



SPACE AND SCALE: WHO CAN AFFORD TO BE SUSTAINABLE? AND AT WHAT COST?

BRIEF 5: METHODS OF CONTEXTUALISING
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Building upon foundation of the group work, this space and scale project analytically examines 'Who can afford to be sustainable? And at what cost?'. Following a meticulous dissection of UAL's Net Zero Plan, the investigation focuses on the current waste management strategy. The project explores the tension between the institution's and the individual's role in creating realised improvement within the waste sector. The overarching aim of the enquiry is to constructively challenge the current infrastructure as laid out by UAL's Net Zero Team, questioning the complex interplay between systemic institutional change and cooperation from the individual.

In an attempt to utilise graphic design to visualise scales of influence and impact, there is an ongoing impetus to communicate complexity. The fundamental understanding of the scale of the chain reaction cause by a singular decision within UAL's waste management system underpins the entire body of work. The notion of a ripple effect guided the formation of the chapters, where each section builds upon the knowledge created in the previous. Following the same system of a network of dependencies as the UAL Net Zero Plan, an index is created to categorise the project guided by the terms; context, contextual, contextualising, contextualisation.

Drawing inspiration from Italo Calvino's (1972) *Invisible Cities*, speculative world-building became a lens to understand the future of UAL's waste management. Through the practice of placemaking, fictitious environments were imagined to speculate how UAL would operate under a The Green Party government or a Reform UK government.

Zooming is utilised as a critical tool to examine how to transfer between different spaces and scales. The introduction of zooming enhanced the enquiry as it initiated a wider network of affordability which transcended between the fixed scales.

Context

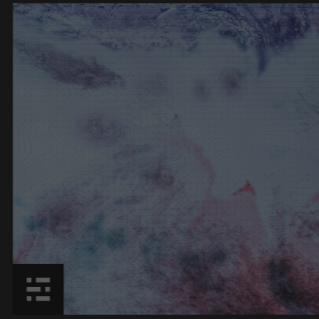
the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood

Climate Action Plan

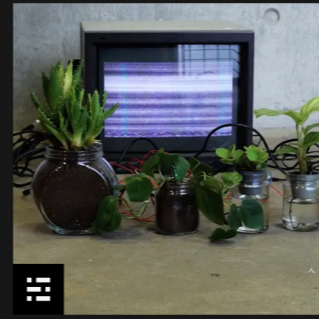
Four action areas



What and how we teach



The knowledge we create and share



How we behave as an institution



Climate Emergency Network: Changing the way we work together

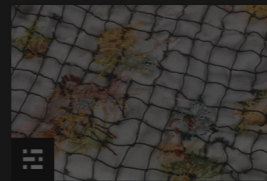


The report explores the various **barriers** that inhibit circular principles and approaches from being embedded systemically across all of UAL's teaching and practice.

What we've done so far



Environmental policy and management



Social and environmental ethics



Waste, recycling and circularity



Sustainable construction, travel and food



Waste and recycling

Our waste management is compliant according to all current statutory legislation and audited through the ISO14001 management system.

Recirculating materials and minimising waste is embedded across our operations and within our teaching and learning. For example:

- we encourage students to use sustainable materials in their projects
- we champion the use of recycled materials and degree shows should design according to the principle of "building for deconstruction" so the materials can be reused
- we have been piloting an environmental assessment framework in our technical workshops which includes the **recirculation of waste** within our workshop spaces
- students have access to **re-use units to encourage waste reduction and material reuse**
- materials can be **re-used, re-purposed or repaired at the Central Saint Martins SWAP SHOP**
- Camberwell College of Arts have launched a Repair Café to foster a culture of repair
- sustainability has also been at the heart of our Grayson's Robes competitions.

Material circularity

UAL's Social Purpose Lab conducted a research project from December 2023 to October 2024 in which they examined the state of play around the topics of material reuse and circularity in regards to courses across UAL.

The report explores the various barriers that inhibit circular principles and approaches from being embedded systemically across all of UAL's teaching and practice.

[Read the Material circularity summary report \(PDF 6.9MB\)](#)

01 Agree university-wide waste and materials aspirations

02 Establish volume and cost baselines for UAL's material use

03 Develop basic waste literacy training

04 Explore behaviour change opportunities across the UAL ecosystem

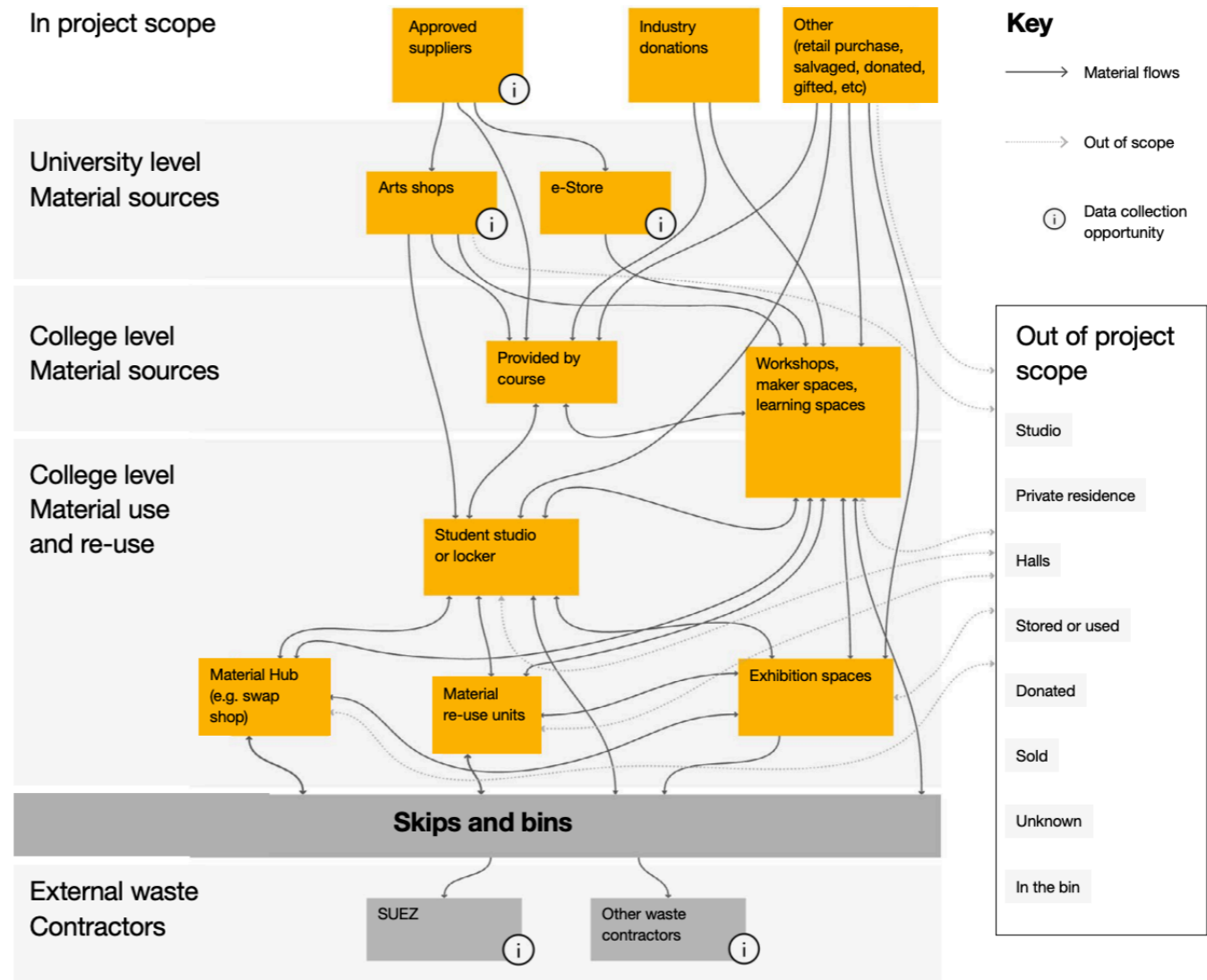
05 Build material circularity objectives into job descriptions and staff roles

06 Support students to exercise greater choice in material procurement

UAL'S CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

To understand the context surrounding UAL's Net Zero Targets, a thorough investigation was undertaken into the methodology within the Climate Action Plan. The structure of the plan operated like a chain of reactions; where one theme opened up into subsequent categories. The concept of *barriers* began to emerge, growing the understanding of the parameters in play that enable or prevent the strategies from being adopted.

