

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 24 February 2025

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Proposed implementation of a booking system at Household Waste Recycling Sites

Purpose: To provide feedback on the results of the consultation on the possible introduction of a booking system.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Note the response to the public consultation on the introduction of a booking system for Household Waste Recycling Sites;**
 - (2) Note the petition opposing the introduction of a booking system for Household Waste Recycling Sites submitted by the Lewes Liberal Democrats;**
 - (3) Approve the proposal to introduce a booking system for access to all East Sussex Household Waste Recycling Sites; and**
 - (4) Approve the proposal to include as part of the booking system the ability to charge non-East Sussex residents a set fee to use East Sussex Household Waste Recycling Sites; and**
 - (5) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Environment and Transport to implement and make changes to a booking system, agree the charges for non-East Sussex residents and develop a policy to govern its ongoing operation and enforcement.**
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1. Background information

1.1. East Sussex County Council is responsible for the disposal and recycling of household waste and operates a network of 10 Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRS). In 2023/24 the sites had 1.2 million visitors who brought approximately 50,000 tonnes of waste and recycling for disposal. East Sussex County Council has a legal duty to provide the service but only for East Sussex residents to use. Businesses must make their own waste disposal arrangements and residents from outside of East Sussex do not have a right to use the sites for free.

1.2. During certain times of the week and year HWRSs can get very busy. There can be queues and at some locations this can cause problems with congestion and concerns for safety in and around the site.

1.3. The proposal is also part of the County Council's work to identify areas where savings can be made to address an expected £55 million funding gap in 2025/26.

1.4. To make sure only East Sussex residents are using the sites and to improve the operation and safety of the sites, it is proposed to introduce a booking system for all

residents to use. Prior to visiting a site, a resident will be required to visit the East Sussex County Council website and book a half hour timeslot. Those who are unable to do this will be able to make a telephone booking.

2. Supporting information

Consultation results

2.1. Between 18 October and 22 December 2024, East Sussex County Council consulted on the proposal to introduce a booking system. The consultation received 5,992 responses, which is the most responses to date for a consultation run by the Council's Communities, Environment and Transport department. In addition, the dedicated email inbox received 78 representations, and 9 people wrote to Lead Member for Transport and Environment or the Leader of the Council directly.

2.2. All the feedback received during the consultation is available to view within the Members' Room. The final public consultation analysis report is attached as Appendix 2, and a summary of the feedback is set out below.

2.3. 91% of respondents felt negatively about using a booking system at HWRS. The responses were as follows:

Response	Total	Percentage
Extremely positive	80	1.34%
Quite positive	175	2.92%
Neither positive nor negative	242	4.04%
Quite negative	1115	18.61%
Extremely negative	4352	72.63%
Don't know	28	0.47%
Not answered	0	0%

The 2 main reasons chosen were that it would be an inconvenience and that it did not fit in with work or personal life. 6% said it was because they did not find booking systems easy to use, even if telephone bookings are available.

2.4 Over half of the survey respondents use the sites once a month or once every 3 months. This is in line with the response to the 2022 satisfaction survey. However, 28% of the consultation respondents visit the sites more than once a month. This is higher than the response to the 2022 satisfaction survey of 17%. The booking system consultation appears to have attracted more responses from more frequent users of the service.

2.5 In response to the question 'Do you want less queuing at our sites?', 79% said no. Feedback received suggests that some residents do not feel they have an issue with queuing at their local site. 24% of the emailed representations were from residents saying that they do not encounter queuing at the sites, and 10% said that they would like the service kept as it is. For many users, particularly during the week, they can drive straight into sites. However, traffic counter data shows that the HWRSs are considerably busier at the weekend, and during easter and the summer, and that some sites are busy every day.

2.6 A booking system may act as a deterrent to traders who try to tip business waste for free at the sites - a cost which is covered by the Council's waste disposal budget at the expense of local taxpayers. However, when asked 'Would you like to see a booking system that reduces trade waste at our sites?', 81% of respondents said 'No'.

2.7 Similarly, 95% of respondents said 'no' to the question 'Do you want a booking system to improve the operations at our Sites?'.

