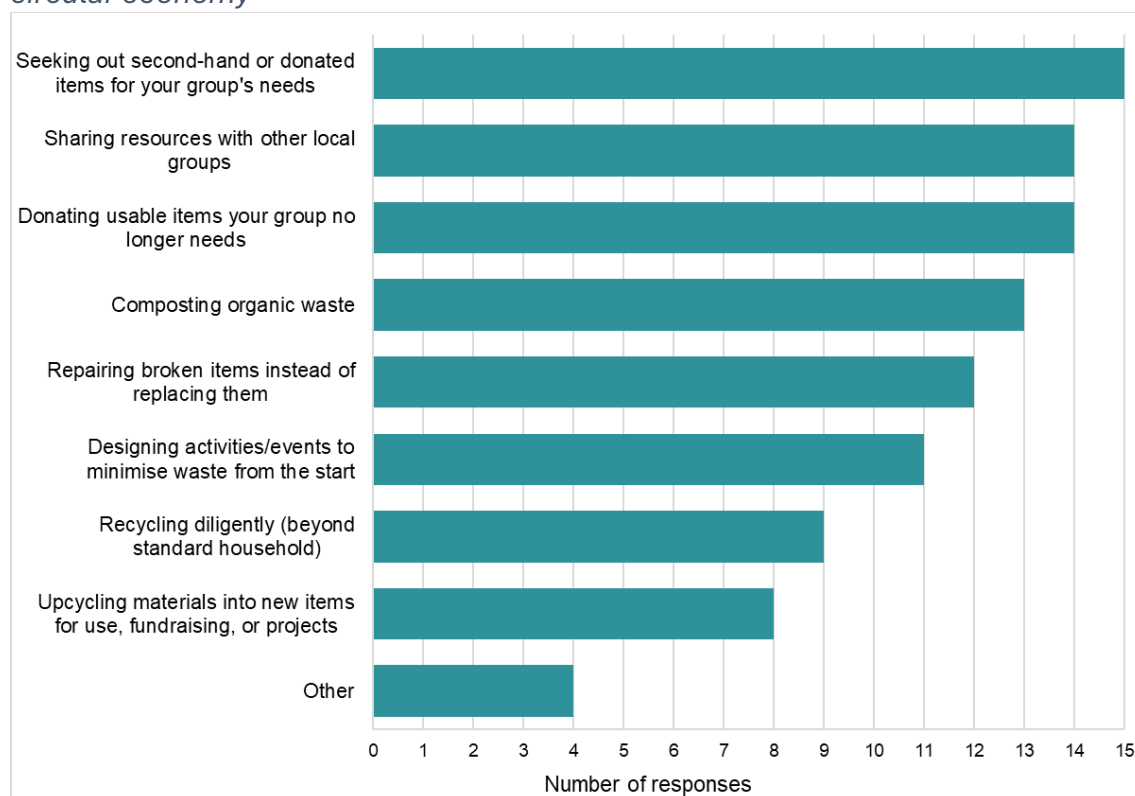
Figure 45: Materials that groups handle most frequently



The survey responses reveal that over a third (35.5%) of groups acquire, use and / or re-use materials at least monthly. Almost one in five groups (19%) do so ‘constantly’ i.e., weekly or most weeks. Over a third or groups do so rarely, while just 7% never do so.

As the following graph shows (Figure 46), groups are already undertaking certain activities that contribute to the circular economy in County Carlow. The figures show, that in respect of the potential circular economy activities, groups are most likely to seek out second-hand or donated items, to share resources with other groups, and to donate usable items.

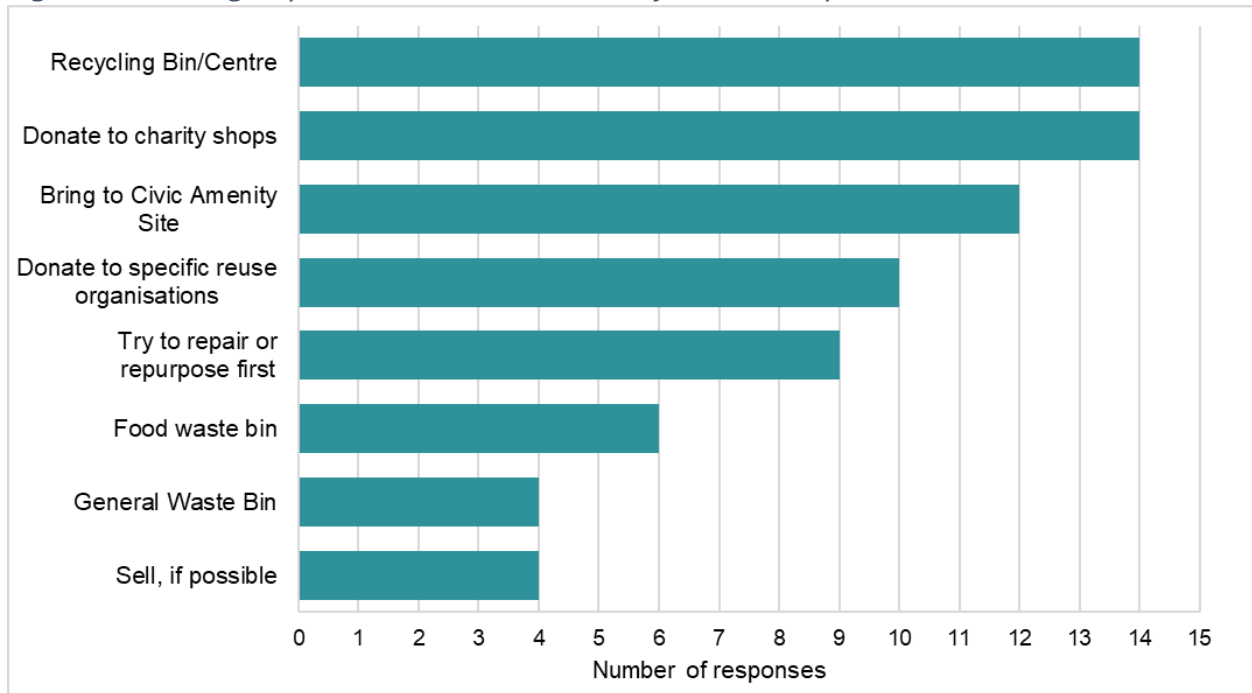
Figure 46: Activities in which groups (survey respondents) engage – relating to the circular economy²¹



The following graph (Figure 47) shows that when groups are finished with items, they are most likely to recycle them and / or to donate them to charity shops. The next most popular actions are to bring the items to a civic amenity site and / or to donate them to specific re-use organisations, such as Be Kind. Nine (of 32) organisations who responded report that they try to repair or re-purpose the item. Disposal (general waste) and selling are less popular.

