



# Repair, reuse, reform

How to accelerate progress  
to a circular economy

Re-use and repair manifesto

January 2025



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# Foreword

Over the past two decades, we have transformed our business around the value within society's 'waste' materials. The transition from reliance on landfill to recycling, energy recovery, composting and manufacturing alternative fuels required long-term vision, investment and new techniques and technologies. However, this systemic change would not have happened, or only slowly, in the absence of legislation by the European Union and UK government.

National policy now aims to move the UK economy on from the long-established and unsustainable linear model – take, make and dispose – to a resource-efficient, circular economy that conserves and reuses natural and man-made resources. Yet, re-use is nowhere near fulfilling its potential. Significant intrinsic value in millions of household items – including furniture, small electricals, appliances and other durable goods and useful materials – is still being lost or destroyed.

SUEZ is capturing part of this resource through re-use, repair and re-sale services and initiatives, with our local authority customers, the third sector and other partners. The benefits are more than environmental. This activity also creates jobs and training opportunities, generates revenue for councils, community organisations and local SMEs, and provides essential goods at prices more people can afford. Our latest research shows that customers of our local authority re-use shops value these services. So do the visitors of charity shops and Repair Cafés across the UK.

This repair and re-use movement is spreading despite major impediments and disincentives. Central government intervention would help level the playing field and accelerate progress. After considerable research and engagement with stakeholders in the sector, we are championing a manifesto for targeted action to unlock the vast potential of repair and re-use for environmental, economic and societal good.

The seven steps we outline here would kickstart the repair and re-use revolution that should be central to our emerging circular economy. SUEZ will continue to invest and innovate in this sector, while championing the wider cause of sustainability in resource use and management in the interests of the planet, people and profit.

I thank everyone who shared their experience and insights as we developed this manifesto, and I urge our new Government to re-focus on this overlooked aspect of waste policy and help unlock the untapped potential of repair and re-use.

**SUEZ will continue to invest and innovate in this sector, while championing the wider cause of sustainability in resource use and management in the interests of the planet, people and profit.**



**John Scanlon**  
Chief Executive Officer  
SUEZ recycling and recovery UK

# Seven steps to stimulate re-use and repair

A vibrant re-use and repair sector will create skilled green jobs, support communities, protect the environment and boost local economies. There are many different actions across government that could catalyse the changes needed to reap those benefits.

Based on SUEZ's direct experience and our engagement with a range of organisations active in this area, we have identified seven steps that would send a clear signal to all parties across the value chain that re-use and repair are integral to sustainable resource management and the UK's emerging circular economy. These changes would make that ambition clear and achievable, and accelerate change:

1

## Cut the cost

Reduce VAT on all reused, refurbished and repaired goods, including spare parts and labour.

2

## Harness skills

Implement the ideals of the former Government's [Green Jobs Delivery Group](#)<sup>1,2</sup> to bring more people into the sector.

3

## Build consumer confidence

Establish a nationwide accreditation scheme for tested and repaired products.

4

## Enable local leadership

Give the public sector a clear objective to prioritise re-use.

5

## Keep products in use for longer

Increase minimum warranty periods for electrical and household items.

6

## Make repairs accessible

Extend [Right to Repair](#)<sup>3</sup> legislation.

7

## Invest to grow

Create a £250 million Re-use Development Loan Fund.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/green-jobs-delivery-group>

2 The Government Green Jobs Plan was never published, but the data provided for our sector can be found in CIWM's Beyond Waste Report – <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Beyond-Waste-Essential-Skills-for-a-Greener-Tomorrow.pdf>

3 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9302/>

# Consumer habits need to evolve faster

The UK's consumer society is unsustainable. If all nations consumed the world's resources at the same rate as the UK, **2.6 planets would be needed** to sustain our demands on nature<sup>4</sup>. How we consume products and food accounts for 45% of total global greenhouse gas emissions<sup>5</sup>.

Tackling these twin challenges – resource depletion and the climate crisis – requires systemic change. Re-use must be part of the solution.

The waste hierarchy has been a fixture in UK government and EU waste strategy for decades. Yet, re-use has been neglected. When we keep products in use for longer through re-use and repair, they move higher up the hierarchy above recycling, as precious natural resources are saved and waste prevented or reduced.

Unfortunately, millions of items are simply thrown in the bin as rubbish. In the case of electrical items, for example, **an estimated 160,000 tonnes** – with a potential resale value of £56 million – are ending up as waste every year<sup>6</sup>.

Research for our 2023 report, **Re-use – seizing the opportunity**<sup>7</sup>, calculated that 35,500 reusable items were passing through household waste recycling centres across the country every day. That is equivalent to 13 million items every year that are at best, broken down for recycling, or incinerated for energy recovery, or at worst, sent to landfill.

In a world of depleting resources, this level of waste is neither sustainable nor acceptable in a society striving to be environmentally responsible. The scale of the problem is daunting, yet there are indications among consumers and some entrepreneurs of a shift in attitudes and behaviours that are deeply embedded in our modern throwaway society.

Innovative brands such as Back Market and Vinted have shown how the re-use business model can succeed in the fast-moving markets of tech and fashion – for example, **Vinted announced a €17.8 million profit in 2023**<sup>8</sup>. Phone repair stalls and charity shops are a more familiar, local equivalent, and there are **600-plus mobile phone repair businesses across the UK**<sup>9</sup>. Charity shops selling mostly pre-loved goods in high street outlets **contributed £387 million in revenue** to the funds of national and local charities in the 2022/23 financial year<sup>10</sup>.

Meanwhile, other social trends point to a more conscious consumerism and openness to re-use. This is easily demonstrated and can be seen through the popularity of TV shows, YouTube channels and blogs showcasing repairs, restoration and upcycling. Alongside this, community and volunteer-led Repair Cafés are part of **a growing international network**<sup>11</sup>, with more than 600 dotted across the UK. Many community centres (often affiliated to the **Community Repair Network**<sup>12</sup>) also host 'mend sessions' where residents bring items to be repaired.

