

the Bristol Method:

how to encourage people to reuse unwanted items

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Introduction

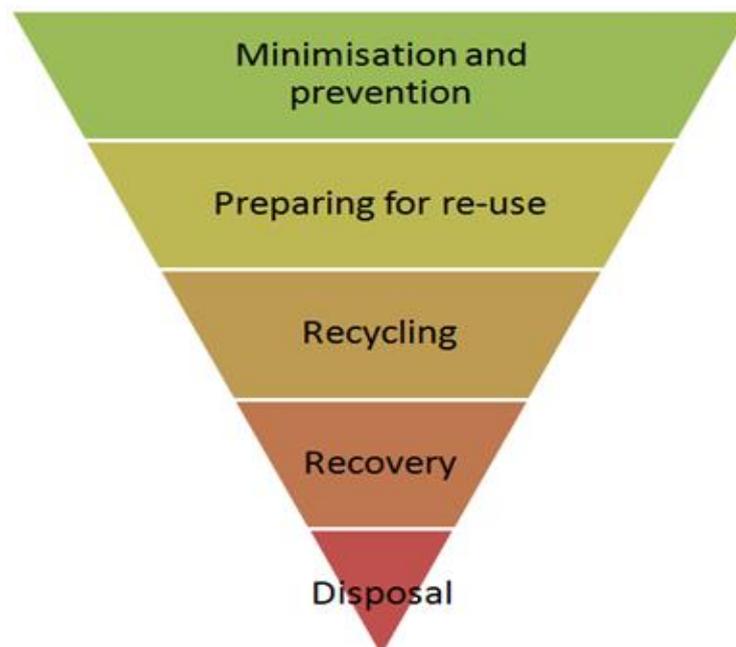
Reusing things instead of throwing them away makes sense both environmentally and socially. It saves the time and embodied energy that went into making the item in the first place, and prevents the need to process more raw materials to make a new version of it. In addition, donating unwanted items to charity shops – as an example – helps charities raise money for good causes and provides a source of low-cost clothes and furniture for people on low incomes. Indeed, we could argue that we have a social and environmental obligation to reuse rather than throw away or recycle.

The European Waste Framework [Directive](#) outlines how European member states should manage the waste that is generated in their countries. In article four, a hierarchy provides guidance for waste producers on the most environmentally beneficial treatment option for handling waste materials. This hierarchy is enshrined in English law via the [Waste Regulations](#) (2011) and is known colloquially as the Waste Hierarchy – see below. After minimisation and prevention, reuse is the next best route for cutting waste.

The UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has made a number of commitments to reducing the amount of waste

generated which are set out in its [National Waste Prevention Programme](#) for England and Wales. Facilitating the reuse of materials is one of the four key objectives of the plan which commits to “encourage a culture of valuing resources by making it easier for people and businesses to find out how to reduce their waste, to use products for longer, repair broken items, and enable reuse of items by others.”

In particular, local authorities are encouraged to provide leadership through their own business and procurement practices as part of the national effort to treat discarded materials higher up the waste hierarchy.



Bristol's challenge

Despite the social, environmental and legal imperatives to encourage reuse over recycling, recovery and disposal, there are a number of challenges in Bristol which, actually, make this harder.

It's easier to throw things away

Rubbish and recycling are free at the point of collection whereas residents have to pre-book and pay for council bulky 'waste' collections like furniture.

Awareness of collection services is low

While some charities and reuse organisations offer free collections (of sellable furniture), there is no central marketing of these services to residents.

High incidence of fly tipping

The council spent £541,226 in 2013/14 clearing 10,472 incidents of fly tipping, the 17th highest number of incidents in England. While lots of this would likely have been rubbish, it also includes things like furniture, fridges and freezers that could have been reused

Recycling is better promoted

There is very little reuse happening at Bristol's Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC). For instance, if a resident brings a working TV they no longer want to the HWRC, it is very unlikely to be usable once it has been thrown in a skip.

