

**TO: JOINT WASTE DISPOSAL BOARD**  
**17<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

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**REVIEW OF RECYCLING CENTRE BOOKING SYSTEM**  
**Report of the re3 Project Director**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to brief the re3 Joint Waste Disposal Board on access options for the re3 recycling centres.

**2 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **That Members endorse one of the options for access to the re3 recycling centres, presented from 5.10.**

**3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 3.1 N/A

**4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 The purpose of this report is to present options for consideration.

**5 PROGRESS IN RELATION TO WASTE MANAGEMENT**

**Review of Booking System**

- 5.1 Members have supported the retention of the recycling centre booking system during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to provide clarity in communications for site visitors, as well as certainty for other council services and support for neighbouring businesses. At the JWDB meeting of January 2021, Members requested that future access options be considered. This report sets out relevant data and considerations related to the booking system and presents three different options which could be implemented as COVID restrictions on social-distancing are lifted.

- 5.2 The booking system was introduced to minimise the formation of queues which may have resulted from the 'one in, one out' policy; used to help maintain social distancing at the recycling centres. Some of the benefits of managing the flow of residents arriving at the recycling centres are set out below.

1. The re3 Partnership has helped ensure that access to the co-located waste transfer stations has not been restricted by queuing vehicles and that the delivery of other public services was not delayed. This has been critically important in supporting waste collection and recycling for the three councils as:
  - a. During 2020/21 and the course of the pandemic, council collected tonnages increased by 16%, and prompt turnaround times were important, and;
  - b. The recent changes in waste collection at two councils, have further increased the number of council vehicles using the sites.
2. There has been vastly improved access for owners and customers of neighbouring businesses, helping to address a long-term issue at Longshot Lane in Bracknell. Limiting the impact of the re3 facilities in this way, compared to previous conditions, helps to foster good relationships and has undoubtedly been valued by local

- businesses during an already complicated period of trading.
3. By seeking to ensure that large numbers of residents do not arrive at the recycling centre at once, we have helped to reduce the idling of cars caused by queuing at the sites. This has potential benefits in terms of the carbon emissions caused by prolonged queueing.
  4. During the user satisfaction survey, conducted in December 2020, 64% of respondents at Smallmead and 65% of respondents at Longshot Lane said they made their visit to the sites more efficient as a result of needing to book. In the period between June and December, visitor numbers at Smallmead were 43% lower in 2019 than they were in 2020, whilst tonnages were only 16% lower. During the same period at Longshot Lane visitor numbers were 50% lower but tonnages were only 18% lower. This is in stark contrast to some other sites, where public order issues have been experienced and Police attendance has been required.
- 5.3 A range of other benefits have also been experienced whilst utilising the booking system. These are as detailed below:
5. The recycling rate at both recycling centres increased during the time in which the booking system was in place. The provisional recycling rate in 2020/21 was 77.6% at Smallmead and 72.0% at Longshot Lane. This compares to 74.2% and 71.6% in 2019/20, respectively. Relevant factors may include more time for residents to prepare for visits (including packing the vehicle and segregating waste) and greater access to site staff.
  6. The provision of contact details during the booking process has enabled re3 to make contact with residents who are expected to visit in cases where the recycling centres have had to close in emergency circumstances. This helps to ensure that residents do not need to make unnecessary trips to the site and can help keep access clear for the emergency services.
  7. Residents can confirm whether they are happy to receive e-newsletters and important announcements from the re3 partnership via the email address they use for their booking. Being able to seek consent in this way has helped to increase distribution of the re3 newsletter from around 500 subscribers before the introduction of the booking system to about 25,000 in March 2021.
- 5.4 The re3 Partnership are also expecting the booking system to be upgraded during June 2021. The addition of an address look-up function to the webform should lead to the following additional benefits:
8. Residency in the re3 area is currently assessed by meet and greet staff upon a resident's arrival at the re3 recycling centre. Whilst staff have developed good recognition for re3 postcodes, the addition of an address look-up function should help to reduce an element of human error and give the staff more time to focus on other checks and provide important information to the residents. More accurate identification of re3 residents will further help to ensure that re3 residents are not covering the cost of waste disposal from elsewhere.
  9. Patronage of the re3 recycling centres has historically been assessed based on data obtained during an annual user satisfaction survey. The introduction of an address look-up function will allow allocation of tonnages and costs to be based on full usage data, rather than an annual survey conducted over a couple of weeks.
- 5.5 re3 Officers have met with the booking system hosts (JRNI) and the re3 Contractor to discuss future options that would be available to the Partnership in the event that a booking system is maintained. Some of these are as set out below:
10. The retention of the booking system would enable the partnership to consider operating parallel booking systems alongside the one for re3 residents. This may

