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Circular citizenship in Wales

A Circularity Foundation publication, written by Shlomo Downen (August 2024)

Abstract

Circular citizenship relates to the way people seek to understand and engage in processes and systems connected to waste management and resource use associated with deliberate choices to be more prudent and less wasteful. This exploration of circular citizenship in Wales begins in the late 1970's with the establishment of the Community Support Anti-Waste Scheme in Cardiff followed in the mid-1980's by the emergence of Wastesavers in Newport, and in the late 1990's by Cylch – the Wales Community Recycling Network. A common theme linking these pioneering community-led recycling efforts is the way they view 'waste' materials "as valuable resources, which, if managed effectively, create environmental, social and economic benefits for individuals and the communities in which they live".

The devolution of powers to Wales in 1999 included the transfer of responsibility for waste management and the promotion of sustainable development to the Welsh Government. Cylch's dedication to promoting "sustainable resource management through public education and practical action" found practical expression in the approach to "Total Resource Recovery" known as Cleanstream® which was first introduced in March 2000. This constituted a profound community contribution to the emerging national waste strategy for Wales.

Cleanstream® was informed by the global 'zero waste' movement and was designed to set a standard and describe a process "to achieve radical change in the way we manage resources after first use". The process was intended to show how Wales could "utilise its newfound political independence...to reap the tremendous benefits of changing to this very Sustainable Resource Management System" that placed great emphasis on preserving recycle quality.

By February 2010 several important developments helped progress Wales's zero waste vision, including:

- The provision of financial support to expand community sector waste, re-use, recycling and composting projects, including as part of the New Opportunities Fund;
- The introduction of separate food waste collections;

- The publication (in May 2009) of One Wales: One Planet, which committed the Welsh Assembly Government to embrace sustainable development as the central organising principle and the “overarching strategic aim of all policies and programmes across all Ministerial portfolios” that “sets out a vision of a sustainable Wales, based on using only a fair share of the earth's resources and becoming a fairer and more just nation”;
- The inclusion within the Sustainable Development Annual Report 2008-2009 of the aspiration that “...local people are involved to promote low-carbon, low-waste living as part of a One Planet Nation...”;
- The adoption of The National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Environment) Order which “conferred the National Assembly for Wales with legislative competence to make primary legislation (known as Assembly ‘Measures’) in respect of waste”; and
- The proposal for a series of ‘waste measures’ designed “to ensure that municipal waste in Wales is managed in a way that delivers the most beneficial environmental outcomes”.

These developments were boosted by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which provided a legally binding requirement for public bodies to: “take account of the long-term, help to prevent problems occurring or getting worse, take an integrated and collaborative approach”.

Wales continued to make progress with recycling and composting, and with diverting waste from both landfill and incineration. These efforts were celebrated with the publication in March 2021 of ‘Beyond Recycling’ the Circular Economy Strategy for Wales, which is described as “A strategy to make the circular economy in Wales a reality”. The publication of Beyond Recycling was accompanied by an immediate moratorium on any new ‘large scale’ waste incinerators (i.e. incinerators capable of generating 10MW or more of electricity from burning waste).

The Written Statement released alongside Beyond Recycling explained how: “As repair, re-use and recycling continue to expand, we want to ensure the capacity we have for generating energy from waste is in line with the capacity needed during our transition to a circular economy, with the long-term solution being to move away from incineration. We also want to see our towns across Wales demonstrate circular approaches by having repair and re-use hubs as well as other important infrastructure including refill points, zero waste shops and resilient green infrastructure”.

Wales’s role as trailblazer and exemplar is confirmed by the actions of the Scottish Government, who followed suit with their own incinerator moratorium in 2022 following the temporary pause that was announced in November 2021.

Reflecting on the way that Wales took advantage of their devolved responsibility for waste / resource management, within a wider context of sustainability, a number of 'success factors' that contributed to the realisation of aspects of Wales's zero waste vision can be identified, such as:

- Involvement of the zero waste community
- Emphasis on preserving recycle quality
- Proactive involvement of Government
- Widespread 'buy-in' to Wales's zero waste vision
- The wider context for change

Each of these success factors is briefly explored, both individually and in relationship with the other success factors. These explorations informed the conclusions that:

- Each success factor taken in isolation is inadequate to explain Wales's success.
- It is only because of the historic interrelationships between these factors that Wales was able to change the culture of those involved in resource management and move from a recycling rate of around 5% at the end of the 20th Century to around 66% some 25 years later.
- These factors need reinforcing if Wales is to maintain its world-leading status.
- If any of the relationships between these factors were to deteriorate this would jeopardise the ongoing realisation of Wales's One Planet low-carbon, zero waste vision.
- For other nations, including England, that might wish to replicate Wales's success, the lesson is that it is not enough simply to impose the laws and strategies that contributed to Wales's success without involving circular citizens in the realisation of zero waste ambitions.
- It is not enough to 'leave it to the market to decide', or indeed to leave it to circular citizens alone to achieve, as the realisation of the circular economy demands a more holistic approach to managing change, including cultural change.

'Circular citizenship' defined

'Circular citizenship' is a term that draws on the notion of 'active citizenship' as applied to the way people can deliberately choose to be more prudent and less wasteful.

Broadly speaking, active citizenship encompasses what is known as the 'community and voluntary sector', that is all of the voluntary (unpaid) efforts people make to contribute to their communities.

One way that active citizenship is described by the Open University is: “the practice of people being engaged in and informed about what happens in their communities and across the country. It also means people being empowered to use their voices to try to effect change and to shape the decisions that affect them”.¹

According to the changesuk.net website, active citizenship includes: “active learning for political literacy and empowerment, addressing structures and relations of power and working to change these, where necessary, in the pursuit of social inclusion and social justice agendas...It also relates to how people can promote community cohesion and social solidarity, thereby strengthening civil society as well as empowering individual citizens”.²

By extension, circular citizenship relates to the way that people seek to understand and engage in processes and systems connected to waste management and resource use.

In January 2024 The University of Groningen in the Netherlands published initial findings of their research into ‘How values, beliefs, and norms influence circular consumption and citizenship behaviours’. They describe how ‘circular citizenship behaviours’ are “behaviours that aim to influence other actors (such as governments, businesses, and other citizens) to take actions that contribute to systemic change towards a circular economy”.³

Resources, including discarded resources (i.e. waste), have been managed for many, many years. There are various accounts of community-based and historic local authority recycling initiatives from the UK and further afield that provide a wider context for the consideration of circular citizenship, including the accounts produced by David Mansell,⁴ Lewis Herbert,⁵ and Paul Connett.⁶

¹ Active Citizenship in Wales (Open University, 24 January 2022), available at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ac-wales> (accessed 31 March 2024)

² Active citizenship (Changes, 2024), available at: <https://changesuk.net/themes/active-citizenship/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

³ How values, beliefs, and norms influence circular consumption and citizenship behaviours: initial findings (Isabel Pacheco, 29 January 2024), available at: <https://circeular.org/how-values-beliefs-and-norms-influence-circular-consumption-and-citizenship-behaviours-initial-findings/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁴ Some history, thoughts and reports on UK recycling collections from 1980 to 2017 (David Mansell, 2018), available at: <https://dmrecycling.wordpress.com/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁵ The History of The Institute of Wastes Management 1898-1998 (Lewis Herbert, 1998), available at: <https://www.ciwm.co.uk/Custom/BSIDocumentSelector/Pages/DocumentViewer.aspx?id=OoR7FzWBtiu7RRO5NFe4UJqVSolqnM%252f1f1afJvAF%252bKVJsmhuyCE67BMTAuojkNm wshUTyKjJ6DfXZpaouZuyKv6nOUWw319q6KKH6QYsX5UlcM%252bsvdFSm7QkZSWO0JH%252fol9ltG6154aZN8FfXAYyz44tuxGbS9SvJKzYUQHdu9E%253d> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶ The Zero Waste Solution: Untrashing the Planet One Community at a Time (Paul Connett, 18 October 2013)

Circular citizenship in Wales

This exploration of circular citizenship in Wales begins in the late 1970's with the establishment of the Community Support Anti-Waste Scheme - or 'CSAWS'. CSAWS operated in Cardiff from around 1979 through to 1989 and is credited as being the UK's first citywide kerbside paper collection scheme for recycling.

