



# Waste Prevention Tracker Survey Report 2024

Tracking the public's attitudes and behaviours around waste prevention

October 2024

# About us

**Keep Britain Tidy is an independent environmental charity that aims to reduce resource use, waste and litter, improve the quality of public spaces, and help people live more sustainably. While best known for our work around litter, we have a 35-year history of campaigning for structural changes that support waste prevention and recycling.**

Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed the development of a waste management system in the UK that has prioritised recycling over waste prevention. We have observed that people default to recycling rather than waste prevention and appear to lack understanding of what waste prevention actually means. Through our work we aim to support a shift towards a more widespread adoption of reducing and reusing behaviours in the UK.



# Our previous work

## From Recycling to Waste Prevention (2023)

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

- Most people engage in some waste prevention behaviours but not necessarily extensively.
- Most people associate waste more with what they throw away than with what they buy.
- Most people think of 'wasting better' rather than 'wasting less'.
- There is a fundamental misunderstanding of the waste hierarchy, where waste is seen as something to be 'managed' rather than prevented.
- This lack of knowledge is a significant barrier to the uptake of waste prevention behaviours, which needs to be addressed.



## #BuyNothingNewMonth

Keep Britain Tidy's annual behaviour change campaign, Buy Nothing New Month, encourages participants to move beyond simply recycling, to reduce the amount of new stuff that they buy, and by extension, the amount of waste that they create. The campaign champions cherishing the things we already have, repairing things rather than sending them to landfill, and finding new homes for the things we no longer need. In 2023, it was awarded 'Campaign of the Year – Over £10k' at the National Recycling Awards.

**#BUY  
NOTHING  
NEW  
MONTH**

## Improving Public Understanding of Waste Prevention (2024)

In **A Guide to Improving Public Understanding of Waste Prevention**, we explored how to communicate with people effectively to help move them up the waste hierarchy. We suggest that designing better, insight-led communications, which increase understanding of waste prevention, is an essential part of encouraging the uptake of these behaviours. Based on this research and further public testing, we reimagined the waste hierarchy in a way that increases public understanding and inspires action.



# Contents

<b>1. Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. Results</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1 Where is the public at with waste prevention?	8
4.2 Who's preventing waste – and who's not?	11
4.3 Is waste prevention an everyday habit?	14
4.4 What's stopping us from normalising waste prevention?	15
4.5 Perceptions of too much stuff	18
4.6 The public still lack understanding of waste prevention... but want to address waste	19
<b>5. Moving people up the waste hierarchy: recommendations</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>23</b>



# Executive Summary

The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey, conducted by Keep Britain Tidy, seeks to provide a thorough understanding of public engagement in waste prevention behaviours, motivations and barriers, as well as attitudes towards reducing waste and consumption in the UK. Conducted online by YouGov in February 2024, with a representative sample of the UK public, the Survey offers a valuable comparison to Keep Britain Tidy's 2022 baseline study *Shifting the Public's Focus from Recycling to Waste Prevention: How do we move people up the waste hierarchy?*, revealing shifts in public engagement over a 15-month period. The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey also aims to identify if any waste prevention behaviours can be classified as an “established norm” comparable with recycling, as defined by the Waste and Resources Action Programme.

We found that adults in the UK engage in a wide range of waste prevention activities. Behaviours related to food waste prevention had the highest engagement and reduce behaviours were more commonly practised than reuse behaviours, a finding consistent with our 2022 research. According to the Tracker's findings, women and adults aged 55+ are more likely to engage in selected waste prevention behaviours than other demographic groups. We were also able to identify waste prevention behaviours that currently have the highest potential for becoming everyday habits such as extending food use-by dates and bulk buying to avoid excessive packaging.

However, we have not seen progress on widespread engagement in waste prevention since the survey was first conducted in 2022 and conclude that none of the investigated waste prevention behaviours have reached the status of an “established norm”. The Survey explored various barriers to widespread waste prevention including lack of awareness, perceived accessibility and costs of waste prevention services as well as an underlying misunderstanding of waste. We uncovered that although most of the UK public engage in some waste prevention behaviours, they do so sporadically and are usually motivated by financial reasons rather than a desire to reduce their impact on the environment. Nevertheless, we found indicators of growing negative sentiments towards consumption among the public, who expressed that they feel overwhelmed by the amount of stuff their own and the constant pressure to acquire new things. This may indicate that, with targeted support and guidance, we will be able to improve the public's understanding of waste prevention and increase engagement in waste prevention behaviours.

By repeating The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey every two years we will identify emerging trends in waste prevention engagement. We predict that by growing the evidence base and monitoring the UK public's attitudes towards waste prevention, we'll be able to develop targeted recommendations for moving people up the waste hierarchy.

