

SHARE, REPAIR, SAVE: GROWING THE COMMUNITY-BASED CIRCULAR ECONOMY SECTOR



THE ISSUE

There is widespread public support for climate action¹, but many people remain unsure how to engage in meaningful, accessible ways. Community-led circular economy initiatives such as repair cafés, libraries of things, and reuse hubs offer a practical way to engage people and build community resilience, but they need support to reach their potential.

Such activities can reduce waste, lower carbon emissions, save people money, and foster community cohesion and skills development, and promote wellbeing. However, grassroots efforts often face challenges due to lack of funding, limited access to community spaces, and difficulties recruiting and retaining volunteers. Changing perceptions – that choosing reuse implies you have a low income and therefore stigmatising – is also an issue.

The long-term, broader potential of a local circular economy where sharing, repairing, and reusing become the norm and help provide a local wellbeing economy remains underdeveloped, requiring the right policy framework and targeted investment to move forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Value the community-led circular economy:** Local authorities and funders should actively seek out and support such projects through targeted funding (especially micro grants), resources, and policy frameworks.
- **Resource community infrastructure/hubs:** Local authorities and funders should support facilities where they exist and enable their development where there is need, or consider co-location with existing services.
- **Promote local circular economies:** Local authorities and place-based bodies should bring initiatives together under umbrella brands and campaigns to increase public awareness and change behaviour, facilitating cross-sector collaboration to create a cohesive local ecosystem.
- **Develop skills:** Government / mayoral strategic authorities should include skills needed for repair in policy priorities.
- **Adopt repair and reuse legislation:** Government should strengthen and expand "Right to Repair" regulations in the UK.

CONTEXT

In Yorkshire and the Humber, we have a growing local circular economy sector that needs support to help it reach its potential. This sector includes private businesses, entrepreneurs, and social enterprises, as well as grassroots community projects.

The Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission's Communities and Engagement Group held a 'Share, Repair Save' event to hear from community initiatives around the region and understand their challenges and potential.

The event revealed that local projects face significant barriers to startup and success. In particular, securing affordable venues with adequate storage space, attracting and training volunteers with the right skills, and finding the necessary but often small levels of funding needed for insurance and everyday operations. Those running circular economy projects argue they are often ineligible for funding targeted at environmental initiatives; or lack capacity to complete complex grant applications.

Repair initiatives specifically would benefit from legislation nationally that supports their development through expanded right-to-repair rules, mirroring or surpassing EU standards. New targets for reuse and repair alongside recycling and other policy interventions would make repairing easier, and more affordable and attractive than buying new.

The opportunity to use physical spaces, both indoors and outdoors, and in locations with high footfall where communities can meet and collaborate, makes a big difference to how successful these projects can be. These spaces, such as community hubs, can benefit hugely from having funding for the facilities and paying people to help the organise the activities. However, maintaining the funding and staffing for sustained periods can be challenging, and instability can be disruptive and demotivating.

OPPORTUNITIES

The development of local circular economy projects can link the climate agenda with everyday concerns and help to engage a wider section of the community.

These projects can create visible 'entry points' for people, providing a way of making sustainable behaviour easy, practical, and even fun. Repair cafés, sharing libraries, and upcycling workshops are not only environmentally beneficial – they also build significant social capital.

As well as helping to change mindsets around resource use, these projects can bring significant co-benefits including skills development, improved wellbeing, community cohesion and resilience, and cost savings for residents.

There are examples within the Yorkshire and Humber region of initiatives that have successfully brought together local circular economy projects to increase their impact and potential for change, such as Circular Malton and Norton² and Doncaster's Lesstival³. These sorts of place-based umbrella brands and campaigns can increase public awareness, stimulate greater behaviour change and establish ongoing networks of stakeholders that can help collectively grow this type of local activity through collaboration.

Often the investments needed to help push this sector forward are not large. Doncaster's Lesstival – a month-long celebration and promotion of these types of projects – demonstrated that a relatively small financial investment through micro-grants can mobilise significant community action and achieve a high return on investment per person engaged.

Even more could be achieved with greater coordination, visibility, and knowledge sharing. Creating a regional map or digital hub, supporting peer networks, and investing in paid coordinator roles would amplify and sustain this movement.

1 <https://climatebarometer.org/climate-barometer-trackers>
2 <https://circularmaltonnorton.org>
3 <https://www.yourlifedoncaster.co.uk/the-great-doncaster-lesstival-2025>

For related case studies,, go to:
<https://yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/ADDRESS TBC>

Pic: Circular Malton & Norton

