

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date:	2 December 2020
Title:	Pedestrian Access to Household Waste Recycling Centre Trial
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide context for the decision taken to temporarily restrict pedestrian access to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) during the current pandemic and propose the implementation of a small trial in New Alresford to evaluate if pedestrian access could be reintroduced in a controlled and safe way.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment approves the establishment of a three-month trial at New Alresford Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) from mid-January 2021 to evaluate the impact of facilitating pedestrian and cycle access on a controlled basis for half an hour, up to three mornings a week, utilising the existing HWRC pre-booking system.
3. That the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment delegates authority to the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment, to make amendments to or cease the trial at any point if circumstances change significantly or concerns about safety or financial impacts are identified through ongoing monitoring.

Executive Summary

4. This paper seeks to:
 - set out the context for how pedestrian access has historically been managed at HWRCs;
 - outline the reasons why access has been restricted during the current Covid-19 pandemic;
 - detail the safety issues associated with pedestrian access; and
 - recommend the establishment of a three-month trial at New Alresford HWRC to evaluate the impact of allowing pedestrian and cycle access on a controlled basis using the established pre-booking system.

Contextual information

5. The County Council reopened the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) network on Monday 11 May 2020, following the enforced closure during the national lockdown from 24 March, in response to central Government and industry desire for sites to reopen. New social distancing measures and operational procedures were introduced at all sites to protect both the general public and contractors, who operate and service the sites, from contracting Covid-19. To manage demand and address significant congestion issues seen around most sites, a pre-booking system was implemented from 15 June 2020.
6. Access to HWRCs has been restricted to vehicles only since reopening in May in order to ensure that the sites operate safely in line with the Government guidelines and to support social distancing recommendations. In order to minimise social interaction and the number of people onsite at any one time, measures have been implemented to maintain the health and safety of all site users and operatives, which include preventing pedestrians and cyclists from entering any site.
7. This decision has not proved to be a significant issue, with just 12 enquiries regarding pedestrian access received since May 2020 out of an overall total of just over 3,000 waste related enquiries in the same period. A deputation was made to a meeting of the County Council on 24 September 2020 by two residents who use New Alresford HWRC, requesting that the County Council reviews its position, and citing grounds of discrimination and climate change in support of the proposition.
8. Prior to the pandemic, pedestrian access to HWRCs was strongly discouraged for a number of reasons, primarily customer safety, and it was made clear through onsite signage that this was only accepted at the customer's own risk. No HWRC in Hampshire has designated, separate pedestrian access or was built with pedestrian access in mind, therefore customers choosing to do so have no option but to enter the site using the vehicular entrance.
9. There is an inherent and arguably unacceptable risk to this practice, including a hazard of distraction in such a situation when carrying bulky and/or heavy items. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not look favourably on 'mixing traffic and pedestrians' for safety reasons. The WISH Forum advises that: *"Vehicle movements in the waste and recycling industry represent a risk of serious or fatal accidents to workers and members of the public. The most hazardous activity on CA sites is the movement of vehicles near pedestrians¹."* The WRAP Household Waste Recycling Centre Guide² also notes that: *"Site operatives should ensure that users are not tempted to park outside designated areas and walk to disposal areas, rather than waiting. Site layout and parking should aim to minimise pedestrian interaction with traffic. There should be access to the disposal areas for pedestrians without crossing traffic lanes."*

¹ Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum FORMAL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT: WISH WASTE 26 - Managing health and safety in civic amenity sites – Issue 1 2015

² https://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/INH0449_HWRC_Guide_%20final.pdf

10. In recent years, occasional accidents involving pedestrians (i.e. site users moving about the site on foot) have occurred, such as a pedestrian being struck by a reversing vehicle or tripping over whilst attempting to walk waste into the site.
11. In addition, pedestrians 'walking in' waste have historically faced accusations of queue jumping in busy periods, while site staff have also observed some customers using it as a means to attempt to avoid either the permit scheme or paying trade waste charges, albeit this particular issue has largely disappeared with the introduction of the pre-booking system. During the financial year 2019/20, less than 10 enquiries were received on this topic.
12. At least 17 other county councils, including all of Hampshire's immediate neighbours do not allow access into sites by pedestrians and cyclists. Oxfordshire County Council publicly states on its website that it considers health and safety to outweigh environmental and economic benefits of permitting pedestrian access³.
13. Of the 24 HWRCs in Hampshire, only two are located directly within residential areas (Hedge End and Hayling Island), with a further seven located in industrial estates but within reasonable walking distance (up to 10 minutes) of housing. Although many of these sites have pavements on the highway leading up to (but not through) the site entrance, in some cases the capacity of the footway to support access to sites for pedestrians carrying waste, particularly in some of the industrial estates, is not ideal and requires pedestrians to cross multiple business vehicular accesses to neighbouring premises with dropped kerbs as well as negotiating vans and cars frequently parked on the pavement.
14. The deputation focused on two key threads – inferring that Hampshire County Council is discriminating against the elderly, those with disabilities and low-income families; and failing on climate change by indirectly encouraging car use. A potential impact on physical and mental health was also raised. In addition, it was suggested that the restriction on pedestrian access had stifled opportunities to recycle as well as fuelling an increase in small domestic fly-tipping incidents, although data continues to indicate that the incidence of fly-tipping across Hampshire is comparatively lower so far in 2020.
15. It should be noted that HWRCs are primarily provided for the deposit of bulky household and garden waste items such as furniture and wood, none of which are suited to being carried by pedestrians or cyclists. Carrying heavy and/or bulky items on foot is, as previously outlined above, a risky practice. By contrast, the domestic kerbside recycling service and smaller recycling points provided by district and borough councils offer a convenient and effective alternative for small recyclable items.

³ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/waste-and-recycling/household-waste/household-waste-recycling-centres/visiting-recycling-centres>

Consultation and Equalities

16. The Public Sector Equality Duty, established by the Equality Act 2010 (“the Act”), places a duty upon the County Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations. Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership (in employment only), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation are protected characteristics for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. It is important to note that impact on poverty is not listed as a protected characteristic under the Act.
17. The deputation alleged that residents with disabilities or low incomes could be indirectly discriminated against through the current practice as regular access to a vehicle may not be possible. The County Council does not accept any suggestion that this practice is discriminatory, as it was introduced on health and safety grounds to protect all site users, and is consistent with neighbouring authorities’ practice. However, to continually develop and improve public services, the County Council will investigate and, where appropriate, implement reasonable, safe and proportionate measures to enhance service provision. The current pre-booking system provides a new opportunity to test the impacts of excluding vehicles for short periods in order to safely enable pedestrian and cycle access.
18. It should also be recognised that alternative options exist for ‘low weight’ waste materials such as the kerbside recycling collection and local recycling banks. Waste collection authorities and some charitable organisations also provide an alternative collection service for bulky items such as furniture, albeit sometimes for a fee.

Proposal

19. The current HWRC network is not designed to accommodate pedestrian access, and as a consequence there is no question that pedestrian access at the HWRCs presents a significant safety risk.
20. Providing a dedicated, segregated entrance for pedestrians would be challenging at any of the Hampshire HWRCs due to cost and space reasons, but especially so at a site as small as New Alresford, which is the smallest HWRC in the county. However, in response to the deputation, and the fact that a proportion of the additional enquiries have originated from the Alresford area, it is suggested that a trial could be undertaken at the New Alresford HWRC to examine more closely the impact of enabling pedestrian access on a controlled basis.
21. The existing pre-booking system lends itself to such a trial whereby a period of time could be ‘blocked off’ to vehicle users in order to enable pedestrians and cyclists to enter more safely. Such a trial would enable the Council to quantify the patronage generated by such an approach as well as the impact on existing HWRC users (who would lose a proportion of currently available slots) who visit using vehicles in a controlled way. It should be noted that without the existence of the pre-booking system, it would not be possible to sufficiently segregate

vehicles and pedestrians in a safe manner, and therefore such a trial would be impossible for the safety reasons discussed in earlier in this report.

22. Pedestrians and cyclists that had booked a slot would be asked to wait outside on the pavement, queuing in a socially distanced manner, until invited into the site. It will be very difficult for site staff to identify customers who have booked a 'pedestrian' slot, as compared to identifying pre-booked vehicle users, so this will need to be monitored to ensure the non-vehicle period is not abused by customers parking on the highway and presenting as pedestrians to get around limitations on busy days. Existing site regulations regarding social distancing such as site staff being unable to provide direct assistance or the optional wearing of face coverings in an outdoor environment would remain unchanged.

Finance

23. The financial operation of the HWRC service is predicated on a throughput of waste materials that contributes towards the financing of each site and the wider network. While recyclable material generally attracts a positive income, general waste incurs a disposal cost to the County Council. Closing the site to vehicles even for a short period will naturally result in less bulky material being presented which could have a financial impact. For a small site such as New Alresford, the County Council would anticipate that this impact would be modest and balanced between cost and income changes. However, the outcome of the trial will need to be assessed in relation to the potential impact on other/larger sites, and taken in to account in any future decisions.
24. It is expected that the cost of implementing the trial will be met using existing resources.

Conclusions

25. It is recommended that the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment notes the considerations above and approves the establishment of a three-month trial at New Alresford from mid-January 2021 to evaluate the impact of a designated half hour pre-booked slot on up to three mornings per week to facilitate access to the site by pedestrians and cyclists, while simultaneously restricting vehicle access during that period. The trial would benefit from continuing up to and including the Easter bank holiday weekend in order to evaluate the impact on a traditionally busy period for the HWRC network.
26. A review of operational and safety impacts during that period, including monitoring the relative popularity of the trial, and any issues that arise will be important. As such, it is recommended that authority be delegated to the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment, to alter or cease the trial at any point if circumstances in the Covid-19 response change significantly or any concerns about safety or financial impacts are identified.
27. A formal review will be reported through the appropriate channels following completion of the trial and evaluation of the relevant data and findings.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

The trial seeks to evaluate the impact of utilising the existing HWRC pre-booking system to determine if it can be used to manage the safe access of sites by residents who may not have access to a car, or choose to walk or use a bicycle. All impacts are considered neutral.