# Introduction

In the UK, households are producing almost 30 million tonnes of waste every year<sup>1</sup> and many would agree that globally we are drowning in waste, generating it at a rate we cannot cope with. Much of this is driven by our wholly unsustainable levels of consumption, resulting in the overuse of our planet's natural resources. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has been conducting an annual survey of UK citizens' recycling attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. It is the largest and most established survey of its kind, having been undertaken by WRAP since 2004. WRAP first referred to recycling as an 'established norm' in 2020 when the Recycling Tracker reported that almost nine in ten people (87%) were recycling regularly<sup>2</sup>. However, we must recognise that treating the already created waste is not enough. We need to act earlier. The emphasis on the importance of waste prevention and reduced consumption has grown in recent years and the need for more accurate data regarding the public's attitudes towards and engagement in waste prevention has become apparent. Before now, there has been no regular survey of the UK public's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour with respect to the multitude of different waste prevention behaviours. The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey, created by Keep Britain Tidy, is the first nationally representative survey

of its kind that sets out to monitor these issues. With it, we aim to track the public's attitudes, awareness, and behaviours in relation to waste prevention and consumption. With a tracker survey conducted every two years, we will monitor how these factors are changing over time and identify what more needs to be done to promote and diversify the range of waste prevention activities undertaken by the public.

In tracking attitudes and behaviours, we also aim to verify whether any waste prevention behaviours could be identified as established norms comparable with recycling. We encourage others in the sector to join us in utilising the data and insights gathered from this survey to inform the direction of future work, develop targeted interventions and campaigns to promote waste prevention among the UK public, and track the impacts of our work and programmes over time. Ultimately, we hope to see consistent patterns of increased engagement in waste prevention, and reduced consumption, among the UK public over the coming years which will lead to a reduction of resource use and our collective contribution to the climate and nature emergency.

This report summarises key results and insights from the 2024 Waste Prevention Tracker Survey.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-waste-data/uk-statistics-on-waste>

<sup>2</sup> WRAP "Recycling Tracker Report 2020: Behaviours, attitudes and awareness around recycling"



# Methodology

The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey, developed by Keep Britain Tidy, aims to identify:

- The public's engagement in waste prevention behaviours.
- Their motivations and barriers for participation.
- Public attitudes towards reducing waste and consumption.
- Public awareness of waste prevention services and tools.
- Track changes in attitudes and engagement in waste prevention over time.

The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey was conducted via YouGov's online Omnibus service, with a total sample of 2,070 adults aged 18+. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th and 9th of February 2024 and results are representative of the UK adult population.

The survey comprised of 17 questions, many of which are consistent with those asked in Keep Britain Tidy's 2022 'Shifting the Public's Focus from Recycling to Waste Prevention'<sup>3</sup> research. The 2022 data is a first-year baseline of where the UK public are at with waste prevention, allowing direct comparisons to be made to the Waste Prevention Tracker results 15 months on. Repeating The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey in the coming years will expand the evidence base and allow us to monitor changes and identify trends in waste prevention engagement in the UK.



<sup>3</sup> Keep Britain Tidy 'Shifting the Public's Focus from Recycling to Waste Prevention' 2023  
<https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/recycling-waste-prevention>



## 4.1 Where is the public at with waste prevention?

To identify the prevalence of waste prevention behaviours among the UK public, research participants were presented with a list of waste prevention activities and asked which, if any, they do regularly. For means of comparison, this included measuring engagement in kerbside recycling services.

Results show that while using recycling services at home is the most engaged in behaviour of those measured, less than 6 out of 10 people (58%) say they regularly do this. This is lower than many previous estimates of national engagement in recycling (90%)<sup>4</sup>, which may in part be due to previous research asking participants about the extent of their household recycling (i.e. whether they recycle everything, most things, or only key items), as well as only involving UK adults who are responsible for dealing with rubbish and recycling at home<sup>5</sup>, rather than a nationally representative sample of all UK adults, as used here.

The 2024 Waste Prevention Tracker Survey uncovered that there is a great deal of variation in engagement between various waste prevention behaviours, a finding which has remained unchanged since 2022. In both data sets, reduce behaviours are shown to be more commonly practiced than reuse behaviours. Following recycling, behaviours related to preventing food

waste were observed to have the next highest engagement, with 53% of the population checking their cupboards/ fridges before shopping and extending food use-by dates through responsible storing (48%). In contrast, renting clothing (2%), hiring tools (4%), and using refill shops or services (7%) were the least commonly engaged in behaviours. However, despite being the behaviour with the lowest regular engagement, renting clothes is the only monitored behaviour to have increased in engagement since 2022; from 0% to 2% in 2024. This may be due to an increased awareness of clothing rental platforms and growing popularity of rental services supported by mainstream media. Overall, we have not seen an increase in the proportions of people regularly engaging in waste prevention behaviours in the 15 months between the surveys. Rather, the UK public appear to be engaging less in a number of reducing and reusing behaviours.



<sup>4</sup> WRAP "Recycling Tracker Survey in the UK – Spring 2023"

<sup>5</sup> WRAP "Recycling Tracker Report 2020: Behaviours, attitudes and awareness around recycling"

When it comes to donating or giving items away regularly, engagement in this dropped from 52 percentage points to 43 percentage points, since 2022, which represents a 17% reduction in engagement. Regularly borrowing or sharing an item with a friend/neighbour instead of buying it new also decreased from 19% in 2022 to 14% in 2024, a 26% drop after 15 months. Regular participation in buying loose items to avoid packaging saw a 24% drop, from 38% in 2022 to 29% in 2024. Moreover, fewer UK adults are saying they regularly choose reusable alternatives for single-use products, with 34% indicating that in 2022 and only 29% in 2024, a 15% reduction in engagement.

