ReLondon

How urban circular economy solutions scale

Wayne Hubbard

23/04/2026

Who is ReLondon?

Mayor of London

ReLondon

London boroughs

We focus on five key areas of consumption:

Food

Fashion & textiles

Plastics & packaging

Built environment

Electricals & electronics

Public bodies

Businesses

Citizens

Our vision is of a future without waste, where the way we make, consume and dispose of stuff actively tackles the climate crisis and protects our planet.

We will make London a global leader in sustainable ways to live, work and prosper, by **revolutionising our relationship with stuff and helping Londoners waste less and reuse, repair, share and recycle more.**

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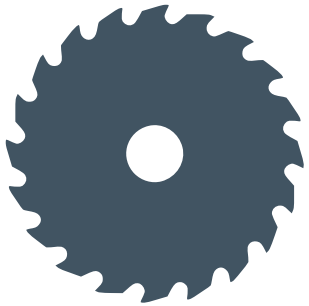
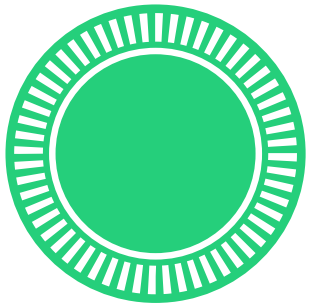
The circular economy is a solution to three converging pressures