In 2013/14 Bristol ranked 83 out of 161 authorities in the UK (excluding Scotland) in the HWRC reuse performance tables. Whilst there are many worse performing authorities (including 60 who do not divert any material at all for reuse from their HWRCs) Bristol's reuse performance has actually decreased in the last year from 0.27% to 0.10%. Some of the best performing authorities now report reuse diversion rates of between 3 and 9% from their HWRCs.

The Bristol Reuse Network

Despite the difficulties outlined above, which are by no means unique to Bristol, the city has a thriving reuse sector comprising charities, social enterprises and sole traders, all diverting 'waste' materials for reuse or creative activities.

The Bristol 2015 Company awarded grant funding to the Bristol Reuse Network to enable it to tackle some of the challenges that prevent people from reusing items.

The Bristol Reuse Network brings disparate individuals and organisations working on reuse of different materials in different sectors together. It was formed by reuse organisations for the benefit of reuse organisations meaning it has a clear vision about what is needed to further reuse in Bristol, as well as a commitment to working collaboratively to achieve it.

Established in January 2014, the network grew out a Bristol Green Capital Action Group. Members are drawn from the public, private and third sectors with the majority being social enterprises. Founder members include a cooperative, a business, and a charity (a full list of members can be found here: www.bristolreuse.com).

The vision for the Bristol Reuse Network is for reuse of unwanted items to become the norm, with people increasingly purchasing second hand or re-purposed items instead of buying them new.

The grant funding is being used to conduct research into how to increase reuse in Bristol's two household waste and recycling centres, as well as to launch collaborative projects to strengthen the Bristol Reuse Network and the sector as a whole in Bristol.

The project is overseen by an elected steering group from people and organisations active in reuse in Bristol. The project is run a development manager who is employed by Resource Futures, a Bristol- based consultancy with expertise in reuse and the circular economy. Resource Futures provide line management, back office support and expert advice. They also wrote the report identifying opportunities for reuse at Bristol's HWRCs.

"There is so much great furniture, clothing, construction materials, household goods and other things out there that are still being land-filled. The scale of the challenge can feel overwhelming so it is really important to start with short-term or pilot practical projects so that we can at least measure our impact, learn and improve."

Jessica Hodge, Development manager, Reuse Network

Future plans

Bristol Reuse is still in its infancy but below we share two things that it is seeking to achieve in the months and years ahead, and why. We hope this may inform other cities' efforts to build a stronger reuse community.

Creating a shared space

A key ambition is to create a Reuse centre or hub where people can shop, donate and learn new skills. As well as helping to build awareness of reuse projects, the rationale is that, by grouping different projects together, physical proximity makes collaboration easier. It also means different reuse organisations can share resources such as warehousing or vehicles, making more efficient use of them. It would be more efficient for donors too, as it would function as an alternative to a household waste recycling centre, meaning that the public could go there and drop several resources off in one go, to different projects.

The team also holds the view that a Reuse Centre could function as an alternative shopping centre, where people could buy a variety of second hand, salvaged, reclaimed or remade materials and products in one place.

At present, many of the members of the Bristol Reuse network pay no or very little rent.

Industrial space in Bristol is currently leased for around £7.75/square foot so the Reuse Centre can only happen if suitable premises can be found for a peppercorn rent.

Sparing items from the tip

Bristol Reuse Network has made a proposal to Bristol City Council to divert materials for reuse from one of its household waste and recycling centres (HWRC). The ambition is to deliver a pilot a scheme during 2015, to benefit from the publicity and promotion around the Green Capital year, as well as use the funding provided by Bristol 2015. The ambition is to run a three-month pilot.

If the council agrees, Bristol Reuse Network would purchase, lease or borrow a second hand shipping container which would be re-sprayed to make it look smarter, and to include graphics with instructions for what should be placed inside it. A member of staff would be on hand to help householders understand what items can be reused. Reuse organisations would then be invited to collect whatever material they wanted, and if anything had not been collected within 7 days, it would be moved to the HWRC bulk containers.

The aspiration would be to collect: lengths of wood and plywood; pieces of furniture; clean, dry textiles and pairs of shoes; small electrical goods and white goods; household goods and bric a brac; and scrap materials that can be reused by the Children's Scrapstore for the purpose of play.

