



**KEEP
BRITAIN
TIDY.**

**Shifting the Public's Focus from
Recycling to Waste Prevention:
How do we move people up the
waste hierarchy?**



About us



Keep Britain Tidy is an environmental charity that aims to eradicate litter and reduce waste, improve the quality of local places and help people live more sustainably.

Project team and here today:



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Research report and behaviour change intervention



SHIFTING THE PUBLIC'S FOCUS FROM RECYCLING TO WASTE PREVENTION

HOW DO WE MOVE PEOPLE UP THE WASTE HIERARCHY?

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY
PEOPLE'S POSTCODE LOTTERY
POSTCODE EARTH TRUST

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

SAVE YOUR PENNIES. PROTECT YOUR PLANET

The report, the research that underpins it and the Buy Nothing New Month campaign have been made possible thanks to an award from Postcode Earth Trust, a grant-giving Trust funded entirely by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

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Our key message



Please watch the short video available at <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/recycling-waste-prevention>

You can also download the report from this page.



Unsustainable consumption patterns mean we're in a climate and nature emergency



Consumption patterns are not balanced with the natural world's capacity to regenerate and absorb our waste. If everyone on Earth lived like people in the UK, we would need 2.6 planets. We need systemic change to move to circular economy and individual behaviour change.



The waste hierarchy as it relates to consumer decision-making



Consumers can reduce the environmental impact of what they purchase, use and dispose of by following the waste hierarchy or 'the 3Rs'.

For the purposes of this work we regard reduce and reuse as waste prevention and recognise this reduces consumption.



Basis of our research

Observations:

1. Policy has prioritised recycling over waste prevention.
2. Recycling hit 'established norm' status when almost nine in ten people (87%) reported they regularly recycle (WRAP Recycling Tracker 2020). No systematic tracking of the range of waste prevention behaviours, but engagement appears to lag behind.
3. People typically default to recycling and appear to lack understanding of what waste prevention actually means.

We wanted to explore this further to better understand how to move people up the waste hierarchy from recycling to waste prevention.

Given lack of time and resources to focus on each single waste prevention behaviour in isolation (status quo), are there any unifying motivators that can be leveraged to initiate behaviour change across a number of behaviours, particularly concern about the climate emergency?



Qualitative and quantitative research programme



1. 20 half-day ethnographies in homes with people from a range of backgrounds/household types across England.
2. Two focus groups with 16 different people from a range of backgrounds/household types in Liverpool.
3. Nationally representative survey of over 6,000 UK adults.

This allowed us to explore themes in detail and then examine their prevalence.



What did we find?



Most people engage in some waste prevention behaviours, but not necessarily extensively



Nine in ten (91%) people had engaged in at least one waste prevention behaviour in the past 12 months.

Engagement in individual waste prevention behaviours ranks lower, with a great deal of variation between behaviours, demonstrating the engagement is not necessarily extensive across the wide range of waste prevention behaviours.

Reduce behaviours are generally practiced more than reuse behaviours but none sit at 'established norm' levels.

With respect to purchase avoidance, 60% of people reported to have regularly *made do with what I had instead of buying something new*, and half of people have regularly *avoided buying an item they wanted but didn't need*.

With respect to repair, less than a quarter of people (22%) have regularly *repaired an electrical item or device*. Less than one in five people (19%) have regularly *borrowed or shared an item with someone else*.

Where a person does engage in a waste prevention behaviour, they typically tend to do it relatively consistently.



Most people associate waste more with what they throw away than what they buy



‘Waste’ means different things to different people:

- Most people associated waste more with what they threw away than with what they bought. Many see waste as items that were disposed of poorly (e.g. destined for landfill) or underutilised.
- Some people did not view things as waste if the item had already been ‘well used’ or ‘had a good life’.
- Some people viewed waste as something that they acquired but didn’t want or need. For many, this was about excess packaging.
- Only a few people viewed buying something they wanted but didn’t feel they needed as being wasteful.
- The resources ‘wasted’ in the production of items were rarely considered.



Most people associate waste more with what they throw away than what they buy



What does waste mean to you?