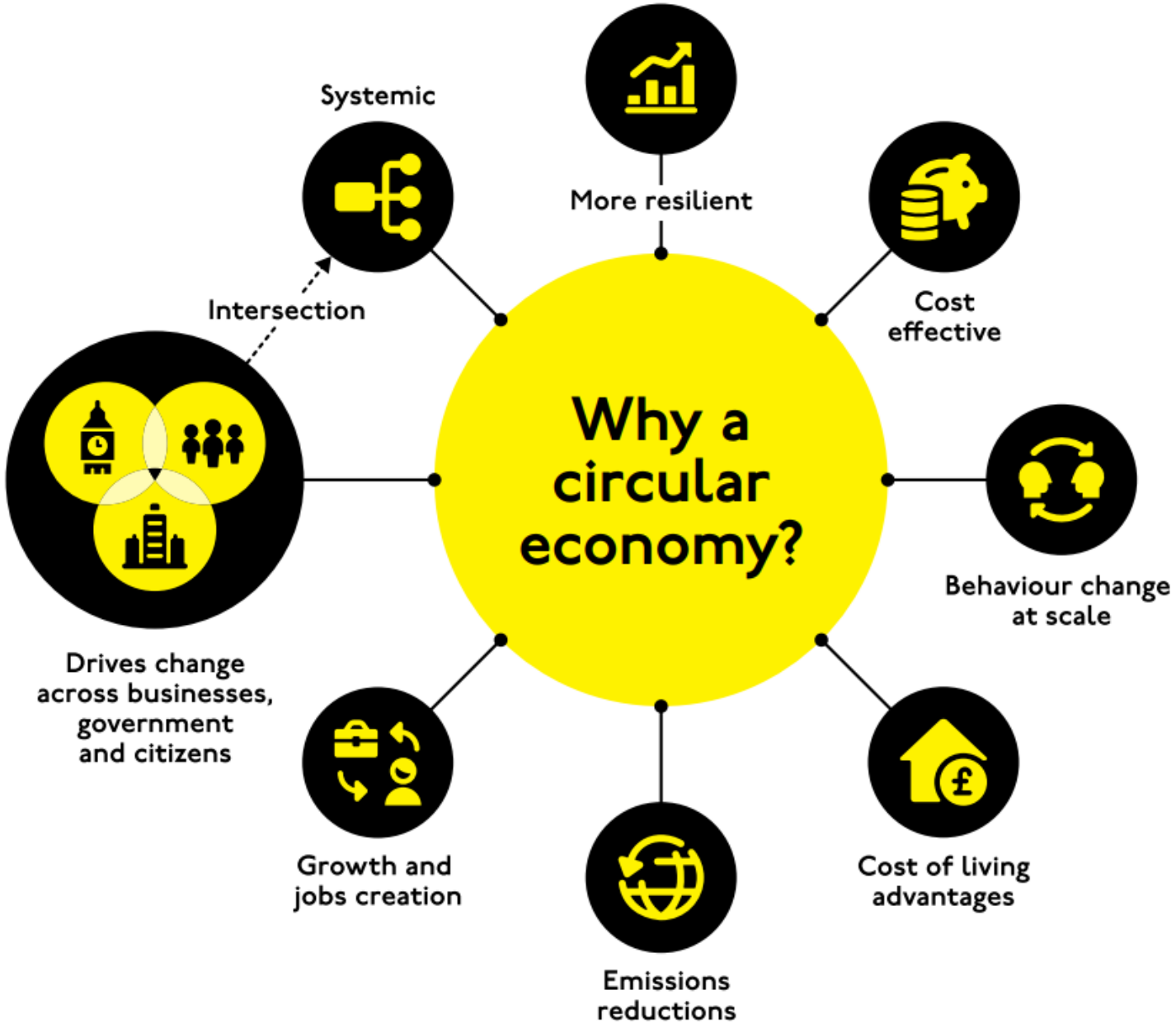


Economic Resilience



Climate

Affordability


Why a circular economy?
Systemic
Intersection
Drives change across businesses, government and citizens
More resilient
Cost effective
Behaviour change at scale
Cost of living advantages
Emissions reductions
Growth and jobs creation

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The ‘R’ Ladder

Adapted from Kishna & Prins (2025), PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

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Cities have four structural advantages for circular economy development

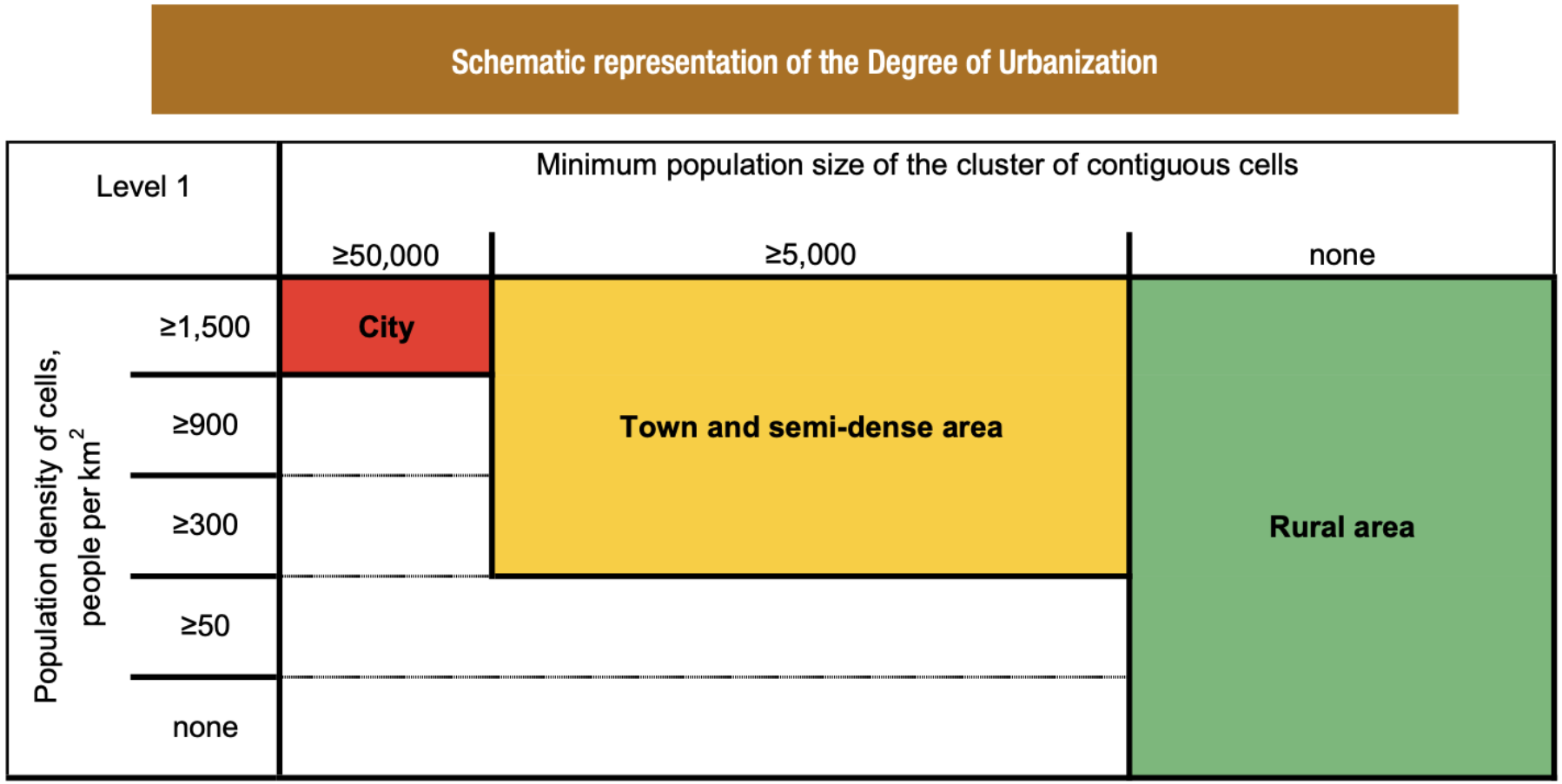
Political scale: a city-level position carries more weight with national government than individual municipalities acting separately