At the end of the pilot, a report will be provided by Bristol Reuse Network which would help the council determine whether it is cost effective to continue. Information collected would include: the weight and/or number of items taken by reuse organisations during the pilot; actual sales data if tracked, theoretical value, if not; calculation of saving to the council in waste disposal costs. In addition, the team will conduct interviews with staff from the council and the reuse organisations.

Communicating the reuse message

A significant part of the work of the Reuse network is to build awareness of opportunities to reuse resources, and to help people connect with each other. Below is some additional information about the different ways the Network is doing this.

Website and directory

Bristol Reuse Network already has a basic website but is introducing new functionality including a directory of members and a search function so residents can find where to donate reusable items. It will also include a monitoring tool for community reuse activities, and guidance for reuse organisations on waste legislation.

The website includes a community impact tool so that groups running reuse activities can work out the weight of goods saved from landfill and the economic and carbon impact.

Reuse forum

Having a reuse forum (both online and through regular evening gatherings) facilitates more reuse as it allows people to easily identify who has surplus materials that could be used by them and vice versa. It also helps to identify projects which can be worked on collaboratively, or which are too big for one organisation to manage. The online platform that Bristol Reuse Network uses is Mobilize.io. This allows different reuse organisations to share ideas and materials.

Social media

Bristol Reuse Network uses twitter to communicate to Bristol residents, other reuse organisations and to help promote reuse activities across the city. <https://twitter.com/BristolReuse>

Re: Bedding

Kate G.

Posted: Aug 28, 2015

Does anyone take duvets, pillows or bedding?

Jessica

Animal shelters often want it for bedding

Vicky B

We do! Re:Store at 17 Filwood Broadway.

Ella

The Children's Scrapstore would love big sheets.

Events and workshops

The Reuse Network holds quarterly evening events for members to get together, share ideas and plan future activities. It also offers training for members such as in testing electrical items – essential for shops selling second hand WEEE.

What we've learned so far

Below is advice from the Development Manager for the Bristol Reuse Network, Jessica Hodges, shared here to help others follow in its footsteps.

Prepare for the challenge!

Behaviour change is notoriously difficult and so while making reuse the norm is our aim, we acknowledge that we are only starting to scratch the surface.

Look for ways to keep costs down

The Bristol 2015 Company has provided funding for just 10 months. Many of the projects we are hoping to deliver will take longer than that to come to fruition.

With no ongoing funding and very little income generating potential (for example through paid membership), Bristol Reuse Network can only run pilot projects, or start projects that can be continued without further funding.

In some cases this is easy – we have adopted Mobilize as a networking tool, rather than starting a newsletter, for example, because this way every member is able to contribute content or ask questions, rather than relying on a centralised

secretariat. In this way it will carry on organically after the end of the funded project.

Be ready to manage change

Mid-way through the project, when we were presenting our ideas for reuse at household waste and recycling centres to Bristol City Council, the council announced they were ending the existing waste collections contracts and had set up a Council owned company to manage the services.

This has meant that council officers are extremely busy preparing for and directing the new collection service and understandably have less time to dedicate to new projects such as reuse at the recycling centres.

Organise yourselves

Bristol Reuse Network has opted to form a charitably incorporated organisation – or CIO – which will allow us to apply for additional funding. However, as the Network is an umbrella organisation, there are challenges to overcome to secure funding.

Case study: Bristol Big Give

The Big Give from the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England (UWE) collects unwanted items and food from students in halls and private accommodation at the end of the academic year.

Bristol Big Give is an annual student move-out collection and recycling campaign run by the universities which donates unwanted goods to charity. The two universities collaborate with Bristol City Council, raising vital funds for over a dozen local and national charities including British Heart Foundation. During the summer of 2014, 88 tonnes of donated items from students were collected with a value of £180,000.

The campaign encourages students living in halls of residence and private accommodation to donate their reusable unwanted items at the end of term before moving elsewhere or returning home, diverting the products from landfill. A vast array of goods is donated by students at designated collection points around the city, including kitchenware, clothes, food, sports equipment and books.

