

# GOVERNING SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT

*Haverton Hill  
Furniture Re-use Scheme*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since *Waste Strategy 2000*, municipal waste policy (MWP) has undergone considerable upheaval. Local authorities which until recently had to concern themselves with little more than the collection, planning and disposal of waste, and a relatively narrow range of regulations, today have a radically broadened agenda with progressive statutory performance targets for recycling and composting, as well as responsibilities for diversion of waste from landfill, recovery from waste and waste minimisation. In the wake of these developments, the *Governing Sustainable Waste Management*<sup>1</sup> project seeks to examine what facilitates, and what prevents, the development and implementation of sustainable MWP in the North East of England, and the wider lessons which can be learned across the UK. The project involves an overview of MWP across the region, and the analysis of three case-studies: Durham County Council; Newcastle City Council; and Stockton Borough Council. In each case, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with local policy-makers and stakeholders, and a range of policy documents have been analysed. Six initiatives which aim to reduce, re-use or recycle waste have been selected for further research, involving semi-structured interviews with relevant actors, documentary analysis, and interviews and participant observation with those communities involved in the particular waste management initiative. These research 'snapshots' are intended to illustrate the range of good practice taking place across the region and the challenges facing the development of sustainable waste management policy and practice.

This report focuses on one such scheme: a pilot project enabling furniture re-use through a drop-off facility at the Haverton Hill Civic Amenity site undertaken in partnership between Stockton Borough Council (SBC), SITA, and two community sector organisations, Furniture Re-use and Development Enterprise (FRADE) and Settlement Furniture Services (SFS). The research involved semi-structured interviews with key members of staff at the organisations involved, informal interviews with members of the public both donating to and buying furniture from the scheme (in person and over the telephone), and participant observation at FRADE and SFS. The report details the development and day-to-day working of the scheme, and considers more broadly the work of FRADE and SFS, the challenges of promoting re-use, and the role of new forms of partnership for managing waste sustainably. We hope that in highlighting the positive lessons and the challenges that our research has uncovered, the report will be of interest to local authorities, community sector organisations and waste contractors, as well as to regional and national government.

The report is structured in the following way. Section 2 provides some background to MWP in Stockton, and Section 3 gives an overview of the project, the partners involved and the funding and development of the scheme. Section 4 considers the good practice which has been evident in this initiative, while Section 5 considers the key challenges that have arisen in relation to partnership working, quantifying re-use, capacity building and funding difficulties. Drawing on this analysis, Section 6 identifies the implications of these findings for sustainable waste management, and Section 7, in conclusion, places this report within the broader framework of the findings from the research project as a whole

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Municipal waste policy in SBC

SBC is a Unitary Authority and has responsibility for the collection and disposal of municipal waste, as well as for planning for the facilities to provide these services. Together with the other successor local authorities to the former Cleveland County Council, the majority of SBC's waste is contracted to an Energy from Waste plant, operated by the waste contractor SITA. In 2002/03, 83% of waste generated in Stockton was disposed of via the Energy from

<sup>1</sup> The project team acknowledges the support of H J Banks & Co. Ltd. funders of the project through the Landfill Tax Credits Scheme, facilitated by Entrust. We are also grateful for the support of the International Centre for Regional Regeneration and Development, University of Durham. Finally we wish to thank our many respondents for the time and support they have given to the project to date. For more details on the project, visit the project web pages via [www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/).

<sup>2</sup> SBC (2004) 'Cabinet Decision, Wastes Management'. Stockton-on-Tees, Stockton Borough Council.

Waste plant, with 8.5% recycled or composted, and 8.4% sent to landfill<sup>2</sup>. Responsibility for municipal waste is split between the Waste and Fleet Services division, who undertake strategic work, and the Care for Your Area division, who provide day to day waste services.