offer options to maximise the potential of the facilities, whilst protecting the statutory service for residents. For example, it could be possible to have a separate trade waste system, with a limited number of slots set aside for local businesses, to help facilitate the expansion of this service. Alternatively, the partnership may want to consider limited access for residents outside of the re3 area, as a way of discouraging fly-tipping.

11. It could be possible to take payments for some chargeable products or services via the booking system, thereby speeding up access for residents when arriving at the recycling centres. Whilst not currently recommended for non-household waste types (which are assessed by HWRC staff for consistency) it may be possible to take payments in advance if the Councils were to introduce an access charge for visitors from outside the re3 Partnership, or for bags of compost.
12. The booking system may help the re3 Partnership to identify frequent users, whose usage may suggest activity more like that of a trader (potentially depositing waste illegally, and at the tax payer's expense) rather than a householder. In the past, data relating to usage of commercial vehicle permits has been analysed via a manual process. JRNI have confirmed that they will be able to automate some or all of this process. The booking system can also be linked to Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and the Partnership could consider investment in this in the future, subject to clarification of the practical and operational benefits.
13. The ability to tailor the number of visitors present in the recycling centre at any one time, could help to minimise disruption to residents caused by activities such as ad-hoc maintenance, or the need to conduct a 'push up' of waste at Longshot Lane, such as in high-Summer, when lots of garden waste has been delivered.

5.6 Alongside the benefits, there have also been some perceived difficulties with operating a booking system. These are set out below, alongside the actions that have been taken to mitigate against them, where appropriate.

1. During the pandemic a limit on the number of available slots has been necessitated by the need to comply with social distancing guidelines at the recycling centres. At times of high demand, this may sometimes have led to residents booking a slot that was not preferred or booking further ahead than they would have liked. Officers managed the number of slots available, in consultation with the Contractor, to ensure that additional slots were released where these could be accommodated safely.
2. As with most online systems, a few technical issues have been experienced with the booking system. Officers have worked closely with JRNI to ensure that these have been quickly resolved.
3. In order to operate the booking system, the re3 Partnership require all users to provide some limited personal information including name, address and email address. The quantity of information requested is kept to a minimum in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) requirements and this is handled in line with the Data Privacy Notice, which is publicly accessible online.
4. In order to enable booking details to be easily and safely transferred to Meet and Greet staff at the recycling centres, all bookings for the re3 sites must be made online, via the appropriate form. In order to make the booking system accessible to residents without access to the internet, the customer services teams at all three councils are able to make bookings on behalf of these residents, over the phone.
5. Some users have associated the recycling centre booking system with an increased level of fly-tipping. Officers have monitored levels of fly-tipping and no association between fly-tipping and the introduction of the booking system (from May 2020) can be determined from the available statistics (Appendix 1).

## Options

- 5.7 Before considering the options available, Officers sought advice from the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM) about any restrictions that may be implemented on the use of booking systems once COVID restrictions are lifted. The CIWM advised that DEFRA and the Local Government Association (LGA) had both advised that the use of booking systems is for individual authorities to decide.
- 5.8 Alongside this, Officers received confirmation from the Reading Borough Council Data Protection Team that re3 can continue make provision of limited personal information (name, address and email address) mandatory when the use of booking system is no longer necessitated by social distancing.
- 5.9 In light of this information and the review above, re3 Officers have consulted with the Contractor in relation to the options available. Three options for Member consideration are set out below.