However, it is important to note that where we see lower engagement in waste prevention behaviours, this does not necessarily indicate a reduction in the public's concern surrounding waste or their willingness or motivation to reduce waste. This may instead point to the emergence of new barriers that are hindering action and delaying progress, such as the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK's cost of living crisis.

These results indicate that we need to further explore how to best support the public's efforts to overcome such barriers, so that they have the tools and infrastructure available to continue in their efforts to reduce waste and consumption.

Results from the Tracker also indicate that almost 30% of the UK public attempt to prevent waste by choosing reusable products over single-use ones, buying better quality items that they believe will last longer, and by purchasing unpackaged/loose items to avoid unnecessary packaging (all 29%). One in three adults regularly buy items second-hand and one in five opt to repair their electrical devices instead of buying brand new products.

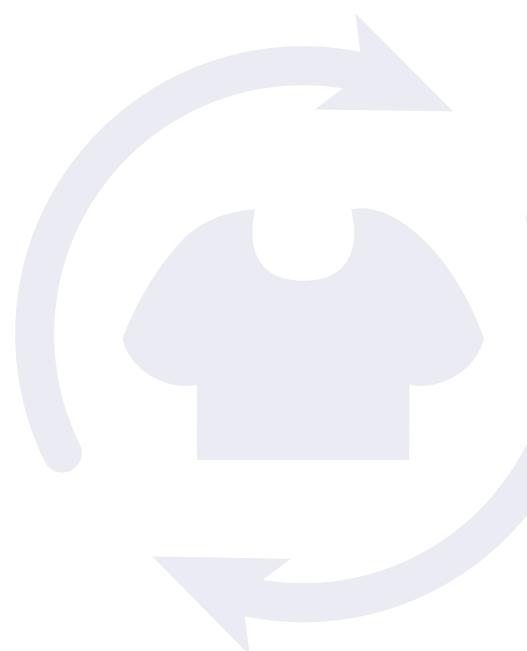
While many of these results are promising, showing significant proportions of the population reducing, reusing and repairing, we would suggest that as of February 2024 none of the waste prevention behaviours tracked are yet at the level of an established social norm, as defined by WRAP. Full results are presented in Figure 1.



Fig.1 Proportion of UK adults who regularly engage in waste prevention behaviours.



Base: 2,070



## 4.2 Who's preventing waste – and who's not?

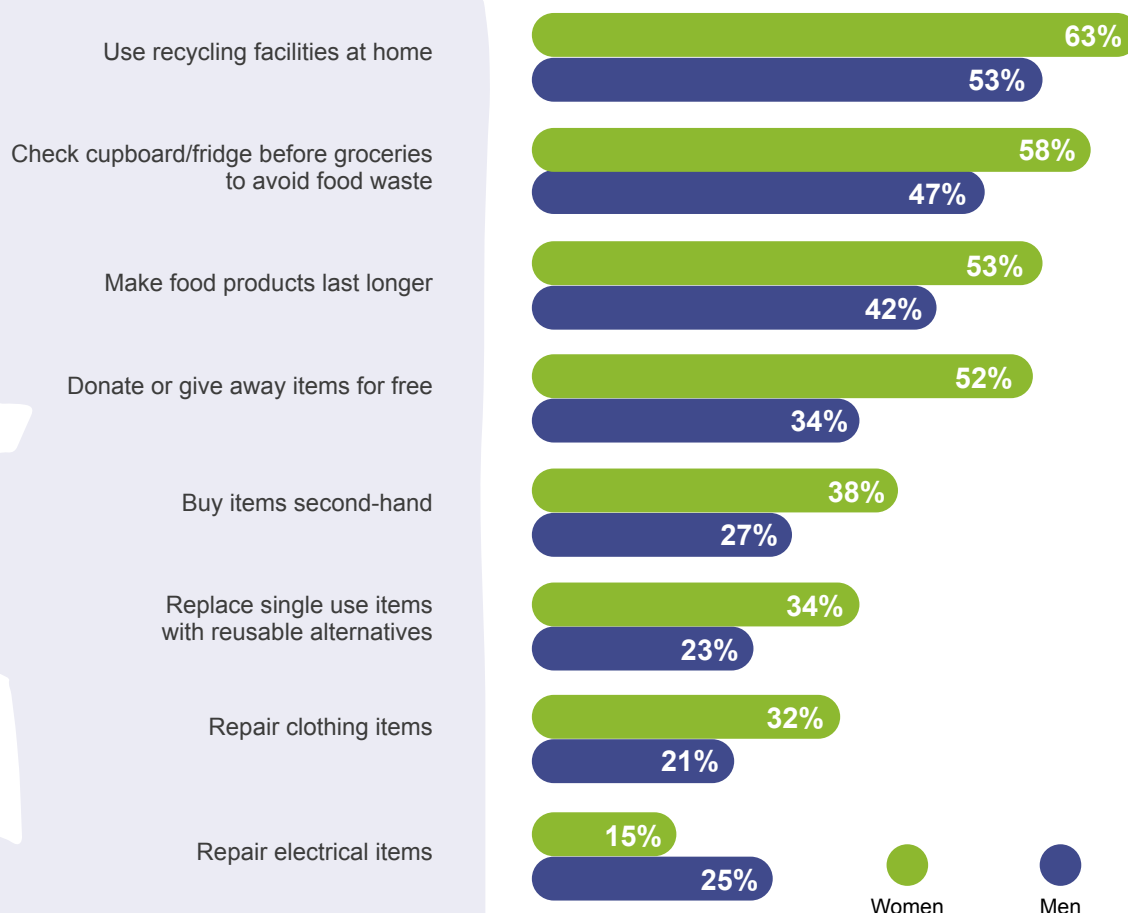
Results from the 2024 Waste Prevention Tracker Survey indicate that some demographic groups are more likely to be engaging in waste and consumption reducing behaviours than others. For means of comparison, we also included measuring engagement in kerbside recycling services, even though using recycling facilities is not a behaviour that *prevents* waste.

