

Draft circular economy strategy consultation (Scotland)

January 2026

About the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF)

The Institute of Chartered Foresters is the Royal Chartered body for foresters and arboriculturists in the UK. We represent over 2,300 members working across forestry, arboriculture, and related disciplines in the private and public sectors, academia, and research institutions. Our mission is to uphold professional standards, provide guidance, and support sustainable management of trees and forests.

Acknowledgement of Consultation

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to this consultation and recognise its importance in shaping policy. While this topic falls outside the Institute's core area of expertise, we support the overarching objectives of evidence-based policymaking and integrated approaches to land and resource management.

The ICF has not submitted a response via the Citizen Space portal but requests that the Circular Economy team in Scottish Government accepts this statement as our response. This statement has been produced in consultation with our membership.

Position Statement

- The Institute does not intend to provide detailed technical input on this matter, as it is beyond our primary remit of forestry and arboriculture.
- We encourage policymakers to consider the interconnections between this area and sustainable land use, climate resilience, and biodiversity, which are central to our members' work.
- Where relevant, we advocate collaboration across sectors to ensure holistic outcomes that benefit society and the environment.

Response

Wood plays a central role in supporting a circular economy in the UK due to its renewability, carbon performance, and versatility across multiple life cycles.

1. Renewable and Sustainable Resource

When sourced from responsibly managed forests (e.g. FSC, PEFC or Grown in Britain certified), wood is a renewable material that can be replenished through sustainable forestry compliant to the UK Forestry Standard. UK forestry supports long-term land stewardship, biodiversity, and rural economies.

2. Carbon Storage and Climate Benefits

Wood products store carbon absorbed during tree growth, locking it away for decades in buildings and furniture. Substituting wood for more carbon-intensive materials such as steel, concrete, or plastics significantly reduces embodied carbon, supporting the UK's net-zero targets.

3. Reuse, Repair, and Cascading Use

Wood fits well with circular economy principles because it can be:

- Reused (e.g. reclaimed timber in construction)
- Repaired and refurbished
- Repurposed into lower-grade products (panels, boards)
- Finally used for bioenergy at end of life

This cascading use maximises material value over time.

4. Recyclability and Biodegradability

Many wood products can be recycled into new materials such as chipboard or fibreboard. Untreated wood is biodegradable, reducing long-term waste and landfill impacts compared with synthetic materials.

5. Reduced Waste and Landfill Pressure

Using wood in construction, packaging, and manufacturing helps divert waste from landfill. Wood waste can be sorted, reused, recycled, or recovered for energy, aligning with the UK waste hierarchy.

6. Support for Green Jobs and Local Supply Chains

The UK timber and wood products sector supports domestic jobs in forestry, construction, manufacturing, and recycling. Shorter supply chains reduce transport emissions and increase economic resilience.

7. Compatibility with Modern Methods of Construction

Engineered wood products (e.g. CLT, glulam) enable low-waste, precision construction and off-site manufacturing. This improves resource efficiency, reduces on-site waste, and supports circular building design.

8. Direct Support from UK Policy Frameworks

- The UK Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2025 includes goals to *increase sustainable domestic timber supply and use*, reinforcing wood's role as a low-impact natural resource that supports circular economy outcomes. It highlights timber's contribution to sustainable resource use, habitat plus economic benefits, and low landfill rates for wood products.
- The Timber in Construction Roadmap 2025 explicitly aligns wood use with *circular economy ambitions and decarbonisation targets*, promoting increased use of timber in buildings to reduce embodied carbon and support a zero-waste economy.

9. Benefits of Wood Aligned with Policy Goals

- Wood stores carbon and displaces carbon-intensive materials, directly supporting the UK's net-zero by 2050 and Scotland's vision to become a *net zero and nature positive nation by 2045*.
- The UK and Scottish strategies both emphasise *keeping materials "in use for longer"* and *minimising waste to landfill*. Wood's reuse, recycling and renewable end-of-life pathways fit these aims better than many synthetic materials.
- Both nations' strategies view circular economy transition as an opportunity for *innovation, resilient supply chains, and new jobs*. Wood sectors (forestry, processing, engineered timber) already contribute to rural economies and can expand in a circular system.
- Scotland's draft strategy includes establishing *monitoring frameworks and indicators for circularity*, allowing future tracking of wood material flows and reuse performance against strategic targets.

Closing Remarks

We remain committed to engaging on issues directly related to forestry, arboriculture, and land use. Should future consultations intersect with these areas, we would welcome the opportunity to contribute in detail.