



Why repair?

The benefits of community repair for people and planet

Repair has so many benefits for individuals, communities and the environment. This briefing explores how repair builds and upskills communities, reduces our environmental impact and challenges our throw-away economy.

Produced by the [Community Repair Network](#) in October 2021

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Repair for the planet



By repairing, we keep much-loved and useful items working longer, cut waste and save all the materials, energy and cash needed to make and transport new things.

Manufacturing and extracting resources for new products has a huge impact on the environment, making up around 50% of the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced worldwide. And this impact is only increasing.

Repairing and reusing the products we already have is the best way to reduce this impact. It's also something we can all do and has a huge range of other benefits.

Repair has even more potential to tackle climate change than recycling, which can use lots of energy to break down items which could still be used for years with a simple fix and still doesn't extract all the useful materials inside most electronic devices.

Preventing waste by repairing broken items is also important. E-waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world. And in the UK, we are the 2nd highest producers of e-waste per capita globally.

Currently, many manufacturers are making it harder to repair their products. The Right to Repair movement is an effort to push back by ensuring that products are made easier to fix by design. [See below for more on this.](#)

Case Study: Repair Café Glasgow



[Repair Café Glasgow](#) started in 2017, holding monthly drop in repair events in the southside of the city. In four years, they have mended almost 1,000kg of household appliances, gadgets, clothes, bikes, toys, clocks and much more. A cuppa, home-baked treats and a friendly welcome are always an important part of the experience.

The team has grown from 4 volunteers to more than 30 and is helping communities as far away as the Highlands and the Isle of Jura start their own repair communities.

Jon Dawes, who set up the repair café, said: “It’s about more than getting gadgets fixed. It’s about making repair easy, normal and sharing skills so people can go on to fix things for themselves. Doing it together is the key – it’s much more fun and you can see the difference you are making to individual visitors and the wider community. We always say our mission is saving the world – one toaster at a time!”

Facts & figures

- The UK generates the second highest amount of e-waste per person in the world. Every person in the UK generates an average of 23.9kg of e-waste each year. This far exceeds the world average of 7.3 kg per capita and the European average of 16.2kg (source: [UN Global E-Waste Monitor](#))

- Natural resource extraction and manufacturing, including for making new products, has a huge impact on the environment, making up around 50% of the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced worldwide. At the rate we are currently consuming new goods, greenhouse gas emissions from resource extraction and processing will increase by 43% from 2015 to 2060. (source: [Environmental Audit Committee Report on Electronic Waste](#))
- Electronics are particularly carbon intensive products; making just one laptop produces as much greenhouse gas as flying from London to Berlin (per passenger). (source: [The Restart Project](#))
- Extending the lifetime of the EU's stock of mobile phones by five years would save 5.5 million tonnes of emissions (CO₂e) annually by 2030. This is equivalent to taking 3 million cars off the roads for a year - (source: [European Environmental Bureau](#))
- According to the IPCC, changing our behaviours and lifestyles is crucial to meeting our climate commitments. Allowing people to use products longer through Right to Repair is massively politically popular, more so than other behaviour changes we need to make.

Further reading

- Bloomberg article: ['How Right to Repair is a climate issue'](#)
- Briefing from The Restart Project: [Repair & Climate change](#)
- UK parliament Environmental Audit Committee report: [Electronic Waste and the Circular Economy](#)

Repair for people



Repair doesn't just bring benefits for the environment. Community repair projects, such as Repair Cafes, are creating welcoming spaces to bring people together, share skills and do something positive and practical together – and that feels really good!

Community repair groups make repairing easy and accessible. It is much easier to 'think repair' when you can pop to a neighbourhood venue and meet local people with the skills to fix or advise.

There are obvious practical benefits for people who get something fixed – the item restored to working order, saving the money and hassle of having to buy a new one and picking up tips about how to fix and maintain it in the future. Meanwhile, volunteers feel valued and that they have made a difference. Many enjoy meeting visitors and hearing about the things people bring. Just like the BBC's Repair Shop – there are often great stories to tell!

