

# The green carpet treatment

New processes mean that the issue of carpet waste is finally being addressed across the UK. **Naomi Dirks** finds out how one group in Wales is taking up the challenge

**"It is often the case that companies change their flooring due to corporate rebranding issues rather than because the carpet itself is worn out"**

**Carpet waste** in the UK currently makes up around two per cent of all waste sent to landfill. This percentage may seem minor when compared with other waste statistics, but it is a figure that could be greatly decreased using the correct methods. With an estimated 3.5 million carpet tiles landfilled annually in South Wales and the South West of England

alone, the question of sustainability in this area has never been more relevant. To deal with the amount of unwanted carpet needlessly wasted, carpet recycling projects are now becoming a reality across the UK.

Helping along the way is non-profit membership organisation Carpet Recycling UK (CRUK). Formed in 2007 by individuals who had first-hand experience in the

carpet recycling industry, the company facilitates the growth and acceleration of this sector. The mission of CRUK is to provide support and technical advice for carpet recyclers and to create end markets for carpet recycle. Although growing rapidly, the organisation is still looking for more members to increase productivity.

Co-founder of CRUK, Kate Atkinson, also established the UK's first specialist carpet recycler, Spruce Carpets. In 2005, the Glasgow based company started providing refurbished household carpet for low-income families. The organisation has

a turnover of £250,000 a year and between February 2005 and June 2008 diverted 140 tonnes of carpet from landfill. As a successful predecessor, Spruce serves as a model for similar projects.

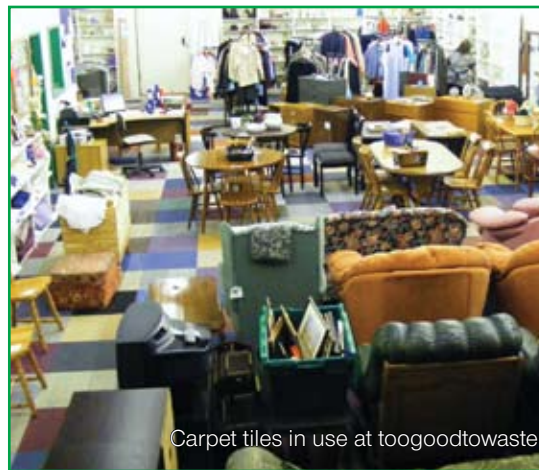
Whilst achievements have already been made in the household market, the new Welsh company Cleanstream Carpets is now focusing on recycling

carpet tile waste in an effort to decrease the 500,000 tonnes of carpet annually sent to landfill in the UK.

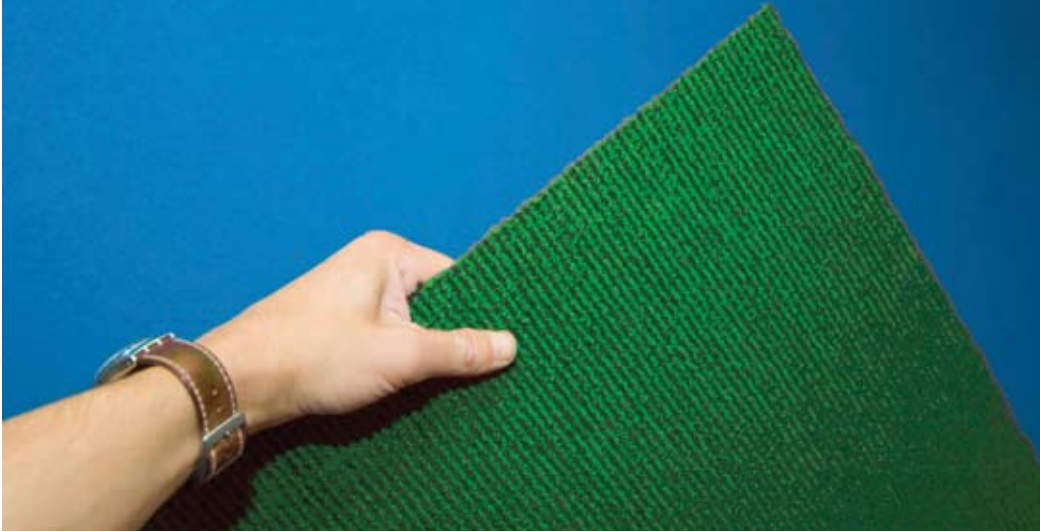
Based in South Wales, Cleanstream Carpets has recognised the value in used carpet tiles. Whereas its predecessor Spruce Carpets addresses household carpet, Cleanstream Carpets

