

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date:	17 June 2021
Title:	Household Waste Recycling Centre Operations
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 an update on operations at Hampshire's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) in light of the Government's Roadmap towards the gradual relaxation of measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes provision to retain in the short-term the booking system that was successfully implemented during the pandemic in order to facilitate a means by which pedestrian access to HWRCs may be reintroduced on a trial basis at certain sites in a controlled and safe way.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment approves the establishment of a six-month trial at the Hedge End, New Alresford and Waterlooville Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) from July 2021 to evaluate the impact of facilitating pedestrian access on a controlled basis for one hour, up to three mornings a week, utilising the HWRC booking system.
3. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment approves the reintroduction of access to cyclists on a controlled basis at all 24 HWRCs operated by Hampshire County Council, from July 2021, utilising the HWRC booking system.
4. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment delegates authority to the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Lead 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.
5. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment approves the retention of the HWRC booking system until March 2022 to manage customer demand and facilitate continuation of a controlled and safe

HWRC operation while visitor numbers are increased as social distancing restrictions are reduced.

6. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment approves the commencement of the £5 charge for non-residents using Hampshire HWRCs from 1 September 2021, and the removal of glass banks from Hampshire HWRCs from 1 July 2021 in line with the previously taken decisions, which were deferred during covid-19 restrictions.

Executive Summary

7. This paper seeks to:
 - provide an update on HWRC operations as the UK moves out of COVID-19 restrictions and propose the retention of the booking system in the interim to facilitate a safe and controlled relaxation of restrictions;
 - set out the context for the management of pedestrian and cycle access at HWRCs;
 - outline the reasons why access was restricted during the pandemic;
 - detail the safety issues associated with pedestrian and cycle access;
 - recommend the establishment of a six-month trial to evaluate the impact of readmitting pedestrian access on a controlled basis at selected sites, making use of the established booking system; and
 - recommend the reintroduction of access to cyclists on a controlled basis at all 24 HWRCs operated by Hampshire County Council, utilising the HWRC booking system.

Contextual information

8. Hampshire 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 2020, 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 booking system was implemented from 15 June 2020.
9. Despite some initial challenges created predominantly by excessive demand, the booking system has proved to be very successful. The queuing outside HWRCs was eliminated and allowed the additional site security that was required to be removed which significantly reduced the additional cost of service provision. Through close analysis of data and on-site observations, the number of slots available per half hour at every site are maximised and adapted based on each site's individual profile, with more than 6,000 slots bookable per day (around 45,000 per week). A number of unsolicited compliments have been received from members of the public who find the booking system more convenient and a better customer experience.
10. Access to HWRCs has been restricted to vehicles only since reopening in May 2020 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.

Review of measures to control the COVID-19 virus at HWRCs

11. During the pandemic, the number of vehicles and customers able to attend a site at any time was restricted to support social distancing rules. Implementing the booking system in conjunction with the closure of a proportion of parking spaces with barriers assisted in this aim to maintain at least a 1m+ distance between site staff and customers, while eliminating disruptive queuing seen after the initial reopening of sites.
12. The success of the vaccination programme nationally has been a cornerstone behind the progress of the Government's Roadmap to relax measures that were implemented to control the virus. As the Government works towards Step 4 in the Roadmap, it is possible that some restrictions could be removed from 21 June 2021 onwards to enable all sites to increase their capacity back towards pre-COVID levels. However, despite the continued success of the vaccination programme, Government advisors have warned that there is the potential for some restrictions to return during Winter 2021/22 and for some form of social distancing to continue to be required in the short to medium term or on an ad-hoc basis in the future.
13. The booking system has demonstrated that managing customer throughput is an effective means of enabling the HWRCs to operate more efficiently. Congestion was commonplace at several HWRCs on sunny weekends and key public holidays, creating delays on the local road network and increased vehicle emissions from idling cars queuing. Booking a slot enables residents to plan with confidence that they can deposit their waste swiftly and easily. Many similar authorities also now operate a similar system, while others are actively considering implementing one based on the success of authorities like Hampshire.

