

Improving waste diversion from civic amenity sites



Funded by DEFRA's Waste Implementation Programme Local Authority Support Unit under the 2004/5 consultancy programme



The projects

Civic amenity sites are an essential source of recyclables, a developing source of reusables, and the main way in which disposal authorities are able to meet their recycling targets and share of future diversion targets. They will also be an essential part of a local authority's approach to diverting biodegradable waste from landfill under LATS. For unitary authorities, including the metropolitan authorities, they are a very important disposal/recycling route, with ready opportunities for integration with collection options. A good well managed site can also act as an example to members of the public in waste management more generally, raising awareness of recycling and waste minimisation.

M-E-L carried out several projects aimed at improving waste diversion through civic amenity sites with funding from DEFRA's Waste Implementation Programme's Local Authority Support Unit. These

have included projects for three unitary authorities, one London Borough and one County Council.

The projects included:

- Assessing whether an authority should remain at their existing site or move to a different site
- Identification of suitable locations for sites as well as the design of two affordable and deliverable new sites that will also maximise diversion and customer service, including a split-level design for one site
- Appraisal and redevelopment of an existing site, including a survey of users and a waste analysis
- Analysis of the salvage operation at a site, redesign of the site and development of a new contract

Barriers to waste diversion at civic amenity sites

Signage

At many of the sites, signage was poor or could be improved. For example one site had only one signpost directing users to it and this was placed less than 300 metres from its entrance. At this site other advisory signage, clear though it was, was situated along the entrance roadway in such a manner that moving traffic could not read it. Recommendations were therefore made with respect to directional signs and also on-site signage. Acting on these

recommendations should make significant improvements to the site and assist residents to use them correctly.

Publicity material

Some of the councils' publicity material was not sufficiently available or could have been more helpful to readers. In one authority, for example, it was found that there was no material specific to the use of site; what there was had been included as part of the annual waste collection information leaflets and these

were not available in most outlets at the time of the project. In another authority we recommended adding a map of the sites to the information leaflet. Better and more widely available publicity material should help increase the correct use of sites; in one area where a survey of users was conducted, we found that most people had heard about the site through word of mouth, local knowledge, newspapers or leaflets with a tiny number using the web site.

Site design and layout

This was an important aspect of several of the projects, including capital investment options to create recycling-focused and customer-friendly single (or preferably) split-level sites. Allocating space for a reuse centre is an important element as is ensuring efficient traffic flow through the site. By way of example, one site was due for an update using a WRAP grant because this was to accommodate a growing need for extra green waste capacity. For this site a major proposal was to revamp the tipping hall system into a raised site. At another site it was recommended that the site be zoned using signage to ensure more efficient use of space.

User satisfaction

Despite some of the sites being old and in need of redesign, site users were found to be generally very satisfied with them where surveys were carried out. This reflects the generally low expectations the public has of waste sites and is something that the improvements made as a result of these projects will go some way to change. These sites need to be seen as community assets, not as 'tips' or 'dump-it sites'.

Management issues

Poor performance may be due to management issues rather than site design or operational factors and there is a limit to what short term consultancy can do to improve this. Communications between the local authority and the site contractor need to be improved in some areas. Contracts may also need to be further incentivised to encourage higher levels of recycling.

Lack of targets

Not all of the authorities had target diversion rates for their sites. This should be standard practice in order

to guide performance. Waste analysis can help to quantify what might be achievable in this respect (see below).

Lack of information

Some of the sites lacked data, drawings and plans, particularly where the sites were older. Compositional data was also absent for many of the sites; this can help in the development of standards or targets as part of contracts, can also help to identify recyclables and reusables not currently being targeted, and also identify where poor direction of the public may be resulting in more waste being disposed of than necessary. This lack of information hampered improvement efforts. For one site, for example, it was immediately clear that there was no real information on the composition of waste being deposited and so before any other recommendations were made, a waste analysis was recommended and carried out. This was essential as the basis of a new performance related contract.

Totters

Although totters do perform a useful function at many sites, they operate independently and tend to keep few records. Without clear overall material recovery targets, they will only recover materials where they can earn profit, thus leaving much that is recyclable or reusable behind. This makes it difficult if not impossible to assess the scale of waste diversion, particularly for items such as WEEE and furniture. Much tighter arrangements will be needed if reuse credits are implemented and also under the WEEE Directive.

Lack of investment

For some of the sites there had been a history of under-investment which meant that improvement efforts started from a very low base. This seems to be particularly the case for unitary and metropolitan authorities which seem to have less capital money to spend. In addition some of the new unitaries had inherited sites from county councils in need of radical improvement. Other sites even have stacks or buildings from the old 'destructors' for example.

Trade waste

In London trade waste is admitted to sites and good money is being made from it. In most areas in England outside London trade waste is banned from sites or only allowed into a very few. The potential for joint household/small trader use of sites should be exploited. In some areas councils are considering site redesign options retaining height barriers. While this complicates site redesigns it does offer the future option of receiving and charging for trade waste.

Vague briefs

Many of the project briefs were vague and needed considerable work to develop them into a workable project. This is inevitable, but time and resources need to be allowed to firm up the brief to make a successful project. Major site redevelopment also takes time and money. A two stage process would allow time for the involvement of consultants in the developing of a brief before moving on to implement the brief.

