



# Putting re-use at the heart of your household waste recycling centre

A guide to introducing or improving re-use on site

# Introduction

## The value of re-use and repair

Prevention sits at the very pinnacle of the waste hierarchy, saving resources and improving resource productivity by avoiding waste. Re-use and repair stop items becoming waste by maintaining their original form, supporting both the prevention agenda and progress towards a circular economy.

When done well, it can support skilled jobs, enable businesses to begin and grow, and, in turn, deliver meaningful social value for local communities. For example, it has been estimated that prevention can create and support more than eight times the number of jobs when compared to recycling<sup>†</sup>.

Approaching this topic with a retail mindset and a more business-like agenda can lead to an increase in revenue, which will support existing and new start-up companies, generate new opportunities for supply chains, provide more support for vulnerable people and communities, and create an additional income stream for a local authority.

Re-use is becoming more mainstream. Shops are offering preloved clothes and equipment, and peer-to-peer mobile phone apps are enabling unwanted items to find new homes and purposes. Household waste recycling centres have a key role to play in this revolution – to do so, re-use needs to be at the heart of its day-to-day operation, based on a retail and not an operational mindset.

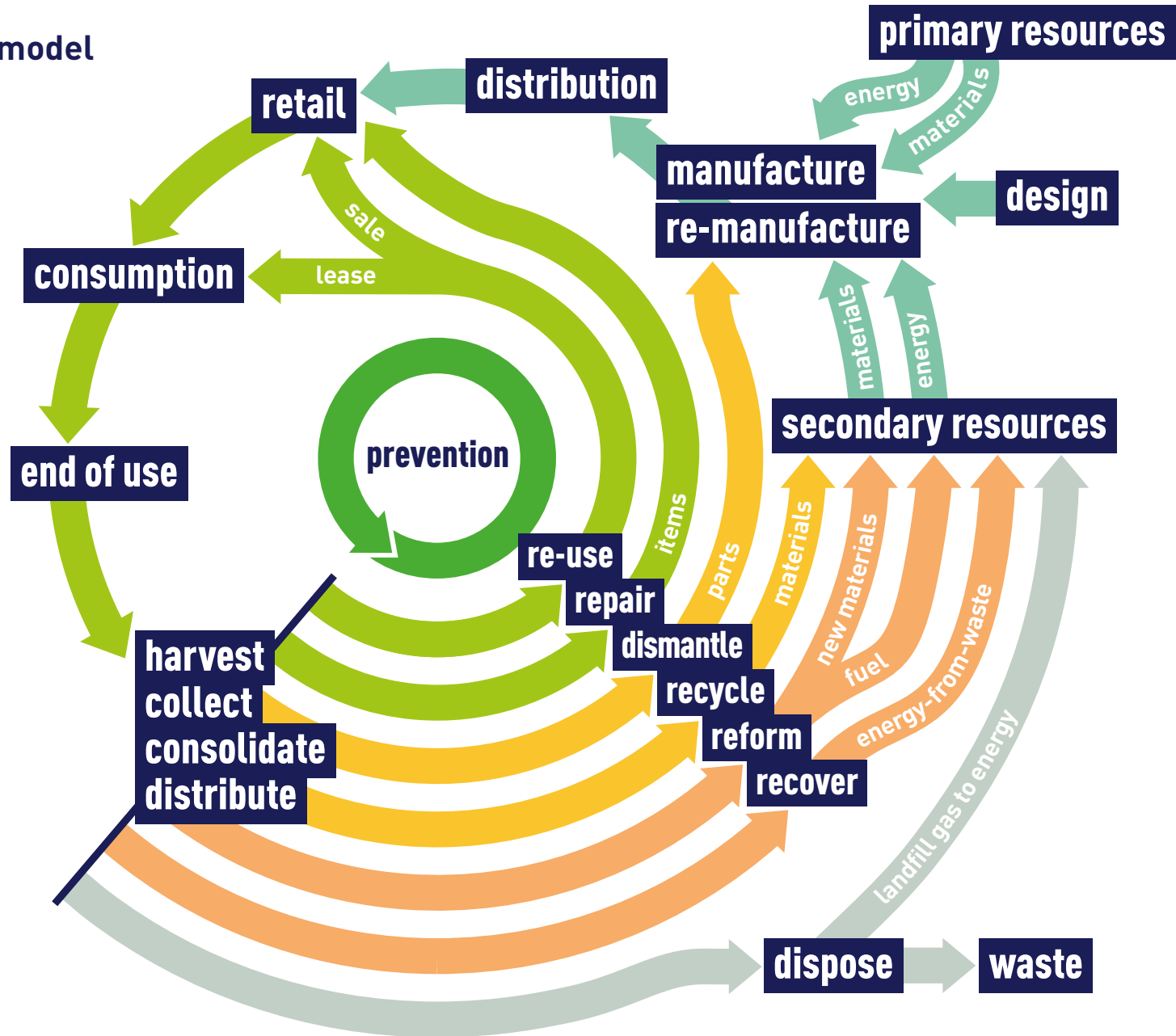
10,000 tonnes of wasted resources creates

