

January 2023

GETTING BEHIND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY:
A Sustainable Future

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(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)**

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WHY NOW (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Our future is seriously threatened by the unintended consequences of how our needs for nutrition, clothing, travel, shelter and comfort have been met. War in Europe has ruthlessly exposed that vulnerability. A year of climate disasters has underlined that the time to act is now. We do have choices and we can make a different future.

It is in Ireland's vital interests that we move early towards an environmentally and economically sustainable Circular Economy. Early adopters will reap the benefits, particularly in those countries which depend heavily on a reputation of selling abroad to discerning consumers.

Ireland is at a crossroads. Some suggest we hunker down and wait for other bigger countries to lead. A wait and see approach is very flawed. Our work shows that it is impossible to see a prosperous future for Ireland that does not have the adoption of circular strategy at its heart.

- It will safeguard Ireland's economic success and create new jobs and better working lives. It is the pathway to new opportunities that ensures business remains competitive and prosperous. Doing nothing is not an option and delay will only make the transition harder and more difficult.
- It will help communities build a fairer and safer world for themselves and future generations, building on the natural instinct of communities to stick together for common purposes. Is ar scáth a cheile a mhaireann na daoine.
- It will strengthen supply chains, reduce our vulnerability to external shocks, and build our reputation in food production and processing. It will ensure that Ireland has the opportunity to lead in food security and sustainability.
- It will maximise our capacity for innovation which benefits humankind in ways that are sensitive to nature and to our own well-being.

The take-make-consume-throw-away pattern is increasingly out of step with environmental, political and societal realities. The traditional dependencies on cheap materials and abundant energy resources now seem both wasteful and foolish as we face ever increasing raw material and energy prices and uncertainty over future supply.

The evidence is all around us of the practices which cannot be sustained, especially as new and growing populations aspire to decent and equitable standards of living.

- It takes 10,000 litres of water – what one person drinks in nine years – to make just one pair of jeans [United Nations];
- 40% of people are now having to replace washing machines every 6 years or less because these types of appliances are breaking down two years sooner than a decade ago [Oko Institut Research];
- New buildings account for one eighth of greenhouse gas emissions embodied in the structure, but we neglect the lower impact opportunities of refurbishment rather than demolition or better choice of materials. [Irish Green Building Council];
- In 2020, Ireland ranked second last among all EU member states in the share of material recycled and fed back into the economy. [Eurostat];
- ☐ On present trends material use will reach a level three times what nature can replenish with serious consequences for our environment. [MacArthur Foundation];

It is imperative that we break the destructive link between improving standards of living and environmental degradation. The Circular Economy is a framework that demonstrates ways in which we can still deliver growing standards of living through innovative and sustainable solutions.

The key principle of the Circular Economy is to reduce environmental impact by rethinking how we meet our needs and designing out the damage. It involves redesigning products and services. It recognises the multiple dimensions of environmental integrity: climate, biodiversity, pollution, depletion of resources, and waste disposal. It builds a new approach around principles like reducing use of extracted materials, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products. While Climate Action tends to focus on the direct use of fossil fuels, it is important to bear in mind that 45% of emissions come from our use of other materials.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 80% OF ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE IS BAKED IN AT DESIGN STAGE. IN ALL SECTORS, WE NEED TO STEP BACK AND RETHINK HOW SERVICES CAN BEST BE DELIVERED.

The Circular Economy Framework offers a bold vision rooted in values that people understand and cherish, integrity, careful use of the world's resources, and the desire to pass on our world in a better way than we found it to the coming generations.

It is estimated that 80% of environmental damage is baked in at design stage. In all sectors, we need to step back and rethink how services can best be delivered. This is the most important and sometimes the hardest step, but without it, the biggest gains will be missed.

We must transform every element of our take-make-waste system: how we design the systems and markets which serve our needs, how we choose and manage materials, how we make and use products, how we prolong their useful life, and what we do with the materials afterwards. Only then can we create a thriving circular economy that can benefit people, business and the environment.

Our work has shown that there are huge opportunities in every sector, but the most immediate opportunities lie in Construction, Food, Non-Food Retail and Fast Fashion.

