

## Jill's talking rubbish

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<https://transitiontownlewes.org/>

*[Note that the Councils' systems have changed since this piece was written]*



A team from Lewes (see photo of us all kitted up) took up the offer noted in the TTL newsletter of a tour of the Hollingdean Materials Recycling Facility, operated by Veolia as are the Newhaven and Whitesmith sites. Hollingdean processes the recycling from Brighton & Hove District; they, Lewes and Wealden Districts all have different recycling regimes, so here are some notes on the differences and on what happens to the recycled materials.

### Garden waste

Wealden have joined up with Rother, Hastings and Eastbourne councils for their waste and recycling contract. They recycled 48% of their waste overall in 2015/16, compared with our c.27%. A big factor in the higher figure is that Wealden have a free 'green waste' collection system: householders can opt in and put out a wheelie-bin load weekly, and this accounts for nearly half of the recycling material that Wealden collect. Lewes have been conducting trials of 'subscription' collections in Seaford, and are now expanding collections along the coastal strip; householders who opt in pay £70/ year for fortnightly collections (except in December and January when it seems that volumes are low). Brighton & Hove introduced 'subscription' green waste collection this year, at £52/ year. Green waste goes to the Whitesmith processing facility near Laughton and is turned into a soil conditioner called Pro-Grow for agriculture and gardens; you can buy it at the Ham Lane site, for example.

### Paper, cardboard, plastic, cans etc

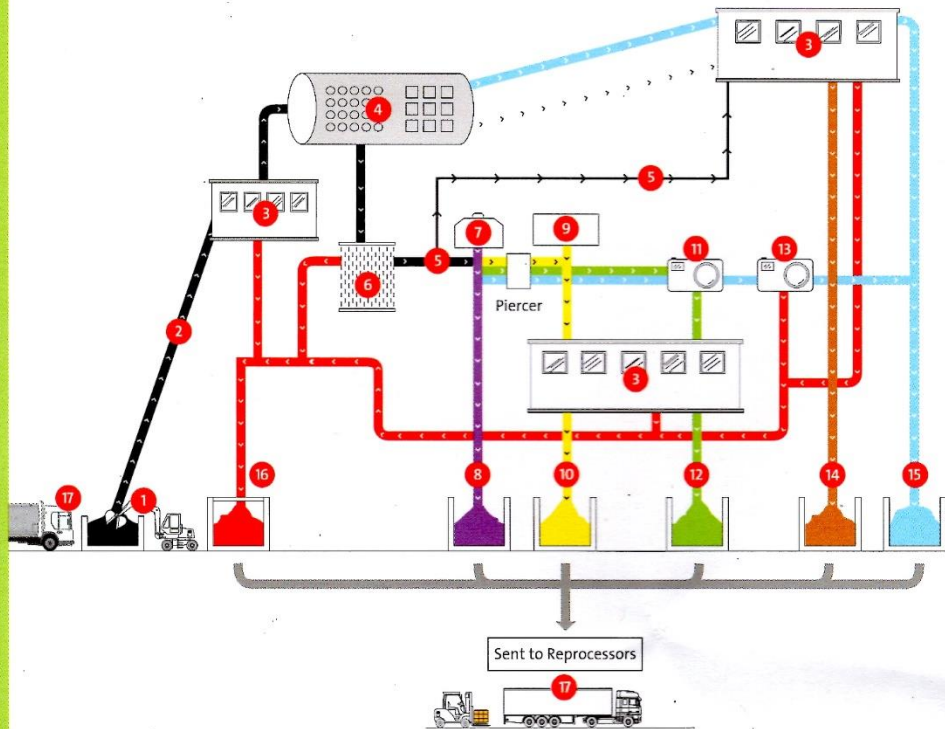
Unlike Lewes, Wealden uses the 'one bin for all' system, putting paper, cardboard, plastic and metal in one recycling wheelee-bin; also unlike Lewes, householders can recycle drinks cartons, plastic pots/ tubs/ trays, bags, film and blister packs, all in the same bin. Glass bottles/ jars are collected separately. Wealden send their mixed recycling to a Materials Recycling Facility in Kent, similar to the Hollingdean one.

Brighton & Hove also use the one-box-for-all system, with everything except glass in one box, though they accept a narrower range than Wealden – basically the same items as Lewes. Recycling accounts for about 30% of Brighton & Hove households' waste, though that figure is eroded down to 20-23% due to the number of consignments which have to be rejected due to contamination – people putting the wrong things into the bins or boxes. Hollingdean say that 10-15% of the material arriving is contaminated, with a strange array of miscellaneous rubbish (which is sorted, and recycled if possible), including people just mistakenly putting glass bottles in the paper/ plastic/ cans bins. Quite a lot of plastic bags and cling-film also turn up and have to be manually removed; Hollingdean say that although the number of plastic carrier-bags turning up in rubbish has gone down hugely since the new ban, the weight hasn't, as most bags still coming through now are 'bags for life', which are much thicker. A particular issue in Brighton & Hove is the very mobile population, with many students and temporary residents, who – and this will strike a chord with many – are used to different local systems and put things in the wrong containers. The many flat-dwellers in Brighton & Hove can also find recycling a problem, and the district's recycling levels have traditionally been low.