²¹ Among the 'other' activities undertaken by groups are: home-baking, avoiding the use of disposable cups/plates, swapping household materials, car boot sales, and promotion of local food produce.

Figure 47: What groups do with items which they need to dispose



As the following table (Table 4) shows, groups are most likely to source materials through seeking donations and purchasing items – either new or second hand. They are less likely to repair or re-purpose items.

Table 4: ‘Typical’ sources of materials

Sourcing Method	Count
Seek donations from members/public	19
Buy new (retail)	12
Buy second-hand (charity shops, online marketplaces)	12
Use existing group resources/repurpose	9
Seek donations from businesses	9
Borrow from other groups	6
Use resource sharing schemes/library of things	4
Make them	1
It depends on the item	1

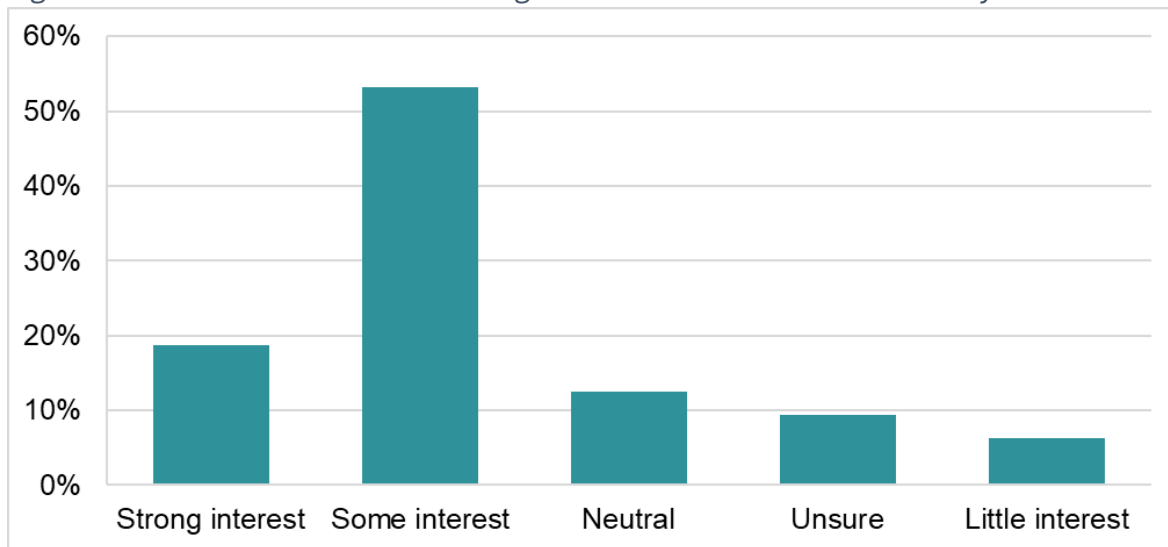
6.3 Perceptions of the Circular Economy

The survey responses indicate a positive disposition to, and interest in, the circular economy. The majority (60%) of respondents believe their group could benefit financially from it. As the following graph shows, 19% (of all respondents) believe they could benefit ‘significantly’, while a further 41% believe they could benefit ‘somewhat’ from it. Just over one third (34%) of respondents believe that their group might (maybe) benefit, while

just 6% believe their group is unlikely (probably not) to benefit financially from the circular economy.

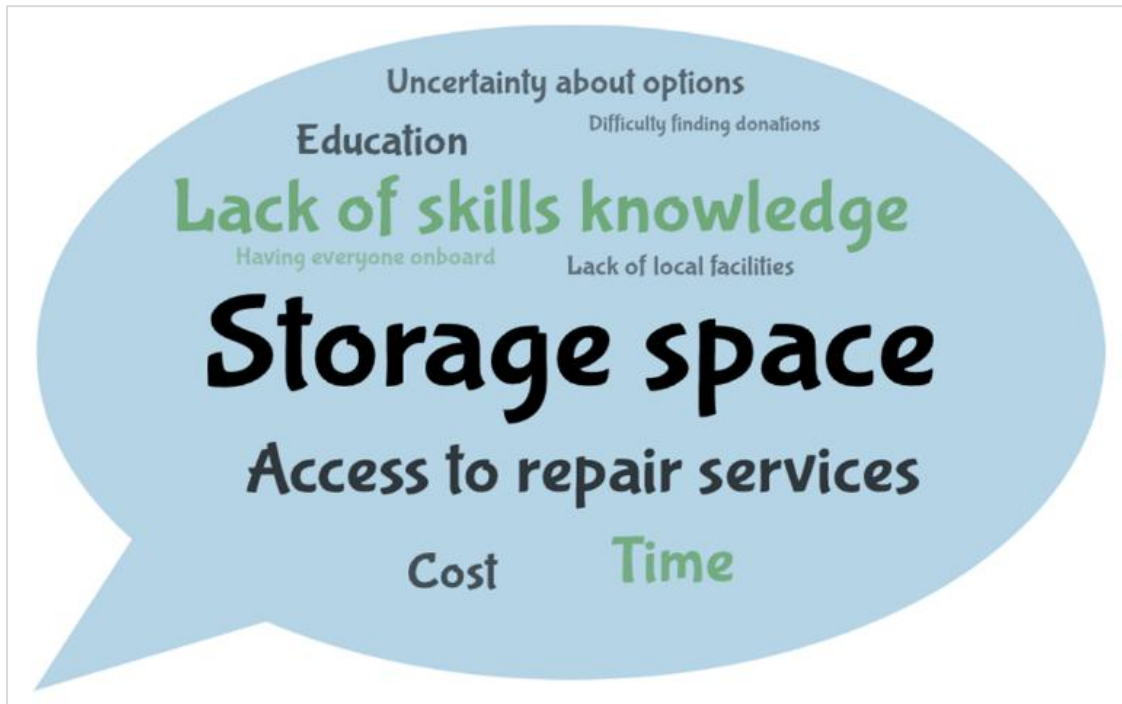
A clear majority of groups are interested in learning more about the circular economy or developing skills related to upcycling and repair. As the following graph shows (Figure 48), nearly one in five groups has a ‘strong interest’, while a further 53% have ‘some interest’. A further 13% of groups indicate they are ‘neutral’ on the issue, and 9% are unsure. Just 6% state they have little interest.