Fears about the cost of living and growing instability underline the potential for a circular approach to deliver immediate resilience in a crisis such as this one. This must be seized in a National Resilience Campaign founded on these principles.

Issues such as Climate Change and the Environment remain quite low in the priorities of voters outside a small but dedicated group. However, our work has shown that environmental concerns are widely held, but people find it difficult to get accurate information linking individual action to the issue. We have found a perception that high cost and system inertia are a big barrier to progress. People perceive action on issues like food waste or fast fashion as much easier to implement than changes in relation to how buildings are heated and used, or in their travel patterns.

We must recognise that what is considered 'waste' is a resource and that all too often these resources end up in the wrong place with untapped potential to be used again and again.

There is an opportunity, in this time of heightened concern about exposure to high costs particularly for energy but also for other items, to mobilise actions that make households and businesses more resilient in the face of these exposures. Past history shows a good record of achieving major behavioural change when it is made part of a national campaign. Rural electrification, plastic bag curtailment and the smoking ban are good examples of where a focussed effort on behavioural change delivered massive transformation that gained rapid grassroots support.

Politics needs to frame a bold ambition which the whole community can share that taps into a demand for a sustainable and satisfying life in both rural and urban settings. This ambition can build

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on developing interests in conservation in all spheres, the Origin Green (Ireland's food and drink sustainability programme) campaign and the increasing adoption of self-sustaining lifestyles. These trends have been accelerated by the Covid pandemic. People want a different future and do not want an unthinking return to pre-pandemic life.

The political system must bring the whole of society on the journey that eliminates the degradation of our environment while enhancing the quality of life we enjoy. One of the great strengths of the Circular Economy approach is that it frames the challenge in positive terms in which people can see a place for themselves and feel a sense of control.

- It offers a "problem solving" framework, in which we ask how we can continue to enjoy improving quality of life and the comfort and services we enjoy without the environmental damage which could potentially cripple us.
- It offers important positive political themes which have resonance with the public: exciting new opportunities; a path to a resilient future, urban and rural; integrity in personal choices; communities coming together to create a legacy for the future; new decentralised jobs in repair, reuse, recycling, rental and leasing sectors amongst others; allowing nature to recover.
- It offers the opportunity to create a shared commitment to help one another, not point the finger of blame. This will require collaboration within and across sectors, communities, voluntary organisations and government, harnessing a growing network of change-makers.

There is an immediate need to frame discussion around these positive opportunities. People fear that openly counting the costs on the environment will mean a much higher cost of living. However, with fresh thinking, new designs for longer life, easy repair, and smart use to avoid waste, savings can be made quite quickly.

Our work has identified an enormous range of "low hanging fruit" that with the right campaign of support and mobilisation could trigger transformational shifts.

There are many opportunities within relatively easy reach. These include the greater use of: - smart controls, shallow retrofits, smart meters, food waste avoidance, guidance for low impact refurbishment, changing the choice of building materials, better waste separation, more public charging networks, sharing platforms for travel and others uses, rightsizing supports, packaging free areas in larger supermarkets, remote health delivery. They all represent structural shifts with low upfront costs but significant savings.

A Circular Strategy can turn the tables for rural communities. It can reverse the trends of centralisation which has weakened them by exploiting the infrastructures and practices of the future, which favour them. New sources of wealth can come from high quality food and reward for environmental services. It fosters regional strength as remote working, remote access to health, renewable energy and more local sourcing.

Sectoral leadership in the Circular Economy is a realistic ambition for Ireland. Our large multinational base is well equipped to power the transition. Our Food sector already has a head start.

The key role of government is to recognise the profound structural changes which need to be anticipated, the opportunities that need to be seized, and to create a framework where they can be adopted as quickly as possible.

Many of the present institutional arrangements are too fragmented to respond adequately to the need for transformative change. Responsibility must be shouldered in every sector. The EPA cannot be the sole agent for driving the circular agenda. It simply does not have the bandwidth. The Circular Economy should be embedded within the robust structures now being created for Climate Action.

