

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

EXPLAINER GUIDE

This Explainer Guide covers the key principles of a circular economy in the built environment.

What is a circular economy?

The dominant economic model today is known as a '**linear economy**', where raw materials are mined, processed into a product and then thrown away after use. In contrast, a 'circular economy' prioritises the reuse of materials, preventing the over extraction of natural resources and the number of usable materials that end up in landfill. Its principles consider a different way of doing business, placing more importance on regenerating nature, carbon reduction and sustainable resource management.



Why is it important?

The current linear economy model is causing the UK to overshoot the earth's **planetary boundaries**. If every citizen globally lived like the average UK resident, we would need **2.6** times the earth's resources!

Simultaneously, pollution is ever increasing and nature is rapidly declining, with dramatic consequences for planet and people. By moving to a circular economy, we can change the way we value materials, and start to remedy these issues.

What is the role of the built environment?

The built environment is the most resource intense sector in the world, and is also responsible for **25%** of UK greenhouse gas emissions. A circular economy can greatly **help to reduce** these emissions and offers the built environment the opportunity to lessen the need for the extraction of virgin materials.

In practice, this might look like designing with re-used materials in a commercial development or retaining a building's structure and utilising second hand steel. New buildings must be designed using circular design principles, such as material reuse, flexibility and adaptability in use, or **designed for disassembly** at the **end of the building's life**.



HAVE YOU READ...

The UKGBC **Systems Enablers for a Circular Economy** report? It explores the key enablers to transition to a circular economy in the built environment such as greater collaboration, establishing a marketplace for secondary construction materials, and scaling up green finance. Read the report **here** to learn about all eight enablers!



FURTHER RESOURCES

UKGBC **System Enablers for a Circular Economy**

UKGBC **How Circular Economy Principles can impact carbon and value**

UKGBC **Implementation Packs for Products as a Service and Reuse**