CIWM

Circular Economy Institute

resource futures

# A new strategic direction for the resources and waste sector in England

Policy briefing | September 2026

**Contributing authors**

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The Circular Economy Institute Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM).

# Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Term |
|---|---|
| AD | Anaerobic digestion |
| AATF | Approved authorised treatment facility |
| C&D | Construction and demolition |
| CCC | Climate Change Committee |
| CCUS | Carbon capture, usage and storage |
| CIWM | Chartered Institution of Wastes Management |
| CPR | Collection and packaging reforms |
| DRS | Deposit return scheme |
| EEE | Electronics and electrical equipment |
| EfW | Energy from waste |
| EIP | Environmental improvement plan |
| EPR | Extended producer responsibility |
| ETS | Emissions trading scheme |
| F2F | Fibre-to-fibre |
| OEP | Office for Environmental Protection |
| R&D | Research and development |
| R&W | Resources and waste |
| WEEE | Waste electrical and electronic equipment |

# 1. A call for a new, clear strategic direction

## 1.1 Introduction

This briefing has been produced for the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), which represents resources and waste management professionals in the UK and Ireland.

Its primary aim is to engage with the new UK Government over the need for a refreshed and clear strategic direction for the resources and waste sector in England, so we can ensure necessary investments are put in place to achieve the progress needed in the 2030s for the purpose of achieving waste reduction, net zero, and resource productivity targets.

This briefing also has relevance to the devolved governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on areas where UK-wide coordination is required.[1]

## 1.2 What we are calling for

**CIWM is calling on the government to set a new, clear strategic direction for the resources and waste sector in the 2030s.**

The UK nations have stated ambitions to reduce waste, decarbonise our sector, and reap the economic gains of using our material assets more efficiently within a more resilient and circular economy. In England, clear progress has been made under the 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy. Defra expects to achieve 90-100% of its 2030 interim waste reduction target.

It is important now to articulate a new and clear strategy, along with an implementation roadmap for the resources and waste sector. This should cover at least the Sixth Carbon Budget (2033-37) and ideally up to 2042, when the long-term residual waste reduction target falls. This will allow the sector to plan for the required changes to services, infrastructure and skills with enough lead-in time.

The Circular Economy Growth Plan (drafted and awaiting release) is expected to set the direction for the economy as a whole. Our sector needs to understand its role in supporting that plan and delivering on its economic, social and environmental potential. We also need clarity on how our sector can enable the Government to achieve its environmental and sector-specific targets.

The questions that need to be answered are set out below. For each of these, we are calling on the UK Government to set out a clear vision as well as the specific policy mechanisms – such as financial and fiscal incentives – that will drive progress.

**Our sector is ready and willing to support the Government to achieve its aims.**

A next-generation resources and waste strategy and implementation roadmap would set out how the sector will enable the Government to:

- **Meet its environmental targets**
  What steps are needed to achieve the statutory 2042 residual waste reduction target, the sixth and seventh carbon budgets (2033-2037, and 2038-2042), and target 16 of our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to reduce waste and overconsumption?
- **Build on existing recycling and decarbonisation progress**
  How will we ensure continued improvements to the quantity and quality of recycling, and accelerate the decarbonisation of residual waste management such as energy from waste (EfW) and landfill?
- **Drive circularity in other high-impact materials and sectors**
  The 2018 Strategy largely drove improvements to household packaging and food waste recycling. How will we drive resource-efficient and circular management of other

[1] *Resources, waste, and environmental protection are devolved policy matters, and each UK nation develops its own strategies and legislation for the sector. However, some policies relevant to the sector are being developed collaboratively with Defra leading, such as packaging extended producer responsibility (pEPR). Policies are not devolved if they fall under connected areas such as energy – for instance, the UK's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).*

[2] *Evans, S; Owens, H; and Fydrych, U (2024) Shaping future financial and fiscal policies for a more circular economy in the UK. CIWM.*

high-impact items, notably textiles, electronics and electrical equipment (EEE), and construction and demolition (C&D) materials?

- **Scale up reuse and reduction**
  There are large economic, social, and environmental benefits to be gained from a decisive shift to reuse. These include resale, leasing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing, and product lifetime extension.

  Reuse has yet to receive tangible policy support in England. Our sector has data, knowledge, and transferable skills that can enable reuse. What role will reuse and reduction play in meeting our targets, and where should we focus our efforts?

- **Drive demand for recycled materials and reused products**
  The 2018 Strategy focused on collections, but weak market demand is a key barrier to domestic reprocessing.

  We continue to export valuable materials. How will we support the UK to attract investment in reprocessing, refurbishment, manufacturing, and remanufacturing, creating growth opportunities and skilled jobs?

- **Leverage the strategic importance of resources and waste management to a thriving and resilient UK economy**
  Recirculating materials and products domestically is critical to achieving resource resilience in a turbulent world. Our sector can also boost local and regional economies with reindustrialisation and skilled jobs, providing diverse entry routes that could help address youth unemployment.

  How will our economy-wide role in economic security and prosperity be recognised and supported?

- **Address the cross-cutting issues of health and safety, and tackle waste crime**
  These issues reduce the appeal of our sector to both potential investors and employees. How will these be robustly addressed, to ensure they do not undermine progress across all areas of the new strategy?

More detail on these points, with the reasons why each is important, is provided in **section 2**.

**Sticking to a specific, realistic, achievable roadmap will spur investment.**

To seize the opportunities of a resource-efficient, resilient economy, we want to help the Government set – and adhere to – a clear and realistic implementation roadmap for the new strategy. This would identify a timeline of specific policy and industry measures.

It takes years to develop new resources and waste infrastructure. We want to give investors confidence to channel money into scaling up domestic sorting, reuse, reprocessing, and end markets for secondary goods.