Having discussed the origins of the commitment to zero waste in Wales with Mal Williams, the Executive Director of The Zero Waste International Trust,⁷ it became clear that Mike Croxford was one of the pioneering circular citizens behind the Welsh story. Both Mal and Mike are described as having been "instrumental in driving source separation and the collection of high quality recycled materials in Wales" over the past 30 years.⁸

Mike Croxford has been described as "a pioneer of recycling in his native Wales...[whose] interest in recycling began in 1980, while running the Augusta Street youth project in Cardiff. The young people started collecting newspapers to improve their standing among local people and to fundraise to run events for the community. The project turned into the Community Support Anti-Waste Scheme (CSAWS) that in 1986 initiated the first citywide collection scheme in the UK".⁹

Although there are no signs of a CSAWS website anywhere on the Internet, CSAWS is listed as having received £7,489 of funding from the Welsh Office's 1978/79 Urban Programme,¹⁰ and as having been sponsored by Cardiff City Council. CSAWS was described in a doctoral thesis as an "Anti-Waste Co-operative" that employed eight people in 1981.¹¹

⁷ The Zero Waste International Trust website: <https://zwia.org/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁸ Zero Waste Forum 2018 Speaker Bios, available at:

<https://www.zerowastenetwork.org.au/speaker-bios> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁹ Mike Croxford obituary (Mal Williams, The Guardian newspaper, 7 June 2016)

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/07/mike-croxford-obituary> (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹⁰ 1978/79 Urban Programme (Hansard HC Deb 23 June 1980 vol 987 cc44W), available at: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1980/jun/23/urban-programme> (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹¹ Waste Paper Recycling A Community Technology Approach (Christine Thomas, May 1986), available at: https://oro.open.ac.uk/57015/1/377784_VOL1.pdf (accessed 31 March 2024)

Re-Create is a scrapstore in Cardiff.¹² According to their website: “Re-Create holds a minute record from a meeting that was held on Wednesday January 29th 1986 at 11.15 a.m. at the Community Support Anti-Waste Scheme building in Hope Street, Splott. The aim of the group that met that day was to set up a Children’s Play Resource Centre”.¹³

CSAWS is listed as an Affiliate Member of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in the WCVA Annual Reports for 1986/87¹⁴ and 1987/88,¹⁵ and reference was made to CSAWS in the House of Lords as part of a debate on the re-use of waste materials that took place on 13th November 1989. Lord Hooson explained how: “One hundred local businesses were involved, the local authority was involved and there was an urban aid grant from the central government. Recycling took place with eventually a full-time staff of 47. There was a great deal of voluntary collection, and the activity was particularly directed at paper recovery” adding: “That shows what can be done in one town”.¹⁶

Newport is another town in South Wales where the community has been active in promoting recycling since the 1980’s. According to their website, Wastesavers is both a social enterprise and a charity that currently offers “commercial recycling services in Newport, Cardiff, Monmouthshire, Torfaen and surrounding South Wales areas”. As a social enterprise Wastesavers “provides the weekly domestic recycling service for 75,000 households on behalf of Newport City Council”.¹⁷

The Wastesavers Charitable Trust (Charity No: 1116150),¹⁸ which benefits from the support of more than 120 volunteers as well as more than 40 employees, runs a network of reuse shops, two repair cafes, a Nappy Library and two education programmes.

¹² Watch a video about Re-Create at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds6GEazFhNw> (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹³ Our History (Re-Create) available at: <http://www.re-create.co.uk/our-history.html> (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹⁴ Wales Council for Voluntary Action 40th Annual Report (WCVA, 1987), available at: https://wiserd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/wcva_annualreport_1986-1987.pdf (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹⁵ Wales Council for Voluntary Action 41st Annual Report (WCVA, 1988), available at: https://wiserd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/wcva_annualreport_1987-1988.pdf (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹⁶ Debate on Waste Materials: Re-use (Hansard HL Deb 13 November 1989 vol 512 cc1202), available at: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1989/nov/13/waste-materials-re-use> (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹⁷ Recycling in Newport (Wastesavers) available at: <https://wastesavers.co.uk/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

¹⁸ Charity Commission entry for Wastesavers Charitable Trust Limited, available at: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/4022564> (accessed 31 March 2024)

One of these education programmes, known as 'PEAK', entails delivering an "alternative curriculum for young people struggling with mainstream education".¹⁹ According to their 2023 Trustees Report, Wastesavers Charitable Trust "works with schools, pupil referral units, the youth offending team, social services, and local authorities in South East Wales, specifically Newport and Torfaen, to take young people who are finding it difficult in mainstream education. The young people then work towards gaining basic/essential skills including plumbing, carpentry, bike repair, cookery, photography and Art and Design".²⁰

Wastesavers was set up in 1985 to promote the importance of reuse and recycling in Newport, with an emphasis on maintaining recyclate quality and engaging the local community. Their website describes how, in the mid 1990's they "became more proactive and began picking up old newspapers from peoples' doorsteps for recycling, and hand sorting these at the local paper mill" and how "In 1995 Wastesavers collected and recycled 22 tonnes of paper. Today Wastesavers recycles more than 18,000 tonnes of material...We now employ more than 100 people across our kerbside and commercial operations as well as our reuse and education charity work".²¹

For more about The Story of Newport, and how "when separate collection systems prioritise quality over just quantity, and invest heavily in meaningfully engaging with the community, combined with well-designed equipment, world-leading results can be achieved whilst simultaneously reducing costs for local residents"²² see the case study produced by Zero Waste Europe as part of their Zero Waste Cities initiative.²³

Another major breakthrough for Wales was the establishment in 1997 of Cylch (Welsh for 'circle'), the Wales Community Recycling Network (Wales CRN), which was formed to promote sustainable resource management through education and practical action in Wales.

¹⁹ PEAK project website, available at: <https://peakproject.co.uk/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

²⁰ Report and Audited Financial Statements (Wastesavers Charitable Trust Limited, 31 March 2023), available at: https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search?p_p=id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A14380763&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=4022564 (accessed 31 March 2024)

²¹ About Wastesavers (Wastesavers, 2024), available at: <https://wastesavers.co.uk/about/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

²² The Story of Newport (Jack McQuibban and Mal Williams, March 2021), available at: <https://zerowastecities.eu/bestpractice/the-story-of-newport/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

²³ Zero Waste Cities (Zero Waste Europe, 2024), Zero Waste Cities website, available at: <https://zerowastecities.eu/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

As their Wiser Directory entry explains, from the very beginning Cylch promoted and supported “partnership-led, community-based, sustainable resource management initiatives as the practical and effective solutions to Welsh waste problems”, whilst viewing so-called ‘waste’ materials “as valuable resources, which, if managed effectively, create environmental, social and economic benefits for individuals and the communities in which they live”.²⁴

Cylch’s website was launched in February 1999 where Cylch is described as “a non-profit-distributing, registered charity, forming the Welsh element of the Community Recycling Network UK (CRNUK)”²⁵ with the following aims and objectives:

- to promote sustainable resource management through public education and practical action
- to position the community sector centrally as an equal partner in the future of resource management in Wales
- to ensure free exchange of information between member organisations
- to support new and existing waste minimisation, re-use, recycling and composting projects, enabling them to achieve financial independence through delivering high quality support services to them

Significantly, with respect to their aim of positioning the community sector centrally as an equal partner in the future of resource management in Wales, Cylch’s Chief Executive Mal Williams was appointed the community sector representative on the Wales Waste Forum. The Wales Waste Forum was established in December 2000 by the Welsh Government Minister for Environment, Transport and Planning Sue Essex to advise on the development of the Welsh waste strategy.²⁶

Such a national waste strategy for Wales was required because in 1999 responsibility for waste management was devolved to the Welsh Government.

The Landfill Directive, more formally described as Council Directive 1999/31/EC of 26th April 1999, was a European Union directive for the regulation of waste management in landfill sites across the European Union.

²⁴ Wiser Directory entry for Cylch – Wales Community Recycling Network (Archive of the Organizations Directory of WiserEarth.org / Wiser.org (2007-2014)), available at: <https://wiser.directory/organization/cylch-wales-community-recycling-network/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

²⁵ Community Recycling Network website <https://www.crn.org.uk/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

²⁶ Managing Waste Sustainably: A Consultation Paper (National Assembly For Wales, July 2001), available at: <https://business.senedd.wales/Data/South%20East%20Wales%20Regional%20Committee%20-%20First%20Assembly/20010713/Agenda/p1.%20annex%202.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

The Directive's overall aim was "to prevent or reduce as far as possible negative effects on the environment, in particular the pollution of surface water, groundwater, soil and air, and on the global environment, including the greenhouse effect, as well as any resulting risk to human health, from the landfilling of waste, during the whole life-cycle of the landfill".²⁷ This legislation had important implications for the management and disposal of waste.

Less than a month later the National Assembly for Wales met for the first time (on 12th May 1999), when the Welsh Government was given a statutory duty to promote sustainable development. This proved to be a turning point for waste and resource management in Wales.

1999 also saw the publication in July of a visionary book by Robin Murray²⁸ entitled 'Creating wealth from waste'.²⁹ Both the book and Robin Murray's own active involvement proved inspirational to the UK's emerging zero waste movement. Robin had already been working with others, including Nicky Gavron who was made Deputy Mayor of London in 2000, on an Alternative Waste Strategy for London³⁰ which had been published as 'Re-Inventing Waste: Towards a London Waste Strategy'³¹ in August 1998.

Robin went on to write 'Zero Waste'³² which was published by the Greenpeace Environmental Trust³³ in February 2002.