- Throwing stuff out that could still be used – cited by 70% of people
- Items with too much packaging – 69%
- Stuff you throw away in the bin (not in the recycling) – 64%

Compared to:

- Buying more stuff than I really 'need' – 51%
- Acquiring stuff I didn't want or only thought I wanted – 41%



“

**WE'VE GOT THE STUFF NOW.
IF I GOT RID OF IT I'D BE
CREATING WASTE.**



People think of ‘wasting better’ rather than ‘wasting less’



Waste is thought of as something to be ‘managed’ rather than prevented – ‘wasting better’ rather than ‘wasting less’:

- Most people focused on recycling as their main contribution to ‘waste prevention’.
- They tended to see recycling as ‘doing enough’ in relation to waste.
- People associated the act of recycling with being virtuous or responsible.
- This did not necessarily encourage people to practice waste prevention behaviours.
- If something is recyclable people often consider it as ‘neutral’ when it comes to producing waste.



WHEN I THINK ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE, I WAS THINKING ‘AT LEAST WE’RE RECYCLING’.



People think of ‘wasting better’ rather than ‘wasting less’



Ways of ‘wasting better’ that are counter-productive for actual waste prevention:

- Justification for buying more stuff:
 - 31% of people agreed *that as long as an item or its packaging is recyclable, I don't feel bad about buying it.*
 - 27% of people agree that *to justify buying something new, I will get rid of something old.*
- People holding on to an item they didn't want or need in order not to ‘create waste’ by throwing it away, while still purchasing a replacement.

“

IF I COULDN'T RECYCLE CARDBOARD, FOR EXAMPLE, I WOULD FEEL A LOT GUILTIER ABOUT IT. IT MIGHT ACTUALLY AFFECT WHETHER OR NOT I BOUGHT SOMETHING FROM AMAZON.

“

EVERY TIME I BUY SOMETHING, I WILL SWAP SOMETHING OUT SO THAT MY WARDROBE IS NEVER TOO FULL.

“

WE'VE GOT AN OLD SKY BOX ... I DIDN'T WANT TO THROW IT OUT BECAUSE SURELY SOMEONE COULD USE THAT.



People think of 'wasting better' rather than 'wasting less'



What does waste mean to you?

- Stuff you throw away in the bin (not in the recycling) – cited by 64% of people
- Stuff you throw away in the recycling – 25%

85% of people view recycling at home as a way of helping to prevent waste.

This confirms a fundamental misunderstanding of the waste hierarchy which tells us that recycling is only the third best option when looking to reduce the impact of what we purchase, use and dispose of.



People are focused on the environmental impact of throwing things away rather than having the things in the first place



Association with negative environmental impact:

- Putting things in the bin (not recycling) – 83% of people agreed
- Buying the things I want and need – 49%

68% of people agree that *recycling is the best thing I can do to reduce the environmental impact of the things I buy.*



Conceptualising the barriers to waste prevention behaviours using the COM-B model