### **Option 1 – Removal of the booking system**

- 5.10 Option 1 would see a return to pre-COVID access arrangements.
- 5.11 Complete removal of the booking system would have advantages and disadvantages. On one hand residents would have the freedom to visit the recycling centre at a time that suited them, without needing to provide their personal details in advance. On the other hand, we now have experience of a system which genuinely provides certainty over a residents' visit. With removal of this system, queueing, as a result of many visitors arriving at the sites at the same time (particularly on Bank holidays or throughout periods of good weather) would once-again be more likely. This will make current and future usage of Island Road and Longshot Lane harder for neighbouring businesses. There would also likely be a return to periods of under utilisation at the sites and the other advantages of the booking system (such as the patronage data, ID validation and additional communication tools) would be lost.
- 5.12 The peaks and troughs in visitor numbers, as seen before the introduction of the booking system, are clearly visible within the graph at Appendix 2.

### **Option 2 - Retention of the booking system, with current profiling and additional slots**

- 5.13 Throughout the pandemic, Officers have sought to maximise access to the HWRCs, to operate efficient reception of waste from council collections and to minimise the impact of the sites on neighbouring businesses though profiling the available bookings. The profiling of bookable slots reflects the busiest periods at the transfer stations, the risk of queuing before the sites open, peak access times for neighbouring premises and Contractor experience.
- 5.14 Appendix 3 shows how profiling in this manner has enabled numbers of bookings to be tailored to the operating conditions, whilst smoothing the large peaks and troughs that were seen previously.
- 5.15 As noted at 5.6 above, the limit on the number of available slots has been necessitated by the need to comply with social distancing guidelines at the recycling centres. However, with the relaxation of social distancing rules, additional slots could be opened across the week, to allow residents more choice over when to book.
- 5.16 Any lasting impact on residents' requirements for visiting the recycling centres, caused by COVID 19 (both from changes in lifestyle and the operation of a recycling centre booking system for a significant period of time) is as yet unclear. However, Officers would not propose to a return to pre-pandemic levels of visits.

- 5.17 Instead, Officers in consultation with the Contractor (who is responsible for site safety and the receipt of waste from the various sources), would seek to progressively increase bookable slots to reach an optimised but practically operable level.
- 5.18 The exact numbers of bookings would need to be carefully managed. Too many bookings in the system, at one time, could still lead to queues (and associated access issues) during some periods. As the restrictions of social-distancing are being relaxed, Officers would propose to continue to amend the profiling in a cautious and gradual way in order to maximise the benefits from this scheme *and* increase accessibility to the facilities.

### **Option 3 - Retention of the booking system, with weekday profiling and additional weekend slots**

- 5.19 Under Option 3, the re3 Partnership could retain booking-slot profiling during the working week (Monday to Friday) similar to the numbers currently available, in order to maintain easy access for other service users. At the weekend, from 1pm on Saturday and throughout Sunday, a larger number of bookable visits would be scheduled. As shown in Appendix 2, the weekend has historically been the most popular time for residents to visit the re3 recycling centres and caters for residents who may not always be able to make a visit during the week.
- 5.20 The weekend is a period in which increased numbers of visitors can be accommodated, particularly on a Sunday. This is achievable because the other integrated facilities (such as the transfer stations) are not operational on Saturday afternoon and throughout the day on Sunday. Making use of on-site queuing measures, such as those required in the Planning Permission for Longshot Lane, mean that the impact on surrounding roads can be moderated even over busy weekend periods.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

- 5.21 A summary of the three different options and the retention of the booking system benefits is presented in Appendix 4. In reference to this summary, and following discussions with other Councils and the re3 Contractor, Officers would recommend that Members request that Option 3 be implemented.
- 5.22 Officers in neighbouring Councils are not looking to remove their booking systems at this time. A third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is predicted for Autumn/Winter 2021 and could prompt the return of social-distancing conditions. The retention of the booking system would therefore provide some clarity and consistency for users in the event that this circumstance arose.
- 5.23 But the experience of operating a booking system has also illustrated other benefits to residents, the councils and the neighbours of the two re3 HWRCs, as this report has illustrated.
- 5.24 Officers therefore propose that the JRNI system would be renewed in November 2021 (on expiry of the current agreement) and run until the following November, ahead of which the retention of the scheme could be reviewed again.
- 5.25 Officers will implement the Member decision on this matter, subject to any further comments from the Contractor. If the decision is made to retain the booking system under Option 3, Officers would recommend that increased numbers of bookings are trialled at the weekend and then formalised following a review.

