

TO: JOINT WASTE DISPOSAL BOARD
7th September 2021

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. Following the request at the June meeting for trials to take place in relation to some of these options, this report has now been amended to include the results.

- 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 (previously common) queuing vehicles and that the delivery of other public services was not delayed. This has been 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 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 may have been valued by local businesses during an already complicated period of trading. Residents are now being allowed to queue on site at Longshot Lane, before the recycling centre opens, following feedback from neighbouring businesses.

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 were experienced and Police attendance was 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 has been in place. The recycling rate in 2020/21 was 76.31% at Smallmead and 72.13% 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 the opportunity for better engagement with site staff.
6. The provision of visitor contact details during the booking process has enabled re3 to alert 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 booking system was also upgraded on the 18th of August 2021. The addition of an address look-up function to the webform will, it is anticipated, lead to the following additional benefits:

8. Residency in the re3 area has previously been assessed by meet and greet staff upon a resident's arrival at the re3 recycling centre. Staff are now familiar with re3 postcodes but the addition of an address look-up function should help to reduce an element of human error, give the staff more time to focus on other tasks 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. Due to a slight delay in implementing the upgrade, the upgrade has only been live for a week, at the time of writing the report. Data from the first few weeks will therefore be presented to Members during the September meeting.

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.
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 Considering 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, alongside the outcomes from the recent booking system trials.

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 As part of a trial, Officers, in consultation with the Contractor (who is responsible for site safety and the receipt of waste from the various sources), sought to progressively increase bookable slots to reach an optimised but practically operable level. Officers profiled increases of between 5% and 20%, based on our existing principles and previous booking levels, and trialled progressive increases at both Recycling Centres across June, July and August.
- 5.18 Too many bookings in the system, at one time, may have led to queues (and associated access issues) during some periods. The exact numbers of bookings were carefully managed. As a result, there was minimal queuing seen on Longshot Lane and Island Road.
- 5.19 During the 20% trials there were 13,134 slots available across both sites (compared to our baseline of 10,926). For an average week in 2019 (between April and September), we had 9,526 visits at Longshot and 8,232 at Smallmead. As a result capacity, during the 20% trial, was at 74% of pre-covid levels.
- 5.20 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* potentially further increase availability of bookable slots at the facilities.

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

- 5.21 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 this option would help cater for residents who may not always be able to make a visit during the week.
- 5.22 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 co-located waste 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.
- 5.23 During the weekend of the 14th and 15th of August the number of slots was greatly increased at both recycling centres and the use of hour-long slots was trialled to give residents extra flexibility over when they visited. Numbers of visitors allowed within the recycling centre at any one time was also increased at Longshot Lane, which is an outdoor site. Users of the sites were invited to give feedback via a survey and the results were used to inform a second trial on the 21st and 22nd. During the second trial, 30 minute slots were utilised and the number of vehicles permitted within the recycling

centre was increased at Smallmead to match the numbers successfully trialled at Longshot Lane.

- 5.24 During the second trial there were just under 1,150 slots available at each site on the Saturday and just under 1,400 slots available across both sites on the Sunday. For the Sunday, this compares to an average of 1,640 visits at Longshot and 1,595 at Smallmead during an average week in 2019 (between April and September). Although fewer slots were available during the trial than the average number of visitors in 2019, over both surveys and both sites, 65% of respondents said that their preference is for there to be fewer slots available at the weekend if this results in shorter queues. However, following the second trial, with its amendments, 87% of respondents at Smallmead and 96% of respondents at Longshot Lane rated the length of time spent queueing as acceptable or better. At Longshot Lane, only 95% of the available slots were booked for Sunday the 22nd of August. Officers therefore conclude that there was a balance of availability and queueing during the second trial that was acceptable to site users.