Pedestrian and cyclist access to HWRCs

14. 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 due to the nature of the operation, which is to provide facilities designed for the deposit of larger quantities of recyclables, waste material and bulkier items (albeit one site, Waterlooville, has a side gate which could be adapted for this purpose), therefore customers choosing to walk in enter the site using the vehicular entrance.
15. As previously noted in the report to the Executive Member of Economy, Transport and Environment on 2 December 2020, 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 WISH Forum advises that: “*The most hazardous activity on CA (Civic Amenity) sites is the movement of vehicles near pedestrians¹*”, while published guidance by WRAP strongly recommends that measures are taken to ensure that users are not tempted to park outside designated areas and walk to disposal areas, rather than waiting, and that site layout and parking should be designed to minimise pedestrian interaction with traffic.

16. In recent years, 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.
17. 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 booking system.
18. The decision to limit access to vehicle users only since the pandemic has not proved to be a significant issue, with just 21 enquiries regarding pedestrian access received in the 12 months from May 2020 out of an overall total of just over 3,750 waste related enquiries in the same period. Almost all pedestrian access enquiries were from the Alresford area. A deputation was however 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.
19. As recognised highway users, cyclists wishing to visit HWRCs in Hampshire had not been unduly restricted prior to March 2020, but the volume of customers using bicycles has traditionally been very low. So-called ‘cargo bikes’ have increased in popularity in recent years, enabling customers to bring bulkier items than a regular bicycle would permit. For the reasons discussed above, it was considered prudent to prohibit cyclists on safety grounds when the HWRCs reopened after lockdown to minimise interaction between customers and staff and support social distancing rules.
20. Desktop research indicates that 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 access².
21. Of the 24 HWRCs in Hampshire, only three are located directly within residential areas (Hedge End, Waterlooville and Hayling Island), with a further six within

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.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/waste-and-recycling/household-waste/household-waste-recycling-centres/visiting-recycling-centres>

reasonable walking distance (up to 10 minutes) of housing but located within adjacent industrial estates. 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.

22. The deputation in September 2020 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 indicates that the tonnage of fly-tipping recorded across Hampshire was actually comparatively lower in 2020.
23. Following the deputation, an initial proposal to implement a three-month trial for pedestrians and cyclists at the New Alresford site was presented to the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment on 2 December 2020. Following a number of representations from local interested parties which focused further on alleged discrimination against those customers who may be elderly, infirm or on low income, as well as a conflation of issues separately impacting on pedestrians and cyclists, it was considered that the trial could be made wider, splitting pedestrian and cyclist requirements. It was also suggested that operating the trial at one site only during the winter was too limited and would not provide enough evidence on which to evaluate it. As such, it was recommended that officers came back with a revised proposal in 2021 that addressed the issues highlighted, which is outlined in this report.
24. It should be noted that HWRCs are primarily provided for the deposit of bulky household and garden waste items unsuitable for kerbside waste collections such as furniture and wood, many of which are uncondusive to being carried by pedestrians or cyclists. Carrying heavy and/or bulky items on foot or by bicycle can, as previously outlined above, be 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.

Other transformational service changes

25. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated an unavoidable delay to the implementation of a number of transformational service changes at HWRCs during 2020/21. This includes the removal of glass banks from all HWRCs, and the introduction of a £5 charge for non-Hampshire residents wishing to use Hampshire HWRCs, which were previously agreed by the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment. The decision to delay implementation of these initiatives was taken to reduce the impact of additional disruption while stricter social distancing measures remained in place, however the national

Roadmap to exiting restrictions means that it is now sensible to consider a date when these initiatives can be reasonably commenced.

Consultation and Equalities

26. 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.
27. The deputations to date have alleged that residents with disabilities, older residents and residents on low incomes could be indirectly discriminated against through the policy to restrict pedestrian and cycle entry, as regular access to a vehicle may not be possible. The County Council does not accept any suggestion that this practice is discriminatory, either directly or indirectly, as it was introduced as a proportionate measure 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 booking system provides a new opportunity to test the impacts of enhanced safety measures in order to safely enable pedestrian and cycle access.
28. It should also be noted 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 a charge may sometimes be applied for this service.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

29. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council’s climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
30. The adaptation project screening tool considers vulnerability of proposals to the effects of climate change and whether any adaptations are required. A full assessment of climate change vulnerability was not completed in this instance as the initial vulnerability assessment indicated that the project is at minimal risk from climate vulnerabilities as the overall statutory service would continue to be required to be provided.

