

**Report to Councillor Deborah Urquhart, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change**

**September 2021**

**Recycling Centres Booking System Review**

**Report by Director of Environment and Public Protection**

**Electoral divisions: All**

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**Summary**

Since [April 2021 a pilot booking](#) system has been in operation at six of the eleven Recycling Centres\* in West Sussex.

In anticipation of the spring surge, i.e. the peak demand period, coinciding with reduced capacity due to Covid restrictions, it was necessary to look at an alternative way to ensure that residents could continue to access the sites and also reduce the queuing on nearby roads that were impacting on the highway network and householders and business owners who are located near the sites.

The scheme has proved successful in operation: not only meeting the above objectives but also proving to be popular with a large majority of users.

It is proposed to undertake formal public consultation about adopting the scheme permanently at the six trial sites as well as the Burgess Hill Recycling Centre.

\* Note that the Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRS) have been rebranded as "Recycling Centres". This took advantage of new signage being provided by the incoming contractor following the sale of Viridor West Sussex Ltd to Biffa plc on 1 September 2021

**Recommendation**

That the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change approves that:

1. a public consultation is undertaken in respect of making the pilot booking system permanent at the Bognor, Crawley, Horsham, Littlehampton, Shoreham and Worthing Recycling Centres and extending the booking system to include the Burgess Hill Recycling Centre.
2. the consultation responses and any proposals for a permanent booking system will be considered by the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee prior to any further decision.

## **Proposal**

### **1 Background and context**

- 1.1 Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Waste Disposal Authorities like West Sussex County Council have a duty to arrange for accessible places to be provided at which persons resident in its area may, at reasonable times, deposit their household waste free of charge.
- 1.2 Currently West Sussex provides 11 permanent Recycling Centres, these sites have both Summer (09:00-18:00) and Winter (09:00-16:00) opening hours and have opening days that range between 5-6 days in winter and 5-7 days a week in summer.
- 1.3 A mobile service serving Selsey, and the Witterings in the Chichester district is available one day a week on a fortnightly basis. From April 2021, the local Town and Parish Councils have funded this service which will not be affected by these proposals.
- 1.4 Queuing at most sites can be an issue at peak times, weekends and bank holidays and can disrupt the traffic system around the area and impact on neighbouring residents and local businesses. Prior to the introduction of the pilot booking scheme, it was not uncommon, during peak periods, to have vehicles waiting to enter several of the Recycling Centres for 45-90 minutes.
- 1.5 At the end of December 2020 queues at a number of the Recycling Centres (Littlehampton, Shoreham, Horsham, Crawley and Worthing) become so long that Sussex Police made requests for sites to close on the grounds of safety for the local area.
- 1.6 From April 2021 a booking system was implemented at the six sites known to experience queuing. The introduction of the booking system to manage demand for site access has worked well. Users are able to pre-book safe access to a Recycling Centre with minimal on-site waiting time local residents have been able to gain access to their homes and local businesses have been able to trade without being impeded by queuing cars.
- 1.7 By the end of August over 300,000 bookings will have been made using the system.

### **2 Benefits of the Booking System**

- 2.1 There is widespread familiarity and acceptance of online and telephone booking systems amongst the public via commonly used services such as click-and-collect shopping, medical appointments, and online supermarket deliveries.
- 2.2 User feedback confirms that the scheme is easy-to-use. It gives residents the confidence to know that when they have booked a slot for their waste, they will be able to travel to the site, not wait in a queue and have enough time to unload their waste without delay in a safe environment.
- 2.3 With the elimination of peak-time overcrowding, site users are able to approach the container they require and, with the minimum of carry distance necessary, deposit their waste safely.