Conclusion and Recommendation

- 5.25 Officers in neighbouring Councils are not looking to remove their booking systems at this time. A further wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is possible for Autumn/Winter 2021 and could prompt the return of some social-distancing conditions.
- 5.26 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.
- 5.27 Officers therefore propose that the JRNI system would be renewed in November 2021 (on expiry of the current agreement).
- 5.28 Officers have assessed that there is a need to balance the availability of slots with the management of queues, and also to ensure that a high level of accessibility is maintained at the weekend, for residents who are unable to visit during the week.
- 5.29 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, the outcome of the trials, and following discussions with other Councils and the re3 Contractor, Officers would recommend that Members request that a variant of Option 2 and Option 3 be implemented.
- 5.30 Following the trials, Officers have assessed that the number of bookings during weekdays can be slightly increased with minimal impact on other facilities or businesses. However, there is also scope and demand to enable far greater levels of bookings to be offered at the weekends. A summary of the proposal is included in Appendix 5. Under the proposal 14,056 bookings would be available each week, across both sites; equating to 79% of the pre-covid levels.
- 5.31 Officers will implement the Member decision on this matter, subject to any further comments from the Contractor.
- 5.32 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 to allow larger quantities of some items to be delivered in a single visit. This revision, as per the table in Appendix 6, would help residents to continue to make their visits to the site more efficient.

- 5.33 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.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM ADMINISTERING AUTHORITY

Head of Legal Services

- 6.1 None for this report.

Corporate Finance Business Partner

- 6.2 None for this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 None.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 None.

Climate Impact Assessment

- 6.5 Each of the re3 Councils has made commitments relating to climate change and the UK Government declared a Climate Change emergency in 2019. As a result, a high-level assessment has been undertaken on the impact of maintaining a recycling centre booking system on carbon emissions.

- Energy Use – Shorter queues at the recycling centre result in less idling of vehicles on site.
- Waste Generation – No known impacts.
- Transport – During the user satisfaction survey conducted in December 2020, residents advised both that they made more special journeys to the recycling centre as a result of having to book and that they made their visit more efficient. As lockdown has eased and more slots have been added to the system, the number of special journeys may have reduced. However there is also evidence that visits are being coming less efficient as more slots are added to the system.

- 6.6 It has also been assessed whether the decision will improve resilience to climate change impacts.

- Heatwaves – No known impacts
- Drought – No known impacts
- Flooding – No known impacts
- High Winds/Storms – No known impacts
- Disruption to Supply Chains – No known impacts

- 6.7 The overall rating assigned to this decision is a low positive one. It is not possible to quantify the impact on transport, but there is a known benefit at the recycling centre.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Principal Groups Consulted

Not applicable.

7.2 Method of Consultation

Not applicable.

7.3 Representations Received

Not applicable.