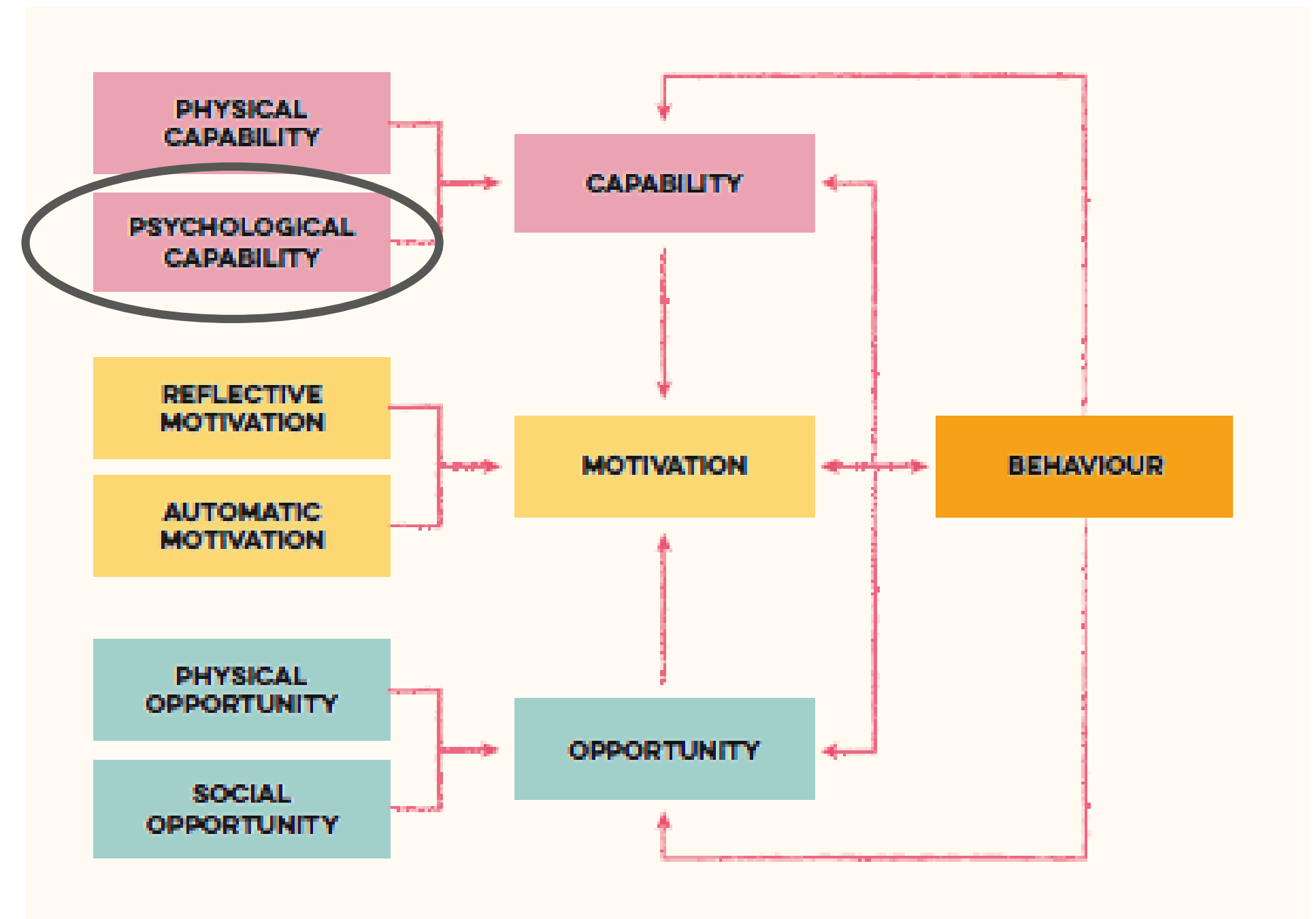


In order to carry out a behaviour an individual must have the capability to do it, the motivation to do it, and external factors must provide the individual with the opportunity to do it.

A change in behaviour is facilitated by modifying at least one of the components.

Lack of knowledge, particularly misunderstanding of the waste hierarchy, is a significant, but overlooked barrier to waste prevention behaviours.

Barriers around opportunity and physical capability (e.g. skills) remain important to tackle but increasing understanding of waste prevention and its climate relevance should be a key element of any behaviour change strategy.



How do we move people up the waste hierarchy?

Our recommendations



Focusing on what behaviour change practitioners can do



Create and communicate easy to use physical opportunities to help people prevent waste



- Only four in ten people (41%) feel they have access to products and services that can help them prevent waste.



Use the waste hierarchy to explain what waste prevention is



- The waste hierarchy is easily understood and grasped quickly when properly explained.
- After being exposed to the waste hierarchy, 55% of people agreed that they now have a better understanding of how waste should be dealt with to minimise its impact on the environment.
- Develop a consumer-focused, and user-tested version of the waste hierarchy for maximum impact.

“

I DO TRY AND RECYCLE A LOT AT HOME. THEN, YOU LOOK AT SOMETHING LIKE THAT [THE WASTE HIERARCHY] AND YOU THINK, YOU KNOW, YOU CAN DO A LOT MORE. LIKE, THAT MAKES ME THINK I CAN DO AN AWFUL LOT MORE.



Shift the narrative from what we throw away to what we buy



- The waste hierarchy may also offer opportunities on this front.
- Explore how communications can best do this.
- Keep Britain Tidy is starting with Buy Nothing New Month.

“

I THINK IT'S QUITE CONTRADICTIONARY AS WELL BECAUSE I THINK WE'RE ENCOURAGED TO RECYCLE, AREN'T WE? BUT SIMULTANEOUSLY, WE'RE LIVING IN A SOCIETY WHERE WE'RE BEING TOLD CONSUME, CONSUME, CONSUME. SO, IT'S LIKE ... WHO REALLY WANTS US TO DO WHAT?