**If all nations consumed the world's resources at the same rate as the UK, 2.6 planets would be needed to sustain our demands on nature<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.overshootday.org/how-many-earths-or-countries-do-we-need>

<sup>5</sup> WRAP. Taking Action on Climate Change. Available at: <https://wrap.org.uk/taking-action/climate-change> [Accessed 02/04/2024]

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wrap.ngo/resources/guide/re-use>

<sup>7</sup> Published 31 March 2023. <https://www.suez.co.uk/en-gb/news/list-of-publications>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/worklife/article/20240301-international-second-hand-clothing-market-profitable>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ibisworld.com/united-kingdom/market-research-reports/mobile-phone-repair-industry/#IndustryStatisticsAndTrends>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.charityretail.org.uk/key-statistics/>

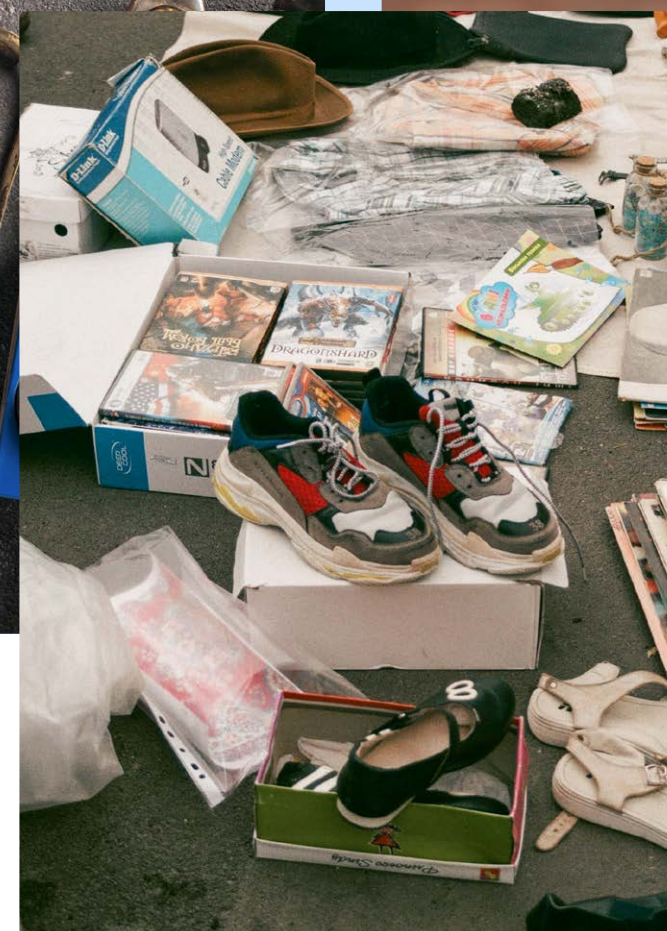
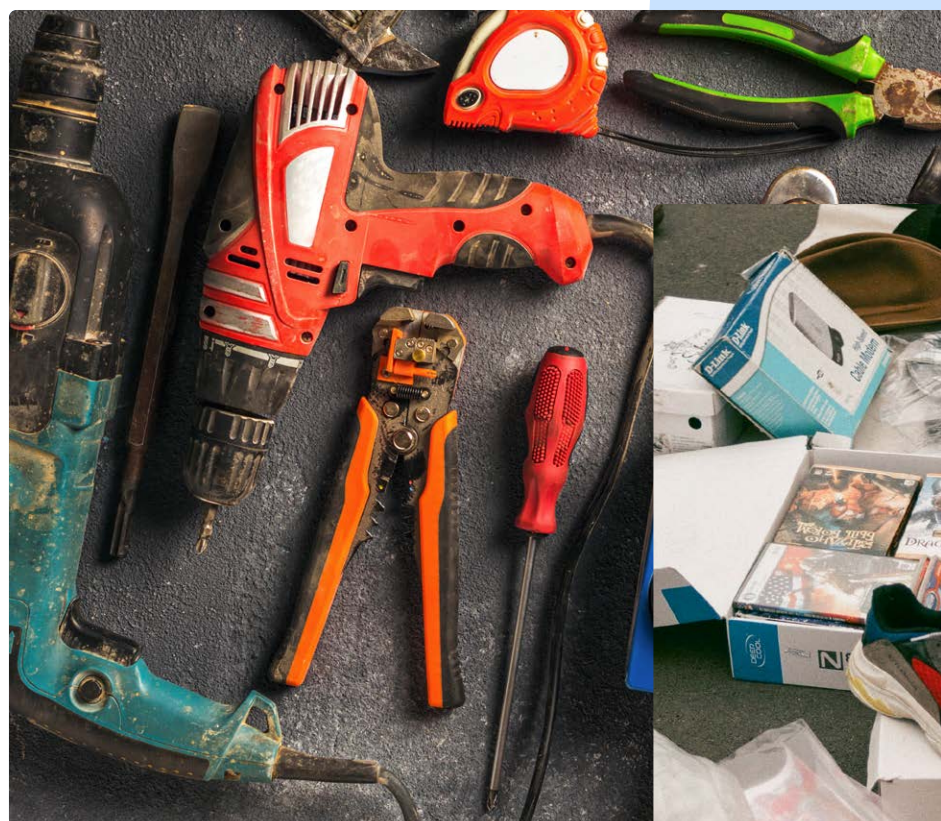
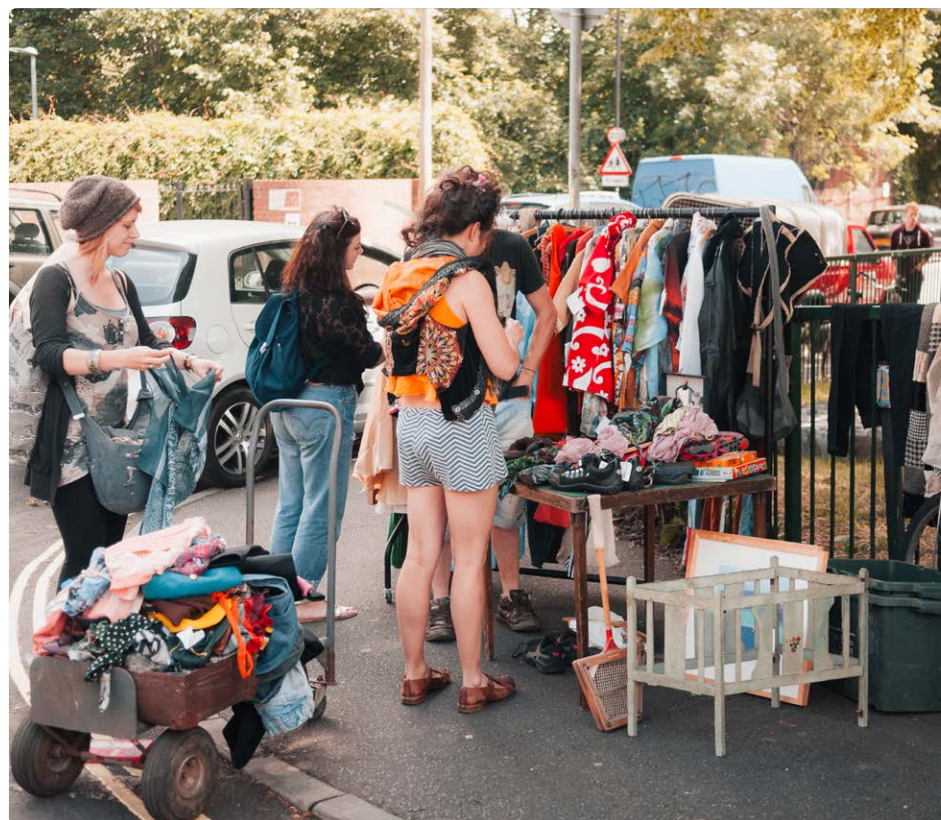
<sup>11</sup> <https://communityrepairnetwork.org.uk/find/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://communityrepairnetwork.org.uk/about-us/>

