

Catherine Causley answers some of the questions we didn't get around to asking on the webinar.

**1. Items eg furniture are in need of a half-way house after being relinquished & awaiting repair/reuse. Any solutions you know of?**

This depends on what the solution is. Currently I am working on a project to increase the amount of reuse from items collected as part of the council BHW collections. The view is that these items should be sold through the reuse shops at HWRCs but space and time are the issue. The quality of these goods is often questionable and there is a plan to divert as much of this as possible from the BHW collection, the challenge is that LAs generate revenue from this important and much needed service.

In one DC a charity does the BHW collection service and items are collected from inside the property, this increases the quality and leads to more reuse as the charity have an incentive to reuse the items. With our current system the LA, sees no financial incentive for ensuring reuse.

Another approach might be to have storage places on HWRCs for charities to collect items from, but space is an issue. There are also issues in working with the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector and trials have not been entirely successful.

Usually due to the quantities involved, very few items are repaired or restored prior to resale, they get at best a wipe down.

**2. How can charities/social enterprises ensure their reuse models remain competitive as reuse becomes more mainstream?**

This is a challenge and this is where the social and environmental benefits must be taken into account by valuing the social benefits. These types of operations should be funded by the organisations that benefit from their services, e.g. mental health groups, housing associations etc. I know of very few that run without any form of subsidy or grant funding. They already have to compete with the large charities such as Hospiscare and Oxfam. I believe they should have a focus on passing on skills, community benefits and education. They are already in the main staffed by volunteers and if the prices have to rise to above a certain point then the very people that rely on their service will be priced out. Also reuse / second hand isn't for everyone.

**3. What do you think can be done to pressure the public sector into supporting and promoting a circular economy for textiles?**

I think we need to be very clear about the effect of fast fashion and its massive environmental impact. If you are buying a £2 t-shirt to wear once, someone somewhere is paying the price. A shift in consumer expectation is needed, this is easy to say and hard to do.

**4. Why is reuse of day to day items in the commercial sector so far behind the domestic recycle reuse networks?**

There has been schemes like the WARPit scheme but funding was withdrawn and it has faltered. I think that there is a lack of awareness and understanding in some parts of the purchasing chain. If this formed part of companies CSE reporting it might have greater prominence,

**5. Camel dung?**

Bag it up and sell as fertilizer or put into an AD plant.

**6. Why wasn't Design at the top of the Hierarchy now?**

Design should be at the top of the hierarchy but this needs to come from the government and big business is likely to push back as we see with the right to repair legislation.

**7. Is there an opportunity here for better collaboration between charities, retailers and LAs to drive reuse? Is policy too focused on driving reusable goods up the waste hierarchy when items have already become waste - during which they have already lost some of their value?**

I don't believe policy does do this, but yes there is the opportunity for a more collaborative approach. Budget cuts resulting in less staff at a LA level have hampered efforts but working with the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector does bring additional challenges. Reuse groups / main charities have to be picky about what they take as the disposal costs eat into their operating profits.

**8. I think take back isn't enough. There needs to be financial incentives (or other incentives).**

**Likewise, design for repair shouldn't be limited to just repair, we should allow for upgrading**

Agree some manufacturers do this already such as Dualit toasters and Miele washing machines but its comparatively rare, they are also very expensive products. The right to repair legislation is looking to address some of these issues by making parts available for longer and ensuring the design of an item is suitable for repair – so common tools can open them and parts aren't glued in place. There is also a public perception that repairing items just isn't worth the cost. Maybe a rental model is better?

**9. How would you convince authorities to get a repair cafe. Is everyone a volunteer (skilled people who share knowledge)?**

Repair cafes run independently of the council. In Devon we provide them with insurance or a small grant of £250 to cover insurance. They will usually receive a small grant of £1000 from a local trust, council or parish to set up and then will be self-funded through donations. They are all run by volunteers and many of the fixers are skilled, trades people, whilst you might trust a holey jumper to a skilled amateur you wouldn't your laptop! The key thing is to find your do-er and get a team involved. I can help, email me directly.

**10. Might the younger demographic be more likely to engage with online platforms and resources such as 'ifixit'?**

Yes absolutely and the Restart Project which is specifically designed to teach you how to fix your own items, they have fix parties. They attract a much younger audience. The main issue is that warranties are invalidated if you attempt a repair yourself and the difficulty in accessing the mechanics, often specialist tools are required and backs are glued in place causing them to break as they are opened, plus the lack of parts.

**11. Does the cost of the repair of fridge/freezers make it economically viable, when there are cheap new white goods on the market?**

This is the issue; parts prices are kept artificially high and quickly become unavailable. The lack of repairers and the amount of accreditation they need to go through means these highly trained people are expensive. The way we buy goods needs to take into account the resource use. It's this thinking that drives excessive consumption and a lack of skills to attempt repairs ourselves.

**12. Large % of people replace because they can't get spares, or it's too costly to repair. this is an advantage for retailers to sell new. The movement of these goods are detrimental to the environment and takes away local repairs to help the local communities**

Agree

**13. To encourage more people to reuse, we need to make reuse easy and more convenient for them - are there too many options for reuse subject to what the customer is looking to donate, quality of item, geography of services available - do we need to simplify the system, and if so, how?**

I still think this is something that most people don't ever consider. WRAP figures show that 40% of small WEEE at HWRCs still works at the point of disposal. It's the value that people put in these items. I think there is definitely an opportunity to work with estate agents, kitchen fitters, plumbers etc so that they can advise their customers on reuse options. A Devon project did this on a limited scale with one estate agent resulting in over 100 additional donations to a small charity. We need to encourage people to be responsible for their own goods / waste simply putting it in a bin / skip is not taking responsibility

**14. Where do you source your items for the repair cafes?**

The general public bring things they already own that are broken. The council is not involved with the sourcing of items

**15. What role does the panel think HWRCs and their staff can play to reuse more?**

In Devon HWRCs do have a target in relation to reuse based on total tonnage the site handles. There could be more reuse and it would involve more staff and greater engagement from the public, maybe more drop off points (Devon sites have these) but they should be encouraged and promoted far more. It's about behaviour change in the public as much as the site activities. Maybe HWRCs should be renamed, as resource collection areas or something to get away from the idea of binning or tipping. Also there needs to be a drive to encourage the purchasing of reused items from sites as you need the customer base. Also maybe relaxing the regulations on what can and can't be sold on. I would like to see the salvage of usable parts from white goods but the compliance scheme rules don't allow for that.

**16. How do we stem the future tide of products that don't meet quality standards and design for repair mindset? Many come from overseas, e.g. China. Young people are getting rich by setting up dropshipping sites with no regard for the quality, end of life of imported products, which concerns me that we are never going to win this battle**

This is all down to two things; behaviour change and government rules. Just imagine if all the PR and marketing people put as much effort into persuading us to think of the planet as they do to persuading us to buy poorly made products that end up in the bin the moment the warranty has elapsed. The extended producer responsibility rules and right to repair legislation should address some of these issues but its capitalism, so what effect they will have is yet to be seen. The climate emergency declaration may also in the longer term have an impact. There needs to be a closer working relationship between manufacturers and the people who have to recycle these products, as LAs and the waste management sector currently have no say and just deal with it, maybe extended producer responsibility will impact in a positive way?