## 1.3 Why we need a new, clear resources and waste strategy

**As we head to a future of zero avoidable waste, our sector needs to undergo a transformation.**

As materials management specialists, we have a critical role to play in building a more resilient and resource-efficient UK economy in an unstable era. We can support city and regional growth plans with robust circular value chains. For instance, channelling used products and recycled materials as inputs to manufacturers (and remanufacturers) in the same region would give them a key advantage when international supply chains are disrupted.

To make this happen, the resources and waste sector wants to more closely support, and further integrate with, all other sectors. We need to unlock investment into infrastructure and attract skilled people into careers. This requires policy focus and incentives to drive change, particularly during the transition period.

The need for resource efficiency and security is not currently well integrated or understood within the UK's industrial strategy,[3] despite our economy being highly reliant on imports and, as a result, at risk from global supply chain disruptions.

At best, other industries tend to focus on how to increase recycling. The opportunities to generate value from keeping materials in use for longer, or to increase supply chain resilience and boost regional economies by procuring secondary goods, are largely sitting ignored. This puts the economy at unnecessary risk, while denying opportunities to our sector and innovative UK businesses.

### Circular business as an economic safety net

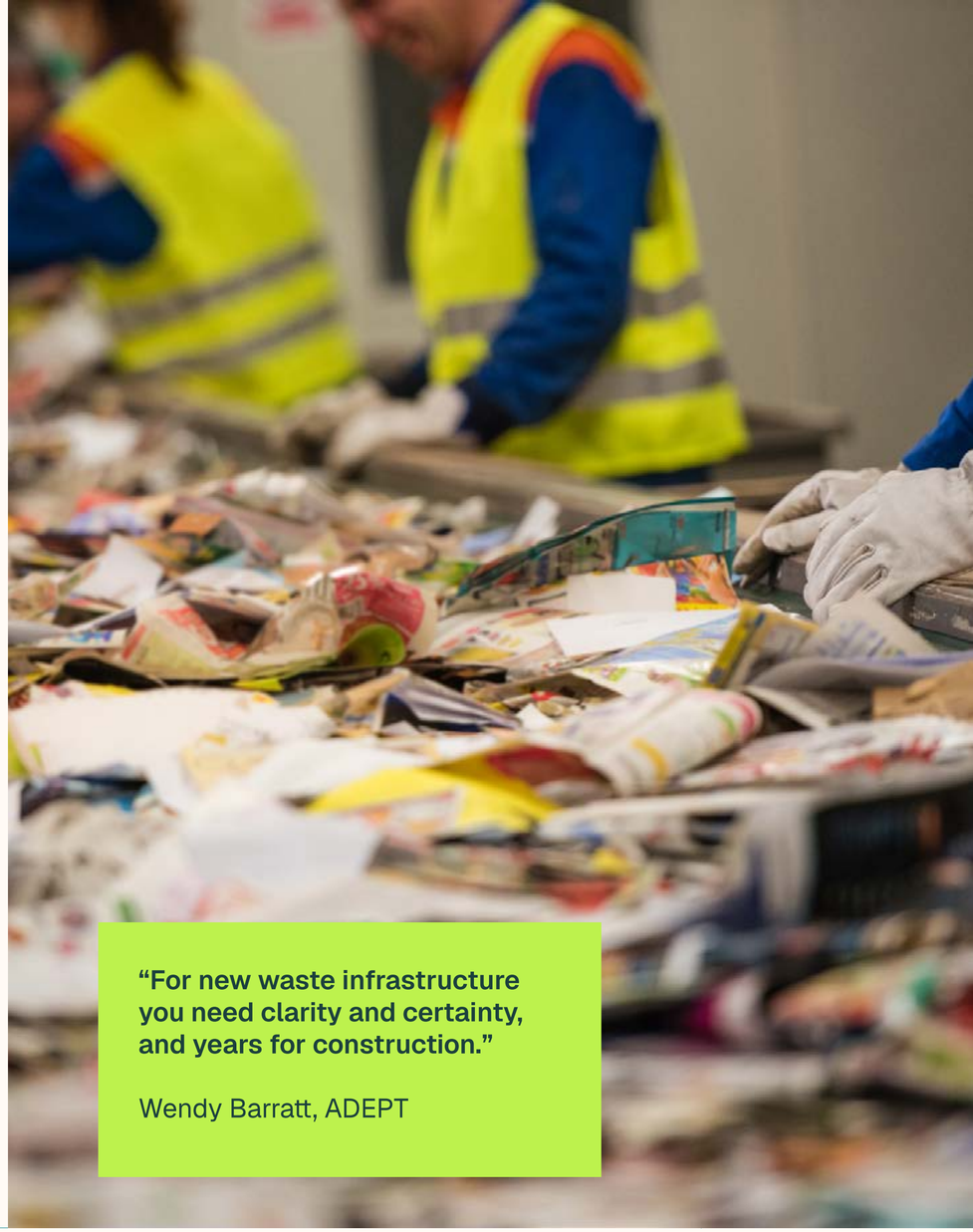
We have seen during Covid and other recent supply shocks that when international supplies are disrupted, circular businesses thrive. When automotive supplies ground to a halt, second-hand car sales and repair services stepped in to keep us moving.

Similarly, with global chip supplies currently under enormous strain to keep up with the roll-out of AI and datacentres, UK-based suppliers of refurbished technology and lifetime extension services are scaling up their activities.

Without them, during supply shocks many UK businesses could rapidly lose competitiveness, and public sector institutions such as the NHS could see disruptions.[4] Refurbishers and remanufacturers are also gaining ground in the energy and construction sectors, yet these initiatives have largely been ignored in policy development to date.

### Reducing our exports to retain material value

A large volume of materials is exported each year for recycling or energy recovery abroad. With the right support many of these materials – such as steel, mixed plastics, and textiles – could undergo additional processing and reprocessing at home, and find end markets in existing or new British businesses.