Government must rethink the framework for policy in many instances. It needs to embed foresight and innovation into core processes such as planning, regulation, and procurement which tend to be too siloed and overlook the dynamic role they must adopt. Often markets will need to be recast to release the potential for more sustainability. Public investment in infrastructures will be vital to enable better practices across the community. To make compact living more workable some Departments need to rethink their habits of only

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putting in social infrastructures long after homes are built. More attention will need to be given to behavioural complexities and removing the barriers or developing the nudges that encourage the mobilisation of community action.

Integrated thinking around designing how our communities and our economy works is essential to join up the strands and drive a coherent strategy.

Each of the sectors where we held policy kitchens threw up different challenges and opportunities. The attached table gives a snapshot of resource use, environmental impact, waste and recycling in the key sectors which we examined: Construction, Food, Consumer Durables and Fast Fashion. It also shows that huge opportunities exist for changes which still yield a high quality of life but with less adverse impact. In summary:

- **Construction** absorbs half the materials we use and has the worst record for recovery and reuse. It embodies enormous emissions in the construction itself as well as in subsequent use. Timber is used three times as much in Scotland where it replaces materials which are intense creators of emissions by one which sequesters carbon. Core to a transformational shift are new approaches to planning and design that embody a lifetime perspective.
- **Food** and the associated choices of land use at farm level account for 40% of total emissions. However, the sector is unique in that it alone can reduce atmospheric warming, whereas the best other sectors can do is slow the pace of deterioration. Massive policy changes are needed to measure and to reward farmers for exploiting that unique opportunity, which can be successfully delivered alongside food production to the highest standards of sustainability. Food waste is rampant, well over 1 million tonnes per year is carelessly discarded. Packaging, logistics and labelling offer huge opportunities for progress.
- **Consumer Durables** are the scores of pieces of equipment we buy that shape the impact of our lifestyle. Although few are manufactured in Ireland, they embody a massive material extraction. The market fosters early obsolescence and low levels of utilisation, which adds little to the quality of life, but have a heavy toll on the environment. The scope to develop sharing platforms is a major opportunity. Although schemes for recycling are in place, they can be developed into more dynamic protocols that can deliver significant progress.
- **Fashion** is a sector which puts big pressure on scarce water resources and is a big contributor to micro plastic pollution. It has fostered consumption patterns that see clothes used fewer and fewer times and where reselling or recovery are very poor. It is a sector where shifts in design thinking and a shift in consumer attitudes are crucial. Better labelling can help, but behavioural change needs new role models to light a better path.

Drawing on the work of these different sectoral kitchens which were held, a number of crucial signposts for future policy emerged:

- Recast **market strategies** that properly reward the practices which remove sources of damage and improve our utilisation of resources. {Food and Land Use, Construction, Sharing Platforms}
- Create more **dynamic regulatory environments** — planning, financial and environmental — which foster innovation and fresh design thinking and easy transition to new uses. {Construction, Packaging}
- Recast **Extended Producer Responsibility Schemes** to embrace far more than paying for safe disposal, in order to incorporate the right choice of materials, right packaging and presentation and the right channels for material recovery. {Consumer Durables, Construction}
- Reboot **public procurement** to make it a source of dynamic leadership for change and embed it in every state body. {Construction, Durables, Food}
- Create **new infrastructures** for recovery and repair from waste streams, for renewables, for sharing, for retrofitting, and for quality consumer information. {Consumer Durables, Community Resilience}
- Develop active support to embed **Circular initiatives in the community** at scale: promoting active use of these infrastructures and developing enterprises to exploit the many new opportunities. {All sectors}

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- Develop **Sectoral Compacts** which build networks at all levels. Sectoral leadership in the Circular Economy is a realistic ambition for Ireland. Our large Multinational base knows that their reputations will be shaped by their adaptation. Our Food sector already has a head start. {All sectors}
- Invest in the capacity for **data analytics, measurement and verification**, which is crucial to identify the impact of potential actions and for recognising and rewarding those who adopt them.
- Create a **central repository** of information and good practice to assist sectors and to inform consumers of the impact of choices, and develop a **Foresight** Programme in key areas.