Background Papers

October 2020 re3 Board

Contacts for further information

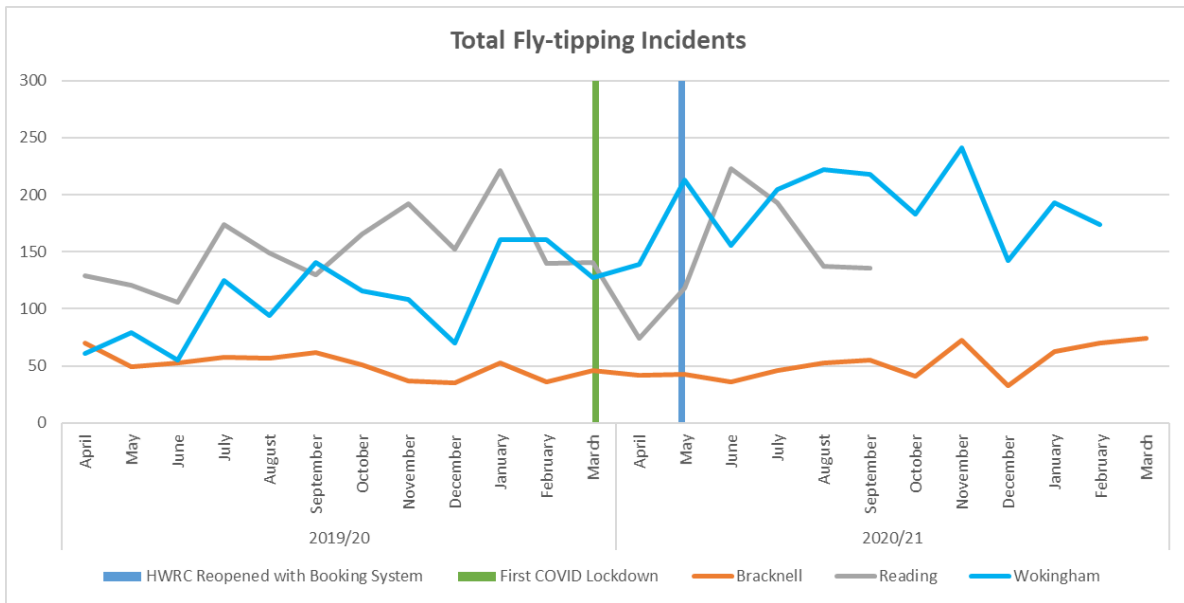
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APPENDIX 1 - Fly-tipping Data