“

[WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT] IT'S NOT PREVENT ... IT'S NOT REDUCING, IT'S ... IF WE'RE RECYCLING IT, IT'S FINE TO CONSUME IT.



Make the link between climate concern and how waste prevention behaviours make a difference



- Climate concern is evident but people don't link their personal consumption to climate change. Explicitly highlight this link.
- Make the climate emergency feel more personal and relevant.
- While this thread is pursued, tap into the wider set of motivations that can cross over:
 - Saving money
 - Thriftiness and pride in wasting less
 - Protecting the environment
 - Desire to minimise clutter
 - Pro-social goals



Celebrate people's waste prevention strategies



- People often take great pride in their waste prevention strategies, by:
 - Giving something away to someone who really appreciated it
 - Being resourceful
 - Finding a creative outlet in reusing materials
- Showcase these strategies and develop a culture of talking about these successes.



Focus on thrifty people



- Look to target individuals who are already motivated to prevent waste in some areas of life, but often apply this attitude inconsistently.



Final thoughts on the research

We all need to recognise that:

- The prioritisation of recycling over waste prevention in policy is reflected in a fundamental misunderstanding of the waste hierarchy among the majority of the public, including the notion of ‘wasting better’ rather than ‘wasting less’.
- The vast majority of waste prevention behaviours cannot be regarded as being ‘established norms’ like recycling.
- We need action to engrain waste prevention in people’s minds as the best thing they can do to reduce the environmental impact of the things they buy.
- Any attempt to move people up the waste hierarchy through communications is an attempt to counteract the marketing messages that people are increasingly exposed to, continually pushing them to buy more stuff.
- We need to work together to educate and motivate people to move beyond recycling and make choices that reduce the environmental impact of what they purchase in the first place. We invite other organisations to collaborate with us, debate and share evidence to take this agenda forward.



#BuyNothingNewMonth



**#BUY
NOTHING
NEW
MONTH**

**SAVE YOUR PENNIES,
PROTECT YOUR PLANET**

A month long digital campaign in January 2023 encouraging people to rethink what they want versus what they need, reconsider if they can repair versus replace and think about whether they can rent, borrow or buy second-hand rather than buy new. While giving away unwanted stuff and recycling are both great, but we need to do more and buy less.

Underpinned by the research:

- Pulling on motivations to save money and protect the environment, but also to save space/clutter
- Trying to shift the narrative from what we throw away to what we buy and strengthen the link people make between what they buy and their environmental impact, particularly in relation to climate
- Celebrating the pride that can go along with buying nothing new and encouraging a culture of talking about this



Each week has a different theme



**#BUY
NOTHING
NEW
MONTH**



WEEK 1:
RESIST AND REORGANISE

**#BUY
NOTHING
NEW
MONTH**



WEEK 2:
RETHINK AND REUSE

**#BUY
NOTHING
NEW
MONTH**



WEEK 3:
REHOME

**#BUY
NOTHING
NEW
MONTH**



WEEK 4:
REPAIR, RENT
AND BORROW



keepbritaintidy

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

ADOPT THE 48 HOUR RULE

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY.

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stylemesunday Paid partnership with keepbritaintidy

I am getting involved with buy n

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

FEEL OVERWHELMED?

WE ARE SUPPORTING WE ARE SUPPORTING WE ARE SUPPORTING

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

WE ARE SUPPORTING WE ARE SUPPORTING WE ARE SUPPORTING

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

I'M TAKING PART I'M TAKING PART I'M TAKING PART

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY.

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#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

REDUCE

REUSE

RECYCLE

THROW AWAY

MOST PREFERRED

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY.

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY.

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30 December 2022

#BUY NOTHING NEW MONTH

GET INSPIRED BY:

LESS WASTE LAURA

GEMMA STYLES

EMMA SLÅDE EDMONDSON

NANCY BIRTWHISTLE

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY.

gemmastyles

AD

Happy new year friends!

Hope you're entering 2023 in good spirits — if you'd like to join me in starting the year off right then letttt me tell you about @keepbritaintidy's January campaign:

#BUYNOTHINGNEWMONTH

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY.

LEARN MORE

WIN-WIN FOR YOUR WALLET AND PLANET

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY.

Liked by inaaya_ijaz and 80 others

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lesswastelaura

KEEPBRITAIN TIDY

Who's up for trying to buy nothing new next month?

