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Dear Newcastle Waste Commission,

Further to our letters in March, please accept this as our initial response to your Commission, setting out some initiatives suggested by our members to reduce waste, promote greater levels of reuse and better support recycling.

The BAN Waste reports mentioned at the end of this document are available online, with links towards the end of our webpage at:

❖ <https://newcastleupontyne.greenparty.org.uk/waste-strategy.html>

Yours sincerely,

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(for and on behalf of Newcastle Green Party)

## **A Waste Strategy for Newcastle: Community Proposals to The Newcastle Waste Commission, April 2017**

On 12.4.17, Newcastle Green Party held a policy discussion, focusing on three questions.

These were:

- a. How can we tackle problems of rubbish/ fly-tipping / recycling? (Bearing in mind that the current recycling % has dropped from c. 44% to c. 38%)
- b. Look at the BAN Waste Select Committee Final Report summary. What still applies and what needs to change?
- c. Sustainable Newcastle: what do we need to do to achieve a green society with lower consumption and less waste?

### **a. How can we tackle problems of rubbish/ fly-tipping/recycling?**

#### *Reduce:*

Is the WEEE Directive being optimally, or even adequately, implemented?

Reduce is the buzzword here, get companies such as John Lewis to agree that when they sell a washer, tv, kettle, they will be duty bound to take the goods back at end of goods life. Could also bring in idea we don't buy "stuff", but rather pay a one off sum, to have say the washing machine for its useful life, then hand it back to the company if broken or not useful anymore.

#### *Repair and re-use:*

There are good people-based schemes of re-use, e.g. Men in Sheds and Olio. These could be publicised, reported and spread.

Encourage and promote local hubs for repair and re-use, e.g. Freecycle, Freegle, Gumtree.

Networks of water fountains and re-usable bottles could be re-introduced, but this would have to be combined with public education on the matter, such is the widespread addiction to bottled water.

Find sponsors for promoting reuse and recycling. The Newcastle Waste Commission members could set the example with sponsored champions.

#### *Recycle:*

Where local firms or farms are involved, the reduction of food outlet packaging should be encouraged.

The Food Waste collection pilot study that took place under the Liberal Democrat's initiative, was a complete success and popular.

Unfortunately, of all the towns and cities participating, Newcastle was the only one that did not follow through and roll it out throughout the city. Anaerobic digestion is now much better established, and is the obvious way forward for food waste. Allotment societies could be involved in this, particularly at this pivotal point in the administration of parks and allotments in Newcastle.

Large communal rubbish and recycling bins in Jesmond are reported as incredibly successful in some areas, although they were violently opposed by some residents, and still unpopular in different areas. At best, they've brought back a sense of pride and ownership to back lanes.

Distribute a (laminated?) A4, double sided card to all householders to include information about what is recycled and where charity shops are that take household goods and clothes.

Funding needed for recycling publicity.

Have the same system and standards across the country: influence national policy to prevent the present confusion

#### *Develop growing spaces:*

Provide resources and community assets for groups to grow food crops, eg city centre community buildings / roof tops, e.g. multi-storey car parks. This has already been considered in depth by voluntary groups in Newcastle.

#### *Markets:*

Space could be provided and encouraged for markets in various suburb locations. In the recent past Newcastle has turned down such approaches, preferring to concentrate on the monthly, city centre Farmers' Market, which is welcome but is not enough.

#### *Rubbish collection:*

In The Netherlands in Groningen everyone has a pin number, so rubbish is weighed, a person puts their pin number in, and they are charged according to weight( not sure if this is volume too). It has massively pushed up recycling, as high participation means a smaller bill from council waste services.

In Belgium, people buy 10 waste bags from a supermarket for £20, the more you recycle, with the council collecting these bags, the less general waste there is in bags, and the less you pay as an individual for rubbish collection. There are spot checks on bags to prevent anonymous fly tipping.

In Newcastle's Cowgate around 10 years ago there were "amnesty days" for collecting large items that might otherwise have been fly-tipped. These were successful. Such amnesties could be offered in

other areas of Newcastle. They would reduce the cost of clearing up, and of prosecution, while encouraging people towards behavioural change: to be on the side of those who treat waste disposal responsibly.

**b. Look at the BAN Waste Select Committee Final Report summary. What still applies and what needs to change?**

A remarkable amount still applies from the reports of the BAN Waste Select Committee (which spanned 3 years, 2001- 3). The two fundamental changes needed were identified as follows:

*Resource recovery:*

Society must change from **waste disposal to resource recovery**. Resource recovery treats what is called waste as valuable resources. These should not be thrown away but re-used, recycled and composted.