Figure 48: Levels of interest in learning more about the circular economy



In order to enable Carlow County Council and other statutory bodies to understand how best to support community-led circular economy activities, the survey questionnaire asked community groups to identify the challenges they face in this regard. As the following wordcloud (Figure 49) illustrates, the four main challenges they face are: storage space; lack of skills/knowledge; access to repair services; and time. These challenges were listed by at least thirteen groups. Ten groups also mentioned costs, while a further seven respondents cited ‘uncertainty about options.’

Figure 49: Circular economy challenges faced by groups



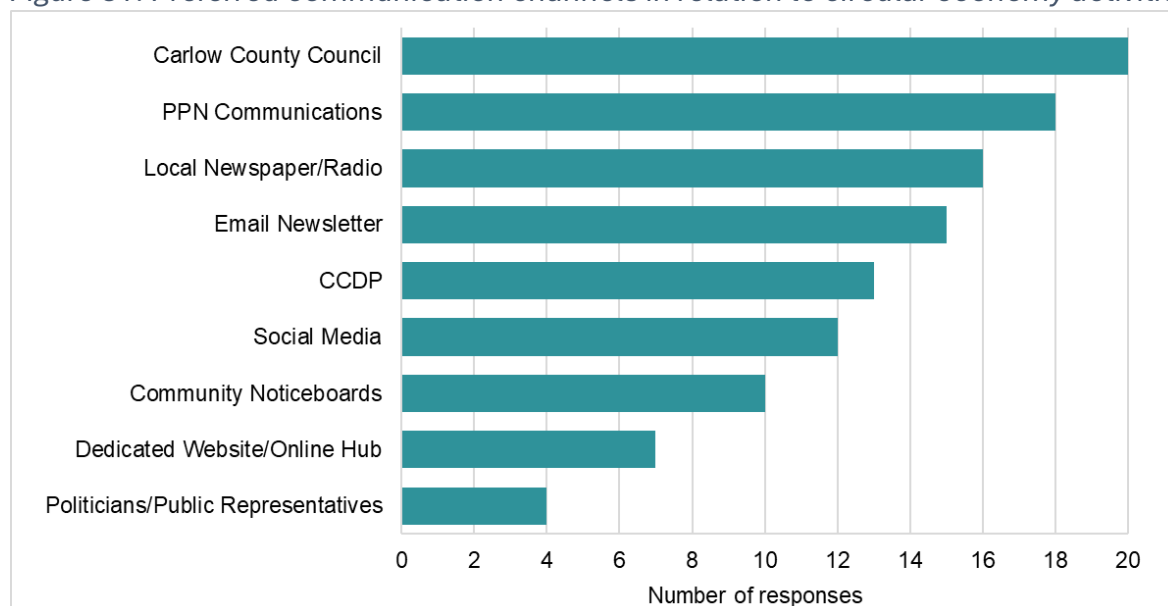
Groups were also invited to identify what would help them to engage more with circular economy practices. Their responses indicate a strong interest in a wide range of options, as the following wordcloud (Figure 50) illustrates.

Figure 50: Interventions that would help groups to engage more in circular economy activities



Respondents believe that Carlow County Council, the PPN, and traditional media (print and broadcast) are community groups' preferred communication channels - in respect of ways to share information and resources about the circular economy. The responses indicate an interest in an email newsletter (Figure 51). CCDP is also identified as a useful conduit, while social media is considered to be less useful. Smaller numbers of the respondent's advocate using noticeboards, a website / hub, or disseminating information via public representatives.

Figure 51: Preferred communication channels in relation to circular economy activities



6.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided valuable insights into the experiences, perceptions, and potential of the circular economy among community and voluntary organisations County Carlow. The survey results reveal a landscape of significant opportunity, grounded in a strong foundation of existing activity and positive community disposition.

The findings indicate a solid baseline of awareness, with three-quarters of respondents reporting that they are familiar with the term 'circular economy'. They associate it primarily with eliminating waste and with practices like reusing, repairing, and sharing. This conceptual understanding is being actively put into practice in many communities / organisations, and there is scope to enhance and build on current practices. A vibrant ecosystem of circular initiatives is already at work across the county, driven by a diverse range of actors including Carlow County Council, CCDP, men's sheds, charity shops, community gardens, and local businesses. Most groups are actively engaged in sourcing

second-hand materials, sharing resources, and ensuring items are recycled or donated at their end-of-life.

The research also identifies clear pathways for growth and support. While general awareness is high, nearly half of the respondents were not aware of specific local circular economy initiatives, indicating a need for improved communication and visibility. Furthermore, a strong appetite for further engagement is evident, with a majority of groups expressing interest in learning more and believing they could benefit financially from circular practices.

The primary challenges identified—storage space, lack of skills/knowledge, access to repair services, and time—provide a clear and actionable set of signposts for Carlow County Council and its partners. Correspondingly, the suggested interventions, such as practical workshops, funding, and further capacity-building and information dissemination, point towards concrete solutions.

In summary, the survey results indicate that communities in County Carlow are not just ready for a transition to a circular economy; they are already actively building it. The role for strategic support is now clear: to empower current community champions by addressing their specific challenges, amplifying their efforts, and connecting them through preferred channels like the Council, CCDP and PPN. By doing so, Carlow can harness this considerable community energy to build a more resilient, resourceful, and truly circular county.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This research project, commissioned by Carlow County Council in summer 2025, set out to map and understand the landscape of community-led circular economy activities across County Carlow. Through comprehensive desk research, mapping exercises, detailed case studies, and direct engagement with community groups via a survey, this study has established a robust evidence base that documents current practices, identifies success factors, and illuminates the challenges facing those working to advance circularity at the local level.

This concluding chapter synthesises the key findings from the preceding chapters, draws out critical insights for policy and practice, and presents a series of actionable recommendations. These recommendations are designed to support Carlow County Council, other agencies, NGOs, community groups, and the wider public in strengthening and expanding the circular economy across the county. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that County Carlow possesses significant circular economy momentum, driven by community champions, supportive local governance, inter-community networking, and a growing public awareness of sustainability imperatives. The task now is to build strategically on this foundation.

7.2 Summary of Key Findings

7.2.1 The Policy and Literature Context

The literature review (Chapter 2) established that the circular economy has evolved from a primarily technical, industrial concept into a more nuanced framework that recognises the critical importance of social, cultural, and place-based dimensions. Community-level initiatives are increasingly understood as important testing grounds for circular innovations and essential mediators between individual behaviour change and systemic transformation. However, significant research gaps persist, particularly regarding the effectiveness of community circular economy models, their scalability, and the appropriate support mechanisms required within the Irish context.