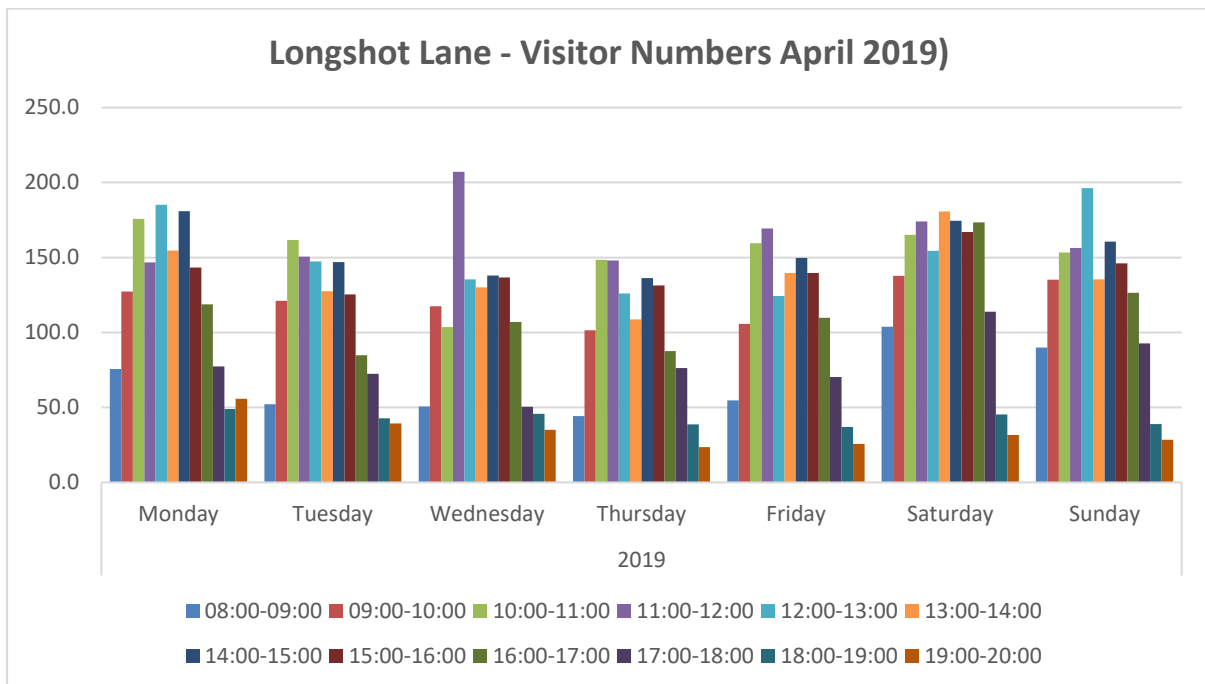
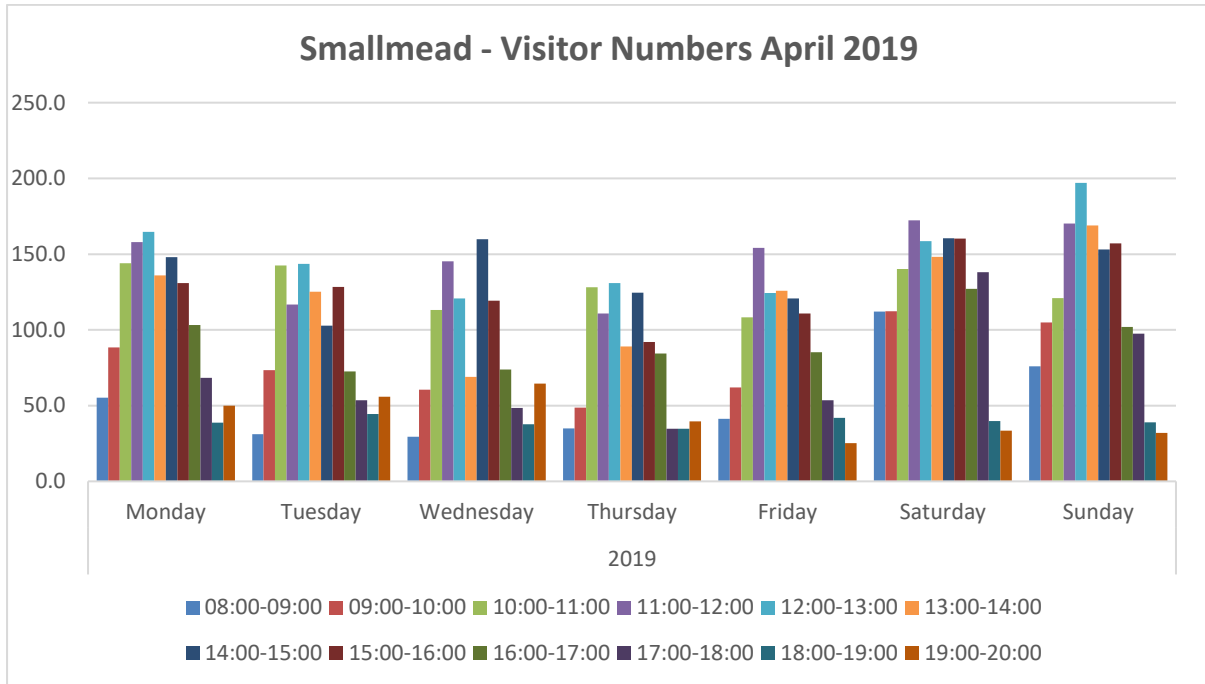
The graph below shows the total number of fly-tip incidents under all reporting categories. As the category of fly-tipping is often reported by a variety of stakeholders and relating to a variety of standards (and can therefore vary from case to case), all instances of flytipping have been reported.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



