

“Better Recycling and Less Waste”

The purpose of this meeting was to inform people about the successes and problems of the current door to door recycling system and to seek ways to improve the performance of the existing recycling systems in Reading.

The meeting was held at RVA's Highbridge House on Thursday 9th October 2014 and was attended by Councillors Liz Terry and Paul Gittings, by Oliver Burt and Michele Prior from Reading Borough Council (RBC), with 19 members of the Greater Reading Environmental Network (GREN) and Reading Neighbourhood Network (RNN).

It was set up by members of GREN and RNN. RNN provided resources and support in kind. Reading Borough Council kindly provided speakers.

Introductions:

John Booth (Secretary of GREN) explained the aims of the meeting as:

- Users and campaigners to understand the current system better
- Feedback user experience to RBC and re3 (re3 is the joint waste management partnership between Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell and 'FCC Environment')
- Spread knowledge of good practice to users – to reduce 'contraries' and encourage recycling - GREN, RNN, media.
- Discuss actions Local Authorities and voluntary sector can take “now” to reduce waste.

Councillor Terry said RBC was keen to increase recycling but in the present economic circumstances any changes to the collection regime, or to re3's 25-year PFI contract, would have to show cost savings.

Recycling Household Waste:

Oliver Burt (RBC's re3 Project Manager) explained how the recycling system works and showed a video of material collected for recycling being sorted at Smallmead to separate out useful materials for industry. This produces high quality materials from loose paper, cardboard, cans (including aerosols) and plastic bottles, but other materials, such as glass and other plastics, have to be rejected to avoid contamination.

re3 ran publicity campaigns throughout the year to encourage recycling – with 'bursts' on specific topics such as carrier bags.

re3's 'Annual Environmental Report' (including the tonnages of waste and different recyclates) is at

http://www.re3.org.uk/Data/Page_Downloads/AnnualEnvironmentalReport2013-2014.pdf

Kerbside Collection:

Reading's kerbside collection of 'Mixed Dry Recyclables' (MDR) showed a weak falling trend, partly explained by industry changes to reduce the weight of packaging, and partly by the recession. There was currently a reduction in recycling of newspapers but more cardboard was being received.

Materials wanted via kerbside collection were:

- Newspapers and magazines
- Paper, junk mail
- Cardboard
- Plastic bottles
- Tins and cans
- Aerosols (empty)

Contamination of kerbside collection was an important problem – it increased costs of sorting and meant some recyclable material went to landfill. Key contaminants were:

- Recyclate incapable of going through the sorting plant such as tied bundles of newspaper or recyclate tied up in plastic carrier bags
- Plastic Pots and tubs
- Plastic film, trays and bags
- Metal items such as knives and saucepans
- Food
- Video or audio tape
- Textiles
- General waste

Direct Delivery to Smallmead:

Recyclable waste taken directly to Smallmead Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) showed a rising trend.

- Good Re-usable goods – especially furniture - diverted to Sue Ryder
- Part-used tins of paint were re-sold for £1/litre via Green Machine CIC (<http://greenmachinecommunityrepaint.co.uk>)
- White goods (and other electrical equipment) were separated into the five categories of WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) and were dismantled or re-used.

Discussion:

- There were opportunities to improve recycling from transient population and from people with poor command of English. Neighbourhood groups and/or RBC street team could benefit from accessible information (leaflets, internet?) in a variety of languages and/or pictorial communication.
- There was no reliable market for plastic pots or tubs in the UK – many that were separately collected went to energy from waste, rather than for recycling as plastic.
- Kerbside collection of glass can easily contaminate material for the paper recycling industry, so there won't be a change to the existing system. There was very little glass in the residual waste collections so most of it must be being recycled via bottle banks already.
- Problems can be caused by 'Unexpected Items in the Recycling Area' - the video showed a cricket bat and a frying pan coming into the recycling plant!
- Large items are a particular problem as these can jam the machinery, and have to be picked out by hand. Materials for recycling should be loose – not put into in bags or tied in bundles - and other items should go into the general waste.
- Wood re-use should be encouraged (although some wood taken to Smallmead is already re-used).
- Community composting should be investigated (although there is composting of green waste collected from Reading residences already).

Encouraging Recycling from Flats:

Michele Prior (RBC Senior Waste Minimisation & Recycling Officer) explained that the Council is having success with a special project – funded by government - to maintain weekly collections of residual waste for landfill and to improve recycling for blocks of flats. The equivalent of 190 tonnes of waste per annum has been diverted from landfill.

The scheme was to address low recycling participation rates in many blocks of flats and high levels of contamination in communal recycling bins.

The team tackle the issue building-by-building – 37 sites so far. They talk to residents, reduce the capacity of bins for general waste, provide re-usable bags to manage recyclable materials within homes, and provide information leaflets and posters and special labels on communal bins.

Discussion:

- It was suggested RBC should work through letting agents – Michele said they already do so and will continue.
- Managers of flats could be encouraged to keep waste management records and given incentives to improve – although it was questioned if this would be effective.
- Labels could be provided for communal bins and for waste chutes where they are used in multi-storey blocks (using the labels already developed by RBC).
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are not covered by the government funded project – but efforts were made to provide information to new students before 'Freshers Week'.
- Posters could be provided with spaces to write-in local information
- Building control could seek to improve waste management/collection facilities in new-build estates.
- Should consider community engagement – perhaps a 'user panel' – to evaluate actions and communications – at the design stage and as follow-up.
- Community representatives suggested that it would help if the information was available in more languages.

Waste Reduction:

The 'Waste Hierarchy' goes 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle ...' – recycling should not be the first option. A number of initiatives were discussed and suggestions were made:

- Love Food, Hate Waste – WRAP had run their training/education initiative in Berkshire over 2013/14 – research on their work in London showed it was effective in reducing waste.
- Reading's Repair Café was launched in October 2013 and was being run monthly – now at Jackson's Corner - by Transition Town Reading and Hackspace.
- Pavement collection days – people in a particular area put their unwanted stuff out for anyone to take, and the next day the Council collect what's left - once a month or once a year – this was done in several countries on the continent.
- A somewhat similar initiative was already run in the Caversham Road area – a community group had sponsorship to hire a big skip for large waste, once a year, and tried to separate out re-usable and recyclable materials that were brought to it.
- Community groups could arrange WEEE collections – but there was thought to be a decline in local repair facilities.
- Freecycle / Freecycle – internet-based listing sites - operated in Reading to facilitate re-use of items.
- GREN and Transition Town Reading were collaborating to prepare a web-directory of opportunities to give away and acquire second-hand furniture.

A more comprehensive approach was needed – as outlined in the book 'Cradle to Cradle' which advocates designing for 'up-cycling'.

Links and Contacts:

GREN: www.gren.org.uk email secretary@gren.org.uk

RNN: www.rgneighbours.net email info@rgneighbours.net

re3: <http://www.re3.org.uk/>