1 job if it's incinerated

36 jobs if it's recycled

up to 296 jobs if it's refurbished and reused

# The circular economy model





## Introduction

### Building on what we've started

Re-use as part of a household waste recycling centre service isn't new and is something SUEZ and others have been involved with for more than a decade.

Unfortunately, re-use is not a universal service at all sites and this lag in adoption is for a range of reasons – from the physical limitation of a site to a lack of investment, or re-use simply not being a strategic priority.

In the future, we see household waste recycling centres evolving to become household re-use and recycling centres, where their primary function is as a point of consolidation for unwanted items, as a first point of assessment and the gateway for a flourishing preloved item resale network.

The starting point for this future is the current form of our existing household waste recycling centres. Focusing our efforts on all arriving items so that no opportunity is lost for resale, minimal repair or repurposing to lift their value both visibly and financially. This means staff who can identify the value in items brought to the site by the public, alongside a clear system so that once we have saved these items from the waste pile, we catalogue them and get them back on the retail shelves as quickly and efficiently as possible. Not every household waste recycling centre is fit to host a shop and these can become feeder sites, capturing the items that arrive so they can be resold, repaired or repurposed in a shop at another site or location.

In this guide, we focus on the now, what we can all do to maximise the sites we have in their current form and to help local authorities and their partners across the country seize the opportunity. We have developed this guide with key points of advice, based on our significant, hard won and award-winning experiences, to help anyone looking to convert their household waste recycling centres to household re-use and recycling centres.





## Introduction

### Our history with re-use

Like many, SUEZ has been on a journey – from the simple separating of reusable items on site to now redeveloping and building sites centred around re-use, from collecting only weight-based data to item-by-item data, from site staff incorporating re-use into their role to dedicated retail staff.

Our re-use evolution started in 2012 with Devon County Council, accelerated with South Gloucestershire Council and our first SUEZ-installed re-use shop, and continued to expand and innovate with Surrey, Calderdale and Manchester among others. Our journey continues in 2022, with a new shop opened in Aberdeen in July and more planned for 2023 and beyond.

In recent years, we have been working with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on our Manchester Renew hub, where we have consolidated much of the learning from other locations into a 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> warehouse, repair and repurpose centre, a click and collect retail location and a dedicated internet sales point for higher value items.

Through this period of activity, our approach has evolved to suit the local circumstances, customer demands and changing legislative and regulatory conditions, but many of the fundamental principles remain the same. The lessons we have and continue to learn are actively shared between our teams involved in re-use across the country, and there is a continuous improvement culture in terms of best practice, from quality and pricing to data capture, networking and innovation.