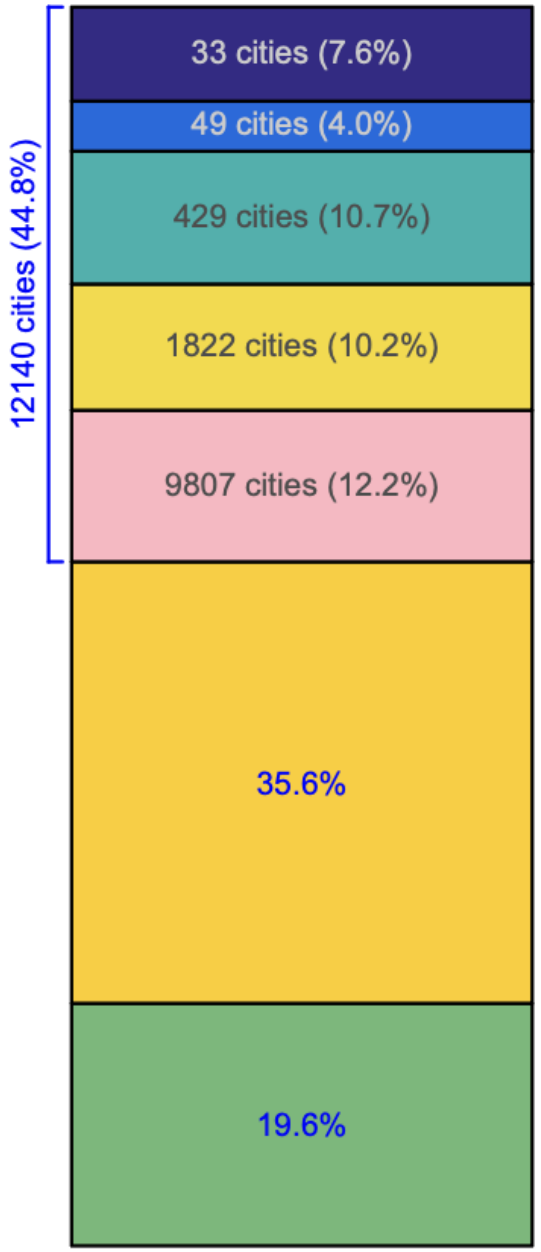
Diversity: urban populations reflect the full range of incomes, cultures and circumstances — solutions that hold up here are more likely to generalise elsewhere

Density: diverse populations and institutions in a defined geography — pilots are faster, cheaper and more representative than anywhere else

Networks: cities connect government, business, civil society and national policy in ways that no single sector can replicate independently

