

A Wealth of Waste

Executive Summary

A report by the BAN Waste Select Committee 2003

BAN Waste & Select Committee

BAN Waste (Byker and Newcastle Waste) is a city wide organisation with nearly 200 members representing a much wider level of public interest and support. It grew from the concerns of residents of Byker and Newcastle about Newcastle City Council's proposal to replace the existing incinerator at Byker with a new plant. BAN Waste was established in January 2000, following a meeting of 200 people to discuss these concerns. It has worked to stimulate public interest and debate on waste issues and to find ways to involve the public in decision-making.

BAN Waste chose a Select Committee made up of city residents, council officers and representatives of trade union and community and voluntary groups to examine many issues to do with waste and its treatment.

Terms of Reference for the Select Committee

"To examine and recommend an appropriate waste strategy for the citizens of Newcastle, and to identify what needs to be done by individuals, companies and the local authority to facilitate that strategy. In particular, to look at:

- *The national guidance in the Government's Waste Strategy 2000*
- *The implications of such a strategy for the health of the community, the provision of employment, the environmental and financial implications for citizens.*
- *Examples of best practice nationally and internationally.*

To develop new methods of participatory democracy and to ensure local people are able to have an effective say in any proposals for a waste strategy."

Introduction

Newcastle has to change the way it handles waste. The British Government, the European Union and public opinion all demand a change.

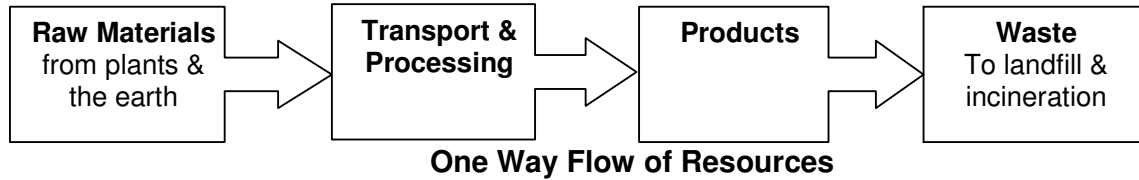
The first report by the Select Committee (published January 2002) urged the adoption of a strategy that provides a vision for the future and meets the needs of tomorrow as well as today. We urged a shift for waste disposal to resource recovery. BAN Waste proposed that the vision of a sustainable waste strategy is linked to the bid for Capital of Culture 2008.

This summary of the report, *A Wealth of Waste*, outlines the waste strategy needed to ensure that Newcastle has a policy of resource management rather than waste disposal. It considers the legal, environmental, health and employment benefits. It also examines the costs and shows the strategy proposed by BAN Waste is affordable.

Newcastle should seize the opportunity to be a leader in Britain, and even the world, in resource management with all the benefits for employment, health, and environment. This change would also secure Newcastle's reputation as a dynamic and proactive municipal authority.

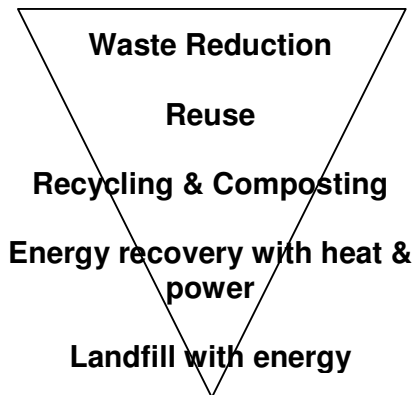
Reasons to Change

Waste is very much a product of the modern western society. Industrialised countries have become used to mining the earth's resources in order to produce materials that for the most part will be discarded after a very short life span. Britain produces 10 tonnes of waste for every tonne of goods produced. And most of the goods, in turn, end up as waste.



New Laws Force Recycling and Composting

The European Union recognised that this one way flow cannot continue. It has agreed laws requiring reduction of waste, more recycling and composting and a change in the ways of handling the remaining waste. The British government has stated the need to move to reducing waste and recycle and re-use the waste that is produced.



Britain lags behind most of Europe in recycling and composting. Parts of Europe are already reaching between 30% and 60%. At present Britain recycles only 11% of waste and Newcastle less than 4%. By 2015 Britain has to reach 33%. If Britain fails to reach the targets, it may well face fines of millions of pounds.

Strategy Unit

A recent Government report, *Waste not, Want not*, urges higher targets for recycling and composting of 35% by 2010 and 45% by 2015. It states that this is possible and already being achieved in other countries.