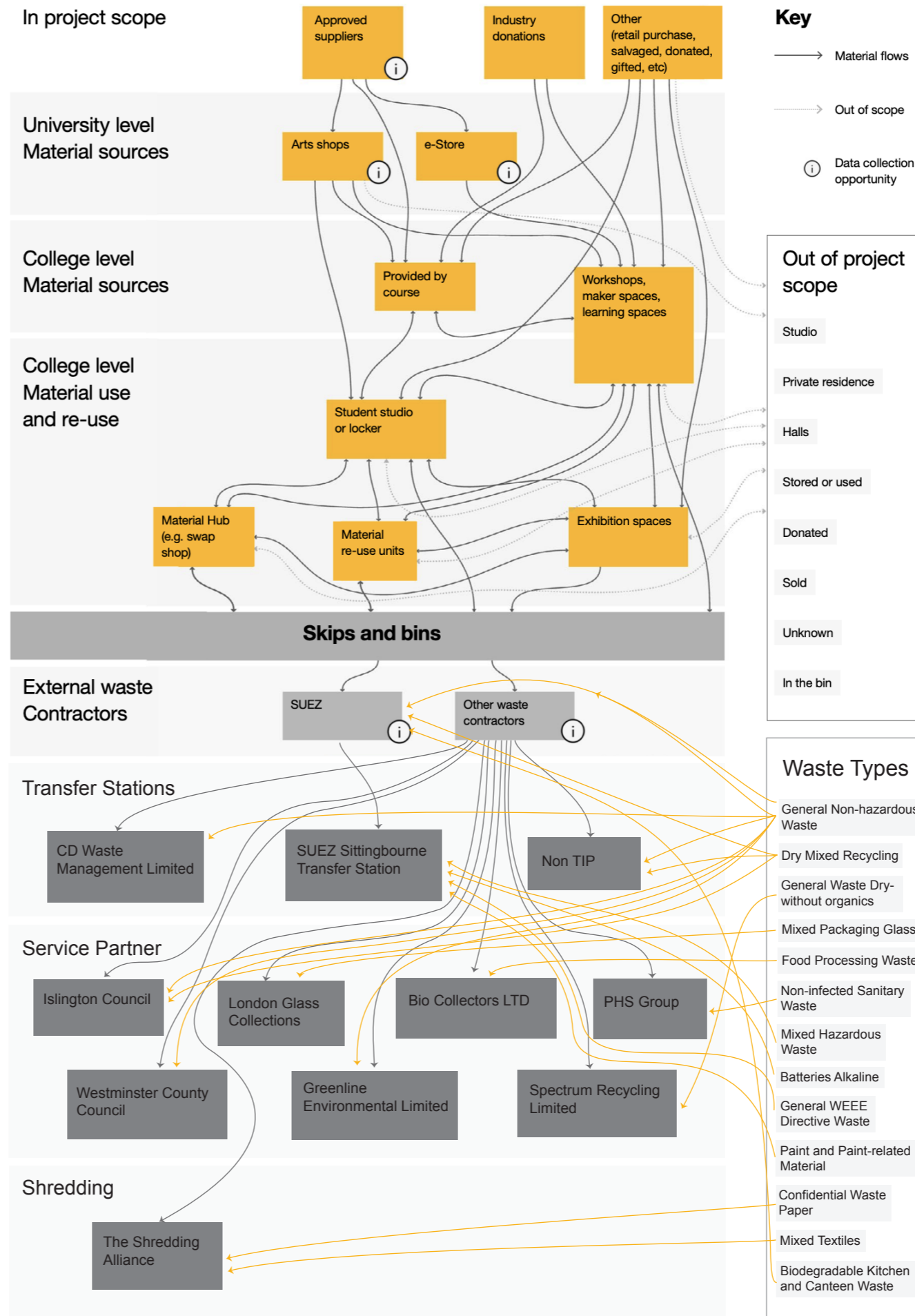
Material flows across UAL



NETWORK OF DEPENDENCIES

Within the Material Circularity at UAL report, this flow diagram is used to visually communicate the network of waste management across UAL. There is a suggestion about what happens after these items leave UAL, but at this point it becomes harder to trace. The boundary of this diagram is fixed; a censored redaction of information which has purposefully not been communicated.