Following the publication of *Waste Strategy 2000*, SBC began to diversify the services offered for the collection and disposal of waste, developing a new Civic Amenity site at Haverton Hill in 2001, and introducing kerbside collection of recyclables (glass, paper, tins, cans) to all households over the period 2001-2004. SBC have also successfully gained bids for the piloting and roll-out of a kerbside green waste collection and centralised composting service, and for participation in WRAP's home composting project (see separate project report regarding composting). In addition to the initiatives adopted directly in response to changing national government agendas on waste, SBC's waste policy framework has been influenced by its role in the development of an Interreg project, *Making Waste Work*. The project involves five European partners from the 'North Sea' region focused on the development and exchange of best practice among the partners in the areas of waste management systems, business and employment opportunities in the waste sector, and public education and awareness.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 Key drivers for furniture re-use

Since *Waste Strategy 2000*, and in response to the 1999 Landfill Directive, the ways in which municipal waste is managed has come under critical scrutiny and legislative pressure. The introduction in 2001 of statutory performance targets for recycling and composting waste for each local authority under the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) framework has had a significant impact on policy and practice across the UK. SBC was tasked with recycling or composting 10% of its municipal waste in 2003/04, a target is exceeded by achieving a rate of 11%, and will need to reach a rate of 18% by 2005/06. While waste reduction initiatives such as furniture re-use do not 'count' towards these statutory targets, performance indicators for household waste collected per head are included within the best value framework. Moreover, the implementation of the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) in April 2005 requires local authorities to reduce the amounts of biodegradable waste sent to landfill and imposes significant financial penalties (at £150 per tonne) for those who exceed their quota. While furniture diverted from landfill has the potential to assist local authorities meet these targets, the process is complex and the feasibility of doing so unclear (see 5.2).

Despite the lack of statutory drivers for waste re-use or minimisation, it is generally acknowledged that increased levels of waste arisings represent a significant barrier to local authorities achieving future targets as higher tonnages of waste will need to be diverted from landfill if targets are to be met. Waste arisings in Stockton are increasing by 5% a year<sup>4</sup>, significantly above the national average, standing at 1.8% from 2001/02 to 2002/03, but below the trend in the North East which witnessed an increase of almost 7% between 2001/02 and 2002/03<sup>5</sup> (DEFRA 2004). Furthermore, the targets and LATS system are representative of a shift in approach to waste management at the national level, and SBC have shown forward thinking in acknowledging and positively supporting the reasoning that waste minimisation, in decreasing waste tonnages, offers a more sustainable response to the waste problem by moving further up the waste hierarchy.

For the other partners in the scheme, the drivers are somewhat different. For SITA, furniture re-use represents a tiny fraction of the total tonnages of waste that it processes through Haverton Hill. Participation in the scheme is driven by their contract with SBC, but also - over and above this - a sense of civic responsibility and a desire to improve their environmental credentials. For FRADE and SFS, the drivers for participating in the Haverton Hill scheme are less clear cut. On one hand, both organisations aim to provide good quality furniture at low cost to people living in socially deprived circumstances, and Haverton Hill represents an additional feedstock to their everyday collections. However, both organisations have

<sup>3</sup> See the project web site for more details at <http://waste.tec-hh.net/uk/>.

<sup>4</sup> SBC (2004) 'Cabinet Decision, Wastes Management'. Stockton-on-Tees, Stockton Borough Council.

<sup>5</sup> DEFRA (2004) 'Municipal Waste Management Survey 2002/03'. London, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

operated successfully for many years without this additional input of furniture, and there are issues surrounding organisational capacity (common across the community sector) in terms of accommodating an increase in materials to deal with, which are discussed later (see 5.4).

## 2.3 The wider context of furniture re-use

Re-using furniture is, of course, nothing new. Furniture of all kinds is routinely passed among families, collected and sold as 'antique' or 'retro', sold at car boot sales, and donated to charity shops. However, specific 're-use' schemes have been established by community groups in order to alleviate 'need, hardship, distress and poverty'<sup>6</sup>. The Furniture Re-Use Network (FRN), established in 1989, is the national co-ordinating body for '300 furniture and appliance re-use and recycling organisations in the UK that collect a wide range of household items to pass onto people in need'. According to FRN, through this network 1.5 million items per year are re-used and passed onto low income families, 63,000 tonnes of waste is diverted from landfill and 5000 people are engaged in work to collect and deliver furniture and appliances. Comparatively few such organisations exist in the North East, and those which do are relatively small in scale compared to some of the other schemes and networks in other parts of the UK.

More recently, furniture re-use has been seen as a critical part of the wider sustainability agenda, and in particular the environmental imperative to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. Re-use is the second 'step' on the waste hierarchy of 'reduce, re-use, recycle', and in effect by cycling materials through the economy furniture re-use schemes can also contribute to the reduction of waste. However, this role is ambivalent within the current policy framework which focuses on targets for recycling and composting, and within which an 'audit culture' of monitoring and meeting targets prevails. The ODPM has dropped plans for local authorities to report re-use tonnages under BVPIs, recognising that "the complexities of reporting against the indicator would outweigh the benefits of urging better performance" given that much re-use is dealt with by the voluntary sector (ENDS, 2005).

