

Harrow Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Forum Environment & Sustainability Subgroup meeting

Notes from 5th meeting, held on Tuesday 11 September 2018 at 6.00pm
at the Green Pavilion, Harrow Recreation Ground, HA1 1PB.

Attendees

Mick Oliver	Harrow University of the Third Age (Sustainability Group) – Acting Chair
Gerry Devine	Harrow VCS Forum Vice-Chair, Harrow Community Transport
Swan Kazi	Harrow Parks Forum
Jane Galbraith	Harrow Parks Forum, Harrow Recreation Ground Users Association
Diana Dolman	Harrow in LEAF
John Hollingdale	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Pamela Swain	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Margaret Huitson	Harrow Natural History Society
Penny Hayward	Harrow Cyclists
Linda Robinson	38 Degrees Local Harrow Group - Notetaker
Lorene Cavagna	Harrow Council, Recycling & Waste Strategy Manager

Apologies

Jane Skelly	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Steve Bolsover	Harrow Nature Conservation Forum

1. **Welcome** by Mick, acting as meeting Chair this time. Thanks to Jane G for opening pavilion and providing refreshments. **Introductions** all round. Lorene new to her council role.
2. **Notes from the last meeting** (17 Apr) corrections already made. Actions carried out. Follow up still awaited, including from previous meeting (24 Jan):
 - 2.1 **Air Quality** – Mick now chasing new Portfolio Holder, Varsha Parmar, for details e.g. re equipment and locations. No news yet.
Action:
Mick to keep pressing for responses on behalf of Harrow U3A Sustainability Group.
 - 2.2 **Kenton Recreation Ground** – Verbal council assurances given to Gerry, re restoration of temporary overspill car park to original parkland afterwards. More solid, written guarantee sought by Harrow Parks Forum (HPF), to safeguard against future non-park use.
Action:
Swan to request commitment in writing on behalf of HPF.
 - 2.3 **Open Spaces Act** – no satisfactory answers yet received from Legal, Planning or Parks departments about interpretation of Open Spaces Act/council policies re building on Byron Park development and classification of Byron Hall, despite chasing by Gerry and by HPF.
Action:
Swan to lead HPF in considering whether to pursue the questions via a Freedom of Information route.
 - 2.4 **GLA's [Roque Landlord Checker Scheme](#)** – still not showing any Harrow landlords. Excuses about election purdah given to Linda by Graham Henson in May.
Action:
Linda to chase once again on behalf of 38 Degrees Harrow Local Group.
 - 2.5 **Highways** – Responses about dropped kerbs, potholes and road hump surfacing received from David Eaglesham and circulated to all members by Linda in June.
 - 2.6 **Rail Transport** – Harrow Public Transport Users Association's decision against petitioning for Met Line extension. Proposals now dead.

3. Questions and Answers

3.1 Under the current contracts, which of Harrow's waste streams are destined for Energy from Waste (EfW), and which (if any) are still destined for landfill?

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

Lorene's answer: West London Waste Authority (West Waste) responsible for disposal of non-recyclables (including green bin contents), of which 100% destined for EfW. Bulky items e.g. furniture/mattresses/appliances dealt with separately, materials recovered for re-use where possible. West Waste not responsible for disposal of recyclables (including blue bin contents), handled by direct contract between Harrow and Viridor's Materials Reclamation Facilities (MRF). Of co-mingled collections, 92% recycled at MRF and only 8% unable to be recycled, of which 92% sent for EfW by Viridor and only 8% ending up in landfill (i.e. 0.64% of total collected recycling).

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

MRF contracts/operators - different for each borough council in West London.
Harrow's contract with Viridor due for retender next year.

3.2 What progress has Harrow made towards acquiring its own Materials Reclamation Facility (MRF) (outside Harrow), as favoured by Graham Henson at our Subgroup meeting last November?

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

Lorene's answer: Possibilities still being explored. Costs likely to be prohibitive.

3.3 We've read at <https://www.getwestlondon.co.uk/news/west-london-news/west-london-councils-sent-thousands-14837546> that, in 2016/7, Harrow sent 526 tonnes of wood to Belgium as well as sending 7,175 tonnes of paper and card and 251 tonnes of plastic to locations outside Europe. As China and other countries are restricting their imports of Europe's waste, it seems that some of the UK's waste is being exported for criminal or irresponsible reprocessing to Poland and Malaysia, where there are no such restrictions. Please can you provide current details on any of Harrow's waste that is being exported overseas?

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

Lorene's answer: Viridor very diligent about 'duty of care' – documentation, site visits, measures to prevent unethical dumping anywhere. Harrow's record therefore one of the best. Some to China; tiny amount to Malaysia; wood to Belgium as nearest suitable reprocessing site so cheapest and most environmentally friendly for transport. Final destinations changeable, dependent on markets for recycled materials.