- 2.4 When a resident makes an online booking a confirmation e-mail is sent providing a reference to the booking that can be used when accessing the user's chosen site. A reminder e-mail is sent 24 hours before the booking slot time. Slots can be booked online at any time of day or night removing the need to wait on phone lines opening to make a booking.
- 2.5 During the booking process the terms and conditions of use and any site restrictions on vehicles and waste types are clearly signposted and any mismatching of waste and vehicle types with site acceptance criteria are filtered out. Filtering at the time of booking helps eliminate misunderstandings and avoids customers turning up at sites that are unable to accept either their waste or vehicle type.
- 2.6 Bookings can also be made by telephone if the resident does not have access to online facilities or if they prefer to speak with a West Sussex County Council Contact Centre representative. To date 6% of bookings have been made via telephone call.
- 2.7 The system provides the ability to update residents who have booked slots about unforeseen circumstances such as site closures, e.g., due to adverse weather conditions. This was used to update residents when a major road traffic accident closed Crawley and wasted journeys by residents and contribution to traffic congestion were avoided.
- 2.8 The system provides a good picture of demand on the sites which will assist with future planning of the waste infrastructure.
- 2.9 The centres have seen a dramatic drop in traders attempting to deposit commercial waste. The sites are, by law, provided free of charge to householders for household waste but are not funded through Business Rates or other means for free disposal of commercial waste.
- 2.10 It is difficult to assess the impact of the system on visitor numbers due to other disruptive factors. In March 2020 all Recycling Centres were closed for a number of weeks due to COVID-19 and Government restrictions of some kind were in place until July 2021. In April 2019 a major fire at Westhampnett pushed usage to other sites which had additional opening days to cope.
- 2.11 One of the main aims of the booking system was to encourage residents to make fewer visits with larger loads, between April – July 2021 the average weight per visit was 69.4 kg compared to 65.5 kg covering the same period in 2019.

### **3 Experience of Customers, Staff, Local Businesses and Nearby Residents**

- 3.1 The current booking system has resulted in additional benefits in relation to health and safety, site operations and operating costs.
- 3.2 The reduced queues has greatly reduced emissions and improved air quality to nearby residents and businesses.
- 3.3 The booking system has reduced disruption to nearby businesses and their customers

- 3.4 The booking system has substantially eliminated the on-site and off-site risks associated with safely managing user demand. It has helped to match capacity at each site whilst ensuring suitable and largely un-delayed access is available.
- 3.5 Controlling the number of vehicles on site affords staff and site users greater safety due to fewer internal vehicle and pedestrian interactions.
- 3.6 Regulating traffic flow is conducive to a safe environment for users and staff. Customers are now more likely to have space to park alongside their required container and not have to carry materials within the site, thereby reducing the risk of slips/trips/falls, strains and injury or accidents.
- 3.7 Site staff were asked for feedback on the system and have unanimously requested that it remains in place for the following reasons:
- Instances of abuse towards staff have fallen
  - Attempts to deposit trade waste illegally have reduced
  - A reduction in instances of slips, trips and falls by members of the public
  - It has been easier to keep track of users' movements on the site for the benefit of safety and placement of items in the right container
  - The regulation of traffic flow is conducive to keeping the site tidy and free of dropped items, scheduling of rest breaks and training
  - Comments from the public have been positive
- 3.8 Steve Sawyer, the Executive Director of Manor Royal Business Improvement District, who works with the businesses in Metcalf Way, Crawley which have been impacted by queueing traffic for a number of years has provided feedback attached at Appendix A. This shows that the local businesses are in favour of the system staying in place and being made a permanent feature.
- 3.9 A permanent booking scheme at Crawley might eliminate the need for a one-way traffic system in the area, which was proposed as mitigatory measure to tackle the congestion issue, but was unpopular.
- 3.10 Traders at the Arun Business Park in Bognor have been impacted by queuing traffic for a number of years provided feedback at Appendix B. Again, this shows that local businesses would like the system to be made permanent.
- 3.11 The Burgess Hill site is a dual Recycling Centre and Waste Transfer Station used by Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC). Queues can form from a mixture of customers, Refuse Collection and other MSDC vehicles and articulated HGVs. At times traffic management is required to allow HGV access past the cars.
- 3.12 The Burgess Hill site is accessed via Fairbridge Way. This road was originally used only to gain access to the Recycling Centre and a commercial business and is a dead end. In September 2019 permission was granted to build 325 homes on an adjacent brownfield site and building commenced shortly afterwards. As these homes are occupied, additional pressure will be placed on the access roads. Appendix C indicates the location of the development in relation to the site.