The policy review (Chapter 3) revealed that Ireland has developed a comprehensive multi-layered framework for circular economy development, spanning international commitments (UN SDGs), EU regulatory requirements, and national legislative initiatives. The *Circular Economy Act 2022* and the 'Living More, Using Less' strategy provide the statutory foundation and strategic direction for Ireland's circular transition. At the local level, both the *Carlow County Development Plan (2022-2028)* and the *Carlow*

Local Economic and Community Plan (2023-2029) embed circular economy principles within spatial planning, economic development, and community action frameworks, while the *Carlow Local Authority Climate Action Plan (2024-2029)* is an important driver of the circular economy, within the framework of sustainable development.

However, the December 2024 European Environment Agency assessment identified a significant implementation gap between policy ambition and practical delivery. Ireland maintains one of the EU's highest levels of material consumption and waste generation per capita, with continued heavy reliance on waste export and municipal waste landfilling rates that substantially exceed EU averages. This gap between national ambition and current reality underscores the critical importance of empowering local authorities and community groups to translate policy into practice.

7.2.2 Current Circular Economy Practices in County Carlow

Chapter 4 documented a vibrant and diverse ecosystem of circular economy activities across County Carlow. The mapping exercise identified:

- 9 second-chance and charity shops;
- 9 community gardens;
- 4 public (local authority) libraries with exchange programmes – in addition to a growing number of community / free libraries;
- 13 community centres and family resource centres;
- 22 events, training, and workshops; and
- 22 community groups actively promoting circular practices.

These figures represent only a snapshot of a dynamic and expanding circular economy. Activities span multiple sectors, from major employers and several SMEs implementing comprehensive sustainability programmes, to grassroots initiatives such as men's sheds restoring furniture and community gardens closing the loop on organic waste. Educational institutions, including the 50+ primary and secondary schools registered for the *Green-Schools Programme* and SETU's *Living Laboratory*, are embedding circular economy principles in the next generation whilst generating practical innovations for current application, and Carlow College and Carlow College of Further Education are both developing active Green Campus and Sustainability teams.

Throughout the research, participants consistently emphasised both the social justice and environmental dimensions of their work. Community leaders articulated the connection between environmental sustainability and social well-being, whilst practitioners cited specific metrics related to waste diversion, energy savings, and carbon footprint reduction. This dual focus on environmental sustainability and social

equity has proven essential in securing community buy-in and maintaining long-term engagement.

7.2.3 Case Study Insights

The four detailed case studies presented in Chapter 5 provided rich, contextual understanding of how circular economy principles operate in practice:

The [BE Kind Project](#) demonstrates the power of an integrated social inclusion and circular economy model. Operating from a community hub, the project has diverted several tonnes of material from landfill annually whilst providing essential support to vulnerable individuals and families. The project's success stems from its embedded position within Carlow County Development Partnership's wider community development and social inclusion framework, its dedicated staff structure, strong collaborative relationships, and the trust built through transparent operations.

The [Carlow County Council Clothes Swap Kit](#) exemplifies how local authorities can empower communities through provision of simple and effective tools. By operating a library-style system where the public can borrow a professional-grade kit to run their own swap events, the Council has enabled hundreds of residents to participate in circular fashion whilst keeping an estimated 1,500 items of clothing in circulation. The initiative's strength lies in its empowering simplicity and its role as a gateway to broader engagement with pre-loved retail. It should be noted, however, that initiatives such as this require additional personnel to manage and store materials.

The [Carlow County Council Master Composting Programme](#) illustrates the effectiveness of a 'train-the-trainer' model combined with practical infrastructure support. By training 22 community champions and supporting the establishment of seven community composting hubs, the programme has already produced 26 tonnes of finished compost whilst building lasting community capacity. The programme successfully addresses the critical knowledge gap that historically hindered composting uptake in Ireland.

The [County Carlow Environmental Network \(CCEN\)](#) operates as the county's 'circular economy nervous system', fostering awareness, facilitating connections, and building the social capital necessary for circular activities to thrive. Through its diverse programme of film screenings, climate cafés, practical workshops, and community gatherings, the network creates safe spaces for dialogue whilst connecting disparate groups and amplifying their collective impact.

These case studies collectively demonstrate that successful circular economy initiatives combine passionate leadership, practical tools and infrastructure, supportive

partnerships, and clear community benefit. They also reveal common challenges: funding uncertainty, volunteer burnout, infrastructure constraints, and the ongoing need for knowledge-sharing and skills development.

7.2.4 Community Perceptions and Experiences

The survey results, which were presented in Chapter 6, reveal a landscape of significant opportunity. Three-quarters of respondents are familiar with the term 'circular economy', associating it primarily with eliminating waste and with practices like reusing, repairing, and sharing. A vibrant ecosystem of circular initiatives is already evident across the county, with most groups actively engaged in sourcing second-hand materials, sharing resources, and ensuring items are recycled or donated at end-of-life.

However, nearly half of respondents were not aware of specific local circular economy initiatives, indicating a clear need for improved communication and visibility. The primary challenges identified—storage space, lack of skills and knowledge, access to repair services, and time—provide actionable signposts for support. Correspondingly, groups expressed strong interest in practical workshops, funding, enhanced information-sharing, and opportunities for networking and collaboration.

Importantly, a majority of groups expressed interest in learning more about the circular economy, with 60% believing their group could benefit financially from circular practices. This appetite for engagement, combined with existing activity and positive disposition, indicates that communities in County Carlow are not just ready for a circular transition—they are already actively building it.

7.3 Success Factors and Enabling Conditions

Drawing across all findings, this research identifies success factors that underpin effective circular economy implementation at community level:

- **Dedicated Leadership and Vision:** Every successful initiative documented in this research is driven by passionate individuals or small core teams who provide vision, continuity, and energy. These champions possess combinations of technical knowledge, social skills, and institutional understanding that enable them to translate circular principles into practical community action.
- **Practical Tools and Infrastructure:** As evidenced by the Be Kind project, the Clothes Swap Kit, composting systems, or the CCEN's event programme, successful initiatives provide tangible, accessible resources that enable participation. Fit-for-purpose infrastructure—including appropriate physical spaces, equipment, and digital platforms—is essential for sustained engagement.

