

Lifecycle approach to co

In the third part of our waste review roundtable discussion, industry figures scratch their heads over localism within a planning landscape and the value in voluntary deals

It seems responsibility deals can work for some sectors but are they enough? How does localism stack up for planning?

The waste review said: "Communities often do not perceive any direct benefit from hosting waste infrastructure yet feel they have to bear the environmental cost."



AT A GLANCE

Our debaters agree that more community engagement is needed when planning new facilities

WORDS: Tiffany Holland

MATTHEW THOMSON: I do feel sorry for local government. It is much closer to political volatility than the private sector. The political side is much more changeable. But then, I've seen waste management companies try to do their best for their client local authorities as to their political choices, and it has still been a nightmare. I think it's really hard to offer industry certainty from a local government perspective.

MARCEL GOEMANS: The opportunity in UK business has changed from a logistics business to a processing business. So you have to invest in infrastructure.

CHRIS DOW: This is where strategic partnerships are key. You need relationships – ones where you can trust each other. We take a lot of material out of MRFs from all waste companies. And without those partnerships we wouldn't have the certainty to be able to build facilities.

IAN BOURTON: We want good companies, good models and good facilities.

CD: The free market does deliver a reasonably good outcome. I would suggest the landfill tax has been the envy of Europe. I would question some of the policies that have been adopted in Europe because we have ended up with a slightly distorted industry. But,

largely, I think if we provide the foundations for investment, the free market will run these facilities and do it in the most sufficient way. I understand the idea of getting decisions back into the community, but that does not mean not using the massive efficiencies that are provided by free market investment.

GEV EDULJEE: I've never been in favour of keeping decisions upstairs – they should be with the community.

MIKE TURNER: Localism has some attributes but sometimes no outcome. There is an infrastructure need there that needs to be addressed and locals do get involved, but sometimes there is still no outcome. It is where clarity and direction needs to be brought in.

GE: We need to address engagement much earlier on.

CD: It's trying to value the perceived overspill costs to the local community, even if they are relatively low, if it assists us in moving forward. I just can't imagine the amount of money spent on planning companies like yours must do [directed towards GE].

GE: Even if you don't spend the money it is just sitting there, which is also a cost. We have to renegotiate if time has passed, which costs money.

MG: Quite a few European companies are recalculating whether they want to keep trading with the UK. They know there is a market but they can't work out when is best to invest.

MTH: Edmonton council with London Waste is constantly showing it is grounded and working hard to ensure everybody knows what happens to this waste. As soon as people understand the implications of their waste, then they start to take more interest in being a part of the solution. So I think we can trust the public to make the right decisions, but it has to be done with sincerity and commitment and it isn't just a tick box to go through a planning hurdle. It has to be about 'who is our community'? What kids are going to be growing up around this facility and maybe working there? Let's have that lifecycle approach to community planning and maybe we can de-risk some of it.

THE DEBATERS

- Ian Bourton (IB), project director, Oxford City Council
- Nigel Bridges (NB), managing director, Whitespace Waste Software
- Chris Dow (CD), managing director, Closed Loop Recycling
- Gev Eduljee (GE), external affairs director, Sita
- Marcel Goemans (MG), UK business director and Europe-Africa sector for waste, MWH
- Matthew Thomson (MTH), chief executive, London Community Resource Network
- Mike Turner (MT), UK operations director, Shanks



Saying 'yes' to voluntary deals?

The waste review said: "We are now working closely with businesses to develop new voluntary responsibility deals in a range of sectors including hospitality, retail, direct mail, waste industry – focused on reducing and recycling waste."

community planning



GE: This isn't a new idea. During the past 20 years there have been 40 or 50 voluntary deals across the sectors, but you do rely on other people for that and evidence is a matter of mandatory regulation. The Government doesn't want to upset anyone. But only time will tell. There is another point I don't think many of our sector trade bodies are sufficiently sophisticated to really drive some of these forward.

MG: Voluntary only goes so far. There needs to be incentives.

CD: What we are seeing right now are so many regulations. There are all of us playing by the rules and then so many who are not – surely that must be frustrating?

GE: This is also this the nonsense of having voluntary MRF standards.

MG: If you look at the experience in Europe, the voluntary deals that get results are the ones that are backed by trade bodies. They manage themselves to do it or they will be hurt by legislation, which would be far more painful.

CD: It works for some sectors but not for splintered ones. When you look at the dairy industry, which has delivered in the milk roadmap, there are only half a dozen players so it is easier to get things done. That's been remarkable, one of Britain's great success stories. The Courtauld Commitment has also been remarkable by what it has tried to bite off right across the stream. WRAP has done a damn good job of it.

GE: Where are the resources so that they can put the same effort into other agreements on the table now? You can have a sector that is dominated by the large companies and so is the voluntary deal. It's only the sectors that are SMEs primarily that are very tough to get together.

NIGEL BRIDGES: The problem is the market is so fragmented and you've got so many players. It has a knock on effect. We are suppliers to you guys. There is no certainty, no planning and no strategy. We're like the end of the tail at the end of the dog chasing a ball.

MG: Rather than trying to get all results from voluntary agreements, I would argue that probably trying to get economic drivers in place so people will migrate towards those would be better.

GE: The kindest thing to say is let's wait and see.

