

Post Exhibition - Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035

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Summary

The Leave Nothing to Waste Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2030 has guided the City of Sydney's waste and resource management over the past 8 years. It focused on 6 priority areas: waste avoidance, increased recycling, litter reduction, planning for waste in developments, future treatment solutions, and better data management.

Of the 35 actions outlined, 29 have been completed or are ongoing, 2 were superseded, and 4 actions have been updated and are included in the City's new strategy. Significant achievements include reducing residential waste per person by 18%, introducing separate food waste collection to over 24,500 households, expanding recycling services to cover over 20 hard-to-recycle items, doubling the recycling rate for waste collected from maintaining our streets, parks and public spaces, removing single-use items from City events, and supporting local circular economy projects with over \$400,000 in grants.

External factors such as new state and federal targets, changes in legislation, global recycling restrictions, increased single-use waste, and infrastructure challenges have prompted the need for a refreshed approach.

More positively, there is also growing momentum and support for a transition towards a more circular economy, such as increased global recognition of circular economy principles, acknowledgment of a landfill crisis in Greater Sydney, the state-wide single-use plastics ban introduced in 2022, recognition of the economic potential of circular systems, and strong local community support for waste reduction.

In response, City staff developed the Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026–2035 (the Strategy). This new Strategy outlines 5 strategic directions: championing waste avoidance, boosting reuse and recycling, fostering circular design, keeping the city clean, and building resilient waste systems. It includes 39 targeted actions, such as promoting sustainable consumption, expanding food and textile recycling, supporting small businesses, improving urban waste management, and advocating for stronger infrastructure and policy support.

This strategic shift positions Sydney to lead in waste reduction and circular economy practices while adapting to evolving environmental and regulatory landscapes.

The draft Strategy was approved by Council to be placed on public exhibition for 6 weeks from 24 September to 5 November 2025. Community feedback shows very strong support for the strategy. Our community wants us to help them reduce waste, make recycling easier, keep the city clean and build a more circular local economy. They also want to work with us to keep valuable materials in use for longer.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the submissions received from the community on the exhibited draft Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2025-2035, as shown at Attachment B to the subject report;
- (B) Council adopt the Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035, as shown at Attachment A to the subject report;
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make amendments to the Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035 to correct any minor drafting errors and finalise design, artwork and accessible formats for publication; and
- (D) Council note the finalisation of the Leave Nothing to Waste Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2030 noting it is now replaced by the Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035.

Attachments

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| Attachment A. | Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035 |
| Attachment B. | Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035 (with tracked changes) |
| Attachment C. | Engagement Report - Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035 |

Background

1. The Leave Nothing to Waste Strategy and Action Plan 2017- 2030 was adopted in 2017 and has guided the City's approach to waste and resource management for 8 years.
2. The strategy comprised 6 priority areas including waste avoidance, increasing recycling, reduce litter and illegal dumping, planning for waste in new developments, future treatment solutions and better data management.
3. Targets for the strategy focused on waste recycling and diversion from landfill across our own properties, our public spaces, residential services and commercial businesses within our local area.
4. Progress against targets, development of new services, programs and case studies were provided to Council through regular CEO Updates, Operational Plan reports and our annual Green Report, which is also published on our website.
5. Highlights since 2017 from the implementation of the 35 actions include:
 - (a) residential waste per person reduced from 84kgs to 69kgs per year (18% reduction)
 - (b) separate food waste collections for more than 24,500 households and in selected City of Sydney managed properties
 - (c) expanded collection and drop off recycling services for more than 20 common residential waste streams that cannot be recycled in the yellow bin. These services include mattresses, paints, chemicals, batteries, electronics, large cardboard, bicycles and scooters, clothing, bedding, soft toys, lightbulbs, x-rays, coffee pods, printer cartridges, polystyrene and blister packs
 - (d) doubled the rate of recycling and recovery of waste from maintaining our streets, parks and public spaces, from 26% in 2016/17 to 54% in 2024/25
 - (e) removing reliance on single-use items across our own events and services
 - (f) supported circular economy projects in our local area with more than \$400,000 in grant funding.
6. Since the adoption of the strategy there have been several changes, both within our area and from external influences, that required us to review and update our strategy. The notable external influences include:
 - (a) new state and federal targets for reducing and recycling waste
 - (b) new NSW Government legislation requiring local governments to offer a food waste collection service by July 2030 and relevant businesses to have separated food collection services in place by July 2026
 - (c) international restrictions on exporting recycling
 - (d) continued and significant growth in single use plastics, textiles and electronics