## 3 IMPLEMENTING THE FURNITURE RE-USE SCHEME

### 3.1 The project partners

The pilot furniture re-use scheme established at the Haverton Hill Civic Amenity Site is a partnership between SBC, SITA (the waste contractor for SBC), and FRADE and SFS, two local furniture charities. FRADE was established in 1990 by a group of local churches in Stockton, to re-distribute unwanted furniture to 'the poor', and more formally registered as a charity and company limited by guarantee in 1993. Since then, it has collected donations of furniture free of charge from the Stockton area, and sold it on at low cost to local residents on state benefits. More recently, FRADE amended their constitution from its sole emphasis on addressing social deprivation, to incorporate the aim of "education of the public to the benefits of the re-use and recycling". SFS was established in 1991, along similar lines to FRADE, and is also a registered charity company limited by guarantee. SFS collects unwanted furniture free of charge to sell on to people on benefits, through two premises, one in Hartlepool and one in Middlesbrough. SFS is also equipped to 'PAT test' (portable appliance test for working order) white goods such as fridges, freezers and other electrical items for resale. In both cases, recent years have witnessed a broadening of their agenda from purely social welfare community organisations to incorporate a concern for environmental issues, in response to shifts in the nature of waste management locally and nationally.

### 3.2 Project funding and development

SBC initiated the pilot project at Haverton Hill in August 2004, partly in response to government targets for the diversion of waste from landfill, and partly as inspired through their involvement with the Interreg project. SBC provide the funding for the project from the Interreg project, funding SITA to provide the site, infrastructure (a shipping container)

<sup>6</sup> The Furniture Re-Use Network – [www.frn.org.uk](http://www.frn.org.uk).



Image courtesy of www.recyclenow.com



and member of staff to direct the public to deposit furniture for the scheme. The furniture is collected from Haverton Hill weekly, in rotation, by FRADE and SFS, who then sell the furniture on alongside that which they collect through their normal collection service.

All partners – to varying degrees – described the pilot as a success. SITA reported in February 2005 that between 6,000 – 7,000 tonnes of furniture had been diverted from the waste stream up to that point. Moreover, the quality of furniture deposited at the scheme was generally described as good quality and above initial expectations. This success has resulted in the proposed expansion of the scheme, with a new building specifically designated for furniture re-use and additional staff to ‘meet and greet’ the public depositing waste to increase participation in the scheme. This will not only offer increased capacity for furniture re-use, but it is also anticipated that the charities may increase re-use of white goods (SFS), as well as diversifying to re-use/refurbish other materials, e.g. bicycles and possibly mattresses (FRADE). At time of writing, the new building is under construction, but decisions on additional staff depend on securing funding bids which are still pending. It is envisaged that FRADE and SFS will take on additional members of staff (possibly 2) to work at the Haverton Hill site in the new building. The organisations currently have bids in to the Community Recycling and Economic Development (CRED) fund to support such posts. It is uncertain whether FRADE and SFS will be able to provide staff at the Haverton Hill site if these bids are unsuccessful. However, all parties appear hopeful that the furniture re-use scheme at Haverton Hill will continue and expand.

### 3.3 Project aims

While no specific targets were mentioned for the furniture re-use pilot scheme, the broad aim of the project is to decrease the amount of furniture going into the waste stream at the CA site, thus improving the percentage recycling achieved. More indirectly, SBC and SITA expressed the hope that encouraging people to deposit furniture for re-use rather than to be tipped will increase public awareness of waste issues, leading to changes in waste production behaviour in the future.

The social benefits of the re-use scheme were also discussed as aims of the scheme, though to varying degrees. For SBC the social benefits were certainly ‘add ons’ – providing low cost furniture, training for long term unemployed/New Dealers, local employment and the possibility of volunteering as social rehabilitation were positive knock on effects of the scheme, much valued by the local authority, but not a central concern in facilitating the pilot. SITA described social benefits as improving their public image, but in no way impacting upon their decision-making process regarding the furniture re-use scheme.