- **Collaborative Partnerships:** The synergy between Carlow County Council's resources and support, community groups' grassroots energy, and specialist expertise from organisations like Composting Ireland and CCDP create multiplier effects. No single actor can deliver circular transformation alone; success requires coordinated action across multiple scales and sectors.
- **Social Cohesion and Trust:** Initiatives that foster social connection, create safe spaces for dialogue, and operate transparently build the trust and community bonds necessary for sustained participation. The social dimension of circular economy activities—the relationships formed, skills shared, and collective identity built—is as important as the material flows.
- **Clear Communication and Visibility:** Making circular economy opportunities visible and accessible to the wider community is essential for growing participation. Multiple communication channels, clear messaging, and demonstration of tangible benefits all contribute to effective engagement.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Whilst leadership and volunteerism are crucial, they cannot sustain operations indefinitely. Access to appropriate funding—whether through council budgets, competitive grants, or earned income—is essential for maintaining professional coordination, covering operational costs, and enabling strategic development.
- **Embedded Policy Support:** Initiatives thrive when they are supported by coherent policy frameworks at local, national, and European levels. The integration of circular economy principles into county development plans, local economic and community plans, and climate action strategies provides legitimacy, resources, and strategic direction.

7.4 Persistent Challenges and Barriers

Despite considerable progress, significant challenges persist:

- **Funding Uncertainty:** Many initiatives operate on a year-to-year basis with no long-term security, creating instability and hindering strategic planning. The time and expertise required to secure funding through competitive applications can place additional burden on already-stretched volunteer and staff resources.
- **Volunteer Burnout:** Reliance on small core teams of volunteers creates risk of exhaustion, particularly when initiatives grow in scale and complexity. The 'drop-in, drop-out' nature of volunteering and age profile of volunteers can also create challenges for maintaining consistency and institutional memory.
- **Infrastructure Constraints:** Many groups operate from premises that are not fit-for-purpose, as they lack adequate storage, workspace, or facilities. This is

particularly evident in waste management, where disposal costs for inappropriate donations can consume scarce resources.

- **Knowledge and Skills Gaps:** Whilst enthusiasm is high, practical knowledge about circular economy practices—from proper composting techniques to effective repair methods—remains limited. Access to training, mentoring, and ongoing technical support is inconsistent.
- **Communication Challenges:** Although multiple channels are available (social media, traditional media, direct mail, noticeboards, websites), it is difficult to effectively reach all potential participants and would-be beneficiaries. Many valuable initiatives remain unknown to those who could benefit most.
- **Storage and Space:** Physical space for storing donated items, hosting events, or managing materials is consistently identified as a constraint. The cost and availability of appropriate premises limits the scale at which many groups can operate.
- **Quality Control:** Managing the quality of donations and preventing inappropriate dumping requires constant vigilance and clear communication. The misperception that circular economy projects will accept anything can lead to groups being overwhelmed with unusable items.
- **Measurement and Evaluation:** Whilst the environmental, social, and economic impacts of circular economy activities are evident, quantifying these impacts precisely remains challenging. This can hinder efforts to demonstrate value and make the case for continued support.

7.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis presented throughout this report, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration by Carlow County Council, other statutory agencies, community groups, and wider stakeholders. These recommendations are organised thematically and prioritised according to their potential impact and feasibility.

7.5.1 Strategic Recommendations for Carlow County Council

Recommendation 1: Develop a Multi-Annual Circular Economy Fund

Establish a ring-fenced, multi-annual Circular Economy Community Fund that provides:

- Core funding for established initiatives to ensure operational sustainability;
- Start-up grants for new community-led circular economy projects;
- Capital funding for infrastructure (storage, workshops, equipment); and
- Capacity-building grants for training, mentoring, and skills development.

The fund should feature:

- A streamlined application process designed for community groups;
- Multi-year funding commitments where appropriate to reduce administrative burden;
- Clear criteria aligned with circular economy principles; and
- Support for both environmental and social impact measurement.

Rationale: The current reliance on year-to-year competitive funding creates uncertainty and administrative burden. Multi-annual funding would enable strategic planning, reduce staff and volunteer burnout, and provide the stability needed for initiatives to mature and scale.

Recommendation 2: Develop a County-Wide Circular Economy Hub

Invest in the development of a purpose-built or refurbished Circular Economy Hub that provides for the following:

- A permanent home for the Clothes Swap Kit and expanded swap-shop operations;
- Workshop spaces for repair cafés, upcycling, and skills training;
- Storage facilities for donated items and project materials;
- Meeting and event spaces for community groups;
- Tool library and resource sharing facilities;
- Demonstration composting systems; and
- A shared space for circular economy staff and partner organisations.

This hub should be designed collaboratively with community stakeholders and could potentially be co-located with existing council facilities to maximise efficiency.

Rationale: The lack of appropriate physical infrastructure is a persistent barrier identified across case studies and survey responses. A dedicated hub would provide the space and facilities needed to scale activities whilst serving as a visible, accessible centre for circular economy engagement.

Recommendation 3: Further Integrate Circular Economy Metrics into Council Reporting

Expand the existing Climate Action Key Performance Indicators framework to explicitly include circular economy metrics, such as:

- Tonnage of materials diverted from landfill through council-supported initiatives;
- Number of community groups engaged in circular economy activities;
- Participation rates in swap shops, repair cafés, and composting programmes;

- Number of training sessions delivered and participants reached;
- Economic value generated through circular economy activities; and
- Establish baseline measurements and set ambitious but achievable targets for improvement.

Rationale: The principle that 'what gets measured gets done' applies equally to circular economy development. Formal inclusion in council reporting frameworks would raise the profile of circular economy work, enable progress tracking, and support evidence-based decision-making.

Recommendation 4: Expand and Diversify the Master Composting Programme

Building on the success of the initial programme:

- Provide follow-up training and ongoing technical support for existing sites;
- Expand the programme to additional communities across the county;
- Develop school-focused composting education programmes;
- Create a peer-learning network for Master Composters;
- Invest in additional composting infrastructure at community sites; and
- Explore commercial-scale composting options for businesses and institutions.

Rationale: The Master Composting Programme has proven highly successful, with strong demand and tangible impacts. Expansion would multiply these benefits whilst building on established momentum and expertise.

Recommendation 5: Enhance and Grow Circular Procurement Practices

While public procurement processes are governed by EU and national regulations, public bodies should, within these frameworks, look at ways of strengthening their green procurement policies by:

- Setting specific targets for procurement of recycled, refurbished, and reused goods;
- Prioritising low-carbon circular economy enterprises in procurement decisions;
- Including circular economy criteria in tender evaluations;
- Piloting 'product-as-a-service' models for appropriate categories;
- Publishing annual reports on circular procurement achievements; and
- Participate in networking and collaboration activities among public sector organisations in the county (e.g., schools, health services) to adopt similar practices.

