

CIRCULAR ECONOMY ROUTEMAP 2024 update



West Midlands
Combined Authority



Greener
Together

Introduction

The West Midlands Combined Authority published the West Midlands Circular Economy Routemap in 2021 to outline a vision for a more circular future in the region, focused on systems change in manufacturing, construction, and food. Since publication, WMCA has focused its efforts on making progress across industrial symbiosis, zero waste construction, and supporting communities.

What is the circular economy?

Rather than depending on linear, extractive, and wasteful processes, a circular economy encourages repair, reuse and regeneration of resources and materials as well as a transition to renewable energy. Developing a more efficient economy will be key for the region to achieve its net zero targets, but also to promote economic growth and resilience.

This document provides an update on the latest progress towards delivering the WM Circular Economy Routemap priorities.

More detail on the WMCA’s Circular Economy Routemap can be found [here](#).

West Midlands Resource Reuse Network

What is it?

The West Midlands Resource Reuse Network is part of our work on “Industrial Symbiosis,” which is an approach to industrial decarbonisation which focuses on unlocking mutually beneficial resource exchanges between businesses, such that one businesses waste or surplus becomes another businesses raw material. As industrial symbiosis reduces reliance on virgin materials, and disposal of waste through landfill, the process can create significant cost and carbon savings for participating businesses

Why is it important for the West Midlands?

Analysis conducted by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation has suggested that a transition to clean energy will only reduce the carbon emissions of industry by 55%, with the remaining 45% of emissions coming from the extraction, refining, and production of raw materials making it crucial for the West Midlands to decarbonise material consumption to achieve its 2041 net zero target.



A business case produced by the WMCA in 2022 suggested that a programme engaging 200 business a year in the region could reduce the region’s carbon emissions by 14,000 tonnes, divert 44,000 tonnes of waste from landfill, and contribute to a GVA uplift of £1.8m per year. The West Midlands is a national leader in industrial symbiosis policy, with our work to date highlighted as best practise in DEFRA’s Waste Prevention Programme for England.

Progress made

The West Midlands Resource Reuse Network is a 12-month pilot exploring how industrial symbiosis can best be delivered in the West Midlands. Launched in April 2024, the project will seek to confirm previous assumptions made on the costs and benefits to the region of delivering industrial symbiosis activity, and act as a practical demonstrator of what could be accomplished with scaled up funding.

Next steps

Now that the pilot project has been funded, the priority is to secure funding to extend and scale up the delivery of the Network so that businesses in the region can continue to benefit from the service.

Zero Waste Construction Hubs

What is it?

Materials recovery hubs operate in the construction sector which aim to reclaim usable materials from building sites which would otherwise be sent to landfill. These materials can then be sold on to small trades and DIYers, or donated to community groups.

Why is it important to the West Midlands?

The construction sector is a significant producer of waste in the region, responsible for around 55% of all waste produced, and sending around 4.5 million tonnes of waste to landfill. It has been estimated that around 13% of waste the sector sends to landfill is usable material. Putting mechanisms in place to recover this material will create significant environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Progress made

The WMCA completed a feasibility study and business case in 2023 which confirmed the viability of the concept in the West Midlands, and mapped various routes to delivery for Hubs in the region. Analysis indicated that a series of three Hubs in the region can deliver £1.5m in additional growth, and divert over 3,000 tonnes of waste from landfill.

WMCA was able to support the setup costs for the first hub in the region, the Reuse Hub, launched in July 2024 in Wolverhampton.



Next steps

Following successful completion of the feasibility study work and the launch of the first Hub, work is now focused on identifying and pursuing opportunities for further hubs to begin to form the network across the region.

Repurposing to Zero

What is it?

Building repurposing, also called adaptive reuse, is the process of reusing an existing building for a purpose other than that for which it was originally designed. Repurposing differs from retrofit, in which the building continues to serve its original purpose, in a more efficient manner.

Why is it important for the West Midlands?

Existing buildings have large amounts of carbon embodied in the structure, carbon which is only emitted when the building is demolished. A typical post-war building can hold as much as 40,000 tonnes of carbon embodied in the structure. By encouraging a reuse first approach to buildings in the West Midlands, the region can dramatically reduce the carbon emissions associated with the built environment sector, whilst also bringing social and economic benefits through the regeneration of local centres, and by enabling a more flexible, strategic approach to the use of the built environment.