2.8 During the consultation period, residents asked if a partial booking system could be considered; for example, where a booking is only required at weekends, at busy times, certain days or certain HWRS. However, for the reasons set out below, this is not considered a viable option at this time.

2.9 Recent government waste and recycling policy has sought to ensure a more consistent service across both the collection and disposal of waste. The waste collection service provided by the District and Borough Councils can often result in some confusion due to lack of consistency around collection days, and what can and cannot be recycled. Consistency would be vital while booking to access the HWRS. If a partial option were to be deployed at the HWRSs, there is the potential for confusion for the customer, who would need to check which days and which HWRS require a booking slot before attending.

2.10 A partial system could also result in change of customer behaviour, where a resident chooses to go to an HWRS where booking would not be required, or a weekday when they would normally go at the weekend – this could lead to HWRS which would ordinarily have no queues, or days which would ordinarily be quieter, becoming much busier with resultant queuing. A partial solution would undermine the intention of introducing a booking system, i.e. to better manage access to HWRSs, and create added confusion for residents.

2.11 During the consultation period, 24 residents got in touch to say they thought that the questions were biased and that the format of the consultation was too closed. The consultation did not allow for free text answers, but residents were able to say whether they supported the proposal or not. A dedicated email address was also made available so that residents were able to get in touch with any comments or concerns and, as set out above, 78 representations were submitted this way.

2.12 A petition with 2,276 signatures has also been submitted by the Lewes Liberal Democrats via email regarding the proposal for a booking system to be introduced at East Sussex HWRS. The petition has not reached the 5000-signature threshold to trigger a Full Council debate.

2.13 The concerns raised by the petition are similar to the responses and representations received from individuals during the consultation period. These are set out in more detail in the consultation report at Appendix 2.

Increasing numbers of visitors

2.14. HWRSs in East Sussex are busy and have been getting busier. All sites are fitted with automatic traffic counters. Between April 2023 and March 2024, the sites had over 1.2 million visits which was 7% higher than the previous year. During 2024/25 there has been another 7% increase in overall site visits compared to 2023/24. Maresfield has seen the biggest increase in visitors of nearly 20%.

2.15. In December 2024, Maresfield's usage was 14% higher than the previous December, whilst Hastings was 12% higher.

2.16. It is predicted that there will be 1.3 million visits to the sites during 2024/25 which is 100,000 more visits than 2023/24. The most recent customer satisfaction survey carried out by ARP Research on behalf of the Council's HWRS contractors, Veolia, found that queues remain the main deterrent putting site-users off from recycling. This survey is carried out bi-annually and this year used a sample of 1,009 HWRS users from across the County.

Business and out of county waste

2.17. Most of the visits to the sites are made by East Sussex residents. However, some of the visits to the sites are made by businesses and visitors from outside of the county. The sites are not for businesses to use. They must pay for the disposal of their own waste. Booking systems are known to act as a deterrent to businesses. Similarly, the sites are not provided for anyone living outside of the county.

Savings

2.18. Costs to dispose of waste from businesses which should not be disposed of at HWRSs and out of county waste which does not have to be accepted for free, are currently being met by the Council's waste disposal budget.

2.19. Other authorities who have introduced booking systems have seen a reduction in waste after implementation. A 7.5% reduction in waste has been assumed if a booking system were to be introduced.

2.20. After booking system running costs are factored in, a saving of approximately £50,000 per year is estimated. Savings from the booking system will be generated by the subsequent reduction in trade waste which should not be delivered to the sites. It is also proposed to include as part of the booking system the ability to charge non-East Sussex residents a set fee to use East Sussex HWRSs.

Operational benefits

2.21. Across the network, queuing to gain access varies from site to site and can occur both seasonally (New Year, Easter, summer), on certain days (Saturday and Sunday), and during different times of the day (peak use times tend to be between 10am and 2pm). A booking system will help to spread demand over the entire day rather than having peak times in the middle of the day. Further information about the design of a new booking system is set out in Appendix 1.

2.22. A booking system will help some site-specific queuing issues. For example, the site at Eastbourne has ongoing queuing problems and a problem where a small number of visitors park outside the site before it opens. This blocks the highway and causes difficulties for neighbours. A booking system would help remove the motive for this kind of behaviour and improve the current situation.