### Do men and women prevent waste differently?

Overall, women are significantly<sup>6</sup> more likely to use recycling facilities at home and engage in a number of waste prevention behaviours than men.

Women are more likely to regularly mend clothing, donate, give away or sell items they no longer need, buy second-hand, prevent food waste, purchase reusable alternatives to single-use products, buy unpackaged/loose items, repurpose already owned items, borrow or share items with someone, and to discourage themselves from making purchases. The only waste-reducing activity that men are significantly more likely to engage in than women is repairing electrical items. These results indicate that the responsibility for household waste prevention, from purchasing to disposal decisions, appears to lie most predominantly on women. These results are shown in figure 2.

**Fig. 2 Proportion of UK women and men who regularly engage in selected waste prevention behaviours.**



Bases: Women = 1,066 / Men = 1,004

<sup>6</sup>Statistically significant data as defined by YouGov at the p=0.05 level

Motivations for engaging in these behaviours also vary. While men and women are almost equally likely to consider the environmental impacts of the items they purchase being transported across the globe (48% of women, 46% of men), women are more concerned about the impact of the items being produced in the first place (53% compared with 49% of men), as well as the impacts of them being disposed of (61% compared with 56% of men). Most noticeably, 67% of women are concerned about the impact of the packaging their purchases come in, compared to just 57% of men.



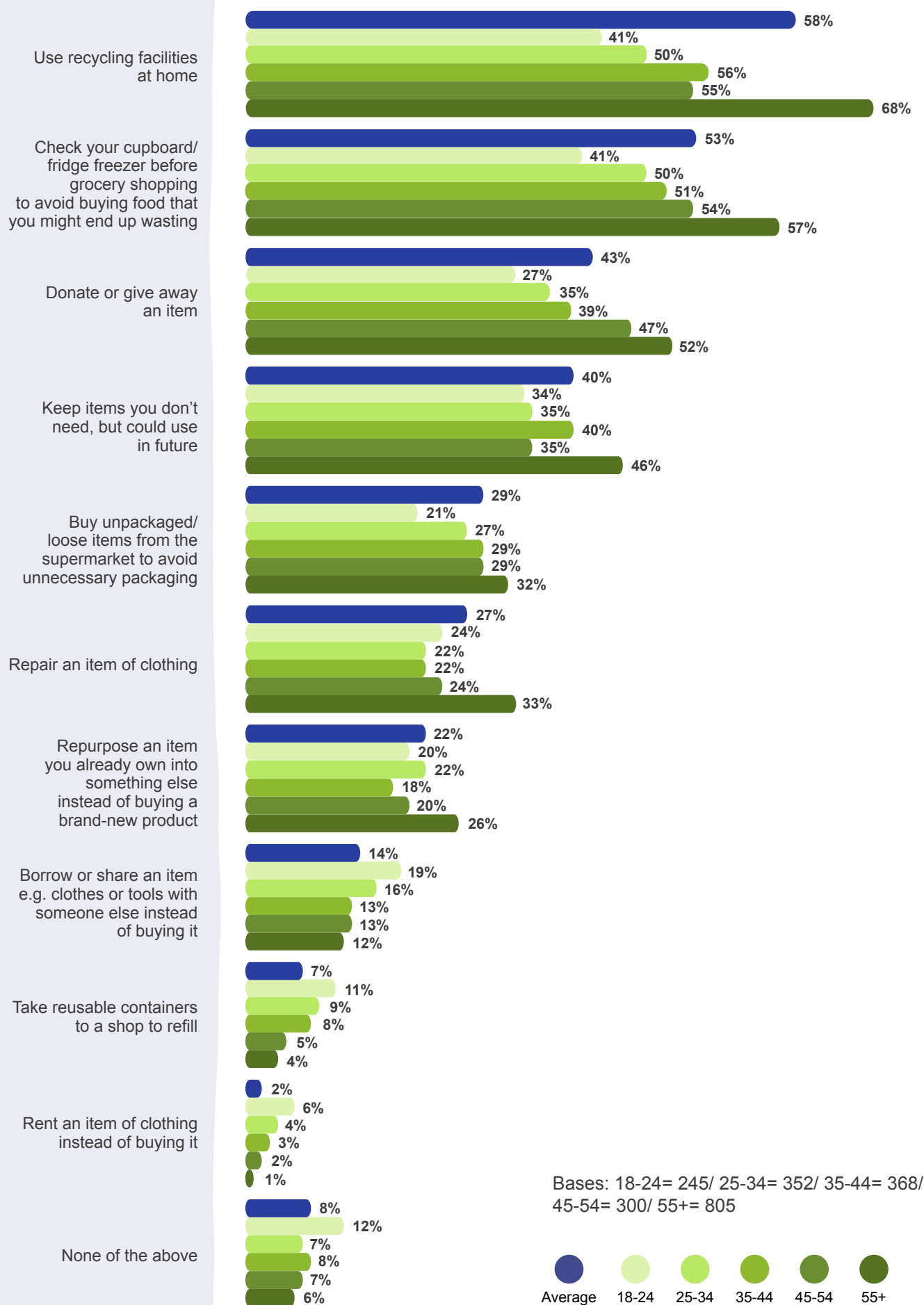
## Does engagement differ across age groups?