In 'Creating wealth from waste' Robin Murray set out how waste management was becoming "a dynamic, fast-changing, international economic sector". He observed that: "This transformation presents new choices and opportunities, and provides lessons and pointers for industrial, social and environmental policy".

²⁷ Council Directive 1999/31/EC of 26th April 1999 on the landfill of waste (Official Journal of the European Communities, Volume 42, 16 July 1999), available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:1999:182:FULL> (accessed 31 March 2024)

²⁸ Website dedicated to Robin Murray (Trellis Foundation, 2020), available at: <https://robinmurray.co.uk/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

²⁹ Creating wealth from waste (Robin Murray, 1999), available at: <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/files/Creatingwealthfromwaste.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

³⁰ London's Alternative Waste Strategy, 1998-2006 (blog post by Nicky Gavron, August 2019), available at: <https://robinmurray.co.uk/london-alternative-waste-strategy> (accessed 31 March 2024)

³¹ Re-Inventing Waste: Towards a London Waste Strategy (Robin Murray, August 1998)

³² <https://www.zerowasteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/zero-waste-by-robin-murray.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

³³ Greenpeace Environmental Trust website <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/environmental-trust/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

He explored how such change was being driven by concerns about the hazards of waste disposal and broader environmental concerns, especially global warming and resource depletion, alongside “the economic opportunities [that were being] created by new waste regulations [such as the Landfill Directive] and technological innovation”.³⁴

Prophetically, Robin warned how: “...Multinationals are taking an increasing interest in waste. Privatisation has opened up new markets in collection. The new standards of treatment and the industrialisation of waste management require resources beyond the means of small and medium-sized firms...” He contrasts this centralisation of waste management that disempowers communities with a more holistic approach to resource management. He explained how: “Intensive recycling and waste reduction depends on changing whole systems. It relies on distributed intelligence rather than centralised knowledge and on innovation that is widely dispersed across collection, processing, materials technology and product design. As a result, the change can seem far harder to achieve than the straightforward modernisation of existing systems”.³⁵

‘Zero waste’ is a term used to describe the profound systemic change required to meet the combined challenges posed by the increasing commercialisation (or ‘industrialisation’) of waste management (previously led by the public sector) and the environmental imperatives of addressing climate change and resource depletion (living within planetary boundaries).

Cylch’s dedication to promoting “sustainable resource management through public education and practical action” found practical expression in the approach to “Total Resource Recovery” known as Cleanstream® which was first introduced in March 2000.³⁶ This constituted a profound community contribution to the emerging national waste strategy for Wales.

In Cylch’s own words: “Cylch’s Community Waste Strategy is based on working in partnership with government at a national, regional and local level to achieve a Sustainable Resource Management Strategy and Implementation Plan that will reduce waste. To meet and exceed the targets set by the current legislation in the Landfill Directive and the forthcoming UK Waste Strategy. Cleanstream® is a quality standard but this document incorporates it into a PROCESS of managing change”.

³⁴ Creating wealth from waste, page 4 (Robin Murray, 1999), available at: <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/files/Creatingwealthfromwaste.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

³⁵ Creating wealth from waste, page 21 (Robin Murray, 1999), available at: <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/files/Creatingwealthfromwaste.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

³⁶ Cleanstream - Total Resource Recovery Systems (Mal Williams, 1 March 2000), available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20020812210825/http://www.cylch.org.uk/press_detail.asp?event_id=39 (accessed 31 March 2024)

Cylch declared that “if we separate used materials in the first place, we have an opportunity”. Described as “the vehicle that creates and develops this opportunity” Cleanstream® was designed to set a standard and describe a process “to achieve radical change in the way we manage resources after first use” intended to show how Wales could “utilise its new found political independence and Objective 1 status in order to reap the tremendous benefits of changing to this very Sustainable Resource Management System”.

The thinking that underpinned the Cleanstream® Total Resource Recovery System proposed for Wales also influenced zero waste activists around the world. In 2002 what became known as ‘The First Zero Waste Dialog’ was held in Brighton. According to the Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA), in February 2002 “activists, most of them part of the ZWIA team as well as experts from several other organizations, held a meeting chaired by Professor Robin Murray, teacher at the London School of Economics and author of two books on Zero Waste (Zero Waste and Creating Wealth From Waste). Together the team helped to form a Zero Waste coalition for the UK, and also set the wheels in motion for formation of the Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA). This meeting was what the ZWIA team later retrospectively called the first Zero Waste dialog”.³⁷

Those wheels continued to turn, and from 19th - 21st October 2003 a series of meetings were held at the Bulkeley Hotel in Beaumaris, Ynys Môn, Wales³⁸ resulting in the formation of the Zero Waste International Alliance with the following initial focus:

- To convert waste to resources for the benefits of local production and the creation of a sustainable society.
- To redesign products and methods of production to eliminate waste by mimicking natural processes and close loops.
- To resist incineration and landfilling in order to promote innovation in resource conservation and methods of production.
- To collaborate with others with common interests worldwide, to advance the education of the public by all appropriate means through the elimination of waste.
- To promote and fund scientific research for the public benefit.
- To promote the effectiveness of other (zero waste) charities.

³⁷ History of ZWIA (Zero Waste International Alliance, 2024), available at: <https://zwia.org/history-of-zwia/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

³⁸ Attendees included: Warren Snow (Zero Waste New Zealand Trust), Eric Lombardi (Eco-Cycle), Monica Wilson (GAIA), Manny Calonzo (GAIA, The EcoWaste Coalition), Mal Williams (Cylch), Richard (Ric) Anthony (Grass Roots Recycling Association), Mike Underwood (Cylch and Biognosis), Robert Slater (Environment Canada), Julie Dickinson (Zero Waste New Zealand Trust), Gerry Gillespie (Zero Waste Australia), Carolyn Brooks (Zero Waste Australia), George Cheng (Waste Not Asia), Chia-Jung Lee (Taiwan Watch Institute), Sonia Mendoza (Mother Earth Foundation), Jim McLaughlin (Community Resource Network), and Andy Moore (Community Resource Network)

- To promote recycling through sustainable resource management in accordance with best practice.

These meetings were informed and energised by the paradigm-shifting genius that inspired the Cleanstream® approach, and the whole event was funded using earnings from Cylch's work supporting the development of a zero waste strategy for Doncaster.³⁹

According to 'An opportunity not to be wasted: Doncaster Waste Strategy 2009': "The [Doncaster] Mayor's Zero Waste Strategy was developed by DMBC [Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council] in 2004; the process involved a significant amount of public consultation and engagement with different stakeholder groups. The approach was significantly wider than just municipal waste and aimed at combining resource efficiency actions with those for economic development and employment in Doncaster".⁴⁰

Returning to Wales, and returning to June 2002, the first national waste strategy for Wales was published. 'Wise About Waste' opened with the following paragraph: "Waste is Wales' biggest environmental problem; a problem to which we all contribute as individuals on a daily basis. However we can also as individuals be part of the solution. This new waste strategy for Wales, Wise about Waste, sets the direction for developing sustainable waste management practices in Wales, in some cases building on the good work that is already taking place and in others developing whole new solutions. This new strategy replaces the joint England and Wales Waste Strategy 2000 and represents the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government taking formal responsibility for waste matters within Wales".⁴¹

Wise about Waste went on (at paragraph 5.39) to spell out how: "Local authorities are encouraged to enter into partnerships with the community sector and the waste industry to deliver an integrated system that maximises the separate kerbside collection of recyclable and compostable material and the further extraction of materials from residual wastes. This three-way partnership can take maximum advantage of the strengths of each sector. In particular, local authorities are encouraged strongly to involve the community recycling sector, since it:

- has a proven track record for kerbside collection schemes for recyclables;

³⁹ Zero Waste Planning: Recycling Movements in France and the U.K. (Neil Seldman, Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), 17 June 2004), available at: <https://ilsr.org/zero-waste-planning/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁴⁰ An opportunity not to be wasted: Doncaster Waste Strategy 2009 (Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, 25 March 2009), available at: <https://doncaster.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Cabinet/200903251000/Agenda/250309rp5ap1.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁴¹ Wise About Waste (Welsh Assembly Government, June 2002), available at: <https://www.circularityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Wise-about-Waste-June-2002.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

- And in the subsequent paragraphs the strategy is even more explicit and focussed in the recommendations and offers of support, stating that: “Local authorities are strongly encouraged to follow the principles of the Cleanstream® approach advocated by the Wales Community Recycling Network/Cylch. This sets a standard for a ‘total resource recovery system’ that maximises the collection of clean recyclable and compostable materials from the household waste stream” and announcing how: “The New Opportunities Fund is committing, by 2004, £3.25m to projects that expand community sector waste, re-use, recycling and composting...”