## **4 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)**

### **4.1 Put in place traffic management at sites for busy periods – Not Recommended**

Traffic management in the form of attempting to control traffic by staff was put in place during post lockdown reopening in May 2020. This had very limited success; many of the sites West Sussex operate do not contain room to queue vehicles and many of the queues take place out of the site on the public highway. This approach would also increase costs and no budget exists for this. This would attempt to mitigate but not prevent congestion.

### **4.2 Remove the booking system – Not Recommended**

Arguably the need to regulate usage over the winter months is diminished however the scheme has maximum benefit during the spring and summer months. Shorter hours commence from 1 October and generally October and March can be busy months, the booking system will spread the visitors during these months. Given the generally positive response to the scheme from users and other stakeholders it makes good sense to maintain it. Ceasing the scheme over the winter and reinstating it in the spring of 2022 risks confusion and is much more complex message to manage.

### **4.3 Extend trial to establish usage over a second, possibly less unusual, spring and re-evaluate in autumn 2022 – Not Recommended**

The scheme has proved both effective and popular with users and, while the Covid-related measures will hopefully not need to be reinstated, the wider benefits set out above are clear. There is not much more that can be learned from an extended trial and therefore public consultation on a clear policy proposal at this point is recommended.

### **4.4 Make permanent removing some and/or adding further sites – Not Recommended**

Westhampnett, Midhurst, Billingshurst and East Grinstead – as well as the mobile site serving Selsey and the Witterings - historically have not had, and nor is it envisaged for the time being, any issues with disruptive, off-site queuing. Having “non-booking” sites located across West Sussex also provides residents with an option if they need to use a site at short notice and cannot get a booking. The non-booking sites are strategically located in the North, Central and Southern parts of the county.

There is an argument to adopt a uniform system across the county with the scheme applying at all sites. However, the rationale for a booking scheme that applies to the trial sites – and will shortly apply to Burgess Hill – does not currently apply at these other sites.

While there is currently no major issue at these sites, there could be in the future, particularly given the rate of housing growth in parts of the county. The question of adding future sites could be acknowledged in the consultation process. If, in due course, it is proposed that the current scheme be adopted permanently, a mechanism for this should be outlined in the decision process.

**4.5 Public consultation is undertaken to make the booking system permanent in the future and add Burgess Hill Recycling Centre to the booking system – Preferred Option**

The arguments preferring this option are set out throughout the report.

**5 Consultation, engagement and advice**

- 5.1 A survey of residents visiting the West Sussex Recycling Centres was carried out by Resource Futures and ran in July 21 the full survey report is attached at Appendix D.
- 5.2 Over the period, 911 surveys were achieved, 609 from sites with the booking system and 302 from sites without the booking system. The headline results are summarised below:
- 75% of site users surveyed at a booking system site find the experience of using the booking system either excellent or good
  - 81% saying the system was easy to use
  - 99% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed, that they thought the queuing time had improved since the introduction of the booking system
  - 78% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that there are always booking slots available when they wanted them
  - 79% of people answered yes to booking system should be a permanent arrangement
  - 98% of all respondents rated their overall experience of using the site as excellent or good
  - The most significant improvement users suggested was that the booking system should allow for on the day bookings, to increase flexibility (61%)
- 5.3 To gather feedback on the trial an email address was set up contacted by emailing [Bookingsystemfeedback@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Bookingsystemfeedback@westsussex.gov.uk) this feedback has been put into a summary and is attached as Appendix E. Residents sent 243 emails which contained 759 items of feedback on the system. Many emails covered several different comments within their one communication.
- 5.4 During the period 29 March to 30 July residents made 231,180 bookings, as expected the early weeks of the system generated the most comments with 310 being registered in the first month of the launch of the system. In July only 14 items of feedback were received.
- 5.5 At present users cannot make a booking on the same day even if spaces are available and this is seen as one for the few negative aspects of the scheme. Waste Team Officers are actively working with Biffa on improving internet connectivity at the sites and with the software provider with a view to adding this as an option.

