

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

Notes from 7th meeting, held on Friday 29 November 2019 at 5.30pm
in the Environment Boardroom, 4th Floor, Harrow Civic Centre, HA1 2XF.

Attendees

Mick Oliver	Harrow University of the Third Age (Sustainability Group) – Acting Chair
Simon Braidman	Harrow Nature Conservation Forum (HNCF)
Swan Kazi	Harrow Parks Forum
Stephen Mills	Harrow Parks Forum (Friends of Headstone Manor Recreation Ground)
Leslie Williams	Harrow Green Drinks
Trevor Steeples	Harrow in LEAF
Frances Goldingay	Harrow in LEAF
John Hollingdale	Harrow Friends of the Earth
John Ratcliff	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Margaret Huitson	Harrow Natural History Society
Penny Hayward	Harrow Cyclists
Linda Robinson	38 Degrees Local Harrow Group - Notetaker
Dave Corby	Harrow Council, Head of Service - Community Engagement

Apologies

Jane Skelly	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Steve Bolsover	Harrow Nature Conservation Forum
Gerry Devine	Harrow VCS Forum Vice-Chair, Harrow Community Transport
Jane Galbraith	Harrow Parks Forum (Harrow Recreation Ground Users Association)
Pamela Swain	Harrow Friends of the Earth

1. **Welcome** by Mick, acting as meeting Chair this time. Thanks to Dave for offering to enter into dialogue with the Subgroup about Harrow's recycling. Acknowledgement of the council's limited powers to influence waste policy decisions in the national context, as recognised during Mick's attendance at [REcoup](#) (RECYcling Of Used Plastics Ltd) conference. **Introductions** all round.
2. **Presentation** by Dave, followed by discussion, answering many of the questions posed in advance by Subgroup members below. Failure to reach Harrow's 47 per cent recycling target (including dry mixed, garden and food waste); currently only 41 per cent. Non recyclable 'residual waste' taken by West London Waste Authority (West Waste) via South Ruislip site to be burned at 'energy from waste' plant near Bristol. 'Bottom ash' recycled into Thermalite blocks (not counted towards Harrow's recycling rates). Better than some East London boroughs still sending residual waste to Dutch landfill sites. More recycling education and encouragement needed; review to gain insights into barriers. Promotional initiative to be launched in January, mainly for flats, covering all strands. Door knocking campaign to raise awareness also re disposal of batteries etc. 'What goes where' leaflet being revised with clarified instructions, to be sent out with Welcome Pack to new council tax payers.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Actual renters/occupants/waste producers may not be council tax payers.
- Waste/recycling information often not given to tenants by landlords, not properly explained, not understood by occupants e.g. from immigrant communities/diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Differing schemes and instructions in other local authority areas, even in neighbouring boroughs, extra confusing for transient residents.
- Create list of recycling locations, like [Brent's](#); include and work with repair and charity shops too.

3. Questions and Answers

3.1 How can community groups like ours best help the current Council Leader in his role as Chair of the West London Waste Authority?

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

What Dave said: Subgroup useful to feed into Leader. Happy to use Mick as a channel for two-way communication with member groups.

3.2 Can you motivate us by telling us how the council has followed up on the helpful suggestions we made at our previous meeting? Like using the council's own social media and publications to encourage more recycling; introducing proper recycling facilities for community groups based at the Lodge and similar council owned premises; finding out about the success or otherwise of Brent's street skip initiative; investigating possibilities for more suitable food waste receptacles.

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

What Dave said: Unaware as no handover from Lorene. Brent's street skip initiative believed to be unsuccessful.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- No sign of success in persuading Communications team to mention 'Zero Waste' concepts or anti-littering messages in Harrow People or elsewhere.
- Plea to use Subgroup members own social media platforms and publications to promote recycling good practice.

Actions:

All to contact Dave with any recycling stories suitable for *MyHarrow* news email etc.

Dave to consult with Subgroup members on future publicity material about recycling.

3.3 This year's [Harrow Ambition Plan](#) talks about a Waste Review being in progress to deliver a Waste Strategy. In the [Strategic Performance Report](#) presented to Cabinet last April, we read that a "Community Engagement Plan (recycling strategy) has been ... further developed as part of the Waste Review." Please can you tell us more about the Strategy, the Review and the Engagement Plan?