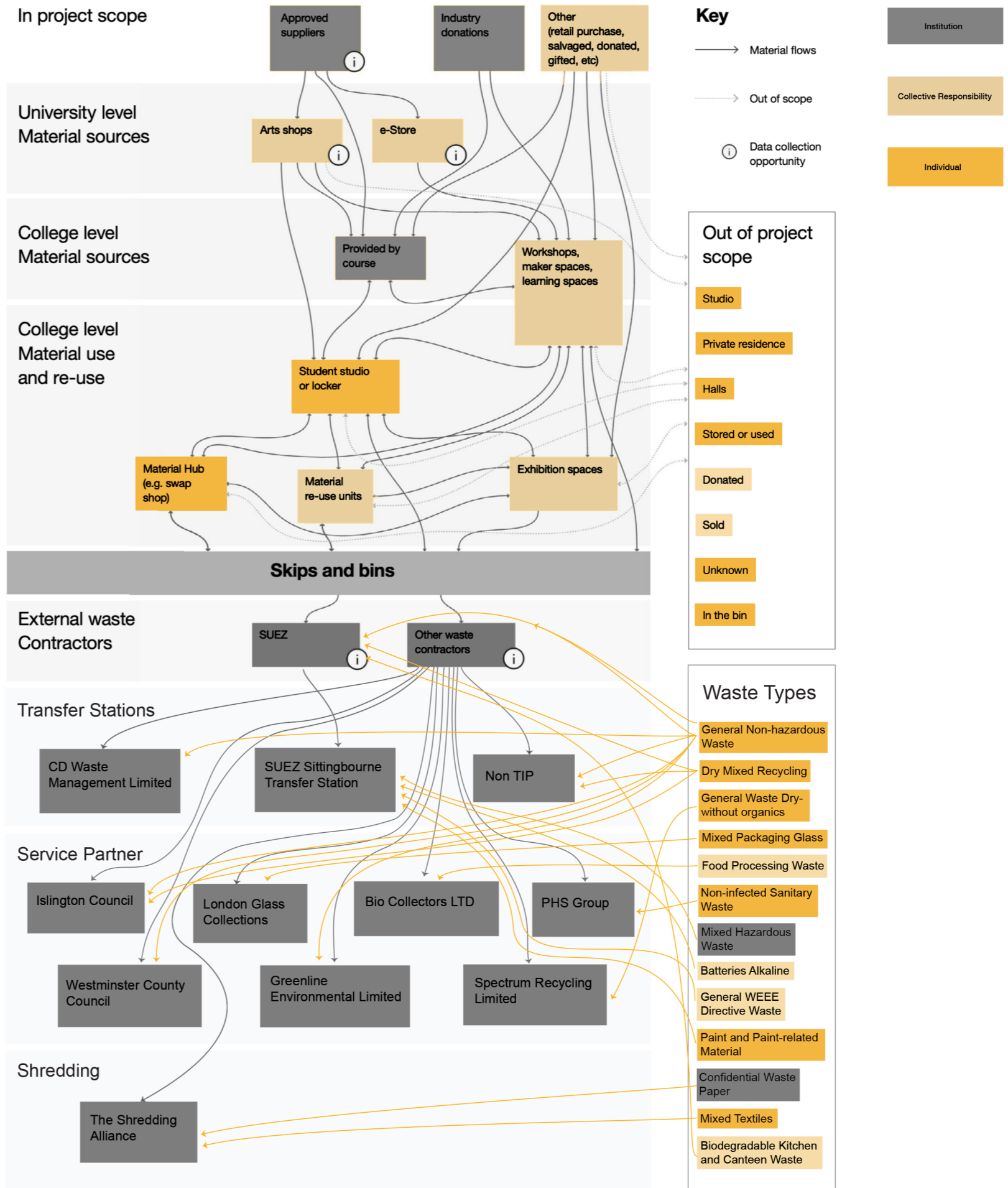
Material flows across UAL



EXPANDING THE NETWORK

Although the current UAL material flows diagram creates a robust foundation to understand current waste management across the university, the scale does not address the wider impact of the waste produced and where it is distributed to. It conforms to the barriers that it was trying to break. By expanding the network of dependencies, the complexity of the relationships is illustrated. This exercise highlighted the barriers within both the flow of information and the structures that inhibit circular principles from being adopted.

Material flows across UAL



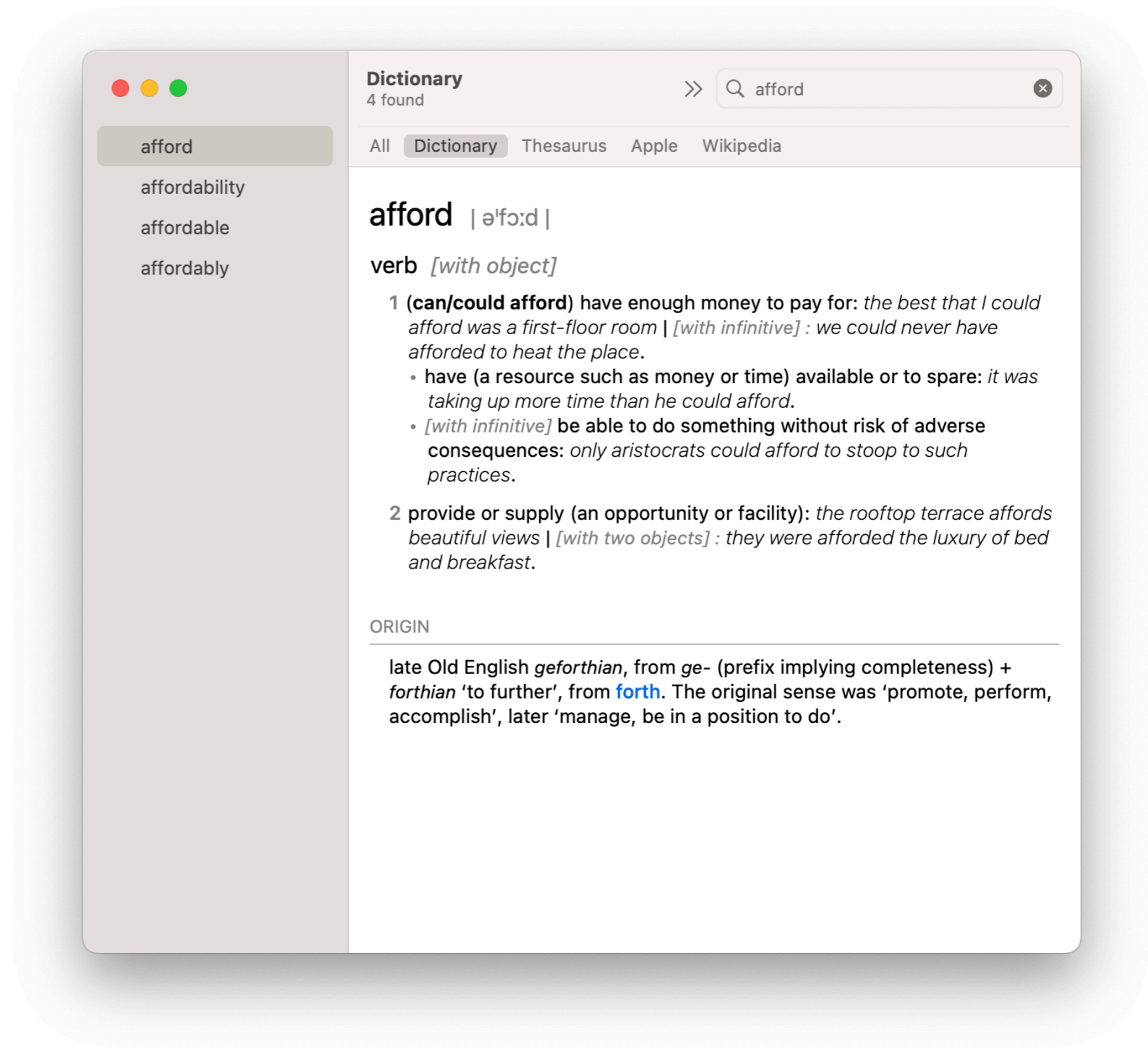
THE INSTITUTION AND THE INDIVIDUAL
 To understand the ownership over waste management, the previous diagram was reorganised to highlight the responsibilities of the institution and the individual. There was a correlation that the individual bears more responsibility for the waste that is created, whereas the institution has more contact with the distribution aspect of the system. It was apparent that there was a lack of collective responsibility, which may be exacerbating the obstacles that are inhibiting UAL from meeting Net Zero Targets within the waste management sector. A line of enquiry was beginning to emerge around affordability, as ownership over waste is distinct between the institution and the individual.

Financial:
have enough money to pay for.

Material:
have available or to spare.

Social:
be able to do something without risk of adverse consequences.

Political:
provide or supply (an opportunity or facility).



AFFORD

The term afford provides multiple definitions which span across various aspects of life. The concept of afford evokes notions of exchange, where one action has a reciprocal reaction. This is reflected in the typology of the chain of reaction system which has been evident throughout UAL's Net Zero Plan in regards to waste management.

WHO CAN AFFORD TO BE SUSTAINABLE? AND AT WHAT COST?