How are all these materials separated out at Hollingdean? The accompanying diagram gives you an idea, but no impression at all of the huge noisy 3-dimensional operation, with conveyors running at all angles, ingenious auto-sorting processes at every juncture, and little manual-sort rooms dotted along the system, where workers in heavy gloves flip intrusive material from the conveyors into bins. Then to the end where the sorted materials are baled, and sold on to reprocessors for turning into new items. (See the link below to their video). Aluminium is valuable per tonne at present (though volumes coming in are surprisingly small), with steel a long way behind. Cardboard is fetching a good price, and volumes are increasing hugely with online shopping; paper generally has a steady market, but volumes are well down with the decline of newspapers.

Lewes use the several-containers system and sort the contents manually, during collection (as some readers may have experienced, containers with obviously wrong contents are left behind with a note) and at their North Street site. Lewes report that reprocessing companies then pay better prices for the resulting very low-contamination materials. Lewes are looking into recycling pots/ tubs, trays and drinks-cartons, though they need to be sure of both well-divided collections at the kerbside (there's a lot of potential for confusion among would-be recyclers) and a re-processing facility that will take these items; some products contain complex layers of materials, tricky to separate out. Drinks-cartons can be recycled in Lewes, in a container at the Tesco mini recycling centre; they go to paper mills, which can pulp them using shredding and water, and float and sieve off the foil and plastic, rescuing three-quarters of the cardboard element for use in paper-making.

# Material recovery: how it works



## KEY

- |   |                                    |    |                      |   |                   |
|---|------------------------------------|----|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Bag splitter                       | 9  | Aluminium separator  | ■ | Mixed             |
| 2 | Material loaded onto conveyor belt | 10 | Non-ferrous bunker   | ■ | Residue           |
| 3 | Manual sort cabins                 | 11 | Plastic optical sort | ■ | Non-ferrous metal |
| 4 | Trommel                            | 12 | Plastic bunker       | ■ | Ferrous metal     |
| 5 | Air knife                          | 13 | Paper optical sort   | ■ | Plastic           |
| 6 | Disc screen                        | 14 | Cardboard bunker     | ■ | Card              |
| 7 | Ferrous separator                  | 15 | Mixed paper bunker   | ■ | Mixed paper       |
| 8 | Ferrous bunker                     | 16 | Residue bay          |   |                   |
|   |                                    | 17 | Vehicles in and out  |   |                   |

## Glass

Glass is 100% recyclable, and has been collected nationwide for many years for recycling. Glass is made of soda ash, sand and limestone, and when reheated in a kiln it melts again and can be remade directly into containers: in the UK, glass jars and bottles have about 30% recycled content. An issue in the UK is our fondness for imported drinks in green glass bottles, as the recycling process produces more green glass than we can re-use in the UK, and green 'cullet' (the crushed glass from recycling schemes) may have to be re-exported for use abroad; though if Sussex wine production (in green bottles) continues to rise we may manage to use our green

glass in-house.... There's some use of crushed cullet in construction materials. (www.berrymanglassrecycling.com, one of the big glass-recyclers' website, has more information)

#### Food waste

A third of all food grown for human consumption in the UK ends up being thrown away. Lewes District's website says 'When we throw away food we are not just wasting the food but all the resources that went into producing, growing and transporting the food.' Lewes is the only one of the three councils to collect food waste, and it goes to Whitesmith, where it's mixed with the garden waste coming in and turned into soil conditioner. The mixture is kept at a highish temperature in large vessels until it all breaks down and becomes sterile. Levels of food waste recycled in Lewes have gone down since the launch, partly because of householders' concerns about smells and flies in the summer; so Lewes plan a revivification of the scheme next year, with advice about regularly transferring full bags to the larger grey outside bin.

#### And finally, street-sweepings

East Sussex County Council have started sending street-sweepings from some areas for recycling by Veolia in Warwickshire, and plan to extend this to the whole county. The process sends twigs and leaves to composting, metal and plastic bottles to recycling, and stones and glass for aggregate; even the final dust can be checked for precious metals.

#### Some relevant websites

[www.brighton-hove.gov.uk](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk)

[www.lewes.gov.uk](http://www.lewes.gov.uk)

[www.wealden.gov.uk](http://www.wealden.gov.uk)

#### Videos of Material Recycling Facilities in operation (fascinating to watch!)

Veolia's MRF: [www.veolia.co.uk/southdowns/facilities/facilities/hollingdean-materials-recovery-facility](http://www.veolia.co.uk/southdowns/facilities/facilities/hollingdean-materials-recovery-facility)

Viridor's MRF: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DAk8m7sVM4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DAk8m7sVM4)