In urban areas, householders leave unwanted items on the pavement outside their properties for neighbours or passers-by who might put them to good use (instead of, or before, taking them to their 'local tip', i.e. household waste recycling centre). Volunteers and social enterprises operate 'libraries of things' loaning out popular but occasionally used DIY and gardening equipment for a small fee, while residents offer up items via street groups on WhatsApp and other social networks.

Convenience, money saving, neighbourliness – and various motivations besides environmental awareness and a desire to prevent waste – drive these and other practical examples of re-use and repair in various sectors. This shift may be largely below the radar and seem small-scale, but statistics show that the sale of second-hand items is on an upward trajectory. Total spending on pre-owned household items increased by 16% in 2022 (£1.5 billion), according to the [2023 Ethical Markets Report](https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/sites/default/files/media-file/2023-12/EC-Markets-report-2023-web-final2.pdf)<sup>13</sup>.

Given the vast scale of discarded goods, there is huge potential to grow this activity by giving people more opportunities and incentives to change society's unsustainable and resource-intensive behaviours.



**Total spending on pre-owned household items increased by 16% in 2022 (£1.5 billion)**



<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/sites/default/files/media-file/2023-12/EC-Markets-report-2023-web-final2.pdf>

# Re-use by SUEZ

Re-use is a core part of the SUEZ recycling and recovery UK business. Back in 2011, under a new processing contract with Devon County Council, we took over the operation of the county's household waste recycling centres and their re-use shops. Over the years since, we have further developed our approach to re-use in the UK by innovating in how we deliver local authority waste management services and forging creative partnerships with the third sector.

Today, we manage a growing network of more than 30 such shops around the country and have developed a first-of-its-kind Renew Hub for refurbishing a range of used household goods in Greater Manchester.

In 2023, these facilities helped divert more than half a million items for re-use – that was more than 100,000 items up on the 2022 total (of 390,944). Weighing in at just over 4,100 tonnes, this 2023 contribution may still be comparatively small, but it's growing – up 36% on the previous year's tonnage.

**The £3 million raised through our re-use activities in 2023 was shared with local authorities and provided funding for community projects**

There are wider benefits from re-use that we recognise as a business committed to advancing the circular economy while balancing the interests of people, planet and profit. Re-use is a circular solution with environmental, economic and societal dimensions. Giving goods a second life meets this triple test of sustainability in its widest sense:

## Environmental

Repairing and refurbishing discarded items conserves and adds value. These manufactured goods have intrinsic value that is reduced or lost through recycling and reprocessing constituent materials, incineration or landfilling. Carbon emissions are also avoided, along with extraction of raw materials, manufacturing (when most emissions are embodied in products) and shipment of new goods.

## Economic

Re-use generates a revenue stream that can be retained within the local economy. The £3 million raised through our re-use activities in 2023 was shared with local authorities and provided funding for community projects. Re-use operations also create and sustain repair and retail jobs, and often support social enterprises.

## Societal

Re-conditioned goods are sold to local people at affordable prices, easing pressure on household budgets, or donated to organisations supporting those in need (such as care leavers and families fleeing domestic violence). Local people have new opportunities for training, work placements, and purposeful jobs. The long-term unemployed, prison leavers, or other disadvantaged or excluded groups may also benefit, depending on how a scheme is designed.

These benefits make re-use worthwhile, but realising them is not without its challenges. Our experience has taught us what does and does not work, and the change of mindset required – not only of us as waste operators – if we are to scale up the contribution of re-use to a national circular economy.



## Hub of activity

The Renew Hub was developed by SUEZ in partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). Serving the city region's nine boroughs and a network of Renew shops, the award-winning facility is the most advanced of its kind in the UK.

We designed and equipped the Hub and its repair pods for refurbishing a wide range of products from bicycles and furniture to electrical goods. So far, more than 283,000 items have been processed, 20 jobs created and half a million pounds raised for charity.

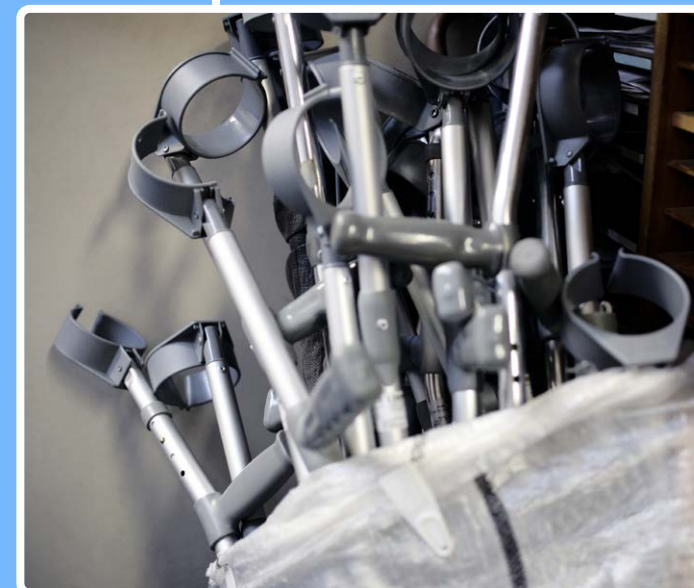
Ex-offenders are among those to have benefitted from skills training and work placements in the Hub, which is also designed to host community events as part of the SUEZ strategy to maximise social value through our activities.

## From re-use to rehabilitation

Abandoned bikes collected from across Surrey are refurbished and re-sold as part of our collaboration with the county council and HM Prison Service.

Since 2018, we have partnered with HMP Ford, investing in a workshop equipped for repairing cycles within the men's open prison in West Sussex. The bikes are collected at 15 community waste recycling centres. Prisoners are trained in bike repair, acquiring skills that contribute to their rehabilitation, and they earn money for their work. Sold through the council's network of Revive shops run by SUEZ, the cycles are valued by customers for their quality and affordability.

