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Our World · Our Waste Our Choice

Summary

BAN Waste Select Committee Interim Report

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2001

Select Committee's Terms of Reference

“To examine and recommend an appropriate waste strategy for the citizens of Newcastle, and to see 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 for such a strategy for the health of the community, the provision of employment, the environmental and the 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.”

Where Are We Today?

Waste

The average household generates over a tonne of waste a year. However waste is treated – whether burnt or merely dumped in the ground – its collection and disposal creates pollution and health hazards. Creating so much waste does not make economic sense. There are huge advantages to using less energy and materials and re-using waste when it is created.

It is immoral for the richest 20% of the world to use up resources at such a rate and create so much pollution, while the poorest 80% of the world still go short of so many basic necessities. There is an overwhelming moral, economic and health argument for a waste strategy that aims to reduce waste and treats the waste produced as a resource.

We need to change the way we deal with waste. Society needs to move from waste disposal to resource recovery.

Turning Waste into a Resource

Almost everything that is thrown away has many uses.

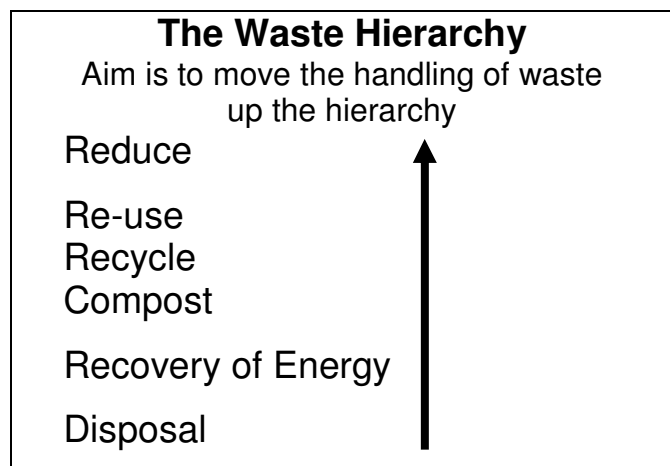
- Glass, paper, metals, textiles and plastics can be recycled.
- Almost all kitchen food scraps and garden cuttings, as well as some paper and cardboard, can produce valuable compost to improve the soil.
- Many fridges, computers and white goods that are thrown away can be repaired and re-used.

What is called waste can be a resource.

Using waste as a resource benefits the environment as it reduces the use of raw materials and the amount of pollution. This would also provide more jobs than just throwing away materials.

Government's Waste Policy

'Waste Strategy 2000', the Government's new strategy sets targets for councils to reduce the amount of waste that is thrown away in landfill. It states that the aim should be to treat waste as near the top of the waste hierarchy as possible. This means that effort and resources should be concentrated on reducing waste, but if waste is produced then it should be treated as a resource – to be re-used, recycled and composted.



Newcastle Council's Present Plans

In 1999/2000 Newcastle Council collected 122,124 tonnes of household waste which averages 1.01 tonnes per household per year. A further 71,488 tonnes of commercial and industrial waste was collected which gives a total of 193,612 tonnes of municipal waste.

At the moment 96% of household waste goes to landfill, with less than 4% recycled. This has to change

Composition of Newcastle's Household Waste:

Material	Percent Composition by Weight	Tonnes
Paper	33	40,301
Organic	30	36,637
Glass	9	10,991
Cans	8	9,770
Plastics	6	7,327
Other	14	17,097
TOTAL	100	122,124

Newcastle has signed a contract with SITA, a multinational company, to handle the city's waste. The proposed new waste strategy is to treat this waste in several ways.

Incineration: mixed waste to be burnt to produce electricity and heat	60,000
'Grey Compost': mixed waste to be made into a type of compost, but it can only be used on landfill sites rather than on gardens and parks as it may be contaminated with plastics, glass and heavy metals	40,000
Recycle: steel, aluminium, paper and glass to be collected at bring schemes and through household collection	18,000
Building Materials: to be recycled	21,000
Clean Compost: garden waste made into good compost	5,000
Landfill	50,000
TOTAL	194,000

Central to Newcastle's present plans are the use of 'grey compost' and a new incinerator. There are genuine concerns about both these schemes as they are near the bottom of the waste hierarchy and can squeeze out preferable options higher up the waste hierarchy. There are also concerns about possible health risks and low levels of employment. Future legislation and taxation may make these options unviable.

This report addresses these concerns and suggests alternatives to develop a new approach to waste that will benefit the people and economy of Newcastle.

A Sustainable Future for Newcastle

We urge Newcastle Council to take the view that waste is a resource to be used for the benefit of the economy and society.