Landfill

At present 96% of Newcastle's waste goes unsorted or untreated to landfill. Although the running of landfill sites has improved in recent years they still have many problems. Valuable resources are thrown away and wasted. There is evidence of ill-health around them. Landfill sites produce leachate, water polluted with a cocktail of chemicals. Landfill sites produce 25% of all the methane released in the UK, which is a major cause of global warming. Methane can also cause explosions. The cost of landfill is going to rise steeply due to government taxes and stricter controls. In a few years landfill will cost around £60 a tonne.

Incinerators

Incineration linked to the production of heat and energy has been encouraged as an alternative to landfill. However, incinerators destroy the useful materials they burn such as paper, plastics and organic matter. There are major health concerns about the dioxins and heavy metals they produce. Incinerators are expensive to build and operate. They rely on complex controls and filters to limit the release of dangerous chemicals. However, these can and do go wrong.

Recycling

Recycling provides many useful resources such as paper, glass, plastics and metals that can be used again. This provides new jobs. Recycling is a relatively safe process. Recycling materials saves much more energy than is produced by burning these materials.

Compost

The soil of Britain is declining in quality. The need to reduce the organic waste sent to landfill and instead return it to the soil will change waste management in the future. The European Union is bringing forward a directive to require the composting of household waste to produce safe clean food for the soil.

Jobs and Social Justice

A strategy based on a high level of recycling and composting would avoid the negative impact on people's well-being of building a new incinerator. Also landfill sites and incinerators employ few people. In contrast a high level of recycling and composting would provide between 500 and 1,000 direct and indirect jobs. This would make a significant contribution to the economic strength of the city.

Public Opinion

Most people, around 90%, want to recycle and compost more and reduce the amounts of waste.

An Environment Agency study found that householders were very willing to separate their waste and to recycle when they were provided with the means of doing so.

"Where containers are provided incidence of responsible recycling action increases dramatically across the entire spectrum of recyclable products."

The seven BAN Waste Community Events found very high support for a change in the handling of waste. The residents' clear message was that they wanted the council to support recycling by creating a good and easy to use infrastructure.

"The vast majority of people want to dramatically increase the levels of recycling and composting and are willing to do their share, especially if good comprehensive and easy to use systems are in place."

Views from the BAN Waste Community Events	Yes
Do you ever think about the waste you throw away?	88%
Do you think that as a society we produce too much waste?	96%
Do you ever try to reduce your waste?	81%
When shopping do you ever refuse extra plastic bags?	69%
Do you choose items with less packaging?	62%
Should the Council and government do more to reduce waste and packaging?	97%

There are many and powerful reasons to change from waste disposal to resource recovery. The law will force Britain to catch up with other countries. Far too many materials are thrown away or burnt; wasting their value and the energy it took to make them. In contrast, a high level of recycling, composting and re-use is better for employment, the environment and health.

An Outline Strategy

BAN Waste's proposals are based on:

- Achieving and exceeding Government targets
- Making Newcastle a leader in Resource Recovery in Britain and realising employment opportunities
- Using technologies that are flexible and which minimise negative health and environmental impacts
- Systems that are easy for the public to use

The key points of BAN Waste's strategy are

- High quality weekly kerbside collection of recyclable materials
- High quality weekly kerbside collection of kitchen organic matter and fortnightly collection of garden matter
- Good Resource Recovery centres to collect a mix of materials for recycling composting and re-use
- The remaining mixed waste to be collected fortnightly and treated to capture the energy and made safe for landfill

BAN Waste's Strategy focuses on separation at an early stage. This is vital to produce materials for further use. It also reduces many of the problems of dealing with mixed waste. Organic waste separated by the householder will be turned into high quality compost. The Mechanical and Biological Treatment of the residue will capture methane gas for energy and metals for recycling. After MBT the **inactive** remainder would be sent to landfill.

Comparing BAN Waste and Newcastle Council's Planned Strategy

BAN Waste's policy would achieve over 50% recycling composting and re-use, while the Council's plan would reach 26%. Both the Council and BAN Waste propose improved Civic Amenity sites, increased bring schemes and improved recycling from bulky collection. The differences lie in the higher level of recycling planned by BAN Waste, the collection and composting of organic waste (which is likely to become a legal requirement) and the proposed treatments.