3.4 Harrow purports to be committed to the concepts of Zero Waste and the Circular Economy, so why do we never hear these terminologies used or promoted locally?

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Personally very keen to familiarise all with these terms. Simple for people to understand. Coming up against resistance from Harrow's Communications Department.

Action:

Lorene to step up efforts in persuading Communications team to promote 'Zero Waste' concepts via its available media.

3.5 At our council-owned premises there are no recycling facilities - only one general bin collected by the council as 'commercial waste'. Couldn't our service charges be used towards improving recycling rates at council-owned sites like ours?

(question from Harrow Community Transport)

Lorene's answer: Premises at Forward Drive Depot due for redevelopment, not yet well set up for recycling despite being next to Recycling Centre! Unaware of waste arrangements for community groups based in council-owned premises at The Lodge in Pinner Road. Probably treated as 'commercial premises', so responsibility of the Commercial Department (very secretive). Charges applicable for waste services, with higher costs for recycling bin/collection than for residual waste.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Approach Alan Whiting (Environmental Services Manager) with requests for recycling bins.

Action:

Lorene to investigate possible improvements for recycling at The Lodge.

3.6 **What powers does the council have to make provisions in the planning process to ensure that new builds are 'recycling friendly', with appropriate facilities 'designed in' such as waste chutes, sufficient space for bins and easy, unobstructive access for using and emptying them?** (question from Harrow Community Transport)

Lorene's answer: Environmental Services now working closely with Planning on all this.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Certain provisions already specified in existing regulations for new planning applications.

3.7 **How will your area of responsibility be impacted by Brexit?**

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

Lorene's answer: Not sure. Working with Viridor to minimise potential problems with European destinations for waste exports.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Possible issues/extra costs for recycle processing, e.g. wood in Belgium (see 3.3 above).

3.8 **Where does our food waste go and how is it treated?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Taken to anaerobic digestion plant in Hertfordshire. No waste or methane produced. Very high participation rate in Harrow's food waste collections – over 60%.

3.9 **How's it going with the trial of separate food waste collection from flats? Is it true that some council tenants have been threatened with fines 'shared by the whole block' when the collective red food waste bins are contaminated by some who haven't grasped the new system?**

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

Lorene's answer: Pilot on four council estates, very good so far. Surprisingly lower levels of contamination than expected. Kitchen caddies and initial supply of biodegradable bags provided, with one red wheelie bin per block. No knowledge of fines being threatened – no need as contamination easily eliminated during collection. Culprits identified and corrected where possible. Liaison between Housing Department and Lorene's line manager, Rebecca Johnson, Head of Environment & Waste Strategy. Second pilot planned for council flats in Hatch end area. Eventual extension to privately owned flats. Flats above shops too problematic to be included.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

What to do with dead wildlife e.g. rats or birds killed by cats etc.? Wrap up and put in residual waste, definitely not food waste.

3.10 **When, if ever, will Harrow next be distributing free 'compost' from the results of its garden waste collections? Or is this bounty now a thing of the past?**

(question from Harrow in LEAF)

Lorene's answer: Unaware of this historical dividend from previous contract, prior to separation of food and garden waste collections.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Much missed community access to free distribution of soil improver in parks, under former combined contract with West London Composting in Harefield (WLC, in conjunction with Grundons). Popular bonus for many years but no longer available.

Garden waste disposal contract still with WLC. Assuming lower quality soil improver from garden waste without food waste. Unclear about costs and payments (net charges payable to WLC for disposal or to Harrow for supply?), as rates dependent on fluctuating market value of soil improver produced.

Grant used by Harrow in LEAF to build separate big collection bins on allotments for leaves, for wood chippings and for general composting, but initial council support now disappointingly withdrawn.

Leaves swept up by park volunteers being taken home to chargeable brown bin collections, so leaf bins needed in parks, to be provided/emptied by the council.

Action:

Lorene to investigate possibilities of resuming the provision of soil improver for the community from WLC's garden waste process.

Lorene to explore feasibility and costs of introducing bins in parks for leaves, and also for recycling (see 3.14 below).

3.11 **What happens to all the wood collected at Forward Drive that is no longer counted towards recycling targets? Could any of it be separated for use on allotments?**

(question from Harrow in LEAF)

Lorene's answer: Although no longer included in recycling figures, treatment unchanged.

Some reused where possible; most only fit for burning; some sent via West Waste for EfW.

Possibility of making some available for allotment holders if required/requested.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Health & Safety concerns about nails etc. in discarded wood.