In another collaboration with HMP Feltham in west London, medical equipment – such as crutches and walking frames no longer required by Surrey residents – were sorted and cleaned by offenders in the young offender institution. As well as salvaging these items for re-use within the NHS, the initiative saves many hours of hospital staff time.





# Seizing the opportunity

Research by SUEZ and others suggests there is a major market for re-use and repair that would generate benefits for consumers, employment, the local and national economy, and the planet.

The volumes and usability of commonly discarded goods point to the scale of this untapped supply and also the demand:

- + Households and companies in the UK dispose of two million tonnes of electrical items each year. Of this total, **40% (800,000 tonnes) comprises large household appliances** such as washing machines, fridges and over two million televisions<sup>14</sup>.
- + **Work by the social enterprise Restart** found that more than a third (36%) of all electrical devices brought to a West London Waste Authority household waste recycling centre for recycling were perfectly reusable. Combined with those that were economical to repair, 46% could have been put back into use<sup>15</sup>.

- + **Almost 70 million homeware items are being discarded every year in the UK** – from cushions and sofas to lamps and mugs<sup>16</sup>.
- + **A SUEZ survey in September 2023** revealed that home movers in the UK throw away up to £150 million worth of goods each year<sup>17</sup>.
- + When moving house, **Britons spend an average of £13,000** on home furnishings, DIY and other home improvements.
- + More than a fifth (21%) of household spending is on products that could be easily sourced from second-hand sources, including home furnishings and domestic appliances, which totals over £220 million every year<sup>18</sup>.
- + There are an **estimated 880 million unwanted electrical items** being stored in drawers and cupboards by UK households<sup>19</sup>. Changing tastes, advances in technology and the need for software or other upgrades means that these items have a limited window to be reused. That opportunity is lost because consumers are concerned about misuse of their personal data, unsure about their devices' value or what to do with them<sup>20</sup>.

## Almost 70 million homeware items are being discarded every year in the UK

## Households and companies in the UK dispose of two million tonnes of electrical items each year

Tapping these hidden resources and shifting some household spending to reused, repurposed and remanufactured products would create a virtuous circle, while expenditure is retained with the UK (rather than spent on imports), supporting local services, trades and suppliers.

Research commissioned by SUEZ shows that if households had two additional items reused or repaired every year, this would keep an extra 23 million items in use and generate more than £1.6 billion in revenue for local economies. It would also create 74,200 skilled jobs opportunities across the country. The number of 'green' job opportunities **is projected to reach 240,000 by 2040** as the re-use and repair ecosystem expands<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hse.gov.uk/waste/waste-electrical.htm>

<sup>15</sup> <https://therestartproject.org/news/recycling-reusable-products/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/news/study-suggests-british-people-throw-away-2-2-billion-worth-of-homeware-each-year/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.suez.co.uk/en-gb/news/press-releases/230918-home-movers-research-reveals-brits-could-be-throwing-away-up-to-150m>

<sup>18</sup> [https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SNA\\_TABLE5](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SNA_TABLE5)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.materialfocus.org.uk/press-releases/nearly-1-billion-worth-of-precious-materials-could-be-saved-if-all-our-electricals-were-recycled/>

<sup>20</sup> Consumer research commissioned by SUEZ

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Beyond-Waste-Essential-Skills-for-a-Greener-Tomorrow.pdf>



## An under-used pipeline

Local authority household waste recycling centres are an essential part of the infrastructure network supporting waste recycling and management in the UK. They are generally not promoted as a means for householders to enable re-use, but tend to be the last opportunity to divert reusable items from recycling or disposal.

Household waste recycling centres have untapped potential as a supply pipeline for the re-use and repair economy – we estimate that around 13 million items per year pass through enroute to recycling or disposal.

SUEZ has estimated that, with the right policy support, household waste recycling centres could build up capacity over five years to salvage more than 15 million items annually, generating sales revenue for local authorities in excess of £63 million per year<sup>26</sup>. In addition to the financial savings over buying new, the carbon emissions saved would be equivalent to taking 189,000 cars off the road<sup>27</sup>.

**Our most recent research** captured useful insights from current and prospective customers of household waste recycling centre-based re-use shops<sup>28</sup>. Nine in 10 shop visitors were happy with their experience and the same proportion could be considered regulars, having been at least twice before. Of those household waste recycling centre users who had not visited the on-site shop, over half had already bought second-hand elsewhere, such as charity shops or online marketplaces.

<sup>26</sup> Re-use – Seizing the opportunity. 31 March 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Equivalent to 930,000 tonnes per annum.

<sup>28</sup> Choose to reuse. Customer Insights from SUEZ re-use shops.' SUEZ September 2024. <https://www.suez.co.uk/en-gb/news/list-of-publications>

<sup>29</sup> <https://therestartproject.org/beyond-recycling-of-e-waste/>

Repairing and reusing durable items rather than replacing or recycling them shrinks the carbon footprint of consumption. A study that compared the emissions arising from repair with those from the production of new products **estimated that there was a 10kgCO<sub>2e</sub> carbon saving per kilogram weight** of the items repaired<sup>22</sup>. For direct re-use, with no carbon burden from repairs or reprocessing, the benefit is even greater.

There are also wider social benefits to consider. **Six million people in the UK are living without essential furniture items** such as a cooker, a fridge or a child's bed<sup>23</sup>. This is despite the efforts of the Re-use Network and its members **who helped 1.59 million households in 2023**<sup>24</sup>. Re-use enables vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and families to access furniture and household appliances at affordable prices, but there are many more in need. More than one in five people in the UK (22%) were in poverty in 2021/22 – **14.4 million people – and poverty is deepening**<sup>25</sup>.

Taking into account these and other social, economic and environmental benefits, expanding repair and re-use by two items per household would generate over £1.5 billion a year in social value for the UK.

<sup>22</sup> Privett – Impact of UK Repair Cafés on GHG emissions. [https://frc.cfsd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Summary-findings-of-study-into-UK-Repair-Cafee%CC%87s-impact-on-GHG-emissions\\_v1.5.pdf](https://frc.cfsd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Summary-findings-of-study-into-UK-Repair-Cafee%CC%87s-impact-on-GHG-emissions_v1.5.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://endfurniturepoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Extent-of-Furniture-Poverty-in-the-UK-final-3.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://reuse-network.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Reuse-Network-Social-Impact-Report-2023.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

## Further polling by Restart in 2024 shows that more than a third (34%) of people don't know what happens to household items left at household waste recycling centres.

Of those surveyed, 39% **assume that electrical items in good condition are repaired if necessary and reused**<sup>29</sup>, yet this is not the reality.

The charity's volunteers found that only half (51%) of 1,026 waste facilities they identified across the UK offered any kind of re-use stream for unwanted products and the service was usually limited. Only 18% catered for small electronic and electrical goods and just 2% provided a repair option.