The journey is far from complete. We have many new things to learn, mistakes to make and new opportunities to grasp, but this document seeks to share our learning and hopefully to provide you, the reader, with ideas and insights that maximise re-use in every location, support local skilled jobs in your area and generate revenue to support more developments and greater ambitions.



In 2021, our shops ...

- ✔ diverted 418,000 items back into re-use in the local area
- ✔ employed 30 people (full-time equivalent)

# Diverting items for re-use

The basis of any successful re-use activity on a household waste recycling centre is the diversion of items brought in by members of the public.

If you are thinking of introducing re-use or looking to improve what you already have in place, then our top tips are a good place to start.

## ① Involve and inform your staff on site

No matter what your approach is to re-use on site, everyone has a role to play. Training and having the buy-in of your site staff is essential to the success of any re-use activity, and they will ultimately determine the success or failure of your approach.

If you are just starting with re-use, take time to consider how your site staff can be involved and allow plenty of time for training and supporting them. Make sure they understand their role, where the boundaries are and crucially what can and can't be accepted and why, so they can make good decisions about what to intercept and inform the public whether items can be reused or not. Also consider how you can help them recognise value, such as designer rips in jeans or an old chair that could be a valuable Parker Knoll (a brand synonymous with high-quality, handcrafted sofas and chairs) or similar highly sought-after brand that could be well worth that extra investment to refurbish or repurpose to maximise its value.

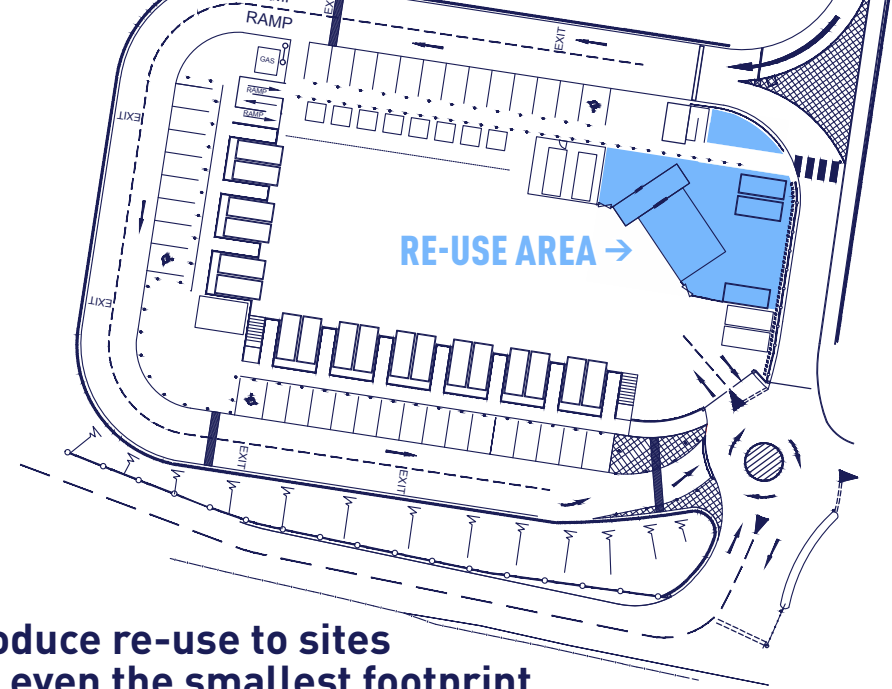
Remember that everyone learns differently. Once your main training or awareness raising is complete, ensure there are visual guides on site so that new staff can be brought up to speed easily about re-use best practice and local protocols.

## ② Introduce re-use to sites with even the smallest footprint

Most sites can accommodate re-use in some form. From a simple weather-secure container to collect and store items to an entire retail shop, it is possible to introduce re-use to sites with even the smallest footprint. For example, in Devon, a re-use shop is a feature at all but one of the 15 household waste recycling centres. This includes Severn Brethen in Barnstaple, which has one of the smallest footprints in the county at only 7,490 m<sup>2</sup> and one of the highest levels of waste deposited, but also includes a well-used re-use shop.