2.23. The experience of neighbouring county councils is that booking systems have provided a range of benefits to residents, including:

- acting as a deterrent to traders who try to tip commercial waste for free at the sites. This cost is passed on to the taxpayer when businesses should be paying for their own waste disposal;
- less queuing, particularly at sites that can get very busy and sites where some visitors arrive well before the opening time and cause congestion around the site;
- less traffic in and around the HWRS, because a booking system will ensure visitors arrive at a steady rate;
- customers take their waste in bulk and visit less often. Kent County Council report that their residents are making fewer journeys but with more waste, benefiting the environment;
- reduced crowding within the HWRS;
- less disruption to customers if site servicing and bin movements can be planned around demand;
- residents can plan their time more effectively with the certainty of a booking and less chance of getting caught in a queue;
- allows staff to concentrate more on managing the site effectively and safely, and less on managing traffic;
- helping to manage usage more efficiently, a booking system may help extend the life of sites where there is housing growth. For example at Hailsham there is increasing demand on the local site;

Further information about the experience of other local authorities that have introduced booking systems is set out in Appendix 1.

Equality Impact Assessment

2.24. The Lead Member must have due regard to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty or PSED) when making a decision on this proposal.

2.25. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) (Appendix 3) has been carried out to identify adverse impacts that may arise as a result of the proposal for those with protected characteristics. This assessment details potential actions to help minimise, avoid or mitigate negative impacts of the proposals. The EqIA is attached at Appendix 3. The Lead Member must read and have regard to the EqIA when determining this proposal.

2.26. Two protected groups were identified as being impacted by this proposal: age and disability. For people with one or both of these protected characteristics, they may find online booking difficult. This would, however, be mitigated by providing the option to book via telephone.

2.27. The EqIA has considered the impact of the proposals on different groups. The Council considers that by delivering this proposal, it is meeting its statutory duties under the Environmental Protection Act (1990), the Equality Act 2010 and its commitment to improve the environment.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. Within the context of the budget pressures facing the authority and the significant increase in the usage of the HWRS network (including visits by traders and out of county

residents), a system to regulate access, reduce trade use and charge for out-of-area visits would help contribute to improving the efficiency of the service and reduce the authority's funding gap. If agreed, the charge for out of county residents would be reviewed annually along with the charges for non-household waste at recycling sites as part of the Council's annual fees and charges review mechanism.

3.2. From the consultation results, the vast majority of those that responded do not want a booking system. However, the experience of neighbouring authorities who have introduced systems has been that some residents do not want the system to begin with, but then become accustomed to it. In June 2021, after implementing their scheme one year previously, Kent County Council asked 5,866 of their household waste site users how positive or negative would you feel about using the booking system in the future. 84.9% responded that they would be 'extremely or quite positive' about using one. West Sussex County Council carried out a consultation in 2021 on continuing with the booking system that was introduced during the pandemic. Over 60% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the booking system should be maintained. Over 80% said it was extremely easy or quite easy to make a booking.

3.3. The proposed booking system would:

- help to manage queues at peak times at our busiest sites;
- help to improve operations and safety;
- help to prevent traders from bringing in commercial waste which should not be disposed of at taxpayers' expense; and
- ensure only East Sussex residents are accessing the sites for free.

3.4. Booking a HWRS visit will require a little effort from residents to access a service that is currently freely available. Around 50% of councils in England now operate some sort of booking system for their HWRS, including West Sussex, Hampshire, Kent and West Berkshire. Information received from these councils suggests they work well, residents can make bookings and use the service easily, and they are broadly satisfied with the service. If approved, a similar and easy to use booking system could be implemented for East Sussex HWRSs during financial year 2025/26.

3.5. The Lead Member is therefore recommended to note the responses to the consultation and the petition submitted by Lewes Liberal Democrats. The Lead Member is , also recommended to approve the proposal to introduce a booking system for access to all HWRS, including the ability to charge non-East Sussex residents a set fee to use East Sussex HWRSs and delegate authority to the Director for Communities, Economy and Transport to implement and make changes to the booking system, agree the charges for non-East Sussex residents and develop a policy to govern its ongoing operation and enforcement.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Consultation results – individual responses and full list of questions