A YouGov survey, however, showed widespread support for re-use and repair, and government targets to divert electrical items from household waste recycling centres to the secondary market – 85% thought electricals in good conditions should be kept in use rather than sent for recycling.

Research studies to date confirm high levels of customer satisfaction with existing re-use shops, strong public support for greater repair and re-use, and a belief that household waste recycling centres are or should be at the centre of that activity. These findings underscore the opportunity to grow the re-use sector by building on existing behaviours and expectations in the short term.



**In a SUEZ survey of 2,000 members of the public in 2024, 40% said they would take an item that developed a fault to their local household waste recycling centre, and almost a quarter (23%) said they would simply throw it away.<sup>†</sup>**

<sup>†</sup> The polling was carried out by Opinium for SUEZ, with fieldwork completed from 7 to 10 June 2024

# The main barriers to repair and re-use

Notwithstanding the efforts of everyone supporting re-use and repair, their progress in growing this activity is being held back. There are multiple barriers whose combined effect is to deter, penalise and frustrate behavioural change and more responsible consumption in our society. Most cannot be overcome by proponents of re-use alone. Four of these major obstacles to unlocking the environmental, economic and social benefits of re-use merit special consideration:

## Historic lack of ambition at government level

Recycling holds centre stage in all government policy on resources and waste in England. The only relevant policy paper in relation to re-use and repair – [The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste](#) (published in July 2023) – discusses both at some length, but offers little in the way of affirmative action and lacks any real ambition<sup>30</sup>.

[DEFRA's consultation](#) on waste electrical and electronic equipment, launched in December 2023, continued this trend<sup>31</sup>. Its proposed reforms of the producer responsibility system and call for evidence again focused on recycling. Meanwhile, after more than five years, reforms to extended producer responsibility for packaging are still only just at the earliest stages of implementation. Extended producer responsibility obligations for bulky household items – mooted in the waste prevention plan – could be another five or more years behind.

What's needed is a clear commitment and strategy from government on the re-use and repair of household items (both electrical and non-electrical) to signal a clear direction of travel for manufacturers, retailers and actors in all sectors. Re-use deserves a more central role in resource and waste policy strategy, reflecting its position near the top of the waste hierarchy. We hope that this government will grasp this opportunity to reprioritise, rather than tinker with reforms narrowly focused on recycling and managing waste streams.

## Confusing information and options

When an item is no longer needed or develops a fault, what should the owner do? There are various options to consider, which can be unclear, confusing and vary depending on one's location.

An item may be suitable for donation, but charity shops have to change their acceptance criteria when overrun with stock, and donors often need to transport all but the bulkiest items. For faulty products not under warranty, finding a professional repairer can be difficult and, unless they are tried and tested, there will be uncertainty about cost and reliability. The alternative of purchasing a new replacement with the promise of timely delivery at the buyer's convenience will be attractive, even if a repair may be more cost-effective.

Lack of clarity and established routes for repairing the wide array of products and brands used in households adds to the complexity of these decisions (despite the worthy efforts of some community enterprise websites to signpost recycling and re-use options).

In a SUEZ survey of 2,000 members of the public in 2024, 40% said they would take an item that developed a fault to their local household waste recycling centre, and almost a quarter (23%) said they would simply throw it away<sup>32</sup>. Restart's recent findings shed further light on the thinking, or confusion, behind those responses, given that more than two thirds of people either don't know what happens to items deposited at the household waste recycling centre or believe (often mistakenly) that repairable electrical items will be saved for re-use.

**When an item is no longer needed or develops a fault, what should the owner do?**

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/waste-prevention-programme-for-england-maximising-resources-minimising-waste>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/electrical-waste-reforming-the-producer-responsibility-system>

<sup>32</sup> The polling was carried out by Opinion for SUEZ, with fieldwork completed from 7 to 10 June 2024

Other research reveals a gap between people's preferences and the practicalities. There is a clear desire among the public for more action and support to help reduce waste and increase re-use: **71% of people say they want to see more information** about how to reduce the impact of the things they buy, and less advertising driving consumption<sup>33</sup>. Meanwhile, the greatest barriers to consumers choosing to repair were found to be 'convenience' (including the cost of services and limitations in repair infrastructure) and feasibility (lack of spare parts and repair manuals)<sup>34</sup>.

**71% of people say they want to see more information about how to reduce the impact of the things they buy, and less advertising driving consumption<sup>32</sup>**

## Cost too often outweighs the benefits

Apart from the practicalities of finding the right service and arranging a repair, the likely cost is a major factor in the decision whether to replace or repair household products. The relative cost of repair compared with buying new is the 'tipping point for repair'. Research has shown that **people are unlikely to choose to repair a product if the cost is more than 30% of the price of the same product bought new**<sup>35</sup>.

For lower-cost electrical items, such as lamps or toasters, even a basic repair could be up to four times the cost of a new replacement. Our research also indicates, by contrast, that returning a high-value item such as a smartphone to use, might cost as little as 12% of a new equivalent.

The price of repair services should fall as consumer demand, the number of providers and the repair infrastructure grow in a circular economy. However, interventions now to reduce the disparity and make repair a more cost-effective option would stimulate this emerging market. For example, a simple measure such as removing the 20% VAT rate on repairs and replacement parts could **reduce the average price of a washing machine repair from £79 to £66**<sup>36</sup>. This would push costs below the tipping point for repairing a wider range of items and encourage their re-use.

## Re-use and repair still have an image problem

**Despite the reported 16% rise in sales of pre-owned household items in 2023<sup>37</sup>, a considerable proportion of the population do not consider buying second-hand.**

Our recent poll found that 42% of those who haven't already purchased a pre-owned item would never do so, and this rose to 64% for small electrical appliances<sup>38</sup>. There may be multiple reasons, but concerns about quality are probably the main factor. Research in the fashion market confirmed the perception shared by more than half of people over 45 to be that second-hand clothes would be of 'poor quality'. However, those in the 18-34 age group were **notably happier to buy pre-worn clothing**<sup>39</sup>.

To overcome this objection and make re-use mainstream, Zero Waste Scotland introduced its Revolve support network and certification system in 2011. To date, more than 100 businesses and organisations involved in re-use and repair are benefiting from expert knowledge and training to help them meet all legal obligations and operate to a high standard.

