

Leeds: Circular economy collaborations across sectors

The initiative

Partners across Leeds are collaborating to make the economic, social, and environmental benefits of circular economy a reality in the city. A system wide, strategic approach to embedding a circular economy is emerging, with public, private, higher education, and third sector partners working together in different ways to meet community and business needs.

This case study explores how three of these projects – Leeds By Example, Zero Waste Leeds and Healthy Holidays – are taking a broad circular economy focus to provide business support, advice and guidance, fund community activities, and collaborate in practical ways that are leading to tangible benefits throughout the city.

Leeds by example

Leeds By Example is a collaboration of leading retailers, brands and manufacturers working with Leeds City Council and third sector partners. Originally a project developed in partnership between Leeds City Council and Hubbub, #LeedsbyExample is now funded, owned, and governed by Leeds City Council.

The aim of the project is to raise awareness on a range of issues related to tackling climate change and provide support and guidance to households, communities and businesses to help them be part of the change. The Leeds By Example approach involves trialling a wide range of activities with lots of business and community partners and seeing what works and then rolling that out across the city. One example of this is the 'Recycle-on-the-go' project which led to a significant (near three-fold) increase in recycling in the city (see Figure 1).

The success of the Leeds By Example programme has been attributed to two main factors: The active partnerships between organisations involved including Leeds City Council, Zero Waste Leeds and funding

organisations such as Leeds Community Foundation who understand the city well, combined with a 'give it a go' approach. Partners use their knowledge of places, networks and communities of practice to promote engagement and provide guidance on where and what to trial.



Recycle on the go:

- Introduced 186 new recycling points in the busiest locations and collected 1.2 million coffee cups, 140,000 cans and 160,000 plastic bottles.
- Worked with local and national partners to shorten supply chains so that good quality recycling (bottles, cans and cups) are recycled in the North of England.
- The number of people recycling in Leeds City Centre has almost tripled from 17% to 49%.
- The model is now being adopted in Swansea and Edinburgh, and Leeds By Example is working with these and other locations to help support roll out of a place based approach to recycling on the go.

Figure 1: Impact of 'Recycle-on-the-go' project.

Zero Waste Leeds

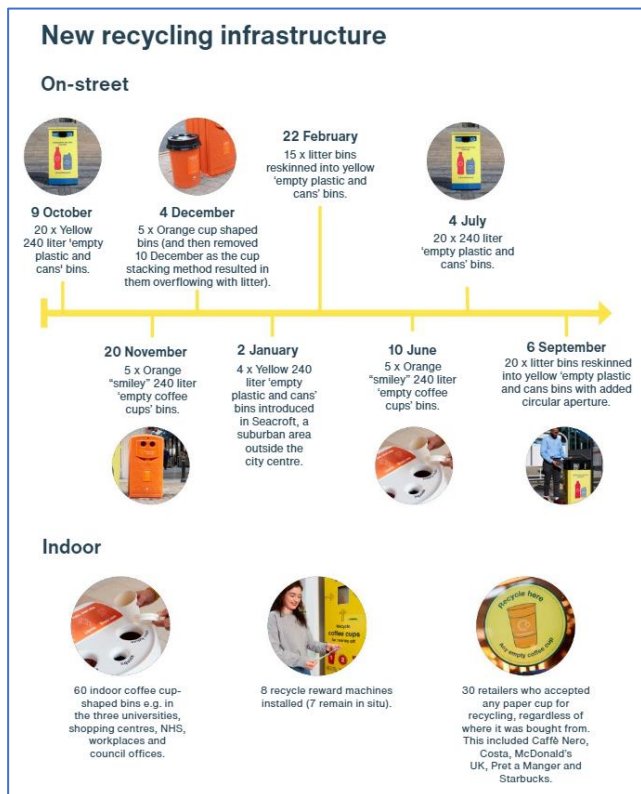


Figure 2: Timeline for new recycling infrastructure.

Zero Waste Leeds is part of Social Business Brokers, a social enterprise established in 2010 with the aim of tackling complex social problems. Zero Waste Leeds' core aim is to build a movement that will help Leeds become a zero waste city by 2030. They work towards this aim by engaging and connecting local people, communities, businesses, schools and universities and working with them to find practical ways of reducing waste such as by giving tips and advice, mapping reuse/recycling activity using Facebook and other platforms. Two projects in particular are using a circular model to bring about clear social, environmental, and economic benefits: Leeds Uniform Exchange and Leeds Fashion Futures.

Leeds Uniform Exchange

'Almost 30,000 children in Leeds live in poor households and for these families, paying for the average cost of school uniforms (£350 per child per year) means having to make decisions about what not to buy.