Age can be a valuable indicator of engagement in certain waste prevention behaviours, with the biggest differences observed between the youngest (18-24s) and the oldest (55s and over) surveyed groups.

Results indicate that young adults aged between 18 and 24 are the least likely to regularly use recycling facilities at home (41%), while those aged 55+ were the most likely (68%). Similarly, those aged 18-24 are the least likely to regularly donate items (27%), while individuals in the 55+ age group were the most likely (52%). Moreover, people over 55 were also the most likely to regularly repair clothing, repurpose owned items into something else, keep items that they don't need but might in the future, buy unpackaged or loose items to avoid packaging, and check their cupboards or fridge before grocery shopping to avoid waste.

However, out of all age groups, young adults (18-24) were the most likely to regularly rent clothing (6%), take reusable containers to refill in shops (11%), and borrow or share an item with someone else (19%). Those in the 55+ age group were the least likely to engage in these behaviours with only 1%, 4% and 12% participating respectively. Overall, young adults (age 18-24) were twice as likely not to engage in any of the listed waste prevention behaviours as those aged 55+ (12% compared with 6%).

**Fig. 3 Engagement in waste prevention behaviours across age groups**





It is important to note that these results do not necessarily indicate that younger people are less willing to participate in waste prevention. This may instead point to the presence of barriers or a lack of opportunity to prevent waste that are specific to or more prevalent in this age group, such as financial or living situations (e.g. lower incomes, living with parents).

### 4.3 Is waste prevention an everyday habit?

In 2022, we found that nine in ten (91%) people had engaged in at least one waste prevention behaviour in the past 12 months, increasing marginally to 94% in 2024. This reinforces the finding that most adults engage in some kind of waste

prevention, but they don't necessarily do so consistently. If we aspire for waste prevention to become as prevalent as recycling, we must encourage the public to engage in it routinely and habitually, as often as possible. As part of The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey, we explored the extent to which UK adults may be engaging in waste prevention behaviours but doing so infrequently rather than routinely. Here we compared the proportions of people engaging in the behaviours just once in the past 12 months, versus the proportions participating in them regularly (Figure 4).

**Fig. 4. Proportion of UK adults who engaged in waste prevention behaviours at least once in the past 12 months versus those who engaged in waste prevention behaviours regularly/as much as possible.**





This comparison highlights how certain approaches to reducing, reusing and repair are more likely to become embedded within regular routines than others. Behaviours with the smallest difference between occasional and regular engagement may have more potential to become a waste prevention habit. Results indicate that these are most likely to be behaviours linked with preventing food waste as well as everyday shopping habits. The Waste Prevention Tracker Survey uncovered that out of the people who have checked their cupboards/fridge before grocery shopping to prevent food waste in the past 12 months, 2 in 3 (66%) do it regularly or as much as possible. Similarly, of the adults who bought items in large quantities to avoid unnecessary packaging in the past year, 62% do so regularly.

Conversely, those behaviours with a larger difference between regular and infrequent engagement highlight the waste prevention approaches which are, at present, less habitual and engaged in more sporadically. These behaviours include using clothing rentals, borrowing or hiring tools/equipment and borrowing or sharing an item with someone instead of buying a new product. Of the participants who indicated they rented an item of clothing in the past 12 months, only 21% say they do it as frequently as possible.