For FRADE and SFS, however, the social agenda is their key aim, with waste minimisation or environmental impacts being the 'add ons'. Both organisations report being increasingly concerned with/aware of the environmental aspect of the work they do, and actively look to access 'green' funding streams, but alleviating social deprivation (through supplying low cost quality furniture) and offering employment/training to individuals with few local opportunities remains the central focus of their organisations.

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## 4 GOOD PRACTICE IN STOCKTON

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### 4.1 Involving the community sector

Across the North East, our research has found few examples of local authorities or waste contractors working with community sector organisations. In contrast, FRADE and SFS are actively involved with the Haverton Hill re-use scheme, particularly in practical terms and on a day-to-day basis. Certainly, this has been crucial to all aspects of what the scheme is attempting to achieve, in terms of:

- decreasing waste tonnages, by removing furniture from Haverton Hill, and to a greater degree through independent collections as part of the core work of FRADE and SFS;
- increasing public awareness of waste issues;
- improving social benefits to the community at large through the environmental activity of furniture re-use.

Involvement at the decision-making level is more difficult to ascertain. There were concerns that FRADE and SFS were not as engaged with the scheme as SBC and SITA expected them to be, while the community organisations themselves reported being cautious about the partnership, particularly in terms of perceived inequality in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, all members view the partnership as improving over time, as trust is built up among the organisations involved. Importantly, everyone interviewed believe that individual personalities are critical to the success of the partnership – consistency among staff from the different partners involved in the scheme was considered important, but it was felt that working relationships could improve more quickly if the 'right' staff came in, but deteriorate if the 'wrong' people came into post.

### 4.2 Diverting the waste stream

Approximately 7000 tonnes of material was diverted from the waste stream between August 2004 and February 2005 through the Haverton Hill scheme. To put this into perspective, SITA report that they process 24,000 tonnes of waste through the CA site per year. Figures are not available in tonnage terms for the amounts diverted through the core work of FRADE and SFS, but it seems safe to assume that a greater bulk of material is collected day-to-day by the two organisations than from the Haverton Hill scheme.

### 4.3 Social benefits

In terms of the implications of the waste minimisation activity at Haverton Hill on social issues, there are a range of people who benefit through the re-use scheme and the core work of FRADE and SFS more generally:

- people living in economic hardship who buy from FRADE/SFS;
- local individuals employed by FRADE and SFS;
- volunteers from a local prison undertaking social rehabilitation before parole or community service;
- New Deal trainees and members of other training organisations able to get qualifications through working at the organisations.



Such wider social benefits of the furniture re-use scheme are notoriously difficult to quantify, beyond monitoring the numbers of individuals involved. As with the majority of initiatives with a social agenda, the real achievements of the core work of FRADE and SFS are perhaps impossible to capture in concrete terms.

## 5 KEY CHALLENGES

### 5.1 Financial limitations

Given that the Haverton Hill scheme currently relies on external funds for capital and running costs, all parties recognise the financial instability of the scheme. SITA are able to 'swallow' up the high cost of collecting furniture for re-use (£300 - £400 per tonne) within the larger Civic Amenity site operations, but not indefinitely as they are under commercial pressure to minimise costs. SBC have their own financial pressures, both in terms of depending on grant funding to undertake such schemes, as the overall costs of managing waste increase, and the duty to balance the money put into waste minimisation against Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 82, as set out by government and examined by the Audit Commission, and ensure that waste targets/services are achieved/delivered at reasonable cost.

FRADE and SFS operate under similar financial restrictions. Core funding is almost impossible to raise in the community sector, and while FRADE and SFS rely on sales to underwrite some of their costs it is unlikely that such income will enable them to become financially viable businesses under current organisational policy/practice. External project funding is time limited, therefore even if the bids to CRED to support new staff members to expand the Haverton Hill scheme are successful, such funding is short term - again raising issues of the sustainability of the scheme. In this climate, community organisations adapt through being flexible in response to changing funding priorities: for example emphasising the contribution that such schemes make to the regeneration of deprived areas, working with asylum seekers, or their environmental benefits, depending on the financial and organisational opportunities at hand. This chameleon-like quality of community organisations enables them to survive, but can place a strain on partnerships built up on one particular priority, as we discuss below.