**6 Finance**

- 6.1 Whilst it is difficult to attribute changes in visitor numbers to any one factor the levels of waste, across a number of materials, seen at the Recycling Centres has seen a marked reduction during the period of the trial. A reduction in trade waste abuse will also have contributed to the reduced tonnages seen in the period. The expectation therefore is that the cost of implementing and administering the booking system can be met from within existing resources.

	Current Year 2021/22 £s	Year 2 2022/23 £s	Year 3 2023/24 £s	Year 4 2024/25 £s
IT System Costs	22,700	13,200	13,200	13,200
Provision of Call Handling	52,000	78,000	78,000	78,000
Reduction in Waste at Sites	-74.700	-81,200	-81,200	-81,200
Net Impact from Decision	0	0	0	0

## 6.2 The effect of the proposal:

### (a) **How the cost represents good value**

West Sussex needs to ensure that its Recycling Centre network is used to its full potential, and a booking system will encourage frequent users who dispose of small quantities of waste to attend less frequently and reduce the number of total visits undertaken.

### (b) **Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

The rate of new housing growth in West Sussex means that the usage of sites is going to increase. With limited capital and land options available for the County Council to invest in infrastructure, the booking system will have the effect of smoothing peaks and troughs in demand and make best use of the assets during opening hours.

### (c) **Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact**

No impact on West Sussex County Council IT services as the system is externally hosted and supplied by a third party.

Call Centre costs are covered as part of the proposal.

## 7 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Booking system not available to resident as third-party website is down	The system has been available 99.99% of the time since it was live. In the event of serious problems, the booking scheme would be suspended while the problem is fixed.
Resident arrives without a booking	Resident is not admitted and reminded that a booking is required to use the site. This will be mitigated by the implementation of same day booking, currently fewer than 5% of residents visit with no booking.
Resident not turning up	Residents are encouraged to cancel as far as possible in advance if they cannot take up their slot. "No-shows" will be monitored, and anyone

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating Action (in place or planned)</b>
	who repeatedly takes up a slot without using it can be contacted. By monitoring the no-shows percentage, the number of booking slots may be increased.
Reverting back to no booking system will cause traffic issues which may worsen over time	Service will need to arrange for traffic management which is unbudgeted expenditure and not always effective. There will be reputational issues given the popularity of the scheme with those previously affected by traffic congestion.
Government may issue guidance to prohibit booking schemes	This is an issue that is best left to local determination and it is considered unlikely that government would use legislation to fetter local discretion.
Loss of public support	The site user survey has shown that the majority of users support the booking system.

## **8 Policy alignment and compliance**

### **8.1 Legal implications**

WSCC as the Waste Disposal Authority has a statutory duty to provide facilities for its residents to dispose of their household waste under section 51 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and has express and implied powers as to how this duty can be exercised.

### **8.2 Equality duty and human rights assessment**

Age and disability have been identified as having potential for a low negative impact. It is recognised that some people may find it difficult to use the booking system and the aim is to ensure there are no barriers to accessing the Recycling Centres. The system is compliant with digital accessibility standards so that customers using screen readers or with low vision can use the website. For those who cannot access the internet, bookings can be made through West Sussex County Council's Call Centre.