#BuyNothingNewMonth

Support the campaign



JOIN US

Sign up at

<https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/buy-nothing-new-month>

Resources for organisations are also available here

Join in on socials #BuyNothingNewMonth

We will share monitoring and evaluation of the campaign later in 2023.



Time for comments and questions



Talk to us after the webinar via
network.enquiries@keepbritaintidy.org



Questions and answers

How much prompting around the waste prevention behaviours did you do or did you let them explain what they did?

The ethnographic element of the qualitative research was carefully developed so that researchers could explore what the participants purchase, use and dispose of without the participants being initially aware that the project was about waste prevention.

The survey asked questions split across three surveys to minimise response bias but all results are representative of the UK adult population.

Did you do any work to categorise consumption categories? Do people think differently about the different types of things they consume / waste they produce: i.e. food, essentials, cosmetics, electricals, clothes (from school uniforms and fast fashion to higher end items)?

We took a broad view of behaviours across food, plastics, clothing, electrical/electronic equipment, and furniture.



Questions and answers

Did you do any focus group testing messages explicitly telling people that recycling is failure to see what their reaction is?

We presented and explained the waste hierarchy in a short and neutral way. We didn't paint recycling as failure. People's surprise at the relative impact of recycling needs to be handled sensitively so as not to demotivate them from recycling. We want to explore how best to do this, and how best to use the waste hierarchy as a communications tool through further research.

Did you test the term Circular Economy with people?

This was touched on lightly. We wanted to focus on the resonance of the climate emergency primarily.



Questions and answers



On the ‘thrifty’ behaviour types, were there key themes they didn’t apply this behaviour to, and why they didn't?

Thrifty people might go to further lengths to avoid waste but opportunities for doing it across all areas of their life are often not on their radar. We can’t generalise further than that from the qualitative sample.

**Did you have many 18-30 year olds in your sample for the research (both the ethnography and focus groups)?
And, if so, were there any differences in their responses?**

On the thrifty behaviour, was it noticeable what the age group was mainly?

Both the ethnography and focus groups included younger people but we can’t generalise from those samples. Some differences in responses by age were evident in the survey. These are not included in the report as it is already very detailed.



Questions and answers



Funding recycling behaviour campaigns has always been difficult, never more so than now, is there sufficient evidence that a waste prevention campaign would be 'viable' for a local authority?

We recognise the challenges that local authorities face regarding funding of behaviour change campaigns. Local authorities are people's most prominent source of information about recycling so have an important role in communications that seek to move people beyond recycling. That needs to be properly financed. We believe that there is a lot more to explore in terms of communicating waste prevention as more of a single concept. Knowing how to do this more effectively, through for example use of the waste hierarchy, would likely move waste prevention campaigns forward in terms of their 'viability'.



Questions and answers

We received a number of questions/comments about the value getting other organisations on board to support Buy Nothing New Month before it went live, allowing promotion through their channels.

We did reach out to local authorities and other organisations prior to the campaign launch. If you don't already receive local authority news from Keep Britain Tidy then please sign up at <https://confirmsubscription.com/h/i/9E3B4F5A52EAE315> to be kept in the loop.

Many local authorities and other organisations are actively promoting the campaign through their channels by accessing the resources available at <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/buy-nothing-new-month>

We hope there will be a second year of the campaign with a much longer development period allowing us to enlist the support of more local authorities and other organisations working in this space.

Could we promote a version of the 'Buy Nothing New Month', another month for our own organisation?

The resources will remain on our website for people to use as they wish.



Questions and answers

Are you thinking about doing public engagement in the lead up to Christmas? Almost half of people feel guilty about Christmas waste, so it could be an opportunity to give people 'permission/tools' to waste less and push back against more wasteful traditions. Black Friday could also be a good time to talk about this as it's such conspicuous consumption.

We hope there will be a second year of the campaign and the timing of that would be subject to further discussion. We agree coinciding with Black Friday/Christmas would be timely.

Is there a 'local' equivalent of this [great] campaign being run in Wales, via Keep Wales Tidy?

Buy Nothing New Month is a national campaign run by Keep Britain Tidy.

From a comms perspective, what's been the most successful element of this series and how do you measure success?

As one measure we have currently reached over 1.1M people through social media. Full monitoring and evaluation of the campaign will take place and this will inform the second year of the campaign.