- 5.26 If the booking system is retained, Officers would also propose that the limits on certain types of waste, which set out the number of items which can be deposited of at the recycling centres, per trip, be revised. A revision, as per the table in Appendix 5, would help residents to continue to make their visits to the site more efficient.
- 5.27 Officers would, as with other services, continue to monitor the booking system operation and propose improvements and amendments to the re3 Board, so the re3 Partnership can continue to respond to any further changes in our operating conditions. Officers would also continue to keep the number of slots under review, as per the current arrangements.

## **7 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM ADMINISTERING AUTHORITY**

### Head of Legal Services

- 7.1 None for this report.

### Corporate Finance Business Partner

- 7.2 None for this report.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.3 None.

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 7.4 None.

## **8 CONSULTATION**

### Principal Groups Consulted

Not applicable.

### Method of Consultation

Not applicable.

### Representations Received

Not applicable.

### Background Papers

October 2020 re3 Board

### Contacts for further information

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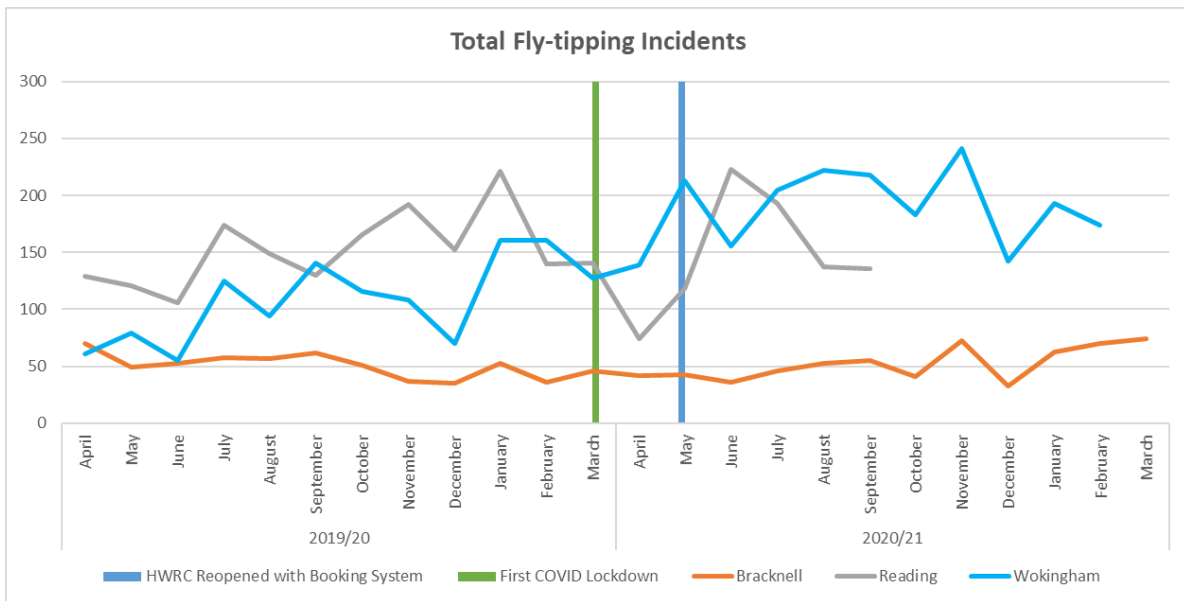
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**APPENDIX 1 - Fly-tipping Data**

