



Southern Region
Waste Management Office
Llssanalta House
Dooradoyle
Limerick
T +353 61 556596
E info@srwmo.ie
W www.srwmo.ie

Oifig Bainistíochta Dramhaíola
do Réigiún an Deiscirt
Teach Lios an Fháлтаigh
Tuar an Dail
Contae Luimnigh
T +353 61 556596
E info@srwmo.ie
W www.srwmo.ie

The Planning Department,
Kilkenny County Council,
County Hall,
John Street,
Kilkenny,
Co. Kilkenny R95 A39T

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Subject: Draft City and County Development Plan

A Chara

We wish to make the following emphasis on the importance of expanding on the concept of the Circular Economy, in the draft City and County Development Plan.

The Circular Economy – proposal for inclusion in City/County Development Plans

A circular economy is based on the principles of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems.

Source: www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org

Introduction - The Circular Economy

The Circular Economy aims at maintaining the value of products, materials and resources for as long as possible, rather than the ‘take-make-waste’ linear model. The circular economy process begins from design phase through production and operation and final reuse or recovery back into the loop. This circular approach saves finite natural resources and presents new business and social opportunities.

Circular economy policy is now adopted at European and national level. Under the European Green Deal, a new Circular Economy Action Plan: ‘For a cleaner more competitive Europe’ was launched in March 2020. This was a further development following on from the first Circular Action Plan which was published in 2015.

Circular Economy actions tie in with other European targets, such as the ambition of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, boosting the economy through increased jobs and growth, climate and energy, the social agenda, industrial innovation, and international sustainable development goals. Linked with the Circular Economy Action Plan, the European Plastic Strategy has also been agreed which includes increased plastic recycling targets. Furthermore, the Single Use Plastics (SUPs) Directive targets ten categories of SUPs –that will not be permitted on the Market from July 2021.

Ireland's policy 'Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy' Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020-2025 was launched in September 2020. The goal of this policy is

to have a circular economy that reduces our carbon impact and protects our natural resources, environment and health. Such a circular economy also supports viable and sustainable enterprise opportunities, jobs and training¹

What are the benefits of the Circular Economy?

As well as saving on scarce resources and protecting our environment, the Circular Economy also provides cost savings and job opportunities along the supply chain, from production through to reprocessing of materials, as well as facilitating community and social enterprise initiatives around reuse, repair and recycling. Consumers too can benefit from a cost savings viewpoint, through increased durability and reparability of the products that they purchase.

Circular Economy for Building Design & Construction Projects

The concept of the Circular Economy can be applied to the whole lifecycle of new developments, from planning and design right through demolition, construction, end-use and repurposing or end of life of a development.

To adopt the principle of the Circular Economy more fundamentally, applicants could be encouraged submit a Resource Management Plan, including a Circular Economy Statement, covering different phases of the project from initial design through to construction and end-use functioning. This approach would help the application of modular construction, and the facilitation for easy repair and replacement of components and repurposing for reuse.

Financial / Economic Opportunities around the Circular Economy

By embedding sustainability into the economy, the Circular Economy provides potential for economic and financial gains through employment in green activities to replace employment in traditional industry that is either being ceased or upgraded with newer more automated technologies. A current example is the potential for transferring jobs from peat extraction and processing to new green jobs such as reinstatement and protection of wetlands, or energy retrofitting of homes. Jobs in the Circular Economy can open up in areas such as repair, upcycling and green technologies for reprocessing of secondary materials for recycling and recovery.

This includes significant potential in establishing or expanding social enterprises, which have a significant role to play in society, as highlighted in 'National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland'.

The strong link between a low carbon economy and the circular economy

There is an urgency to transition to a low carbon future (ref RPO56 of the Southern Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES)). The concept of the Circular Economy goes in tandem with moving to a low carbon economy, which is now seen as an essential core to development planning.

¹ Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy

The Bioeconomy

The Circular Bioeconomy is a manifestation of the Circular Economy, and covers potential for recovery of materials and byproducts to create new products of high value, or alternatively recovery of biomass as energy. The principles of the Circular Economy can be applied to increasing the benefits from agricultural and forestry practices.

Applying the principles of the Circular Economy to effective waste management

While designing for waste prevention is the most desirable and effective option, waste that is generated can be accommodated in the circular economy reuse loop, through preparation for reuse, recycling and recovery.

Applying the Circular Economy to waste management can be accommodated through provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure – from designing for waste segregation and access within residential and commercial development projects, through to adequate infrastructure for handling and reprocessing of waste. The principles of the Circular Economy will form a fundamental part of the upcoming *National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy*, for which pre-draft consultation has now commenced. This national plan will also incorporate new guidance 'Waste Management Infrastructure – Guidance for Siting Waste Management Facilities.

The Southern Region Waste Management Planning Office will be happy to provide further input or assistance regarding waste management, resource efficiency or the circular economy.

Yours faithfully



Margaret Murphy
Resource Efficiency Officer
Southern Region Waste Management Planning Office