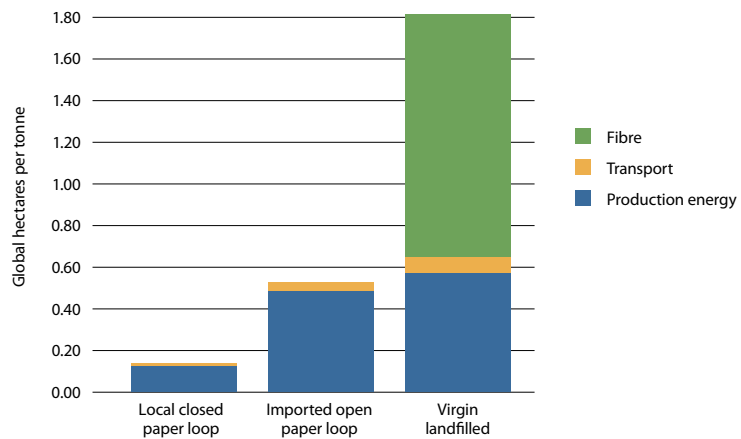


Closing the loop for zero waste

BioRegional has invented and delivered new solutions for zero waste. By closing the loop – that is, recycling waste resources locally and selling them back – we can make significant reductions in its quantity and treatment.

A life cycle study of our office paper scheme showed that we have reduced transport emissions by 86% and the ecological footprint of the paper by 92% compared to importing virgin paper and then sending it to landfill.



Ecological footprint of paper production systems



Local paper loops in London and Surrey

We aimed to reduce carbon emissions and boost UK green industry by encouraging closed loop recycling in London and Surrey. Incredibly, given all the hype around ‘buy recycled’ policies, just 5% of office paper purchased has any recycled content.

We signed organisations up to our scheme, ensuring that they recycled their paper to a mill in Kent and bought the paper back. Over 500 businesses signed up to our London loop scheme, including the House of Commons and the Greater London Authority. The sales value of the paper being bought back is £1.1m a year.

BioRegional MiniMills

Local paper loops need some virgin material, which could come from local residual materials like straw. Small scale pulping of straw is usually costly, and produces a toxic effluent – black liquor – that has led to most straw paper mills closing down. BioRegional is developing the MiniMill, a clean pulping technology for straw that recovers energy from the effluent. Industrial trials are taking place in Manchester, with particular interest from China and India where industrial pollution from straw-based paper production is a big problem.



The Laundry

BioRegional set-up this social enterprise to provide a closed loop recycling service for SMEs in central London, which are currently failed by the market and local authorities.

The Laundry makes recycling cheaper than landfill, and created a young, irreverent, brand that moved away from a dull, green focus. It was London's first kerbside service and has over 1,350 active, happy customers, 100% of whom would recommend The Laundry. Businesses can recycle paper, cardboard, cans, plastic bottles, various kinds of electronic waste and even Christmas trees.

Dense kerbside collection routes collecting from over 350 businesses per day, great customer service and segregation at source keeps prices low and the environmental benefits high.

The Laundry has received some funding from London Boroughs to start new collection routes, which helps them meet their LATS targets without needing the resources and expertise to start up such a social enterprise in-house. Some local authorities have directly obstructed The Laundry, however, for example with inflexible fly tipping policies that lead to customer fines when recycling trucks are stuck in traffic.

Policy drivers to close the loop

More regulatory obligations and incentives could tip the balance:

1. Integrate waste, recycling and procurement policies to promote local loops.
2. Target the quality of waste recycled, not just tonnage which leads to co-mingling.
3. Pro-actively support social enterprises like The Laundry with flexible, supportive policies, for example on fly tipping.
4. Plug the LATS carbon leak caused by incineration of commercial waste that should be recycled.
5. Plug the bigger carbon leak caused by the Climate Change Levy, to make UK green manufacturing more competitive and so keep paper recycling local.



The Laundry celebrates reaching the 1000 customer mark in 2007

Bioregionalism in action

These projects are part of our vision for a bioregional economy, where the use of local waste and renewable resources through nationally coordinated networks helps us live within our fair share of the earth's resources – what we call one planet living.