- (e) challenges with changes to NSW Government regulations impacting processing of waste and recycling
 - (f) increases in costs to service expanding material streams.
7. More positively, there is also recognition and investment in making change including:
- (a) global recognition of the need for a more circular approach from leading designers, innovators and governments
 - (b) acknowledgment by the NSW Government of a landfill capacity crisis in Greater Sydney
 - (c) the NSW Government have recognised infrastructure and transfer capacity shortages
 - (d) NSW Government single use plastics ban introduced into legislation in 2022, with additional items pending for 2026 to 2030
 - (e) recognition of economic opportunities from circular economy
 - (f) strong local community support for reducing waste and recycling more.

Waste and Circular Materials Strategy 2026-2035

8. The new Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Strategy 2025-2035 (see Attachment A) provides a clear roadmap for reducing waste and fostering circular economy principles.
9. By focusing on waste prevention, recycling, circular design, city cleanliness, and resilient systems, the draft Strategy aims to support Sydney to significantly cut waste, improve resource recovery, and build a more sustainable urban environment.
10. The draft Strategy has 5 strategic directions with each one listed below along with its ambition:
- (a) Champion waste avoidance and careful consumption – alongside us, our communities consume responsibly, reduce waste and embrace circular practices.
 - (b) Boost reuse, repair and recycling – our communities have convenient access to reuse, repair and refurbishment servicers at no greater cost than buying new.
 - (c) Where these options are not yet available, recycling is prioritised over disposal to landfill.
 - (d) Foster circular design – new buildings and spaces are designed with circular principles, so they use fewer new materials, last longer and allow for easy repurposing at end-of-life.
 - (e) Keep our city clean – streets are clean and free of clutter and our environment is protected from the impacts of litter and harmful materials. We adapt our services as Sydney changes and grows.

- (f) Build resilient waste and circular systems – flexible, reliable solutions meet the long-term waste and resource recovery needs of our communities. State and federal policies and regulation allow us to achieve our local ambitions for a more circular system.
11. To fulfil the ambitions of the 5 directions and realise our vision for a more circular economy, the draft Strategy includes 39 focused actions for our organisation and communities. Included in these actions are the following key activities:
- (a) leveraging our buying power to support the shift to a circular economy transition
 - (b) supporting small businesses in our area to become more circular
 - (c) inspiring residents to reduce their waste through targeted communications campaigns
 - (d) acting on textile waste by providing new recycling options for unwearable items and creating more opportunities for our residents to understand and practice sustainable shopping and clothes repair
 - (e) delivering food scraps recycling to all residents and trial new local processing options
 - (f) increasing support for reuse and repair projects through our grants
 - (g) championing the use of circular design in new local developments by creating detailed guidelines to support the building sector
 - (h) tackling our urban waste management challenges with a dedicated program to address problem areas and with creative methods to curb single-use waste and litter
 - (i) providing flexible, reliable services to meet our long-term waste and resource recovery needs
 - (j) advocating for adequate waste infrastructure and circular economy projects.

Targets

12. To allow meaningful measurement of progress to achieving the long-term ambitions of waste reduction and circularity and to reflect changes to the external environment around how waste and resources are managed, the draft Strategy includes the following additions and changes to targets.
13. New waste reduction targets for residential waste, waste from our own properties and commercial and industrial waste. These targets acknowledge that we need to make less waste in the first place as well as reusing materials recovered and diverting from landfill.