The ideal time to embed re-use into a site is during an upgrade, significant service change or new site development, where it can be built into the fabric of the site's layout and operation. SUEZ is increasingly building household waste recycling centres on behalf of our partner local authorities and we are always open about our desire to include re-use on as many as possible.

Careful thought should be given to site usage and flow. Ideally, the re-use area shouldn't impact the flow of users coming to site to discard waste, particularly if you are encouraging users to browse items in a retail format.





## Diverting items for re-use

### ③ Have a clear transport plan

Sites without a shop on them will need a regular collection of items to keep stock moving and to prevent newly donated items being lost because the storage space is full. If the stock is directly feeding another shop on a different site, then your drivers have an important role to play in helping filter items before they're loaded, to prevent them being damaged in transit and in confirming their suitability for sale, repair or repurpose. Where possible, they are the ideal people to report on what they do collect by recording the items they pick up and reporting on the item flows from each site.

If you are not planning on having your own retail outlet on any of your sites, then building a good relationship with local re-use businesses and suitable charities will be important, and something that should be done early in the planning process, so you can meet their needs and maximise what you reuse. For example, they will have a clear idea of what they can and cannot accept based on what they know will sell through their outlets, or what they are able to repair or repurpose for a profit.

### ④ Help the public to reuse when they're on site

Install a suitable space on site for the public to drop off items they identify as reusable, ideally located in as accessible and visible place as possible. Use signs and information boards to raise awareness of the potential of the items they are seeking to throw away and encourage them to place suitable items there or to speak to a member of staff. Remember staff will need time during the day to sort and move these items.

A clear communications plan for any new or existing re-use activity is valuable to help raise awareness both on and off site, and to help prepare visitors for what to expect.







## Diverting items for re-use

### ⑤ Think outside the box

Re-use isn't just about household items – it can also be a way to divert other reusable materials which can bring additional benefits to your customers and the community. For example, DIY materials including reclaimed / reused wood are popular in Devon, where the shops have seen a significant increase in both demand and sales due to the rising cost of virgin materials.

If an item like a bike is broken beyond repair, it can be a great source of spare parts for other bikes, so think about dismantling and holding stock for your own repairs or to sell those spare parts to others who need them, just like car dismantlers do.

- ✓ Through our renew hub in Manchester, so far in 2022, 991 bikes have been repaired and 274 have been salvaged.
- ✓ We also donate bikes through one of our sites to Positive Cycles in Oldham who have collected 409 this year, with 162 of them repaired.

In Surrey, a paint re-use point has been set up at Slyfield household waste recycling centre in Guildford, helping to divert paint that would otherwise have been disposed of and, in this example, raising money for Macmillan Cancer Support at the same time.

- ✓ In the 12-month period from September 2021 to September 2022, the shop diverted 1,090 containers of paint – around 6,000 litres – and raised £1,693 for Macmillan Cancer Support.



# Retail

The financial return from reused items comes not only from their sale value, but also the environment they're found in – the experience of the customer is crucial to maximising their return. Setting up a shop as part of a site's operation can seem a daunting task, but with some early planning and forethought it can become a valued part of the site's operation, creating an opportunity to divert usable items, engaging staff in the site's development and future, and connecting more directly with the local community.

## ① Voluntary sector, in-house or contractor managed?

The first question many may think of is who's best to run a retail outlet on site. Ultimately, there is no right or wrong answer. Each has its benefits and challenges. SUEZ's approach has been to manage the shops ourselves and we see the advantage of this over other options because:

- ✓ We are able to create employment for local people and benefit from their knowledge, including retail or local connections.
- ✓ We can offer opportunities for others to learn and benefit from a working environment such as through our release on temporary licence programme in Surrey and our relationship with HMP Ford, where prisoners learn bike repair skills in their purpose-built workshop, with the bikes being sold through our re use shops in Surrey.
- ✓ The profit that's generated by a shop or network of shops can be used in a way that's agreed with the local authority. We use this in a variety of ways, including the Recycle for Greater Manchester Community Fund, which supports local groups and charities with at least £220,000 every year.

