

CASE STUDY

Podback®
THE POD RECYCLING SERVICE

JULY 2025

PODBACK AND FCC ENVIRONMENT: RE3 WASTE MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP, BERKSHIRE



In 2023, Podback set up coffee pod recycling at two household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) which are serving three local authorities in Berkshire – Bracknell Forest, Reading and Wokingham Boroughs. The councils form the re3 Partnership, which is working with its waste management partner, FCC Environment¹.

The service was immediately popular with residents, collecting over 4 tonnes of pods within the first three months of operation

and 23.3 tonnes in the first year. Coffee pod recycling with Podback is now a permanent service at both re3 recycling centres.

As a result of the initial council-led trial, Podback collections have now been rolled-out across FCC-operated HWRCs nationwide. Separately Podback has established drop-off points at more than 200 recycling centres across the UK, with an active ongoing mobilisation programme.



¹re3 is a waste management partnership between three councils – Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest. The partnership has contracted FCC Environment to manage waste disposal and the operations of the household waste recycling centres (HWRCs).

Background

From its launch in 2021 Podback recognised local authorities as being key to its ambition to establish a free, nationwide coffee pod recycling service. Many authorities expressed an interest in collecting pods at their recycling centres, and research carried out in 2022 showed that pod consumers wanted a choice of ways to recycle that fitted with their regular routines. In July 2023, two trials were established: at the two re3 sites and 11 HWRCs in Suffolk; both services operated by FCC Environment. The trials were fully-funded by Podback.

Several weeks after the re3 trial was launched, a trial with Morrisons Supermarkets saw 29 stores in the Home Counties provide Podback recycling points where shoppers could drop off Podback bags.

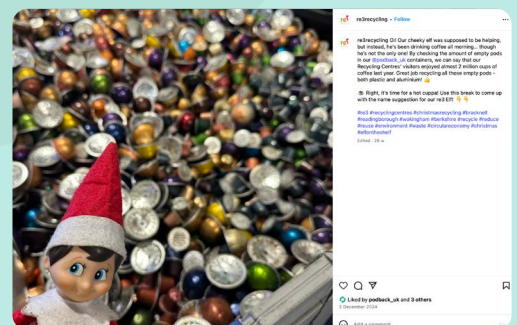
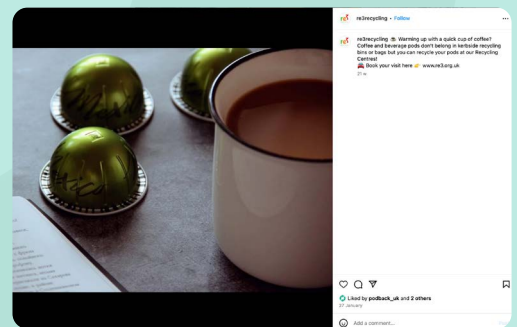
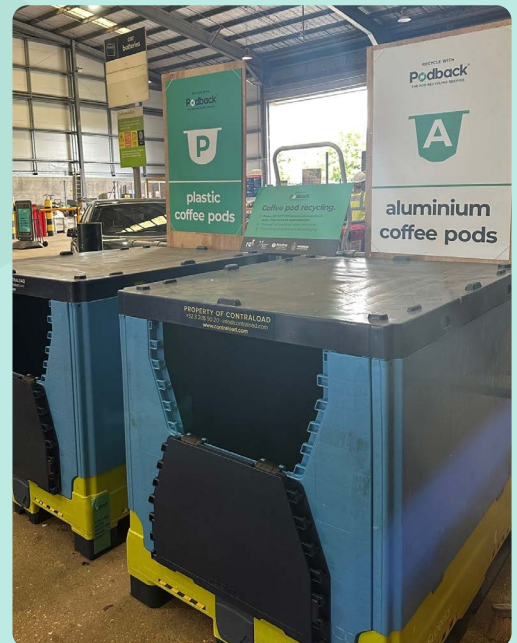
Three of the Morrisons trial stores were based in the re3 area, so Podback was able to assess uptake of an additional collection route alongside the HWRCs, and the impact on the existing Podback returns service via Yodel.