31. The mitigation decision-making tool considers the impact of carbon emissions and whether any mitigations are required. There is a carbon benefit to encouraging more sustainable travel options such as walking and cycling, however this could be to the detriment of recycling performance as bulkier/heavier items could possibly be less likely to be delivered. Recycling produces less carbon emissions than waste disposal, so maximising recycling has carbon benefits. The overall aim of the HWRC service is to minimise landfill where possible and therefore reuse, recycling and recovery actions will always be prioritised in line with the waste hierarchy. In addition, retention of the booking system could contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions by reducing queuing with idling engines outside HWRCs and spreading customer demand across the day/week.
32. This project addresses all four of the County Council's statutory priorities by supporting economic prosperity, enabling residents and communities to lead healthy and independent lives, and assisting the County Council's ambitions to protect Hampshire's unique environment in the future.

Proposals

33. As the country begins to exit restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic, there is a need to review HWRC operations and consider if and how onsite capacity may be increased safely. It is recommended that a staggered programme is developed to incrementally increase capacity over a period of time, allowing monitoring at each stage to evaluate the impact on site operations. Retention of the booking system would play a crucial role in this by facilitating a control method in the short term to optimise customer demand and prevent HWRCs getting overwhelmed during what is traditionally the busiest period of the year, while respecting any Government guidance on social distancing. It would also facilitate the proposed trial of pedestrian access described below.
34. The current HWRC network in Hampshire is not designed to accommodate pedestrian access. Providing a dedicated, segregated entrance for pedestrians would be challenging at the vast majority of Hampshire HWRCs for cost and space reasons. However, in response to the deputations, and in recognition that a number of Hampshire HWRCs are situated near to residential areas, it is proposed that a six-month trial is undertaken at three such sites – namely New Alresford, Hedge End and Waterlooville - from July 2021 to examine more closely the impact of enabling pedestrian access on a controlled basis over a defined period including both summer and winter months to gather data over the range of seasons.
35. The existing booking system lends itself to such a trial whereby a designated hour would be 'blocked off' to vehicle users on up to three mornings per week in order to enable pedestrians to enter more safely. This time slot represents the best operational approach and would create the least disruption to vehicle users, thereby enabling the most favourable conditions for the trial evaluation. Such a trial would enable the County Council to quantify the patronage generated by such an approach while observing the impact on existing HWRC users (who would lose a proportion of currently available slots) who visit using vehicles in a controlled way. Health and Safety experts at both Hampshire

County Council and Veolia UK Ltd have advised 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.

36. Pedestrians that wished to visit the HWRC during the designated period would be asked to wait outside on the pavement until invited into the site. It could be very difficult for site staff to identify customers who have booked a 'pedestrian' slot, 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 choosing to park on the highway and present 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 until such time as the Government advises otherwise.
37. It is also proposed that cycles, which are able to safely access the sites using vehicular routes, are reintroduced on a wider basis to all sites. A small adaptation to the existing booking system would enable cyclists to book a slot in the same way as a vehicle, noting it as a bicycle rather than providing a registration number. While it is not expected that a high number of cyclists would book slots, it should be noted that this would reduce the proportion of slots bookable by other vehicles in order to maintain a smooth throughput per half hour.
38. A review of operational and safety impacts during the trial 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 Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment, to alter or cease the pedestrian trial at any point if circumstances in the Covid-19 response change significantly or any concerns about safety or financial impacts are identified. The trial will also benefit from running partly over the summer period in order to evaluate the impact on what is the busiest period annually for the HWRC network.
39. A formal evaluation will be reported through the appropriate channels following completion of the trial and evaluation of the relevant data and findings. It should be noted that, as set out in paragraph 21, there are a number of HWRCs that are unlikely to ever be suitable for pedestrian access due to their geographic location, proximity to housing and surrounding road network.
40. In line with the decisions previously taken by the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment, it is also recommended that initiative to remove glass banks from HWRCs is commenced on 1 July 2021, and the £5 entry charge for non-residents³ and unregistered users is commenced from 1 September 2021 with necessary communication.

³ Please note, this does not apply to residents from Dorset or West Sussex as a separate cross-border agreement has been reached with the respective authorities.

Finance

41. 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. Given the relatively limited scope of the trial, the County Council would anticipate that the initial 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 and larger sites, and taken in to account in any future decisions.
42. It is expected that the cost of implementing the trial will be met using existing resources.

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

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
T21 Waste Savings Proposals-2020-10-08-EMETE Decision Day (hants.gov.uk)	8 October 2020
HWRC Cross Border Charging Update https://democracy.hants.gov.uk/documents/s24838/Report.pdf	29 October 2018

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 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. All impacts are considered neutral for groups with protected characteristics.