

Recycling: The Never-ending Story with Ruth Whaymand

We were delighted to welcome Ruth along to tell us what more we can all do to boost Rushmoor's poor recycling rate. Ruth gave a very informative and self-assured presentation, and it was clear that the audience had a real determination to understand the problems and to make sure they were doing all they could personally to improve matters.

Ruth began by outlining the service currently provided: weekly general waste; fortnightly recycling, glass and garden waste; bulky waste upon request, and charged; clinical waste weekly/on request. She emphasised that the quality of the collection service is very high, even in severe weather, when RBC uses a 4-wheel drive vehicle with snow plough to reach more inaccessible areas.

Rushmoor's collection cost, at £54 per household, is the highest in Hampshire, mainly due to the retention of weekly general waste collection. At the same time, we achieve only 26% recycling, placing us firmly in the bottom quartile nationally, which leaves us woefully short of the 40% target that was set by the Government to be achieved by 2010 and even farther adrift of the 67% target by 2015 set by Waste Strategy 2000. At the moment, therefore, it looks extremely unlikely that we will achieve the target set by the EU of 50% by 2020 and failure will incur penalties against RBC.

Ruth went on to explain the 'waste hierarchy' which aims to reduce the amount of waste going to the incinerator. She made the point that there are measures to be taken even before recycling becomes an option, such as reducing packaging during manufacture and changing attitudes about making things last.

The Waste Hierarchy



If recycling is the best option, however, society benefits in a number of ways:

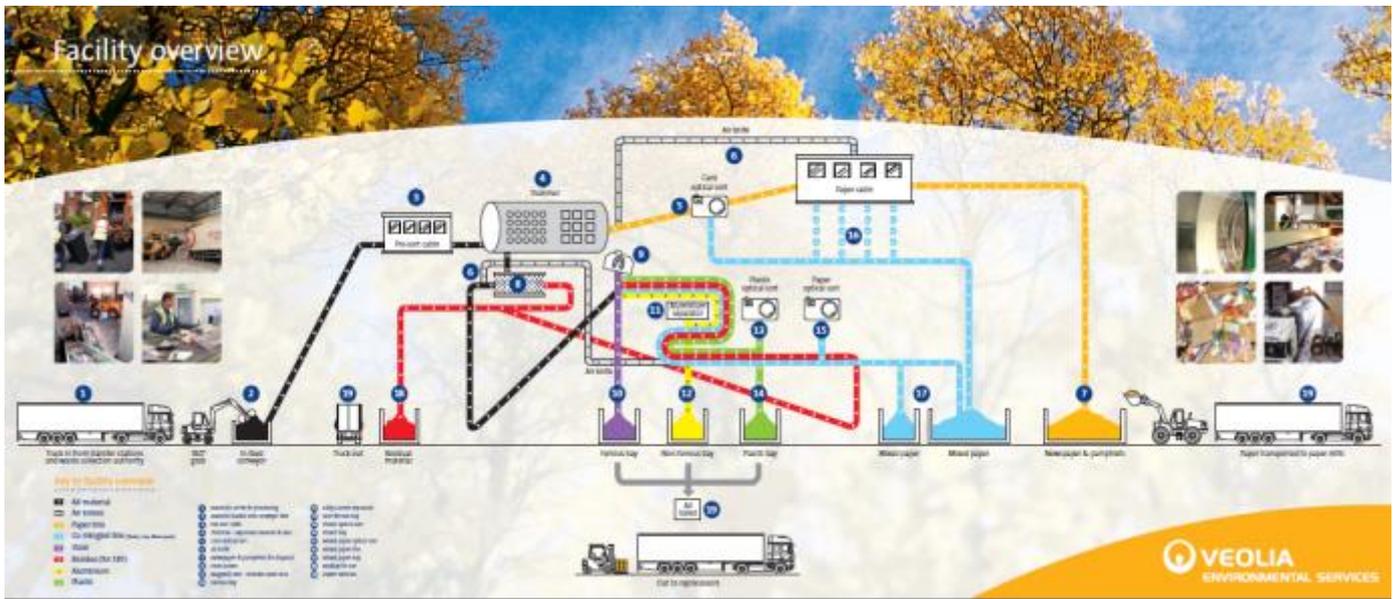
- Conservation of natural resources and habits
- Energy savings
- Mitigating climate change
- Reducing costs
- Raising awareness of environmental issues.

But the concept of recycling is hardly new.

Farnborough once had a regular food waste collection to feed pigs, a practice no longer possible because of the risk of foot and mouth disease, and during WWII metals and waste paper were among the materials collected towards the war effort.

By the latter part of the 20th, however, we had lost the recycling habit. Then, in the 1980s, bottle banks began to appear around the borough. In 1994, RBC introduced the bag and hook system, superseded in 2002 by the familiar blue bins. Kerbside garden waste collection began in 2005, glass collection in 2009 and battery collection in 2012.

What happens to all this recyclable material? A fleet of nine 26-tonne vehicles, each capable of carrying 7 tonnes of waste, generally fill up twice a day. The contents of green bins, blue bins and glass boxes goes to Eelmoor Road waste transfer station, while garden waste goes to Little Bushywarren near Basingstoke to be processed into compost. From Eelmoor Road, the recyclable material is sorted to capture anything that can be re-used in some way and the rest goes to the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in Alton.



The complicated system at the MRF separates paper and card, which goes to a paper mill for pulping. In answer to a question from the audience Ruth explained that shredded paper does not yield the long threads necessary for reprocessing, and tends to clog up the machinery. The cans collected will go to a processing plant to be melted and rolled into sheeting, which can be used for cars, aeroplanes, new cans, etc. Plastic bottles will be melted down into small beads, which can be used for pipes, plant pots, and even fleece clothing. When asked why many plastics are excluded from recycling, Ruth told us that the molecular structure of such things as trays and yoghurt pots makes them unsuitable because their polymer strands are too short to produce good quality new plastics.

Glass is crushed and colour sorted. Then it is simply made into new bottles.

At Little Bushywarren, our garden waste is first shredded, then put into Toblerone shaped piles. The material is turned every two weeks, then screened to produce compost in 16 weeks.

The kerbside battery collection is funded by battery manufacturers and keeps potentially harmful material from contaminating the waste collection process.

Where does the material from our green bins go? To the Energy Recovery Facility at Chineham. Nothing goes to landfill. At the ERF, it is incinerated to produce energy. Metals and bottom ash are recycled.

This whole process can take as little as seven days, with the customer driving the service by making the right choices. RBC tries to help us do that wherever possible, by, for instance redesigning the recycling bins for communal use to reduce contamination. They use Arena magazine, the RBC website and social media to educate and inform. Working with elected members, the Council is actively exploring ways to improve recycling rates, such as the recently introduced furniture re-use project, and is currently engaged in competitive dialogue towards procurement of a new contract for waste collection services.

Additional information on recycling can be found on the RBC website: <http://www.rushmoor.gov.uk>