In the words of the Committee: “The Committee acknowledges the significant funding that the Welsh Assembly Government has provided to local authorities and that this has been a major factor in securing higher levels of recycling and composting. The Committee considers that meeting the targets for 2009–10 and beyond will require substantial capital and operational funding, and at significantly higher levels than currently provided”.⁴²

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These 'Other sources of funding', set out at paragraph 2.35 of that inquiry report included: the Strategic Recycling Scheme (for which partnership working between local authorities and the community sector was encouraged), and Cleanstream funding which aimed "to get communities throughout Wales involved in waste re-use, recycling and composting" (as part of the Big Lottery Fund's Transforming Your Waste Programme).

As we move to 2007 and beyond we see separate food waste collections being rolled out across much of Wales. This has been described as 'pivotal' in improving recycling rates in Wales.

On Friday 12th October 2007 the BBC News reported on how "the lion's share of a £14m grant package in Wales" had been "awarded to seven local authorities for food, kitchen and green waste schemes", to support what the BBC article described as "food waste recycling".⁴³

And in November 2007 WalesOnline published an account of how weekly collections of food waste were to be trialled ahead of a roll-out across Cardiff, and how such weekly collections could greatly reduce the use of landfill.⁴⁴

According to a Cardiff Council Environmental Scrutiny Committee report their 2007 inquiry into food waste collections found that: "the most important aspect to gain public support was talking face to face with the public, through door to door calling and having road shows at schools and community centres".⁴⁵

The report also noted how "successful implementation was dependant on...appropriate and extensive education and support to the public to assist with the implementation of food waste collections and ensure the public are aware of the reasoning behind the changes...[and how] to ensure public support the Council will need to deliver on their promises. An important factor in this is the attitude of the workforce. Collection crews need to be fully aware of the reasoning behind introducing food waste collections..."

⁴³ Food waste recycling given boost (BBC News, 12 October 2007), available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/7040353.stm> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁴⁴ Weekly food waste collection could half landfill total (WalesOnline, 9 November 2007), available at: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/weekly-food-waste-collection-could-2216702> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁴⁵ Communicating Food Waste Collections & Environmental Initiatives (Cardiff Council Environmental Scrutiny Committee, 8 July 2008 - Agenda Item 5), available at: [https://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Environmental%20Scrutiny%20Committee/20080708/Agenda/Communicating%20Food%20Waste%20Collections%20and%20Environmental%20Initiatives%20\(223k\).pdf](https://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Environmental%20Scrutiny%20Committee/20080708/Agenda/Communicating%20Food%20Waste%20Collections%20and%20Environmental%20Initiatives%20(223k).pdf) (accessed 31 March 2024)

Mal Williams identified separate food waste collections as an important 'success factor' in the increasing of recycling rates, observing how the success of the separate food waste collections gave the Welsh Assembly Government (and the then Minister for Environment, Sustainability in the Welsh Government - Jane Davidson) greater confidence to encourage change.

Meanwhile, efforts to promote recycling across Europe were continuing, and in November 2008 a revised Waste Framework Directive (WFD), also known as Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, was adopted.⁴⁶ According to the WFD's Preamble (Section 28), the aim of the WFD was to lay the basis for turning the European Union into "a 'recycling society' seeking to avoid waste generation and to use waste as a resource". One of the features of the WFD is the European Waste Hierarchy.⁴⁷

With the publication in May 2009 of 'One Wales: One Planet' the Welsh Assembly Government "made a commendable start to tackling [Wales's] ecological and carbon footprints..."⁴⁸

One Wales: One Planet committed the Welsh Assembly Government to embrace sustainable development as the central organising principle and the "overarching strategic aim of all policies and programmes across all Ministerial portfolios" that "sets out a vision of a sustainable Wales, based on using only a fair share of the earth's resources and becoming a fairer and more just nation".

The introductory chapter begins with a quote from then First Minister Rhodri Morgan, which reads: "I want a Wales fit for generations to come...What motivates me is doing my very best to ensure a brighter, sustainable future for [my grandchildren and their grandchildren] and every other child growing up in Wales today...[Therefore], top of the list...of our priorities which will continue to improve the quality of life for people today and in the future...is sustainability".

⁴⁶ Directive 2008/98/EC (European Parliament and of the Council, 19 November 2008), available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eudr/2008/98/contents> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁴⁷ Waste Framework Directive (European Commission Directorate-General for Environment), available at: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/waste-and-recycling/waste-framework-directive_en (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁴⁸ One Wales: One Planet - the 2009 Sustainable Development Scheme (Welsh Assembly Government, May 2009), available at: <https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/media/1505/wd32.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

The 78-page document uses the words ‘waste’ or ‘resource’ 127 times, helping to emphasise the importance given to sustainable resource use. This is made clear by statements such as: “...we will need to reduce by at least two thirds the total resources we currently use to sustain our lifestyles. To reduce this we must...have a radically different approach to waste management, moving towards becoming a zero waste nation. By this, we mean a society where we focus on eliminating waste, and waste that can’t be eliminated must be recycled in ‘closed loop’ systems that achieve the best reduction in ecological and carbon footprints...”

One Wales: One Planet also states that: “By 2050, we want to see zero waste, so products and services will need to be designed so that they reduce or reuse waste as far as possible”, noting how “Recycling alone will not get us to where we need to be by 2025 if we are to be a zero waste nation by 2050. Our new waste strategy will therefore stress that prevention of waste is our most preferred option...”

By February 2010 three important developments helped progress this vision, the publication of ‘The Sustainable Development Annual Report 2008-2009’,⁴⁹ the adoption of The National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Environment) Order,⁵⁰ and the proposal for a series of ‘waste measures’ designed “to ensure that municipal waste in Wales is managed in a way that delivers the most beneficial environmental outcomes”.

The Sustainable Development Annual Report 2008-2009 restates the vision for sustainable resource use to include the aspiration that “...local people are involved to promote low-carbon, low-waste living as part of a One Planet Nation...”

Achievements celebrated in the Report include:

- The provision of £50 million in Sustainable Waste Management Grant support for local authorities to meet Welsh Assembly Government and EU Directive waste management targets.
- The continuing decrease in municipal waste, a trend that started in 2005/06.
- Preparation of the draft new Waste Strategy “Towards Zero Waste” in co-operation with partners, which was launched for consultation in April 2009. “Towards Zero Waste sets out an ambitious agenda for change and incorporates our commitments within the Environment Strategy “to minimise the amount of waste we produce at source and work towards achieving minimised waste to landfill by 2026”.

⁴⁹ One Wales: One Planet - The Sustainable Development Annual Report 2008-2009 (Welsh Assembly Government, February 2010), available at:

<https://senedd.wales/media/dtcay03q/gen-ld7941-e-english.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁵⁰ Waste (Wales) Measure 2010 (Measures of the National Assembly for Wales, 2010 nawm 8, 15 December 2010), available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2010/8/contents> (accessed 31 March 2024)

- Meeting municipal waste targets with the recycling and composting rate at 36% and all Welsh local authorities meeting their Landfill Allowance targets, and the statutory EU Landfill Directive landfill allowances targets for 2009/10.
- The launch of what is described as “a major long term waste treatment investment programme to ensure the adequate availability capacity for local authorities to ensure Wales meets its EU diversion targets and aligns with the emerging Waste Strategy document”. Two strands of the programme were ‘mobilised’ during the period covered by the Report, including: food waste treatment and residual waste treatment - with food waste treatment credited for “contributing largely to the achievement of 2012/13 EU targets”.
- Total waste arisings having fallen 5.4% against the baseline.
- 59% of office waste having been sent for recycling.

These achievements were accomplished in the very early days of the One Wales: One Planet Sustainable Development Scheme, and they help to reinforce the centrality of resource management in the Welsh approach to sustainability. The provision of funding and the collection and treatment of food waste continue to be recognised as important to the fulfilment of Wales’s forward-looking vision of local and global sustainability.

The adoption of The National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Environment) Order 2010 “conferred the National Assembly for Wales with legislative competence to make primary legislation (known as Assembly ‘Measures’) in respect of waste”.

The proposed Waste (Wales) Measure 2010 was laid before the National Assembly for Wales on 22 February 2010. The Measure, which was adopted in December 2010, “makes provision to reduce the amount of waste and litter in Wales whilst also providing a more effective system of waste management”.⁵¹

The Measure:

- Set statutory recycling targets;
- Established charges for single use carrier bags (specifying how funds raised must be spent on preventing or reducing waste, waste management, protecting or improving the environment in relation to pollution or nuisances, and associated educational or recreational activities for children or young people); and

⁵¹ Waste (Wales) Measure 2010 (Measures of the National Assembly for Wales, 2010 nawm 8, 15 December 2010), available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2010/8/contents> (accessed 31 March 2024)

- Allowed for the adoption of future regulations prohibiting incineration of waste [“The Welsh Ministers may by regulations make provision for and in connection with prohibiting or otherwise regulating the incineration in Wales of specified kinds of waste”].

