



**circular
do tank**

Rewriting the Rules: Circular Do Tank Policy Workshop Report

The Circular Do Tank (CDT) Policy Workshop, *Rewriting the Rules*, was convened to explore how policy can accelerate the transition from a linear to a circular built environment. Bringing together senior leaders from development, investment, planning, engineering, architecture, law, insurance and the wider supply chain, the workshop sought to move beyond proving that circular construction is technically possible and instead focus on the conditions required to make it commercially viable and scalable across UK real estate.

The event was intentionally structured to build a single narrative. The opening presentations first established why circularity represents an economic opportunity rather than solely an environmental response; then examined how international fiscal and policy interventions are already influencing market behaviour; before finally exploring the opportunities and constraints within the UK's planning and regulatory framework. This strategic context informed the facilitated breakout sessions, where delegates developed practical policy recommendations across planning, economics, regulation and market delivery.

Together, the presentations reflected a common conclusion: the principal barriers to circular construction are no longer technical. They are systemic; embedded within the planning, financial and commercial frameworks that continue to favour extraction, replacement and disposal over the retention of existing value.

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Introducing the Challenge

Tina Paillet | Founder, Circotrade & Co-Founder, Circular Do Tank

Opening the workshop, Tina Paillet welcomed delegates and set out the ambition of the Circular Do Tank (CDT): to bridge the gap between technical capability and market adoption. While circular construction is increasingly being demonstrated through successful projects, widespread adoption remains constrained by policy, financial and commercial systems that were largely designed around a linear economy.

She described the CDT as a multidisciplinary collaboration bringing together developers, planners, engineers, investors, insurers, lawyers and other practitioners to develop practical, investment-led solutions capable of scaling material reuse across the built environment. Rather than simply demonstrating that circular construction is technically achievable, the CDT seeks to identify the policy and commercial conditions that make reuse commercially attractive and investable.

A recurring theme throughout the introduction was the importance of collaboration. Tina encouraged participants to share both successes and challenges openly, recognising that valuable lessons frequently remain isolated within individual organisations rather than informing wider industry practice. Operating under Chatham House principles, the workshop provided a forum for open discussion while enabling the CDT to synthesise the collective findings into future publications and policy recommendations.

She also reaffirmed the CDT Pledge, encouraging organisations to prioritise the retention and reuse of existing materials, contribute project data and evidence, share knowledge openly and collaborate across the industry to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy.

Climate Change as a Real Estate Mandate

Richard Golding | Associate Director, Gleeds & Director, Circular Do Tank

Richard Golding opened the keynote presentations by challenging delegates to reconsider circularity not as a sustainability initiative, but as a long-term strategy for preserving value within the built environment. While climate change provides the urgency for action, he argued that economics will ultimately determine whether circularity achieves mainstream adoption.

Using the analogy of the automotive industry, Richard observed that society readily accepts the repair, maintenance and upgrading of vehicles throughout their lives, creating profitable industries centred on preserving value. By contrast, construction has normalised a level of waste that would be considered extraordinary elsewhere, routinely demolishing buildings that continue to contain significant stores of embodied carbon, materials and economic value. As the presentation suggested, buildings should age better than cars.

Moving beyond the traditional sustainability narrative, Richard argued that the circular economy should not be viewed simply as a means of reducing environmental harm. Instead, it presents an opportunity to unlock greater productivity, resilience and commercial value through adaptability. Using Lansdowne House as an example, he illustrated how long-life, loose-fit design and a kit-of-parts approach enable buildings to evolve over successive generations rather than becoming obsolete at the end of a single lease cycle. In this context, adaptability becomes the highest form of sustainability; allowing buildings to retain both value and relevance over time.

The presentation concluded by arguing that the challenge is no longer demonstrating that circular construction is technically feasible. Rather, it is reforming the planning, procurement and financial systems that continue to reward demolition and replacement. Richard suggested that the opportunity ahead

is not simply to reduce waste, but to rewrite the rules so that carbon, materials and economic value remain within the system for longer. Ultimately, he reframed buildings as assets to be stewarded rather than products to be consumed, posing a final question to delegates: will the buildings we create today still be regarded as assets worth preserving fifty years from now?

The Reuse Dividend: Learning from International Policy

Leanne Tritton | Founder, Don't Waste Buildings

Building upon the economic case for circularity, Leanne Tritton explored how policy and fiscal intervention can fundamentally influence market behaviour. Presenting findings from The Reuse Dividend, she argued that the principal barriers preventing building reuse are no longer technical but economic. Current financial frameworks frequently make demolition the commercially rational decision, even where refurbishment offers lower construction costs and significantly lower embodied carbon.

Drawing on research from the social housing sector, Leanne demonstrated how existing funding mechanisms can unintentionally incentivise demolition. One case study illustrated that while refurbishment represented the lower construction cost, grant funding reduced the effective cost of redevelopment to such an extent that demolition became the financially preferable option. Rather than calling for preferential treatment, she argued that policy should simply create a level commercial playing field between refurbishment and redevelopment.