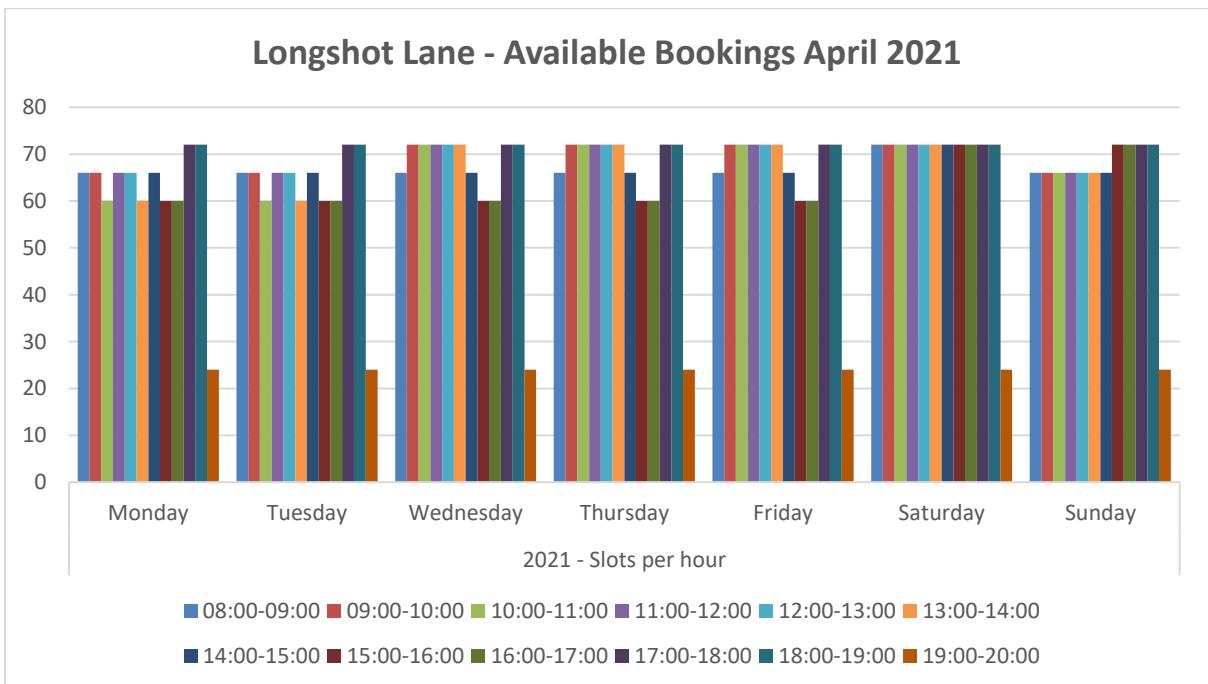
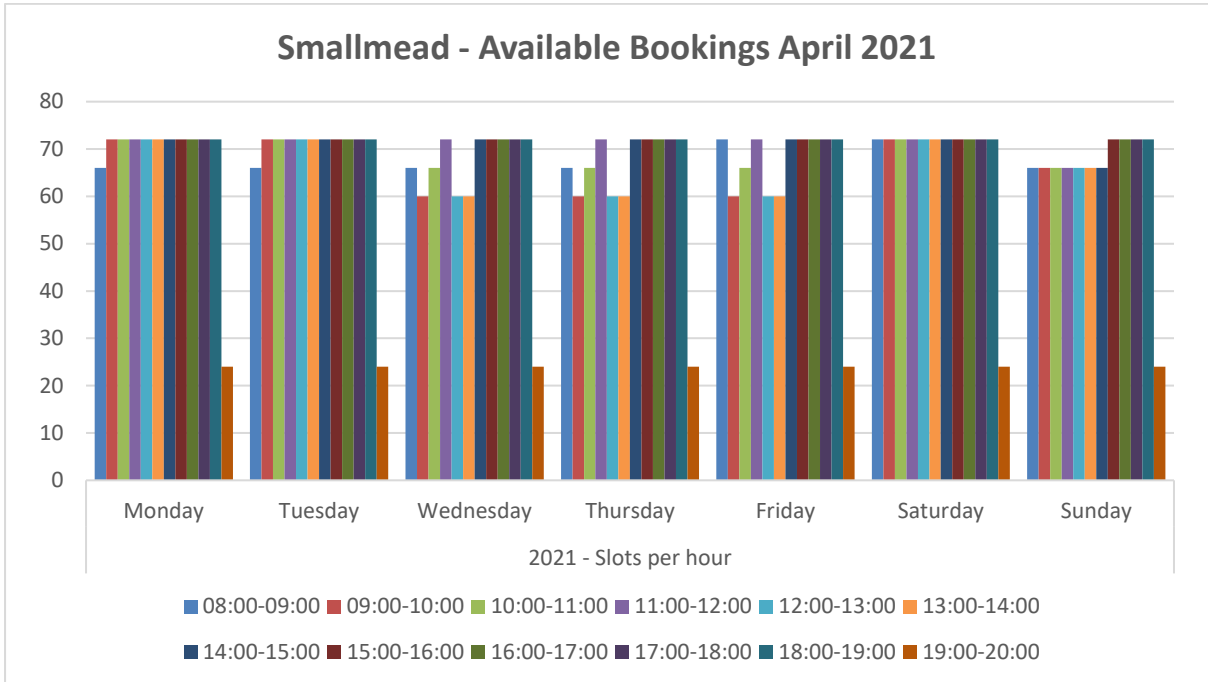
APPENDIX 2 – Option 1

