

Written evidence submitted by Oxfam

About Oxfam charity shops

Oxfam opened the UK's first ever charity shop in 1948, and today we have over 600 charity shops across the country. Thanks to generous donations of clothes and other items from members of the public, as well as the help of our 23,000 shop volunteers who give up their time, Oxfam's shops brought in £93.9m in revenue in 2017/18, and made a net contribution of £18.9m to fund Oxfam's vital charitable work.

Charity shops such as Oxfam's help to minimise the environmental impact of the fashion industry by providing an avenue for clothes to be reused. Any clothes that we can't resell in the UK or in other countries will be processed at our recycling plant as Energy From Waste (EFW), so that no textiles are sent to landfill.

Waste from fashion

An Oxfam/M&S study (June 2016) identified that around 3.6bn items of clothing were left unworn in UK wardrobes, with UK adults regularly wearing only 44% of the clothes they own¹. Oxfam has noticed an increase in clothing donations over the last 5 years within our network of shops, and we believe the growth of 'fast fashion' and low price and discounted garments is likely a significant driver behind this. Other charities have also noticed an increase in donations².

Charities that operate high-street shops can generate significant income from the sale of donated clothing, extend the product life cycle of donated garments, and ensure an end of life solution that excludes landfill. The Charity Retail Association estimates around 232,000 tonnes of clothing is diverted from landfill each year by its members (which includes Oxfam)³.

What happens to clothes that are donated to Oxfam?

Oxfam collects textiles for reuse and recycling through several channels including:

- Donations direct to our shops
- Textile banks, for instance in supermarket car parks
- Customer take back schemes with major retailers, such as our M&S Shwopping partnership, where M&S rewards its customers for donating unwanted clothes to Oxfam.
- Workplace donation points at companies and other organisations.

[Wastesaver](#) - Oxfam's behind-the-scenes sorting and recycling centre in Batley, West Yorkshire – processes around 12,000 tonnes of textiles each year, and is there to ensure that we maximise the value of everything we are given and minimise waste. Any clothes donated to Oxfam that aren't sold in the shop they are donated to will be processed at Wastesaver.

The Wastesaver concept began in 1974 when Oxfam became the first national charity to develop its own facility for recycling and reusing clothing and other materials. At the Wastesaver warehouse, garments are passed along vast conveyor belts with skilled staff picking off different items for different end-uses. Virtually everything Oxfam receives gets re-used in some way and as much as possible is sold in the UK as that is what raises the most money from public's donations. Items with

¹ Oxfam press release, June 2016: https://oxfamapps.org/media/press_release/2016-06-over-three-billion-clothes-left-unworn-in-the-nations-wardrobes-survey-finds/

² Charity Retail Association, Sources of Stock 2017: https://www.charityretail.org.uk/members/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/04/Sources-of-Stock_2017-Report.pdf

³ Charity Retail Association: <https://www.charityretail.org.uk/charity-shops-the-environment/>

the greatest value will be spotted and sent to one of our specialist retail channels such as our pop-up festival shops, specialist vintage shops and boutiques or the Oxfam Online Shop.

Wastesaver also sells around 30% of its clothing to Frip Ethique, an Oxfam-run social enterprise in Senegal. Most of the workers are women, who sort clothes donated to Oxfam and sell them to local market traders. Over 500 small traders buy stock from Frip Ethique and run their own businesses. The profits from Frip Ethique are used to fund livelihoods programmes in Senegal and elsewhere in West Africa. Other clothing is also exported through our trade partners across Europe and Asia, in line with our ethical supply policy.

Oxfam is also investigating innovative collaborations with others, including the potential development of utilising fibre-to-fibre recycling technology (the process of reprocessing used clothing extracting fibres for re-manufacture) to reduce the impact of discarded clothing.

How to reduce waste and minimise the impact of fashion

Clothing production consumes resources and contributes to climate change, the effects of which are already being felt by the world's poorest people with whom Oxfam works, so it is vital that efforts are made to reduce the impact of fast fashion. For this reason, Oxfam strongly welcomes this inquiry by the Environmental Audit Committee. Some potential solutions for the Committee and other stakeholders to consider could include:

- **More locations to recycle textiles:** Many Local Authorities have encouraged the establishment of recycling centres, for example at supermarket car parks and operate kerbside collection schemes to make disposal of clothing easier. The availability of kerbside collection of clothing doubled since 2002 to over 30% of households, but is still less than half of that for other recyclables such as glass and plastics⁴.
- **Clothing labels to encourage recycling:** Whilst the primary purpose of clothing labels is to inform consumers of size, material composition and washing correctly, M&S have previously added a recycling message to the care label ("Recycle with Oxfam") and we would encourage other retailers to do the same.
- **Retailer customer take back schemes:** Customer take back schemes operated by retailers, as part of their extended responsibilities, are becoming more prevalent and encourage environmental disposal of unwanted clothes. Oxfam's 10 year Shwopping partnership with M&S has recycled 31 million items of clothing (around 10,000 tonnes), mostly for re-sale.
- **Consumer awareness:** Ultimately, consumers need to change the way they buy, use and dispose of clothing. Encouraging consumers to buy less clothes is a challenging – but nonetheless vital - long-term goal. In the shorter-term, government, industry and charities should seek to raise awareness of the benefits of ethical disposal and reuse of clothing. For example, in 2017, Oxfam launched a Fashion Show at London Fashion Week to showcase the huge range of clothes on sale in Oxfam's high street and Online shops, and to position 'preloved' clothing as desirable, sustainable and fashionable.

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⁴ Defra (2009): *Maximising Reuse and Recycling of UK Clothing and Textiles*