

Briefing

The Waste Review

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1. Introduction

The Government's Waste Review of England's waste policy is drawing to a close, with Ministers currently considering goals for the 2014-2020 period, due for publication in on 14th June.

Friends of the Earth, which led the campaign for the 2003 Household Waste and Recycling Act, views the Waste Review as a unique opportunity to create a more resource efficient, competitive economy, saving councils and businesses money whilst generating more jobs and less waste. Its effects will be felt across and beyond the UK.

Setting genuinely ambitious goals for English waste policy would help the Government deliver on its twin ambitions of a 'zero waste economy' and being the 'greenest government ever'. As such Friends of the Earth has led the campaign for a goal to halve household waste by 2020, with a similar ambition for business.

The range of supporters for the goal, including Unilever UK, the Federation of Small Businesses, Sainsbury's and the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority, demonstrate the broad demand for ambition, certainty and a joined-up approach to cutting waste. This briefing summarises the need for such a goal, and offers some of Friends of the Earth's perspectives on how we could achieve it.

Friends of the Earth believes the Waste Review should set a:

- **Goal to halve residual waste by 2020:** Switch the emphasis from recycling targets to a goal to halve the residual 'black bag' waste created by households by 2020 – with a similar goal for business. This will reward waste prevention, reuse and recycling and reduce councils' spending on expensive incineration or landfill;

The significant environmental, economic and social benefits of such a measure can be achieved through:

- **Waste prevention and reuse:** Focus on preventing waste such as the third of all food bought currently ending up in household bins, and promoting reuse schemes. Also an increased focus on 'upstream' policies, such as on product eco-design and producer responsibility, through standards and voluntary agreements that set well defined, measurable and ambitious targets, backed up by regulation if they fail to deliver;
- **Better recycling for households and businesses:** Increasing the range of materials collected across England including food waste and furniture, clothes and electrical goods for reuse and recycling. Increase access to and awareness of business recycling services.

"Councils are doing a good job when it comes to picking up the bins. Eight out of ten people are happy with their collection."

Gary Porter,
Chair LGA Environment Board, 2009

Goal to halve residual waste by 2020

Waste is expensive - both through the high and rising cost of disposal and through the unnecessary and costly consumption of resources during production. In a cash and, increasingly, resource-constrained economy the effect of waste is to place more pressure on struggling businesses and public services. Cutting front line public services whilst continuing to spend vast sums on avoidable residual waste treatment is likely to prove controversial.

A sustainable approach to waste is one that recognises that black bag waste represents a failure of waste policy. A true 'zero waste' economy is a 'circular' economy that prevents waste through recycling or reuse.

While there will always be *some* waste that cannot be recycled or better, a 'zero waste economy' must not be interpreted as a 'zero waste to landfill' economy: incinerating or otherwise destroying precious resources is at least as much a failure of waste policy as landfilling them.

"Continuing our current patterns of resource use is not an option...increasing resource efficiency will be key to securing growth and jobs for Europe. It will bring major economic opportunities, improve productivity, drive down costs and boost competitiveness."

Resource Efficiency Flagship Programme, European Commission

What Government can do:

- Emphasise that residual waste represents a failure of waste policy and that greater effort must always be made to promote waste prevention, reuse and recycling whilst reducing residual waste;
- Bring in a residual waste tax covering both landfill and incineration. Work carried out for the Treasury showed the environmental damage from incineration is higher than for landfill, and that an incineration tax is justified in environmental and social terms;
- Adopt landfill and incineration bans on reusable and recyclable materials, with a requirement to sort into separate streams (e.g. paper, glass, food waste, non-recyclables) before landfill, incineration or any other form of disposal. These should incorporate sufficient time and support for businesses and councils to adapt to the changes.

- **Waste generation has been falling** for both household and business waste since well before the recession.
- **Residual waste treatment is costly:** landfill tax hits £80/tonne in 2014 and incineration often requires vast PFI grants and ties councils to inflexible 25+ year contracts.
- **Incineration suppresses recycling.** Within Denmark there is a clear inverse correlation between recycling and incineration; with one of the highest incineration rates in Europe, the country as a whole is struggling to hit 50% recycling despite being many years ahead of the UK.
- **Energy from incinerators is neither renewable nor low carbon:** a Decc Written Response estimated emissions from incinerators to be 540g CO₂/kWhr, over the UK grid average and more than ten times the 50g CO₂/kWhr average the Committee on Climate Change recommended for 2030.

- **Irish local authorities** can levy a charge on waste incineration; central government is able to top up the tax up to €120 per tonne
- **Similar taxes exist across Europe** including in Denmark, Austria, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.
- **Flanders in Belgium and the US state of Massachusetts** have both landfill and incineration bans on unsorted waste and many recyclable waste streams.

2. Waste prevention and reuse

Waste prevention includes reducing the generation of waste in manufacture, designing products to last longer and be easier to reuse, and encouraging people to throw away less edible food.

By redistributing useful products, particularly to poorer communities, reuse schemes could epitomise the very best of the 'Big Society' ideal. But dramatic cuts to council budgets mean that many existing schemes are under threat.

***“We will work towards a
‘zero waste’ economy”***

The Coalition’s
“Programme for government”

What Government can do:

- Ensure the UK pushes for ambitious European standards for product durability (e.g. five-year product warranties) and reparability;
- Full roll-out of separate food waste collections, essential for a massive expansion of renewable energy from anaerobic digestion (AD). Experience suggests that through separating their food waste householders become aware of how much they are wasting and take steps - such as buying less - to reduce the waste in future;
- Reuse can be promoted locally by:
 - Ensuring collection schemes are designed to prioritise reuse in bulky waste collections and civic amenity sites;
 - Partnering with local reuse and repair charities and NGOs;
 - Prioritising high impact reuse streams such as electrical equipment;
 - Promoting 'real nappy schemes', toy libraries etc;
 - Avoiding waste contracts that compete with reuse;
- Reuse can be promoted nationally through public sector leadership in
 - Procurement of second hand and reusable/remanufactured goods;
 - Sending replaced goods for reconditioning and reuse.

