

Sweden is to give tax incentives for repairs: so should...

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I was delighted to [read in the Guardian](#) last night that:

The Swedish government is introducing tax breaks on repairs to everything from bicycles to washing machines so it will no longer make sense to throw out old or broken items and buy new ones.

Sweden's ruling Social Democrat and Green party coalition is set to submit proposals to parliament on Tuesday to slash the VAT rate on repairs to bicycles, clothes and shoes from 25% to 12%.

It will also submit a proposal that would allow people to claim back from income tax half of the labour cost on repairs to appliances such as fridges, ovens, dishwashers and washing machines.

Why was I pleased? Because this is what I wrote in [The Courageous State](#) four years ago:

One of the problems with our current consumer society is that many of the products we buy are designed to have short product lives and to be disposed of not long after their acquisition. So, for example, the volume of clothing we acquire has increased enormously in recent years and much of that clothing is worn only occasionally before being disposed of. In addition, we dispose of many items of consumer electronics within a year or so of acquiring them, while model product life cycles in most consumer sectors have been shortened deliberately to encourage increased consumption. Worse still, far too many products cannot be repaired either by the consumer or even by the manufacturer. They are simply designed to be thrown away when they go wrong.

Recycling is, of course, an important part of sustainability, but so is repairability, as is reuse. Among the VAT incentives that must be given should be reduced rates of VAT on products that can be shown to have a high degree of repairability. Reduced rates of VAT should also be charged on repair services.

And we must realise that, far from being the scourge of the high street, charity and

other shops that recycle consumer products should be seen as being at the forefront of modern retailing and they should be given incentives to extend their operations to ensure that products have the longest possible lives in use, however many owners are involved.

In combination, these policies will reduce our overall level of consumption, but they would also do something else: they would create skilled employment opportunities and increase the range of local economic activity. Both are vital the building of effective communities and societies in which a strong local skill base helps meet local need.

It's good to see Sweden moving in this direction.

The UK should too.