

Laying the foundations to double re-use

How research provided the catalyst for a new approach to re-use in Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland

Three neighbouring local authorities – Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and Rutland County Council – were increasingly conscious that more could be done to drive re-use in their region. Though there was some bulky waste re-use taking place, via a number of routes, no-one was certain how much waste was being diverted from landfill, nor how much more could be diverted.

WRAP support helped answer these questions. Detailed research identified that over 1,390 tonnes of bulky items were being diverted into re-use by local furniture re-use organisations – but also that there was potential to almost double this in four years. With this target in mind, the local authorities, working with the third sector and waste contractors, agreed an action plan to achieve that level of re-use. The first actions in this plan took place in Summer 2013.

"The process of developing the Re-use Action Plan has been invaluable in bringing together the different stakeholders required to increase re-use and develop a more sustainable re-use sector. It will provide a road map for how we can all work together."

James O'Brien, Team Manager - Programme Co-ordination,
Leicestershire County Council

At a glance

- Quantified current levels of re-use across the region
- Identified potential to double the volume diverted from landfill
- Delivered a comprehensive action plan involving all parties – local authorities, private sector, third sector
- Advised local furniture re-use organisations on how to increase their capacity
- Established a local re-use network, which has now been appointed to supply re-usable items to the Leicestershire Welfare Provision service (Social Fund)
- Working towards setting up a WEEE repair facility



The three local authorities hope to nearly double re-use from ca. 1390 tonnes to ca. 2600 tonnes by 2017/18.

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Background

Three neighbouring local authorities - Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and Rutland County Council - were all seeking ways to increase furniture and bulky waste re-use in their areas.

They all were already diverting a proportion of bulky waste from landfill; they all were aware of furniture re-use organisations operating in the region; and they were also increasingly aware of other initiatives around the UK that were helping drive up re-use. However, none of them were sure where to begin in their own region.

Having decided they wanted to work together, they requested support from WRAP to help them increase re-use, and develop a more sustainable re-use sector locally. In Autumn 2012, WRAP appointed Ricardo-AEA as consultants to help the local authorities achieve these goals.

Project aims and objectives

The end goal of the project was to increase re-use of bulky waste across the region. But to do that, it was first necessary to:

- identify current and potential levels of re-use in the three local authority areas; and
- understand the perceived and actual barriers to increased re-use.

Based on this, and knowledge of other re-use activities, the consultants could then:

- recommend the most effective and practical options for increasing re-use in the area;
- work with local re-use organisations to help them increase their capacity;
- lead the creation of a new re-use network across the three local authority areas; and
- lead the development of a re-use action plan, that each partner would have a role in delivering.

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Partners involved		
Local authorities	Local re-use organisations	Waste contractors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Leicester City Council ■ Leicestershire County Council ■ Rutland County Council ■ Blaby District Council ■ Charnwood Borough Council ■ Harborough Borough Council ■ Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council ■ Melton Borough Council ■ North West Leicestershire District Council ■ Oadby & Wigston Borough Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Melton and District Furniture Project ■ REACT ■ SOFA Project ■ Work-Link Project ■ Baby Gear ■ Emmaus Leicestershire & Rutland ■ G&S Services (East Midlands) ■ LOROS (Leicestershire & Rutland Organisation for the Relief of Suffering) ■ Open Hands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Biffa ■ Cory Environmental ■ DHL ■ ERP ■ EWC ■ SITA

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Project approach

The project consisted of three distinct elements: building the capacity of the FROs, conducting detailed research and developing an action plan.

Building the capacity of the FROs

A detailed review was undertaken of how four of the larger FROs – Melton and District Furniture Project, REACT, SOFA and Work-Link Project – operated. This enabled the consultants to understand not only how the organisations worked – where they sourced material, how they distributed it, etc. – but also identify how they could increase capacity. This was particularly important as some were very reliant on grant funding: with local authorities under pressure to make savings, this was not a sustainable business model.

The review led to individual recommendations for each organisation for short term improvements and strategic options that would reduce their reliance on grants and increase volumes. It also recommended:

- working in partnership to increase collections;
- setting up retail outlets; and
- implementing monitoring and tracking systems to show full traceability of items collected, re-used and disposed of.

Conducting detailed research

With a greater understanding of the existing FRO landscape, the research then focused on quantifying the potential benefits of partnership working and identifying what actions would bring the best results. It involved meeting with each partner and gathering data to provide a complete picture of re-use in the area. The central finding was that there was clear potential to almost double re-use within four years, by:

- improving bulky waste collection services;
- reviewing processes for identifying re-usable items at HWRCs, how such items should be stored and how they should be collected;
- setting up a shared repair facility for waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE);
- conducting a joint communications campaign to raise awareness of re-use services in the region;
- setting up shared retail outlets, run by the FROs;
- providing re-usable items to local assistance schemes for disadvantaged people; and
- setting up a re-use network.