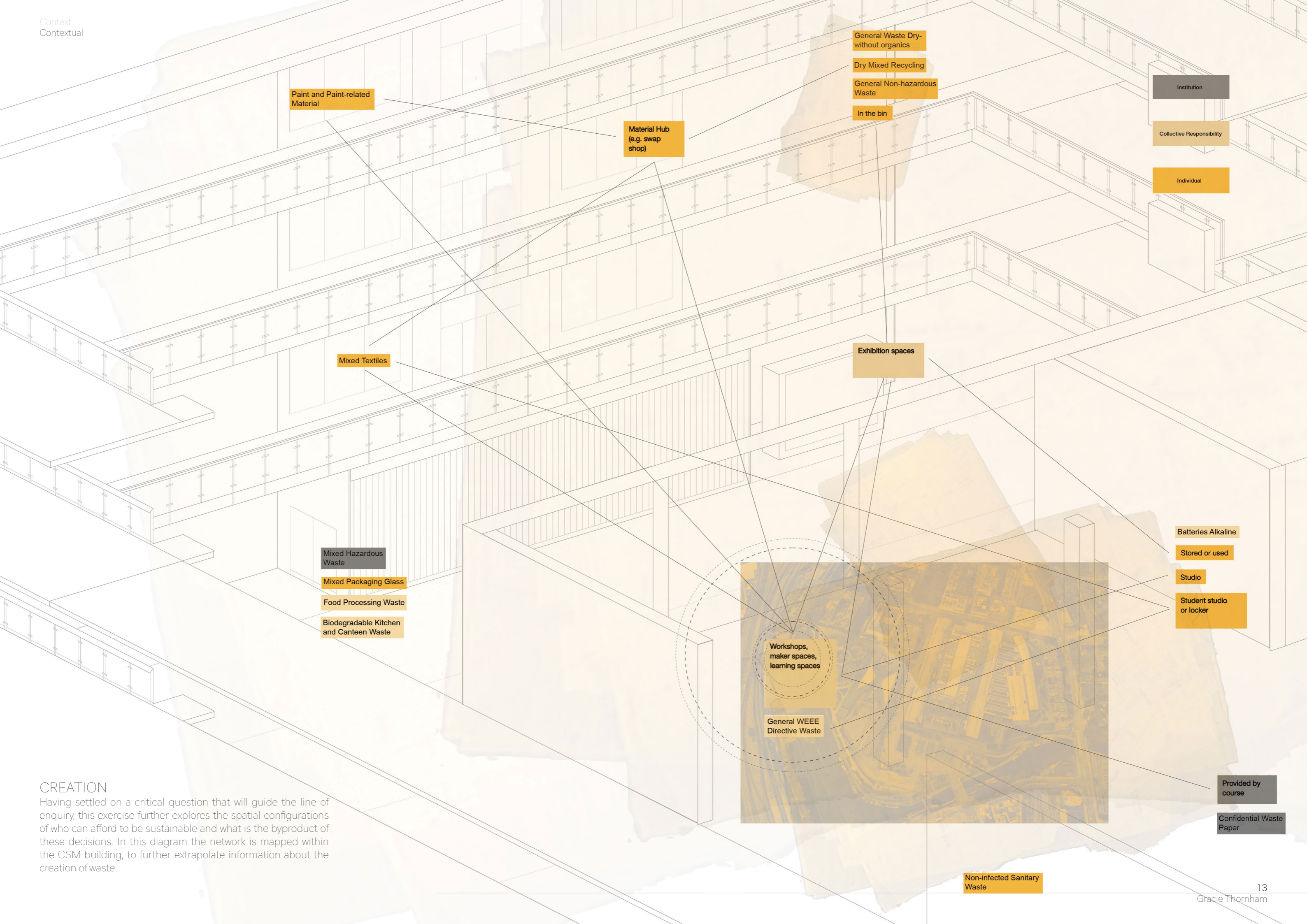
AFFORDABILITY

A line of enquiry was emerging around the theme of affordability. Drawing inspiration from the structure of Afonso Matos's (2022) *Who Can Afford to be Critical?*, the phrasing and formation of the question 'Who Can Afford ...?' transcends above merely financial factors. What does it mean to be able to afford something? And how could that be translated into the conversation surrounding UAL's Net Zero Targets?

Context

Contextual

depending on or relating to the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea

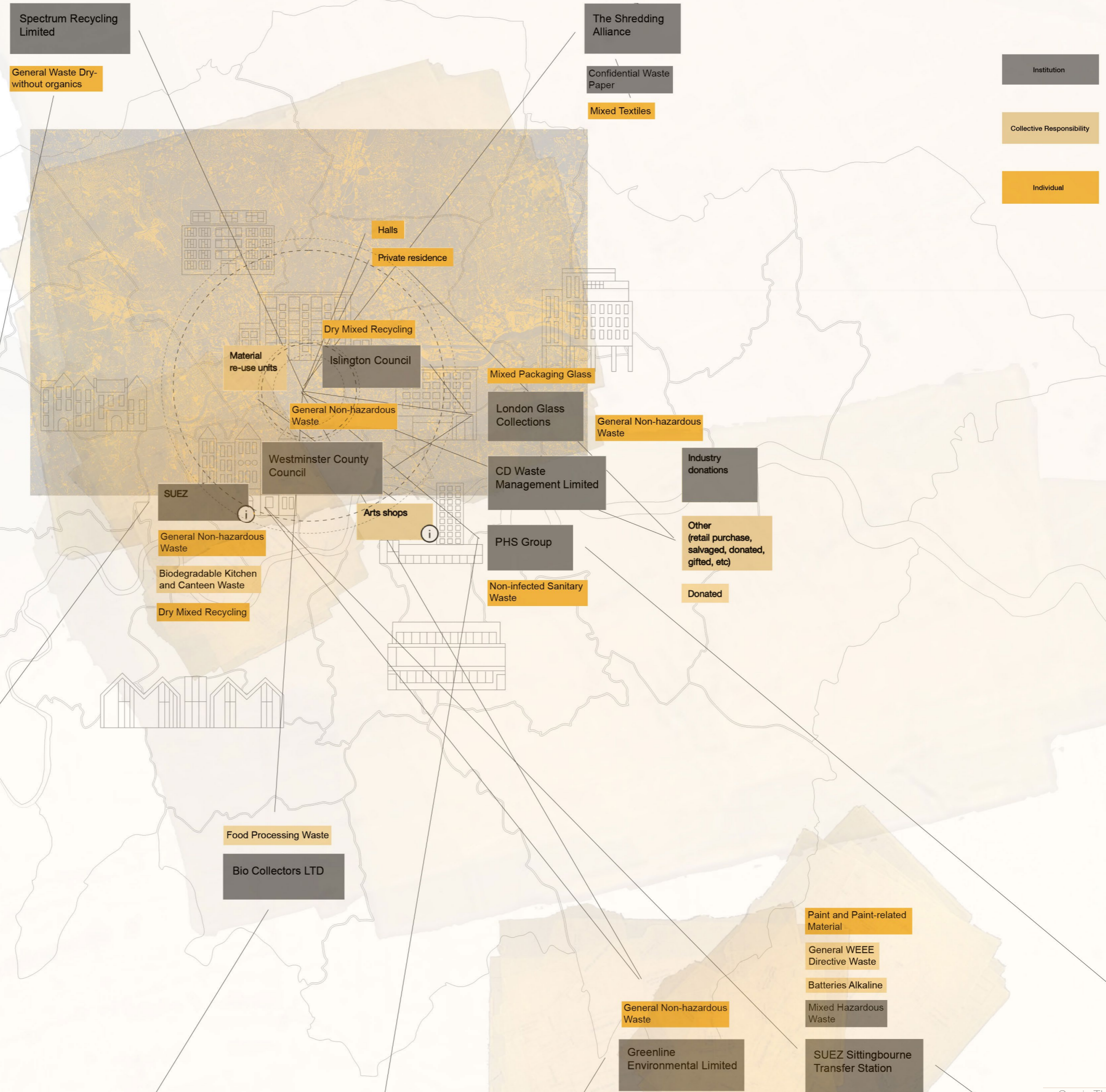


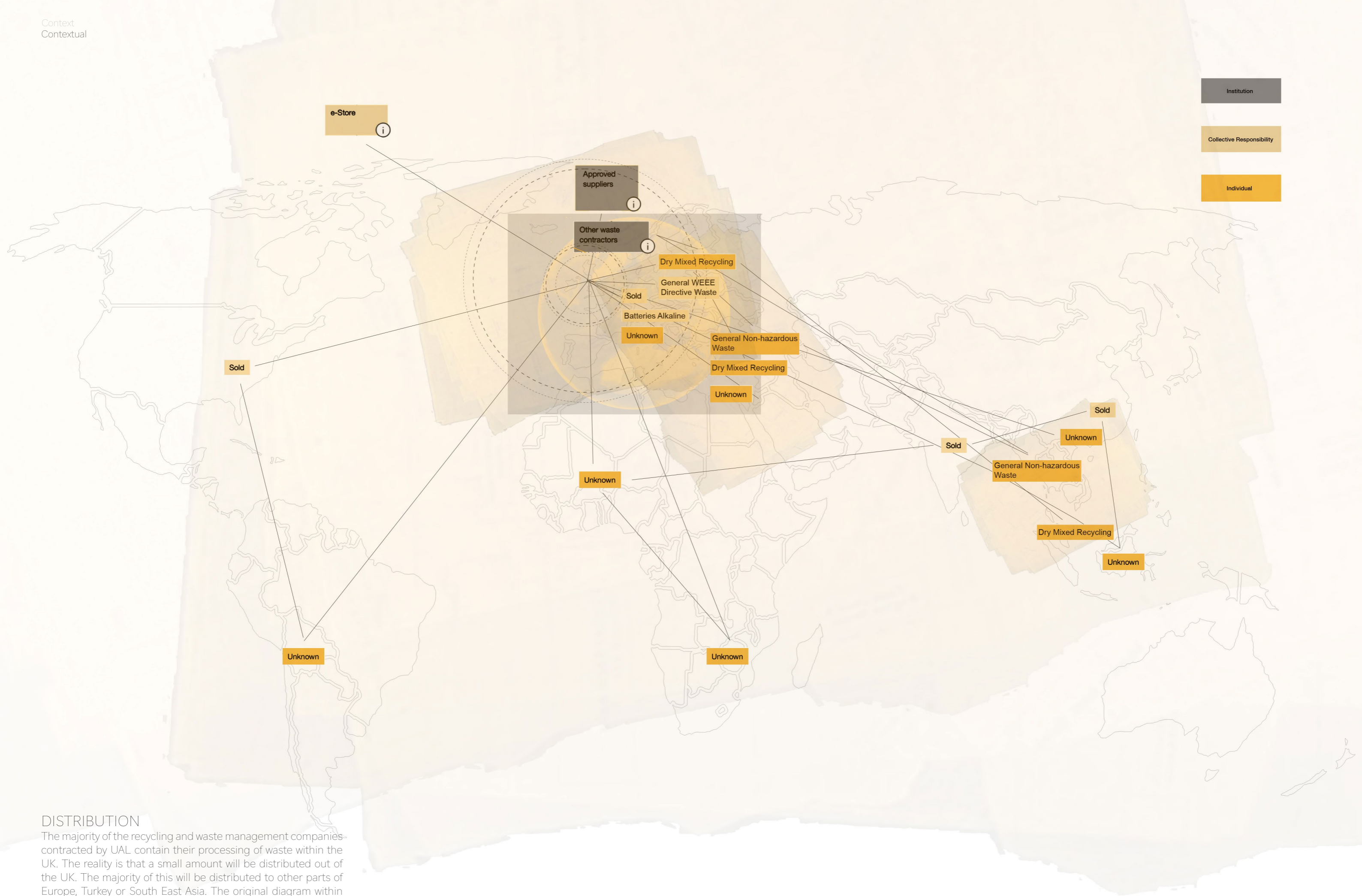
CREATION

Having settled on a critical question that will guide the line of enquiry, this exercise further explores the spatial configurations of who can afford to be sustainable and what is the byproduct of these decisions. In this diagram the network is mapped within the CSM building, to further extrapolate information about the creation of waste.

ACCUMULATION

When zooming out in scale, the complexity of UAL's waste management strategy becomes more apparent. Multiple contractors deal with the same categories of waste, therefore it becomes harder to trace how the waste accumulates across the UAL sites, as well as the subsequent city-wide distribution of this waste.





DISTRIBUTION

The majority of the recycling and waste management companies contracted by UAL contain their processing of waste within the UK. The reality is that a small amount will be distributed out of the UK. The majority of this will be distributed to other parts of Europe, Turkey or South East Asia. The original diagram within UAL's Materiality Circularity report accounts for the *unknown*, suggesting that the distribution of waste cannot be fully traced.



INVISIBLE CITIES

Invisible Cities is a literary example of world-building. Calvino uses a complex index system to thematically categorise sets of speculative cities. Calvino's fragmented descriptions of imagined cities inspired a structural model that centres around speculative futures. Rather than predicting a single outcome, Invisible Cities presents multiple realities that reflect different social logics.

The introduction of speculation as a critical tool allows conjectural understanding of how UAL's waste management system may reform over time. This creates a direct comparison with the present systems at play, which will aid the examination of the barriers that are currently hindering targets from being met.

If UAL Net Zero Targets are achieved

If we are 20 years from now

If we are 50 years from now

If we are 100 years from now

If we live in a post-war world

If global air temperature has increased by 3 degrees

If landfill no longer exists

If everything has to be reused

If everything is single-use

If we live in a post-internet world

If the road network in the UK no longer exists

If the boundary of London changes

If the UK no longer has a relationship with the EU

If The Green Party comes to power

If Reform comes to power

If UAL expands

If UAL shrinks

WHO CAN AFFORD TO BE SUSTAINABLE?

A list of speculative worlds was created where one could imagine how the barriers surrounding the implementation of UAL's Net Zero Plan could be broken down or further built up. There would be a shift in the ownership of responsibility, therefore directly impacting who could afford to be sustainable within these speculative scenarios.

If UAL Net Zero Targets are achieved

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If Reform comes to power

If UAL expands

If UAL shrinks

AND AT WHAT COST?

A change in political power is selected as the speculative worlds for further examination, as the polarisation of politics in the UK is, and will continue, to have a huge effect on environmental policy. Following the next general election, we will see a shift in the ownership over reaching Net Zero Targets nationally, inevitably impacting UAL as they attempt to adhere to the new policies. There will be inescapable byproducts of this change in political power, and this project sets out to examine what, or who, those may be.

Context
Contextual
Contextualising

place or study in context



A SPECULATIVE WORLD WHERE THE GREEN PARTY IS IN POWER

The Green Party manifesto contains a wealth of information about their approach to waste management. They propose a shift from ownership to usership, where responsibility is put onto the collective. This will enable everybody to be able to afford to engage with sustainable practices, whilst minimising the global adverse impact of UK waste management. This will have widespread impact across UAL as The Green Party policy will drive the institution to collaborate with the individual to break down the barriers that currently inhibit systemic, sustained change.

by 2027, the green party will ban all waste exports of plastics.
by 2030, the green party will have reduced plastic waste by 30%.
by 2037, the green party will ban all single use plastic

we operate in a society of circular economy

minimise waste
maximise recycling

Right to Repair

UAL IS NET ZERO

Green Party

Single Use Plastic Ban Starts Today

Green Talks

Ending fossil fuels and fast tracking the transition to green energy is the only way we can get ahead

Please Take

reuse

swap

repair

CLOTHES REPAIR WORKSHOP TODAY

CLOTHES REPAIR WORKSHOP TODAY

MINIMISE WASTE
↓
MAXIMISE RECYCLING
↓
↓
↓



ZACK POLANSKI LECTURE

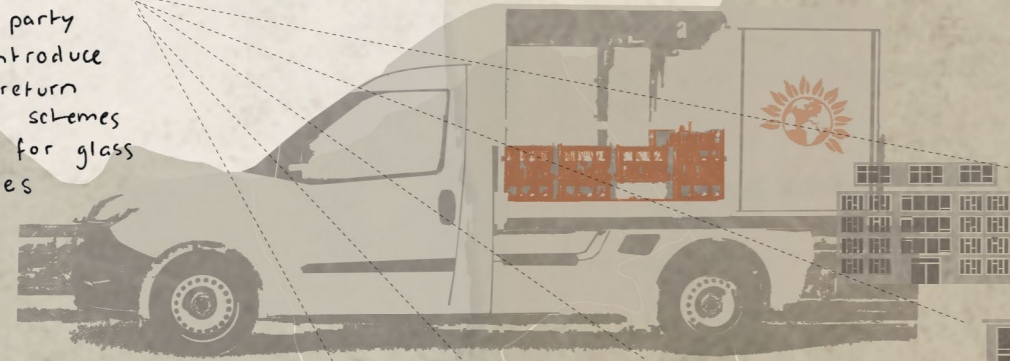
TOMORROW'S SITE IS CARBON CUTS NOT WELFARE CUTS

BAN FOSSIL FUEL ADS

BAN FOSSIL FUEL ADS

deposit return schemes (DRS) for glass bottles will be introduced under a green government