**"For new waste infrastructure you need clarity and certainty, and years for construction."**

Wendy Barratt, ADEPT

[3] *UK Government (2025) The UK's Modern industrial strategy; Green Alliance (2026) Briefing: Get Britain making again*

[4] *Interview with Dr Astrid Wynne, Techbuyer.*

This would create a variety of skilled technical and professional jobs right along these material value chains, while reducing the economy's exposure to global shipping crises or severe climate impacts in the countries whose exports we rely on. But this will not happen at the pace that is needed without interventions to develop end markets for these materials.

### A global focus on developing national resource resilience

Elsewhere in the world, most notably in the EU and China, governments are already recognising and acting on the strategic risks and opportunities related to resources and waste management. They are introducing plans, underpinned by impactful policy mechanisms, that boost domestic demand for secondary materials in support of their industrial strategy and economic security (see box-outs, right).

These are logical, forward-thinking government reactions to a global geopolitical context that is growing more turbulent and protectionist.

Within Europe there are clear examples of nations looking to secure resource resilience through investment in, and incentivisation of, circular practices. For example, the Netherlands offers significant R&D and entrepreneurial support at local and national level for activities that support its net zero and circular economy objectives.[5]

Domestically, Wales has moved more decisively than England in some areas. Wales introduced its Beyond Recycling strategy in 2021 and has more actively intervened in developing flexible plastic reprocessing infrastructure (including potential end uses), as well as in establishing reuse and repair hubs.

Wales has established an international reputation as a leader in recycling though sustained policy commitment and a willingness to accept higher per-tonne recycling costs.

### Responding to a changing climate

Climate change is simultaneously increasing weather-related supply disruptions and fuelling conflict over access to resources,

#### China

China's newly-launched Five-Year Plan for Circular Economy Development goes well beyond an environmental remit, aiming to strengthen national resource security and foster long-term growth. Among other targets, it aims to ramp up end market demand for secondary resources, linking this to a strategy of industrial upgrading, while circular economy services will also receive support. All this will be underpinned by a range of fiscal and financial incentives.[6]

#### European Union

The EU's new Circular Economy Act, due for adoption in late 2026, is positioned as an opportunity to increase the bloc's economic security, resilience, and competitiveness. A key aim is to stimulate end markets for secondary materials. This builds on existing measures to encourage circular design and set minimum recycled content requirements, such as the End-of-Life Vehicles Regulation (2026), the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (2025), the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (2024), as well as the amended Waste Framework Directive (2025). This is aligned with broader EU industrial strategy, notably the Clean Industrial Deal and the Single Market Strategy.[7]

[5] *Government of the Netherlands (n.d.). Circular economy by 2050*

[6] *Ellen Macarthur Foundation (2026) China's circular economy development plan for the 15th five-year period: Signals of a more systemic transition.*

[7] *Directorate-General for the Environment, European Commission (2025) Commission launches consultation and call for evidence for upcoming Circular Economy Act.*

such as critical raw materials needed for net zero. The recent heatwaves have impacted infrastructure, with railway damage in the UK[8] and low river levels in Europe affecting inland freight.[9] Raw material prices rises and supply shocks are predicted to continue as a result.[10,11]

Accessing the right resources at the right time and right price is the competitive foundation of every business, no matter the sector. There is a strong case to intervene more actively to ensure reliable supply of recycled materials and reused products.

**“The 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy provided a huge amount of hope and a strong direction of travel for sectoral change. It provided a timetable you could plan against. At SUEZ, it helped guide our five-year growth plans.”**

Dr Adam Read, SUEZ

## Where the UK risks falling behind

Without a clear strategy and plan with coordinated policy incentives, we risk leaving our economy exposed to supply bottlenecks, losing access to valuable materials, reducing jobs, and missing out on investment. This would also mean missing the environmental targets that underpin our future prosperity and wellbeing – fuelling further climate impacts.

Local authorities, resource management companies, and producer compliance schemes attest that the 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy was instrumental in driving investment in new recycling infrastructure. The clear focus on packaging recycling, with multiple incentives targeting this, gave a focus, shaping business growth since 2018.[12] This took several years to start bearing fruit, with long lead-in times for reprocessing infrastructure.

By setting a new, clear direction now for the sector’s focus in the 2030s, we can ensure that the next generation of recycling and reuse infrastructure – as well as the end markets – can scale up in time for successful implementation.

**The following section sets out in more detail what a new, clear resources and waste sector strategy needs to cover in order to mitigate risks and realise the economic opportunities currently presented.**

[8] *United Nations Climate and Environment (2026) Amid crushing European heatwave, things are about to get hotter for transport systems.*

[9] *Joint Research Centre, European Commission (2026) Worsening drought and record heat grip Europe, fuelling extraordinary wildfires and extremely low river flows.*

[10] *Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (2024) Prices on a warming planet: The inflationary effects of climate change. World Economic Situation and Prospects: July 2024 Briefing, No. 182.*

[11] *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) Climate Change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability.*

[12] *Interviews with Robbie Staniforth, Ecosurety; Wendy Barratt, ADEPT; and Dr Adam Read, SUEZ.*

# 2. What a new strategy needs to achieve

**The next-generation resources and waste strategy needs to set the course for our sector's transition through the 2030s.**

This might be achieved through the **Circular Economy Growth Plan**, depending on how comprehensive it is. In addition, **a resources and waste sector roadmap** will be required to show the specific mechanisms through which the vision will be achieved, along with a clear timeline. This can build on the Net Zero Transition Plan, which was collaboratively produced by our sector in 2026.[13]

We recommend that the Growth Plan and sector roadmap cover at least the period up to the end of the Sixth Carbon Budget (2033-2037), and ideally to 2042. They should set out how the resources and waste sector will support the economy-wide vision in the Circular Economy Growth Plan and other sector roadmaps. They also need to cover sector-specific concerns and opportunities, such as waste crime, health and safety, and skills for the future.

The following aims and questions should shape the new strategy, to give our sector the clarity and direction it needs to maintain momentum on the circular economy and net zero transition.