There is no UK-wide publicly-recognised system to signify the quality of second-hand products or their providers. A certification system would provide assurance that products have been repaired by a suitably qualified engineer and meet standards for safety and quality, building consumer confidence and trust.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/understanding-waste-prevention>

<sup>34</sup> From 'right to repair' to 'willingness to repair': Exploring consumer's perspective to product lifecycle extension – N Rosklada, A Jaegler, G. Miragliotta. December 2023

<sup>35</sup> <https://repair.eu/news/the-price-is-not-right/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/shoppingpricescomparisonstool/2023-05-03>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/sites/default/files/media-file/2023-12/EC-Markets-report-2023-web-final2.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> The polling was carried out by Opinium for SUEZ, with fieldwork completed from 7 to 10 June 2024

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/half-of-adults-say-they-are-unwilling-to-wear-someone-else-s-clothes-when-it-comes-to-second-hand-items-b2406627.html>

**For lower-cost electrical items, such as lamps or toasters, even a basic repair could be up to four times the cost of a new replacement.**

**Our research also indicates, by contrast, that returning a high-value item such as a smartphone to use, might cost as little as 12% of a new equivalent.**



# What more can be done?

Great work is being done at local and regional level by local authorities, charities, social enterprises and other organisations – including waste management and recycling service providers – to promote re-use and repair.

At national level too, start-ups and established businesses have developed or adapted business models that extend the life of some products. However, repair and re-use remain very much the exception rather than the norm for the vast majority of household items and households.

**The growth of repair and re-use will continue to be limited while most products are not designed for disassembly and repair**

All actors along the value chain – including product designers, manufacturers, retailers, repairers, consumer organisations, education providers and the resource management sector – have a role to play in promoting and enabling the more sustainable and responsible use of manufactured goods. Local and central government could give these stakeholders greater impetus to stimulate progress.

Even with their limited resources and powers, councils can take action locally. Local authorities are well placed to nurture partnerships with the third sector and local businesses that create innovative re-use and repair initiatives. Re-use should be given due importance in local waste strategy and procurement – not least contracts for collection, recycling and processing household waste. Drawing on our extensive experience of re-use activities, SUEZ is sharing insights with local government and the industry. We published the second in a series of guides on re-use – [The repair evolution – in September 2023](#), setting out practical steps for integrating repair and re-sale activities within household waste recycling centres<sup>40</sup>.

Consumer preferences and behaviours need to change, but the growth of repair and re-use will continue to be limited while most products are not designed for disassembly and repair. A fundamental market failure, this was a key topic of conversation and frustration at a recent roundtable hosted by ReLondon and SUEZ on how to catalyse future investment.

Only central government holds the policy and legislative levers not only to spur on local authority-led change but to regulate dysfunctional markets and inspire a more radical nationwide repair and re-use revolution. Relatively modest interventions – in areas such as tax, industrial strategy, consumer protection legislation, as well as seed funding – could together provide a major boost to sustainable consumerism. What follows is our suggested roadmap setting out seven ways to accelerate the expansion of re-use and repair en route to the circular economy.



<sup>40</sup> <https://www.suez.co.uk/en-gb/news/press-releases/230220-the-repair-evolution>

# Seven steps to stimulate re-use and repair

An expanding re-use and repair sector will generate green jobs, social value, and boost local economies, while cutting carbon emissions and increasing UK plc's resource efficiency. We have short-listed seven measures based on SUEZ's direct experience and engagement with a range of organisations active in this area, where central government holds the lever to unlock and set the direction for change. These steps would signal that re-use and repair is a priority and accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

1

## Cut the cost

Reduce VAT on all reused, refurbished and repaired goods, including spare parts and labour.

Reduce the cost of buying second-hand and related services, making reused items more competitive with new alternatives and repair more cost-effective.

2

## Harness skills

Implement the ideals of the former [Government's Green Jobs Delivery Group](#)<sup>41, 42</sup> to bring more people into the sector.

Act on its recommendations for upskilling existing workforces, making the sector more attractive to new talent and ensuring training programmes are fit for purpose.

3

## Build consumer confidence

Establish a nationwide accreditation scheme for tested and repaired products.

Boost buyers' trust by ensuring that those carrying out repairs and servicing are meeting minimum training and procedural standards.

4

## Enable local leadership

Give the public sector a clear objective to prioritise re-use.

Encourage local authorities to focus more attention on re-use and repair.

5

## Keep products in use for longer

Increase minimum warranty periods for electrical and household items.

Extend producer responsibility and enhance consumer rights by sending a clear signal to manufacturers and suppliers to increase product lifespans through effective design and repair services.

6

## Make repairs accessible

[Extend Right to Repair](#)<sup>43</sup> legislation.

Ensure manufacturers make parts and service information easy to access for longer and a wider range of products to enable everyone interested or involved in repair, refurbishment and similar services.

7

## Invest to grow

Create a £250 million Re-use Development Loan Fund.

Support start-ups, innovation and the growth of businesses and organisations in the sector.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/green-jobs-delivery-group>

<sup>42</sup> The Government Green Jobs Plan was never published, but the data provided for our sector can be found in CIWM's Beyond Waste Report – <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Beyond-Waste-Essential-Skills-for-a-Greener-Tomorrow.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9302/>



## What would this manifesto mean in practice?

### Cut the cost

Reduce VAT on all reused, refurbished and repaired goods, including spare parts and labour.

Donated items sold in charity shops **are exempt from VAT**<sup>44</sup>. However, without charitable status, other sellers must levy the full 20% rate on all pre-owned product sales. This charge also applies to repair services and the spare parts they require.

Reused products have already contributed VAT to the exchequer through their original sale. Applying the full rate of VAT to them a second time makes reused items less competitive on price with new equivalents. Charging VAT on repair services and spare parts has a similar effect, making repairs less attractive and missing the opportunity to retain the value of these products in circulation, rather than losing them to disposal or recycling. Almost one in four people in our survey said that the expense of repairs was prohibitive.

Reducing VAT on replacement parts, repair services and re-used products would widen the range of second-life items able to compete on price and the cost-effective choice for consumers.

The direct loss in tax revenue to the Treasury would be modest and more than offset by the boost to re-use and repair activity and employment. Second-hand household items currently account for only 3% of sales, while spending on repair services totalled £731 million in 2023 (compared to almost £50 billion spent on new household appliances and furnishings). Reducing VAT to 10% on re-use related spend would cost HMRC £170 million in tax receipts (based on 2023 expenditure).

Our research also shows that if this and other measures achieved the intended shift to re-use and repair, it could generate more than £3.5 billion a year in sales revenue spread across the UK, more than covering the cost of the reduction in VAT.


Also, as part of our research for this report, SUEZ consulted our local authority customers who told us that this tax reform would have the biggest impact on the take-up of re-use and repair.

