

Part A - General Information

Organisation/Individual Name

SoftCycle

Organisation Type/Structure

Community Interest Company (CIC)

If 'Other' please specify

Not yet incorporated

Theme/Nature of Project

Environment

Name of Lead Contact

Claire Birch

Email

claire@good-beans.com

Phone / Mobile

07719489833

Part B - Project Proposal

Project Mission: A snapshot of the project's intention (50 words max)

Our mission is to divert textiles from landfill and turn them into precious raw materials. SoftCycle provides a closed loop recycling system and will create new products, new jobs and new sustainable businesses.

Situation (250 words)

Between 2.5 and 2.7 million tonnes of textiles are consumed annually in the UK, yet over 70% is not collected for reuse or recycling. In the UK in 2017, a total of 921,000 tonnes of textile waste ended up in household residual waste, while 267,000 tonnes ended up in commercial residual waste; all destined for landfill or incinerator. Disposing of clothes and textiles costs the UK around £82 million each year.

Of the textiles that are collected for reuse or recycling, textile banks and charity shops receive 85%. Of this, 32% is re-used in the UK, sold mostly in charity shops; around 60% is exported (known as the rag trade); and only 3% is recycled. Many countries receiving our rag have become discerning consumers who would rather get quality second-hand clothes than our fast fashion cast-offs. What actually happens to exports is unclear and, seeing the mountains of textile waste dumped in deserts, it seems a lot ends up as landfill. Finding decent uses for waste textiles, and avoiding export, is therefore of global importance.

There are already some uses for recycled textiles, but few of high value. The two main applications for used textiles in the UK are: wiping cloths and non-woven products (where textiles are shredded and fibres used in acoustic underlay and mattress spring covers). In the clothing industry, there are initiatives to recycle fibres back into garments, but these are several years away from commercialisation, and are heavily processed procedures.

Complication (250 words)

Because access to recycled materials is limited and complicated, usage to date has been extremely low and innovation almost non-existent. Shredded waste textiles have been used in some car upholstery, but not in domestic homewares. Recycled textile stuffing is not commonly available, and in modern upholstery, foam and polyester is typically used. These materials are easy to find and cheap, but very damaging to the environment, and ripe for innovation and replacement.

In 2019, the UK retail upholstery market was worth £3.2 billion. Consumers are increasingly choosing environmentally friendly homewares, and sustainability is moving up the agenda quickly for the five biggest furniture retailers (IKEA, Argos, Steinhoff, DFS and John Lewis). However, while recycled fibres and 'recyclable' materials have started to be used on certain products, they are not the norm. There are still no

products on the market using recycled stuffing (although some contemporary brands are introducing the idea of stuffing your own furniture with unwearable clothes).

An exciting recent development is the recently launched textile recycling facility in Sweden. For the first time, cuttings, clothing and textiles can be sorted by fibre type automatically, meaning much bigger volumes of waste can be processed. As this technology becomes more widely available, it will allow huge changes in the textile recycling industry, and there will be more and more demand for products made from these sustainable materials.

Solution (250 words)

SoftCycle is an environmentally friendly upholstery filling using recycled textiles, actively reducing the amount of textile waste entering landfill while creating a valuable raw material.

Vision

The SoftCycle brand is made of different parts:

It's a communications campaign and membership organisation, working with charity shops, businesses creating waste textiles, and councils, to collect textiles unsuitable for reuse. Members can prove their commitment to zero waste by proudly displaying the SoftCycle stamp, and households can recycle waste textiles, safe in the knowledge they are actually being recycled (unlike current road side collection).

It's a recycling facility. Waste is sorted, shredded and reformed into various grades, from soft felt to heavy weight stuffing. This is sold as a raw material to manufacturers, small businesses and local makers to make an array of products with 'SoftCycle Inside'.

It's also an innovation studio. Maker members can use the facilities and material to create innovative sustainable designs. Like an incubator, brands can start up and learn from one another.

The SoftCycle brand becomes synonymous with innovation, quality and sustainability. Highly scalable, each county in the UK could have a facility, creating a local closed loop recycling process, local jobs, and new businesses.

Part C - Wider Support

How would the Stephen Lloyd Award network of partners' support be beneficial to your project? (250 words max)

The network of partners is incredibly impressive. To have access to any one of those names would be a privilege. There are some areas that would be particularly beneficial as the project progresses.

Financial advice - How to gain and manage funding is vital, so it would be amazing to learn from Social Investment Business, Sarah Forster, Caroline Mason and the Ashden Trust.

Richard Tyrie's knowledge will be of great value, especially his experience changing public services, and seeking out commercial opportunities.

Understanding regulations and procedures will be important too, and Bates Wells and Claire Pattie will be able to help us navigate the rules that exist in the waste industry.

Support from David Saint at Action Planning, and David Seiderer will be brilliant. Having received business mentoring in the past, I know how precious it is, especially when navigating uncharted waters.

Part D - Financial Justification

In general terms, please explain how the winning funds would be used to carry out your project. (50 words max)

The project is in its infancy. I have spoken to regulatory bodies such as FIRA who have no concerns about the product. Confident that it's possible, we are now ready for the next steps, and this award funding will be vital.

- Product development - creating proof of concept upholstery products
- Branding and website
- Purchasing/renting machinery and storage space
- Engaging waste partners, councils and businesses.

- Putting together a business plan
- Building our team and network

Part E - Supporting Information

Team: We would like to learn a little more about the individual or team invested into the project. What are your individual credentials? Is there a story behind how you or your team all came together to support the project? (75 words max)

Claire Birch - Environmental Science graduate, founder of social enterprise marketing agency, and a trained upholsterer. I have been considering this business for probably a decade!
My team consists of people based in Stroud (famed for its textile history) and my work connections.
Ella Wiggans, co-founder of Good Beans and behaviour change specialist.
Petronella Tyson - Social impact business development expert
Emma Hague - founder South West Fibreshed and Bristol Textile Quarter CIC
Clemency Rittner - World class soft furnishings studio.

Additional References: You are welcome to provide a list of up to 5 links with any relevant supporting material or visuals, as further reference

The most recent and thorough picture of textile waste, solutions and trends.

<https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/WRAP-textiles-market-situation-report-2019.pdf>

Ikea's commitment to sustainability

<https://about.ikea.com/en/sustainability/a-world-without-waste/renewable-and-recycled-materials>

The Remakery - A studio for waste material innovation, and inspiration for SoftCycle

<https://www.remakery.org/>

Smile Plastics- Example of brand making waste into highly desirable materials with exciting applications.

<https://smile-plastics.com/>