### 5.2 Making re-use count

Despite being further up the waste hierarchy than recycling and composting, there are currently no statutory targets for local authorities to re-use or reduce municipal waste. Recently, the ODPM has dropped plans for local authorities to report re-use tonnages under BVPIs, as we outlined in 2.3. However, under the LATS framework, re-use does appear to 'count'. Furniture diverted from landfill is seen to be composed of 50% biodegradable components<sup>7</sup>, and tonnages which the local authority diverts can be counted within the calculation of the landfill allowance. To make re-use count, however, local authorities must be able to report through the WasteDataFlow tool, or another accounting mechanism, the tonnages of waste which have been diverted in this way.

The 'mass balance approach' that underpins this framework "assumes that if the weight of the biodegradable materials diverted from landfill can be measured and the proportion of biodegradable material that was in the waste to start with is known, then the mass balance can be calculated"<sup>8</sup>. Without being able to monitor – by weight – the amount of the waste stream which is being diverted through re-use schemes, it cannot be counted within the LATS framework. While bulky items such as furniture and white goods can be monitored by weight at the CA site, this activity is beyond the capability of FRADE and SFS. The community organisations instead monitor the number of pieces/type of furniture donated and sold on, as they have audit trails and reports to complete for external funders. If SBC were to pay recycling credits<sup>9</sup> to community organisations for their efforts in waste recycling/ reduction,

<sup>7</sup> See HMSO (2004) *The Landfill Allowances and Trading Scheme (England) Regulations 2004*, available: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2004/20043212.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> See DEFRA (2005) *Guidance on the Landfill Allowances Schemes: Municipal Wastes*, available: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/localauth/lats/pdf/lats-municipalwasteguidance.pdf>.



Image courtesy of www.recyclenow.com

then it would become worthwhile for FRADE and SFS to consider monitoring in terms of tonnage. However, this would raise the dilemma of how this could be achieved, and whether this is financially viable for SBC in terms of the alternative means available for meeting LATS diversion targets.

### 5.3 Sustaining partnerships

One of the challenges of depending on time-limited funding is sustaining partnerships. The relationships between SBC, SITA, FRADE and SFS can be described as tentative but positive. While SBC appears keen to develop working relationships with the community sector, FRADE and SFS have been established for well over a decade with no local authority support, and are unsurprisingly more cautious about the partnership, and uncertain as to the motivations and longevity of current local authority interest. In addition, the relationship is unequal in terms of organisational capacity and economic situation. Such inequality always has the potential to create tension if translated into institutional structures, with some partners perceived/perceiving themselves as having more of a stake/say in the scheme than others. While SITA, as a commercial business, has organisational aims which are not echoed by the community sector, they appear to be most easily accepted by all partners due to their apparent transparency: they aim to make a profit through dealing with waste, as contracted by SBC, and as such their position in the partnership is most clearly understood.

There are problems within the partnership, then, in terms of communication between the different partners and the levels of trust among them. The research found evidence of misunderstanding about the nature of the proposed expansion, for example on the issue of new/extra staff to work in the new building: whether or not funding was already secured, by whom and from where. In addition, while SBC described the building as an ‘American-style barn’, FRADE had heard it was to be a ‘Swiss chalet’! The historical lack of engagement between local authorities and community organisations in the North East, and between the latter and commercial companies, is an ongoing challenge for all parties. In addition, while FRADE and SFS are both in the community sector, it cannot be assumed that there will always be agreement between them regarding the Haverton Hill scheme. Moreover, organisational aims and practices do not echo one another across the partnership.

Nevertheless, all partners were honest about their own need to work at developing better relationships, and identified ‘the common cause’ for which it is important to put differing opinions/values and organisational histories aside. There is recognition of the positive benefits of such a partnership, in particular that each member gains access to those aspects that it

<sup>9</sup> Recycling credits are paid by waste disposal authorities (WDA) to waste collection authorities (WCA), in order that the WCA who bears the cost of collecting recycled material can gain the benefits which accrue from diverting waste from landfill. Local authorities ‘have the option (but not a duty) to pay recycling credits to third parties (businesses or community groups) collecting waste for recycling’ (DEFRA 2005, website: [http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/localauth/recycling\\_credits.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/localauth/recycling_credits.htm)).

lacks: organisational capacity; financial ‘clout’; capital infrastructure; local community/ social networks; practical expertise. The challenge identified is to improve communication channels, build trust and continue to develop working relationships between each of the partners. Furthermore, tensions may amplify if/when new partners join the scheme as it expands – increasing the need to facilitate good communication and trust across the partnership.