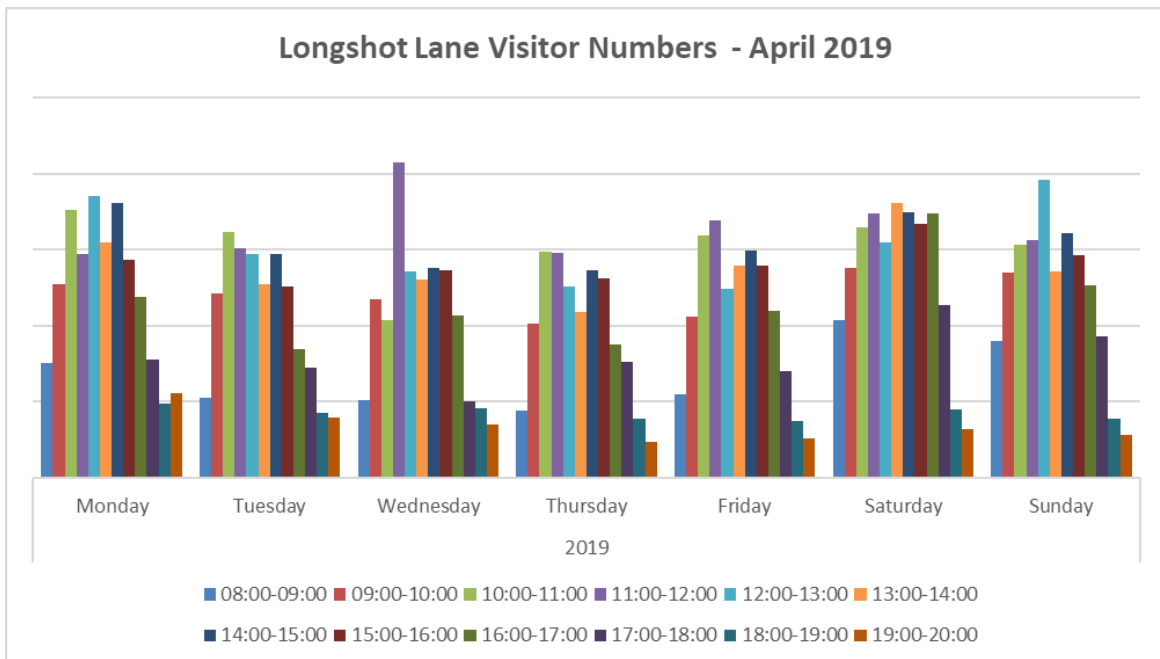
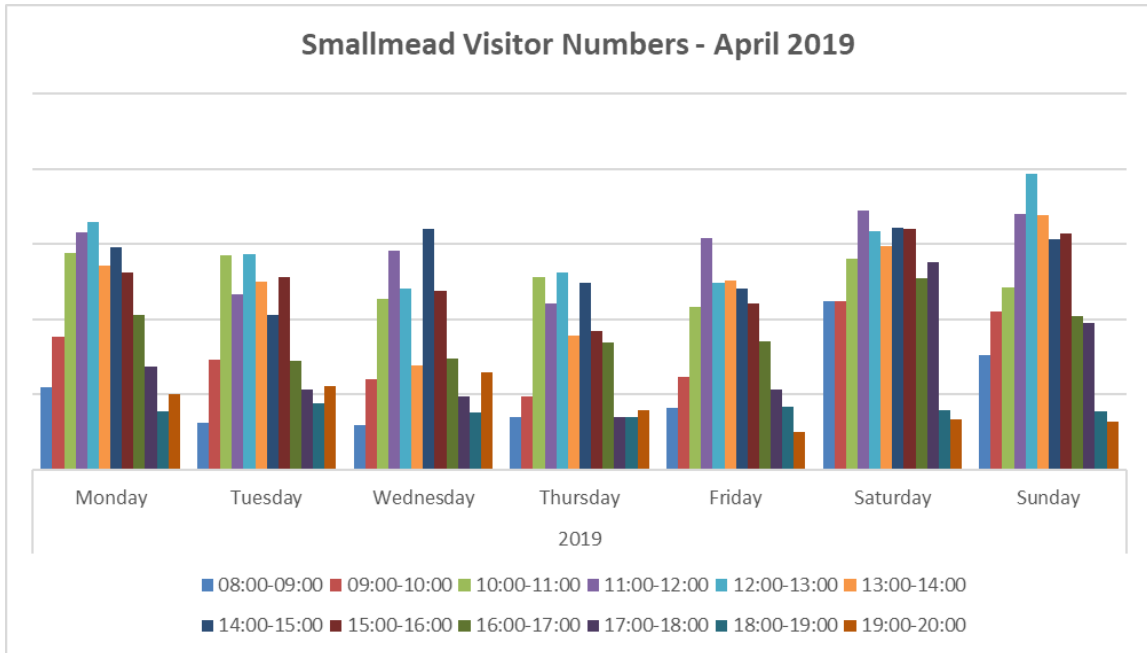
The graph below shows the total number of fly-tip incidents under all reporting categories. As the category of fly-tipping is often reported by a variety of stakeholders and relating to a variety of standards (and can therefore vary from case to case), all instances of flytipping have been reported. The graph therefore represents fly-tips of both commercial and household origins.