We propose two aims:

- **To cut waste disposal to landfill in half in 5 years (by 2007), this to be part of Newcastle's vision of a City of Culture.**
- **To support the goal of Zero Waste as a long-term vision**

The priorities for money, resources and people's energy should be to deal with waste near the top of the waste hierarchy – reduce, reuse, compost and recycle.

We believe that this sustainable waste strategy could put Newcastle City at the front of British cities in improving the environment. Combining this vision with public involvement, in part through BAN Waste, would put Newcastle in a powerful position to urge the Government to provide funds to turn the aims of this report into reality.

Separation and Collection

Most of the materials in the waste stream have the potential to be re-used, composted and recycled. The main problem with the present system is that the waste is all mixed together with the likelihood that the materials contaminate each other. **The key to successful recycling and composting is to keep the materials separate.**

The backbone of effective recycling is the collection of separate materials from people's houses, a door to door system called kerbside collection. This is the best way to produce materials without contamination, so ensuring easier use and higher prices. This also helps raise awareness on issues on waste. It puts resources into employment. There should be two collection containers, one for recycling and one for compost.

As well as a regular door to door, kerbside, collection of separate materials for recycling and composting there should be:

- good Recycling Centres (Civic Amenity sites) available to all communities to take bulky objects, garden and building materials, etc.
- the free collection of bulky objects from houses. It is a credit to Newcastle that this already exists. It should be continued and linked to the re-use and recycling of the goods collected.

Recycle

The following materials can be recycled, easily collected and there are markets and uses for them.

- Glass
- Hard Plastic
- Newspapers, magazines and paper
- Textiles
- Metals

Compost

Garden and food waste make up 30% of the contents of the average wheelie bin. Compost can have a major role in any waste strategy as it can significantly reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. Compost can help restore soil quality and reduce the need for synthetic fertilisers and peat. There is a commercial market for good compost.

A priority should be to collect as much compostable material as possible, both food and garden materials. This can be done through the development of a hygienic kerbside collection system for domestic waste and the encouragement of bringing green waste to Recycling Centres.

Hazardous Materials

Hazardous waste, including paint, consumer batteries and florescent tubes, needs to be collected separately as these all contaminate compost and can have a harmful effect on the environment and people's health.

Handling the Materials

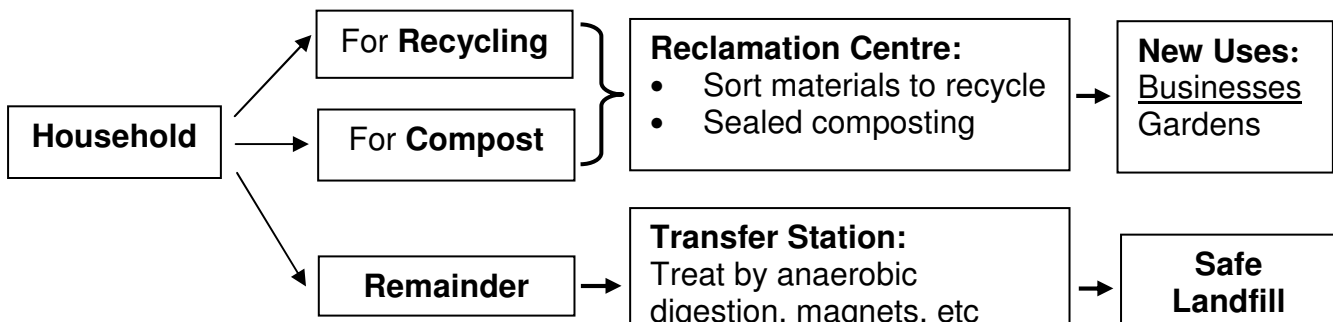
After doorstep collection, the separated materials for recycling and composting could be handled at a Reclamation Centre. This would collect, sort and distribute materials. This Centre could become a centre for new businesses using the recovered materials. The materials for compost could be treated in sealed containers as this overcomes the problems of open air composting.

After the majority of materials that can be re-used, recycled and composted have been collected, the waste that is left will need to be treated in a Transfer station. We suggest that Newcastle Council considers landfill as the least-worst option for dealing with this remaining waste after

- all the materials that can be reused, recycled and composted are removed
- all potential harmful materials such as paint and batteries are removed
- the remainder is mechanically and biologically treated

This fully-treated remainder could be placed in state-of-the-art landfill sites with full controls and monitoring. All new sites for landfill should be carefully assessed to see how suitable they are. The impact on local communities and their views should be taken into account.

We see great potential for anaerobic digestion, where organic matter is rotted in a sealed container to produce a fuel. It could treat the mixed waste residue to gather fuel as part of the pre-treatment for landfill.