The presentation examined successful international precedents, including reduced VAT on refurbishment, historic building tax credits, investment incentives and subsidised retrofit finance. These examples demonstrated that governments can successfully influence market behaviour by aligning taxation and financial policy with circular economy objectives, whilst simultaneously stimulating wider economic activity.

Leanne also highlighted the fragmented nature of UK governance, where responsibility for reuse sits across multiple departments without clear ownership. Combined with short-term funding programmes and inconsistent fiscal incentives, this creates uncertainty for investors and building owners while limiting market confidence. As environmental reporting requirements increase and stranded asset risk grows, she concluded that aligning financial incentives with policy objectives will be essential if reuse is to move beyond isolated projects and become mainstream practice.

The UK Policy Landscape

Hannah Davies | Newmark

Tessa Devreese | ReLondon

The final presentation examined the current UK policy landscape and explored how planning, regulation and wider government policy can either enable or constrain the transition towards a circular built environment.

The speakers observed that while embodied carbon, resource efficiency and circular economy principles are becoming increasingly prominent within climate policy, existing regulation remains largely focused on operational performance. Consequently, the policy framework still provides comparatively limited support for retaining existing buildings and maximising the reuse of construction materials.

The presentation considered a broad range of policy levers influencing circularity, including national planning policy, local authority decision-making, building regulations, embodied carbon policy, VAT, insurance, certification and supply-chain readiness. Whilst progress has been made, delegates heard that these mechanisms continue to operate unevenly, creating inconsistency across the development process and limiting confidence in material reuse.

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Examples from authorities including the City of London and Westminster demonstrated growing leadership through retrofit-first approaches and stronger justification for demolition. However, implementation remains inconsistent nationally, reflecting the absence of a coherent policy framework capable of mainstreaming circular development across all regions.

The speakers concluded that significant opportunities remain to strengthen embodied carbon policy, improve support for construction product reuse, increase consistency across planning policy and develop complementary reforms around certification, insurance and procurement. Collectively, these interventions would create the enabling environment required for circular construction to move from best practice to business as usual.

Together, the presentations established the intellectual and policy framework for the workshop discussions that followed. Delegates were subsequently invited to translate these strategic themes into practical recommendations capable of informing future government policy and accelerating the commercial adoption of circular construction.

Workshop Findings

Following the keynote presentations, delegates participated in four facilitated breakout sessions designed to pressure-test potential policy interventions capable of accelerating material reuse across the UK built environment. Each group explored a different aspect of the policy landscape before presenting its recommendations to the wider audience during a plenary discussion.

Although each workshop focused on a distinct topic, many of the themes overlapped, reinforcing the interconnected nature of planning, finance, regulation and market confidence. The following sections summarise the principal discussions and recommendations from each group. The original workshop themes reflected the event objectives, although the planned fifth breakout on Circularity in New Development was not run.

Group 01 | National Planning Policy

What changes to national planning policy are required to accelerate material reuse?

The group considered how the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) could provide stronger and more consistent support for circular economy principles. Whilst delegates recognised that references to sustainable development already exist, they concluded that existing policy remains open to interpretation and does not sufficiently encourage the retention of existing buildings or the reuse of materials. Delegates also suggested that new terminology within the draft NPPF in respect of weight should kick in, with the retention of building material being given substantial weight in the planning balance.

In addition, the proposed wording at PM10 which removes the ability for Local Planning Authorities to set their own quantitative energy, carbon or circular economy policies should be removed to allow for devolution at an appropriate geographic scale – either local or regional in the case of London – to drive forward innovation.

There was broad agreement that circularity should become an explicit public benefit within planning decisions, creating a clearer policy presumption in favour of retaining existing assets wherever this remains practical and compatible with wider development objectives.

Participants also recognised the importance of designing today's buildings to become tomorrow's material banks. New developments should therefore be planned with future adaptability, deconstruction and material recovery in mind, ensuring that valuable resources remain within the built environment throughout successive life cycles.

Finally, the group identified a need for greater consistency across the planning system. Clearer national definitions for terms such as retrofit, substantial demolition and refurbishment would help create a more level playing field for applicants, consultants and planning authorities. It was suggested that this could form part of supporting guidance within the Planning Practical Guidance.

Key recommendations

- Strengthen circular economy principles within the NPPF.
- Establish a clearer presumption in favour of retaining existing buildings and materials.
- Recognise circular economy outcomes as a public benefit in planning decisions.
- Encourage design for adaptability and future deconstruction.
- Develop clearer national guidance and definitions for retrofit and reuse.

Group 02 | Local Planning and Building Control

How can local authorities practically implement circularity?

Delegates agreed that policy alone is insufficient without effective implementation. Examples including the City of London and Westminster demonstrated that successful retrofit-first approaches rely heavily upon constructive pre-application engagement between developers and planning authorities.

The discussion highlighted the importance of adequately resourcing these conversations. Early dialogue enables design challenges, viability considerations and heritage issues to be resolved collaboratively, reducing uncertainty later in the planning process.