14. Extending the previously adopted 90% landfill diversion targets for residential and commercial waste by 5 years from 2030 to 2035. When the targets were adopted in the previous strategy there was a strong expectation that the recycling and resource recovery industry in NSW would be much more mature, in line with other similar jurisdictions globally, however, with delayed investment in the sector and a lack of regulations driving investment there is now an infrastructure development lag.
15. Removal of target for recycling of construction and demolition waste in our area. Collection of meaningful data for this sector at the local government area level has been difficult to achieve. Unlike the commercial sector, which can be measured and extrapolated against regular business activities, construction and demolition activities are highly variable both in instances and volumes.
16. Reducing the 90% landfill diversion target for City streets and public spaces to 60% in 2030 and 70% in 2035 for similar reasons to those outlined for extending the timeline for achieving the residential and commercial targets, that is delayed investment and delivery of recycling and recovery infrastructure in NSW. This group of materials includes some more problematic waste streams such as street sweepings, stormwater materials, public litter and illegal dumping. While there are recycling opportunities for some of these streams, extending to beyond 60% and 70% will require significant investment by industry and it is unclear if there is sufficient demand for processing of these streams.

Public exhibition and engagement

17. The draft Strategy was placed on exhibition between 24 September 2025 and 5 November 2025.
18. It was promoted through Sydney Your Say, emails to over 12,000 recipients, and social media ads, resulting in 3,453 visits to the Sydney Your Say page, 3,803 views of our Facebook video and more than 240,000 impressions from social media advertising.
19. Engagement activities included an online survey, community pop-ups, a stakeholder workshop, and opportunities for written submissions.
20. City staff have prepared a comprehensive engagement report (see Attachment B) detailing each of the engagement activities, the survey responses, information about the respondents and ideas or recommendations put forward. A high-level summary of the engagement activity is provided below.
21. Throughout the consultation period we received 236 pieces of written feedback on the draft strategy through survey responses (159), emails (9), comment boards at community pop sites (engaged with more than 90 community members for 61 comments) and a workshop (7 participants).
22. Respondents mostly live in the City of Sydney local government area (88%), 47% are aged over 55 years, 80% own their own home, 20% are renters and 57% live in an apartment.

23. Across all engagement activities community members expressed very strong support for the draft Strategy. In the survey responses between 85% and 95% of respondents selected 'strongly support' for each direction area. Reasons for the strong support focused on concern for the environment, that the directions and actions were practical and reflected a commonsense approach, and that action to prevent waste and reduce consumption was the most effective way to address waste issues.
24. Other reasons for support for the directions included:
 - (a) Need to plan for waste systems that can cope with demand
 - (b) Community members value repair, reuse and sharing
 - (c) Need to make reuse and recycling easier to access
 - (d) Desire to live in a clean city
 - (e) Belief that the City of Sydney should show strong leadership on waste and the circular economy
 - (f) Education is central to the success of reducing waste
 - (g) Concern about problems we leave for future generations.
25. When asked for suggestions regarding other areas of focus that were important in reducing waste and transitioning to a more circular economy the most mentioned topics included stronger regulations and corporate responsibility, convenient infrastructure for reuse and recycling, reducing single use plastics, education and food scraps services.
26. When asked how we can improve our waste and recycling services the most mentioned topics included increase in services closer to home, reducing confusion about recycling and increasing the availability of recycling drop off services.

Post exhibition edits

27. The engagement activities demonstrated strong support for the Strategy, as drafted, with most of the comments and recommendations already captured within the existing actions. Some recommendations extend beyond the legislated powers of local government in NSW, however, the responses provided will continue to inform our advocacy. As a result, only minor editorial changes, such as refining definitions of resource recovery and updating the strategy dates, to the final Strategy are proposed with no changes to direction areas or actions. Refer Attachment B for a version of the Strategy with the changes marked up.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

28. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress.