Developing an action plan

These recommendations were put forward at a series of workshops, where they were discussed and evaluated by stakeholders in a transparent and objective way. Preferred options were then formulated into an action plan, which identified quick wins and longer term actions, and clearly assigned responsibilities. Though development of the action plan was a collaborative process, having independent consultants to lead it and draw on previous experience was pivotal as James O'Brien, Team Manager - Programme Co-ordination at Leicestershire County Council explains.

"The knowledge and experience the Ricardo-AEA team brought with them helped us to produce a much better re-use action plan."

One of the most important actions was setting up a re-use network, which would support collaborative working, share information and good practice and enable local partners to take a consortium approach to bid for local authority contracts. A memorandum of understanding was developed setting out how the network should operate, with defined aims, objectives and values.

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Establishing a baseline

As in many other places, there had been no particular imperative to collect data about bulky waste re-use – and the data that was available was held in different locations and formats. This therefore meant there was no easy way to work out the potential to increase re-use, or the business case for doing so.

- One of the first aspects of the research was to gather data together and work out exactly how much was being re-used across the three local authority areas. It revealed that in 2011/12, some 1391.8 tonnes of bulky items were being diverted to re-use via charities, and a further 1015.1 tonnes were being recycled. Based on this, it was possible to calculate how much more could be diverted, and what the potential benefits of increasing diversion would be for the local authorities (in terms of reducing landfill tax) and for FROs, in terms of increased volumes of goods to sell or distribute.

Understanding the actual and perceived barriers to increased re-use

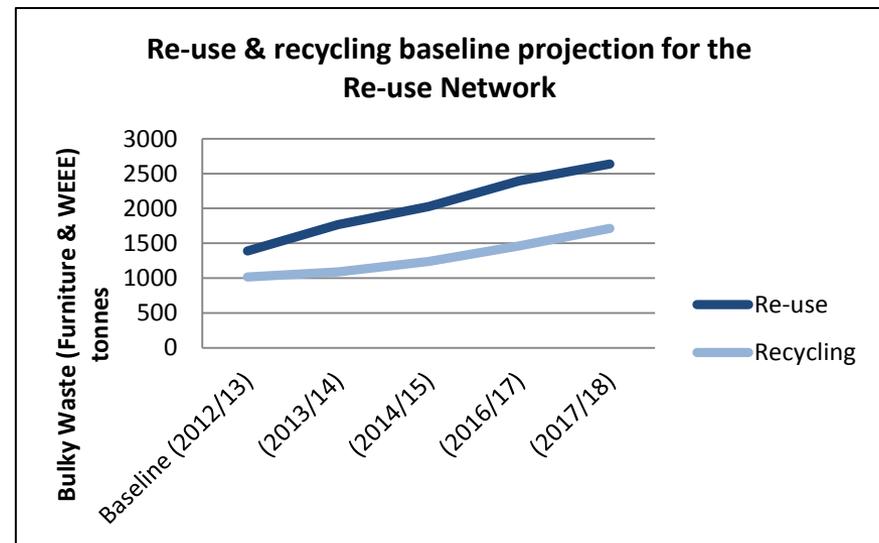
Because there had been no systematic, cross-sector approach to re-use within the region, there was a lack of understanding of what was holding it back. While some genuine barriers existed – such as a lack of retail outlets and co-ordinated communications to raise awareness amongst local people – there were also perceived barriers, particularly in terms of relationships between organisations.

- The consultants asked each of the stakeholders – public, private and third sector – to explain frankly what they saw as the barriers to increasing re-use. They also reviewed in depth how each of the FROs operated, to understand where actual barriers lay.

Developing a clear business case for collaboration

Though each of the parties was interested in working together, there still needed to be a clear business case that set out the benefits and justified investment of time and resources.

- A key outcome from the research was to demonstrate exactly how much more bulky waste could be diverted for re-use. Alongside this, the consultants highlighted the potential actions needed to achieve this increase. This report provided a solid business case.



Once a baseline was established, the full potential of working together could be properly quantified.

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Building relationships

As in many other regions, there was a need upfront to build relationships between organisations that previously have not worked successfully together.

- From an early stage, the different stakeholders met in person to discuss their goals and expectations. This allowed them to engage on a more human level, understand the different priorities and motivations and appreciate what each party could bring to the table.