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 operation during the pandemic (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 – Trial Numbers

The tables below show the number of slots implemented under each of the full week trials and the comparison with the number of slots available in April 2021.

The columns for the ‘5th week trial’ also show the proposed number of bookings to be implemented initially under the Officer recommendation (described at 5.29).

Please note that the 4th week trial was very similar to the 5th week, but with slightly reduced numbers on the Saturday.

Smallmead	Base-line (April 2021)	1st Full Week Trial		2nd Full Week Trial		3rd Full Week Trial		5th Full Week Trial/PROPOSAL	
		W/C 19th July	% Increase	W/C 26th July	% Increase	W/C 2nd August	% Increase	W/C 16th August	% Increase
Monday	810	876	8%	912	13%	948	17%	948	17%
Tuesday	810	876	8%	912	13%	948	17%	948	17%
Wednesday	768	822	7%	834	9%	882	15%	882	15%
Thursday	768	822	7%	834	9%	882	15%	882	15%
Friday	774	828	7%	840	9%	888	15%	888	15%
Saturday	816	942	15%	1020	25%	1056	29%	1146	40%
Sunday	774	900	16%	978	26%	1014	31%	1386	79%
TOTAL	5520	6066	10%	6330	15%	6618	20%	7080	28%

Longshot Lane	Baseline (April 2021)	1st Full Week Trial		2nd Full Week Trial		3rd Full Week Trial		5th Full Week Trial/PROPOSAL	
		W/C 19th July	% Increase	W/C 26th July	% Increase	W/C 2nd August	% Increase	W/C 16th August	% Increase
Monday	738	786	7%	798	8%	846	15%	846	15%
Tuesday	738	786	7%	798	8%	846	15%	846	15%
Wednesday	780	846	8%	876	12%	918	18%	918	18%
Thursday	780	846	8%	876	12%	918	18%	918	18%
Friday	780	846	8%	876	12%	918	18%	918	18%
Saturday	816	942	15%	1020	25%	1056	29%	1146	40%
Sunday	774	900	16%	978	26%	1014	31%	1386	79%
TOTAL	5406	5952	10%	6222	15%	6516	20.5%	6978	29%

The table below shows how the number of bookings available in the week of the 16th of August (above) compares with an average week in the Summer of 2019 (i.e. before implementation of the booking system).

	Smallmead		Longshot Lane	
	Average visitor Numbers - Summer 2019	Percentage available under 5th Week Trial	Average visitor Numbers - Summer 2019	Percentage available under 5th Week Trial
Monday	1249	76%	1487	57%
Tuesday	1022	93%	1280	66%
Wednesday	971	91%	1161	79%
Thursday	946	93%	1154	80%
Friday	987	90%	1213	76%
Saturday	1463	78%	1590	72%
Sunday	1595	87%	1640	85%
TOTAL	8232	86%	9525	73%

APPENDIX 6 – Limits of some waste types deposited 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.