#### 5.4 Capacity building

Attempting to expand the furniture re-use scheme will impact on the core work of FRADE and SFS – requiring them to process greater quantities of furniture and increase their staffing specifically at the CA site. Taking on new staff is not done lightly at FRADE/SFS, given their social agenda and the potential damage done by making people redundant when specific external funding ends or other financial problems threaten their existence. The community sector is notoriously fragile, and expanding an organisation generally viewed with caution on financial and ethical grounds. Developing capacity can also increase hierarchy within an organisation, often with the result that initial founders and/or long term managers become removed from the day-to-day activities of the organisation. Among SFS/FRADE, there is a concern about the implications of such processes and what can be described as a lack of confidence about the ability to sustain the quality of service as a larger organisation, and, on a more personal level, a reticence to move into a more ‘bureaucratic’ position as such work (more meetings, less contact with customer base/other staff) is not the reason individuals sought employment in the community sector.

In addition, increasing organisational capacity requires financial stability, not least for capital expenditure and the ability to sustain the upkeep of new infrastructure. The new building is the property of SBC, and developing their waste services portfolio (staff and infrastructure) involves taking on increasing costs and management. While loss of staff does not perhaps entail the same ethical dilemma for SBC (or SITA) as detailed above, growth in the portfolio of local authority waste management services represents increasing demands on already strained resources.

#### 5.5 Economies of scale and markets for re-use

In terms of affording furniture re-use schemes greater financial stability, economies of scale are an important factor. SBC and SITA generally operate at scales far larger than the Haverton Hill pilot, and both indicated the need to expand the scheme, partly to improve performance but especially to move towards financial sustainability. The practicalities of, for example, diverting appropriate furniture collected through the bulky waste service to the re-use scheme, was discussed by SBC as a future possibility to increase feedstock to the scheme, while SITA are keen to explore the potential of developing furniture re-use at a region-wide level. FRADE and SFS also recognise the need to scale up from the local level if their work is to be financially viable in the long term, and for this reason are members (together with another charitable organisation Community Campus) of the Tees Valley Furniture Consortium Partnership. This new partnership is (at time of writing) undertaking research into future projects, focusing on thinking and working regionally to increase the throughput of materials.

Operating at a larger scale, however, is not without its own issues. One key challenge will be to expand the output (sale) of the re-use scheme so that increases in feedstock do not result in a huge glut of furniture sitting in FRADE/SFS warehouses and the Haverton Hill facility, where it cannot be accommodated. This represents a serious issue for the organisational aims/ philosophies of FRADE/SFS, and requires a careful consideration of market development in line with their social agenda. It was evident throughout the research that the market for good quality low cost furniture is by no means saturated among FRADE and SFS customers, with certain items more in demand than others (eg. beds and sofas). Increases in less called for items and new materials (bikes, mattresses) need to be seriously and imaginatively addressed. One example cited was the potential market for reconditioned mattresses in local student halls of residence.

## 5.6 Involving the public

Clearly, a proportion of the public have become involved in furniture re-use through the Haverton Hill scheme and the day-to-day activities of FRADE and SFS. Through choosing to deposit furniture for re-use at the Haverton Hill site rather than tipping as waste, the public are actively involved in the scheme. Individuals who make the effort to donate directly to FRADE and SFS can be described as even more active in waste minimisation, by taking the initiative to contact the organisations themselves. Those people who buy furniture from FRADE and SFS, however, are in general more passively involved, since their behaviour is dictated, on the whole, through economic and social circumstances not choice.

Despite these levels of involvement, it is more difficult to ascertain the impacts of the Haverton Hill scheme or the community organisations' core work upon *public awareness* of waste issues. The research suggests that people donating directly to FRADE and SFS do so in the main for a combination of social reasons - wanting those 'less fortunate' to get use of 'perfectly fine' furniture - and personal convenience - FRADE and SFS collection response times are faster than SBC's bulky waste service, and they pick up from inside houses rather than on the street. There was some evidence of environmental concern among donors, in that most of those questioned undertook recycling of at least one other material regularly, but waste minimisation was very rarely the key factor in choosing to donate furniture. Buyers were overwhelmingly found to be unconcerned with issues of waste minimisation, their interest in re-use influenced by their economic circumstances.