As for equipment rentals, of the people who have borrowed or hired equipment/tools from a rental service at least once in the past 12 months, 28% are doing it regularly or as much as possible. Similarly, for borrowing or sharing an item with a friend or neighbour, 36% of people who've done it once also do so frequently. The need to engage in these behaviours is more occasional or sporadic in nature than, for instance, grocery shopping which may explain why people engage in them infrequently and only when the need arises. As such, these behaviours may currently have less potential to become a habitual behaviour.

In thinking about how we normalise waste prevention and embed reducing, reusing and repair into the everyday, these results indicate that some options for waste prevention require more work and attention than others.

#### 4.4 What's stopping us from normalising waste prevention?

As part of the research, we further explored the reasons why the UK public are not consistently engaging in waste prevention and the key barriers inhibiting waste prevention from becoming a norm.



## Availability of services

Results indicate that current perceived availability of waste prevention services is low. Nearly half of the population (49%) agree that there are enough resources to repair items of clothing or electrical devices. Only 31% say the same about opportunities to refill reusable containers in shops; this figure has not changed since 2022. Perceived availability of rental services for clothing is lower still, with only 1 in 5 (20%) viewing these services to be sufficient.

These results suggest that either the services are not in place, they exist but people are not aware of them or, alternatively, people are aware of these services but find them inaccessible for any number of reasons. Figure 5 outlines these results, comparing them with the proportions of UK adults who are regularly using those services, which is consistently and significantly lower than the proportions of people who are aware of them. This suggests that increasing awareness of reuse and repair services is not, at present, translating to an increase in engagement, and that other barriers are at play.

**Fig.5 Perceived availability of selected waste prevention services versus proportion of UK adults who regularly use those resources.**

People who agree there are sufficient resources to mend or repair broken items e.g. clothes and electronic devices

49%

People who regularly repair clothing

27%

People who regularly repair electrical items

20%

People who agree there are sufficient resources to rent tools/equipment

37%

People who regularly rent tools/equipment

4%

People who agree there are sufficient resources to rent items of clothing

20%

People who regularly rent items of clothing

2%

Base = 2,070

## Barriers to using waste prevention services

Thinking about waste prevention overall, a quarter of people (26%) say they don't know how to access products and services that can help them reduce waste. Almost half (45%) agreed that opting for products and services that aim to reduce waste is too expensive, and 29% view it to be too time consuming. These barriers are likely to be more or less prevalent depending on the product or service but indicate that, on the whole, perceptions around ease, convenience, and accessibility must be addressed. We will continue to track such barriers to identify how successfully changes in the sector are shifting perspectives over time.

**26%**

of people do not know how to access products and services that can help them reduce waste.

**45%**

of people agree that choosing services and products that reduce waste is too expensive.

**29%**

of people agree that using services and products that reduce waste takes too much time.

## Motivations for preventing waste

In contrast to the commonly held perception that waste prevention products and services are too expensive, saving money is the leading reason for engaging in waste prevention behaviours, especially those related to extending the lifespan of a product i.e. repairing electrical items, mending clothes, buying items second-hand, as well as avoiding impulse-buying. Financial motivations have remained the primary reason for participation in these behaviours since 2022, with 77% of research participants saying they repair electrical items to save money in both 2022 and 2024. Similarly, in 2022 80% of the public indicated that they mend clothing in order to save money, a proportion which has increased to 82% in 2024.

The second most prevalent motivator for repairing or mending is a desire to avoid being wasteful and throw away things that could still be used; 69% of the UK public say this motivates them, compared to 66% in 2022.



Although the public's desire to engage in waste prevention is encouraging, participation motivated by the environment and climate change leaves much to be desired. When asked about motivations for repairing electrical items only 4 in 10 (40%) people indicated that they do it to reduce their impact on the environment, a noticeable reduction from the 5 in 10 (50%) in 2022.

Engagement in repairing clothes and selling no longer wanted items is also primarily motivated by financial reasons, with only 39% of adults saying that they participate in those behaviours to reduce their impact on the environment.

## 4.5 Perceptions of too much stuff

A strong theme from the 2024 Tracker Survey is that negative feelings towards consumption are high and are on the rise, as compared with the 2022 data. Large proportions of the population are overwhelmed by constant advertising and pressure to consume, and by the number of belongings they have. Many are concerned about the consumer society in which we live in and having enough space in their homes to store the things they own. These results suggest that the UK public are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the pressures of consumption and managing waste and may indicate an increased demand for support. A lack of desire or need to prevent waste among the public does not therefore appear to be a significant barrier to increasing uptake of waste prevention behaviours.

**1 in 3** (33%) feel overwhelmed by the amount of stuff they have.

**82%** of people agree that as a society we are constantly being pressured to buy new things. This sentiment has increased from **75%** in 2022.



