

## ***Rubbish, recycling and the circular economy***

Public meeting at Wandsworth Town Hall

19<sup>th</sup> January 2016



Meeting organised by Wandsworth Environment Forum (WEF) which currently comprises Battersea Society, Putney Society, Transition Town Tooting, Wandsworth Friends of the Earth, Wandsworth Living Streets, Wandsworth Older People's Forum, Wandsworth Society, plus individuals who have an interest in local environmental/community issues.

Information stalls on behalf of community groups, Transition Town Tooting, Work & Play Scrapstore and Wandsworth Oasis, plus two local businesses working with recycling, Phoenix Purple Angels (upcycled gifts) and Route to Juice (juicebar working towards zero waste by composting its green waste).

Vicki Carroll, Chair, Wandsworth Environment Forum, welcomed everyone, outlined the scope of the meeting and introduced the three speakers, who took questions after their presentations. The meeting ended with a brief discussion of how some of the issues might be taken forwards.

Any questions or comments, contact: Vicki Carroll [vickigoat@hotmail.com](mailto:vickigoat@hotmail.com)

*The following minutes include questions (in red italics) which have been asked elsewhere (eg [streetlife.com](http://streetlife.com)) and since the meeting.*

### ● **Sharon Ross, Deputy Manager, Western Riverside Waste Authority (WRWA)**

PP presentation attached.

- WRWA manages the waste for four local authorities (LAs): Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, London Boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Lambeth and Wandsworth (see <http://www.wrwa.gov.uk/>).

- WRWA runs a **Materials Recycling Facility (MRF)** at Smugglers Way. Most waste is **domestic** as opposed to commercial. "Split-back" refuse collection vehicles take both recyclables and waste in separate compartments, so only there is one collection of domestic waste. WRWA charges the LAs by weight to process both kinds.

**Do the split-back trucks crush Golden Tickets?!**

- Within the borough there are two waste transfer points, Smugglers Way and Cringle Dock, from which non-recyclable waste is transported by river to Cory Environmental's waste **incinerator** in London borough of Bexley. This is equivalent to a 60 MW power station producing **electricity to power approx. 100,000 homes**. This is the largest plant of its type in the UK and was opened four years ago (see <http://www.coryenvironmental.co.uk/our-services/energy-from-waste/>).

- **Recycling is currently around 80,000 tonnes per year, representing 23% of total household waste.** DEFRA compiles % performance data based on weight: see <http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/household-waste-recycling-rates-borough/resource/6f7bc5cd-217b-4eed-9450-af086f17908e> for Wandsworth's historic performance.

- After sorting, recyclable materials are transported to various destinations in the UK and abroad, wherever there is a **market** for them, which changes through time, eg currently:
  - paper is shipped to Holland/Belgium (low-carbon emission transport used where possible, ie river/sea)
  - glass bottles are melted and re-made in the UK
  - HDPE plastics are remade into pipes in U; PET plastics into clothing, trainers
  - batteries are sent back to manufacturers
  - green waste is taken to Rainham, Essex, for composting, then sold in bulk to farmers.

#### Problems with recycling:

- window envelopes?
- aluminium foil / foil containers?
- spiral binding?
- hardback books?

Are there problems separating the different types of plastics? Add the plastic code to the information on what can/can't be recycled? How should organic plastics such as those made from corn starch be treated, as recycling or general waste?

- Putting shredded paper in recycling is discouraged: shredding renders the wood fibres too short to be recycled; in the plant they are a fire hazard (sparks from metal waste items striking each other) and they also clog up the machinery. WRWA advice is to put **shredded paper in general rubbish** so that they contribute to generating electricity.

- There is a **financial incentive for local authorities to maximise recycling**: the charge for processing recyclable materials is only £25/tonne whereas for sending non-recyclables to incineration is £142/tonne.

- **Rework workshop:** furniture and other household items received at the public recycling point at Smugglers Way are repaired by local people on work experience and passed to charities for re-sale (see <http://www.wrwa.gov.uk/reuse/reuse-workshop.aspx>).

### **Cllr Jonathan Cook, Deputy Leader Wandsworth Council; Cabinet Member for Community Services**

- Cllr Cook is Wandsworth Council's environment spokesman and sits on the board of WRWA Western Riverside Waste Authority.

- Wandsworth is the largest of WRWA's 4 boroughs. **Although Wandsworth's population (currently approx 325,000) has grown considerably in recent years, the level of household waste has been in shallow decline until recently.** Reasons for the decline could include lower levels of consumption following the global financial crisis of 2008; fewer people reading newspapers (historically the largest element in recycling) because they are switching to online media; less packaging by retailers in response to environmental concerns. The recent increase in waste could be explained by increasing consumption as we recover from the economic crash.

- The previous household waste collection system consisted of separate plastic sacks for the different recyclables and two sets of vehicles to collect recyclables and general waste separately. Introduced four years ago the **current system of putting all recyclables into the "orange" sack and only one collection** is a significant improvement and works well for densely populated urban areas.

- The Council is currently **contracted for waste collection with Serco until 2020** (see <http://www.londoncontractsregister.co.uk/Contracts> - search with supplier Serco and local authority name LB Wandsworth).

**Streetlife.com concerns about the mess left after the refuse vehicle has been. Why can't refuse vehicle operatives (a) be tidier? A source of irritation is that dustbin lids are not replaced. Another borough organises street sweeping to follow immediately after refuse collection.**

- After the incineration of general waste at LB Bexley, the residue, **incinerator bottom ash** amounting to approx 600 tonnes/year and approx 30% by volume of the waste, is taken to a plant in Tilbury where the ferrous and non-ferrous metals are removed; the remainder is used in the construction industry. The combustion exhaust fumes are also processing to remove the small particles, **fly ash**; this is also used in the construction industry.

