



It's easy to overlook planning for waste and recycling, but it underpins the UK's ambition to create a more 'circular' economy, says [Phil Clark](#). So why does policy lag so far behind practice?

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Circular arguments

Ignore waste and minerals planning at your peril. This is the blunt message of specialists who fear issues currently affecting their chosen field pose significant risks for the government's growth ambitions – both in the delivery of waste, recycling and minerals facilities sites themselves, as well as the wider increase in housebuilding which prime minister Andy Burnham reconfirmed when he took office in July.

The field is seen as increasingly crucial to the wider circular economy movement which seeks to reduce the reliance on finite resources through reuse of materials. Proponents claim it can contribute to wider targets to reduce energy consumption and

supply chain volatility (see ‘Circular economy explained’, page 40).

As Sharon Queeney, director of SQ Planning, puts it: "Waste is one of those topics that is not talked about very often, but it's integral to the whole of the planning policy system."

Chris Heffernan, managing director at waste planning specialists MPG adds: "Waste planning matters, it's of national strategic importance and crucial to national strategic resilience."

Waste and minerals planning – which covers a growing variety and range of waste and recycling facilities, as well as land use for the extraction and processing of mineral resources such as quarries – is facing a crunch point.

This is down to three main factors: a fast-moving legislative

landscape for waste treatment and other evolving policy on the wider industry; changes in the nature and type of the facilities themselves, in part due to evolving technologies; and an ever-present and ongoing skills shortage amongst practitioners across both public and private practice.

The main legislative change impacting on planning is the Environment Act 2021, which sets a legally mandated target of halving residual waste – essentially the stuff you put in your black sack or bin – by 2042. This is already changing how local authorities are collecting waste by separating recyclable materials in new categories. It's also feeding through to a growth of new waste transfer centres and anaerobic digestion schemes (which convert food waste into energy or fertiliser).