It is not easy to draw clear conclusions from the data. There has been an increase in the number of instances of fly-tipping in Wokingham and Reading but, from the graph, both appear to have commenced before lockdown and may be coming to an end. In the case of Bracknell Forest, levels of fly-tipping are relatively low and constant. It may be helpful to understand, in greater detail and from the councils themselves, what is behind these statistics.



**APPENDIX 2 – Option 1**

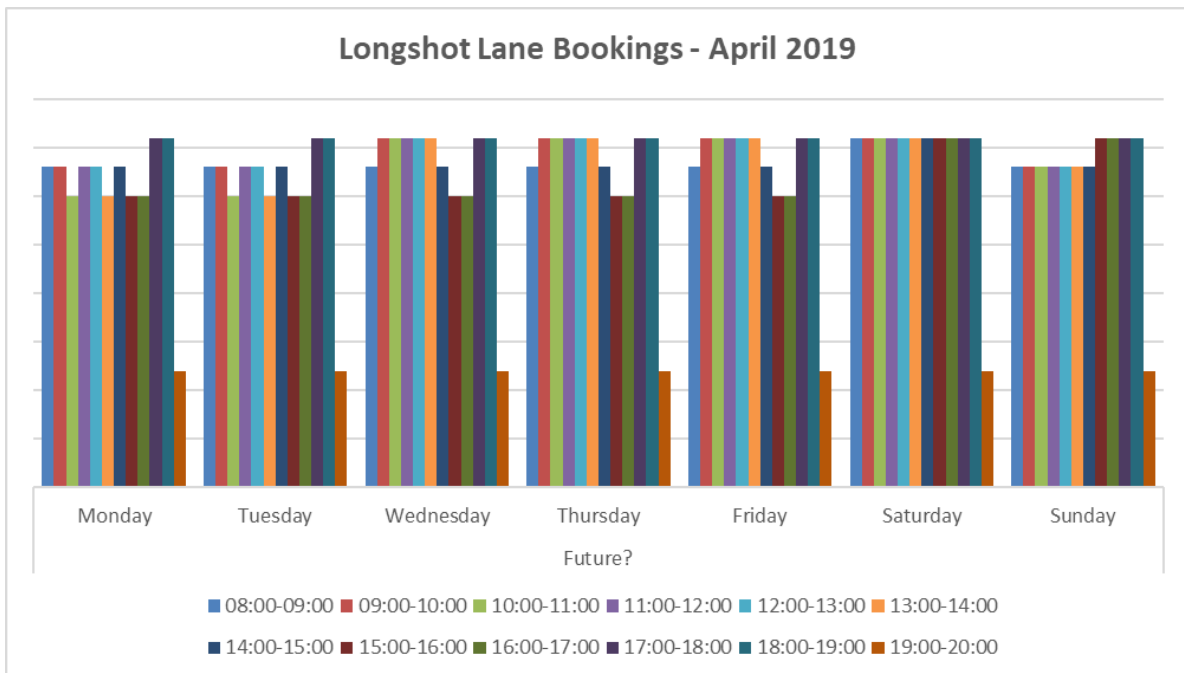
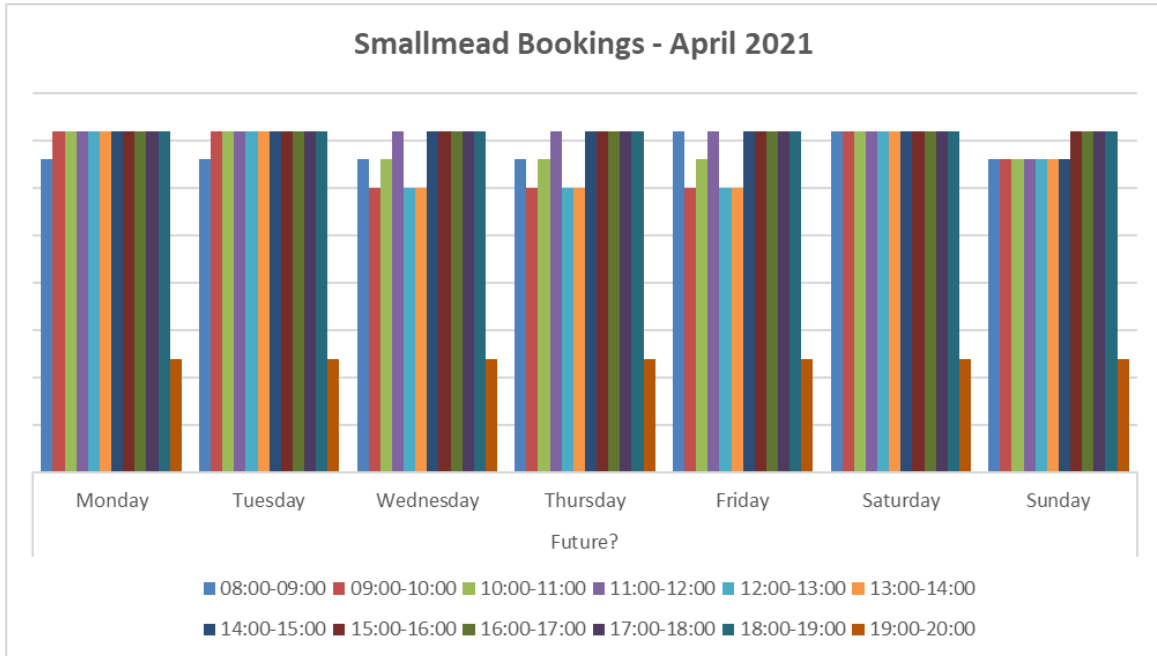
The graphs below show the fluctuation in visitor numbers per day and per hour in April 2019 (when no booking system was in operation at the recycling centres).