## 2.1 Alignment with net zero and environmental targets

**What steps are needed to achieve the 2042 residual waste reduction target, the sixth and seventh carbon budgets (2033-2037 and 2038-2042), and target 16 of our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to reduce waste and overconsumption?**

### Why this matters

Additional policy measures are needed in the 2030s to achieve our legally-binding waste and carbon reduction targets (see box-out on next page).

- While good progress has been made, Defra analysis suggests that England's Collection and Packaging Reforms (CPR)[14] will deliver less than a third of the 2042 residual waste reduction target.[15] Yet repeated delays mean that implementing these in full will have taken more than half of the available time to 2042.
- The Office for Environmental Protection's (OEP) 2026 progress report gave the stark assessment that, eight years after the last strategy was launched, "England is now using more resources with reduced efficiency", and we are off track to meet our targets and commitments.[16]
- Confirming that we are off track, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) reported to Parliament in 2026 that additional policy is needed to get recycling and decarbonisation progress on track to meet the sector's net zero targets.[17]
- The extension of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) to EfW, a key policy mechanism factored into decarbonisation pathways, has just been delayed.

### How we make progress

- In the near term, moving ahead decisively with flexible plastic packaging collections while supporting investment in sorting and reprocessing infrastructure.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the CPR mechanisms, to ensure they deliver the predicted impacts on waste and carbon reduction.
- Additional measures will be necessary to improve the quantity and quality of recycling beyond CPR (see **sections 2.2** and **2.3** for more detail.)

[13] *WRAP (2026) Shaping the Resources and Waste Sector Net Zero Transition Plan.*

[14] *Simpler Recycling, packaging extended producer responsibility (pEPR), and a deposit return scheme.*

[15] *Defra (2026) Residual waste reduction Environment Act target delivery plan.*

[16] *Office for Environmental Protection (2026) Progress in improving the natural environment in England 2024/2025.*

[17] *Climate Change Committee (2026) Progress in reducing emissions: 2026 report to Parliament.*

Existing net zero and environmental targets

### UK Government 25 Year Environment Plan (2018)

By 2042: **eliminate avoidable plastic waste** and **waste crime**.
By 2050: **eliminate avoidable waste** and **double resource productivity**.

NB: This became the UK's first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), which must be reviewed and updated every five years.

### Environment Act (2021)

Statutory target to **halve the tonnage of residual waste** (excluding major mineral waste) per capita from 2019 to 2042. Interim target set for 2030.

### Climate Change Committee (CCC) carbon reduction targets

To help the UK meet its statutory net zero targets, the resources and waste sector is expected to achieve an average annual reduction of 1.1Mt $CO_2e$ in the period from 2024 to 2037.

- New incentives in support of reuse and reduction, which have an even greater per-tonne carbon reduction impact (see **section 2.4**).
- Set a new date for extending ETS to EfW, while accelerating progress on subsidies for carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS) in EfW, and rapidly introducing measures to support local authorities to divert more fossil plastics.
- Commit to other key actions identified in the Net Zero Transition Plan and by the CCC, including new incentives to increase landfill gas capture, to replace the Renewables Obligation subsides from 2027, and to electrify the sector's fleet and infrastructure.[18,19]

## 2.2 Build on existing recycling and decarbonisation progress

**How will we ensure continued improvements to the quantity and quality of recycling, and accelerate the decarbonisation of residual waste management (EfW and landfill)?**

### Why this matters

With a million tonnes of household and commercial waste to process each week,[20] it is essential that progress on packaging and food waste recycling, and on EfW decarbonisation, does not stagnate once the current tranche of policies have been implemented.

The CPR, ETS and CCUS will need to be reviewed and updated over time to correct for unintended consequences and drive continual improvements. Many infrastructure improvements are still required (for instance, to allow for more advanced sorting). There remains uncertainty regarding aspects such as local authority responses to ETS costs and the commercial viability of CCUS for EfW.

These foundational recycling and decarbonisation mechanisms should not be neglected as the Government turns its attention to other sectors and to activities higher up the waste hierarchy.

### How we make progress

See the measures set out in **sections 2.1** and **2.5**.

[18] *Climate Change Committee (2026) Progress in reducing emissions: 2026 report to Parliament.*

[19] *WRAP (2026) Shaping the Resources and Waste Sector Net Zero Transition Plan.*

[20] *Interview with Jacob Hayler, ESA.*

## 2.3 Go beyond packaging and food waste to other high-impact materials and sectors

**The 2018 Strategy largely drove improvements to household packaging and food waste recycling. How will we drive circular management of other high-impact items such as textiles, EEE, and construction materials?**

### Why it matters

As noted above, additional measures are needed to achieve the remaining two-thirds of waste reduction by 2042.

- In the 2020s, measures mainly targeted the most visible materials. New measures are now needed to tackle the highest-impact materials, whether from households or businesses. These include materials with high lifecycle environmental impacts, such as carbon-intensive, high-volume construction materials, textiles, and EEE.

  They also include problematic items such as vapes (and other products with embedded batteries) which are leading to an endemic issue of fires in our sector, placing lives at risk and causing enormous financial losses (see **section 2.7**).

- The EU is moving ahead with measures to make a wider range of products recyclable and, for textiles EPR, presenting some 'low-hanging fruit' where the UK could align without significant producer push-back.