Table: Summary of Sectoral Standings in Ireland

	Construction	Food	Durables	Fashion Textiles
Materials	12mt	NA	63.7 kt (WEE) 170.0 kt (Vehicles)	263 kt
Waste	9mt	1.1mt	160kt	170kt
Emissions	7mt Embodied 16mt In Use	20mt Ag 5mt Land Use		4th globally
Recycling	10%	40%	NA	35%
Reuse Market	(Minimal)	5%	60% (WEE) 94% (Vehicle)	6%

PACKAGING (ALL SECTORS)



OVERALL CIRCULARITY¹

Circularity rate in Ireland is 1.8% second lowest in the EU, only one seventh of the EU

¹ Circularity rate is the % of materials used in Domestic Consumption coming from Recycled sources.

GETTING BEHIND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

1. A Challenging Starting Point

The key principle of the Circular Economy is to reduce environmental impact by designing out the sources of the damage. This is done through rethinking, redesigning, reducing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products. The current approach of 'take, make, discard' leads to more materials being extracted than Nature can replenish, and huge amounts of waste and pollution.

While Climate Action tends to focus on the direct use of fossil fuels, it is important to bear in mind that 45% of emissions come from our use of other materials. Extraction of materials puts other stresses on the environment also such as the depletion of clean water resources or other scarce materials.

Ireland has a material use level of 25 tonnes per head of population which is 70% higher than the EU average. The key materials are metals, non-metallic minerals, fossil fuels and biomass. The proportion of material recycled and fed back into the economy as a proportion of material consumed in the domestic economy is under 2% in Ireland. This indicator known as the Circularity Rate compares to an EU average of 12%.²

The very low rate in Ireland, second only to Romania, reflects the dominance of sectors with high residues namely Construction, and a Food sector where 90% of final product is exported but residues remain in Ireland. It also reflects the poor recycling rates of residues in these sectors. While structural issues mean we can never achieve the 31% circularity rate of the Dutch, we can make huge improvements, both by cutting material use (eg. replacing fossil fuels by renewables, lengthening the useful life of the products that support our lives, or improving the efficiency of use, notably of fossil fuels), and by improving recycling rates, which have been stagnant in recent years and by reuse of materials in key sectors which is minimal.

We must transform every element of our take-make-waste system: how we design the systems and markets which serve our needs, how we manage resources, how we make and use products to maximise their useful life, and what we do with the materials afterwards. Only then can we create a thriving circular economy that can benefit people, business and the environment.

Developing a circular economy will protect our future and enable our children and their children to live healthy and prosperous lives.

**DEVELOPING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY
WILL PROTECT OUR FUTURE AND
ENABLE OUR CHILDREN AND
THEIR CHILDREN TO LIVE HEALTHY
AND PROSPEROUS LIVES.**

With clear evidence that Ireland is falling behind, we decided at the start of our examination of this topic, to develop a survey to establish a baseline of attitudes and practices to help inform our work. It was designed to identify a baseline for people's perception of adopting the transformative change involved in a Circular Strategy for our economy and society. It provided for separate assessment of consumers and of people engaged in the enterprise sector. The Survey provides some valuable insights which help inform policy.

² EU's circular material use rate decreased in 2021 - Products Eurostat News - Eurostat (europa.eu)

High Concern But Less Action

Our survey showed a high level of consumer concern about the environmental impact of our lifestyle, and a recognition that responsibility for action is equally shared across consumers, business, government

and the local community. Respondents were also aware that collectively we are not doing enough. On the positive side, 76% of respondents reported that they always segregate their waste and almost 60% always use Bring Centres. However, few people regularly assess the environmental impact of their product choices or seek upcycled items. (Just 14%).

**A KEY MESSAGE IS THAT
CONSIDERABLE WORK MUST GO
INTO ACCURATELY INFORMING
PEOPLE IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE
WHAT THEIR OPTIONS ARE
AND CREATING NUDGES THAT
MAKE THEM EASIER TO ADOPT.**

Ingrained Habits

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of difficulty in making changes. Moving to Zero Food Waste was rated easy or very easy by 64%, difficult or very difficult by 18%, so on balance those who thought it easy had a +46 point lead over those who thought it difficult. This bodes well for a strategy to cut food waste.

