CIRIA Soil Community of Practice (CoP) roundtable meeting January 2026

Introduction

The CIRIA Soil CoP roundtable meeting took place on 19 January 2026, with 14 organisations present.

The purpose of the meeting was to understand what different soil interested organisations are working on, to explore ways in which they could work more closely together, and to promote industry-wide sustainable soil management.

There were two specific discussions on soil definitions and the importance of decision making for sustainable soil management.

The outcomes of the meeting and discussions are as follows.

1 Soil definitions

This should focus on the functions and benefits of soil but recognise that there are many ways of defining what soil is. For example:

- unconsolidated mineral and organic material that makes up earth's surface make up soil
- an engineering material that support buildings and structures
- a drainage medium
- provide contaminant containment
- ability to support climate change mitigation
- support of biodiversity and growing food.

Existing definitions that might be useful are provided in the glossary of the Defra Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025.

There are different types of soil, ie topsoil and subsoil, and their chemical and physical properties are different. But even these broad soil types cannot show the individual uses of soils and how a single soil type may not be suitable for all uses.

There needs to be a focus on preventing the unnecessary excavation of soils, but when they are excavated, care is needed to prevent them becoming defined as a waste material. Where soils become a waste, there remains the potential for their reuse, although there may be limitations to the reuse and management options available.

There is a wealth of existing guidance documents available to help the reuse of soils, however more guidance or tools are needed to support people in the planning and implementation of soil reuse at different stages of a project.

2 Importance of making the right decision

This should be considered early in the project life cycle. The reuse options are often driven by warrantor providers such as the NHBC, or industry guidance (eg BS 3882:2015) rather than by environmental health and the Environment Agency advice (which looks at it from a contamination and waste point of view). There may also be contractual obligations, which could mean 'thinking outside the box'.

The challenges for many construction projects is to have the right soil, and for it to be reused in the right place and at the right time. However, there are occasions where soil functions were neglected to meet other environmental requirements such as Biodiversity Net Gain.

Conclusions

More cross-sector collaboration is needed, which would promote joined up thinking and consider soil in its entirety. To aid this process, the development of a framework/flowchart to guide the reuse of soils would be beneficial to identifying potential soil types and/or reuse options. This would enable greater reuse of soils, preventing it failing against a limited set of specifications and help individuals identify the right soils for their needs. The approach could also support developers in finding reuse options for surplus soils, preventing them from being considered as a waste.

Organisations represented

- Atkins Réalis
- Balfour Beatty
- British Society of Soil Science
- Environment Agency
- CIRIA
- Homes England
- Independent consultant
- Landscape Institute
- Nature Scot
- RSK
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Sole trader (involved in the production of BS 10177 and updating BS 1075. Also linked to the AGS Contaminated Land Working Group and the Geological Society Contaminated Land Group)
- Sustainable Soils Alliance
- Westbury Environmental

Invited organisations, but not present

- CL:AIRE
- Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals
- Lancaster University
- Mott Macdonald
- The Society of the Environment Soils and Stones Project
- WSP and representing the Geological Society
- Wyre Council representing National Contaminated Land Officers Group