The Regulatory Impact Assessment of the Measure’s waste target provisions describe the targets’ purpose and intended effect, as well as spelling out the rationale for Government intervention as follows: “Existing policies do not take full account of the negative environmental externalities associated with residual waste disposal or the positive externalities associated with recycling. Placing recycling targets on a statutory footing is intended to make clear to local authorities that high rates of recycling are desirable in a context where the appropriate incentives are not in place. The rationale for the Assembly Government’s waste policy is therefore to support the development of more sustainable waste management practices, thereby improving environmental outcomes across Wales”.⁵²

And, to make absolutely clear that such environmental improvements would benefit future generations, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 was enacted in April 2015.⁵³

The Act provides a legally binding requirement for public bodies to: “take account of the long-term, help to prevent problems occurring or getting worse, take an integrated and collaborative approach”, and consider and involve people of all ages.

The Act also established the role of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales “to promote the sustainable development principle (the five ways of working), in particular to act as a guardian of the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things that they do”.

⁵² Appendix A: Waste (Wales) Measure 2010 - Regulatory Impact Assessment for the waste target provisions (Additional information from the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, April 2010), available at:

https://senedd.wales/media/njlnuuak/ltr_from_minister_add_info_april10-a1-english.pdf (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁵³ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Acts of the National Assembly for Wales 2015 anaw 2, 29 April 2015), available at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents/enacted> (accessed 31 March 2024)

For more about the well-being goals for Wales visit the Welsh Government's The Well-being of Future Generations webpage⁵⁴ and to read about the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales see the guidance on how the law is used "to improve social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being".⁵⁵

Jane Davidson⁵⁶ was the Welsh Government Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing who first proposed what became the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. For a comprehensive account of the introduction of what has been described as "the first piece of legislation in history to place regenerative and sustainable practice at the heart of government" you can read Jane Davidson's book entitled "#futuregen: Lessons from a small country".⁵⁷

Part of the significance of the Act for resource and waste management is the Act's promotion of long-term thinking capable of disrupting the tendency to put the demands of electoral cycles ahead of what is required for sustainability.

Such a profound cultural shift is highlighted by Jane Davidson, including in the following passage from page 111 of her book: "The addition of 'culture' to the usual three domains (environment, society and economy) is an important contribution that I would recommend to any country deciding to go down this route and one that we first added into 'One Wales, One Planet'. This is because I believed then and now that changing 'culture' (including...organisational culture) is the most powerful tool to create the marriage between evidence and empathy needed to enable the delivery of a future generations framework...It is critically important in particular that the Act is not seen to be in the 'culture' of any one political party but is a tool for the people of Wales to hold their government and public services to account by calling for a change to the current consumerist, wasteful, throw-away society".

Decisions were made to support these policies with the guidance and funding necessary to achieve the various goals, targets, and commitments described above. Instead of leaving matters to the vagaries of 'market forces', organisations such as WRAP Cymru are actively involved in promoting systemic change.

Under the heading "Tackling the entire system" WRAP Cymru explains how: "Tackling a single part of an issue can just move the problem elsewhere. We take a holistic approach, consider the whole system and create solutions that work together".⁵⁸

⁵⁴ The Well-being of Future Generations webpage (Welsh Government) <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁵⁵ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials (Welsh Government, 23 June 2015), available at: <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-act-essentials-html> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁵⁶ See: <https://janedavidson.wales/>

⁵⁷ See: <https://janedavidson.wales/book>

⁵⁸ About us (WRAP Cymru), available at: <https://wrapcymru.org.uk/about-us-1> (accessed 31 March 2024)

A practical example of this systemic approach is WRAP Cymru's Market Development Programme, which is designed "to increase both the supply of, and demand for, products containing recycled content in Wales", though supporting the use of recycled material in manufacturing via a Circular Economy Fund⁵⁹ and a range of supply chain projects⁶⁰ offering technical support. WRAP Cymru is also working with the public sector to increase the procurement of sustainable goods.⁶¹

At the heart of these efforts is WRAP Cymru's Collaborative Change Programme (CCP),⁶² which offers "strategic, technical and communications support to help local authorities develop and deliver detailed plans to achieve the outcomes of Welsh Government's national waste strategy, Beyond recycling". And at the heart of the CCP is Russell Owens, who has been described as "The unsung hero of Wales's recycling success!"⁶³

In April 2017 the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRACOM) published a report on Food waste in England. The EFRACOM report recommended "that there should be a national food waste target. An ambitious, formal target on food waste would influence the Government's approach to food waste, ensuring that there continues to be a focus on reducing food waste".⁶⁴

The report included the graph reproduced below which acknowledges how the devolved nations provided a higher proportion of households with food waste collections, with Wales having exceeded 90% by 2012. This figure grew to 99% by March 2020.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Circular Economy Fund (WRAP Cymru), available at: <https://wrapcymru.org.uk/taking-action/grants> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶⁰ Supply chain projects (WRAP Cymru), available at: <https://wrapcymru.org.uk/taking-action-wales/supply-chain-projects> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶¹ Supporting sustainable public sector procurement in Wales (WRAP Cymru), available at: <https://wrapcymru.org.uk/taking-action/public-sector> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶² Collaborative Change Programme (WRAP Cymru), available at: <https://wrapcymru.org.uk/taking-action-wales/collaborative-change-programme> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶³ Resource Magazine's HOT 100 2019, available at: <https://resource.co/article/hot-100-2019-70-41-13126> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶⁴ Food waste in England (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2016–17, 25 April 2017), available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶⁵ How Wales became a world leader in recycling (Welsh Government Press Release, 17 March 2020), available at: <https://www.gov.wales/how-wales-became-world-leader-recycling> (accessed 31 March 2024)

119. The graph below illustrates how the provision of household waste collections across the UK has changed since 2008. It can be seen that a significantly lower percentage of households in England are provided with a food waste collection than in the devolved nations.

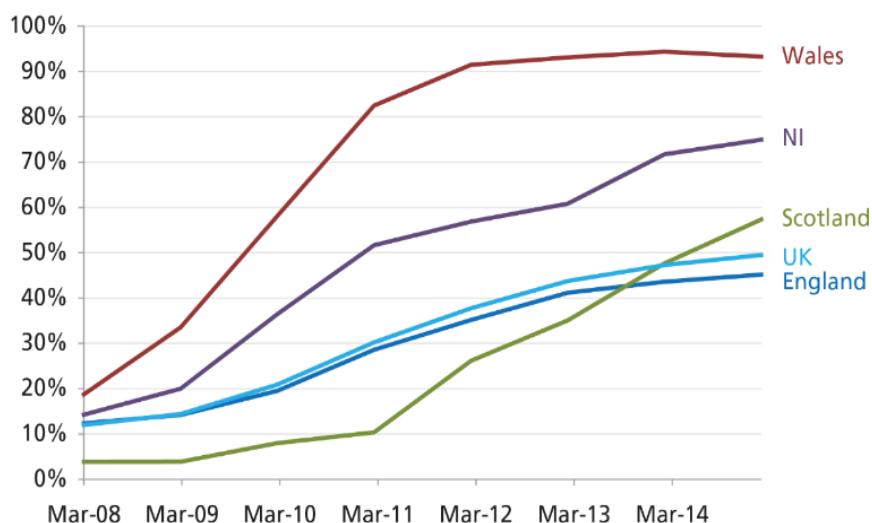


Figure 3: Percentage of households with a food waste collection (separate or mixed with garden) 2007-08 to 2014-15