However, all other change options were found to be more challenging. Using the same measure of the positive balance of those expecting it to be easy over those who thought it hard, our findings were as follows:

- Avoiding Fast Fashion (+24),
- Avoiding Disposable Containers (-7),
- Avoiding Single Use Plastic (-12),
- Zero Black Bag Waste (-24),
- High Energy Efficiency (-24),
- Downsizing (-45),
- Vehicle Sharing (-59).

Only in the case of avoiding fast fashion was the balance positive. Deeper changes will be difficult where habits are engrained.

Obstacles

Higher cost emerges as the greatest obstacle to more rapid adoption, cited by 85% of consumers, but lack of consistent regulation (75%), lack of enterprise awareness (71%) and personal resistance to change (71%) were also recognised. Clearly at a time of heightened concern about the cost of living, it will be important to focus on choices that give families more control of some of these costs and help build resilience, at a time of rising material and fuel costs.

In terms of giving a clue as to where other policies might focus, only 19% reported the opportunity to repair or to up cycle as either good or very good in their area, and only 29% rated information on choices good or very good. Clearly these are areas where policy can focus. Facilities for recycling were rated good or very good by 63% of respondents, but given that our performance in recycling and recovery is weak, this may signal an openness to make better use of facilities.

Business Blind Spots

Similar gaps prevail in business. Only 37% report that they always minimise waste and recycle, while only one in five report good progress in design, transport or end of life policies to minimise environmental damage. Big changes are again perceived as difficult. Cost is again cited as a problem, but less strongly than by consumers. The lack of outlets for materials recovered is a bigger problem for business. Good information on options for improvement is almost as big a problem as for consumers.

Opportunities

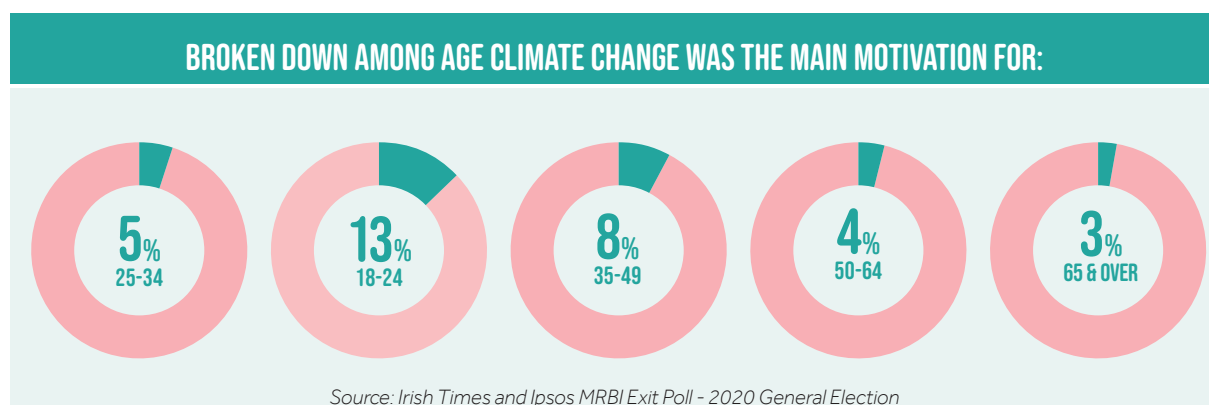
On the positive side, a majority of businesses see opportunity in adopting more sustainable approaches, and there is an appetite for sectoral initiatives. Business and consumers alike show support for a new policy approach. For example there is a 66% v 21% balance in favour of higher charges where environmental damage is caused, and again a strong majority believe such approaches would be effective in deterring damage. A key message is that considerable work must go into accurately informing people in all walks of life what their options are and creating nudges that make them easier to adopt.