Wider Issues

Incineration

The mixed waste going into an incinerator can produce toxins such as dioxins, acids, harmful gases and heavy metals. An incinerator relies on complex filters to remove these harmful gases and particles. There are continuing worries about the health and safety of incinerators. Incinerators are expensive and employ relatively few staff once built. To be financially viable they require a reliable and constant supply of waste. They also need to operate over a long period, around 20 years, to pay back the capital investment. There are risks that an incinerator, which is near the bottom of the waste hierarchy, would limit the commitment to waste reduction, re-use, recycling and composting.

We urge Newcastle Council to give full consideration to a waste strategy without incineration.

Public Involvement

Public support for a new waste strategy is crucial to success. This is best built by public involvement before decisions are made, during implementation and throughout operations. Maintaining public support for kerbside collection is important to its success. One way, is to have incentives to community recycling schemes, groups or schools. Good and regular information is important.

Contract

We recognise that Newcastle needs a new waste strategy. A sustainable waste strategy has to be flexible to deal with future changes in waste, legislation and people's decisions. It must have widespread public support. We believe that it is essential that no long-term decisions are taken on any waste contracts until after there has been full and open assessment of the potential impacts on health and well-being, the environment, employment and finance of different options. There should be a public discussion before any decisions.

Byker Heating

The old incinerator provided heat to the Byker estate. There are serious concerns about the high charges that residents pay. There are separate issues to do with the costs of the heating system, the thermal efficiency of houses and the way that heat is supplied to the houses.

There is a need for a thorough and public investigation into the heating of Byker with the aim of producing a better system, considering the financial and social benefits for residents and efficient use of heat. Byker residents should be fully involved in such a review with the right to decide on what is the most appropriate system.

Government

We welcome the Government's aims of "*breaking the link between economic growth and waste production*" and "*putting waste which is produced to good use*". To turn these into action the Government should introduce targets and policies for home and community composting, minimising waste and reducing hazardous materials.

Regional Economy

The Government and ONE North East should have a programme to support and encourage businesses and councils that are moving to reduce the use of materials and energy. An important part of the region's economic strategy should be support for the production of goods to last; the use of recycled materials in existing industries; and finding new uses for recycled materials. This approach based on recycling and re-use provides many more benefits to society than the disposal of goods and materials

We applaud the businesses that do reduce their waste and treat waste as a resource. We would urge more to do the same. This is an opportunity for Newcastle to be at the front of a new wave of economic growth.

Environment Agency

We believe the Agency must improve its policies and public reputation, which have been tarnished by recent events. It should be the defender of the public and a champion of the environment and sustainable development. It needs to be more open and engaging with the public. The monitoring of polluting plants, such as landfill sites and incinerators, needs greater clarity and rigour.

Progress Already

We applaud the efforts of local people, in the community, public sector and business, who are working to change the way we deal with waste. This includes the existing operations on Tyneside that re-use computers, white goods and furniture; Newcastle's present home composting scheme and the planned improvements to Walbottle Civic Amenity site. We would urge these to be supported and extended to gain greater environmental, employment and social benefits.

Next Stage

This Interim Report of the BAN Waste Select Committee presents some possible strategies for Newcastle's waste. We believe these form the basis of a sustainable waste policy. There now needs to be more detailed work, looking at how best to implement the general aims. There also need to be assessments of the impacts of the options covering health, the environment, employment and other financial issues.

We recognise the financial restrictions on the Council and hope to work with them to find ways of turning this vision into a reality. This would benefit the people of Newcastle, with more jobs, a better environment and less health risks.

We hope Newcastle Council will recognise the opportunities of this report and fully support the process of public involvement in decision-making.

BAN Waste

Byker and Newcastle Waste, BAN Waste, is a city-wide community organisation working in partnership with Newcastle Council to look at the best waste strategy for the city. BAN Waste was established, on the suggestion of the Council, in January 2000 in response to widespread concern about plans to replace the existing incinerator at Byker with a new plant.

BAN Waste is part of a growing understanding that we should use our resources wisely to improve the environment, to reduce harm to health and not waste resources.

It has worked to stimulate public interest and debate on waste issues and to find ways to involve the public in decisions.

Select Committee

The Select Committee, made up of residents of Newcastle, aims to inform both the Council and the public about issues to do with waste. The Select Committee will sit for two phases. This report is a summary of the findings of the first phase. Now there will be assessments of health, environment, employment and other economic impacts of the different options. There will also be a series of Community Events to increase the public's involvement.

After these the Select Committee will sit again to draw conclusions in a Final Report which will recommend a sustainable waste strategy for the city of Newcastle. Newcastle Council has stated that it will seriously consider the results of the Select Committee's investigation

(Back Cover)

**Published by BAN Waste,
Healthy Cities,
14 Great North Road,
Newcastle, NE2 4PS**

**Printed by
Newcastle City Council
Civic Centre
Barras Bridge
Newcastle upon Tyne**