

Waste

Background and explanation of our proposals

Disposal and treatment of waste is a large source of carbon emissions in Leicester. Emissions come from the collection and transport of waste, the energy used to process it, and from the breakdown of waste in landfill sites. When things that could still be used, repaired or recycled are thrown away, more emissions are also produced to make new things to replace them.

The best way to reduce waste, and the carbon emissions it causes, is to follow the 'waste hierarchy'. This says that it is best to prevent waste in the first place, re-use what we can, and then recycle what can't be avoided or re-used. Anything that can't be recycled should be treated to recover energy or resources, for example through Energy-from-Waste or composting plants, with disposal to landfill as the worst option.

If the waste hierarchy is followed it will reduce emissions from collecting and disposing of waste, and from the production of new goods and raw materials.

To reduce these emissions, we think the following things will need to change:

1. Reducing the climate impact of domestic waste

Reduce

Households will need to reduce the amount of waste they produce, firstly by not buying things that aren't needed, and buy items and products that will produce less waste.

This could include buying more second-hand items, products with less packaging and, when choosing things like clothes and electricals, picking products that are designed to last longer and be repaired.

Food waste is particularly important, as a quarter of all food purchased in the UK is wasted, mostly by households. Carbon emissions are released during the production and transport of food. Food waste that is landfilled also emits carbon emissions when it decomposes.

Households will need to change their buying and consumption habits, to reduce avoidable food waste.

Reuse

Attitudes to throwing away things that are not working or are no longer needed will need to change, especially for waste electrical and electronic equipment.

Where possible, people will need to have things repaired or refurbished instead of buying new. Where usable items are no longer needed, they should be sold or donated.

The council already provides a reuse shop operated in partnership with LOROS at its Gypsum Close Recycling Centre, which diverts waste for resale. Opportunities for a second reuse shop could be explored.

Recycle

The council is responsible for organising the collection, treatment and disposal of household waste and recycling. The Council has a good overall recycling and composting rate for a large city, but the council will need to work to further increase this.

There is currently limited scope for changes to the system, as recycling services are provided through a long-term contract. However, the UK Government has recently consulted on their Resources and Waste Strategy, which aims to increase the recycling rate across the UK. The final strategy is likely to require changes to household waste and recycling collections. The UK Government plans to further consult on the strategy in 2020.

The council will need to produce a new Waste Strategy for the city following the final publication of the government's strategy. It will need to look at how to significantly increase recycling rates in Leicester, in line with the government's required changes.

Where food waste cannot be avoided it will need to be composted. More garden waste will also need to be captured and composted. Changes to food waste collection may be required as part of the Resources and Waste Strategy. The council already provides a garden waste service, and this could be more widely promoted to residents.

Expansion of UK domestic reprocessing capacity and end markets for recyclables is critical to improving recycling rates. Industry will also need to use materials and packaging that are easily recycled.

Recover

Whilst some waste could be sent to Energy-from-Waste plants, this should only be done with anything that can't practically be re-used or recycled. Whilst this can be better than simply landfilling waste, burning it does cause carbon emissions.

The majority of household food waste in Leicester is sent to an 'anaerobic digestion' plant. This breaks down the waste to produce biogas and soil conditioner. The biogas is burned to produce electricity. While burning biogas releases carbon emissions, it produces less than if the waste were landfilled.

2. Reducing the climate impact of waste from businesses and other organisations

Businesses and other organisations generate a significant amount of Leicester's waste. Like household waste, the carbon emissions it causes will need to be reduced substantially by following the waste hierarchy and ensuring that resources are continually reused in a 'circular economy'. This means that they will need to start by looking at their production processes, how their services are delivered and their distribution and logistics to find ways of reducing waste at source.

Where waste can't be prevented through efficient processes, it will need to be re-used where possible. This could mean using it within the organisation or finding ways to pass it to other organisations that are able to use it. Food waste from operations will need to be diverted from landfill and sent for composting, or potentially to plants that could use it to produce a 'biogas' fuel. Programmes that redistribute surplus edible food to those in need could also be expanded.

Any waste that can't be re-used should be recycled. All households, businesses and organisations have a Duty of Care to responsibly dispose of their own waste. Unlike households, businesses and organisations are responsible for organising their own waste collections. The council already operates a trade waste facility and could further work to promote this more to local SMEs.

Where waste services are provided by a waste contractor, businesses and organisations will need to ensure the provider collects recyclable materials separately, processes them correctly and recycles as much as possible. Waste from construction work will also need to be reduced, for example through the recycling of the vast majority of demolition waste.

Businesses will have to design, manufacture and sell products that enable these changes. For example, they will need to use more recycled materials, and make their products easier to repair and recycle. This is discussed further in the At Work section.

The council also produces waste from many of its own operations, much of which is already re-used and recycled. Examples of this include re-use of office furniture, recycling of aggregates from road repairs, use of tree waste to make fencing and mulch, and composting of green waste from parks. There is more however that it could do to further avoid, reduce, reuse and recycle its waste just like other organisations. The council should, where possible, take a leading role on this in Leicester, demonstrating good practice and sharing learning.

Summary of our proposals

Vision for waste and recycling

- Households will need to produce less waste. This will mean not buying things that will be wasted, buying products and services that are produced sustainably and re-using and repairing what they already own.
- Businesses and organisations will need to produce less waste. This includes reducing waste from what they make and sell and the services they provide. Products and packaging will also need to be easier for consumers to re-use, repair and recycle.
- As much waste as possible will need to be recycled. The council will need to support homes to do this through the city's waste collection service. Businesses and organisations will need make sure their waste is disposed of responsibly. Food and garden waste will need to be composted.
- Where waste can't be recycled, it will need to be used for energy instead of landfilled. This includes a small amount of Energy-from-Waste and biogas.
- The council will need to lead by example, to reduce, re-use and recycle waste. The council will also need to educate residents and businesses and promote its existing waste and recycling services.

- The UK government will need to support this through their new Resources and Waste strategy. The council will need to produce a new Waste Strategy for the city based on this.

Potential actions for waste

Actions by the council

1. The council will need to produce a new Waste Strategy. This will need to follow the publication of the UK Government's Waste and Resources Strategy.
2. The council's existing household recycling and garden waste services could be promoted more, to encourage greater use.
3. The opportunity to develop a second reuse shop, to resell items that would otherwise be thrown away, could be investigated by the council.
4. More work could be done by the council to continue to promote the existing trade waste facility to more businesses and organisations.

Actions by businesses

5. Businesses and organisations could reduce the waste generated by their manufacturing, distribution and service delivery processes.
6. Waste generated by businesses and organisations could be re-used or redistributed to other organisations which can use it.
7. Businesses and organisations could ensure that the provider of their waste services is correctly processing their waste and recycling as much as possible.

(Refer also to the At Work section for more potential actions by businesses on sustainable production.)

Actions by individuals

8. People could change buying habits to produce less waste. This could mean buying items that will last longer, have less packaging and can be easily re-used or recycled.
9. Things that people no longer want could be sold or donated, instead of thrown away. Gadgets, appliances, clothes and other things could be repaired instead of buying new things.
10. People could make sure that as much of their household waste as possible is recycled through the council's household waste service.

Actions by the government

11. The government will need to publish the final version of the Waste and Resources Strategy. It could also make sure local councils have the resources and funding needed to improve their recycling, composting and waste reduction services.
12. The government could look at how to support an increase in UK reprocessing capacity for recyclable waste materials and create stronger end markets for recyclable materials.