Winning over local authority colleagues

From operating bulky waste collections to working with HWRC contractors to supplying goods to social fund clients, there are often valuable opportunities within local authority service delivery to increase re-use. To capitalise on these, procuring officers, contract managers and other relevant council departments must be convinced that focusing on re-use will be of benefit to them. This was very much the case in this region.

- The Waste teams in each of the authorities involved used the findings from the research and the resulting action plan to demonstrate to their colleagues the business case for focussing on re-use. This work is ongoing and forms an important part of delivering on the plans actions. Establishing a re-use network with greater resources at its disposal than any individual FRO also helped win over the sceptics.



By operating as a network with the support of local authority waste teams, the FROs are in a better position to bid for other local authority contracts.



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Project outcomes and outputs

The four-year action plan began in Summer 2013, with stakeholders all committing to complete various actions to achieve the goal of nearly doubling re-use and diverting over 2,600 tonnes of bulky waste from landfill by 2017/18.

The FROs formally signed up to the MOU to establish the "LeicesterShire & Rutland Reuse Network" (LRRN) and as of September 2013 were considering what form of legal entity would best suit them going forward.

By that stage, the LRRN had already secured its first success, with agreement being reached for it to supply reused items to eligible applicants to the Leicestershire Welfare Provision service – the Social Fund scheme for the area.

One key strand of activity for the LRRN is around repairing WEEE for re-use. This was an option initially discussed at the stakeholder workshops that the FROs were keen to take forward: two already have small-scale WEEE recovery operations. With WRAP support, Ricardo-AEA is helping to develop a business case for establishing a dedicated WEEE repair facility, and has devised a trial programme involving the collection of WEEE from four recycling and household waste sites.

To operate this, licences as an Approved Authorised Treatment Facility and for an T11 exemption for the repair or refurbishment of WEEE will be required so that the waste site contractor, DHL, is legally allowed to pass the WEEE items to the FROs.

Initially, one of the FROs – REACT – will apply for the licences, on behalf of the whole network. DHL is helping fund the licence application. However, should the trial prove successful, it is anticipated that the LRRN will take on the licences in the future, once it becomes a legal entity.

Other actions are scheduled to coincide with contractual developments within each local authority – such as renewal of bulky waste collection contracts – and communication campaigns are being planned.

Most importantly at this early stage, the commitment of all partners remains strong, as Jane Hammond, chief executive officer of the SOFA project explains.

"There is still a long way to go but your work has built quickly on good intentions and a desire for change and it has been good to see faster progress as a result."



Images from an innovative communication campaign called Rooms in Strange Places – raising awareness of furniture re-use by placing re-usable items in unlikely settings

Key Learning Points

- **Take a logical, step-by-step approach.** In this instance, that meant properly analysing the existing situation to scope out the opportunity, before looking at potential options for improvement and formulating the selected options into an action plan. This approach ensured that there was buy-in from all partners, and that they understood the rationale.
- **Accurate data is essential.** Once there was a clear figure for current re-use – and an evidenced projection of the potential – it was much easier for each stakeholder to win support for their involvement in the project. It also enabled the eight different options for increasing re-use to be evaluated and compared, so that informed decisions could be made about which to take forward.
- **Get face-to-face at the start.** Bringing the different stakeholders together in the same room at the start really helped break down barriers and understand each others' motivations and priorities.
- **Seek out quick wins.** These build momentum and confidence in the project. In this instance, the fact that LRRN was quickly appointed to the Leicestershire Welfare Provision service really highlighted the benefits of the FROs working together.
- **Don't underestimate the value of an independent voice.** Partners were more willing to share information and data with the independent consultants than they may have been had a local authority – say – led the project.
- **Be innovative in terms of communications.** Regular progress updates to all stakeholders are essential, but this project also offered visits to HWRCs and FRO sites as a means of helping stakeholders understand exactly what their partners do.
- **Be transparent about expectations.** Following the development of the implementation plan, it was apparent that there was a need for a central co-ordination role, so that progress could continue as scheduled. However, this had not been expected and so neither local authorities nor the FROs had allocated resource for such a role. The importance of the role was made clear to all, so that each stakeholder could review internally what resources they could commit.



Being appointed to support the Leicestershire Welfare Provision service was an important quick win.

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This is one of a series of case studies highlighting the benefits of local partnership organisations working alongside each other to increase re-use. Other case studies in this series can be found on WRAP's website: www.wrap.org.uk/reusecasestudies and feature the following areas projects:

- Bucks;
- Leeds; and
- Surrey

With thanks to the Work-Link Project and the SOFA Project for images supplied.

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