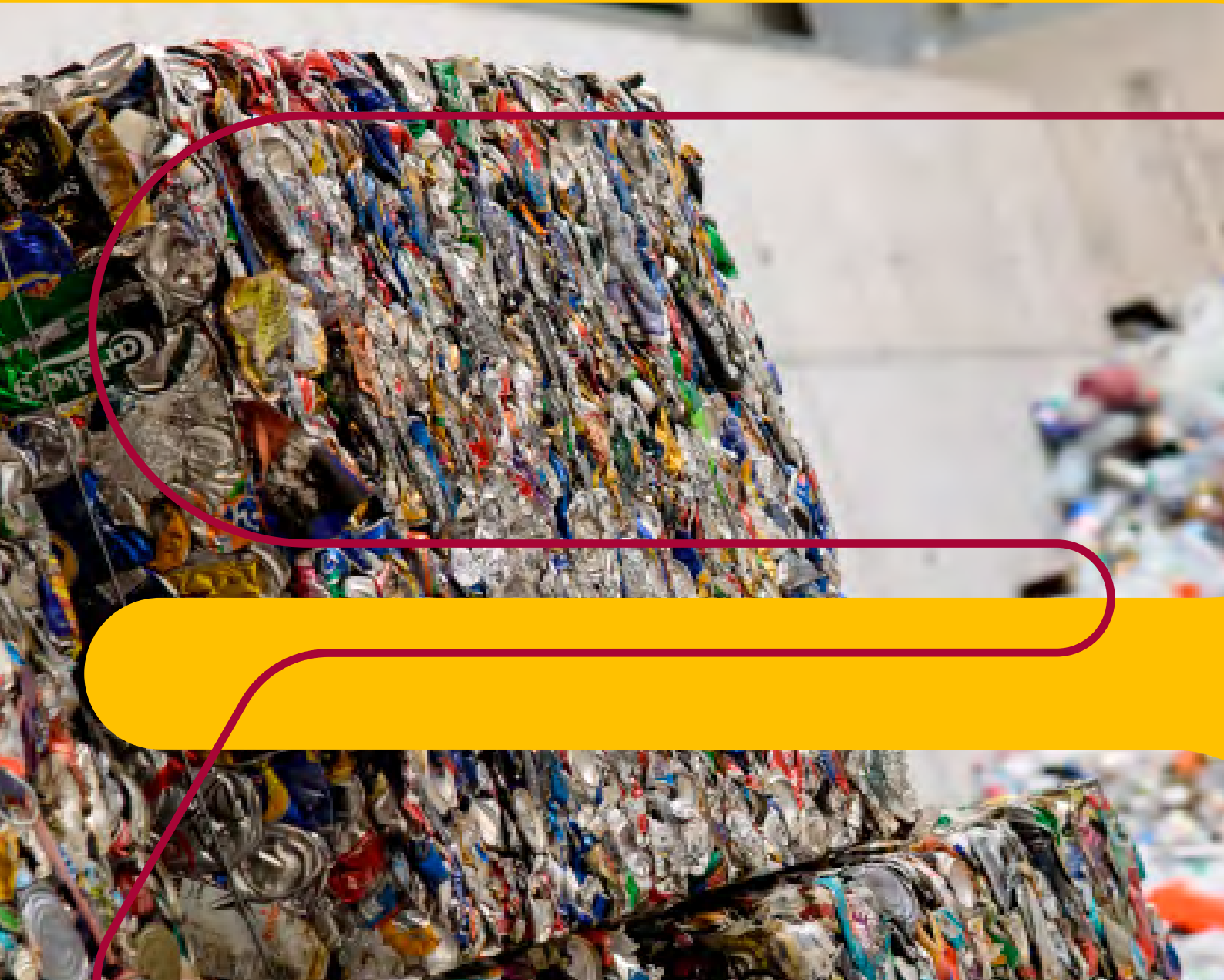




Chapter eight: Embedding the circular economy in decisions



Priority actions for the UK

Government: Resources & waste



1 Support at the highest level...

Promote a culture of re-use and repair across the UK, embedding the circular economy in decision making and engaging the public on the practical steps everyone can take.



2 driving action forwards...

Urgently deliver existing commitments on waste and resources to provide the certainty needed for private investment.



3 with clear objectives...

Set clear government objectives for resource efficiency, supporting a transition towards a circular economy by 2050.



4 tackling the biggest challenges...

Improve the sustainability of resource use for the most challenging sectors, including construction and critical materials.



5 ...and working internationally.

Support international leadership on sustainable resource use, working closely and agreeing a joint approach with the devolved administrations and international partners like the European Union.

“We have a responsibility to give future generations the same opportunities we have received, asking not just how much we can take, but how much we are willing to give back.”