### How we make progress

First and foremost, the government should publish its Circular Economy Growth Plan and sector roadmaps as a matter of urgency. To support their implementation, our sector would like to see measures such as:

- Policies targeting other high-impact sectors and materials, e.g. EEE, textiles, construction and demolition, transport, and energy.
- Growing the role of the Resources and Waste (R&W) sector as a partner to other sectors – this requires:
  - clarity on roles and responsibilities
  - development of new skills, e.g. expanding deconstruction and take-back of construction materials and products
  - new infrastructure, e.g. fibre-to-fibre (F2F) textiles recycling capacity.
- Extended producer responsibility (EPR) for textiles and EEE, potentially accompanied by restrictions on the disposal of unsold goods.
- A deposit return scheme (DRS) or EPR for batteries, along with a ban (with exemption for prescriptions) or other strong deterrent measure on vapes.
- A more widely applicable tax on virgin plastics, which can be adjusted to ensure competitiveness of secondary plastics as markets fluctuate.
- In the built environment: measures to promote recycling and reuse of surplus products and materials from deconstruction, as well as soils. This includes wider application of material passports and pre-demolition audits (see also **section 2.4**).
- Other specific incentives to support our sector to implement the Circular Economy Growth Plan, for instance in the transport sector.

**"Through a clear strategy, we can accelerate markets for reuse, remanufacture, and deconstruction in the built environment to underpin this nationally significant materials market."**

Martin Ballard, Wates Group

## 2.4 Go beyond recycling to reuse and reduction

**There are large economic, social, and environmental benefits to be gained from a decisive shift to reuse, including resale, leasing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing, and product lifetime extension. Reuse has yet to receive tangible policy support in England.**

**Our sector has data, knowledge, and transferable skills to enable reuse: for instance, an understanding of safe materials management and end-of-waste requirements, which could facilitate more preparation for reuse, and skills relevant to the logistics of take-back and pooling operations. Where should we place our focus and how will the transition be enabled?**

### Why it matters

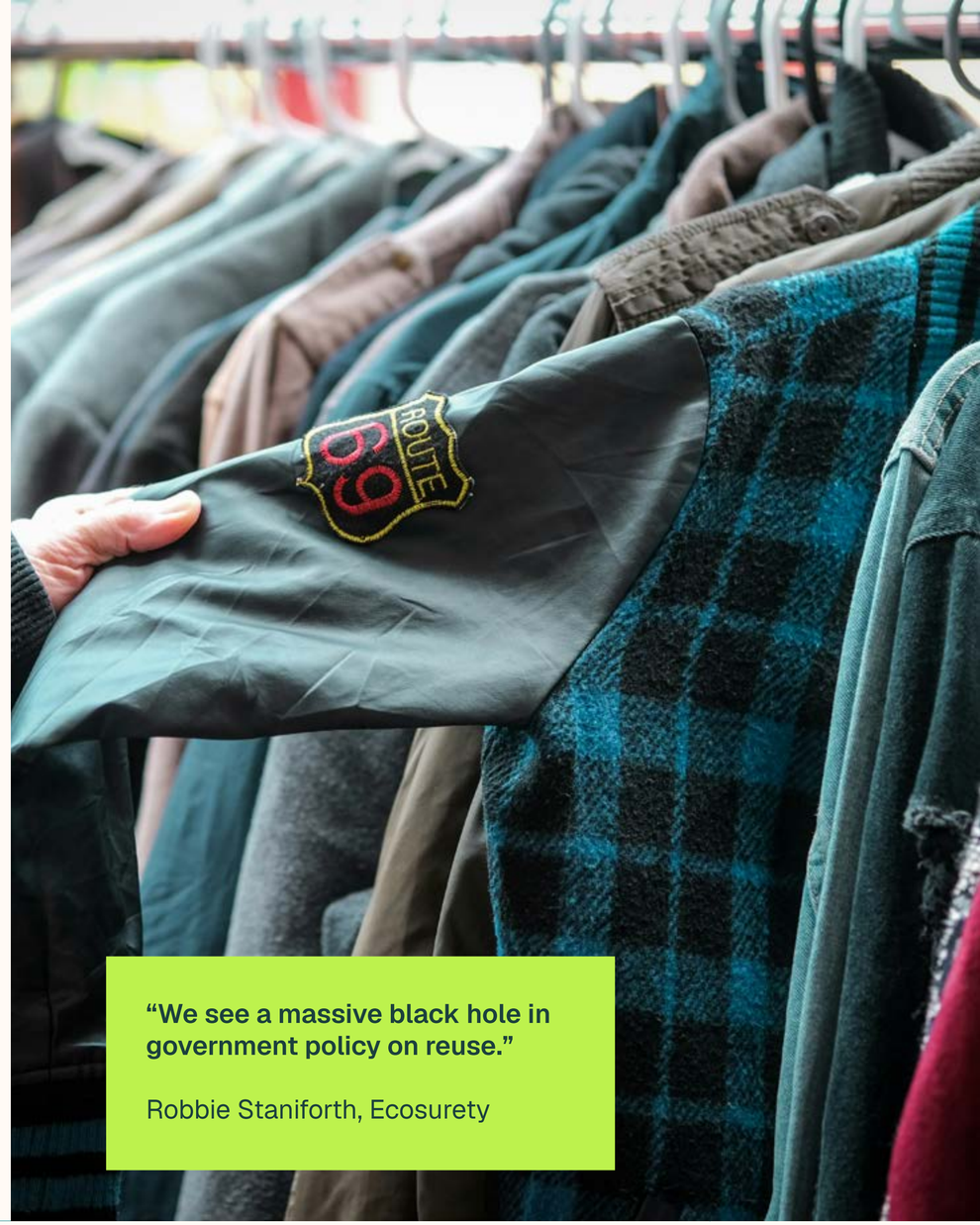
The long-term ambition of our sector is a world beyond waste. We want to lean into this transition and develop the skills and infrastructure to support a transition to a circular economy across all sectors.

Despite its potential to increase the UK's economic resilience and create skilled local jobs and value chains, in most sectors reuse remains a niche activity. The barriers often relate to inertia (for example, a reluctance to change procurement practices) or a lack of circular product design, rather than being economic.

Policy incentives are needed to overcome this inertia.