How it worked

Podback provided both re3 recycling centres with pallet-boxes and instructional signage, and organised regular collections and onward logistics of material to its UK-based reprocessors. Marketing support was built into the overall project support budget, and Podback worked with the re3 communications team to launch and promote the new service to residents. This included a press release and advertisement in local media, newsletters and social media posts on the councils' and re3's Facebook and Instagram channels.

Residents were asked to save their pods up at home in a bag or reusable container, making sure to keep their aluminium and plastic pods separate. At the recycling centre the Podback containers were clearly signposted, and residents could deposit their pods loose into the relevant container.

Podback provides collections at least every four weeks², and shares information on the tonnage and destination of the pods with WasteDataFlow, so pod collections contribute to local authority recycling data.



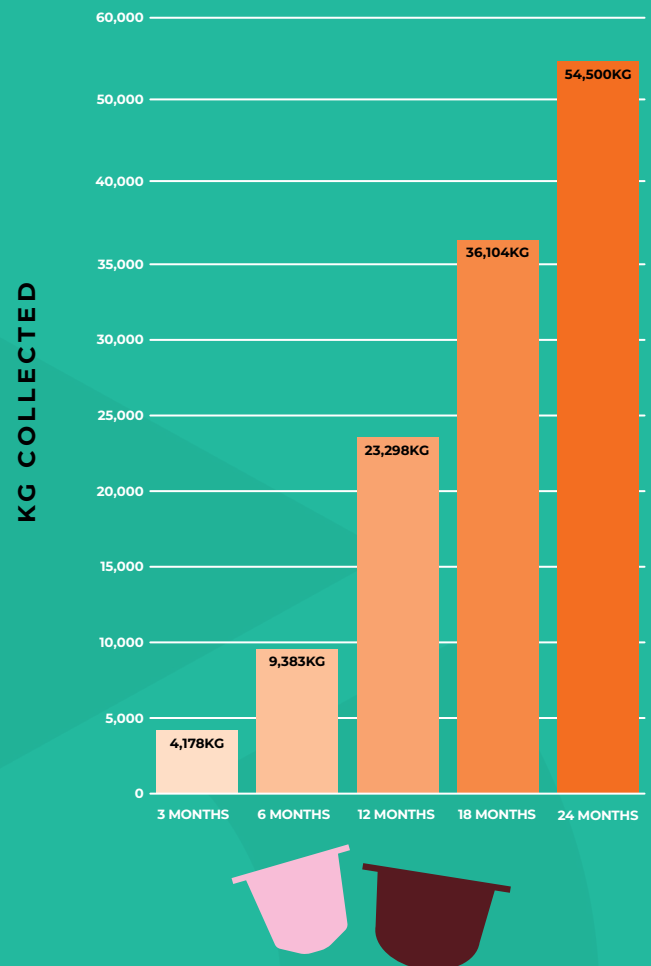
²in order to comply with Environment Agency regulatory position on storage of used coffee pods Temporary storage of waste coffee pods: [Temporary storage of waste coffee pods: RPS 282 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/temporary-storage-of-waste-coffee-pods)

The Results

Reaction to the new service was immediate and enthusiastic, with residents commenting on the social media posts about the convenience of being able to include pods alongside other items they were taking to the recycling centre.

The first six months of the trial saw 9 tonnes of pods saved for recycling, and by July 2025, two years after launch, this had risen to 54.5 tonnes, equivalent to over 3.5 million pods.

Collection volumes in the two re3 recycling centres, and via the retailer drop-off service, have continued to increase month-on-month, whilst demand for the Yodel returns service over the same period decreased. Providing evidence that residents prefer to have a choice of ways to recycle that fit with their regular routines.