the green party
will introduce
deposit return
schemes
(DRS) for glass
bottles



everyone has
access to
recycling

recycling centers
will be improved
nationally

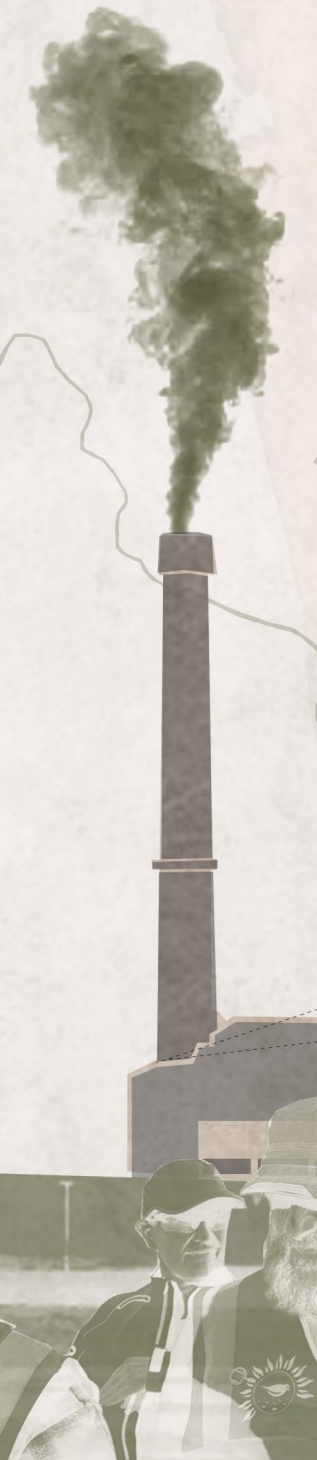
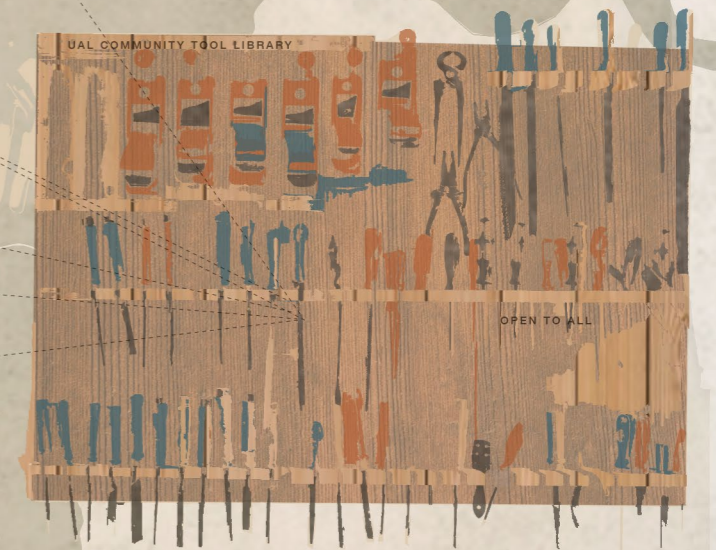
ownership to usership

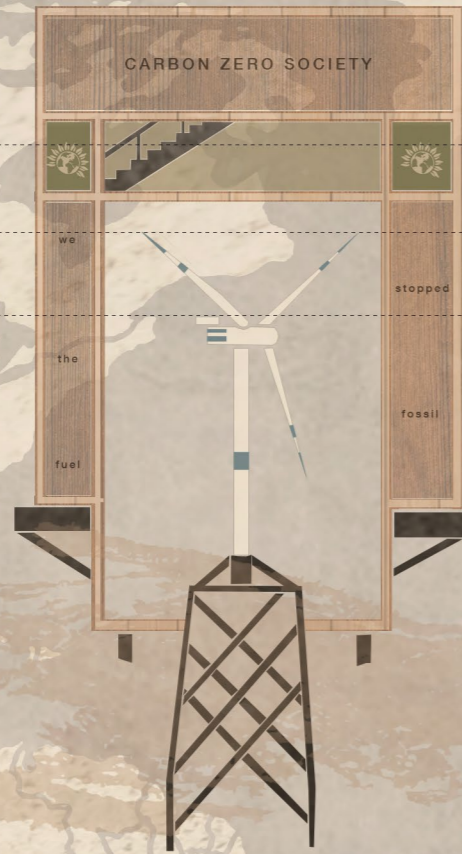
the people
will be
empowered

**STOP
BURNING
OUR
FUTURE**

the green party
opposes the
construction
of new
waste-to-energy
incinerators

all incinerators will eventually be closed





in 2024,
the UK exported 598,000 tonnes
of plastic waste
(60,000 refuse trucks worth)

the green party will
ban the export of plastic
waste by
2027



WE ARE CUTTING PUBLIC SPENDING

reform uk will prioritise energy security over environmental policy



stopping the boats or stopping the bins?

there will be a shift from long term sustainability to immediate cost-saving measures

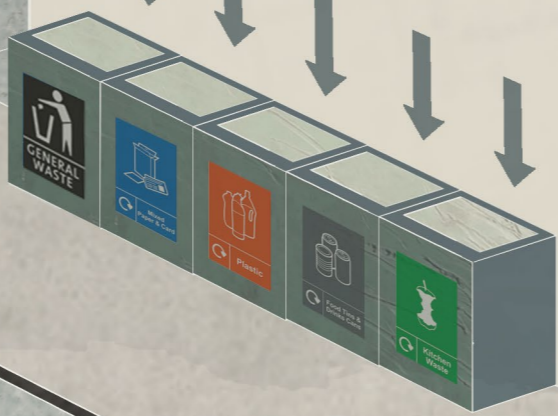
richard tice's catch phrase net stupid zero has come to fruition

NET STUPID ZERO

UAL IS SCRAPPING NET ZERO TARGETS

cut WASTEful spending

we are improving recycling (even if no one is taking it)

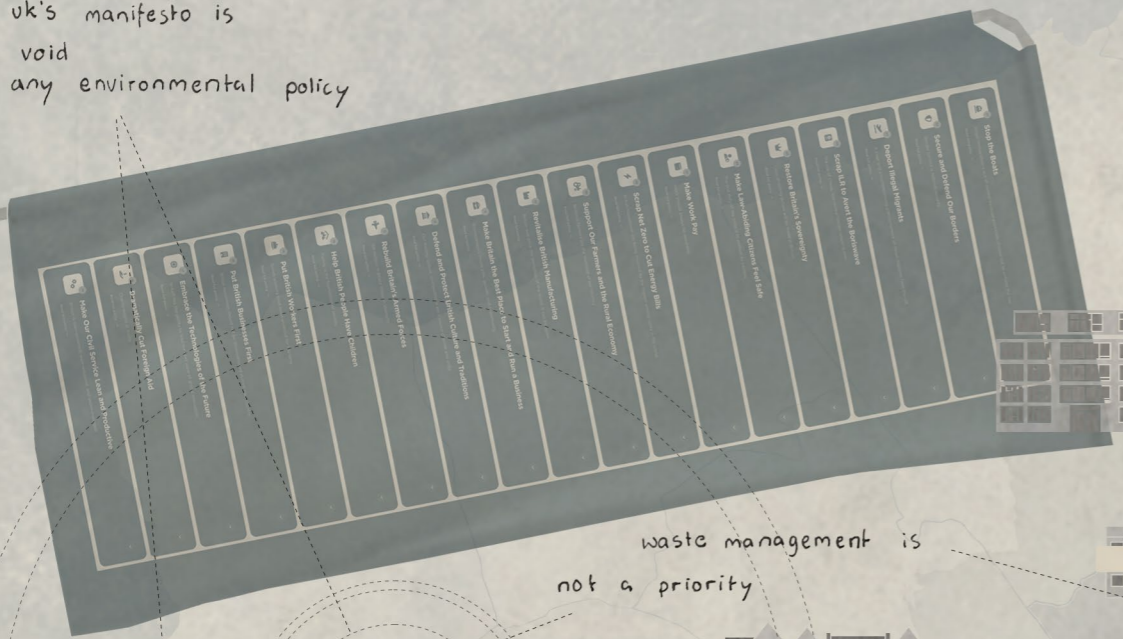


due to government spending cuts, our waste has not been collected studio is closed until further notice