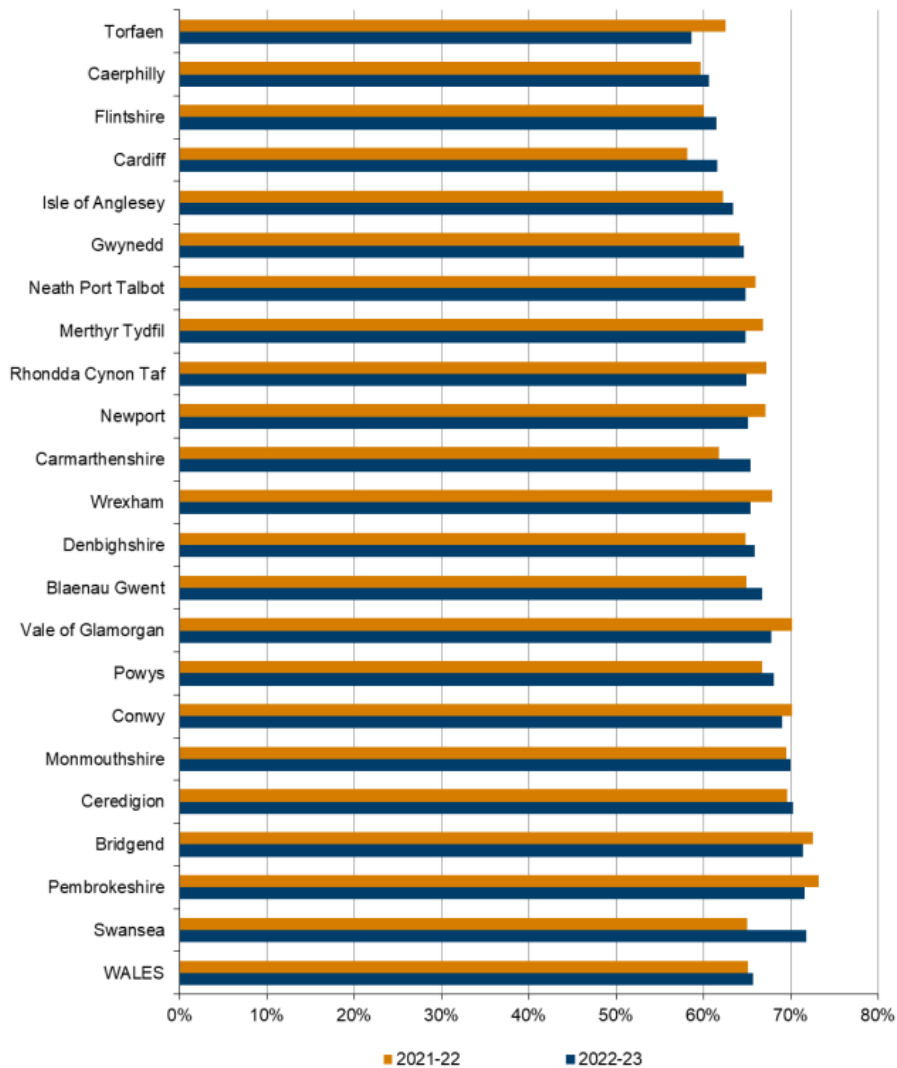
Indeed, according to official UK waste statistics,⁶⁶ Wales has remained the UK's best recycling nation for more than a decade, with most Welsh Local Authorities continuing to improve their recycling rates throughout 2022 and into 2023,⁶⁷ enabling Welsh Local Authority recycling rates as a whole to reach around 66% for 2022/23.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ UK statistics on waste (Defra, 28 June 2023), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-waste-data/uk-statistics-on-waste> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶⁷ Local Authority Municipal Waste Management, 2022-23 (Welsh Government, 7 December 2023), available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2023-12/local-authority-municipal-waste-management-2022-to-2023.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁶⁸ Welsh local authority recycling data (Welsh Government, 2024) available at: <https://myrecyclingwales.org.uk/local-authorities> (accessed 31 March 2024)

Chart 3: Combined local authority municipal waste reuse/recycling/composting rates, by local authority, 2021-22 and 2022-23 [note 1]



[note 1] - Local Authorities are listed in order of municipal waste reuse/recycling/composting rates based on 2022-23 figures.

Description of Chart 3: A comparative bar chart to show the combined local authority municipal waste reuse/recycling/composting rates by local authority for the years 2021-22 and 2022-23. The chart shows that 12 local authorities reported an increase in recycling rates compared to 2021-22.

Source: WasteDataFlow

For more than two decades Wales continued to make progress with recycling and composting, and with diverting waste from both landfill and incineration. These efforts were celebrated with the publication in March 2021 of ‘Beyond Recycling’ the Circular Economy Strategy for Wales,⁶⁹ which is described as “A strategy to make the circular economy in Wales a reality”.

⁶⁹ ‘Beyond Recycling’ the Circular Economy Strategy for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021) available at: <https://www.gov.wales/beyond-recycling> (accessed 31 March 2024)

The publication of Beyond Recycling was also accompanied by “an immediate moratorium [halt] on any future large scale energy from waste [incinerator] developments”. As Lesley Griffiths explains in her Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs’ 24th March 2021 Written Statement ‘Taking action to make the circular economy a reality’: “...this moratorium...recognises the views we received from citizens and stakeholders during the consultation on Beyond Recycling and the advice from the UK Committee on Climate Change on the pathway needed for Wales to decarbonise. This will be accompanied by the publishing of an updated strategic assessment which shows...the success of our recycling and the decrease in waste generated in Wales means no further large scale energy from waste plants [i.e. those capable of generating 10MW or greater] are required”.⁷⁰

The Written Statement goes on to specify that: “Any new small scale [incineration] facilities must also supply heat, and where feasible, be carbon capture and storage enabled or ready. This will therefore mean a small scale plant would not be allowable if waste is to be imported from outside of the proposed region...in order to also avoid locking in transport emissions and associated pollution. This moratorium is being given effect through the planning system. Planning Policy Wales states that the extent to which a proposal demonstrates a contribution to waste management objectives, policy, targets and assessments contained in national waste policy will be a material consideration”.

And on page 26 of the full Beyond Recycling strategy document we read how: “In order to go beyond recycling, we want to develop the infrastructure to accelerate the growth in re-use, repair and remanufacturing and support an expansion in hiring, leasing and lending. We will also need to ensure the infrastructure we have is decarbonised and future investment supports the wider transition to a low carbon economy. We will work with key partners as part of our Team Wales approach to achieving a net zero public sector by 2030.

“As repair, re-use and recycling continue to expand, we want to ensure the capacity we have for generating energy from waste is in line with the capacity needed during our transition to a circular economy, with the long-term solution being to move away from incineration. We also want to see our towns across Wales demonstrate circular approaches by having repair and re-use hubs as well as other important infrastructure including refill points, zero waste shops and resilient green infrastructure”.

⁷⁰ Written Statement: Taking action to make the circular economy a reality (Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, 24 March 2021) available at: <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-taking-action-make-circular-economy-reality> (accessed 31 March 2024)

In March 2020 the Welsh Government offered their own very brief account of “How Wales became a world leader in recycling”.⁷¹ Their press release boasted how: “Since Wales has had its own government in 1999, we have become a global leader in recycling. We’re now first in the UK, second in Europe and third in the world for household waste recycling” and how: “This achievement has taken a clear, long term vision, strong partnership working, significant investment and clear milestones along the way”. Eleven such milestones are outlined, followed by three ambitions associated with “becoming a circular economy and achieving 100% recycling and zero waste by 2050”.

Wales’s role as trailblazer and exemplar is confirmed by the actions of the Scottish Government, who followed suit with their own incinerator moratorium in 2022⁷² following the temporary pause that was announced in November 2021.⁷³

⁷¹ How Wales became a world leader in recycling (Welsh Government press release, 17 March 2020), available at: <https://www.gov.wales/how-wales-became-world-leader-recycling> (accessed 3 August 2024)

⁷² Putting limits on incineration capacity (Scottish Government, 16 June 2022), available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/putting-limits-on-incineration-capacity/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁷³ Chief Planner letter and Notification Direction - Energy from Waste (Incineration and Advanced Thermal Treatment) Facilities (Scottish Government, 17 November 2021), available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/chief-planner-letter-and-notification-direction-energy-from-waste-incineration-and-advanced-thermal-treatment-facilities-17-november-2021/> (accessed 31 March 2024)

Reflections

As has been acknowledged many times by many people involved with Wales's journey towards zero waste and a more circular economy, the community has been central to the Welsh circular success story. It is demonstrably true that community-based organisations together with groups of circular citizens⁷⁴ were pivotal when it came to bringing about, and ensuring the enforcement of, the moratorium on new waste incineration capacity in Wales.⁷⁵

Reflecting on the way that Wales took advantage of their devolved responsibility for waste / resource management, within a wider context of sustainability, a number of 'success factors' that contributed to the realisation of aspects of Wales's zero waste vision can be identified, such as:

- Involvement of the zero waste community
- Emphasis on preserving recycle quality
- Proactive involvement of Government
- Widespread 'buy-in' to Wales's zero waste vision
- The wider context for change (provided by the One Wales: One Planet and the Well-being of Future Generations Act)

Each of these success factors is briefly explored below. Of course the real 'energy', the dynamism of the system, lies not within the separate aspects of the whole but is to be found in the relationships between these factors. These relationships are explored further below.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Involvement of the zero waste community

Wales benefited from the early involvement of leaders from the international zero waste community. There was a pre-existing zero waste community, engaged in co-creating a 'zero waste culture' as an antidote to the 'throw-away society', that connected zero waste practitioners and other pioneering circular citizens around the world, e.g. via the informal network that became the Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA).

⁷⁴ Circular Economy Concepts (Circularity Foundation website), available at: <https://www.circularityfoundation.org.uk/concepts/#circular-citizenship> (accessed 3 August 2024)

⁷⁵ See, for example, the entry for the prevented Buttington Quarry Energy Recovery Facility (incinerator) listed by the United Kingdom Without Incineration Network (UKWIN) as one of the 17 prevented incinerators across Wales at: <https://ukwin.org.uk/incinerators/?filter=®ion=Wales&prevented=show> (accessed 3 August 2024)

This community gave rise to Cylch, the Community Recycling Network for Wales, which was dedicated to positioning the community recycling sector to act as an essential partner for resource management in Wales. As noted in the very first sentence of the first paragraph of the 2006 version of Cleanstream®: “Cylch - Wales Community Recycling Network was set up in September 1997 to represent about 25 Re-use and recycling groups in Wales in anticipation of the advent of the Welsh Assembly Government. As a result of this foresight by the member groups Cylch was able to sit alongside other stakeholders who started the formation of policy to meet the challenges being presented by the ‘Waste’ problem in Wales”.