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

What Dave said: Review still ongoing, comprised of series of elements e.g. fleet, flats, frequencies and route optimisation. Timescales covered in Community Engagement Plan.

3.4 When will we know whether or not the Review is going to recommend any changes to collection arrangements, particularly for garden waste and/or for domestic food waste?

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

What Dave said: Not expected to recommend changes for residents, except possibly to limit availability of additional domestic residual waste bins. Noted decrease in overall recycling rates after introduction of chargeable garden waste service, never yet to recover, but no changes recommended due to financial advantages of separating food waste collection and charging for garden waste collection. Now additional savings from disposal costs for food waste in flats (£14 per tonne compared with £128 for residual waste). Staff being trained in 'mobile working' and new ABAVUS software set to replace current multiple existing systems, offering more functions and flexibility for public realm management and scheduling in streets, grounds, allotments, cemeteries etc. Fly tipping reports expected to rise as a result of easier reporting. Decrease in fly tipping rates since charges introduced at Forward Drive site, remaining stable since. Fly tips counted as household waste.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Difficulties experienced by non-Harrow residents reporting fly tips via current automation.

3.5 Which anaerobic digestion plant(s) are we now using for Harrow's domestic food waste? Does the change of contract(s) mean that we need to tell residents anything different about their food waste behaviour? For example, is it true that it's no longer necessary to use the special biodegradable bags for food waste, and that ordinary plastic bags are now acceptable?

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

What Dave said: Contract between West Waste and [Bio Collectors](#). Acceptable levels of plastic bag contamination expected to be negotiated, both for flats and for houses, as Bio Collectors able to separate with advanced machinery. So possible relaxation of 'no plastic bag' enforcement for flats but no change to general public rules/guidance to use biobags.

3.6 *We understand that the pink bag pilot scheme for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment has been replaced by borough-wide [doorstep collections in partnership with TRAIID](#), which include all waste textiles as well as WEEE. **How about including details of the TRAIID scheme with the Christmas bin hangers? Could Community Champions or some kind of neighbour-hood co-ordinators help streets of residents to publicise and synchronise vanfuls of collections at once?*** (question from Harrow Green Drinks)

What Dave said: Pink bag pilot scheme not fully successful as subject to rifling and theft. So latest scheme more effective; council working in partnership with [TRAIID](#) to collect 1.5 tonnes per month. Use of TRAIID branding, publicity by council, hopefully with help from community group networks. Textile banks at Forward Drive Recycling Centre still operated by [LMB](#), generating income for council.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Wasted opportunity to use 'Christmas bin collection' notice on back cover of latest [Harrow People](#) to promote such initiatives and reach even more residents than community group networks.
- Unclear information on council website re inclusion of textiles in TRAIID collections.
- No need for TRAIID textile collections to be in re-saleable condition, unlike most charity shops.
- Encourage consumers first to consider and take responsibility for 'whole life cycle' of equipment purchased, e.g. valuable/rare metals, refrigerant gas etc.
- Retailers responsible for financial contribution to WEEE recycling costs.
- Reference to scheme seen in Vancouver – large reusable/repairable items (e.g. furniture, appliances, bicycles) left out in street on pre-arranged dates, to be taken by others if wanted or otherwise collected up by authorities afterwards if not. Similar potential for Harrow previously dismissed by council, fearing excuse for increased fly tipping, especially with current environment and demographics.

Actions:

Dave to publicise TRAIID arrangements in *Harrow People* and make better use of council's existing media channels to publicise updates on recycling.

Dave to improve website wording re TRAIID's textile collections in addition to WEEE.

Mick to produce explanation of why recovering WEEE is important

Linda to research the fate of unsaleable donations to local charity shops.

3.7 ***Why not have a big local one-off campaign to recover unused electronic devices from homes and places of work**, in order to maximise recovery of rare elements instead of continuing to exhaust diminishing mines in 'challenging' parts of the world?*

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

What Dave said: No such plans.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Encourage use of town centre [CEX](#) shop to buy, sell, repair and exchange pre-owned technology – mobile phones, video games, computers, digital electronics etc.