*People-centred recovery:*

Those handling the resources, the council and industry must recognise that the key to success is people. This means a **shift from a priority on technology of disposal to people-centred recovery**.

In addition, these two factors appear crucial.

*Be ambitious:*

The biggest message is perhaps BE AMBITIOUS. BAN Waste, which ran for 13 years, was very ambitious; it set a target of 36% recycling, up from a shocking less than 5% at the millennium. During BAN Waste's 13 years run in Newcastle, recycling rose even above the 36% target, to c. 44%.

*Separation at source:*

Separation at source is a mantra that BAN Waste promoted, but was never applied seriously enough. Source separation clearly increases the value of recyclates. BAN Waste designed wheelie bins with separate drawers, and prototypes were produced in Washington, Co. Durham, but never taken up.

Make separation at source simple and easy such as through large community based bottle banks.

### **c. Sustainable Newcastle: what do we need to do to achieve a green society with lower consumption and less waste?**

#### *Community champions:*

The current Waste Commission for Newcastle has an opportunity to introduce a more people- centred approach to waste by e.g. sponsoring community champions to further enthusiasm for and knowledge of lighter consumption, more re-use and recycling, and overall, significantly less waste. The people of Newcastle have the skills and appetite for this.

#### *Sustainable consumerism:*

We need to encourage sustainable consumerism, make or remake products from up cycled, free cycled, recycled, recovered, everything, from furniture, to kitchen benches, cookers, fridges, kettles, create a sexy, fun, green zeitgeist design culture

Newcastle Green Festival, formerly the leading Green Festival in the UK, did much to promote sustainable consumerism. Very sadly it has not run for the past three years, due to prohibitive costs. Finding a way of staging this again would promote these practices to thousands.

#### *Make recycled items appealing:*

Make recycled things cool, trendy, with different costings, including a very strong social justice affordable end, so different levels of design and costing to allow for people's choice/ individuality. Cool trendy affordable recycled things allows people to buy stuff and redeem their consciences.

#### *Humanise the products:*

Humanising the product, tell their story e.g. a kettle, it's not just inert material: who made it, was it made on a living wage, where does it come from, its origins, carbon emissions i.e. materials, made locally or shipped in, can it be repaired...these are all part of the story

#### *Rewards and punishments:*

Carrots and sticks, rewards and punishments will play a part here to pull or push consumers in a sustainable, green direction.

#### *Things to be made to last:*

Declare a war on inbuilt obsolescence, the bomb in every product aimed at the environment and intergenerational planetary justice. Things can be made to last, external design, colour can therefore have the freedom to change, **but** the essentials of the machine will stay the same, i.e. cooker, fridge, sofa, kettle, mobile phone.

### *Promote sharing:*

Also promote "sharing" of household goods, i.e. lawnmowers, washing machines, diy tools, etc. Housing, such as co-housing and indeed estates, can be built to accommodate and encourage such sharing.

### *Environmental awareness education:*

Pull people away from crude material consumption of "stuff", promote/expand adult education, mindfulness and meditation, tai chi, micro gyms, community food growing, reading and debating groups: the list is endless... to promote cultural social human development, self-actualisation, and Jungian individuation (the idea that as we grow older we develop deeper and more complex layers of skill and ability in more areas of culture, our interests grow exponentially).

### **Overarching comments**

- There are severe limits to what can be done at local authority level without the added weight of central government legislation. A good example of this is the levy on plastic carrier bags, introduced in 2015. Far from being the disaster some predicted, the transition was remarkably smooth, and has drastically reduced the single-use of these bags, and thus the number sent to landfill. [In Newcastle, considerable efforts had gone into voluntary reduction in Jesmond in particular, through the work of Transition Newcastle].
- Need for fiscal measures.
- Need for but difficulty of establishing a sustainable baseline which could ensure every citizen's access to resources and then policing the indulgence in excess.
- All plastic should be regulated so that it can be recycled, with very few exceptions. For example, it is frustrating to those trying to increase recycling that apparently black plastic trays, although recyclable, are not able to be detected by selection machinery and so go to landfill.
- We need an effective policy on resource recovery. This was started a few years ago, then abandoned.
- There are better ways to deal with waste than incineration, even when this is put over as Energy from Waste.

### *Finally:*

- The comments made here are inclusive but not necessarily prioritised, and we are only too aware that they are far from comprehensive. We urge the present Waste Commission to revisit the reports of BAN Waste's 3-year long enquiry.
- We would welcome the opportunity to attend and contribute to one or more sitting of Newcastle's Waste Commission 2017.