The full social impact should also be factored into any cost-benefit analysis of this proposed change. The opportunities to boost training, employment and support other social objectives are significant – so are the environmental benefits, though quantifying them is complex. The external impacts of extracting resources, manufacturing and shipping goods are not accounted for in the price paid at the till. Imported products are often produced in countries with lower labour and materials costs, and environmental standards. This disadvantages UK-based repair and re-use providers further.

A 'green hurdle' accounting for the environmental 'externalities' of producing new items from virgin resources is needed to level the playing field. Extending the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK-ETS) to fully cover the waste and resource management sector would help address this imbalance.



**Second-hand household items currently account for only 3% of sales**



**SUEZ consulted our local authority customers who told us that this tax reform would have the biggest impact on the take-up of re-use and repair**

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.charityretail.org.uk/how-charity-shops-work/>

## Harness skills

Implement the ideals of the former Government's **Green Jobs Delivery Group**<sup>45, 46</sup> to bring more people into the sector.

Alongside the other green jobs in a circular economy, a new generation of skilled technicians and other staff will be needed as re-use and repair activity scales. Our industry estimates that by 2035, 40,000 new recruits will be required in this category alone (partly driven by the influence of EU reuse and refill policy). With increasing regulation and industrialisation of re-use, **the total number could reach 140,000 by 2040**<sup>47</sup>.

In recent years, the repair industry has shrunk, however, and **the average age of service engineers has risen**<sup>48</sup>. Key skills and knowledge are being lost, training courses axed and **many companies are struggling to fill roles**<sup>49</sup>. Yet, attracting, training and accrediting skilled people for this expanding workforce is essential.

The creation of new green industries and jobs is a prerequisite for the transition to carbon net zero and a massive opportunity for UK plc and society – long recognised by the incoming Labour government. The Green Jobs Plan, sidelined by the previous administration, was drawn up by **a cross-sector taskforce including representation from the resource and waste management industry**<sup>50</sup>. This plan must be refreshed and implemented as a matter of urgency to kickstart progress.

**Our industry estimates that by 2035, 40,000 new recruits will be required in this category alone**

Fundamental to its success in scaling a viable re-use and repair industry will be investment in upskilling and retraining existing workforces, designing jobs and business models that sustain worthwhile wages and careers, and accreditation to drive standards of safety, competence and best practice.

## Build consumer confidence

Establish a nationwide accreditation scheme for tested and repaired products.

A lack of confidence in repairs and their reliability is **a major factor in individuals' decisions** to discard and replace broken or faulty items<sup>51</sup>. Quality assurance would address buyers' concerns and perceptions that pre-owned goods will be sub-standard or unsafe. Existing accreditation schemes – such as Scotland's Revolve mark and the BSI's Kitemark standards for products and services – might be extended or replicated.

The aim should be to create a universal scheme for repair specialists backed by the relevant industries' trade and professional bodies. Statutory underpinning – as with the UK's **Gas Safety Register**, which is operated on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive<sup>52</sup> – would increase public recognition. Service providers would in any case have a strong incentive to register if certification became a precondition for VAT exemptions on their repairs. The register's requirement for minimum standards of training would also create a desirable route to employment for those looking for a recognised technical career.

45 <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/green-jobs-delivery-group>

46 The Government Green Jobs Plan was never published, but the data provided for our sector can be found in CIWM's Beyond Waste Report – <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Beyond-Waste-Essential-Skills-for-a-Greener-Tomorrow.pdf>

47 <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Beyond-Waste-Essential-Skills-for-a-Greener-Tomorrow.pdf>

48 <https://www.heestforum.co.uk/>

49 <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Beyond-Waste-Essential-Skills-for-a-Greener-Tomorrow.pdf>

50 [https://www.ciwm.co.uk/ciwm/news/2022/ciwm\\_represents\\_waste\\_sector\\_in\\_government\\_s\\_green\\_jobs\\_delivery\\_group.aspx](https://www.ciwm.co.uk/ciwm/news/2022/ciwm_represents_waste_sector_in_government_s_green_jobs_delivery_group.aspx)

51 From "right to repair" to "willingness to repair": Exploring consumer's perspective to product lifecycle extension. N. Roskladka, A Jaegler, G. Miragliotta (2023) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652623038635#bib29>

52 <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/about-us/what-is-gas-safe-register/>

## Enable local leadership

Give the public sector a clear objective to prioritise re-use.

Reflecting national policy, most teams in local authorities working on climate, environmental, and recycling and waste issues are focused on the lower end of the waste hierarchy. Yet, they have a critical role to play in diverting items for repair and toward the higher purpose of re-use rather than more carbon-intensive reprocessing for recycling, energy recovery or disposal. Many authorities have managed to allocate some resources for re-use activities either directly or through service contracts, or at least the signposting of re-use options for residents amid rising costs and budget cuts. However, there is no consistency across the country as councils strive to meet tonnage targets which include items diverted for re-use. Local authority responses to [Restart's recent research](#)<sup>53</sup> on the subject confirmed that products for re-use are weighted identically to products sent for recycling, so local authorities don't have any incentive to choose re-use over recycling.

**The local household waste recycling centre is the most common destination for household items that are no longer wanted – small electricals make up the single biggest category and around 40% are likely to be reusable or repairable.**

Tackling this waste stream should be a priority. Local authorities are also in a position to promote re-use through procurement and collaboration with local charities, social enterprises and businesses.

Central government should re-focus local and national waste management priorities by:

### 1 Setting new targets:

- + By 2030, every household waste recycling centre should have a re-use shop or outlet for reusable items and all bulky waste collection services should be set up to divert reusable items.
- + A national target for diverting household waste for re-use (facilitated by local authorities and all other stakeholders)<sup>54</sup>. For example, aiming for 10% of all household waste to be reused by 2030 (two million tonnes based on current household waste arisings), rising to 50% by 2050.

This would require comprehensive reporting by manufacturers and retailers operating take-back schemes, and other organisations involved in re-use and repair, as well as local government.

### 2 Embedding re-use into wider service provision:

- + Stimulate the re-use market through leading by example in all relevant local authority services, such as social housing and social services, by procuring second-hand furniture and reconditioned electrical goods for tenants, directly and through social housing providers, and for equipping municipal buildings.



<sup>53</sup> <https://therestartproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Beyond-Recycling-of-E-Waste-an-investigation-into-reuse-streams-at-UK-waste-facilities.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Using 2022/2023 statistics and not taking into account changes that would occur in waste arisings given GDP growth and other factors during this period.

## Keep products in use for longer

### Increase minimum warranty periods for electrical and household items.

The business case for manufacturers and retailers to adopt more circular approaches to electrical and household items is limited. Advertised examples tend to be small in scope or impact and do not reflect a fundamental change in business models. Many producers profit from repeat sales driven by planned obsolescence, components with short lifespans or restricted repairability.