The success of the Bristol Big Give highlighted the vast amount of low-cost items that students are buying and disposing of every year. The campaign has contributed to improving the perception of students in the city.

A team at the University of Bristol undertook a feasibility study of opening a charity shop inside the Students' Union in order to close the loop on student waste. The team worked with students to run three pilot events which involved selling items collected from the Bristol Big Give at a very low cost at the start of term, as well as a larger pop-up charity shop fair which invited local charities into the Anson Rooms to sell second-hand items. The events attracted over 1,000 attendees and raised £4,000 for a local charity. Student feedback demonstrated a strong demand for similar events to continue into the future.

“The biggest lesson we learned was the value of peer-to-peer engagement. Students talking and engaging other students in sustainability has a much greater impact than any lecturer or staff member telling students they must do something. We are trying to create a shift in social norms and to achieve that we need to maximise peer-to-peer engagement.”

Amy Walsh, University of Bristol

Case study: Reusing furniture

A team at the University of the West of England (UWE) are taking measures to reuse and prevent waste.

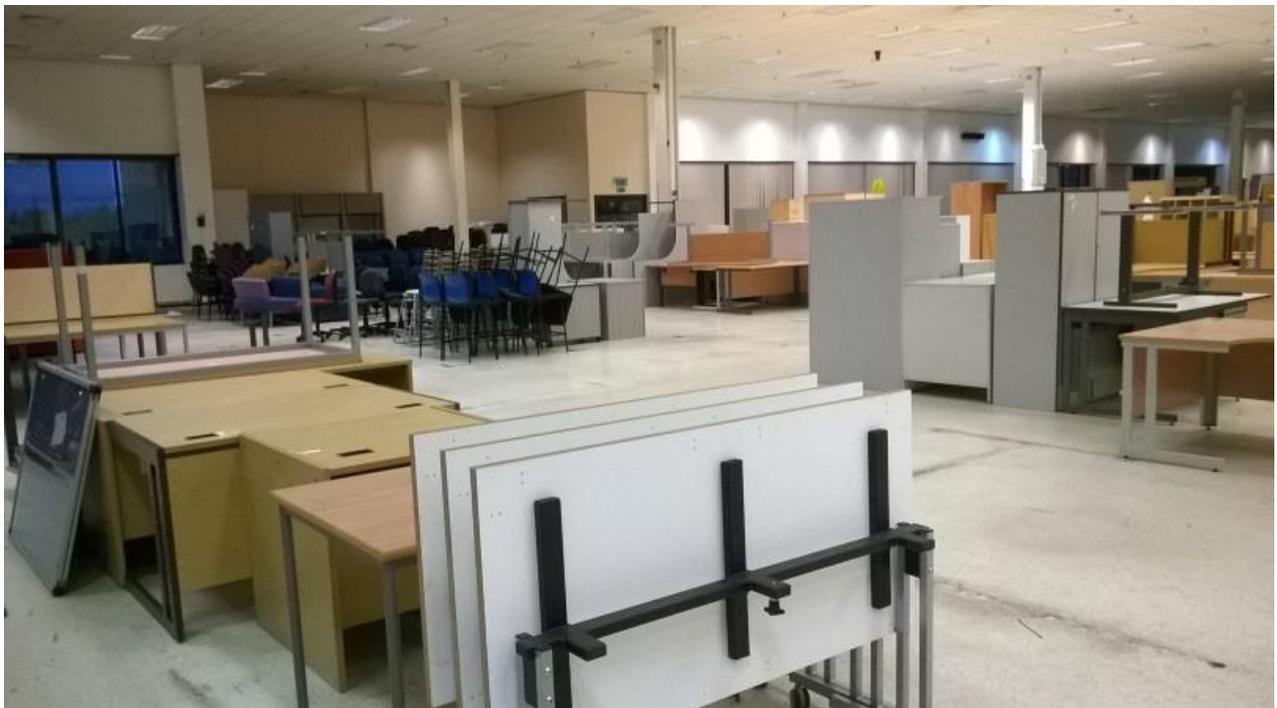
In 2014, a new project was launched to reallocate surplus furniture, and prevent it from being thrown away. To achieve this, the team introduced a managed furniture warehouse in combination with an online reuse portal (www.warp-it.co.uk). To date, it has enabled UWE to reuse 44 tonnes of surplus items.