Wise about Waste⁷⁶ (June 2002) was many things, including: the first waste strategy for Wales; an expression of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government taking formal responsibility for waste matters within Wales; a pitch to individuals to be “part of the solution”; a set of recycling targets to which Wales’s various local authorities were expected to work; and a radical shift away from ‘waste management’ and towards ‘resource management’.

Importantly in the context of this exploration, Wise about Waste was a very public, ‘high profile’, affirmation of how the zero waste community led the way in establishing principles that made their way to the core of the approach to be applied across the nation of Wales.

Emphasis on preserving recyclate quality

Fundamental to the Welsh approach to achieving zero waste is the continuing emphasis placed on preserving the quality of the recyclable material through separate collection and other methods set out in the Cleanstream® Total Resource Recovery System.⁷⁷

Cleanstream® was written and launched in 2000 as Cylch’s contribution to the waste strategy debate in Wales. Many recommendations in the original report found their way into the Wales Waste Strategy ‘Wise about Waste’ launched in 2002.

According to the 2006 version, “Cleanstream® is the process where the householder separates used materials thereby eliminating the creation of waste. Trained professionals maintain this separation throughout the materials recovery cycle. Cleanstream® systems recover high quality, clean materials thereby maximizing their economic, social and environmental value to benefit the community”.

⁷⁶ Wise About Waste (Welsh Assembly Government, June 2002), available at: <https://www.circularityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Wise-about-Waste-June-2002.pdf> (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁷⁷ Cleanstream® Total Resource Recovery System (Cylch, 1 March 2000) available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20020812210825/http://www.cylch.org.uk/press_detail.asp?event_id=39 and the updated 2006 version available at: <https://www.circularityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Cleanstream-2006-final.pdf> (both accessed 3 August 2024)

Cleanstream® informed the Welsh collection methodology, i.e. the Collections Blueprint.⁷⁸ Both the Cleanstream® System and the Collections Blueprint feature:

- A primary aim to efficiently recovery materials, as distinct from an overriding emphasis on ‘landfill diversion’.
- Professional kerbside sorting (which increases capture rates and public participation in recycling, while minimising contamination, improving quality, and sustaining more jobs than commingled collections).
- The multi-material collection of recyclates using specially designed and operated vehicles (this is seen as key to achieving low collection costs per tonne, delivering better value for money than commingled collections). As explained in the 2006 version of Cleanstream®: “The highest material prices can be achieved in this way (i.e. by emphasising the preservation of recyclate quality) and thus offset collection and other costs...”
- Some form of community ownership, e.g. via social enterprise.

Proactive involvement of Government

For many years the Government in Whitehall, including Ministers and civil servants, seems to have left the management of waste to the waste industry, allowing ‘market forces’ rather than strategic thinking to dictate the type and location of residual waste management facilities.

While the UK Government put their faith in voluntary agreements and private finance initiative (PFI) funded waste management contracts (often reliant upon incineration), the emerging Welsh Government made great use of the opportunity afforded them by the devolved status of responsibility for waste to set the pace and direction of change.

By setting out a vision of a zero waste circular economy, by maintaining ambitious national waste strategies to realise the vision, and by proactively directing support including public money to fund a profound change to collection methodology, the Welsh Government was able to transform Wales’s approach to resource management.

As the Welsh Government explained in March 2020,⁶⁵ this transformation was supported by a range of actions including but not limited to:

- The introduction of statutory recycling targets. “The Welsh Government set statutory recycling targets for Local Authorities – this has increased household recycling from 5.2% (1998-99) to globally leading figures of 60.7% (2018-19). Municipal waste recycling rates have also risen from 4.8% to 62.8% during the same period.”

⁷⁸ Collections Blueprint: Best Practice in High Diversion (Published by the Welsh Government in 2011 as part of the Municipal Sector Plan), available at: <https://collectionsblueprint.wales/> (accessed 3 August 2024)

- The introduction of a national recycling campaign for Wales, Recycle for Wales, which “encouraged consumers to recycle more things, more often from all around the home and other websites like My Recycling Wales provide information on where our recycling goes.”
- The provision of more than £1 billion since 2000 to help Local Authorities invest in recycling collection services. “Wales has robust collection regimes and we have supported the creation of infrastructure here to deal with our recycling. Thirteen out of 22 local authorities currently follow the Welsh Government's Collections Blueprint. The Blueprint sets out the recommended method of waste collection, to ensure affordable and sustainable collection services for recyclable, compostable and residual waste.”
- Separate weekly food waste collection and improved facilities at waste recycling centres, with an increasing number of recycling sites offering “shops and other enterprises on site which divert materials away from being recycled and allow them to be reused, repaired and sold”.
- The introduction of a charge on the use of plastic carrier bags. “Wales was the first UK nation to introduce a carrier bag charge, which saw an increase in the number of bags for life used.”

Widespread ‘buy-in’ to Wales’s zero waste vision

The vision of a Wales where citizens, industry and Government work together to bring about “low-carbon, low-waste living as part of a One Planet Nation” could not be realised without widespread buy-in. Such active engagement of various sectors in the realisation of the vision, while not universal, can be seen to extend to include communities, social enterprises, and Government bodies.

For example, most (but not all) Welsh local authorities have adopted a form of discard collection that is based on the ‘Collections Blueprint: Best Practice in High Diversion’, which in turn is based on the Cleanstream® Total Resource Recovery methodology that was informed by international best practice (via the involvement of what became the Zero Waste International Alliance).

The Welsh Government, clearly mindful of the need to work in partnership with the people of Wales, provided ‘easy to read’ versions of consultation documents (e.g. Beyond Recycling: Easy Read Guide – How we want to move Wales to a more circular economy)⁷⁹ and strategies (e.g. Beyond Recycling: our path towards a circular economy),⁸⁰ and the Welsh Government continues to make efforts to engage communities and other stakeholders in the production and delivery of these strategies.

One such channel of communication is being managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW). According to the NRW website,⁸¹ NRW is “engaging with a broad range of stakeholders across Wales, starting conversations about how we can all tackle the climate emergency in ways that benefit our society, our economy and our environment... These conversations are designed to bring networks of people together from across different sectors and disciplines, as the challenges we now face cannot possibly be managed by one sector alone”. This effort is supported by several sources of funding, including the Circular Economy Fund.⁸²

The wider context for change (provided by the One Wales: One Planet and the Well-being of Future Generations Act)

There are many Welsh laws, policy documents, and guidance setting out the wider context for change, including a range of milestones and aspirations associated with Wales’s journey to One Planet Living and the circular economy. This consideration of the success factors contributing to the realisation of aspects of Wales’s zero waste vision focuses on just two of these – One Wales: One Planet and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

⁷⁹ Beyond Recycling: Easy Read Guide – How we want to move Wales to a more circular economy (Welsh Government, March 2020), available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-03/circular-economy-strategy-easy-read.pdf> (accessed 9 August 2024)

⁸⁰ Beyond Recycling: our path towards a circular economy (Welsh Government, June 2021), available at: <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Waste-strategy-English.pdf> (accessed 9 August 2024)

⁸¹ See, for example, the Waste and Area Statements available at: <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/what-we-do/strategies-and-plans/area-statements/sector-specific-information/area-statements-and-the-waste-industry/> (accessed 9 August 2024)

⁸² See, for example, the Circular Economy Funding webpage, available at: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/innovation/support-and-funding/circular-economy-funding> (accessed 9 August 2024)

With respect to One Wales: One Planet, the WWF Cymru report from 2011 entitled 'Delivering a One Planet Wales: Is the Welsh Government delivering a One Planet, low carbon Wales?' describes the One Wales: One Planet Sustainable Development Scheme as having provided: "a clear and measurable overall vision that the people of Wales, within a generation will live sustainably, using only our fair share of the planet's resources", noting the Scheme's commitments "to reducing carbon-based energy use by 80-90% over the same period, moving towards zero waste, less car travel and more sustainable food, within a fairer society".⁸³

In relation to the Well-being of Future Generations Act, according to the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: "The Well-being of Future Generations Act gives us the ambition, permission and legal obligation to improve our social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being. The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act is unique to Wales attracting interest from countries across the world as it offers a huge opportunity to make a long-lasting, positive change to current and future generations".⁸⁴

'The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: Enablers and Barriers to new ways of working' is described as a "Review document prepared for Public Health Wales".⁸⁵ This review considers a range of sources, including case studies, used as 'evidence' to identify nearly three dozen 'factors for enabling change', many of which are evident in the Welsh circular success story, including:

1. Vision, leadership, and commitment;
2. Developing capacity/skills amongst officials and politicians (in using future trends data, identifying risk, working collaboratively, self-awareness, being innovative, creative and critical thinking skills);
3. Predictable and long term funding;
4. Leaders encouraging a focus on outcomes, drawing on stakeholders' perspectives;
5. Leadership and culture for the long-term;

⁸³ Delivering a One Planet Wales: Is the Welsh Government delivering a One Planet, low carbon Wales? Summary Report (WWF Cymru, 2011), available at: https://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/summary_report_is_the_welsh_government_delivering_a_one_planet_low_carbon_wales.pdf (accessed 31 March 2024)

⁸⁴ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 webpage (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2024), available at: <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/> (accessed 9 August 2024)

⁸⁵ The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: Enablers and Barriers to new ways of working (Professors Catherine Farrell and Jennifer Law, University of South Wales Centre for Social Policy, July 2017), available at: https://pure.southwales.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/3087856/PHW_Enablers_and_Barriers_Final_Version.pdf (accessed 9 August 2024)

6. Leaders encouraging thinking of integrated approaches and solutions;
7. Personal networks and trusting relationships to ensure that collaboration is delivered;
8. Developing styles of leadership for leading systems, rather than just individual organisations;
9. Joint governance arrangements ensure that organisations 'buy into' the collaboration and are not threatened with 'takeovers'; and
10. Frequent and continuing communication with stakeholders.

