

“Aiming for Zero Waste”

The Green Group of Councillors’ response to the Brighton & Hove City Council Draft Waste Strategy

August 2009

Summary

We welcome the introduction of a new waste strategy which we believe is long overdue. We believe the targets for recycling and composting set by the strategy are too low and lack ambition. There are clear ethical, environmental and financial reasons for this city to reduce its waste as much as possible. We reject the dependence on incineration and argue the plan would be more robust if a wider range of methods for reuse and recycling were considered.

Given the high level of organic residual waste (45%) we believe food and garden waste collections would not only hugely reduce the levels of residual waste, but would also encourage behavioural changes by highlighting the amounts of food being thrown away. We argue that more types of material should be collected for recycling and that more options should be explored with local pilots. We also ask that recycling be put on an equal footing with waste collection through city-wide weekly recycling collections.

Introduction

The City Council's new waste strategy is long overdue. Originally promised in 2007 we are now only discussing drafts mid-way through 2009. Reducing and reusing waste must be key priorities for this council if it is to meet its environmental responsibilities, hit national targets and avoid additional charges in the EU Landfill Directive.

While there is no doubt that since 2000 the Council's recycling has improved, there remains room for significant additional progress.

This document responds to the proposals in the draft waste strategy as circulated for public consultation in July/August 2009.

Targets set

Overall we believe the targets set in the waste strategy are not ambitious enough. We concur with the Council's own sustainability consultants who argue that higher recycling & composting rates should be set. Grossly unachievable targets are not desirable, but something which can stretch CityClean should be set.

The strategy aims for vast, welcome, reductions in landfill use from 60.6% of waste to 2% in 2020/21 (page 10) however this shift is almost entirely from the use of incineration. We reject incineration (termed Energy Recovery in the strategy) as an appropriate way forward – it is a waste of valuable resources and the resulting pollutants in the air and ash are unacceptable.

We are concerned that so much of the strategy hinges on the successful opening of the Newhaven incinerator on time. More time on alternative waste reduction and recycling methods would make the strategy more robust in the face of unexpected problems.

The strategy's overall targets for Recycling & Composting are below the UK's stated targets, which we believe we should be aiming to beat, not sail below.

Recycling & Composting Targets	2012/13	2015/16	2020/21
UK	40%	45%	50%
BHCC	32%	40%	45%

Food and garden waste

With 45% of residual waste being organic, either food (35%) or garden (10%) waste, there is clearly a huge opportunity to reduce the quantity going to landfill. The current primary method is to encourage home composting. The strategy notes that in September 2009 Government support for compost bin subsidies ends. The strategy proposes continuing to locally promote and subsidise home composting. However the stated 20% reduction in food waste by promotion alone seems unlikely, but would be welcome if it were to work.

Many homes in Brighton & Hove are unable to home compost due to lack of space or family circumstances.

While the modelling done for the council doesn't show a clear direct environmental advantage from food waste collection, we believe the other benefits alone justify its introduction: Collecting food waste would hugely boost the profile of the entire zero waste agenda. It would highlight to residents the amount of food they wasted, thus very directly encouraging them to reduce their wastage. The modelling does not include the significant environmental costs of food production and the massive waste of resources that discarding food represents. The waste hierarchy should be applied to food and before disposal all opportunities for reuse should be considered including as animal feed, digestion and composting.

It is worth noting that the modelling does not taking into account alternative power sources for the collection vehicles or the latest advances in food waste treatment. Such considerations could well change the model's findings.

We believe the council should give serious consideration to an opt-in garden waste collection scheme which would be chargeable. Such a scheme has also been requested by the city's Older Peoples Council. This could start by making the existing scheme with Brighton Community Composting Centre more accessible to

those with small gardens but we believe ultimately a regularly collected scheme should be the goal.

The council should lobby for changes to law to allow mixed food waste to be used as pig swill instead of soya imported from overseas. The council should also work with local food suppliers to ensure their waste food is properly handled so it can be of use to farmers.

We are disappointed by the strategy's very soft commitments to look further into these issues. We believe firm, near-term action can and should be taken on these initiatives to deal with organic waste.

Recycling other materials

The types of materials collected for recycling is another aspect of the city's recycling service which impacts not only recycling levels but also residents' acceptance of the zero waste agenda. For example that aluminium foil, Tetrapaks and yoghurt pots are not recycled clearly affects a huge number of residents who regularly enquire on these matters. We believe ways can and should be found to increase the range of materials collected for recycling as soon as possible. This will increase people's confidence in the recycling scheme and also boost the volume they and the city sees go into recycling.

Given the ongoing phase-out of incandescent lightbulbs we believe CityClean urgently needs to find better ways to handle the disposal of low energy compact-fluorescent bulbs.

We also strongly believe the entire city should receive weekly recycling collections to ensure recycling is as easy as possible and is given equal priority to 'waste' collection.

The radical alternatives:

Fortnightly collections, split communal bins and other options

Explaining to residents the implications of waste disposal in terms of their council tax bill and environment will persuade some to improve their recycling habits. Nevertheless, whilst improving communications with residents is to be welcomed, we firmly believe that promotion alone will not be enough to remotely meet the kinds of residual waste reductions that are necessary.

We believe the Council should not rule out options such as fortnightly collections with weekly recycling & food collections or dividing communal bins to be able to take recycling and waste in one bin. These and other ideas should be piloted in the city to get local feedback on their strengths and weaknesses in the context of our unique city.

We also believe that the council should make greater use of the city's superb range of independent retailers. Trialling local initiatives on cutting packaging, offering

deposits on bottles or jars and action on retailers who over-package should be given greater priority and resources. Furthermore supporting existing and new community co-operative ventures which make use of the valuable resources in the waste stream should be supported by the council.

Conclusion

We believe the City Council can and should be more ambitious in its plans for reducing waste. We have argued that the targets should be higher, at least meeting the UK's national targets, and that food & garden waste collections should be prioritised. We also believe that recycling more types of materials should be pushed. Finally radical options shouldn't be ruled out, they should be explored locally before informed decisions are made.

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