concentrates on office and retail based flooring.

The directors of the company are individuals from the flooring industry and social sector. Ellen Petts, Director of Cleanstream Carpets, has been working with Cylch for almost ten years. "I work with Recycling Developments Community Interest Company, which was set up with support from WAG to develop opportunities to recycle and reuse difficult materials. Carpets, and commercial carpet tiles in particular, happen to be the first 'difficult' material we have managed to process, but there are others in the pipeline such as mattresses."



Carpet tiles in use at toogoodtowaste



"We're up to about 30 tonnes of waste diverted from landfill and we've only just started"

According to Ellen, the idea of carpet tile reuse was developed after meeting a representative from American flooring giant InterfaceFLOR. The project is part funded with a loan from Charity Bank but also has carpet industry investors. Like any other business, the company must achieve its cash flow if it is to pay back the loan within the set period.

Undoubtedly, there are lots of companies out there that are keen to avoid having to send their used carpets to landfill; the challenge is to market these carpets as viable new products. But how does the carpet recycling business actually work? Ellen explains: "It's easy to get material in and we charge a gate fee for this, but our key objective is to sell this material... Currently our input is from businesses like Barclays Bank and Wales and West and other big corporate organisations."

Cleanstream Carpets first visits the donating organisation to assess the quality and saleability of the material. The seller is then responsible for ensuring tiles are palletised and delivered to the Cleanstream depot. The carpet tiles are then categorised by condition, and are ready for resale back into the commercial sector as 'repurposed' tiles. PVC backed and made to last a lifetime, the durability of the tiles is not in question; it is often the case that companies change their flooring due to corporate rebranding issues rather than because the carpet itself is worn out.

Cleanstream Carpets is eager to contact local authority and community group personnel who are looking to refurbish buildings. With 60,000 square metres in stock, the company is encouraging people to visit its website: [www.cleanstreamcarpets.co.uk](http://www.cleanstreamcarpets.co.uk)

The company operations are hosted by well-known furniture recycling business toogoodtowaste. The South Wales reuse group focuses its efforts on community regeneration, aiding those on a low income and preventing waste going to landfill. Ellen says: "We employ toogoodtowaste to run the operations including taking delivery, sorting and storing the tiles. Their volunteers help with this," and Cleanstream Carpets are then responsible for reselling the carpet back into the industry, although a portion of them are also included in starter packs for those who have been recently re-housed in the area.

Clearly, the way carpet waste is dealt with is changing. For Cleanstream, the focus on reuse gives it social and environmental advantages over new carpet. Although the project has been up and running just four months, material has already begun to roll in: "We've already taken about 60 pallets of carpet tiles each weighing about half a tonne, so we're up to about 30 tonnes of waste diverted from landfill and we've only just started," Ellen notes. She maintains that carpet from Cleanstream is a real and viable alternative to new material.

Not afraid of being called ambitious, the future agenda of Cleanstream Carpets includes other floor coverings such as vinyl, lino and household carpet.

The potential for carpet and flooring recycling and reuse across Wales is significant and presents a niche the community sector is well placed to exploit. The day-to-day operations of the company also illustrate how Cleanstream Group companies have been established to work in close partnership with existing social enterprises. Carpet recycling in Wales has got off to a small, but good start.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION >>

To find out more, visit:  
[www.cleanstreamcarpets.co.uk](http://www.cleanstreamcarpets.co.uk)