government and council spending cuts will worsen the infrastructure in the waste management sector



reform uk's manifesto is
void
of any environmental policy



waste management is
not a priority

the people will pay

public spending will be cut

cutting wasteful council
expenditure

many reform uk
politicians
refuse net zero
training

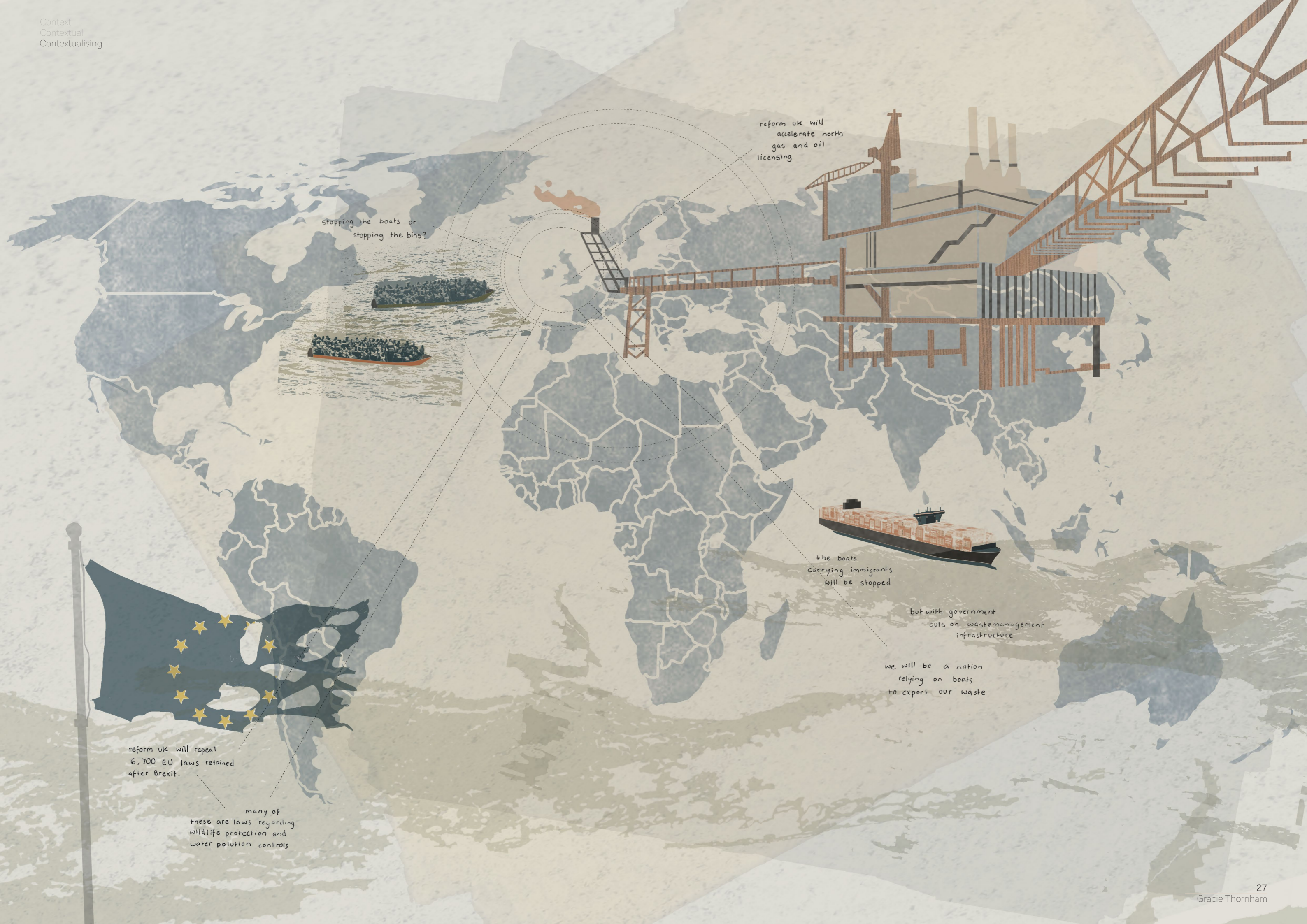
who will pay
the price for
their refusal
of education

~~CANCELLED~~
NET ZERO TRAINING TODAY

NET ZERO TRAINING TODAY
~~CANCELLED~~

we can protect our environment with more tree planting,
more recycling, and less single use plastics





stopping the boats or
stopping the bins?

reform uk will
accelerate north
gas and oil
licensing

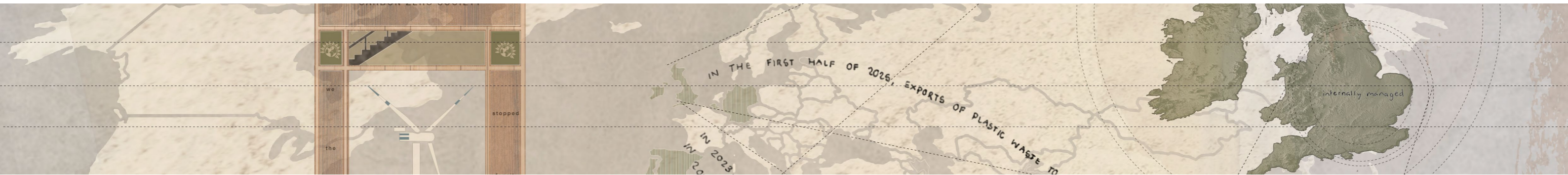
the boats
carrying immigrants
will be stopped

but with government
cuts on waste management
infrastructure

we will be a nation
relying on boats
to export our waste

reform uk will repeal
6,700 EU laws retained
after Brexit.

many of
these are laws regarding
wildlife protection and
water pollution controls



REFLECTING ON THE FIXED PARAMETERS

The division of scales into creation, accumulation and distribution served a purpose to begin to understand the widespread impact of a singular decision made within UAL. The current presentation of these speculative worlds feels disjointed, and does not best communicate the complexity of the chain of reactions. The concept of affordability will become more prominent once these scales are put in conversation with one another and you can trace the flow of waste and information. This act of contextualisation will endeavour to communicate the dependencies within the network of waste management, whilst also understanding whether the barriers inhibiting circular principles from being embedded systemically within UAL are being diminished or exacerbated within the speculative scenarios.