An economic imperative is needed to shift commercial mindsets. Central government can provide this by requiring manufacturers to take responsibility for and extend the life cycle of their products.

Most electrical products come with a manufacturer's warranty for at least a year and are covered by the Consumer Rights Act (2015). Extended warranties are routinely offered by brands and retailers for three to five years. Costing on average £84.80 a year per product, this protection is unaffordable for many and usually not value for money, [according to consumer champions](#)<sup>55</sup>. The average repair cost is often cheaper for some tech products and the cover can fall short of statutory rights.

Legislating for the extension of the minimum warranty period for household products such as electricals and larger household items (subject to an analysis to determine product groups' suitability) would incentivise manufacturers and retailers to improve the durability of products.

A phased timetable – five-year warranties by 2030 and 10 years by 2040, for example – would also allow time to invest in efficient and effective repair systems as the legislation requires producers to prioritise repair over replacement. This change could prompt more widespread commitment to repairability and upgrades for other products and improved labelling. For example, fire safety labels are essential to allow re-use of upholstered items, but they are often removed, forcing the disposal of perfectly usable products.

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.which.co.uk/news/article/five-reasons-not-to-buy-an-extended-warranty-this-black-friday-axqLP0E6mzwZ>

## Make repairs accessible

### Extend Right to Repair<sup>56</sup> legislation.

The UK's Right to Repair legislation came into force in July 2021. Although it strengthened consumers' rights to have their purchased items repaired, there are serious limitations. These include:

- + The appliances covered by the legislation – dishwashers, washing machines, washer-dryers, refrigerators, televisions, and other electronic displays – were already more likely to be repaired, as this is more cost-effective for these high-value items.
- + Manufacturers have up to two years after a product is launched before they make spare parts available and must continue to do so for 7-10 years after a product is discontinued. This is only a segment of the lifespan of appliances such as refrigerators that can last 20-25 years. Parts may also be unavailable if a product fails within its first two years.
- + Not all spare parts are available to the public, some are only sold to professional repairers.

The failure to ensure that parts are available for a period closer to the life cycle of appliances needlessly limits their serviceability and the cost-efficiencies of professional repair services.

SUEZ – along with more than 300 organisations, businesses and MPs – supports the UK Reuse and Repair Declaration<sup>57</sup>, which calls for strengthening the Right to Repair legislation by including all electrical and larger household products, and requiring parts to be available when an item goes on the market.

Making repair more widely accessible will support repair businesses and the UK's network of Repair Cafés, and this reform would work in synergy with the proposed extension of warranty periods.

<sup>56</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9302/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://repairreusedeclaration.uk>





## Invest to grow

### Create a £250 million Re-use Development Loan Fund.

Despite the barriers, re-use and repair activity is growing in the UK, but from a low base. It is clear that “**not enough subsidies are available to scale up circular business models and make them mainstream**”<sup>58</sup>.

Much of the funding that has been made available to circular business models has been used to support recycling and energy developments or targeted at smaller start ups – which in itself is worthwhile – but by excluding existing or larger organisations, these funds fail to recognise or support the wider transition our economy needs. A much-needed stimulus could be provided to this emerging market through a government-backed loan fund. Social and private sector enterprises, and possibly other organisations, could use these funds to establish and expand re-use and repair systems and services. As loans are repaid, the funds would be reinvested in this new circular economy, providing ongoing support for further development.

We estimate that over a five-year period a £250 million loan fund could help boost re-use and repair capacity to process three items from every household every year (in addition to current re-use and repair activities), **spawning around 2,836 retail shops (covering 40% of the UK’s highstreets)**<sup>59</sup> and 153 hubs for repair, refurbishment and upcycling.

Such a network would be self-sustaining, generating up to £1.6 billion in revenue per year (again, within five years). This expenditure would take place in local economies, supporting local businesses, paying the wages of local people and keeping items in use close to where they were originally purchased.

While the purpose and impact of the fund would justify the use of government money, expanding extended producer responsibility to cover a wider range of products would generate funds from manufacturers and retailers that could be ring-fenced to support the development of re-use and repair infrastructure and services.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Shaping-Future-Financial-and-Fiscal-Policies-for-a-More-Circular-Economy-in-the-UK-Jan-2025-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> Based on 6,969 identified high streets in the UK <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/highstreetsingreatbritain/2019-06-06>



## Informing reform

This manifesto to catalyse repair and re-use is rooted in our direct experience, research by SUEZ and others, and engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders – including local authority customers and others involved in a variety of re-use operations.

Also, to mark Circular Economy Week 2024, SUEZ recycling and recovery UK co-hosted a roundtable discussion with ReLondon (the London Waste and Recycling Board). The theme was ‘Catalysing investment into re-use and repair of household items and electricals’. Invitees included representatives from:

- + Central and local government
- + The finance, fashion and electrical industries
- + Innovators and SMEs in the circular economy
- + Academia and research
- + Charities and community groups

Held under Chatham House rules, the discussion covered many of the points made here.

While there was no attempt to seek a formal consensus, calls to action from the discussion did align with most of our recommendations.

Additional proposals deserving further consideration included:

- + Business rate reductions for enterprises engaged in repair and remanufacturing
- + A legal obligation to design and manufacture products for disassembly, repair and re-use
- + Repair voucher schemes
- + An educational campaign to embed re-use and repair in the public’s consciousness alongside (or above) recycling.

Ultimately, the seven steps in the SUEZ manifesto were chosen on the basis of our assessment of their potential impact and ease of implementation, informed by our engagement with all relevant stakeholders within and with influence over the repair and re-use sector.




# Summary

Today's wasteful patterns of consumption are deeply embedded in the globalised economy and UK society. A radical shift is essential if we are to use the planet's resources in a more sustainable way – and that change is urgent as the world's natural resources are depleting, biodiversity losses mount and the climate crisis escalates.

Repairing and reusing durable goods is an obvious way to use material resources more efficiently. However, current activity in the UK is relatively small-scale, not encouraged by policymakers and discouraged or blocked by the business models of most manufacturers and retailers.

Yet, re-use and repair have huge potential, which will eventually be realised in the transition to a circular economy, driven by regulation (in Europe as well as the UK) and economic pressures. In the meantime, the opportunity to generate significant environmental, economic and social benefits for the UK is being squandered.

Only central government has control of the major levers to accelerate the re-use and repair revolution. The seven measures we advocate will kick-start a scaling up of activity to unlock those benefits – saving households money, creating new jobs and businesses, and reducing the impact of our consumption on the planet.



**Re-use and repair have huge potential, which will eventually be realised in the transition to a circular economy**





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