Participants also discussed opportunities to build upon existing advisory services, including Historic England's Enhanced Advisory Service, by integrating commercial viability alongside conservation advice.

On material reuse, delegates acknowledged the positive influence that embodied carbon policies are already having on market behaviour. However, they concluded that stronger digital infrastructure, material marketplaces and supporting logistics will be needed before reuse can become commonplace beyond individual projects.

Key recommendations

- Invest in better-resourced pre-application processes.
- Expand specialist advisory services to include viability alongside technical advice.
- Continue strengthening embodied carbon policy as a driver for material reuse.
- Improve data infrastructure and material exchange platforms.
- Share best practice between local authorities to improve consistency.

Group 03 | Economic and Fiscal Levers Supporting Planning Policy

What wider policy levers are required to support planning reform?

Rather than considering circularity in isolation, this group explored how policy proposals could directly support wider Government priorities.

Delegates discussed how material reuse could contribute towards housing delivery, regional economic growth, public procurement and high street regeneration. Framing circularity within these broader political objectives was viewed as more likely to secure long-term policy support than presenting reuse solely as an environmental issue.

The concept of regional reuse hubs attracted considerable support. These facilities could provide storage, testing, remanufacturing and redistribution services while creating skilled employment and supporting local manufacturing capability.

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The group also considered the opportunity for public procurement to stimulate demand by introducing reuse targets within government-funded projects. Alongside this, greater encouragement for adapting existing buildings was seen as an opportunity to accelerate housing delivery, particularly through bringing vacant or underused properties back into productive use.

Key recommendations

- Align circular economy policy with wider Government priorities.
- Develop regional reuse hubs to strengthen local supply chains.
- Introduce reuse targets within public procurement.
- Support adaptive reuse to contribute towards housing delivery.
- Position circularity as a driver of regional economic growth and employment.

Group 04 | Deliverability, Risk and Compliance

What prevents planners and developers from approving reuse at scale?

The final group focused on reducing the commercial risks that continue to inhibit material reuse.

Delegates recognised that confidence remains one of the greatest barriers to wider adoption. The discussion therefore concentrated on the practical measures needed to increase certainty across the supply chain.

The first theme centred on storage and remanufacturing infrastructure. Regional facilities capable of receiving, testing, repairing and redistributing reclaimed materials were viewed as essential if reuse is to operate efficiently at scale.

Secondly, participants explored manufacturer take-back schemes and extended producer responsibility. Encouraging manufacturers to inspect, refurbish and recertify returned products would improve confidence in reused materials whilst creating new circular business models.

Finally, delegates considered whether insurance and warranty products require further innovation. Government-backed or private insurance mechanisms could provide additional reassurance where conventional warranties remain unavailable, helping developers, contractors and investors become more comfortable adopting circular solutions.

Key recommendations

- Invest in regional storage, testing and remanufacturing infrastructure.
- Encourage manufacturer take-back schemes and extended producer responsibility.
- Develop warranty and certification pathways for reused products.
- Explore new insurance products that reduce perceived commercial risk.
- Improve supply chain readiness for circular construction.

Key Takeaways

Emerging Policy Recommendations

Whilst each breakout group approached the challenge from a different perspective, the discussions revealed a remarkable degree of consensus. The barriers preventing circularity are no longer primarily technical; they are systemic, embedded within planning policy, commercial incentives, procurement practices and market confidence.

Taken together, the workshop suggests that future policy should focus on seven interconnected priorities.

1. Embed Circularity within National Planning Policy

Create a clearer policy presumption in favour of retaining existing buildings and materials, supported by consistent national definitions and stronger recognition of circular economy outcomes within planning decisions.

2. Enable Local Authority Delivery

Provide local authorities with the skills, resources and advisory support necessary to implement circular policy consistently through effective pre-application engagement and decision-making.

3. Align Economic Incentives

Ensure taxation, procurement and funding mechanisms support reuse alongside wider Government objectives including housing delivery, regional growth and high street regeneration.

4. Build Circular Infrastructure

Invest in regional reuse hubs, material marketplaces and digital data infrastructure capable of supporting material recovery and redistribution at scale.

5. Reduce Commercial Risk

Develop warranty, certification and insurance solutions that increase confidence in reused products and materials across the supply chain.

6. Encourage Circular Manufacturing

Support manufacturer take-back schemes, remanufacturing and extended producer responsibility to create viable commercial models for multiple material life cycles.

7. Reframe Circularity as an Economic Opportunity

Perhaps the strongest theme to emerge from the workshop was a shift in narrative. Participants consistently argued that circularity should no longer be framed solely as a climate response. Instead, it should be recognised as a strategy for preserving value, improving productivity, creating skilled employment, strengthening supply chains and enhancing the long-term resilience of the built environment.

About the Circular Do Tank

The Circular Do Tank is a dynamic team of multidisciplinary experts dedicated to tackling challenges relating to the circular economy.

To learn more, contribute evidence, or collaborate on future policy work, please email hello@circulardotank.co.uk