### How we make progress

- New recycling policies (notably EEE and textiles EPR, and any future local authority targets) should embed a preferential focus on reuse and repair. This means standalone targets for 'preparation for reuse', and higher standards requiring approved authorised treatment centres (AATFs) to manually check items for reuse potential.
- The EU recently introduced new measures to reduce disposal of unsold clothes and shoes, and Scotland has studied the topic of unsold goods across several sectors.[21] UK-wide rules on management of unsold goods present opportunities to drive reduction and reuse while promoting local economic and social value.
- Mayoral strategic authorities have opportunities to support local circular businesses, but funding is required for this. The government should explore options such as channelling ETS revenue into helping circular business models scale up. This could be focused on business models that would reduce fossil-based materials destined for EfW.




**"We see a massive black hole in government policy on reuse."**

Robbie Staniforth, Ecosurety

[21] *Webster, H; Evans, S, et al (2026) Unsold consumer goods in Scotland. Produced by Resource Futures and GC Insight for Zero Waste Scotland.*

## 2.5 Go beyond collections, to drive downstream demand for recycled materials and reused products

**The 2018 Strategy focused on collections but weak market demand is a key barrier to domestic reprocessing. We are exporting valuable materials, and missing out on growth opportunities and skilled jobs. Other countries such as China and the EU (see section 1.3) are more actively using policy to develop end markets for secondary goods.**

**How will we support the UK to attract investment in reprocessing, refurbishment, and remanufacturing, as well as increased manufacturing that draws on secondary inputs?**

### Why it matters

- We are getting better at collecting items for recycling and reuse, but the UK economy is not reaping the benefits – large amounts are still being exported after very limited sorting and pre-processing.
- Where exported items are being mismanaged there is also a reputational risk for the R&W sector, as well as detrimental social and environmental impacts on the countries to which this waste is exported.
- Where market failures exist, government intervention is required to develop functioning domestic markets for certain recycled materials, such as plastics and textiles.
- It is also needed to drive demand for, and normalise the use of, reused products such as refurbished electrical equipment, furniture, and construction materials.

### How we make progress

- Financial incentives will be needed to build downstream domestic demand for secondary products and materials. For instance, Contracts for Difference could be used to develop downstream reprocessing and remanufacturing infrastructure. This would mirror how EfW and anaerobic digestion (AD) were supported to grow through the Renewables Obligation.
- Measures that support development of domestic businesses which can make use of the outputs. For example, funding specialist textiles manufacturers, or innovators with high-value uses for recycled critical minerals, such as those derived from waste EEE (WEEE) and batteries recycling.[22]
- Clear and stable policy signals (and implementation timelines) will help to give stakeholders the confidence to invest in the necessary infrastructure and systems needed to develop end markets for secondary materials.
- To support the above, gradually raise barriers to exporting secondary materials and used products, and improve verification of secondary materials.[23]

These measures should be aligned with interventions such as EEE and textiles EPR.

Public procurement is a key demand driver for some sectors, which could be improved in the near term. This means not just providing high-level requirements and guidance, which already exist in some areas, but also the training and support to enable procurement professionals to understand and implement them.[24]

[22] *Interview with Dr Astrid Wynne, Techbuyer.*

[23] *Interview with Jacob Hayler, ESA*

[24] *Interview with Dr Astrid Wynne, Techbuyer.*

## 2.6 Go beyond environmental goals, recognising the strategic importance of resource management to the UK economy

**Recirculating materials and products domestically is critical to bringing about a robust, secure national economy in a turbulent world.**

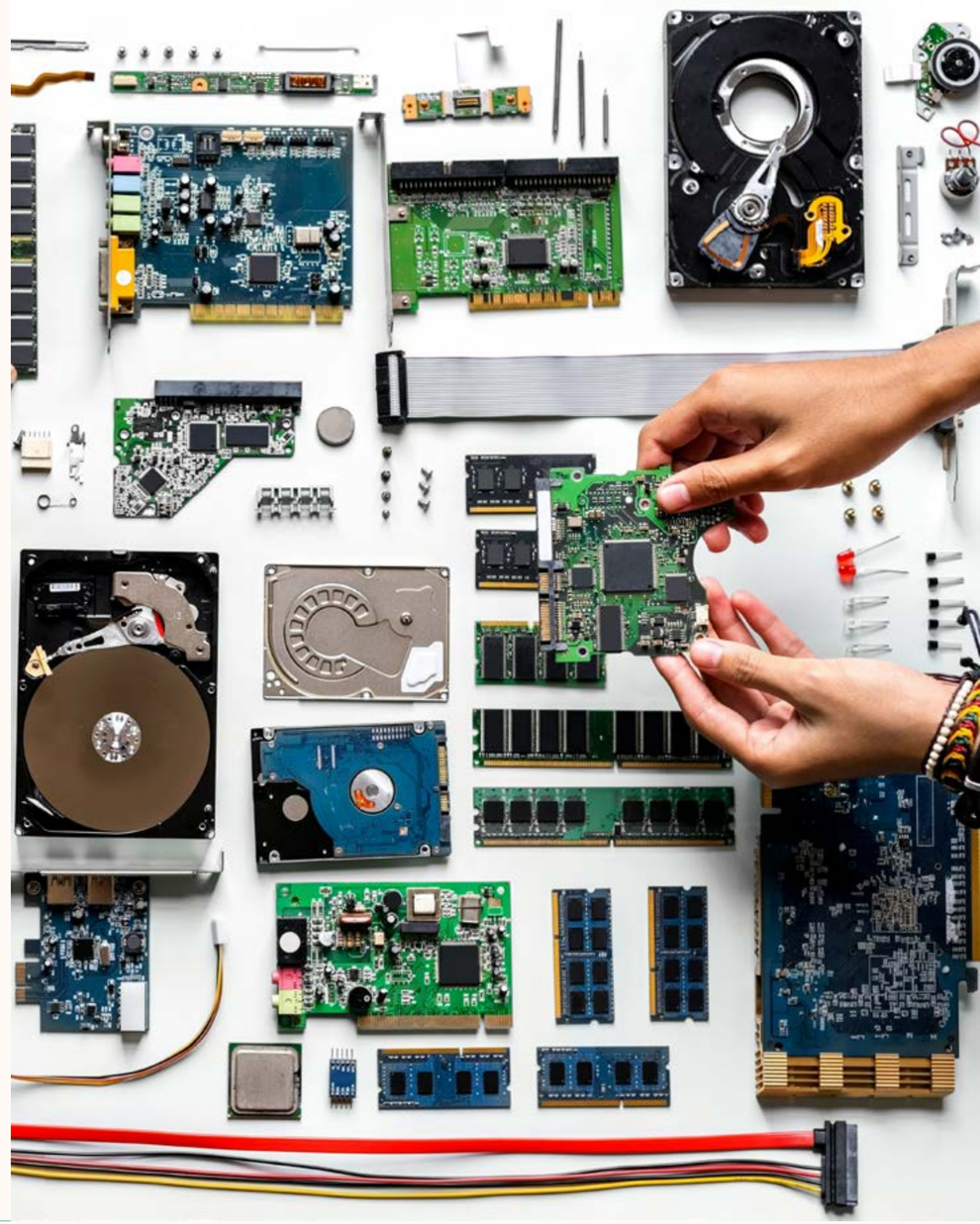
**Our sector can also boost local and regional economies with reindustrialisation and skilled jobs. How will our role in economic security and prosperity be recognised and supported?**