Progress made

The team conducted a study to determine the feasibility of the repurposing of buildings at scale. The study has included engagement with the public and private sectors to understand commercial and regulatory barriers to the approach, and data analysis to determine the scale of the opportunity in the West Midlands. Reporting in September 2022, the feasibility confirmed that the repurposing of buildings is a viable opportunity in the West Midlands, with approximately 650 buildings that could be repurposed in the region. Reusing these buildings would bring significant economic, social, and environmental benefits to the region.

After confirming the feasibility of the approach, a Repurposing to Zero framework has been created, which can be used to showcase best practise guidance for approaching the repurposing of buildings and the reuse of existing spaces. In doing so, the framework will help us to capitalise on the opportunity present in the West Midlands.

Community delivery

What is it?

The Circular Economy Routemap recognised the importance of community organisations in the delivery of a more circular economy, especially where this has wider social benefits.

Why is it important?

Research conducted in support of the Circular Economy Routemap suggested that an extra £2bn a year could be generated if 50% of West Midlands residents engaged in sharing networks. Additionally, the circular economy can help to make communities more resilient by reducing their exposure to price rises and product shortages.

Progress made

WMCA has funded 5 circular economy community initiatives totalling £262,864 through its Community Environment Fund is a £1m fund that was launched in October 2023 to support communities in delivering initiatives that improve the environment and people's lives. The Fund has seen small and large grants made to organisations to support projects across 5 themes: natural environment, access to green space, climate adaptation, environment awareness, and the circular economy.

Make Good Arts, Sandwell - £13,320 to grow its Repair and Share project by providing sewing machines and other resources in even more community venues to help local people to repair, share and remake clothing, saving them money and diverting hundreds of items of clothing away from landfill.

Carriers of Hope, Coventry - £25,000 to continue its What Comes Around, Goes Around project by providing hundreds more people experiencing poverty, primarily asylum seekers, refugees and Roma people from Eastern Europe, with essential items such as baby equipment, furniture, electrical items, bikes and toys, reusing unwanted items that would otherwise be destined for landfill.



ReBuild Site CIC, Wolverhampton - £100,000 to set up the region's first reuse hub to take surplus materials from construction sites, builders' merchants, wholesalers and others in the supply chain to sell them on to local small traders, DIYers, gardeners and crafters at a substantially discounted cost, diverting it away from landfill.

The Active Wellbeing Society, Birmingham - £99,544 to expand its Share Shack project with repair and skill workshops at its sites across the city, helping local people to fix their own broken items such as electrical equipment and clothing - saving them from landfill.



All Saints' Action Network, Wolverhampton - £25,000 to open a Repair Café at its community hub and wood recycling centre. WMCA also worked with the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, as part of a Circular Economy Action Group, to create a circular legacy for the Games. This legacy has included the donation of media vans to The Active Wellbeing Society for use as mobile Share shacks, and the Commonwealth equipment giveaway which saw 16,000 items being donated to community groups, schools, and sports clubs in the region.

Summary of next steps

The WMCA's circular economy priorities can be grouped into three interrelated packages of activity:

West Midlands Resource Reuse Network - Continuation of WMRRN beyond the initial 12-month term to continue informing regional and national policy, support business exchange & identify business innovation.

Circular accelerator - Build a circular accelerator pipeline around regional strengths and opportunities, providing direct support for organisations that could lead to delivery or private sector investment.

Circular skills and jobs - Identifying how people can be supported with the skills required to enhance circular economy activity within the West Midlands and embed circular economy into our regional skills programme.

Circular communities - Strengthen the work of community organisations in delivering circular economy activity work with local authorities to model and trial behaviour change initiatives that influence people's consumption habits.

WMCA is also working closely with local authorities across the region through a Circular Economy Officers Group to enhance the activity outlined above, as well as identify new projects and priorities that can be progressed in the region. We will also continue to engage with UK Government to understand how new legislation and priorities may be tested within the West Midlands.