Context
Contextual
Contextualising
Contextualisation

the fact or process of considering something in its context

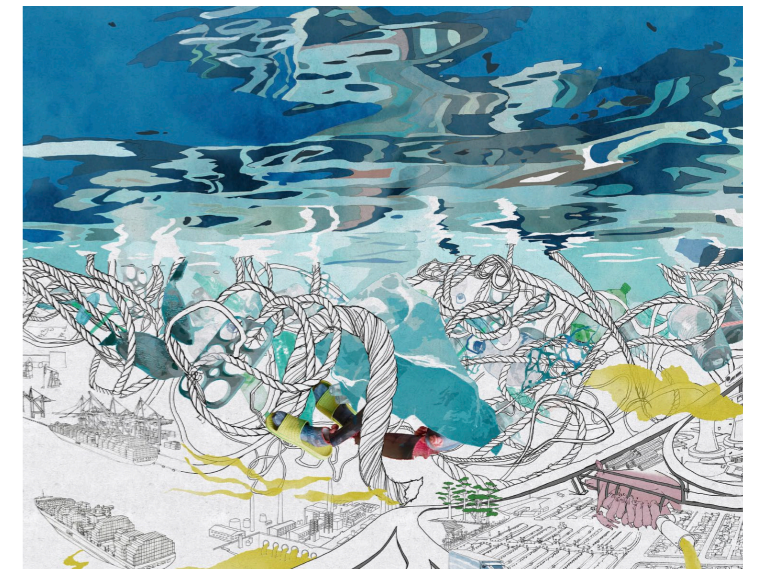


Power of Ten and the Relative Size of Things in the Universe - Charles and Ray Eames

ZOOMING AS A CRITICAL TOOL

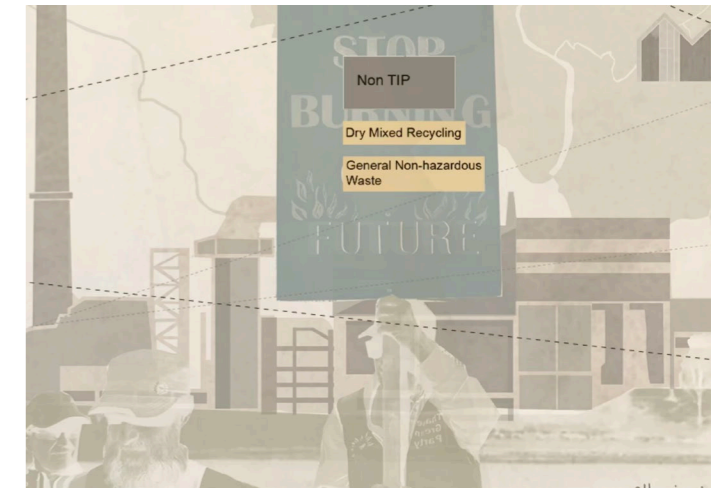
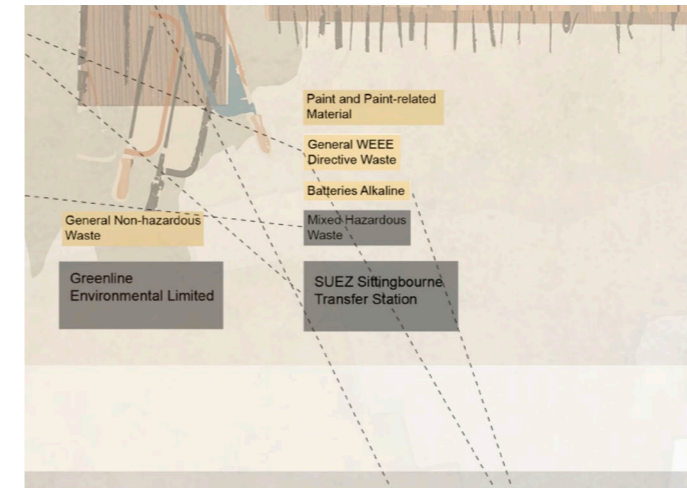
To extrapolate the system of affordability within the proposed government policies, there was a desire for the work to be viewed up close. To enable this, zooming must be introduced as a critical tool.

In Powers of Ten, Charles and Ray Eames use zooming as a tool to visually communicate the relative size of things in the universe. The video uses a system of zooming in or out with a scale factor to the power of ten, creating a framework and structure to their investigation. The project succinctly uses zooming as critical tool to represent scale and space simultaneously.



Feral Atlas - Anna Tsing

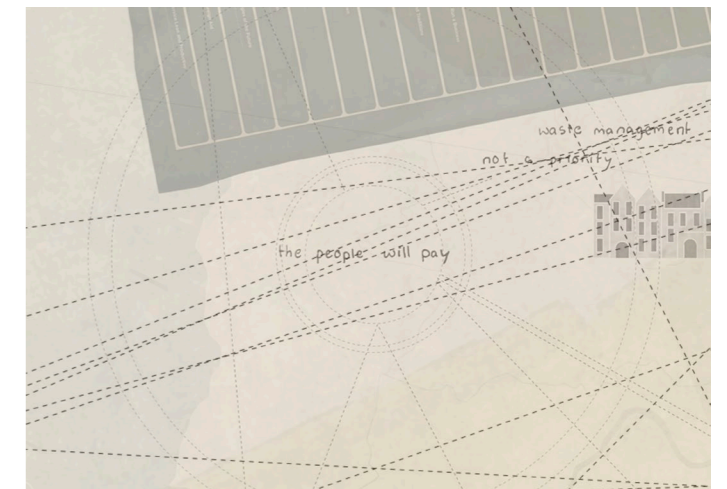
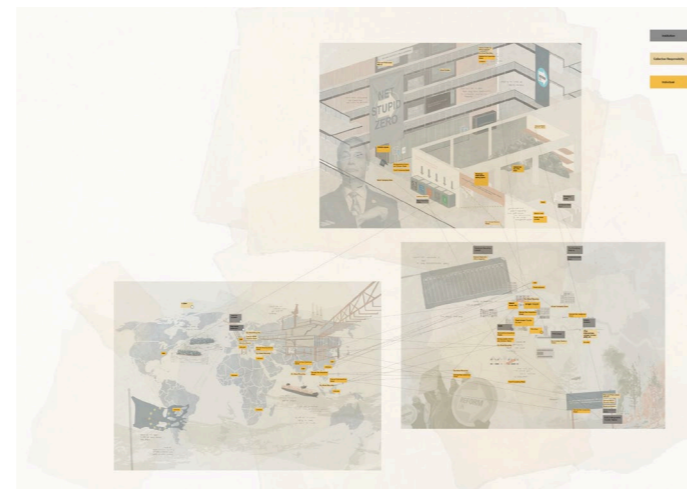
Anna Tsing's Feral Atlas illustrates ecological worlds shaped by human infrastructure and feral non-human effects through non-linear critical cartography. The webpage successfully communicates the complexity of the network of ecologies. This illustrative example of world-building, actively engages the viewer as they are invited to explore the work as they form their own journey across the platform.



AND AT WHAT COST?

There is a huge disparity over who can afford to be affordable within the two speculative worlds. If The Green Party was in power there would be a systemic shift towards collective responsibility. Waste would predominantly be managed within the United Kingdom as plastic waste export would be banned. The infrastructure would be provided for both the individual and the institution to afford to be sustainable and work together to reach Net Zero Targets. In turn, the cost of sustainability would be diminished if the collective has access to the means to be environmentally conscious.

If Reform UK came to power, there would be a breakdown of public infrastructure to manage waste, therefore it will no longer be possible for the individual to afford to be sustainable. There will adverse effects globally as waste exports would inevitably increase, if we do not have our own ability to process waste within the UK. The British population would end up bearing some of the brunt of the governments inability to adhere to Net Zero Targets, but the impacts are much more widespread as we become reliant on waste exports to less economically developed countries.



To watch full video please follow the link:
<https://vimeo.com/1169901098?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

Video has been introduced as a method of incorporating zooming as a critical tool to show the flow of waste within the proposed speculative realities. The viewer is guided through the world-building to understand how policy will shape UAL's ability to manage waste effectively.

The reality the of the power the government holds over UAL's ability to achieve Net Zero Targets has been stark throughout the process of speculative world building. The current barriers that inhibit circular principles and approaches from being embedded systemically across UAL's teaching and practice would be broken down or built up further with a change in political power.

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