The UK has a serious problem with waste.

UK households throw away **more plastic per person** than every other country in the world, except for the US. We are one of the worst offenders in the world for **producing and recycling electronic waste**, and we consume more **fast fashion per person** than any other country in Europe.

Our nation urgently needs a fundamental change in our relationship with resources. When resources are buried in landfills or burnt in incinerators, their value is destroyed, and we have to create more to replace them.

A ‘**circular economy**’ is one where we instead try to keep as many resources within the economy as possible, by re-using them, re-purposing them, repairing them, or recycling them.

This kind of approach has a lot of benefits: it is better for the environment, it can be cheaper, and it gives us more control over

the resources we rely upon, increasing our security and resilience.

Moving towards a circular economy is about better resource use and less waste, but it is also about economic resilience and giving people more value from the products they use and buy.

Everyone needs to be part of this.

Businesses follow what consumers want, and people make these decisions based on what they think are their options, often constrained by convenience and cost. We can’t make these changes unless people want them and understand them, so we need to make the case publicly, provide support, and not block access to better choices through product design or poor policy.

To support this transition, we need to rebuild ‘hands on’ repair skills that were once passed from parent to child but have in many cases been lost. We must create a

generation prepared to repair, supported by education and lifelong learning that gives people the option to get more out of their ‘stuff’.

None of our economies are isolated, so our work towards a circular economy cannot be either. The failure to reach a global consensus around a treaty for plastics represents a major barrier to effective resource security in a world of international supply chains. International cooperation is essential and initiatives from the EU and France could offer potential solutions to the challenges faced in this country.

We need to waste less, but we also need to manage what we waste better.

The **National Waste Crime Survey** estimates that each year, 35 full Wembley Stadiums worth of waste is illegally managed. Waste crime is estimated to cost the UK economy £1 billion a year, but less than a third of waste crimes are reported.

When these criminals cheat the system, they hurt legitimate businesses, make local areas look and smell bad, damage the environment, then put the costs of cleanup back onto the public.

There is a lot at stake if we succeed: waste contributes to poor air quality and health impacts; it creates foul odours and hurts the pride we have in our community; it **poisons our land** and **pollutes the ocean**; it ruins resilience and doubles-down on dependency.

Dealing with resource use is also **essential to dealing with climate change**. Unless we get a grip on the way we produce and consume resources, we cannot fully control the consequences for the climate.

The way we use resources decides what our world looks like.

We have a responsibility to give future generations the same opportunities we have received, asking not just how much we can take, but how much we are willing to give back.

With a circular economy, we can give the next generation a world that is ready to be used again, instead of one that has been wasted.

Box 7. Our work on resource use

Resources and waste management experts, and those working to advance the circular economy, are key to meeting goals of maximising resources and minimising waste.

Many IES members work in resources or waste. Being part of the IES provides an opportunity for resource and waste professionals to connect with experts across environmental disciplines.

Resource, circular economy, and waste management professionals interact with several of our Communities, including our **Land Condition Community** and **Marine & Coastal Community**.

1. Promote a **culture of re-use and repair** across the UK, embedding the circular economy in decision making and engaging the public on the practical steps everyone can take.

- i. Embed the full hierarchy of resource use across government, with explicit support from senior leadership, making reducing resource use the default.
- ii. Regulate for an assumption of ‘circularity by design’ to give people the realistic option to repair products instead of buying new ones. Give consumers an assumed right to repair where doing so is appropriate and practical, like fixing furniture or handling leaky taps and radiators. Work with manufacturers to build-in options for repair.
- iii. Work with industry to produce government-backed circularity standards and guidance and potential incentives for innovation. Explore requiring durability and repairability ratings on relevant products.
- iv. Run a public engagement campaign in partnership with local authorities and industry so that people know how to repair common products and where they can find local facilities for re-use.
- v. Support the development of ‘hands on’ skills for a generation equipped to repair, embedding re-use and repair in the curriculum and adding basic repair skills to GCSE Design Technology.
- vi. Expand how recycling is taught in schools to include options around re-use and repair from a young age, allowing people to make informed choices.
 - See our chapter on environmental education for more details

This would support the Government’s planned intervention in its **Industrial Strategy** to **“Promote resource efficiency [and] encourage the re-use, repairing, and recycling of materials and products.”**

Polling in August 2025 showed that **84% of people support a right to repair**. It also showed that more than **8 out of 9 people think we need to shift towards a society that uses resources more efficiently**.

This is a natural next step to the **Prime Minister’s commitment** to help young people **“discover something new, find their spark and develop the confidence and life skills that no algorithm can teach”** and would help to **“build skills for opportunity and growth”** in line with the **Government’s opportunity mission**.