**30%** admit that they buy too much stuff, an increase from **25%** in 2022.



**57%** are concerned about having space to store everything they own, up from **47%** in 2022.

**69%** are concerned about living in a consumer society, an increase from **6 out of 10 (60%)** in 2022.

## 4.6 The public still lack understanding of waste prevention... but want to address waste

How we understand waste plays an important role in how we look to address it in our daily lives. Results from the 2024 Waste Prevention Tracker Survey show that currently 70% of the UK population still associate waste with rubbish that is thrown in the bin (not recycling) and throwing out items that could still be used, rather than what is produced or consumed in the first place. This perception of waste has not changed since 2022, when 70% of the population indicated they view throwing away items that could still be used as waste and 64% said they see rubbish thrown in the bin (not recycling) as waste. With time, we hope to observe a shift in people's understanding of waste from the physical items and packaging they throw away in the bin to broader, unsustainable use of resources. However, this transition in understanding appears to be a way off. In the 15-month period between available comparable data, the proportion of UK adults who associate waste with overconsumption has decreased. In 2024, only 47% of surveyed adults viewed items not being built to last as waste, compared with 56% in 2022. Similarly, only 26% of people consider items thrown away in the recycling bin to be waste (25%

in 2022). Additionally, 84% of people believe that by recycling they are helping prevent waste, and 68% believe that recycling is the best thing they can do for the environment. These results indicate a misunderstanding of waste prevention among the public, and highlight the work required to improve understanding of the importance of prevention. Keep Britain Tidy's 2024 research A Guide to Improving Public Understanding of Waste Prevention aimed to address this specific issue, providing evidence-based guidance on how to communicate with people effectively about waste prevention to help move them up the waste hierarchy.

**26%** of people view rubbish in the recycling bin as waste.

**84%** of people believe that by recycling at home they are preventing waste.

While the public are showing some concern about the environmental impact of their purchases, it is most likely to be focused on the amount of packaging their purchases come in (78% are concerned by this). Fewer are concerned by the impacts of their purchases on the environment in general (59%).

However, results of the survey also indicate that people are beginning to recognise that there is more that they could be doing. 63% of the public want to do more to reduce the impact their purchases have on the environment, 67% are motivated to reduce the amount of waste they produce, and 6 out of 10 (60%) are confident they can do this. With a majority of the population expressing a desire to reduce the impact of their waste in the environment, an urgent need for guidance and support has become apparent. According to the 2024 Waste Prevention Tracker Survey, only 65% of the UK population feel they are aware of things they can do, other than recycling, to reduce the environmental impact of the things they buy, a considerable decrease from the 76% in 2022. 49% of the population say they would like to receive information and support that would help them with reducing the environmental impact of things they buy.

**6 out of 10 people**

(60%) are confident they can reduce the amount of waste they produce.

**Almost half**

of the UK population (49%) want support with reducing the environmental impact of things they buy.

**60%**

are confident they can reduce the amount of waste they produce.

**67%**

of the public are motivated to reduce the amount of waste they produce.





# Moving people up the waste hierarchy: recommendations

Facilitating the much-needed shift from recycling to waste prevention remains a huge challenge. While we await significant action from government regarding waste prevention policy, the onus remains on practitioners to drive behaviour change. From results of the 2024 Waste Prevention Tracker Survey, we highlight a number of recommendations, aimed at practitioners, for consideration in engaging with their audiences. Keep Britain Tidy will continue to push this vital agenda, apply these recommendations, and build the evidence base around national engagement in waste prevention through ongoing tracking of attitudes and behaviours.

**1. More investment, signposting and promotion of local waste prevention initiatives is crucial** to help drive change. Perceived availability of services to repair, refill, and rent or borrow is low among the UK public. Whether the lack of access to local opportunities to engage in behaviours higher up the waste hierarchy is real or just perceived, it is still a clear and significant barrier for widespread engagement in waste prevention. This must be addressed, not just through increased investment in new and existing services, but wider promotion of them to new and varied audiences.

**2. Further explore how specific barriers to waste prevention can be removed.** Improving awareness of services alone is not enough; perceptions that (certain) waste prevention behaviours are time consuming, expensive, and/or inaccessible also need to be addressed. Here it is important to recognise the barriers that are specific to or more prevalent in a particular demographic group (e.g. restrictions related to financial or living situations). Removing these barriers and increasing the extent to which waste prevention behaviours are viewed as easy and convenient to engage in is key.