2. Understanding and Mobilising Adoption

2.1. Political Attitudes and Challenges

For the 2020 General Election, the Irish Times and Ipsos MRBI conducted an exit poll which, among other things, asked respondents to rank the issue which most influenced how they voted. Health (32%) and Housing (26%) were by far the most significant issues with the Pension Age (8%) in third place, followed by jobs, climate change and a category termed 'other', at 6% a piece. Broken down among age and party affiliation, climate change was the main motivation for:

- 13% of 18-24 year olds,
- 5% of 25-34 year olds,
- 8% of 35-49 year olds,
- 4% of 50-64 year olds,
- 3% of those aged 65 and over.



In terms of party/group affiliation, climate change was the primary voting motivator for: Fine Gael - 3%, Fianna Fáil - 2%, Green - 41%, Sinn Féin - 2%, Labour - 9%, Social Democrats - 5%, PBP/Sol - 3%, Aontú - 0%.

The election results exit poll captured the place of climate action in the hierarchy of issues that motivated voters.

Since the election, the Covid-19 Pandemic, coupled with the Russian war on Ukraine, have led to a cost-of-living crisis which has seen the focus on climate action slip further. Clearly it creates a challenge if we are

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to convince people that the principles of a circular transformation can deliver resilience in the face of these immediate and urgent challenges.

Such change cannot be secured by shame or blame which has characterised a good deal of the climate debate: the shame of being bottom of the league or the blame of poisoning the planet's future.

Instead the challenge is to show how it offers opportunities which have resonance with the public: immediate savings and security; a path to a more resilient future urban and rural; integrity in personal choices; communities coming together to create a legacy for the future; space for Nature to recover. The aim is to create a shared commitment and to mobilise practical action by all sections of the community.

2.2. Themes Emerging from The Policy Kitchens

The discussion in the different sectors unearthed some important features of the circular approach.

In the long term circular approaches mean lower costs.

The apparent cheapness of some products is because they conceal costs that we all bear in the long term. Products that are innovatively designed with an eye to adaptation not obsolesce can deliver meaningful savings to consumers in the short, medium and longer terms.

Design thinking at an early stage can transform what seem to be very difficult changes

It is estimated that 80% of environmental damage is baked in at design stage. In all of the sectors, if we step back to rethink how the service can best be delivered, huge reductions in damaging impact without impairing a good service. It is the most important and sometimes the hardest step, but without it, the biggest gains will be missed. It may trigger the need to redesign comprehensively the markets, processes and materials and existing institutional arrangements often hamper that. Articulating a high level vision for the sector will be pivotal. Influencing producer and consumer behaviour is key to embedding meaningful and constructive change.

Mobilising our Research and Educational Resources to foster understanding and innovation is essential to achieving transformation. It is the next generation who have a greater appreciation of the urgency of change and like in other areas where Ireland has made difficult changes, their capacity to influence the debate is crucial. Building on the success of **Green Schools**, curricular reforms can build further momentum. More generally, sectoral **Centres of Excellence** are needed to innovate, to spin out new approaches, to provide access to best practice, and to attract investors from at home and abroad. A system for certification of how best practice is being applied will be essential and may create data challenges.

Profound Behavioural Change has been possible in Ireland before. The challenge of this transformation can take confidence from successful campaigns of the past.

The area of tobacco consumption may present an example. Ireland's success in halving tobacco consumption demonstrates the need for a multi-pronged approach which includes incentives but also impediments to embed change.

Perhaps the most apt example is that of the Rural Electrification Scheme which was accompanied by an educational campaign. The campaign entailed demonstrations of not only the new electricity service but also its applications, including household appliances, home-heating, etc. The State led the campaign through the ESB, which had a presence in many communities through their branch network.

Our work revealed that there are already some strong elements in place which we can build upon.

Old values refurbished, young impatience harnessed Using resources carefully has an instinctive resonance for most people, but the **old practices of repair and refurbishment** may have been forgotten because the true costs of our discards were not priced. A multipronged public policy will be needed to change practice with a rediscovery of old practices to become both fashionable and economical. Similarly, as

with so many big shifts in public attitudes in Ireland, it will be important to harness the leadership which the coming generation can provide to shake us out of complacent habits. Allowing widespread **benchmarking by households** of their practices can play an important part in normalising better practices.