Disabled or residents who have a mental health condition who are impacted by not being able to book on the same day are able to contact the Call Centre to plan for a same day visit as required.

### **8.3 Climate Change and Public health**

This proposal will reduce the number of cars queuing on and near Recycling Centres including in areas of housing and business / retail parks, this will have a positive impact on emissions, pollution and air quality for the area. The encouragement to make fewer visits with more material per visit is also helpful in carbon reduction terms.

### **8.4 Crime and Disorder**

Additional management controls could lead to anti-social or illegal behaviour in respect of fly-tipping. It is not possible to guarantee that changes will not have

an impact; however, the County Council in partnership with the District and Borough Councils will be using the 'Lets SCRAP fly-tipping' campaign that other authorities have reported successes with.

'Let's SCRAP fly tipping' is a new county-wide campaign that is designed to:

- alert local residents and business owners to the different forms of fly tipping, and that we all have a shared responsibility to help tackle the problem
- highlight the enforcement work taking place to try to identify and punish the perpetrators of fly tipping in the county wherever possible

The campaign which started in April 2021 began with educating residents about the different forms of fly tipping, and the duty of care everyone has when it comes to disposing of waste responsibly (by following the 'SCRAP code'). It will then move on to warn of the implications for people who do fly tip and could lead to Fixed Penalty Notices and prosecutions for offenders.

The District and Borough Councils in West Sussex are responsible for reporting the numbers of fly tipping for their own areas on Waste Data Flow.

The table below shows the number of fly tipping incidents reported by the District and Borough Councils in West Sussex since January 2019 where data has been entered by the relevant authority.

The numbers reported vary from quarter to quarter and year to year, Adur reported 294 incidents between Jan-Mar 2019 yet only 284 total incidents for the rest of the year Apr – Dec 2019. Horsham reported 367 incidents in Jan – March 21 yet in Apr – June 2021, the period the booking system was introduced, that number has reduced to 290 which is fewer incidents than reported in Jan - March 2020.

These numbers show no apparent trends that can be easily identified, much of the waste collected from fly tipping is waste that can be placed at the kerbside or taken to a Recycling Centre.

Total Fly-Tipping Incidents – West Sussex								
Total Incidents Quarterly	Adur	Worthing	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Total West Sussex
Jan 19 - Mar 19	294	96	241	260	214	223	86	1414
Apr 19 - Jun 19	95	105	392	247	279	255	69	1442
Jul 19 - Sep 19	113	115	432	211	329	227	119	1546
Oct 19 - Dec 19	75	65	321	281	245	284	74	1345
Jan 20 - Mar 20	124	67	310	272	196	300	129	1398
Apr 20 - Jun 20	159	69	466	355	328	421	157	1955
Jul 20 - Sep 20	142	208	no data	385	421	359	141	1656
Oct 20 - Dec 20	289	241	no data	415	344	323	114	1726
Jan 21 - Mar 21	305	242	no data	502	no data	367	130	1546
Apr 21 - Jun 21	301	274	no data	298	no data	290	119	1282

## 8.5 Social value

This proposal has no major social value impact; while some may find that booking is an additional burden, many users reported an improved experience through reduced queuing.

## 8.6 Council policy

The recommendation does not conflict with any of the Council's four key priorities and supports three -

Keeping People Safe from Vulnerable Situations - although primarily concerned with social care, this priority also extends to safe use of council facilities.

A Sustainable and Prosperous Economy - the benefit to local businesses is clear from the evidence provided by them.

Making the Best Use of Resources - the proposal will sustain the improved efficiency of the Recycling Centres, reducing traffic delays and provides West Sussex residents living near sites better access and less inconvenience.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Manor Royal Business Improvement District Feedback

Appendix B – Arun Business Park Feedback

Appendix C – Burgess Hill Housing/Site Map

Appendix D – Customer Site Survey Report

Appendix E – Email Feedback Summary

## **Background papers**

None