This plan is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:

- (a) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer – the Strategy includes actions to promote waste avoidance, increase reuse, repair and recycling and combat pollution with actions that:
 - (i) support our community to consume responsibly, reduce waste and embrace circular practices (Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Direction 1 – Champion waste avoidance and careful consumption)
 - (ii) provide communities with convenient access to reuse, repair and refurbishment services and recycling is prioritised over landfill (Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Direction 2 – Boost reuse, repair and recycling)
 - (iii) keep our street clean and free of clutter and our environment is protected from the impacts of litter and harmful materials (Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Direction 4 – Keep our city clean).
- (b) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development – the Strategy encourages circular design principles with actions that:
 - (i) promote the design of new buildings and spaces with fewer new materials, that last longer and allow for easy repurposing at end of life (Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Direction 3 – Foster circular design).
- (c) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy
 - (i) Trial and test new ideas that commercialise circular economy innovations (Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Direction 1 – Champion waste avoidance and careful consumption).
 - (ii) Support capacity building programs focused on waste reduction and circularity for businesses in our area (Waste Reduction and Circular Materials Direction 1 – Champion waste avoidance and careful consumption).

Organisational Impact

29. Council has already approved, in 2024/25, \$8.36M of funds for more cleansing equipment and, in 2025/26, \$1.10M per year for additional cleansing resources. The Strategy does not propose an expansion of the City's ongoing cleansing and resource recovery services or changes to the composition of the businesses units responsible for delivering support for waste reduction and circular economy and implementing the Strategy. Rather the approach to designing waste reduction and circular programs and services will be informed and shaped by the new Strategy, with particular focus on areas of highest need as evidenced by the Strategy.

Risks

30. The Strategy is an evidence-based approach to delivering the community's aspirations and vision. Risk has been managed by ensuring the City's waste reduction, resource recovery and circular materials investments respond to the current issues facing the sector, drawing upon the most current available data and analysis, engagement with industry, and community consultation.
31. The actions presented in the Strategy are within the City's risk appetite which states:
- We recognise the critical importance of environmental protection and sustainability in our operations and decision-making. We are committed to minimising our negative impact on the environment and striving for a more sustainable future. We accept that sometimes environmental protection (e.g. pollution) and environmental sustainability (e.g. cleaner energy) place us at opposite ends of the risk appetite spectrum.
 - We embrace innovative solutions and emerging technologies that enable us to minimise environmental risks and enhance sustainability. We actively explore and invest in sustainable alternatives, renewable energy sources and efficient resource utilisation.
 - Our risk philosophy is centred around achieving a balance between innovation, community and user satisfaction and risk management, ensuring that we meet our strategic objectives while maintaining a robust control environment.
 - We are open to exploring new opportunities and changing service levels to the community, taking into account community expectations, needs and our financial sustainability.
 - We have minimal appetite for more than temporary disruption to our critical service functions, such as waste services.

Environmental

32. The Strategy responds to waste reduction and landfill diversion targets as presented in the draft Community Strategic Plan and the Environmental Strategy 2025-2035 and details the actions we will take to achieve our targets and objectives of increasing reuse, recycling, more sustainable waste management.

Economic

33. The Strategy responds to our aspiration to be a global leader in innovation, technology and green industries and includes actions that support the transition to a green and circular economy.

Financial Implications

34. Actions within this strategy are either provided for in the long-term plan or focus on investigation only. Any future costs would be considered in a future budget cycle as part of the annual development of the City's Long Term Financial Plan which is subject to Council approval.

Relevant Legislation

- 35. Local Government Act 1993.
- 36. Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997.
- 37. Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2001.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

- 38. Work to implement the Strategy will begin immediately upon adoption.

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