3.8 ***When will a decision be made about Viridor's successor with Harrow's contract for disposal of dry recyclable waste? Will this necessitate a change in residents' recycling behaviour? If so, what can community groups do to help get the messages across?***

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

What Dave said: Probable further temporary extension to Viridor's current Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) contract, until summer 2020. Invitations to tender going out for expressions of interest. Not part of combined West Waste contract, due to Harrow's preferential rates for lower contamination levels ('objectionable recycling' – subject to maximum permitted levels). West Waste progress slow. Probably no need to change recycling habits.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Any chance of contract winners producing explanatory video for broadcast by Harrow?

3.9 *In view of the disappointing revelations in the recent War on Plastic programmes, how can we reassure people that all their recyclate is being recycled responsibly? Will we be able to tell them **how much of it is to be taken overseas** when they ask us, for example, whether any of it is destined for places like Malaysia, with all the resultant pollution and shipping emissions?*

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

What Dave said: Reference to Waste Data Flow document showing statistics and final destinations for different waste streams.

Action:

Dave to circulate statistics/destination document to Subgroup members via Linda.

3.10 We note that the current [Waste Management Strategy 2016-2026](#) states, “We will look to maximise recycling in blocks, estates and flats above shops”, but we understand that no recycling bins are supplied to flats above shops “[because there is nowhere to store the bins securely and prevent their contamination](#)”. **What should we be advising to residents in flats above shops who want to recycle as much of their waste as they can?**

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

What Dave said: No progress to report yet. ‘Duty of Care’ advice leaflets being distributed to businesses and shops below residential flats.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Uncollected waste from flats above shops causing problems in Glebe Road.
- Other instances of dumping/waste build-up in alleyways behind shops, settled after clarification re land ownership.

3.11 Given the large number of high-rise blocks planned for Harrow and our understanding from tenant / leaseholder organisations that there is no uniform recycling system even in the council’s own blocks of flats, and that residents get confused and disheartened by impractical demands and contamination by ‘outsiders’:

- How could the planning process, and its ability to levy contributions from developers, be better used to support increased recycling and avoid bad habits, with appropriate facilities ‘designed in’ e.g. waste chutes; secure, accessible bin stores; easy access for collection trucks?**
- Just as each major development must have a travel plan, wouldn’t it be a good idea to insist on a community-based waste plan, covering waste reduction as well as waste disposal?**
- Are there lessons to be learned from other local authorities, such as Camden, which already have a high proportion of flats?**
- Are there separate percentage targets for recycling levels in flats? Have these been achieved? What can you tell us to help us ‘evangelise’ flat dwellers?**
- Would Environmental Services be prepared to work more closely with the council’s Housing department (officers, caretakers etc.) in listening sensitively to the needs of residents to encourage a more sustainable approach to waste?**
- Where it is difficult to provide recycling facilities on site (e.g. flats above shops) can more on-street segregated recycling bins be provided (instead of removing existing ones as at the corner of Weald Lane and the High Road)?**
- What progress has been made with the roll-out of food waste facilities at flats? Do you need any help with evaluating its success or otherwise?**

(questions from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

What Dave said: No differentiation between targets for flats and houses. Food waste pilot for flats successful, so borough-wide roll-out now completed – individual caddies; supply of biodegradable bags; ten flats per communal red wheelie bin. Emptied the day before residual waste collections. If more than ten per cent contamination, usually collected with residual waste next day instead. Publicity in conjunction with West Waste. Further doorknocking to take place in February to raise awareness and explain. All blocks of flats to be included, but not flats above shops; some omissions not yet identified and still to be addressed. Together with West Waste, Harrow investigating potential first tender for ‘dirty MRF’ provider, able to reclaim 20 to 30 per cent of residual waste content, e.g. from park litter and street cleaning, avoiding need for segregated street bins.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Need to liaise with Housing’s Resident Involvement Team in Resident Services, and with Harrow Federation of Tenant and Residents’ Associations.