Rationale: The public sector's substantial procurement budget provides significant leverage for stimulating circular economy markets. Leading by example would create

demand for circular products and services whilst demonstrating best practice to other organisations.

7.5.2 Recommendations for Enhancing Communication and Awareness

Recommendation 6: Refine a Comprehensive Circular Economy Communications Strategy

Create and implement a multi-channel communications strategy that:

- Uses preferred channels identified in survey research (Council website, email newsletters, traditional media, CCDP, PPN);
- Features regular 'spotlight' articles on successful initiatives and community champions;
- Develops educational content explaining circular economy principles and practices;
- Creates simple, accessible guides for different audiences (households, businesses, community groups);
- Utilises social media strategically to reach younger demographics; and
- Coordinates with partners (CCDP, PPN, CCEN) to ensure consistent messaging

The strategy should include specific campaigns around key themes such as:

- Fast fashion and textile waste;
- Food waste prevention and composting;
- Repair and reuse alternatives to disposal; and
- Benefits of pre-loved shopping.

Rationale: Survey findings revealed that nearly half of respondents were unaware of local circular economy initiatives. Enhanced communication would increase visibility, participation, and impact of existing activities whilst shifting broader consumption patterns.

Recommendation 7: Establish a Circular Economy Digital Platform

Develop an interactive online platform (integrated with the Council website) that:

- Maintains an up-to-date, searchable directory of all circular economy initiatives, groups, and businesses in the county;
- Provides an interactive map showing locations and activities (building on the map presented in this research);
- Enables online booking of the Clothes Swap Kit and other resources;
- Hosts educational resources, guides, and how-to videos;

- Features a calendar of upcoming events and workshops;
- Facilitates resource-matching and sharing between groups; and
- Provides real-time information about donation points and accepted materials.

Rationale: A centralised digital platform would address communication challenges, increase accessibility, and enable new forms of collaboration. It would serve as the 'go-to' resource for anyone seeking information about circular economy opportunities in Carlow.

Recommendation 8: Expand and Develop (new and additional) Targeted Educational Programmes

Working with partners, most notably An Taisce, Kilkenny-Carlow Education and Training Board and other education providers, create and deliver:

- Circular economy modules for integration into the Green-Schools Programme;
- CPD training for teachers on circular economy education;
- Practical workshops for community groups on specific skills (repair, upcycling, composting);
- Information sessions for businesses on circular business models and procurement;
- Public seminars and lectures on circular economy topics; and
- Family-friendly events that make circular economy engaging and fun.

Rationale: Whilst awareness is growing, knowledge gaps persist. Structured educational programmes would build capacity, develop skills, and embed circular economy thinking across generations.

7.5.3 Recommendations for Supporting Community Groups

Recommendation 9: Establish a Circular Economy Peer Network

Create a formal network that brings together representatives from all circular economy initiatives across the county for:

- Quarterly networking and knowledge-sharing meetings;
- Peer mentoring and support;
- Joint problem-solving on common challenges;
- Collaborative project development;
- Sharing of resources, expertise, and equipment; and
- Provide light-touch coordination support whilst ensuring the network remains community-led, responsive, and innovative.

Rationale: Many groups face similar challenges and could benefit enormously from shared learning. Formalising these connections would reduce duplication, foster innovation, and provide mutual support that could help prevent volunteer burnout.

Recommendation 10: Ensure Continued Provision of Comprehensive Capacity-Building Support

Ensure the on-going delivery of a structured support programme for circular economy groups that includes:

- Signposting to supports e.g., CCDP and LEO social enterprise supports;
- Start-up mentoring for new initiatives;
- Governance and financial management training;
- Funding application support and grant-writing assistance;
- Social media and communications workshops;
- Volunteer recruitment and retention guidance;
- Impact measurement tools and support; and
- Access to pro-bono professional services (legal, accounting, design).

Rationale: The survey responses and case studies revealed that groups face challenges beyond their core circular economy work. Targeted capacity-building would strengthen organisational resilience and effectiveness.

Recommendation 11: Expand Equipment and Infrastructure Sharing

Building on the success of the Clothes Swap Kit model:

- Develop additional 'kits' for other circular economy activities (repair café toolkit, event equipment);
- Create a county-wide tool library for community use;
- Establish a transport pool or logistics support for moving donated items;
- Provide access to shared storage facilities at key locations; and
- Make available relevant council equipment (e.g., waste-segregation bins, signage) for community events.

Rationale: Lack of equipment and storage space are major barriers. Shared resources would lower entry barriers for new initiatives whilst improving the efficiency of existing ones.

7.5.4 Recommendations for Supporting Business Engagement

Recommendation 12: Expand and Mainstream the 'Together Towards a Greener Carlow' Programme

Working with Carlow Chamber and Local Enterprise Office:

- Secure long-term funding for the programme's continuation;
- Expand capacity to support more businesses annually;
- Develop sector-specific guidance (hospitality, retail, agriculture, manufacturing);
- Create a Circular Economy Business Network for peer learning;
- Establish an annual Circular Economy Business Awards scheme; and
- Provide financial incentives (grants, rate reductions) for businesses demonstrating circular leadership.

Rationale: The private sector is a critical actor in circular economy transition. The 'Together Towards a Greener Carlow' programme has demonstrated effectiveness; expansion would multiply impacts across the business community.

Recommendation 13: Facilitate Industrial Symbiosis Networks

Support the development of industrial symbiosis arrangements whereby waste from one business becomes input for another. This could include:

- Mapping material flows and identifying synergy opportunities;
- Facilitating introductions and partnerships between businesses;
- Providing technical and financial support for pilot projects; and
- Developing shared infrastructure for material collection and distribution.

Rationale: Council facilitation and support can overcome information barriers and transaction costs that prevent businesses from identifying opportunities independently.

7.5.5 Recommendations for Partnership and Collaboration

Recommendation 14: Further Invest in, and support, relevant organisations' (e.g., Carlow County Development Partnership, VOICE Ireland and NGOs) circular economy capacity-building, community development and social economy approach and roles.

Building on the success of the Be Kind project and Care & Repair initiatives, which have been operating for 5 years and 13 years respectively, and the knowledge capital that pertains in many NGOs – including at national level:

- Work collaboratively, in line with partnership principles to progress shared goals;
- Coordinate funding applications to maximise resource leverage, where appropriate; and
- Explore the potential for social enterprise development in circular economy sectors.