The low level of public awareness of the scheme is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that there is currently no active marketing of the scheme at Haverton Hill by any of the partners. Furthermore, neither FRADE nor SFS promote their projects beyond local newspaper adverts asking for donations or providing information to appropriate referral bodies/locations (eg. Social Services, Probation Services, Women's Aid centres, etc.). There are several reasons for this:

- lack of community organisation capacity to deal with any significant increase in material throughput;
- a wish on the part of the community organisations to avoid the stigma commonly attached to furniture reclaimed from 'the tip';
- negative connotations connected with waste in general and SITA as a business dealing in waste;
- mistrust among potential buyers of 'authority' in general terms, leading to a reticence on the part of the community organisations to include SBC as named partners.

Addressing the lack of awareness of the existence of the Haverton Hill re-use scheme, and FRADE and SFS, is only the first step: tackling public apathy towards waste issues was identified among research participants as critical in responding to waste problems. Turning around the negative images connected with waste will involve work at national, regional and local levels. While SBC have the mechanisms for education at the borough-wide scale, and important links into schools (see separate project report regarding environmental education) it will be crucial to look beyond school education if the immediate and 2010/11 recycling and LATS targets are to be met. FRADE and SFS are involved in specific community sector networks, though to date any education work regarding their specific activities has been limited due to organisational priority and capacity. SITA also have a role to play in being more proactive in encouraging people to stop thinking of waste as waste, but as a resource – to view Civic Amenity sites as recycling/re-use centres rather than 'the tip'.

Furthermore, a key challenge is not only translating education/knowledge into increased environmental concern, but converting such values into action. Changes in waste habits/practices among the general public is vital if participation in the furniture re-use scheme, and waste minimisation and recycling generally, are to reach levels set out by legislation.



## 6 IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT

### 6.1 Recognising the relevance of re-use

In order to provide financial and political stability, it is important that the value of materials re-use be recognised within sustainable waste management policy and practice. One means of doing this may be through monitoring furniture diversion from the waste stream via the Haverton Hill scheme and the work of FRADE and SFS and its contribution to the achievement of LATS targets. This will be critical to encouraging local authorities to mainstream re-use within current practices of waste management. Furthermore, such action could, if accompanied by a statutory duty upon local authorities to pay recycling credits to community sector actors, or a similar initiative, enable increased social benefits and local economic regeneration through sustained financial support for community organisations.

However, the development of any quantifying system brings with it the danger of an emphasis on targets rather than valuing the broad contributions on social, economic and environmental fronts that re-use schemes can make; treading the tightrope here will be a key feature of a successful scheme.

### 6.2 Valuing partnership development

Partnership working can be beneficial to sustainable waste management, with several 'add on' benefits beyond the environmental sector, including the social benefits and capital/skill/experience sharing which it yields. In addition, partnership working is central to the 'joined up working' pushed by recent government, and *should* gain political support, although how far this rhetoric is being put into action remains to be seen beyond specific projects and geographical areas.



Image courtesy of [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com)

Partnership working, though, takes time if it is to be effective and sustainable, as it requires a build up of trust between organisations. This can be facilitated by the pilot approach adopted in the Haverton Hill scheme, which has allowed the partners involved to 'feel their way' into the partnership, rather than be plunged into the deep end. The meaning of this example is clear – local authorities (or other governmental or non-governmental bodies) cannot simply decide that partnership approaches are relevant, pull some groups together and expect success. This case suggests that consideration must be given to:

- allowing time and space for working relationships to develop;
- taking account of the individuals involved across the partnership organisations;
- ensuring equality of input in the decision-making process;
- remaining adaptable to change at a variety of levels (personnel, policy, funding, etc.).



### 6.3 Engaging the public

Most mainstream approaches to increasing public participation in environmental initiatives tend to involve education initiatives which include advertising campaigns – for example, the current national campaign ‘Recycle Now!’. However, given the sensitivity of working with communities in particular socio-economic circumstances, and the stigmas of ‘secondhandedness’ associated with notions of ‘re-use’, such an approach is neither possible nor desirable in this instance. Indeed, by drawing attention to the multiple communities involved in donating and re-using materials, schemes such as this point to the varied motivations and capacities of ‘the public’ in terms of their involvement with the waste-resources stream. In turn, this raises questions about how far large scale, blanket advertising campaigns can engage the public, beyond the simple message that ‘recycling is good’, and points to the need for alternative means of education and involvement for different communities.