	BAN Waste	Newcastle Council
Home Compost	1%	0%
Recycle and Reuse	30%	26%
Compost of Separate Organic Matter	24%	0%
Stabilisation by Composting of Mixed Waste	0%	18%
Incineration	0%	40%
Rubble	4%	0%
Mechanical and Biological Treatment	41%	0%
Direct Landfill	0%	16%
Total	100%	100%

The Council is still considering incinerating 40% of the waste with the active and harmful residue being sent to landfill. A further 18% of mixed waste would be treated in a process similar to composting. However there are concerns that the resulting material would contain dangerous heavy metals and other contamination and therefore would not meet the legal standards for safe use on gardens or farmland. The Council's plan would still directly landfill around 16% of mixed waste.

Costs

The Council cannot continue with the present policies, new laws mean things have to change. The cost of landfill is going to rise sharply due to an increase of landfill tax from £14 to £35 a tonne in the next few years. BAN Waste's policy makes sure that the people of Newcastle gain the benefits of these increase costs by capturing as much of the valuable resources as possible and providing increased employment.

BAN Waste's strategy will be groundbreaking in Britain, although it is based on what has been achieved in other cities around the world. The costs are an estimate, limited by BAN Waste's access to information. However, they show that a good resource recovery strategy could be introduced in Newcastle for about the same expenditure as that proposed by the Council.

Nova Scotia, in Canada, went from virtually no recycling to 50% in less than ten years. It is estimated that this increased the waste management budget by only 15%. At the same time 1,000 jobs were created with all their benefits.

Kerbside Collection for Recycling

Kerbside collection and handling of paper, glass, plastics, metal, etc could be introduced at no extra cost. This is because the value of the resources collected more than covers for the cost of collection and handling.

Kerbside Collection for Compost

The collection and composting of kitchen and garden matter would have a modest additional cost compared to collecting mixed waste.

Kerbside Collection of Mixed Waste

The successful collection of recyclable materials and organic matter would reduce by half the volume of mixed waste in the wheelie bins. This would allow the change from a weekly to fortnightly collection. The savings on this would compensate for the cost of collecting compostable materials.

Treatment

The capital and operating costs of the Mechanical and Biological Treatment of the mixed waste would be in the range £35-£60 at tonne while an incinerator – the comparable part of Newcastle Council's proposed strategy – would cost between £68 and £91 a tonne. MBT would not only produce clean energy and inert landfill it would have significantly lower costs than an incinerator.

Funding

Ban Waste's proposed policy would allow much greater access to additional funding than the Council's approach as it is innovative and of a higher standard than most other local authorities. There are many potential sources such as DEFRA, Landfill Tax, the New Opportunities Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal, the European Union, the Community Fund, WRAP and grant making trusts. Access to some of these funds is only available to the community while others depend on community involvement.

It is clear that the BAN Waste's strategy is affordable. We urge the Council to carry out a full investigation into the costs and benefits of these proposals.

How To DO It

It Can Be Done

The strategy outlined by BAN Waste is achievable. It follows policies supported by the Government's Strategy Unit, Community Recycling Network, Green Alliance and advice from experts. It is based on what is already being achieved in cities in Europe and North America. BAN Waste wants Newcastle to be a leader in Britain. To realise this strategy needs determination from all. We believe that success depends on:

- Vision and determination from the council
- An enthusiastic workforce
- High public involvement

Public Involvement

Crucial to the success of kerbside and composting is strong public support. Newcastle is rich in community initiatives and voluntary groups committed to improving their neighbourhoods. This resource needs to be fully realised.

The public and community groups need to be involved from the start in the design and implementation of the strategy. BAN Waste suggests creating a partnership board, made up of community representatives, council officers and workforce, councillors and businesses to advise on systems and operation of the resource recovery strategy. This body would be responsible for public awareness, with active dialogue being established with residents.

Committed Workforce

An enthusiastic workforce is key. They need to have good pay and conditions to ensure they remain committed. The workforce will have direct contact with the public and can provide guidance, information and support on a daily basis. This work could also be built on with 'green ambassadors' who would do outreach work with schools and organisations.

Business

Waste management companies have an important role to play. They need to actively change their outlook from waste disposal to resource recovery. They must recognise the importance of working with the community and encouraging links with the public sector. The potential opportunities for business and employment in using the recycled resources can make an important contribution to boosting the local economy. The Regional Development Agency, ONE North East, has an important role in ensuring expansion in this area.

Council

Newcastle Council has a fundamental role in any change in the way we deal with waste, as they are the legally responsible body. Whoever runs the system, the Council determines the strategy, its aims, its character and the terms of its operation.