No noticeable consideration about potential recovery of other materials from wooden furniture, e.g. textile coverings or metal frames.

3.12 **We welcome the pilot scheme collecting Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment in trial wards. Please could you give us an update on how this project is proceeding?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Pilot due to end in November. Awaiting review before taking any decisions.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Pink bags supplied found to be too small for many common items of WEEE, e.g. printers.

3.13 **What can the council do to reduce the amount of litter generated by fast food outlets? Can Harrow find a way to make them pay the cost of clearing it up, through their business rates or other fees?**

(question from Harrow Nature Conservation Forum)

Lorene's answer: Businesses not responsible for their customers' antisocial behaviour. Legal limits to any action by councils, beyond encouraging businesses to talk to customers about proper disposal of litter and perhaps engaging staff and customers in litter picking activities. Fines/Fixed Penalty Notices for littering and Public Order Protection Order offences – enforcement contract with Kingdom Security. Council's Environmental Compliance team sometimes able to identify offenders through card payment receipts discarded with litter.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Successful litter pick arranged by park user group volunteers with staff of local KFC.

Request for anti-littering messages in different community languages for businesses to use.

Reduce business rates as incentive for more biodegradable/less environmentally damaging materials e.g. paper straws instead of plastic, cardboard instead of polystyrene cartons.

Kingdom's enforcement officers not visible enough or widespread enough, just focussing on easy targets not worst litterers or antisocial behaviour.

Actions:

Lorene to explore ways of getting anti-littering message across e.g. via *Harrow People*.

Lorene to provide figures for number of littering fines issued.

3.14 **Is any of the waste recycled that is collected from public litter bins in streets and parks, and from street sweeping, fly tips etc.?**

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

Lorene's answer: No, as below – unacceptably high levels of contamination in Public Realm.

3.15 **Harrow has some segregated street rubbish bins. Do they work effectively? Any plans to extend their use and make them more visible and easier to use?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: No. Failure of previous attempts and nationwide, due to lack of compliance.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

More litter bins required, with more frequent emptying by council, especially by bus stops.

Overflowing bins encouraging adjacent dumping.

Separate dry recycling bins requested in parks (see 3.10 above).

Better success reported in Europe re segregated street bins.

Much less street litter in countries without 'public bin' habit – rubbish taken home instead!

Brent's experiment with public skips in streets for co-mingled recyclables; prone to abuse.

Various textile collection points operated by LMB, including at the Recycling Centre – all material reused or recycled, e.g. in Africa.

Action:

Lorene to keep an eye on the outcome of Brent's street skips initiative.

3.16 **Where can we find an easy-to-read 'idiot's guide' explaining what should go in which of Harrow's domestic bins? Is there something definitive online? Could we have stickers or posters, for example, to use on bins or fridges?**

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

Lorene's answer: Web pages now revamped to be clearer - [What goes in which bin?](#)

Explanatory leaflets given only to households with identified problems. Money saved by ceasing to distribute hard copies of calendars/guidance each December.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Still no clearly presented information to keep on hand and easily check for individual items.

3.17 **Is it true that: a) plastic containers that are black cannot be successfully separated at the MRF used for Harrow's recycling? If so, what happens to them?**

b) **metal cans shouldn't be squashed because they won't go through the recycling system as well as unsquashed ones?**

c) **bottle lids should be screwed on and straws pushed back into their cartons, because on their own they are too small to make it through the recycling process?**

d) **containers needn't be thoroughly rinsed out before being put in the recycling bin, as the waste of water decreases the environmental benefit of recycling?**

(questions from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

Lorene's answer: a) True, Viridor currently unable to capture certain black plastics, but already working on a solution.

b) Untrue, squashing optional. Squashed anyway, during collection/transportation. Volume/space/fuel emissions reduced by minimising/squashing if possible.

c) Not important for recyclability either way, but best to leave on lids and straws for practicality.

d) True, not necessary to rinse completely clean, just remove excess contents, avoid contaminating other items.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Not all black plastics problematic.

Green plastic bottle lids collected for fundraising by the London Ambulance Service.

3.18 **Is it necessary to remove the window from window envelopes placed in recycling?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Yes please, not essential but best to remove plastic window if possible and put in residual waste, otherwise lower quality of recycled paper produced.

3.19 **Why is it so difficult to get dry recycling collections working well in blocks of flats and what can we do to make it work properly?**

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

Lorene's answer: Recycling now operating in most Harrow flats. Contamination levels decreasing, generally pleased with results so far, still room for improvement. Efforts ongoing to help residents comply. Flats above shops worse than blocks.