### Why it matters

- Mayoral strategic authorities have been asked by Defra to embed circular economy aims into their regional economic and spatial plans. Our sector is keen to work with them on this opportunity, supporting the new UK Government's vision for city and regional economic growth, and driving resilience.
- Our sector presents exciting opportunities for skilled technical and professional jobs as part of a reindustrialisation agenda, and offers diverse entry-level employment opportunities that can help tackle youth unemployment.
- Resources are the basis of our entire economy, from entrepreneurs to hospitals and the military. For instance, in the global AI and data race, competitiveness is underpinned by access to hardware, with countries and tech giants vying to control key items such as chips.[25] These can be used for longer through repairing equipment and by recovering them from used products.
- Resource management needs to be recognised as a strategically important sector - and not just when a crisis such as Covid hits.

### How we make progress

- Scaling up financial support for the sector's circular transition to effectively leverage our potential role in national economic security and industrial competitiveness, as well as boosting regional and city growth.
- We strongly welcome the renewed focus on vocational training and are ready to collaborate with educational institutions to develop skills for the future. New vocational programmes need to align with the long-term strategic direction for our sector; CIWM's current president and its Skills for the Future Specialist Expert Group is focusing on this topic, making it a good time to co-develop policy proposals.
- Measures to deter export of valuable materials and scale up domestic reprocessing and (re)manufacturing (see **section 2.5**) would help with the Government's reindustrialisation agenda.



[25] *Interview with Dr Astrid Wynne, Techbuyer.*

## 2.7 Tackle the cross-cutting issues of health and safety and waste crime

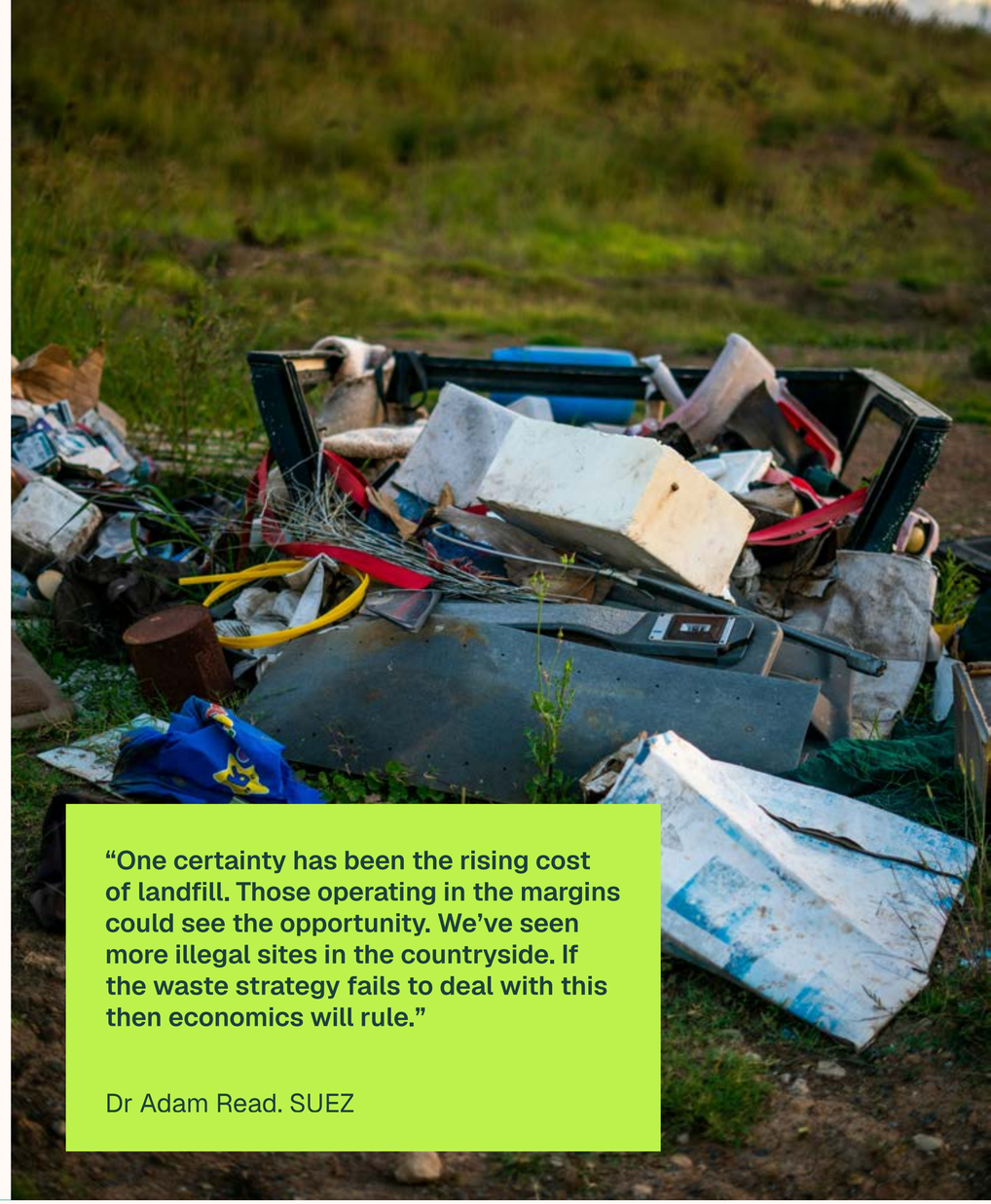
**These issues reduce the appeal of our sector to both potential investors and employees. How will they be robustly addressed to ensure they do not undermine progress across all areas of the new strategy?**