- Council's own properties in Astall Close not yet included in food waste collections; omission not reported by caretakers; no response to residents even after approach to Housing Portfolio Holder. Also dry mixed recycling bins never emptied as constantly contaminated.
- Call for lockable bin areas; most effective in avoiding contamination by outsiders.
- Penalties/costs cross charged to Housing department for removal of contaminated waste from council owned flats, expected to be passed on to tenant/leaseholder culprits. Unable to be identified, so simply added unfairly to service charges for all.
- Harrow's lack of experience in planning new high rise developments – suggest depot staff analyse applications re bin storage/collection and develop 'community waste plan' before approval, taking into account people's actual behaviour and making recycling as problem-free as possible for them.

Actions:

Dave to add flats in Astall Close, Weald Lane and Sefton Avenue to 'urgent' list for food waste provision.

John R to find out and advise Dave of appropriate contact(s) in Housing.

John R to explore possibilities of including 'personal stories' of recycling in council tenants' and leaseholders' *Homing In* magazine.

3.12 Do we know what sort of levels of contamination there are in the segregated litter bins in, for example, St Ann's or St George's shopping centres? Would it help if we tried to help you find out and see what they do about it?

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

What Dave said: Trials of segregated bins taking place at Whitmore High School.

Action:

Linda to ask shopping centres re contamination levels in segregated litter bins.

3.13 Please would it be possible for extra blue wheelie bins to be provided free of charge for parks, accessible only to litter picking volunteers or maybe stored in their own nearby gardens, with them being responsible for putting them out to be collected? How else can we help to recycle rubbish in parks?

(question from Harrow Parks Forum)

What Dave said: Yes.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Nowhere for Breeze Bikes volunteers to dispose of dry recyclables collected in recent Harrow Recreation Ground litter pick.

Action:

Swan to let Dave know requirements for volunteers' recycling bins in parks.

3.14 We note that Harrow's new Climate Change Strategy says, "We incorporate green waste bays into parks to recycle green waste easily". Are they readily available to volunteer path sweepers etc., or are they still expected to dispose of leaves by paying for their own garden waste collections?

(question from Harrow Parks Forum)

What Dave said: Room for improvement with this.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Compost bins provided in every park in Hillingdon.

Action:

Dave to work with Harrow Parks Forum to make green waste recycling easier and fairer for volunteers.

3.15 Where a packet consists of several different materials joined together, each of which can be recycled, do the different bits need to be separated before being binned?

(question from Harrow Parks Forum)

What Dave said: No, nice but not necessary.

3.16 In what ways might the council use its various powers to incentivise a reduction in the amount of waste and litter generated by local businesses, e.g. requirements in planning permissions, rewards from environmental health, business rate rebates, clauses in contracts, specific licensing conditions etc.?

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

What Dave said: Working on this. Increase in take up of council's food waste contracts by businesses, thanks to incentives, audits and choice of competitive models, despite lower base rates charged by other providers. Council working with shops and applying penalties to discourage fly-tipping.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Cross-borough working, e.g. with businesses in Edgware.

3.17 *Between the council and our community groups, **what actions can we take to encourage local businesses to do more to help their customers reduce waste**, especially plastic waste, e.g. bottle refill schemes, selling competitively priced loose goods etc.?*

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

What Dave said: Plans to work with ethnic food shops to develop 'hubs' for recycling information and guidance.

3.18 ***How big a part are Harrow's schools playing** in making sure that children learn the importance of waste reduction and recycling, **and how could we expand on that?***

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

What Dave said: Plans to use currently existing education department communication media to liaise with schools about improving recycling.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

- Reminder of former Harrow Environmental Forum's original Education Action Group with regular newsletter to teachers in all local schools re eco initiatives including recycling. Group no longer active, teachers now without guidance.
- HNCF able to link to nature education sessions for schools.
- Offer prize to schools for best recycling project/poster e.g. with class trip to MRF as reward (or booby prize/punishment!).

Action:

All to advise Dave of any relevant school contacts.

4. **Other matters mentioned**

4.1 **Climate Action Fund bid** – expression of interest submitted by Harrow Parks Forum to run a community-led climate action project. More details to follow.

Action:

Swan to invite Subgroup members, via Linda, to Harrow Parks Forum meeting on 27 February.

4.2 **Climate Working Group** – no specific news yet on the progress or composition of the council's working group, promised in response to its Climate Emergency declaration in July.

5. **Next meeting** – not arranged.