CD: The concern I have with waiting is that we'll end up spiralling, become very fragile and have a touchy-feely lack-of-priority ending. But if we all participated in pushing the powers-that-be, it seems to me we have agreement over many core issues now and if we do then that should be communicated.

MT: We don't lobby – we don't have a means to lobby effectively.

GE: There is some sense to voluntary agreements if you want to change behaviour, direction, environment. They are obviously much cheaper than regulation, where you need a competent authority and inspectors. A lot of money is involved that industry would have to pay for.

MTH: I think the thing is that one man's voluntary agreement could be another man's anti-competitive behaviour.

GE: But this is why it is so important. If you have one or two stragglers that stay outside, it doesn't work.

CD: Going back to Courtauld – think about Britvic. I don't know how much money it must have invested in driving the use of recycled content and reducing its carbon footprint. As a company, it is inspirational. We need to ensure that other companies come along with those leaders. Their driver is the incredible corporate social responsibility outcome – they are way ahead of the curve. I think what they've done is seen the future and thought 'let's get there before everyone else'.

GE: Another issue is it is driving the supply chain. So, with time, they will all have to change their behaviour. You won't get a contract with these guys unless you can achieve 90% recycling.

IB: Government could raise legislation to local authorities, so that the waste collection department will only procure to people that are members of these agreements. And that's very effective. You can streamline regulations by taking councils along that route. So, straight away, you do not have cowboys at a local authority and you have got voluntary agreements in industry. We want to know that what we are producing is going where we want it to.

CD: This is where we've got to put a value on the →



“As a local authority, you are the owner of a materials stream, and the way in which you deal with it and sell or buy around it is crucial to the sort of infrastructure that can go up”

externalities of what we are doing. You might get a guy that says to you ‘I’ll give you £300’, and another says ‘I’ll give you £260 but I’ll do it with these added benefits’. That has cost your council £40, so who is going to pay that? It is about valuing those externalities, those costs that are market players against what we want as an aspiration to occur. Who is going to value that?

IB: We will try and eliminate that through a level playing field.

CD: But that concept of taking more responsibility should be driven further. As a local authority, you are the owner of a materials stream, and the way in which you deal with it and sell or buy around it is crucial to the sort of infrastructure that can go up.

GE: Brussels is looking at this too.

Trace that waste

MTH: There was a link, when the previous Government was championing re-use credits and instructing local authorities to do re-use and recycling credits. And so the charity shop would sign up to these credits.

NB: Another element is that nothing comes for free. So everyone along that supply chain has got to say, ‘yes we will all contribute to it’. So reporting is of a high quality. If a big chunk of that chain doesn’t want to play, the whole chain fails. That is the issue.

MTH: Waste composition analysis is bin snooping. How can you get that information? We have just done a survey update on electrical re-use. We have started a barcode system to classify it at the point of collection, and then you are able to trace it up to point of distribution. This will come online in the next year or so. London Reuse Network is also getting the waste hierarchy working within depots. At the moment, 30 or 40 charities carry out re-use but also try to sort, repair and retail. Efficiency is not there, and the system to run it tends to get all mixed up. So, by separating it out, the information will run better.

NB: A while ago we were putting barcodes in bins.

MG: It happens in many sectors already. In the whole food supply chain, everything is traceable, from farm to supermarket. It took the food industry 20 years to get there.

NB: The waste industry is a young industry but is maturing rapidly.

To separate food or not?

The waste review said: “The Government understands that the public has a reasonable expectation that household waste collections services should be weekly, particularly for smelly waste.”

MT: If you take food out of what you collect from industrial and commercial premises, you can recycle everything and that is a real key driver. Most of the waste collectors collect trade waste with food in it, and one of the behavioural changes we have got to make is not to put it in general waste, so we can recycle it all.

GE: The collection side is so critical.

CD: This gets back to the whole aspiration that the Scottish have done very well. Their goal is very aggressive. They are ensuring their process gets out value from every stream. It’s exciting.

MT: The food will not go in with the other material because of economic reasons. By doing that, you can get certainty processing from a MRF and then there is the other revenue opportunity for the food.

CD: Take away contamination and then the other material streams become so much more valuable.

MTH: On bin collections, the only thing I would say is that alternate weekly collections are a waste prevention measure. The reason why the Department for Communities and Local Government didn’t push through weekly collections is because it is demonstrable that you get an extra one million tonnes of waste through it. I think smart collection is a great way of thinking.

GE: I think the Government made a big tactical mistake. It allowed this relatively trivial issue to completely dominate. An error was that the Government didn’t talk to us as an industry – it did it behind closed doors, which is very silly. If it had come to us and said ‘here are the topics, how are we going to action this?’, then it would have a lot more practical stuff in it and a lot less criticism of it. This is our cash that’s on the table here. They can’t action any of this without us putting money out there.

CD: But it is still a review. I’m holding out hope. Pick up on the concept of lobbying and focus on the serious issues. We don’t want the whole thing dumbed down when this is an absolutely serious and crucial point in history.

GE: The Government will have to do something to call this a plan. And it will have to reconcile three different plans – England, Scotland and Wales – to put them together into a national UK plan. I think we should be saying: ‘Look, great start here, let’s work together.’ ■

Next week: In the final part of our waste review roundtable, what do our debaters feel industry should be concentrating on to push it forward?