However, not all items can be reallocated within UWE so the university is taking part in the development of The Bristol Reuse Network which helps to redistribute unwanted items of furniture to third sector organisations.

In its first year, the furniture reuse scheme has diverted 44 tonnes of waste from disposal, with an estimated 105 tonnes of avoided CO₂ emissions.

The scheme is a great example of a win-win scenario – where environmental gains are matched by significant financial gains. It has already saved the university around £170,000 in avoided procurement and waste disposal costs. Furthermore the university has donated £40,000 worth of surplus furniture to local charities, and brought in a small amount of externally sourced income through sales to staff.

Paul Roberts, UWE Resources Manager says, “This project is challenging the “throwaway culture” and changes how people and the institution view and use previously unwanted items. We are excited by our success with this project in its first 12 months, and will look to other material streams where a similar approach can be taken.”



UWE's furniture warehouse, which stores surplus UWE furniture

Case studies: Reuse Network members

Below are brief summaries of some of the organisations working in the Bristol area to encourage reuse. All of them are members of the Bristol Reuse Network. A list of members can be found at bristolreuse.com.

Kecks Clothing

kecksonline.wordpress.com

Kecks Clothing upcycles clothes to keep them out of landfill. They teach others to do the same through workshops and seminars with the intention of helping people lead environmentally-conscious lifestyles.

“As a small company with big aims, the linked-up thinking of the Reuse group, which has so organically grown out of a shared aim, has been invaluable to our success. Kecks not only spreads the word about upcycling textiles, but now encourages businesses and institutions to revise their attitude to waste and create their own network of reuse groups where ever they are in the UK. Practical changes to the way we dress every day, and how we consume textiles can instil an ethos that spreads far and wide rapidly, saving us money, and saving resources too.” Helen Brown

The Bristol Bike Project

thebristolbikeproject.org

The Bristol Bike Project accepts unwanted bicycles from the public and refurbishes them for use by underprivileged and marginalised people in Bristol. Unwanted bikes are a fantastic resource, providing mobility, improved health and independence to those most in need. Repairing them also provides an ongoing volunteer opportunity which brings in people from a wide range of backgrounds, learning new skills and gaining confidence. Bikes become the vehicle for people to work together for a common aim as well as to make friends and feel part of a close community.

Children’s Scrapstore

childrensscrapstore.co.uk

The Children’s Scrapstore is a charity that collects safe waste from businesses and offers it as a low-cost creative resource to member groups working in creative play, care, educational and therapeutic settings. Resources are stored in a warehouse in Bristol and include a wide range of items that are useful for creative play such as paper and card, foam, plastic pots, tubes and tubs, netting, fabric, books, CDs and all manner of off-cuts and leftovers from business. Members are invited to give a suggested donation of £14.50 per trolley.

“We find that there is a consciousness in the Bristol public that reuse is important. As a charity active in this field for the last thirty years, we have watched this mentality extend to local manufacturers and industry who contact us to donate manufacturing scrap. To encourage this, we have started using PR – events, social media and outreach events – to help spread the word that reuse is active and responsible. We hope to move further towards corporate business and expand our capacity to influence big business and industry to reuse.” Ella Wiles

Tangentfield

tangentfield.co.uk

Tangentfield is an open architectural field-research practice that works work with individuals and community groups (both specialists and novices) to make temporary or permanent constructions. It often uses performance as part of its method, and reclaimed or found materials as its resource.

“We joined the Bristol Reuse Network initially to source and share materials and collaborate with other reuse organisations and individuals. We soon realised that by becoming an active part of the network we could also most importantly help encourage and support change in the wider context.” Sally Daniels

PAPER Arts

This summer, as part of Bristol 2015's Neighbourhood Arts Programme, PAPER Arts has launched the Make Some Noise About Litter! project. Through a series of up-cycling workshops, this program aims to inspire young people to change their behaviour with regards to littering. Events include transforming an adventure playground using waste materials from a youth centre, and bringing professional artists together with children to create musical instruments from litter.