Some schools and community groups have set up uniform swaps, but this has been ad hoc, and not always in areas where need was greatest. Zero Waste Leeds worked with community groups and other organisations across the city to co-ordinate this activity

and map where there are gaps in provision. The project was supported and funded by Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation's Jimbo's fund and promoted widely through #LeedsByExample and the Healthy Holidays scheme.

The business support involved:

- £5,000 funding through Leeds Community Foundation Jimbo's Fund.
- Connections to organisations through Leeds Community Foundation and Leeds City Council networks and Leeds' wards and voluntary, community and social enterprise hubs.
- Other funders and networks including the University of Leeds.

In the first 10 weeks of the programme in 2020:

- Approx. 600kg of potential textile waste was saved,
- 10,800kg of CO2 emissions prevented,
- 8.1 million litres of water saved and over £50,000 uniform costs saved, and,
- Lots of engagement, creating connections and social capital including social media.

Leeds Fashion Futures

This interesting, place-based initiative builds on Leeds' heritage in fashion and textiles. Again, Zero Waste Leeds are finding and sharing practical activities to embed circular approaches.

The success of the project to date rests in high levels of engagement with people and communities across the city. This has helped raise awareness of opportunities to reuse, share and extend the life of clothes. Again, the focus is on developing practical and fun ways for people to be involved such as mapping location of textile banks and charity shops, and an online fashion week.

Healthy Holidays

Healthy Holidays started working with FareShare and Rethink in 2016 to redirect intercepted food to children who would normally be in receipt of a paid for school meal during school holiday activities.

The successful circular model, co-funded by Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation is based on working closely with community groups and families to divert usable goods from waste streams in a way that clearly meets community needs whilst reducing environmental impacts. The underlying aim is to change the way people and businesses think about fair distribution of resources so that extending

the life of products (food, uniform, sports equipment, IT) becomes the norm.

The approach is egalitarian, equitable, and assets based so that everyone is playing their part to use resources more fairly and efficiently in Leeds. This approach is helping to destigmatising poverty and demonstrating that a circular approach has social, environmental and economic benefits.

The project has since expanded considerably and now also addresses other community needs (e.g. technological support during the Covid pandemic).

As well as providing funding, Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation have connected individuals and organisations together across geographies, for example working with Tech Angels and Digital Access West Yorkshire to connect with companies to help them clean and refurbish computers to be reused rather than sent for recycling.

The three main circular economy-related projects with clear environmental, economic and social benefits are:

- **Alleviating food poverty and reducing waste:** Intercepting and redistributing food to the community. This equates to 15.7 tonnes from FareShare and 4.5 tonnes from Rethink in summer 2020. As a result, 'food pathways' are emerging, with pop-up social supermarkets being set up in community centres.
- **Uniform:** Working closely with Zero Waste Leeds and other community-led initiatives across the city, this project has encouraged local action and engagement including Facebook groups set up by parents so outcomes are most relevant for local needs. One key outcome from this is that the project is now expanding to work with West Yorkshire Sports Foundation to use the same model for sports equipment.
- **Digital:** By intercepting surplus business IT equipment and refurbishing it for redistribution to schools and community groups, this work has been a vital part of the city response to the Covid pandemic as well as reducing the amounts of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) waste.

Challenges and local solutions

One key emerging challenge is that activity towards embedding a circular economy or wider strategic approaches to reaching net-zero is happening on the

ground and in communities, but it is less clear whether circular economy will be fully embedded into the wider city plans including the waste strategy review.

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the city, in particular the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors and their ability to meet increasing demand for their services. This collaborative, place-based approach has demonstrated the potential for to reduce the impacts of Covid, e.g. Zero Waste Leeds online workshops and videos, and Healthy Holidays door to door deliveries supported by Leeds City Council and connections with others, has been effective.

The Leeds' context: place-based collaboration

In these examples, learning in three key areas is being shared across the city and wider region, as well as with other local authorities (e.g. Edinburgh and Cardiff) to support development.

- The start of a co-ordinated system wide approach. In Leeds, there has not been one specific governance measure or business support activity, rather an 'organic' but still joined up approach is making a circular economy a reality.
- Collaboration across sectors and issues: public, private and voluntary, community and social enterprise partners are working together based on their needs, experiences, strengths. The involvement and key role of Leeds' strong voluntary, community and social enterprise sector has led to a focus on equity, social justice and community benefits which are then felt locally.
- Local, asset based, practical solutions to community and business challenges: The projects build on existing activities successes to connect communities that are finding solutions to the challenges they face.

As live, ongoing projects, this learning is being shared with Leeds City Council partners across departments including financial Inclusion, adult social care, schools and education and to inform the new waste strategy in the hope that this will help form part of future, strategic and policy developments across the city.

W: <https://circulareconomy.leeds.ac.uk/>



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