3.20 **We understand that the technology exists to separate the different plastics PET, HDPE, and PP economically, enabling the materials to be reused. Which operator/site does Harrow use via West Waste, and does it make use of this technology?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Yes, different plastics separated by Viridor e.g. milk bottles, before selling on for reprocessing e.g. to China.

3.21 **On a visit to Enval's plant in Alconbury, we've witnessed the recovery of aluminium from composite laminate, with the conversion of the plastic component into oil and gas that can be sold or used to power the plant - a process that can easily be introduced into a commercial MRF. Can Harrow and West Waste introduce this microwave pyrolysis technique into their operations?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Possibly, but no direct council control over Viridor's MRF operations.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Brighton's council showing interest in this technology.

Can it be considered when the MRF contract is retendered?

3.22 *Plastic film often carries text stating that it is recyclable, and we were once told that Harrow's tender document for waste contracts includes the ability to collect and separate plastic film. So why can we still not put it into our recycling bins?*

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Unaware of any such provision in the tender requirements. Controversy over plastic film because of problems at MRFs (flying around, getting stuck in equipment and causing blockages) and lack of commercial markets for the reclaimed material.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

So how come it is so readily recycled by supermarkets?

Reports of material from recycled plastic film/bags being used to repair potholes in a pilot scheme in Cumbria.

3.23 *Black plastic trays, film etc. present problems – how much of our blue bin waste actually gets recycled? What can we do to improve matters and what is Harrow Council going to do?*

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Figures showing 93.7% of Harrow's blue bin waste recycled between January and August 2018. Breakdown given as per table.

2018	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Total contamination (non-target)	11.98%	10.47%	8.54%	7.96%	7.96%	7.95%	10.60%	10.42%
Recyclable	91.46%	92.59%	94.46%	95.04%	95.04%	95.15%	93.23%	92.45%
Non-recyclable	8.54%	7.41%	5.54%	4.96%	4.96%	4.85%	6.77%	7.55%

Difference between 'contamination' (some non-target materials still extracted and recycled) and 'non-recyclable' (rejected, treated into EfW)

3.24 *Is any of our plastic waste used as a source for recovering oil/gas/monomers?*

(Possible strategy for contaminated mixed plastic waste.)

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: No.

3.25 *Is Harrow currently meeting its stated recycling targets? To what extent have recycling rates been impacted by the new ID requirements at Forward Drive?*

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

Lorene's answer: Current 42.4% recycling rate, up on the previous year but still behind 50% target and down on previous years. Sixth highest in London, so considered good in view of challenges and budget cuts. Dump visits down by 12-18% since ID required – no impact on recycling rates, less queuing.

3.26 *How big is the 'slight increase in the number of queries' about the garden waste service as mentioned in a response to a Cabinet question in June? Can the service really be cost effective, considering the level of missed collections and the ongoing investment in new hire vehicles and hardware required?*

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

Lorene's answer: Not sure about details given to Cabinet. Confident the service has improved.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Brown bin repeatedly emptied despite lack of payment.

Despite payment, brown bin repeatedly missed/not emptied.

3.27 *Are Waste Services continuing to experience high levels of sickness absence, as during 2017/18 (reported at Cabinet in June), with additional agency personnel and weekend collections still having to be used to cover this staff absence and because of increasing housing developments and HMOs? What's being done to ensure we don't repeat the resultant £0.582m overspend this year?*

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

Lorene's answer: Recent decrease in sickness absence. Trying to reduce overspend. Less conscientious agency workers used because of restrictions on employing permanent staff.

3.28 **Would free collection of bulky items service reduce the incidence and cost of fly-tipping?** (question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: No, probably not. Fly-tipping levels not much affected by collection charges.

3.29 **Complaint about omission of some streets, and foxes getting into food waste bins.**
(Divided on whether this was a problem – bins do have a lock.)

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Lorene's answer: Missed collections getting better. Aware of some issues with durability of black food waste bins.

Action:

Lorene to consider recommending more suitable food waste bins in future.

4. **Other matters discussed**

4.1 **Harrow Half Marathon, 16 September** – commendable initiative to ban single use plastic water bottles in favour of edible water capsules made of seaweed (by Ooho Water).

4.2 **Northwick Park** – Brent Council planning to build on open space. Proposals favoured by Bob Blackman MP, including housing and new school site. HPF supporting Brent Parks Forum in raising objections. Intensive development also being planned on adjacent hospital and university land – must be resisted.

5. **Next meeting** – Consensus to focus on waterway pollution and misconnections. Hopefully, to be chaired by member with expertise in natural environment/water pollution. Venue possibly The Lodge (one free room hire offered) or newly opened North Harrow Community Library (charge expected).

Actions:

Mick to arrange and advise next Subgroup meeting date and details in due course.