FCC ENVIRONMENT PERSPECTIVE

“Our focus as a business is always on providing a service that residents want and will use. This has very much been the case with the introduction of the Podback initiative. HWRCs allow the public to be an active participant in the circular economy, contribute to creating social value for the local community, and reduce carbon with well-planned trips.

Podback has now been successfully established at HWRC sites operated by FCC Environment in England and Wales are now successfully established and Podback is an integral service we offer new partners.”

Rory Brien,
Head of Municipal Treatment,
FCC Environment

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY PERSPECTIVE

“Partnering with Podback demonstrates our commitment to making recycling simple and accessible for residents across Bracknell Forest, Reading, and Wokingham Boroughs. Every year, more than 600,000 people visit our re3 recycling centres, which are recognised for their high standards and excellent customer service – something our residents value highly, as seen in our consistently strong satisfaction ratings.

The immediate uptake and increasing volume of coffee pods being recycled show just how positively communities respond when recycling is made easy and well supported. We're proud that our centres are at the heart of forward-thinking initiatives that not only cut down on waste but also support a more circular economy. We're excited to see this service continue to grow and look forward to celebrating next milestones with our residents.”

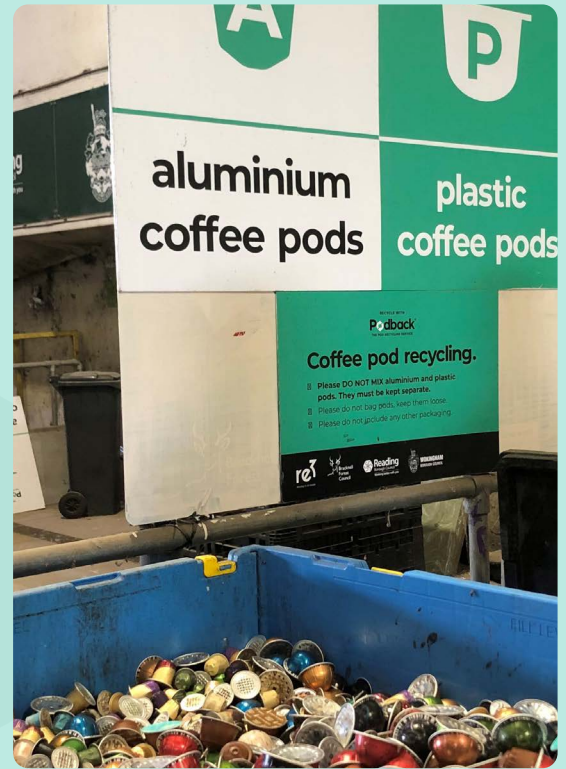
Karen Rowland,
Chair of re3 Joint Waste Disposal Board

Summary

HWRCs provide important locations for people to recycle their household waste responsibly, including many items that are considered 'hard to recycle'.

The trial of a Podback service at re3's two recycling centres has been instrumental in shaping Podback's evolution, and HWRCs now form a key pillar of the pod recycling service's nationwide network of drop-off points.

Ease and speed of mobilisation, combined with fully-funded support covering signage, logistics and data-reporting are proving to be an appealing proposition to local authorities across the UK and the network already includes more than 200 HWRCs. Podback is confident that UK household coverage will reach 50% before the end of 2025.



About Podback

A not-for-profit coffee pod recycling service created in partnership with the biggest names in coffee pod systems (NESCAFÉ Dolce Gusto, Nespresso and Tassimo), Podback is focused on giving people who used coffee pods simple and convenient ways to recycle.



Pod recycling journey - what happens to the pods?

At our UK-based recycling partners the pods are shredded:



Coffee grounds are recycled with other food waste, and transformed by anaerobic digestion into renewable energy (biogas) and soil improver for agriculture.



Aluminium and plastic are recycled into new products like cans, crates, and building materials.



Podback bags are recycled along with other soft plastics and plastic films.

For more information about Podback,
or to discuss rolling-out a coffee pod
recycling service in your local authority,
email: will.french@podback.org

www.podback.org

Podback[®]
THE POD RECYCLING SERVICE