- When considering the overall financial costs of the current system of processing waste, the **value of electricity generated**, approx £100K, should be included.

- Contamination rates have now reduced from approx 20% a few years ago to approx 12-15%. If a bag/paladin is too contaminated it has to be rejected at the plant. This is costly to the Council which is firstly charged £25/tonne as recyclable, then £142/tonne to be sent for incineration. Clearly it would save money if the general public could be encouraged to recycle more (see for example the WRWA/Wandsworth current Council Golden Ticket scheme: [https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/news/article/12996/recycle\\_your\\_way\\_to\\_5k](https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/news/article/12996/recycle_your_way_to_5k)).

Why did Wandsworth choose to offer fewer larger Golden Ticket prizes when other boroughs offered more, smaller prizes?

- Contamination of housing estate recycling paladins with general rubbish: although it would be impractical for the Council to monitor individually the several thousand such paladins in the borough, small interventions such as siting the recycling point further away than the general waste point could work.

Queries on [streetlife.com](http://streetlife.com) have flagged up that orange sacks should be made available at libraries again, as well as from Council offices (people working full time struggle to get there to collect them). Some concerns that Council not sending out recycling sacks when requested.

What is the Council doing about encouraging businesses to recycle more; to encourage customers to take back packaging?

- **Wandsworth's recycling performance** according to DEFRA statistics based on dry weight is one of the lowest of the London boroughs (see <http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/household-waste-recycling-rates-borough/resource/6f7bc5cd-217b-4eed-9450-af086f17908e>). Although "wheely bins" have been associated with the highest recycling rates in the rural counties, in the dense carparking of Wandsworth's streets there could be practical problems of storage and access, not to mention poor visual impact.

- An **analysis of waste processing looking not at weight but at the equivalent weight of CO2 emissions per tonne of waste** has been developed by sustainability consultancy, Ricardo Energy & Environment (see <http://ee.ricardo.com/cms/helping-our-clients-solve-some-of-the-world-s-most-complex-environmental-challenges/>). Their latest league table (see <http://energyandenvironment.ricardo.com/cms/uk-local-authority-carbon-league-table-Full>) shows Wandsworth as the second best London borough and on a par with the 45 – 46% recycling by weight of the rural counties.

- Approx 40% of general black bag rubbish is **food waste**. Clearly a preferred option might be to encourage the general public and supermarkets to reduce this; however, successful communication around behaviour change is notoriously difficult to achieve. Although neighbouring LB Lambeth collects food waste separately, the amount collected is below initial expectations. Currently Wandsworth Council has identified that separate collection (which would require caddies and a further collection) as costing approx £1M/year, a figure currently seen as not returning value for money. The Council suggests measures to reduce food waste: home composting and wormeries; waste disposal units designed to fit under a kitchen sink.

- **Data on LB Wandsworth's waste processing** is available on the WRWA and Council websites.

### [Gemma George, Project leader, London Sustainability Exchange \(LSx\)](#)

#### [PP presentation attached](#)

- London Sustainability Exchange (LSx) is a “think and do” charity aiming to accelerate change towards a sustainable London (see <http://www.lsx.org.uk/>).
- The **circular economy re-uses waste materials** rather than draw further on the Earth's natural resources. This is important not least from a financial point of view as raw materials are becoming scarce and energy costs increasing.
- Currently it is being actively promoted to industry and commerce by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (see [www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org)). It is also being championed by the current Mayor of London (see the ‘route map to a circular economy’ at <http://www.lwarb.gov.uk/what-we-do/accelerate-the-move-to-a-circular-economy-in-london/>). The EU is currently developing the **Circular Economy Package** (see [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/index_en.htm)) which, as well as giving economic gains, will set higher targets for recycling waste.
- LSx works to **support local businesses** which address sustainability issues; five types of business models have been identified. Examples: Rentez Vous clothes hire, Snact (used crowdfunding to overcome financial barriers); upcycled personal and household items, eg books glued together to make furniture, paper jewellery. LSx it is currently very active in LB Waltham Forest (see <http://www.lsx.org.uk/search/search.aspx?strSearchText=waltham%20forest>). LSx can try to link people: contact Gemma at [g.george@lsx.org.uk](mailto:g.george@lsx.org.uk).

- Within Wandsworth another entrepreneurial idea which the Council supports is **car clubs** (see [http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/200083/roads\\_highways\\_and\\_pavements/289/car\\_club](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/200083/roads_highways_and_pavements/289/car_club)); evidence suggests this discourages the purchase/use of private cars.

## Discussion

- Regarding **designing adequate facilities for waste and recycling in new high-rise buildings**, the Council's guidance to developers is given here: [http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/200489/rubbish\\_and\\_recycling/996/developments\\_and\\_waste\\_planning](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/200489/rubbish_and_recycling/996/developments_and_waste_planning). Cllr Cook felt there were problems with poor facilities in social housing built during the 1950s and 1960s.
- Given the financial and environmental costs of transporting green waste outside the borough for composting and food waste being sent for incineration, there appeared to be an argument for **exploring the composting of green and food waste locally** including, for example, using rickshaws for transport. The Council supported this idea in principle but was concerned about lack of space for composting sites in some parts of the borough. Transition Town Tooting suggested that Wandsworth Council, local businesses, community groups and people meet together to discuss a project to tackle green waste.  
Action: WEF will set up the meeting.

What happens to parks dept green waste (via Quadron) and housing dept green waste (via Ground Control)?

How much does it cost WRWA to send green waste for composting ie annual weight, approx cost per tonne? How is it transported? Who is the contractor at Rainham?