'Quick win' waste prevention strategies could include:

- **Lean production:** re-design products to reduce material weight. This is extremely effective as it influences a wide range of goods sectors and saves costs for producers.
- **Food waste:** Britons throw away a third of their food, half of which is edible, at a cost of £10billion. This waste could be halved by 2020.
- **Longer product life:** more durably designed products could cut discard rates by a third by 2020. Linked to this - a third of products are thrown away still working, of which a third could be used to their full lifetime by 2020.

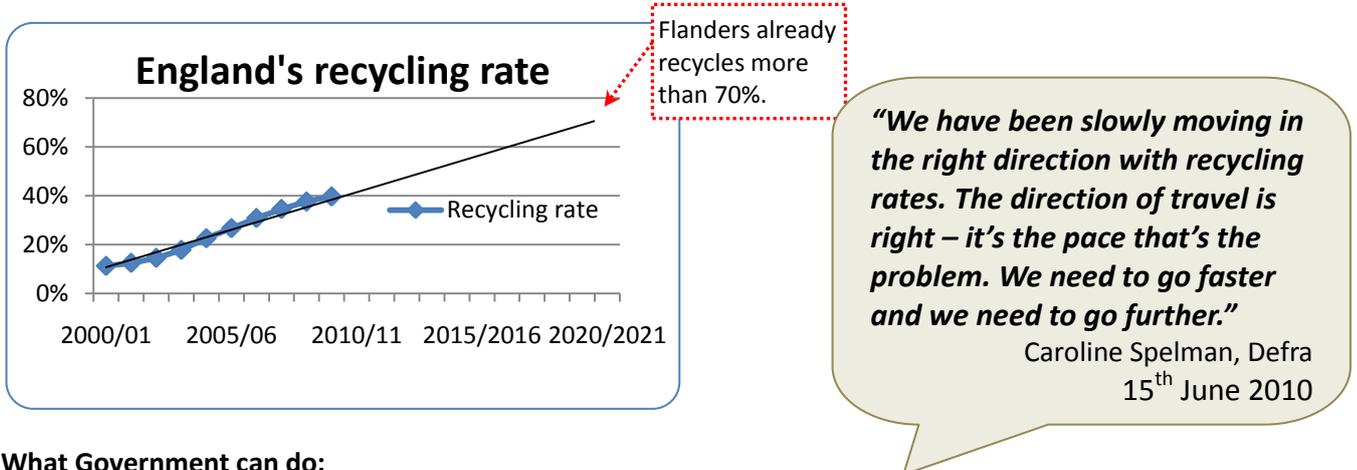
Reuse:

- **Recent figures for London** indicate that out of 1.7 million tonnes of furniture discarded in London, only 170,000 items – 10% – were sent for reuse instead of to landfill. About 10,800 tonnes of carbon are saved by this landfill avoidance alone.

- **Unilever** recently committed to halving the total carbon, water and waste impact of their products by 2020, including through using a third less packaging, promoting refillable products, and cutting manufacturing waste by 80%.
- **Doncaster Re-Furnish** is a social enterprise that collects furniture, electrical appliances and household goods free of charge from homes and sells them at affordable prices in two stores.
- **Flanders** has developed a thriving network of reuse stores, selling refurbished goods at discount prices. London plans to follow suit by creating “the world’s largest reuse network”.

3. Better recycling

Recycling is popular, cost effective and a fast growing source of jobs in the green economy. For many it's also the 'way in' to understanding how their behaviour impacts the environment, and how they can make a difference. Progress is fragile though - ill-considered and inaccurate populist rhetoric with regard to recycling risks setting back public participation across the whole sustainability agenda.



What Government can do:

- Ensure the UK pushes for ambitious European standards for product design for recyclability;
- Set more ambitious packaging recycling targets;
- Develop markets for recyclates by investing in sorting, separation and reprocessing technologies, and ensuring high quality recycling to support the UK's reprocessing industry;
- Support councils in taking a much greater role in collecting and recycling business waste;
- Assist councils in recognising and communicating the benefits of recycling beyond meeting targets, including emphasizing the value of civic amenity 'bring sites' and of recycling a wide range of materials.

- **England's recycling rates** have grown rapidly to 40% for household and 52% for C&I waste. But a Welsh Assembly study estimated 93% household waste is recyclable.
- **Recycling is popular** - Wrap research shows over 80% of the public are satisfied with their waste & recycling collection and a clear majority can be described as committed recyclers.
- **Employment:** Increasing UK municipal and key business recycling rates to 70% would create 70,000 new jobs
- **Value:** Every year, the UK buries or burns £650m worth of recyclables. Recycling these would save emissions equivalent to grounding six million cars, and provide manufacturing with valuable raw materials.
- **Savings:** By recycling more local authorities would save billions in avoided incineration and landfill charges.

- **Flanders in Belgium** already recycles 70%, and Wales and Scotland have set 70% targets for 2025. Several English councils already recycle over 60%, and others are increasing rapidly.
- **Coca Cola's** UK manufacturing sites now recycle 97% of their waste.
- **London-based Closed Loop Recycling** is doubling capacity and creating 50 new jobs as a result of the spectacular growth in price and demand for food grade plastics.
- **Civic amenity 'bring sites'** are key to boosting recycling, but many UK councils are now closing them.

Further information

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