Councils, including Newcastle, are short of cash, but a forward-looking authority can tap into a resource as valuable as money – the skills, energy and abilities of its people. If Newcastle Council decided to work with the city's citizens and workforce to achieve a vision for the future it would discover, as Nova Scotia has, that this is a powerful force for change.

Benefits of BAN Waste's Strategy

Facing the Future – Be Ahead of the Game

Our society will need to alter its attitude to waste and how we deal with it. Waste will be treated as a resource, and the environmental and health impacts minimised.

There are doubts on whether Newcastle's' proposed strategy will reach the targets on recycling or meet likely legislation on compost. BAN Waste's proposed strategy would allow Newcastle the flexibility not only to comply with present and future requirements, but also make the city a leader in resource recovery.

Flexibility – Dealing With Change

The legislation covering waste is shifting towards lower levels of waste production and higher levels of recycling or re-use. The government's Strategy Unit has proposed higher targets for recycling and compost. They have proposed a ban on landfilling some materials. They and others are proposing a tax on incineration. It is clear that in a few years Councils will have to produce safe clean compost.

This increased pressure from legislation along with the changes in waste composition predicted over the coming years mean that Newcastle's Waste Strategy needs to be flexible to cope with such changes. BAN Waste's strategy would ensure that Newcastle is not only ahead of targets but it can deal with future changes in legislation, taxation and composition.

Sustainability

Newcastle's proposed approach, with its dependence on landfill and incineration, is not sustainable. BAN Waste's proposals concentrate on resource recovery rather than waste disposal which will have long-term benefits. Newcastle Council is part of European review of sustainability, PRESUD. This study highlighted the city's waste as a key area of concern. BAN Waste's proposals would greatly enhance the city's reputation for sustainability.

Employment

The higher rates of recycling proposed in BAN Waste's strategy would lead to increased employment. If the markets for reprocessing and re-use were developed within the North East this would be in line with the Government's aim of treating waste where it is produced rather than transporting it to other areas of the country. The potential for employment and sustainable economic development would be immense. There is an opportunity for 500 to 1,000 jobs.

Public Support, Democracy and Culture

There is strong support for recycling from residents, in contrast to the opposition to landfill sites and incinerators. BAN Waste's strategy is a result of wide community involvement and aims to continue and strengthen this. The proposed partnership board would enable direct community involvement in public service delivery and operations. By working with residents to adopt this strategy Newcastle Council would gain wide public support and help to meet government' policy of strengthening local democracy, partnership, community cohesion and improving services.

A city which ensures its residents are active partners in its future plans is a progressive one, and this attitude must assist its endeavours to promote cultural potentialities.

Conclusions

We Have To Change

The need to protect the environment for ourselves and future generations means we have to stop throwing away mountains of waste and creating pollution that is damaging to health and the environment. We have to move from waste disposal to resource recovery.

British and European law states that we have to recycle and compost more. These laws are going to become stricter in the future. There is already a sharply increasing tax on landfill. There is likely to be bans on landfilling some materials, a tax on incineration and requirements to produce clean compost. Newcastle at the moment only recycles 4% of all its waste. It has to change!

A Policy for Now and Future

BAN Waste has outlined a policy that meets present government targets and likely future ones. It is based on high levels of recycling and composting and the safe treatment of materials to produce clean compost and energy and inert matter to landfill. The Council's proposed policy, which includes incineration and landfilling active waste, may not meet present targets and will struggle with future legislation.

BAN Waste's policy is based on what other cities in Europe and North America are already doing. BAN Waste want Newcastle to be a leader in resource recovery in Britain. The Council's proposed strategy will not do this.

An Affordable Policy

BAN Waste's policy is affordable and the overall costs are similar to what the Council plans to spend. BAN Waste's policy would allow access to additional funds that are only available to community partnerships.

Benefits

As well as meeting government targets, BAN Waste's policy would also:

- Gain wide public support
- Provide the opportunity for 500 to 1,000 jobs
- Increase the city's sustainability
- Improve local democracy, community cohesion and public involvement
- Enhance the city's reputation and boost the bid for Capital of Culture in 2008

Doing It

To realise the aims of BAN Waste requires

- Vision and determination from the council
- An enthusiastic workforce
- High public involvement

There needs to be a detailed investigation of these proposals with the involvement of the council, the workforce, BAN Waste and other community groups and stakeholders.

Nova Scotia reached 50% recycling in less than 10 years by involving the public. The change has created jobs and raised the confidence of people there. BAN Waste believes that like Nova Scotia, **Newcastle is too Good to Waste.**