The review signposts to the Public Administration Select Committee's 'Governing for the Future' Report⁸⁶ which notes that: "Governing for the future is difficult. Not only are there notorious uncertainties in forecasting, but governments are also hampered by the short-termism of the electoral cycle". The review also refers to the 2015 Public Administration Select Committee observation that: "most policy making is short-termist, reactive and uncoordinated".⁸⁷

Amongst the many benefits of the Well-being of Future Generations Act is the way that the Act helps politicians (and others) escape from the trap of electoral cycles and associated short-termism to think and act in ways that honour the interests of future generations.

The Welsh Government provides a wealth of online resources that support transformative cultural change, under the banner of "Changing the world starting with Wales (and other places)", including their 'Culture Change Manual' which "is full of examples of how the Welsh Government is changing its practices, including holding meetings where everyone is heard".⁸⁸

With respect to resource management, the sort of farsighted and inclusive sensibility engendered by the Well-being of Future Generations provides the sort of wider context required to enable decisions to be made that fundamentally change the way things are done, a necessary prerequisite for any move away from the linear economy mindset towards zero waste circular economic thinking and acting.

⁸⁶ Governing the Future, Second Report of Session 2006–07 (Volume I) Report (House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, February 2007), available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmpubadm/123/123i.pdf> (accessed 9 August 2024)

⁸⁷ Leadership for the long term: Whitehall's capacity to address future challenges (Public Administration Select Committee, March 2015), available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmpubadm/669/66904.htm> (accessed 9 August 2024)

⁸⁸ Well-being of Future Generations Culture Change (Welsh Government), available at: <https://academiwales.gov.wales/quick-tips/> (accessed 9 August 2024)

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SUCCESS FACTORS

Taking these 5 high-level success factors as our starting point, whilst acknowledging that this list is not exhaustive, the relationships between these factors can be considered. Some of these relationships are straightforward; for example there is a clear relationship between the Welsh Government's proactive approach to change and their obligation to fulfil their duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Other relationships become clear upon further consideration. Relationships between each of these success factors are briefly explored below.

Involvement of the zero waste community - Emphasis on preserving recyclate quality

It was the zero waste community that was a vocal and eloquent advocate for the emphasis on preserving recyclate quality. It is clear that the ongoing involvement of circular citizens working in partnership with local authorities is central to preventing the sort of 'contamination' (the mixing of separate waste streams) that degrades the value of discarded materials. Framed positively, Wales's Collections Blueprint, inspired by pioneering members of the zero waste community, is delivering on its promise to increase capture rates and public participation in recycling, whilst minimising contamination and improving recyclate quality, and maintaining more jobs than commingled collection.

Involvement of the zero waste community - Proactive involvement of Government

Simply put, success was achieved through a process that included the Government (Ministers and civil servants) asking for and listening to the ideas of circular citizens and subsequently adopting their proposed collection methodology and, importantly, also adopting the zero waste culture that underpinned those ideas (e.g. by adopting as a 'primary aim' the efficient recovery of materials, as distinct from merely aiming to divert waste from landfill).

Involvement of the zero waste community - Widespread 'buy-in' to Wales's zero waste vision

The zero waste community bought in to the Government's consultation process by contributing in good faith, and Government decision-makers established and maintained a positive working relationship with members of the zero waste community, extending this to a wider range of circular citizens and other stakeholders, including through the ongoing partnership with the social enterprise company Wastesavers.

Involvement of the zero waste community - The wider context for change

The Well-being of Future Generations Act, and the ongoing work of the Future Generations Commissioner, supports and affirms the zero waste community's longer-term approach to resource management. The Act and the Commissioner also continue to promote 'new ways of thinking' that disrupt the status quo in favour of cooperation, collaboration, integration, and wider circular citizen involvement. The Act's seven well-being goals build on Wales's One Planet living commitment in harmony with the zero waste community's own values and aspirations, e.g. with respect to sustainability, resilience, equity, and global responsibility.

Emphasis on preserving recyclate quality - Proactive involvement of Government

In Wales we see what can be achieved with Government-directed funding and policy support for adopting collection methodologies designed to maintain recyclate quality, instead of leaving investment decisions only to 'market forces'.

Emphasis on preserving recyclate quality - Widespread 'buy-in' to Wales's zero waste vision

Most 'Waste Collection Authorities' in Wales were early Cleanstream® adopters and this has yielded real-world results. This has included the use of special collection vehicles capable of keeping different materials separate (to avoid 'contamination'), accompanied by training for operatives and education for the public.

Emphasis on preserving recyclate quality - The wider context for change

The emphasis on maintaining the quality of recyclable material provides an example of longer-term values in action. This approach is succeeding in recovering high quality, clean materials that help to maximise their value, not only their financial value, but also their wider value to society and the environment. This benevolent cycle delivers numerous community benefits that offer hope for a future that is less wasteful and ever more sustainable and resource efficient.

Proactive involvement of Government - Widespread 'buy-in' to Wales's zero waste vision

In order to succeed there needed to be a clear vision supported by determined and sustained leadership on the part of all those with responsibility for realising that vision. Such a proactive orientation required the buy-in of politicians and civil servants at national and local levels, as well as the active support of members of the public. This was, and remains, necessary to change the prevailing culture, e.g. from one that is wasteful to one that is resourceful. It is also the case that the evidence, e.g. rates of recycling, indicates that those local authorities that adopted the Government's recommended Collections Blueprint are outperforming those who have resisted buying in to this way of achieving the Government's zero waste vision.

Proactive involvement of Government - The wider context for change

The adoption by the Welsh Government of a statutory duty to ensure sustainable resource use and to reduce Wales's ecological footprint, including by becoming a zero waste nation, provides the context necessary to succeed in realising this worthy aspiration. As has already been explored, the Well-being of Future Generations Act is helping Wales to transcend electoral cycles and to make responsible decisions for the longer term in ways that benefit future generations and that are true to the commitment to a globally responsible Wales.

Widespread 'buy-in' to Wales's zero waste vision - The wider context for change

An important aspect of the job of the Future Generations Commissioner is to help promote buy-in and joined up working towards the achievement of Wales's zero waste vision. Some of the ways that the Commissioner is supporting this ever-deepening buy-in are described above, including by supporting the dissemination and use of the resources associated with the Wales Culture Change Manual that was developed from the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Change Programme.

Conclusions

In conclusion, having considered the emergence of circular citizenship and the zero waste community and how these have contributed to the 'circular success story' in Wales, and having identified a number of success factors associated with Wales's zero waste achievements to date, and having briefly explored the relationships between these success factors, it becomes clear that each success factor taken in isolation is inadequate to explain Wales's success.

It is only because of the historic interrelationships between these factors that Wales was able to change the culture of those involved in resource management and move from a recycling rate of around 5% at the end of the 20th Century to around 66% some 25 years later.

The implications of this observation are important both for Wales and for other nations that might wish to 'replicate' Wales's success. For Wales, the need for all the various success factors to interact meaningfully with each other means that, if Wales is to maintain its world-leading status, these factors need reinforcing, and that were any of the relationships between these factors to deteriorate (e.g. if the relationship between the involvement of the zero waste community working in partnership with a proactive Government were to be diminished through neglect of circular citizens) then this would jeopardise the ongoing realisation of the One Planet low-carbon, zero waste vision.

For other nations, including England, that might wish to replicate Wales's success, the lesson is that it is not enough simply to impose, from the top down, the laws and strategies that contributed to Wales's success, without also involving circular citizens in the realisation of zero waste ambitions. Nor is it enough to 'leave it to the market to decide', or indeed to leave it to circular citizens alone to achieve, as the realisation of the circular economy demands a more holistic approach to managing change, including cultural change.