Our work and success in this area helps us to continue to support the charity sector through the donation of items they need, including furniture and donations of some of the profits generated on site, whilst our Renew hub in Manchester has a number of charity partners based on site who are involved in its training, re-use and repair activities.

### NAME

Pam King

### LOCATION

Shepperton Revive shop, Surrey

### ROLE

Site Operative

### EXPERIENCE

Pam has been working in the Surrey re-use shops since 2019 and is a long-time upcycler in her free time.



"I've always liked saving things and upcycling and I don't really buy anything new, so when I saw the advert for the job I thought 'oh my god that's perfect.' I was so excited about starting to work here. I love it, it's really rewarding. It's great saving things that might have been thrown out and there's a really nice regular customer base that comes in. It's an awesome job."

## Retail

### ② Data is key

No shop or retail environment works in the absence of data – it is vital in helping you to understand and adapt to how the shop is being used, by knowing what sells and when.

Having a till system with software that allows you to capture and export this data efficiently is a fundamental function to have in place before you open a shop. Over time, this allows you to analyse sales data and adapt what items you offer for sale and how they're priced, based on the information at your fingertips. Cataloging each item identified for resale creates a stock inventory which is essential for a retail approach.

To help you understand the weight of the items you sell, without having to weigh each individually, the Reuse Network has developed the Product Weight Protocol, which is available through [the Reuse Network for an annual fee†](#). This can be used in a till or back-office system to easily understand the weight of items sold.



### ③ Stocking your shop

It's easy for re-use shops to look like a traditional jumble sale to a potential customer and if it does, expect your stock to attract jumble sale revenues. Taking the time to create a quality retail environment is a vital part of the shopping experience for your customers, helping to maximise the potential value of your stock and encouraging them to return.



#### Top tips when it comes to setting up and stocking your shop

- ✓ Split your resale area into sections, so it's easier for customers to find items they may want (music, clothes, books, furniture, bikes etc).
- ✓ Place items that are similar by type or colour, or display sets such as crockery together to make them look more appealing.
- ✓ Less is more – don't try to cram too much into one place or on one shelf.
- ✓ Giving items a wipe down before they go on sale will make them much more appealing to prospective buyers.
- ✓ Always check that DVDs, CDs and games have a disc in them and it's the right one.



