
THE COMMUNITY WASTE MOVEMENT

A report about an
amazing movement
that helps people and
their stuff





Waste is an often ignored part of everyday life, society, and everything in between. Yet waste has many negative impacts on the environment and on humans, locally and globally. These include greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and resource depletion. Even though governments around the world attempt to respond to these challenges, waste streams continue to grow and create problems.

In the face of this, individuals, groups, and communities take matters into their own hands. They organise waste – both the prevention and management of it – differently. These groups and communities are varied, but they all work collectively to solve local and/or global waste-related issues, and to instigate change towards more sustainable and fair ways of handling and preventing waste.

This is the Community Waste Movement.

Community Waste Movement...?

The Community Waste Movement is made up of Community Waste Projects. These projects are relatively small in scale, either regional or local. They can be either formal or informal groups, and operate in the non-profit, community-based sector. There are many different types of projects, but they all deal with waste or waste prevention.

What do Community Waste Projects aim to do?

1. Reduce waste
2. Increase awareness around waste-related, environmental issues
3. Create volunteer opportunities
4. Engage one's community around waste

How many Community Waste Projects exist in the UK?

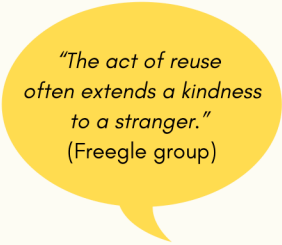
We estimate that there are around **3,500** Community Waste Projects in the UK, of which around 2,000 are litter-picking groups. However, given that some groups in this movement are small, informal and/or are not very visible, this number is likely higher in reality. If we include charity shops as well, the number rises to around 14,500.

How are Community Waste Projects organised?

There are many ways to organise a Community Waste Project. The projects in this movement are often informal, or organised as a charity, social enterprise, cooperative, or are community-based (e.g. community interest company, community benefit society, constituted community group).

What are the nine types of Community Waste Projects?

- Waste management projects, which include recycling collection and composting
- Reuse/repair/recycling initiatives, e.g. furniture redistribution and upcycling initiatives
- Shops, which includes charity shops, scrapstores and zero waste shops
- Libraries, which lend clothes, toys, things, and tools
- Organised gifting, e.g. Freegle
- Litter-picking groups
- Local campaign groups, e.g. Plastic-free groups
- Repair event organising, for example Repair Cafés
- Local or regional networks



*"The act of reuse often extends a kindness to a stranger."
(Freegle group)*

There's probably many more!

THE COMMUNITY WASTE MOVEMENT AT A GLANCE

**Clothes, litter,
scrap material**

are some of the wastes this movement handles

3,500

Community Waste
Projects in the UK



**Thousands of
items are saved**

by the Community Waste Movement every year

To reduce waste

is the most common aim



Charity or informal

are the most common organisational forms

Furniture, packaging, garden waste, wood waste, electrical items

are some other wastes this movement handles

Tip: you can pin this to the wall!

What has the Community Waste Movement achieved?

The successes and achievements of this movement are many, but difficult to quantify across the whole diverse movement. Individual groups have, however, reported that they divert hundreds to thousands of tonnes, bags, and/or items from industrial recycling, landfill, or natural areas. Imagine then what thousands of groups can do!

Beyond this, the Community Waste Movement does three things that are immensely important, in addition to 'saving' waste:

They create social benefits for people, communities and/or disadvantaged groups, for instance by combatting loneliness, creating job/volunteer opportunities, strengthening communities, making friends, and spreading positivity.


They have a positive influence on the (local) public and authorities, for example by being a source of inspiration, helping similar groups start, raising awareness, teaching skills, supporting and collaborating with LAs, and actively influencing local politics/authorities.

They promote and carry out more sustainable waste systems, by encouraging and campaigning for more sustainable and fair ways of handling and preventing waste, while also providing services they see as lacking in society, both environmental and social ones.

Challenges

Community Waste Projects continue to achieve amazing things, but also face many challenges. Funding is the most common challenge: too little funding is available; funding applications are too complicated; and they have too complex demands on small-scale organisations. Additionally, material or logistical challenges are also

common, e.g. unavailability of affordable and suitable premises, not enough storage/room for the materials or equipment needed, or an inability to deal with the high volumes of waste handled. Lastly, participation is another common challenge, with volunteer capacity being unreliable or limited.



*"We have proved we cannot be ignored and we are taking ownership."
(litter-picking group)*



Five lessons for Community Waste Projects

- 1. Emphasise co-benefits!** You deliver a multitude of benefits, in addition to effects on waste tonnage. Pay attention to, and communicate about, what these benefits are for your group.
- 2. Document!** If you can weigh the rubbish you save – great! Even better – capture your work, the good you do, the co-benefits, as much as you can, through stories, testimonies, interviews, photos, film etc.
- 3. Use your insights!** You have a unique position in that you are close to local contexts, and have an insight into what is needed, possible, and desirable within this context. Make sure that everyone, including local authorities and your local public, knows this.
- 4. Collaborate!** Groups are the strongest when they work together with others. These could be other local groups, other similar groups via social media, local authorities, businesses and so on.
- 5. Be part of the movement!** See your work as part of something bigger – the Community Waste Movement – which includes thousands of projects across the UK. You are not alone!

Three lessons for local authorities

1. Support! Support the experimentation and good work that Community Waste Projects do in as many ways as possible, e.g. simpler funding applications, legal and financial advice, help with logistics, e.g. equipment, storage, transportation, hiring a community convenor and so on.

2. Invite Community Waste Projects! Inviting these groups into consultations, planning, and decision-making can result in a better understanding of the local context and needs, as well as make waste management more inclusive, contextually sensitive, and democratic.

3. Be open to change! Community Waste Projects experiment with, and showcase, that waste can be approached very differently. Be inspired, be open to that there are other ways of dealing with and preventing waste!

*"We stand for inclusion and access to technology and tools for all."
(repair and maker hub)*

And a couple of lessons for funders...

1. Soften your demands! Allow Community Waste Projects to report their benefits in other ways than waste tonnage. Not all projects can quantitatively measure what they do, and not all that groups do can be measured. Be open to impacts based on other parameters than waste tonnage!

2. Give core investment! Help projects build their core organisation, to do what they do best. Avoid making demands on expansion, new and taxing projects, or complicated application and reporting processes.



Norfolk County Council

This report is based on a 3-year PhD project undertaken by Sara Skarp, co-funded by University of East Anglia and Norfolk County Council. For more information, scan the QR code or head to saraskarp.com/community-waste-movement. Written and designed by Sara Skarp and Gill Seyfang. Photos and illustrations by Sara Skarp. Printed on recycled paper. 2023.