Rationale: CCDP's community development expertise, their experience and established relationships complement the Council's resources and remit. Strengthening partnership working – based on parity of esteem - would strengthen both organisations' circular economy work. NGOs with a national remit, including those that are involved in EU-wide networks, have the potential to promote further innovation and to transfer additional learnings and best practices to communities.

Recommendation 15: Strengthen Relationships with County Carlow Environmental Network

Recognising CCEN's vital role as the county's 'circular economy nervous system':

- Support CCEN to secure multi-annual core funding to support network coordination;
- Collaborate on joint awareness campaigns and events;
- Support CCEN's development of its proposed food network hub;
- Facilitate CCEN's access to council facilities for events; and
- Ensure CCEN is consulted in policy development.

Rationale: CCEN plays a significant convening and educational role that cannot easily be replicated. Strategic investment in the network would yield benefits far exceeding the direct costs.

Recommendation 16: Develop Regional Circular Economy Collaboration

Work with neighbouring local authorities in the South East region to:

- Share learning and good practices;
- Develop joint funding applications for regional projects;
- Create economies of scale for specialist services (e.g., electronics refurbishment);
- Coordinate communications to amplify impact; and
- Advocate collectively to national government and the EU for policy and funding support.

Rationale: Many circular economy challenges and opportunities transcend county boundaries. Regional collaboration would enable approaches that are not viable at individual county level whilst strengthening collective advocacy.

7.5.6 Recommendations for National Policy Development

Recommendation 17: Advocate for Reformed National Funding Mechanisms

Carlow County Council, in collaboration with other local authorities, should advocate to central government (Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, Department of Rural and Community Development and An Ghaeltacht) for:

- Dedicated circular economy funding streams separate from competitive climate action funds;
- Multi-annual rather than annual funding cycles;
- Recognition of circular economy initiatives as infrastructure investment;
- Core funding provisions for network organisations and coordinators;
- Simplified application processes appropriate for community groups; and
- Revenue as well as capital funding to support operational sustainability.

Rationale: Current funding mechanisms, whilst valuable, create uncertainty and administrative burden. Reform would enable more strategic, sustainable development of circular economy capacity nationally.

Recommendation 18: Seek Formal Recognition as a Circular Economy Pioneer County
Position County Carlow for formal recognition (at national or European level) as a circular economy pioneer or demonstration site. This could:

- Attract additional resources and investment;
- Provide opportunities for knowledge-sharing and replication;
- Raise the county's profile and reputation;
- Enable participation in research and innovation projects; and
- Strengthen political commitment and priority.

Rationale: The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that Carlow has already achieved significant circular economy progress. Formal recognition would consolidate this position whilst providing tangible benefits.

7.5.7 Recommendations for Monitoring and Research

Recommendation 19: Establish Baseline Measurements and Conduct Follow-Up Research

Building on this initial mapping exercise:

- Establish baseline measurements for key circular economy indicators;
- Conduct follow-up mapping and survey research at regular intervals (e.g., every 2–3 years) to track progress;
- Commission deeper research into specific topics (e.g., economic impacts, behaviour change mechanisms);

- Participate in national and international circular economy research initiatives; and
- Ensure findings are published and shared to contribute to broader knowledge development.

Rationale: This research represents a valuable starting point, but circular economy is dynamic and evolving. Regular monitoring would enable adaptive management, demonstrate impact, and contribute to the evidence base nationally and internationally.

7.6 Concluding Reflections

This research reveals that many actors in County Carlow are already deeply engaged in building a circular economy. These include dedicated volunteers at community gardens and men's sheds, those delivering and overseeing innovative programmes and projects on the parts of Carlow County Council and CCDP, the enablers of networking and advocacy (most notably CCEN). The maps, case studies, and survey responses presented in this report demonstrate that several individuals, communities and organisations are actively working to reduce waste, extend product lifecycles, and build community resilience.

The challenge now is not to create something from nothing, but rather to strategically support, connect, and amplify what already exists. The recommendations presented above provide signposts for doing so—addressing the specific barriers identified by practitioners whilst building on demonstrated success factors.

Several themes emerge as particularly critical to underpinning the delivery of these recommendations:

- **Community-Led Local Development:** Every successful circular economy initiative documented in this research is community-rooted and community-led. Top-down approaches that do not engage and empower communities are unlikely to succeed. Conversely, community initiatives that lack appropriate support and enabling conditions struggle to achieve their potential. The sweet spot lies in strategic partnership—where local authority resources, policy frameworks, and coordination support meet community energy, local knowledge, and grassroots innovation. Partnership principles – based on mutual respect and equity are essential.
- **The interconnection of environmental and social objectives:** The circular economy in County Carlow is not pursued as an abstract environmental goal but

as a practical response to lived challenges—poverty, isolation, environmental degradation, rising costs. The most successful initiatives are those that deliver multiple benefits simultaneously: environmental improvement, social connection, economic saving, skills development, and community pride. Policy and support mechanisms must recognise and respond to this multiplicity.

- **The importance of the long-term view:** Circular economy transformation is not achieved through one-off projects or short-term initiatives. It requires strategic and sustained investment in infrastructure, capacity, and relationships. Multi-annual funding, permanent coordination roles, and stable partnerships are essential enabling conditions. The current reliance on year-to-year competitive funding is undermining the very stability that successful circular transition requires.
- **The value of the seemingly small:** A clothes swap in a community centre, a composting demonstration in a school, a repair café in a library—these activities may seem modest in scale, but they are profoundly important. They build the knowledge, skills, relationships, and cultural shift upon which larger systemic change depends. Supporting 'small' community-led initiatives is not a second-best alternative to large-scale infrastructure investment; it is a necessary complement and, indeed, a foundation to community wealth building.
- **The opportunity of the present:** Ireland faces significant implementation gaps in meeting its circular economy ambitions, as documented by the European Environment Agency. However, this gap represents opportunity as much as challenge. County Carlow has the potential to demonstrate what effective local circular economy development looks like—to serve as a model for other counties and to contribute to closing Ireland's implementation gap. The foundations are in place; the appetite for engagement is evident; the policy frameworks are largely supportive. What is required now is strategic, sustained investment to realise this potential.

The journey from a linear to a circular economy is not a technical transition that can be delivered through policy mandates and infrastructure investments alone. It is, fundamentally, a cultural shift—a reimagining of our relationship with materials, products, and each other. It requires moving from a culture of 'throw-away' convenience towards one of stewardship, repair, sharing, and care. This cultural shift is already underway in County Carlow, nurtured by the grassroots initiatives documented in this report.

Carlow County Council and its partners have the opportunity and the responsibility to support, nurture, and accelerate this transition. The recommendations presented in this chapter provide a pathway for doing so. Implementation will require political commitment, financial investment, cross-departmental collaboration, stakeholder participation, and sustained effort.