Existing guidance and advice

Local authorities should be encouraged to make use of the *National Assessment of Civic Amenity Sites* which provides comprehensive guidance on the assessment and improvement of civic amenity sites (Future West/Network Recycling 2004 *National Assessment of Civic Amenity Sites*)

Local authority cultures

There were difficulties with local authorities not working together effectively enough. In one county, the districts withdrew their support for a new site with

no apparent reason for doing so. Where sites are located near local authority boundaries local authorities should enter into agreements for the shared use of such sites by all local residents rather than restricting use to the host local authority which may be unsustainable. The next round of local authority Public Service Agreements (PSAs) should be specified so as to encourage joint working between local authorities on provision of recycling facilities.

Site locations

Many sites are now located in the wrong place. At two sites, for example, the respective towns had grown around them so that both have been overtaken by development and regeneration plans. Replacement sites are planned in industrial estates. Other sites are located on busy roads. One site, for example, was situated in the extreme north east corner of the council's area and as most users live within 2 miles of the site some two thirds of residents do not use it. A major recommendation was for the Borough to sell the existing site for housing development which would allow easily sufficient funding for a more central and ultra modern site to be established, easy for all residents to use.

Site ownership

Finding new sites is difficult due to bad neighbour perceptions so the best must be made of existing sites in most cases. Authorities should also investigate the sites that they themselves own; in one project an ideal site was identified and only then was it discovered that the local authority owned it.

Recommendations to local authorities to overcome barriers

- Review and then improve signage at sites to attract more people to use them and also encourage them to use them most effectively
- Review the publicity material available on sites and improve it if required. Make sure that it is available in all council locations and incorporate details in any mailings to residents. Work with district, if in a shire county, to ensure that their publicity also makes suitable reference to sites.
- Review site design and layout, and if improvements are required examine possible sources of funding. WRAP has programmes on civic amenity sites, for example. Split level sites are the most efficient as they enable the public's vehicles to be separated from site vehicles. Also consider setting up a reuse centre.
- Don't assume that because the public are satisfied now with a site that this will be the same into the future; as they are exposed to

sites in other areas they may start to demand higher standards in their own.

- Be aware that the name people give to sites affects how they think about them. Sites that are still referred to locally as 'tips' will be seen as tips. Branding is very important and should start with site signage but should also be conveyed throughout the council so that all staff are referring to them correctly. Over time members of the public will also adopt this terminology.
- Review management arrangements at sites, particularly the communication between the client and the contractor. Make sure that as client you are aware as you can be about what is happening on the site. Although totters perform a useful function, their activities should be monitored and reuse measured.
- All sites should be given targets for waste diversion, preferably as part of the management contract. These can be incentivised through contract conditions. Targets should then be properly monitored and achievements fed back to the public using the site to act as motivation.
- Information about sites, such as plans and drawings, should be kept in a safe place. The sites may last for many years and future generations of officers will need to know where they can find original documents.
- Compositional analysis of the residual waste stream should be a routine aspect of site management. This could be written into contracts as the contractor's obligation to obtain regular independent audits. This enables an assessment to be made of the effectiveness of site segregation activities, targeting of new

materials for reuse and recycling, and development of future contractual targets.

- Authorities should consider on an ongoing basis the merits of allowing segregated trade waste into sites
- When putting together plans for diverting more waste from civic amenity sites, authorities should be absolutely clear about what they hope to achieve as well as what the constraints and barriers are. This is especially important when working with consultants.
- More use should be made of existing toolkits and guidance documents, particularly the *National Assessment of Civic Amenity Sites* toolkit
- Authorities should seek agreement to share costs and recycling yields from sites close to borders rather than ban non-residents from sites. This is more environmentally sustainable as it reduces transport distances and ultimately more cost effective. The Audit Commission has indicated that a robust survey of residents twice a year would be sufficient evidence for them.
- When searching for new sites, authorities should first investigate sites owned by their own authority. Existing sites should be improved where feasible, though, because of the difficulties of obtaining planning permission for new sites.
- Consider carefully the health and safety implications of proposed schemes, consulting with the Health and Safety Executive as necessary. Ensure that all people working on site have appropriate health and safety training.

What not to do

- Don't continue to allow people to use inappropriate terms to describe civic amenity sites such as 'tips' or 'dump-it sites'. Even though old signage has now mostly been replaced and the council itself uses modern

terminology, every opportunity should be taken to promote this to members of the public. This may seem petty but words are very important in shaping views of reality.

- Don't underestimate the levels of investment that are going to be needed to improve old sites to acceptable levels. Make sure this is budgeted for internally and/or seek external funding.
- Don't close your sites to non-residents without first exploring opportunities for sharing costs and

recycling tonnages with neighbours. The Audit Commission is supportive of this approach provided the evidence for the apportionment is robust.

Conclusion

The DEFRA-funded projects have shown that significant improvements in civic amenity sites are possible given suitable attention and investment. The problems found with civic amenity sites are well known – lack of directional signage, poor on-site signage, lack of feedback to the public on

achievements, lack of publicity and inappropriate locations.

To solve problems needs commitment from both officers and contractors and often requires significant financial investment. The increase in recycling yields is likely to justify this in the medium to long term.

Project team

Consultants: Ted Clover, Chris Coggins, Patrick Coulter, Lewis Herbert, Tony Hammond, Alan Phillips, Steve Robinson

Waste composition work: Sarah Knapp, Barbara Leach

Survey work: Barbara Leach, Chloe Nikitas

M·E·L Research
8 Holt Court
Aston Science Park
Birmingham B7 4AX

Waste Implementation Programme
Local Authority Support Unit
Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6DE

T: 0121 604 4664
info@m-e-l.co.uk
www.m-e-l.co.uk

<http://lasupport.defra.gov.uk>