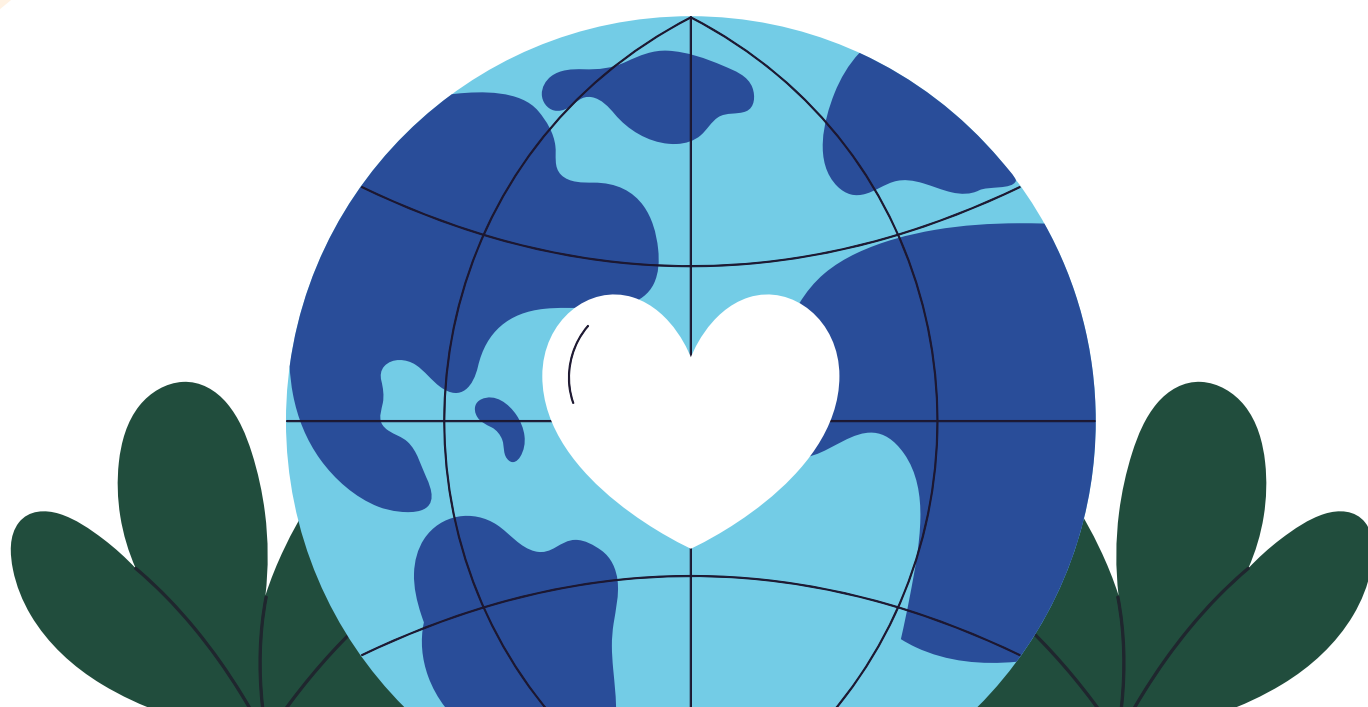




**3. We need better and consistent communications around waste prevention.** It remains the case that there appears to be a fundamental lack of understanding of waste prevention among the UK public. People are more likely to associate waste with what they throw away, rather than what they consume. Furthermore, after recycling, food waste prevention behaviours are the most commonly engaged in of actions we tracked. This is somewhat unsurprising given this is the aspect of waste prevention that has, traditionally, been most pushed through communications and campaigns, and has an immediate tangible benefit of saving money. We now need to see the same for reducing and reusing behaviours more widely, increasing awareness and understanding of these within the mainstream. Practitioners may look to Keep Britain Tidy's A Guide to Improving Public Understanding of Waste Prevention (2024) for further guidance on communicating about waste prevention effectively.

**4. Harness public frustrations and concerns around waste.** A majority of the population feel overwhelmed and concerned about the amount of 'stuff' they own or buy and express a desire to reduce the impact of their waste on the environment. Guidance and support to prevent waste and reduce consumption is not just necessary, it appears to be welcome. Framing waste prevention as a means of addressing these concerns is likely to be an effective way of shifting people up the waste hierarchy.

**5. Strengthen the link people make between consumption and climate.** The UK public are still struggling to recognise the link between the items they buy and their impact on the environment. Concern is higher for the impacts of the packaging items come in than the environmental impacts of the items themselves. While concern about climate change is evident, we need to make the link between this and consumption more explicit, for it to act as an effective motivator for change.



# 6 Conclusion

Results from the 2024 Waste Prevention Tracker show some positive indications that there is need, willingness and desire among the UK public to reduce waste and consumption. The public are largely overwhelmed by the constant pressure to consume and are opening up to the idea of reducing their environmental impact by generating less. They are concerned by packaging, the amount of 'stuff' they have, and want access to support to reduce their waste.

Ultimately, however, we have not seen progress on widespread engagement in waste prevention since this survey was first conducted in 2022, and none of the key behaviours used to measure this are yet at a level that could be considered an established norm. Likewise, the key motivations for engaging in waste preventions are still centred around financial reasons, disliking clutter and the feeling of being wasteful rather than the public's desire to reduce their impact on the environment and climate change. If we are to achieve the necessary, significant reduction in the UK's resource use and consumption-related carbon emissions we need an urgent uplift of engagement in waste prevention.

Keep Britain Tidy will continue to track public engagement in waste prevention, repeating the Tracker survey every two years, with the next one due to be published in 2026. Looking ahead, we hope to see accelerated progress in attitudes towards and engagement in waste prevention, supported by an increase in opportunities and services to prevent waste, improved and consistent public-facing communications, and the beginnings of a cultural, societal and policy shift towards a circular economy.

Please get in touch with us at [network.enquiries@keepbritaintidy.org](mailto:network.enquiries@keepbritaintidy.org) if you would like to speak about your waste issues or if you have questions about the Keep Britain Tidy Waste Prevention Tracker Survey work.



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