This research provides more than a snapshot of current activity; it provides a foundation for strategic action. By documenting what exists, celebrating achievements, identifying challenges, and presenting evidence-based recommendations, this report offers signposts for accelerating County Carlow's circular economy transition. The stories and data contained within are a testament to the power of local initiative, and they demonstrate the merits of supported and strategic development.

Ultimately, nurturing Carlow's circular ecosystem is not just about waste reduction or economic efficiency; it is about building the kind of community where resources are valued, skills are shared, people are connected, and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to a more sustainable future. County Carlow is already demonstrating what that looks like in practice. The task now is to build on this foundation and realise the full potential of a truly circular county.

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Annex 1: Survey Questionnaire

The Circular Economy in Carlow – Survey of Community and Voluntary Groups

This survey is open to all community and voluntary groups in Carlow Town and County. It asks about any experience your group/ organisation may have in relation to the circular economy.

All responses are confidential. Responses go directly to the external consultants, and Carlow County Council will not have access to any of the data.

Should you have any queries about this research, you can contact either Carlow County Council (Climate@Carlowcoco.ie) or O’Keeffe Social Research (OKSocialResearch@gmail.com).

By proceeding you agree that you understand the above information and consent to have your anonymous data used as part of this study. Your responses are anonymous, and they are treated confidentially. If you have any questions about this questionnaire, you can contact the evaluation team by email: oksocialresearch@gmail.com or by phone: 087 6591788.

I agree

Group Background & Context

Group Name

Awareness & Understanding

Have you heard of the term "Circular Economy"?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If YES to Q2, how would you briefly describe what the "Circular Economy" means to you?

How familiar are you with the *principles* of the Circular Economy (e.g., designing out waste, keeping products/materials in use, regenerating natural systems)?

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Heard of it, but not familiar
- Not at all familiar

Which of the following practices would you consider supporting the circular economy? (tick all that apply)

- Repair - Restoration to functional state
- Reuse - Repeated use of a product or component
- Waste Prevention - Measures taken before a material or product has become waste
- Share - The use of a product by multiple users
- Rent - Products are temporarily accessed rather than owned
- Composting - Natural process of recycling organic waste into nutrient-rich soil
- Maintain - Keep a product in its existing state of quality to guard against failure or decline
- Recycle - Break down and reprocess materials to make new products
- Refurbish - Return a product to good working order
- Upcycle - Transform waste materials or unwanted products into new items of higher quality, value, or functionality
- Education – Providing educational workshops and information to community groups

Are you aware of any local initiatives or businesses in *County Carlow* specifically promoting the Circular Economy?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

If yes, please list any of them

Are you aware of any EU, national or county council policies supporting the Circular Economy that might be relevant to your group?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If yes, please list any of them

Current Practices & Behaviours

Thinking about your group's activities, how often are you involved in acquiring, using / re-using, or getting rid of materials, equipment, or items (like furniture, tools, event supplies, office items, arts & crafts materials, sports gear, gardening supplies, etc.)?

- Never
- Rarely – yearly or less
- Occasionally – a few times per year
- Frequently – monthly or most months
- Constantly – weekly or most weeks

What kinds of materials or items does your group most commonly handle? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Arts & Crafts
- Building materials
- Electronics
- Event materials (banners/decorations)
- Food (composting)
- Furniture
- Gardening materials
- Office supplies
- Books
- Sports equipment
- Textiles/clothing
- Tools
- Children's toys
- Other - (Please specify)

Does your group currently practice any of the following? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Repairing broken items instead of replacing them
- Reusing items (e.g., containers, furniture, materials) within your group
- Donating usable items your group no longer needs
- Seeking out second-hand or donated items for your group's needs
- Upcycling materials into new items for use, fundraising, or projects
- Composting organic waste
- Recycling diligently (beyond standard household)
- Sharing resources/tools/equipment with other local groups
- Designing activities/events to minimise waste from the start
- None of the above

Please specify if you selected 'Other' from above.

When your group needs to dispose of items (furniture, equipment, materials etc.), what do you typically do? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Try to repair or repurpose first
- Offer for free locally(e.g., social media, noticeboard)
- Donate to specific reuse organisations
- Donate to charity shops
- General Waste Bin
- Sell, if possible
- Food waste bin
- Recycling Bin/Centre
- Bring to Civic Amenity Site
- Unsure

When acquiring items (furniture, equipment, materials etc.), where does your group typically source them? *(Please tick all that apply.)*

- Buy new (retail)
- Buy second-hand (charity shops, online marketplaces)
- Seek donations from members/public

- Seek donations from businesses
- Use resource sharing schemes/library of things (if available)
- Use existing group resources/repurpose
- Borrow from other groups

What would help your group engage more with circular economy practices (e.g., reuse, repair, upcycling)? (Please tick all that apply.)

- Information/training workshops (e.g., basic repair, upcycling skills)
- Networking events with other groups to share resources/skills
- Access to affordable repair services
- Easier ways to find/share surplus materials locally (e.g., online platform, swap events)
- Dedicated local space(s) for repair/upcycling (e.g., Men's Shed, community workshop)
- Clearer information on local reuse/recycling options
- Small grants/funding for circular projects
- Examples/case studies from similar groups
- Support accessing second-hand/donated materials

Do you think your group could benefit financially from circular practices (e.g., saving money through reuse/repair, raising funds through upcycled products)?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, somewhat
- Maybe
- Probably not
- No

Is there interest within your group in learning more about the Circular Economy or developing skills related to Upcycling/Repair?

- Strong interest
- Some interest

- Neutral
- Little interest
- No interest
- Unsure

What is the best way to share information and resources on this topic with your group? (Please tick all that apply.)

- Carlow County Council
- Carlow County Development Partnership (CCDP)
- Community Noticeboards
- Dedicated Website/Online Hub
- Email Newsletter
- Local Newspaper/Radio
- PPN Communications
- Politicians/Public Representations
- Social Media (Specify Platform if known)
- Workshops/Events

Do you know of any other community or organisation in your locality or elsewhere in County Carlow that promote any of the following?

Activity 1 - Repair, Reuse, or upcycling
(Provide name and location if possible)

Activity 2 - Sharing or swapping initiatives
(Provide name and location if possible)

Activity 3 - Composting or food waste reduction
(Provide name and location if possible)

Activity 4 - Sustainable living or zero waste practices
(Provide name and location if possible)

Activity 5 - Environmental education or awareness events
(Provide name and location if possible)