UN World Urbanization Prospects 2025





2025

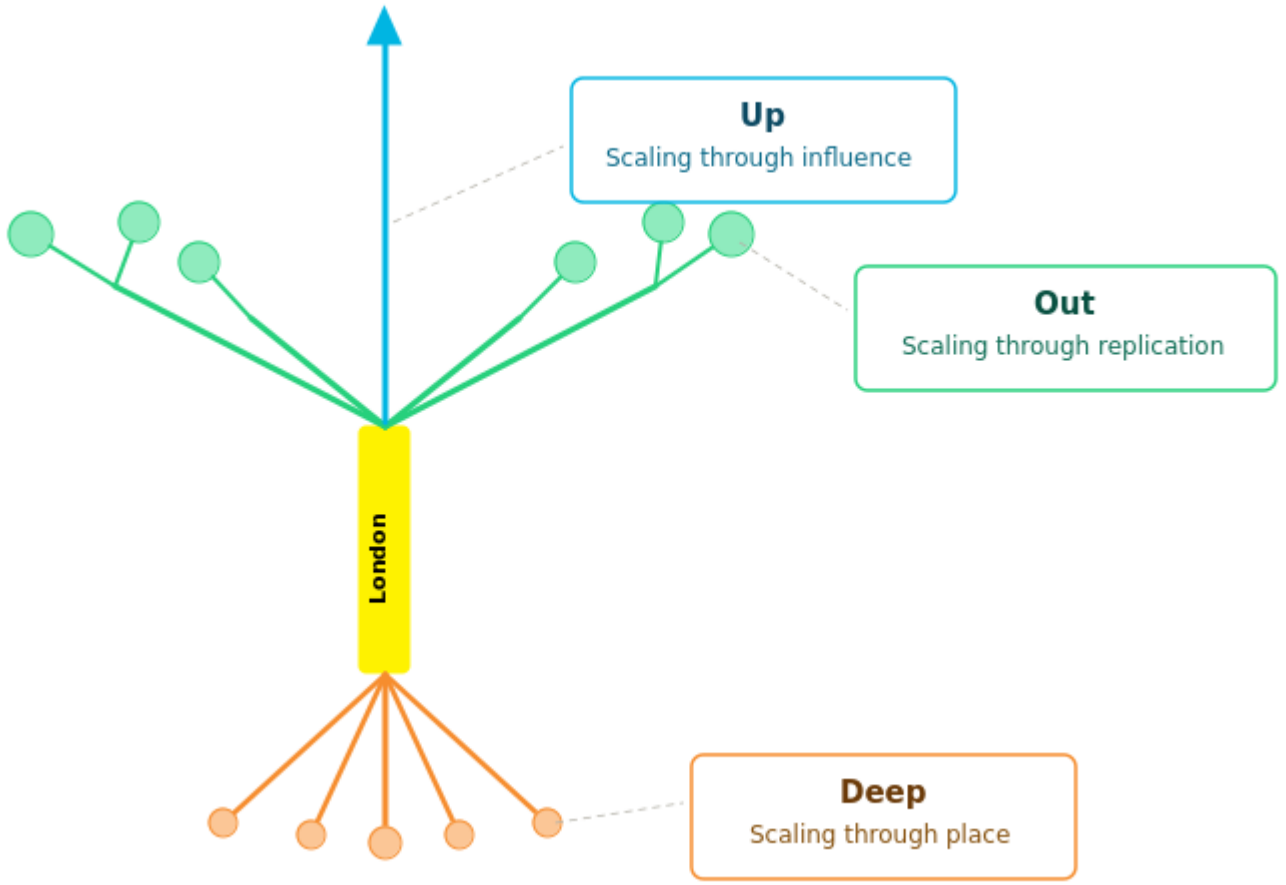
3.7 billion people live in 12,000 cities

- 80% the world's 8.2 billion population live in urban areas; 45% live in c.12,000 cities, 35% in towns and 20% in rural areas
- North America is among the most urbanised regions globally — Canada 83% (same as the UK), USA 83.5%, both above the EU average of ~75% and slightly above the North American regional average of just over 80%
- Globally in 2025: 12,140 cities, of which 9,807 (81%) are very small (50,000–250,000). Just 511 cities exceed 1 million inhabitants. 96% of the world's cities have fewer than 1 million people
- Under DEGURBA, Canada has 52.7% of population in cities; UK 58.0%. London is a megacity (10.4m) — one of 33 globally
- **the challenge of getting circular economy approaches from large/medium-sized cities to small ones is the global challenge.**