3. A Framework of Action and Opportunity

What became clear from our sessions was that a circular transformation chimes with many strong ambitions already strongly espoused in Ireland right across the political spectrum.

3.1. Vibrant Rural Communities built on the infrastructure and practices of the future.

It is within living memory that rural communities were hubs for best circular economy practices. Every household item could be repaired within the village, nothing was thrown away but instead broken down and reused, more valuable items were generously shared with neighbours. In more recent times both rural and urban life is consumed more and more by convenience.

The changes that are required have been portrayed as making travel more expensive, cutting farm incomes, constraining the growth of towns and villages and isolating more vulnerable people. This is a false narrative that must be confronted head-on by a coherent presentation of a Circular Strategy. It is ironic that as cities embrace the concept of “15 minute” urban villages, the original “15 minute communities”, rural towns and villages feel threatened. The new drivers of rural prosperity will be **rich rewards for delivering creating more sustainable, lower emission practices** in agriculture which would be more expensive to deliver in other sectors, rural priority for smart electric travel networks, and **building on the broadband infrastructure to deliver**; remote health access, rural population growth as people can work remotely, and price premiums for Irish Verified Origin Green food production. New high value will be placed on the heritage of town centres and historical buildings to be restored to their former glory.

GOING BEYOND THE CLIMATE AGENDA ALONE TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE OF CIRCULAR PRACTICE CAN GIVE IRELAND AN EARLY MOVER ADVANTAGE.

3.2. Integrated Urban Communities which embrace the need for detailed long term thinking

The vision of a 15 minute city with distinct urban village identities has real appeal. It requires most of all a shift in government processes which have taken a view that it is time enough to deliver the infrastructure of health, education and travel when the unmet demand is clamouring for a response. Front loading public investment to create the opportunity for compact living requires a fundamental shift in the planning process of Departments. The opportunity opens up a Campus approach where the needs of children could be served within easy reach and public assets shared for community use. Huge costs of individual ownership and safe storing of vehicles and equipment could be stripped away if successful sharing platforms are put in place.

3.3. There is already an emerging ambition to hardwire sustainability into key sectors, and Ireland has the opportunity to be a world leader if we set about it

Sectoral leadership in the Circular Economy is a realistic ambition for Ireland. Our large Multinational base knows that their reputations will be shaped by their adaptation. Our Food sector already has a head start. We do not have large swathes of our businesses and workers in heavy material using sectors which face greatest challenges in adapting. Going beyond the climate agenda alone to see the bigger picture of circular practice can

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give Ireland an early mover advantage. Society is slowly beginning to embrace sustainability again at the expense of convenience and many industries and retailers are reacting to this change but more than a nudge is needed. It is up to the government to ensure this change is made possible. Starting from voluntary agreements, we can explore new approaches through its problem solving approach.

3.4. Building from the Community up is something where Ireland has a unique tradition to build upon

It is no accident that the parish based GAA is our most successful organisation at embracing communities right across the country while also ensuring to keep up with the changes of a modern world. In fact, the GAA itself is reducing its emissions across its many venues. . The GAA captures the power of local solidarity and the ambition to excel as part of a community. We have already seen many local communities embrace the goal of Zero Waste and harness the commitment of the public. This is an ambition that local people can take pride in. It can make a truly global challenge real and tangible. It can give the work a foundation of real values enacted locally as part of global solidarity.

3.5. It cannot happen without government leadership and the embrace of the thinking in every public body.

It falls to the government to set a high level of ambition and **concrete targets**. Policy cannot be a rigid straight jacket that offers overweening regulation or swingeing penalties. It must be ambitious, but it must also be a framework which promotes **innovation**, and develops the arena that changes thinking as well as careful **policing** of standards. Government must demonstrate its commitment by making public procurement an exemplar in adopting a changed planning mandate anticipating and shaping the transformation needed in the wider society as well as embedding lifelong cost and benefit in the procurement frameworks in regular use.

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