### Why it matters

- The UK Government has committed to eliminating waste crime by 2042.
- This is essential to ensuring that all the aims in **sections 2.1 to 2.6** can be achieved, without hidden environmental impacts. It underpins the competitiveness of honest resources and waste actors, and will help to establish public support for (and confidence in) recycling and net zero policies.
- Issues range from serious organised waste crime such as large-scale illegal dumps and nationwide fly-tipping networks, to fraudulent mismanagement and misclassification of waste to avoid the higher rate of landfill tax, and smaller scale offences sometimes related to a misunderstanding of regulations and duties. It also includes fraudulent claims of recycled content, which undermine reprocessing demand.
- Some positive steps have been taken in the past year, informed by recommendations from the House of Lords inquiry, but there remains significant work to do. With public awareness of the issue on the rise, there is an opportunity to commit to a funded elimination roadmap.
- Health and safety similarly underpins the sector's effectiveness, as well as its ability to attract the future workforce needed for a low-carbon circular economy.
- In particular, we face a rising challenge of fires, connected to vapes and other products with embedded batteries. This is likely to be exacerbated by rising summer temperatures in the UK.

### How we make progress

- A response commensurate to the scale and complexity of serious waste crime. This needs to go beyond the Environment Agency to be led by more specialised crime investigation and law enforcement authorities, and will require adequate long-term funding.[25]
- The Environment Agency and other regulators across the UK also require sufficient, long-term funding and appropriate training to monitor and respond to issues, and to raise awareness of the rules.
- Decisive action is needed on batteries, vapes, and other products with embedded batteries (see **section 2.3**).



**"One certainty has been the rising cost of landfill. Those operating in the margins could see the opportunity. We've seen more illegal sites in the countryside. If the waste strategy fails to deal with this then economics will rule."**

Dr Adam Read. SUEZ

[26] *Interview with Wendy Barratt, ADEPT.*

# 3. Seizing the moment

The resources and waste sector is keen to play a positive role in accelerating regional and city growth in all parts of the UK: supporting national reindustrialisation in key sectors, building resource security, and contributing to an increase in vocational skills and jobs. This can be done in tandem with the transition to net zero and a circular economy.

As a sector we have implemented many substantial changes to household recycling and residual waste decarbonisation throughout the 2020s to date. The 2018 Strategy and associated measures have attracted a sector-wide commitment of over £10 billion in investment,[27] with more still to come.

Now is the time to line up the investment and skills required to deliver the next wave of improvements to recycling, reuse, and decarbonisation in the 2030s so we can meet the ambition of halving of residual waste by 2042. This effort requires policy clarity on the sector's strategic direction.

Lessons to take forward include the need for clear focus areas, a dependable timeline, cohesive packages of policy mechanisms and, where needed, financial support for each focus area. Negative incentives must be balanced by positive forms of support for the desired alternative, to avoid driving up costs or other unintended consequences.

When positive support is missing, pushback can be expected. This is illustrated by the delays to England's flexible plastic collections, to expanding UK ETS to EfW, and (in Scotland) the ban on landfilling biodegradable materials.

It is important to remember that we are competing for investment with other countries in the region, and even globally. Some are already ahead of the UK in recognising the strategic, national economic security importance of resource management. We wish to work with the UK Government to increase our competitiveness and seize the opportunities presented not just in our sector, but economy-wide.

**With a clear, ambitious, achievable vision and implementation plan for our sector's development in the 2030s, we are ready to play a critical role in supporting the UK's economic growth and security, creating skilled careers and revitalising local economies.**

[26] *Rule, C, et al (2023) Supporting a Net Zero Waste & Recycling Sector: Policy Scorecard. Produced for the Environmental Services Association.*

# Acknowledgements

CIWM and Resource Futures would like to thank the following experts who contributed practice-based insights to inform this briefing. The views expressed in the briefing are solely those of CIWM.

**Martin Ballard, Chair (and Head of Environment) at Wates Group**
(Chair of CIWM Built Environment Specialist Expert Group)

**Wendy Barratt, Vice Chair of the ADEPT Waste Group and County Waste Manager at Devon County Council**

**Jacob Hayler, Environmental Services Association**
(Member of CIWM's Policy and Innovation Forum)

**Marcus Gover, CIWM Trustee and Policy & Innovation Forum Chair**

**Toby Moss, Chief Commercial Officer at Worn Again Technologies**

**Dr Adam Read, Chief External Affairs and Sustainability Officer at SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK**
(Chair of CIWM Skills for the Future Specialist Expert Group)

**Robbie Staniforth, Innovation and Policy Director, Ecosurety**

**Alan Wheeler, CEO at the Textile Recycling Association**

**Dr Astrid Wynne, Head of Sustainability at Techbuyer**

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