

**Minutes
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**03 September 2008
5.30 p.m.
Mayor's Chamber, Town Hall**

Present: Councillors Simpson (in the Chair), Carr, Colledge, Crooks, Kelly, Martin, Mavin, Turnbull, Wilkinson, Wolstenholme and Wynn.

Also in Attendance: Councillors D.Smith and Wilkes.

Professor Tim Burt – Master of Hatfield College and Lead for Environment & Sustainability Issues, University of Durham
Stuart Morris – Sustainable Living Programme Coordinator, University of Durham

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mitchell.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 July 2008

- 2.1 Subject to the record of the venue of the previous meeting being amended to read "Guildhall", the Minutes of the meeting held 23 July 2008 were confirmed as a true record.

3. Scrutiny Topic – Kerbside Recycling Scheme

Witnesses in attendance:

Professor Tim Burt and Mr Stuart Morris, University of Durham

- 3.1 Professor Tim Burt and Mr Stuart Morris from the University of Durham were in attendance to speak to Members, University's approach to recycling.
- 3.2 Professor Burt thanked Members for the invitation to speak at the meeting and gave a brief overview of the University's approach to environment issues in general. This included mention of the University's new Environment Strategy which encompassed many areas including Estate Management, Carbon Footprint, Biodiversity and Recycling. Professor Burt explained that Student involvement was an integral part of achieving success in these areas and Student engagement was high. It was noted through a system of College Representatives coordinated by Stuart Morris (himself a former College representative) feedback from Students was obtained and similarly information from the University is disseminated to Students via these Representatives.
- 3.3 Members were informed by Professor Burt that there were predominately two types of University buildings, those that operated as a business at some level and those which were purely residential accommodation. Recycling from residential accommodation is collected by the City of Durham's recycling contractor, Greencycle similar to any other residence within the City of Durham area. For the other properties, the University has entered into a new contract with BIFFA Waste Management to collect and process the recyclable items discarded by the University and its constituent Colleges.

- 3.4 Professor Burt explained that BIFFA were selected on various criteria, but one specific reason was that of the variety of items that they were able to recycle. These items include glass, plastics, tins, paper and cardboard. BIFFA provide external waste bins for use by the Colleges, but the University has also invested in thousands of recycling bins for use within the University buildings. This enables Students to recycle as easy as using their regular waste bin, with the recyclable items being transferred to the external BIFFA bins for collection.
- 3.5 Members were asked to note that the recycling rate for the University a few years ago was a mere 3%, but through the various policy and strategy changes and through many activities and events, the recycling rate had risen to 28% for the 2007/2008 period.
- 3.6 Stuart Morris informed Members that the University's Sustainable Living Action Group (SLAG) was set up as a coordinating body to facilitate work between the 16 elected Student College Environment Officers, Durham Student Union and the University Administration. This set up is particularly helpful for Durham as the many constituent Colleges and various buildings often have slightly different ways of operating and are at different levels of progress. Stuart Morris added that the new BIFFA contract would hopefully help equalise the levels of recycling across the University to that of the most successful Colleges.
- 3.7 Stuart Morris explained that there were many events that SLAG had organised including media / cartoon competitions relating to recycling and "Rubbish Mountain" an event highlighting the amount of recyclable materials that are thrown away as waste rather than recycled. Another activity is the "Green Move Out" whereby Students, when they are leaving their accommodation at the end of the year, are encouraged to make unwanted items available for collection by charitable organisation for reuse rather than the items being directed to landfill. Healthy competition between the Colleges was encouraged to help increase the amount of items being reused. The North East Air Ambulance was one of the charities that benefited from the Green Move Out activity.
- 3.8 Members asked whether Students within University "Halls of Residence" (i.e. University owned / ran accommodation) had recycling bins available to them, similar to how students in private accommodation have access to the Council's kerbside recycling scheme. Members were informed that indeed those Students that were in Halls of Residence were provided with facilities for recycling, albeit with each College's facilities being slightly different. The ambition is to ultimately have a recycling bin for each individual student.
- 3.9 Members were curious to know whether there was a difficulty in engaging Students and encouraging them to participate. Stuart Morris explained that the situation is usually quite the reverse, with the majority of feedback being to complain about a lack of an ability to recycle. Students were found to be quite pro-active, and if facilities are made available to them the uptake is usually very good.
- 3.10 A Member pointed out that a major component of the waste produced by Colleges was food waste, and that there were schemes to compost kitchen waste (but this was outside of the BIFFA contract). Equipment was available to do this, but this would be an issue for the University to work towards in the future.

- 3.11 Members discussed the issue of some City Centre streets, where the majority of the residents were in fact Students. In these cases, it was felt that there may be a need to have an annual “beginning of term” check on the status of Student properties, i.e. are the green boxes and bags in-situ? Also Members felt it may be beneficial for a leaflet introducing the kerbside scheme as operated in Durham to be distributed to those Students new to private accommodation. Professor Burt agreed, and added that any such information could be forwarded to Stuart Morris to be added to the University’s website. Stuart Morris added that it had been arranged for the C.E.O. of Greencycle to speak to new students via the Durham Student Union Environment and Ethics Officer, Mr Jonathan Collinson.
- 3.12 Members thought it may be useful to have a procedure that recognises the usual annual exodus of students from the City such that student areas are targeted in order to deal with the large amounts of waste and potentially recyclable materials in a responsible and efficient manner. Members were aware that many of the streets within the City Centre were narrow and wondered whether during these sorts of “peak-times” a larger recycling bin or skip could be placed at one end of a street. However, if such an idea was feasible it would be necessary to ensure that the skip was not misused by people simply wishing to dump any type of waste.
- 3.13 Members noted that there was concern from Residents as regards the recyclable items once they were collected by Greencycle. Some Residents had approached Members with queries as regards the necessity for cleaning and separating the types of recyclable materials when Residents can see many different types being collected and stowed within the same section of the recycling vehicles. Members wondered whether a visit could be arranged to see the various processes involved at Greencycle’s facility at Tursdale.
- 3.14 Members thanked Professor Burt and Mr Stuart Morris for their attendance at the meeting and the useful and interesting information that they provided.

4. Any Other Business

- 4.1 Members were concerned by reports from many Residents that dog foul bags were not available from Sports Centres and that Residents had been told by Sports Centre Staff that the free bags would no longer be available. Members asked for information relating to this to be brought to Members attention.
- 4.2 Members acknowledged a delay in obtaining replacement and additional dog waste bins (wheelie bins attached to a metal post). This was thought to be due to a change in recycling policy in Germany whereby all German households were to receive a plastic bin to enable recycling collections of waste paper. Accordingly, there were shortages and delays in obtaining many items manufactured from this particular type of plastic.
- 4.3 Members were reminded that there was an event to launch the Durham Bag Reduction Partnership “Durham Agreement” in front of the Town Hall at 10.00 a.m. Friday 05 September 2008, with the Mayor, Councillor Woods and the M.P. being in attendance as well as representatives from the University of Durham and other Partner organisations. 1000 reusable cotton bags (sustainable sourced) would be available free at the event.

5. Actions for the Next Meeting

- 5.1 The Council's Environmental Services Manager would be in attendance to speak to Members as regards the progress made by the Council's Kerbside Recycling Scheme operated by Greencycle and to answer Members' question on this topic. The Council's Environmental Services Manager would be asked prior to the October meeting as regards the possibility of a potential visit to Greencycle's Tursdale facility.

The Meeting terminated at 6.20 p.m.