**APPENDIX 3 – Option 2**

The graphs below show the level of available bookings per day and per hour in April 2021. These can be contrasted with the graphs presented in Appendix 2. (The 19:00 – 20:00 period is lower than the others as the sites are currently only open until 19:30 to allow for additional cleaning).



**APPENDIX 4 – Review of Benefits**

The table below represents a summary of the options presented in this report, in comparison to the current operation (where all the advantages would be shown in green and all the disadvantages in red).

KEY	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Red	Minimised	Maximised
Orange		
Green	Maximised	Minimised

Factors		Option 1 – Removal of Booking system	Option 2 – Retention of booking system with additional slots	Option 3 – Retention of booking system with additional weekend slots
Advantages	1 – Easier access to Transfer Stations	Red	Yellow	Green
	2 – Easier access to Neighbouring Businesses	Red	Yellow	Green
	3 – Reduced idling of cars	Red	Yellow	Yellow
	4 – More efficient visits	Red	Yellow	Yellow
	5 – Increased access to staff/vehicle preparation	Red	Yellow	Yellow
	6 – Communication during site closures	Red	Green	Green
	7 – Increased circulation of re3 newsletter	Red	Green	Green
	8 – More accurate identification of re3 residents	Red	Green	Green
	9 – Patronage analysis	Red	Green	Green
	10 – Parallel booking systems	Red	Green	Green
	11 – Payments in advance	Red	Green	Green
	12 – Identification of frequent users	Red	Green	Green
	13 – Scheduled maintenance	Red	Green	Green
Disadvantages	1 – Reduction in resident choice	Green	Yellow	Yellow
	2 – Possibility of technical issues	Green	Red	Red
	3 – Retention of	Green	Red	Red

	Personal data			
	4 – Requirement for online bookings			
	5 – Perception of fly-tipping			

**APPENDIX 5 – Limits per Trip**

Material	Current Limit	Proposal if Booking System is retained
Fridges and Freezers	Any domestic fridge or freezer, up to the maximum size of an American style upright fridge can be brought to site.	No change
Paint	Up to 5 litres of paint.	Remove limit
Engine Oil	Maximum of 5 litres.	Remove limit
Animal and Pet Waste	Maximum of 2 bags from domestic animals only. Waste from livestock and stabling is not accepted.	No change
Hazardous Household Waste	Up to 2 litres of chemicals.	Remove limit
Fluorescent Tubes and Light Bulbs	Maximum of 10 tubes or bulbs.	Remove limit
Tyres	Maximum of 4 car tyres.	No change
Fire Extinguishers	Maximum of 2 per household (Up to and including 2kg/3L only).	No change

Where it has been proposed that a limit be removed, staff will monitor the deposits to continue to ensure that trade waste is not deposited at the tax-payer's expense.