Joy and community

It's surprising just how uplifting and joyful repairing can be for everyone involved. By taking time to mend items for people, community repair projects encourage us all to rethink the value of the things we own, of the people who come and the skills of our volunteers – they are celebrated and welcomed rather than seen as disposable.

For communities, repair projects offer a welcoming space for people of all ages to gather and interact with a common purpose. It's a place where under-valued practical skills and knowledge take centre stage and are freely shared, increasing everyone's ability to repair. A little bit of magic happens which can

foster new friendships and new ideas to work together and make a difference locally.

Repair projects add to the fabric of our local neighbourhoods, often working with other groups to make a positive and practical difference and strengthen our connections. After the experience of coronavirus and as people become increasingly concerned with the unsustainable way we have been living, there has never been a better time to start repairing in your community.

Case study: Soham Repair Café

Umesh is the founder of a Repair Cafe in the small market town of Soham: 'Our Repair Café in rural East Cambridgeshire started when I approached my local Library. I'd been regularly repairing with the Cambs Repair Cafe Network and wanted to start something where I lived. I approached the Library asking them if they'd push back the shelves and make some space for volunteer repairers, they were delighted and said 'yes'! With support from the Cambs Repair Cafe Network and the County Council's Strengthening Communities team, [Soham Repair Café](#) was born.'

'Everyone' wondered if it might be a one-off occasion, but the first event saw 22 items fixed and generated a real buzz of positivity in the community. Before long another was in the planning.



Umesh tackling a Dualit toaster

Wendy Lansdown of the Council's Strengthening Communities Team writes, 'In a time when the public sector is stretched, it's important to be creative about how Local Government can support communities. We have some great spaces and we're lucky to work alongside inspiring communities who sprinkle fairy-dust in our buildings when we open our doors and our minds to work alongside them.'

The future of the high street

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our high streets had been in a slow decline. But new projects are exploring how repair, reuse and sharing can bring fresh life to our high streets and transform them into vibrant social hubs.

Dedicated community repair spaces, libraries of things and similar initiatives are starting to pop up in empty high street shops, providing new jobs while helping local people connect with each other, learn new skills and embrace a more circular economic model. Where traditional shops encourage us to buy, use and replace products, these new spaces help us keep our belongings in use for longer and borrow items we need instead of buying them new.

Case study: Share and Repair, Bath



[Share and Repair](#) began in 2017 organising repair cafes in the city of Bath and surrounding villages. After three years, they were offered a vacant shop, rent free, by Bath and North East Somerset Council, and seized the chance to make it even easier for people to get things fixed.

Now, volunteers repair gadgets, household items and clothes three days a week from their high street premises, also a base for repair workshops and a Library of Things. They have created two part time jobs and regular Repair Cafés take place in ten community venues across the city and surrounding area.

Founder Lorna Montgomery said: “We’ve grown through lockdown and gone from strength to strength since we got a prominent shop. We couldn’t have done it without the council’s support – they really put their resources where their mouth was, in practically supporting people to repair and share more, cutting waste and climate impact in our city.”

Another example is [Re:make Newport](#), a new high street project from Repair Cafe Wales.

Securing a future for repair

The Right to Repair is a global movement to make sure everyone has the right to fix the products they own. It aims to change regulations on how these things are made in the first place, to make them easy and affordable to repair, as well as to expand our rights after purchase.



Why do we need a Right to Repair?

The problem is simple. The products we use everyday are getting harder and harder to fix. Electronic waste is one of the fastest growing waste streams in the world, with phone and laptops manufacturers making their products harder to fix. The UK is the second highest producer of e-waste per capita on Earth, producing 24kg per person per year! And it’s not just digital devices – the

amount of household appliances failing within 5 years of their purchase is also skyrocketing.

From our own community repair events, we know that most of the products that are brought in could be fixed. But we're increasingly faced with barriers to repair. Our top three are:

- lack of access to spare parts or the price of these parts
- lack of repair documentation and tools
- product design increasingly making disassembly impossible

And we're facing a new one: companies using software in devices to prevent professionals and DIYers from fixing the things we own.