"We are delighted that there are so many opportunities in Bristol for people that are interested in reuse, and now have some ideas for future events around up-cycling that have come from attending Bristol Reuse's events." Grace Kress

Knowle West Media Centre

ludicrooms.com

KWMC is currently working on The Forgotten Toys Compendium which is part of the Bristol 2015 Neighbourhood Arts Programme. It involves taking people on a journey of 'social archaeology' to re-discover and re-purpose forgotten toys and junk lying in lofts, sheds and garages.

The leader of the programme, Melissa Mean, says: "The project is part of the green agenda for the city because it involves reusing and repurposing objects – from rusty bikes to forgotten consoles - rather than buying new ones. Instead of installing new structures we will incorporate existing street furniture – such as walls, benches and bins – into our game playing.

"Forgotten Toys also helps bring communities together and makes use of green spaces by creating new participative games from junk...And it encourages conversations about what we do with our waste."

The Sewing Skills Project

thesewingskillsproject.co.uk

"The more we can all spread the positive message about the benefits of reusing, the better. As a designer/maker and teacher of sewing I encourage my students to explore the benefits of reworking and refashioning existing garments in addition to creating stylish clothing from off cuts and salvaged fabric. This not only develops their skills and empowers but hopefully educates and increases awareness of how and where manufactured clothes are made." Jennifer Mills

Re:Store

reworkltd.org.uk

Re:store promotes a stronger local economy by providing low priced (and environmentally friendly) ways of maintaining your home while teaching skills that will increase young people's chances of getting qualifications, a job and having a successful life.

It reuses furniture, paint and small electrical items, and aims to find a place, customer or new use for anything else that it is offered.

"We joined the Bristol Reuse Network because we believe that there are smarter ways of dealing with that which can be considered rubbish." Vicky Beckwith

Bristol Textile Recyclers

btr-ltd.co.uk

Bristol Textile Recyclers have been in the reuse industry since 1972 when the company's founder, Fernley Piper, first started collecting and purchasing the unwanted textiles from charity shops in the Bristol area. Now collecting 100 tonnes of textiles each week from schools, local councils, textile banks and charity shops throughout the UK, BTR hand grades every item collected to assess its reusability before exporting for reuse in Eastern Europe, central Africa and Pakistan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This module was compiled by Jessica Hodge, development manager of the Bristol Reuse Network. Jessica has a background in making community and environmental projects financially sustainable, including being chief executive of a city farm. She has launched and developed many new projects and has managed various grant-funded projects with statutory, lottery and trust funders.

Jessica is employed by Resource Futures a non-profit distributing environmental consultancy based in Bristol. Resource Futures have led on many strategic UK studies of reuse and recently produced some '[Reuse How to Guides.](#)'

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www.resourcefutures.co.uk

BRISTOL 2015

European Green Capital is a prestigious annual award designed to promote and reward the efforts of cities to improve the environment. Bristol is the first ever UK city to win the award.

European Green Capital is run by The European Commission, recognising that Europe's urban societies face many environmental challenges – and that sustainable, low-carbon living is vital to the future of our cities and our people.

The award was first won by Stockholm in 2010. Since then, Hamburg, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Nantes and Copenhagen have carried the torch. Bristol will hand over to Ljubljana at the end of the year.



THE BRISTOL METHOD

The Bristol Method is a knowledge-transfer programme aimed at helping people in other cities understand and apply the lessons that Bristol has learned in becoming a more sustainable city, not just in 2015 but in the last decade.

Each module of the Bristol Method is presented as an easy-to-digest 'how to' guide on a particular topic, which use Bristol's experiences as a case study. The modules contain generic advice and recommendations that each reader can tailor to their own circumstances.

The Bristol Method modules are published on the Bristol 2015 website at www.bristol2015.co.uk/method

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