Achieving scale in three dimensions

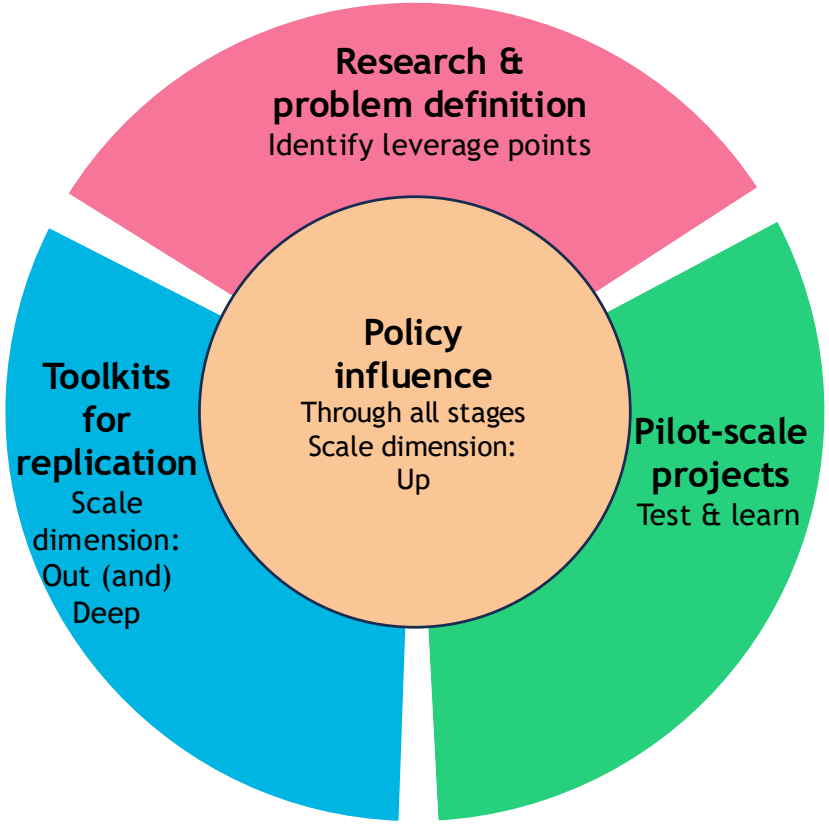
Scaling dimensions

A circular economy strategy focused only on local delivery misses most of the available value. This model pursues scale in three directions— and the bidirectional flow between cities of different scales is what makes those directions compound over time.



Darcy Riddell and Michele-Lee Moore (2015)

ReLondon's Operating Model



Scale OUT: building tools that others can use without you

Research

Research specific to urban conditions — material flows, behaviour change, demographic variation — usable by other cities without duplication

Example:

Material Flow Analysis on Food, Textiles, Plastics and Packaging etc

Pilots

Pilots designed to generate learning produce frameworks and toolkits that any authority or business can adapt independently

Example:

High Streets Beyond Waste; Flats Recycling Toolkits; Flats Above Shops

Communicate

Pan-city communications create shared brand value amplified by every local partner — reach no individual organisation could achieve alone

Example:

London Recycles, Love Not Landfill, Eat Like a Londoner

Scale UP: turning delivery evidence into policy change

Research

Quantifying the real costs of policy transitions for municipalities gives cities a factual basis for constructive policy engagement — not simply opposition

Example:

UK Emissions Trading Scheme

Demonstrate

Demonstrating that ambitious approaches are operationally feasible shifts policy debate from whether to how

Example:

Food Recycling for “Flats” - Toolkit

Communicate

A unified city position carries disproportionate weight — a collective voice lands differently than many separate representations

Example:

Policy Committee, CEO member of Government Circular Economy Taskforce

Scale DEEP: embedding change in specific places and communities

Neighbourhoods

Main streets and commercial cores: a practical concentration point for circular services, reuse infrastructure and business support — most urban residents live within minutes of one

Example:

Neighbourhood networks

Heston in the Loop

Repair, Share, Reuse

Community repair and reuse networks: trusted by communities in ways that institutional programmes are not — directly relevant to cost of living, not just environment

Example:

Library of Things

Cally Food Project

Local Infrastructure

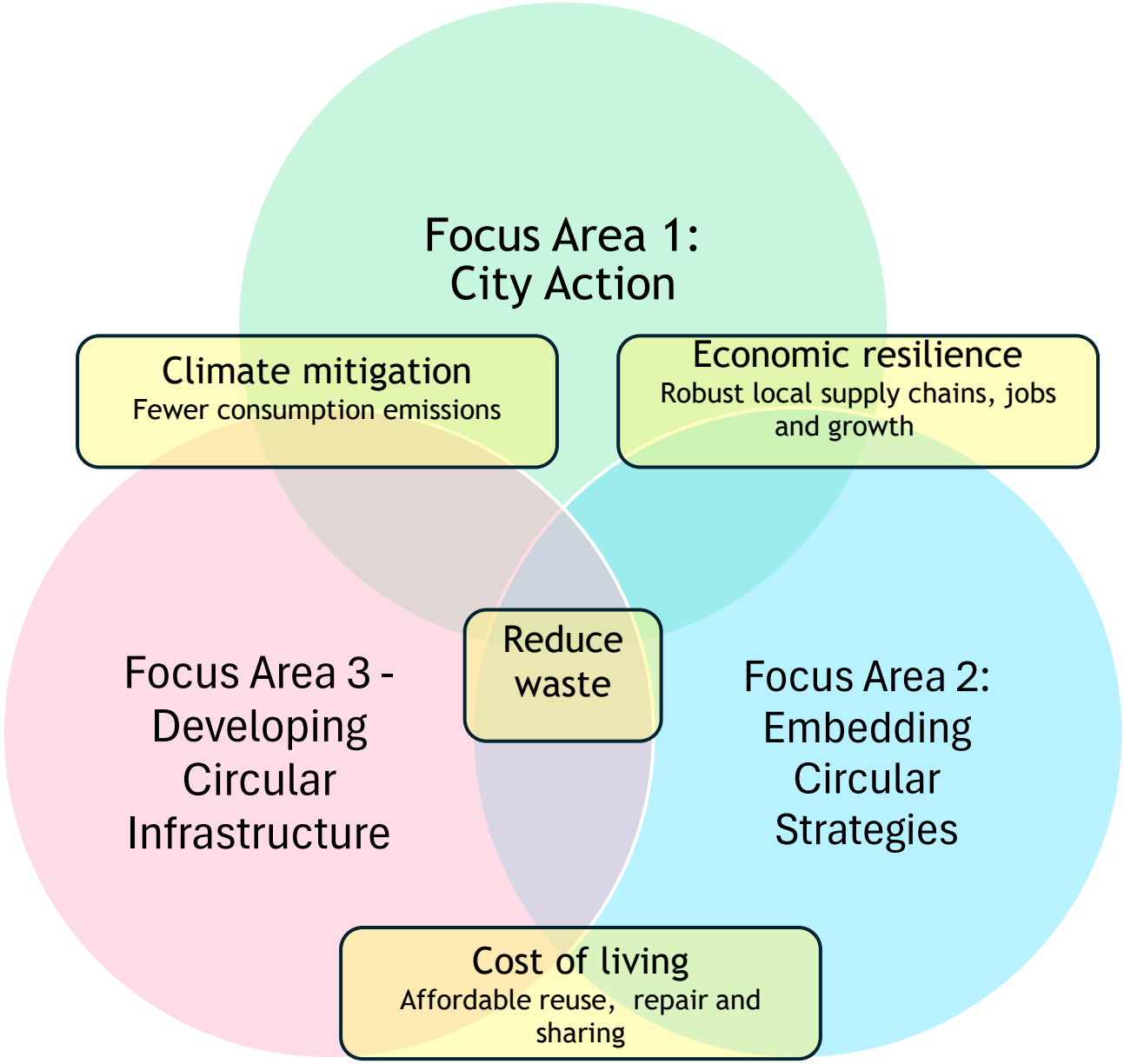
Built environment and retrofit: material reuse in construction delivers immediate place-based economic and environmental value

Example:

Newham Reuse Hub

An emerging framework for city circular economy delivery

Drawing on the London experience, a city circular economy strategy needs to address three distinct focus areas.

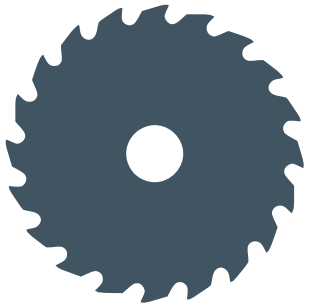


Smaller cities are contributors, not just beneficiaries

Smaller cities are not passive recipients — the relationship between cities of different scales is genuinely bidirectional.

- Larger cities undertake: research, toolkits and pilot learning that smaller cities might not generate alone; policy advocacy at a scale that aggregates their voice
- Smaller cities contribute back: innovations suited to their context; refinements to enable large city toolkits to transfer; neighbourhood-scale evidence
- Every city is made up of communities — and the circular economy activity that happens at that scale is where contact with actual behaviour is closest. Smaller cities are often closer to that scale by default
- **The reinforcing logic**: as more cities apply, adapt and return their learning, the quality of what circulates improves. The network becomes more useful the more varied the participants
- Examples include Canadian Circular Cities and Regions Initiative; European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform and EU Circular Cities and Regions Initiative

Cities are well-placed to lead — and to make that work count beyond their boundaries



Four structural characteristics: density, networks, political scale and diversity. No other single actor has all four

No single other type of actor has all four. National government has political reach but limited operational proximity. Individual businesses have delivery capability but limited convening power. Community organisations have place-based trust but limited scale

The London / ReLondon experience illustrates the logic in practice. The underlying approach — research-led, pilot-based, replication-oriented, bidirectionally connected — is what transfers. The governance form needs to fit local context

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Thank you

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