2. Urgently deliver existing commitments on waste and resources to provide the certainty needed for private investment.

- i. Roll out Extended Producer Responsibility and ensure adequate enforcement through effective regulation and by resolving the **technical barriers to compliance**.
- ii. Accelerate the delivery of Deposit Return Schemes across the UK, following the appointment for the Deposit Management Organisation in May 2025.
- iii. Publish the long-awaited Chemicals Strategy and link it to other key policy instruments, including the revised Environmental Improvement Plan for England and the strategic approach to chemicals across the devolved administrations.
- iv. Deliver the promise of UK REACH with no further **delays to registration** with the UK Health & Safety Executive and a clearer roadmap to increase certainty around the future regulation of chemicals.
- v. Maintain delivery of the digital waste tracking service in line with the **current timeline**, becoming mandatory for receiving site operators by October 2026, with an expanded service in April 2027.
- vi. Improve enforcement on waste crime, cracking down on illegal waste management and the estimated 38.2 million tonnes of illegally-handled waste identified in the **National waste crime survey 2025**.
- vii. Improve the scrutiny and enforcement of waste exemptions on registered sites to increase accountability and minimise abuse of the waste exemptions system. Consider expanding exemption charges to better fund enforcement against waste crime.

This is in line with the timeline set out **by the Government in June 2025**, delivering the commitment to **“make it easier for waste producers and legitimate waste companies ... and harder for rogue operators to compete.”**

viii. Commission research to fill evidence gaps on the economic, health and social costs of landfill and waste incineration and the implications of products and resources for water and energy cycles.

ix. Empower local authorities and other regulators to deliver the circular economy at a local level, including by implementing the recommendations on funding and powers suggested by **Friends of the Earth**.

- See our chapter on local authorities for more details.

3. Set clear government objectives for resource efficiency, supporting a transition towards a circular economy by 2050.

- Use the Environment Act 2021 to set a long-term, legally-binding target for resource efficiency.
- Utilise the work of the Circular Economy Taskforce to achieve a clear vision for a UK circular economy, treating waste management and the circular economy as part of the same issue across government, as well as investable conditions for private sector action.
- Publish clear delivery plans and sectoral pathways to achieve a transition towards a circular economy. Consider the **Fabian Society's recommendations** for delivering a Circular Economy in England.
- Expand waste and recycling infrastructure and integrate infrastructure planning into wider planning and community infrastructure processes.

When **announcing the Taskforce**, the Secretary of State said it would “**end Britain’s throwaway society ... help us cut carbon emissions, create new jobs and increase business profitability.**” To succeed, the work of the Taskforce needs to follow through into action.

- v. Embed circular economy into the waste regulations to avoid unintended consequences, adopting clear definitions and expectations around resource use, resource efficiency, and the circular economy.
- vi. Recognise resource inefficiency in the National Risk Register as a driver of chronic risk, alongside other economic dependencies like global supply chain reliance.

4. Improve the sustainability of resource use for the most challenging sectors, including construction and critical materials.

- i. Apply a circular economy approach across the built environment, including through building regulations, the National Model Design Code, and government-backed guidance for the construction industry.
- ii. Develop a circular economy for critical raw materials, in line with the **recommendations from Green Alliance**.
- iii. Convene a formal partnership between industry, professionals and regulators to develop and deliver pragmatic solutions to the safe and sustainable re-use, recovery, and recycling of soil, including through a regulatory framework.
 - See our chapter on land for more details.
- iv. Adopt measures to address the impact of UK fashion and textiles consumption, assessing the viability of aligning with France's 2025 legislation on 'fast fashion' as well as the recommendations outlined in the **Fashion Declares White Paper**.

This would be a key step to ensuring that **the Government can deliver** its **target of 1.5million new homes** in a way that works for local communities and gives them the infrastructure they need.

5. Support international leadership on sustainable resource use, working closely and agreeing a joint approach with the devolved administrations and international partners like the European Union.

- i. Push for ambitious international agreements on resource use, including by aligning international approaches to banning single use plastics and working to overcome negotiating barriers for the Global Plastics Treaty.
- ii. Fully implement the commitment to banning plastic waste exports to non-OECD countries and expand to all waste exports by 2040.
- iii. Implement clear supply chain reporting on resource use and waste, including by amending the **Trade Strategy** to reflect its commitment to ‘transitioning to a global circular economy’.
- iv. Strengthen monitoring requirements around the digital tracking of waste, including giving producers responsibility for starting the tracking process and leaving a clear waste trail.
- v. Work with the devolved administrations to harmonise waste regulations and recycling requirements across all four nations of the UK, such as for waste separation requirements and rules around waste tracking.

This would deepen the **Trade Strategy**'s existing commitment that **“transitioning to a global circular economy, deriving the maximum possible value from resources before they become waste while also reducing emissions, is also a government priority.”**