The introduction of ‘meet and greet’ staff at Haverton Hill provides one potential for doing education differently: rather than simply giving information to people about the options available for their unwanted goods, it provides a space within which these can be demonstrated, explained and discussed. Nonetheless, this does not escape the need to be sensitive in how the materials recovered are marketed and passed on to those who need them. Furthermore, to avoid the problematic assumption of ‘charity’ regarding furniture re-use, the research suggests a need to be transparent in the ‘costs’ involved in the scheme. That is, an emphasis on re-use as *both* environmentally and socially beneficial – and the ways in which environment, economy and society are interlinked - should form a central tenet of all educational and promotional work, with FRADE/SFS themselves highlighting the business nature of their organisations, alongside their social agenda.

This need for a *broader approach to education* is particularly important with respect to re-use schemes. In moving up the waste hierarchy, such schemes place more demands on those involved in terms of re-integrating wastes in social and economic relations than disposal or recycling. This can partly be addressed through developing economies of scale, and focusing on particular materials with defined uses, but will also necessitate more sustained deliberation with communities as to what wastes and resources are. Furthermore, wider consideration of cultures of consumption and disposal, which go beyond the competences of local actors, is needed.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

As stated in the introduction to this report, the re-use of furniture in Stockton was one of six initiatives researched for the project *Governing Sustainable Waste Management*. In conclusion, we list here the broader recommendations for managing waste sustainably that have emerged through the study in order to place this case-study within its wider context. While our comments are directed primarily to the local authority level, due to their central role in municipal waste management, we believe that they will also make relevant reading for central government, and the business and community sectors.

### 7.1 Enhancing the policy framework

- *Critical mass* – the effective delivery of MWP across any one local authority demands a certain number of people and level of resources – a ‘critical mass’ – to work effectively and proactively across the increasing range of responsibilities that MWP entails.
- *Institutional integration* – progress with the new waste agenda is easiest where waste management is integrated into the local authority; for example, links with active LA21 sections can integrate waste concerns into a broader environmental remit and enrol competencies, such as engagement with the public and voluntary sector, traditionally absent in many waste management sections.
- *Strategic priority* - specifically, a division of responsibilities needs to be established to free up dedicated staff time for strategic issues: identifying and pursuing funding stream; and establishing and maintaining contacts and

networks across and beyond the authority. Clearly, any such 'division' needs to be done carefully to maintain suitable integration between strategy and operations.

- *Political support* - committed officers can do much in an ambivalent political environment, but with effective political support, progress can be faster and more far reaching.
- *Active networking* – locally engaging relevant partners, nationally providing links to key gatekeepers, and internationally learning from other local authorities helps to provide critical resources.
- *Embracing change* – a readiness to take on new challenges and to 'think outside the box' can yield dividends; this demands the creation of a culture in which there is a willingness to experiment and to take appropriate risks in response to a dynamic policy environment.

## 7.2 Moving up the waste hierarchy

- *Process alongside progress* – activities such as partnership building, engaging with the public, and developing new channels of communication should be valued by local authorities as much as monitored outcomes, with the recognition that these processes lead to longer term sustainable waste management. It is also important that central government actively support authorities endeavouring to put such mechanisms in place.
- *Rethinking monitoring* – the relevance of re-use and reduction need to be recognised within monitoring regimes, and the ways in which waste is 'measured' creatively re-imagined in order to make these behaviours 'count'. Unless re-use and reduction are brought within the 'target' sphere, there remains little incentive for North East authorities to seriously engage with or commit funding to them.
- *The importance of the intangible* – re-considering the social and economic benefits of re-use and reduction will enable authorities and other bodies to bring waste issues into other areas of policy and practice, and address waste more coherently and effectively.
- *Moving beyond formal mechanisms* – recognising the informal networks and deliberative processes through which waste reduction and re-use occur at a day-to-day level, there is a need to enable the social space/climate for them to develop, and encompass informality and discursive engagement within waste management.
- *Challenging waste 'norms'* – the image of waste as dirty, and secondhand as inferior, must be changed, if as a society we are to really engage with the waste debate, adopt sustainable attitudes towards waste management and alter waste habits. Such a paradigm shift in how waste is imagined may be aided by a move to considering 'materials' rather than 'waste' as the basis for policy interventions.

For further information about the research project and its findings, please follow the links from: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/>.