## 4 Build a social media presence

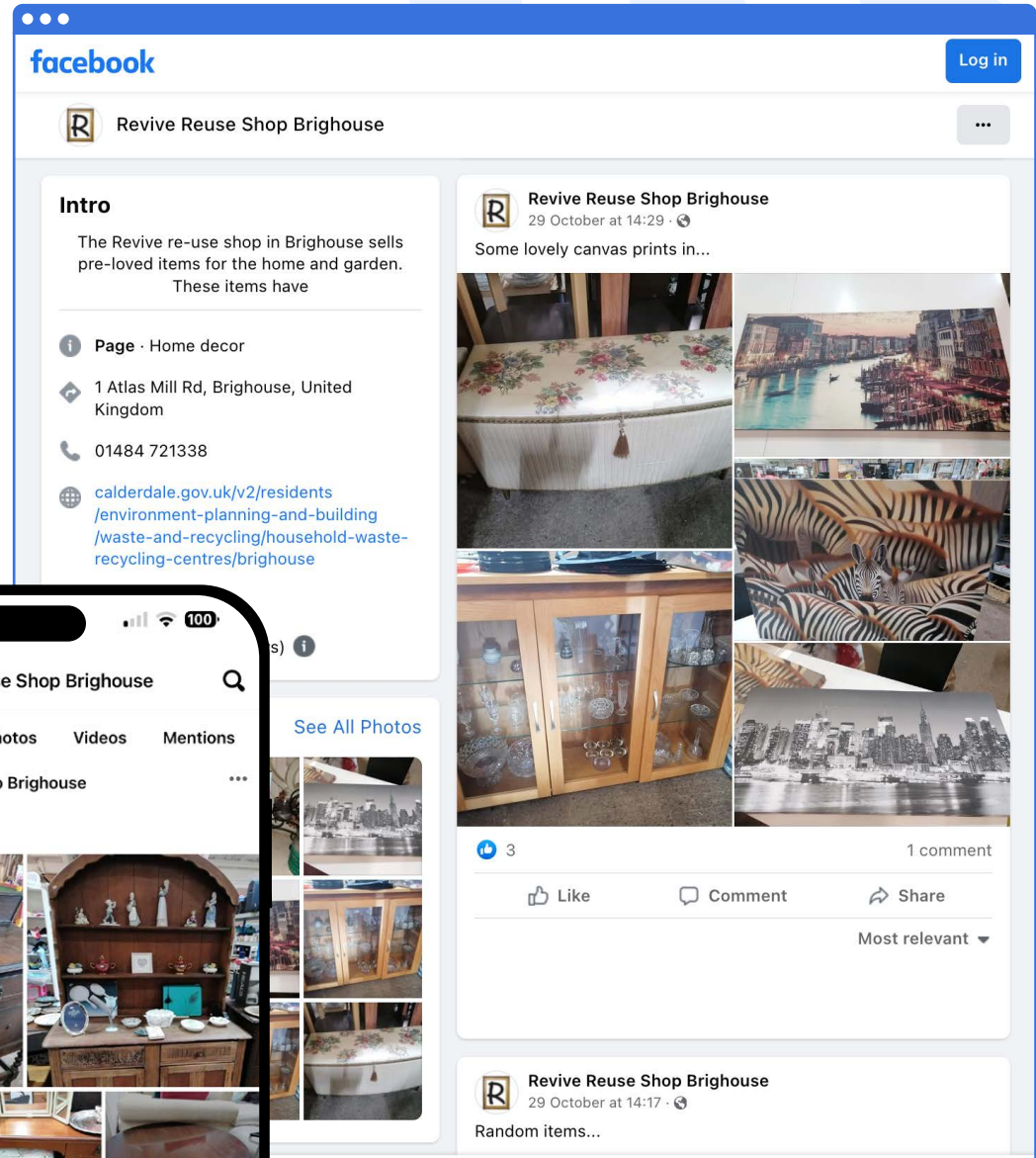
Social media can be a great way to build interest in the shop, connect with those in your local community that may not visit very often, or at all, and highlight the products you have for sale.

Investing a small amount in advertising to targeted postcodes on social media channels can be a worthwhile investment to drive traffic to a page when it's new and establishing itself.

Don't underestimate the time it can take to publish relevant content and respond to potential customers – this can be a worthwhile investment in time when done well, boosting sales and awareness in the local area.

Social media is also an ideal platform to:

- ✓ Help attract customers and encourage more donations by thanking the public for their donations.
- ✓ Showcasing reused items.
- ✓ Promoting seasonal campaigns.
- ✓ Posting regular summaries of the number of items received or sold.



[www.facebook.com/ReviveBrighouse/](https://www.facebook.com/ReviveBrighouse/)

# Summary

Household waste recycling centres are the last intervention point we have to prevent usable items from ending up in the waste stream and being treated further down the waste hierarchy. Introducing or building on existing re-use activities on site and beyond is becoming an increasingly important part of the role of a household waste recycling centre, and we hope this guide helps highlight what you can do yourselves.

Maximising the potential of re-use can help meet environmental targets. If done well, it can also be financially and socially rewarding whilst opening up a plethora of new opportunities for your local community.

**The phrase 'one person's trash is another person's treasure' has never been closer to reality.**