Repair is simply common sense. People are tired of throw-away products: they remember when appliances lasted longer. One day we will look back at the past couple of decades and just shake our heads.

On every metric – emissions, social impact, waste – this can't go on. So we're committing to doing something about it. We want the Right to Repair.

What have we achieved so far?

There is massive public support to bring down barriers to repair, and for all of us to have the Right to Repair the stuff we buy. People overwhelmingly want more repairable products and they think the government should ensure this – more and more studies show this, both [at European level](#) and in the UK. [A 2018 study published by the Green Alliance proves public support for repairable products.](#)

Together with allies, in 2019, members of our network campaigned successfully in support of new, groundbreaking European "Right to Repair" measures, for fridges, lamps, televisions and displays, dishwashers, and washing machines. ([These measures](#) require that appliances can be repaired with "commonly available" tools, and require manufacturers to give professionals access to repair documentation and spare parts for up to 10 years.)

These Right to Repair changes come into effect in 2021 and we will benefit from this round in the UK.

What can we do here in the UK?

But we have [serious questions about the future of the regulations in the UK after Brexit](#). If the UK wants to "do better" than Europe, it is already clear how. We can make Europe's new measures universal, extending them to community repairers and DIYers, not just professionals. And we also need to pile on the pressure to make sure that the UK remains aligned with Europe as it expands these

regulations to cover mobiles, computers and IT products. So far, we don't see any evidence of this.

What people can do

- Sign The Restart Project's [petition for the real Right to Repair](#) and share it widely.
- Community repair groups, allied organisations and MPs can sign [The Manchester Declaration](#) for the Right to Repair.
- Join the Right to Repair European campaign: A coalition of European organisations pushing for system change around repair. Calling for good design, fair access and informed consumers. Learn about changes that have come into effect in 2021, but we still need to go further, so find out more, sign up for updates and spread the word. [Your group can also join the Campaign](#).
- Community repair groups can record and share data from events. Our community data is powerful, revealing the barriers to repair at scale. We're all joined up in our efforts to share repair data, using the same open standard. So in Wales, you can share with [Repair Cafe Wales](#) directly. Everywhere else your group can choose between Restart's "[Fixometer](#)" or The Repair Cafe Foundation's "[Repair Monitor](#)".

Facts & Figures

- 75% of people in the UK think the government should be responsible for ensuring that businesses produce repairable and recyclable products (source: [Green Alliance: By popular Demand](#))
- Many manufacturers are making their products increasingly difficult to repair. For example, replacing the screen on Apple's iPhone 13 will disable FaceID, even if the replacement part was made by Apple [source: [European Right to Repair Campaign](#)]. [Read more about this trend here](#).

About the Community Repair Network

The Community Repair Network started as an informal dialogue between various repair groups and local networks. After initial conversations during Fixfest UK 2020, we came together during the pandemic after we realised that, together, we may be able to raise the profile of repair, share and learn from each other, support local efforts and have more impact.

Who are we?

A network of voluntary, community based repair groups and networks. This includes Repair Cafes, Restart Parties, Share & Repair, etc.

Our mission is to strengthen and support grassroots repair in the UK.

What does that entail?

- Sharing knowledge and resources
- Connecting existing groups and people who want to start their own
- Coming together as a cohesive voice to champion repair

By working together we have discovered there is no single set of rules on how to take part in community repair – and this is our strength!

As of October 2021, the network's members currently include:

- Bedford Repair Café
- Brighton Repair Café
- Cambridgeshire Repair Café Network
- Chesterfield Repair Cafe
- Community Action Groups (CAG) Oxfordshire
- Cornwall Repair Cafe Network
- Repair Cafe Belfast
- Repair Café Glasgow
- Repair Café Portsmouth
- Repair Cafe Wales
- Repair Cafe West Midlands
- Share and Repair Bath
- The Restart Project

More information is available on our website:

<https://communityrepairnetwork.org.uk>