

**TRIAL OF REUSABLE BAGS IN BEANHILL
January/February 2016**

Background and Objectives

A trial of reusable bags for the collection of recyclables instead of pink sacks was undertaken in Beanhill in January/February 2016. The primary objective was the gathering of information to ascertain whether this method of collection could yield cost savings and to improve recycling quality or quantity versus the current system of providing pink sacks. Secondary objectives were to ascertain any issues that might be expected on a larger scale roll-out, both operationally and from resident's perspective; the number of bags that will be needed per property; and to determine any other impacts.

Method

Four streets of Beanhill were selected for the trial covering 218 properties. In two streets – Capron and Chervil – totalling 107 properties, residents were given one bag. In the other two – Wastel and Simnel – totalling 111 properties, residents were given two bags.

Benchmarking observations on these streets were carried out on 16th December 2015. Officers recorded the number of all refuse and recycling containers put out in the half an hour before collection started. Refuse and recycling collections start early in this area, at just after 7am, so recording started just after 6.30am. The total amount of time that the collection vehicle took to complete the round was also recorded.

On 13th January residents were given a “prewarning” leaflet that a trial was to start the following week, and on 20th January the relevant number of bags were distributed to properties in each street, together information and instructions about using the bags and a survey card for the resident to send back any comments, as early feedback was required where possible.

Observations were then repeated on 3rd and 10th February, after which residents were given information that the trial had finished and survey cards were again distributed. All the information also contained a website address where a survey could be completed online.

Results

The pre-trial observations indicated that recycling habits are not particularly strong in this area. Very few blue boxes and green bins were being placed out, and some of the properties were not placing any pink sacks out but were placing out large numbers of black sacks.

As the trial was during the winter, collections were taking place partly in the dark, and, possibly as a result of this, there was little littering - few animals were about, particularly birds which can attack pink bags.

It was also observed that many residents were waiting until the collection time was very close to put out sacks, black sacks in particular, and this made recording of sacks placed out for collection of sacks prone to undercounting. This is particularly suspected in Simnel in the benchmark observations. This practice may also be a reason for the lack of littering.

On 3rd February operational circumstances impacted on schedules which meant that part of Chervil was collected before the observers could count the sacks there, so for this area only the 10th February observation was used.

Immediately prior to the trial a lot of negative discussion took place in the press and on social media about the bags which may have coloured the views of residents. Survey cards received early commented on negative events that residents thought would happen (evidenced by use of the word “will” in replies) as opposed to their actual experience with the bags.

Usage of blue bags (Tables 1-3 below)

It was observed that:

- Many properties seemingly did not start using the reusable bags at all and large numbers of pink sacks continued to be used. In the blue bag area only 25% of the recycling containers that were put out were blue bags and in the two bag area this increased to 46%.
- There was an overall increase in the number of recycling containers put out in both areas.
- In the one bag area and overall, there appeared to be a decline in the number of black sacks put out (in the two bag area, an under-reporting in Simnel in the benchmarking may account for an apparent increase).
- It is not known why there appears to be an increase in recycling containers set out, but possible reasons include that the area has been given more capacity for recycling collections, as well as the information and attention focussed on the area.
- The average number of recycling containers used per household per week was 1.08 in the trial area pre-trial and 1.24 post-trial.

	One Bag Area	Two Bag Area	Total
Table 1 Pre-trial count 16th December 2015			
Total number of properties	107	111	218
Total number of pink sacks set out	111	125	236
Total number of black sacks set out	155	119	274
Total number of green bins set out	14	14	28
Total number of blue boxes set out	6	14	20

	One Bag Area	Two Bag Area	Total
Table 2 Post Trial 3rd and 10th February (Average)			
Total number of blue bags set out	32.0	65.5	97.5
Total number of pink sacks set out	94.0	78.0	172.0
Total number of blue bags and pink sacks	126	143.5	269.5
% of recycling containers put out that were blue bags	25%	46%	36%
Total number of black sacks set out	92.5	150	242.5
Total number of green bins set out	8.0	23.5	31.5
Total number of blue boxes set out	5.5	5.5	11.0

Table 3 change in number of recycling containers and black sacks	One Bag Area	Two Bag Area	Total
Change in number of recycling containers	+14%	+15%	+14%
Change in number of black sacks	-40%	+26%	-11%

Time taken to collect refuse and recycling

Table 4 Time taken to collect using one-pass vehicle, minutes	Pre trial	Post Trial	Increase
Time taken to collect from one bag areas	21:47	30:10	38%
Time taken to collect from two bag areas	20:57	23:52	14%

The observers noted that, instead of providing the usual driver plus two crew, during the trial Serco provided a driver and three. Nevertheless, the collection took longer, and Council observers noticed that the crew were also slowed by the presence of the Serco supervisor and other observers with whom they spoke at times and that they seemed to be working at slower than the normal pace, even given that they had to return the bags to the properties.

Survey responses

By 26th February, 44 residents had returned a survey, either online or by post, giving a 20% response rate.

5 of these replied twice, 4 sending in two postal surveys - one early on and one later - and the other sent in both an online and a postal survey. Four of these did not change their views between the surveys but the fourth changed from positive to negative. Only one response was recorded for each of these properties for the closed questions – the later response. All the comments were recorded from both surveys in the open ended questions.

Most of the responses were by post.

Table 5 Survey Returns Summary

	One Bag Areas	Two Bag Areas	Total
Total number of properties in the area:	107	111	218
Number of properties responding to survey:	19	25	44
Response rate	18%	23%	20%

Table 6 Method of Response	By Post	Online	By post and online	Total
Total number of properties responding:	37	6	1	44

Most residents had negative views of the reusable bags with 57% disliking or strongly disliking them (Table 7). However 22% liked them or strongly liked them. Dislike was slightly stronger in the one bag areas.

It should be noted that this survey is self-selecting and therefore it is more likely to be completed by those with stronger views or who wish to make a point. To obtain a more complete view, house-to-house surveys should be considered.

Table 7 Opinion of blue bags and pink sacks

	One Bag Areas		Two Bag Areas		Total	
	Blue Bag	Pink Bag	Blue Bag	Pink Bag	Blue Bag	Pink Bag
Strongly Like	2	10	1	5	3	15
Like	2	3	3	10	5	13
Neither like nor dislike	2	3	5	3	7	6
Dislike	2	0	4	0	6	0
Strongly Dislike	8	1	7	0	15	1
Not ticked/No response	1	0	0	2	1	2
Total	17	17	20	20	37	37
% like/strongly like	24%	76%	20%	75%	22%	76%
% dislike/strongly dislike	59%	6%	55%	0%	57%	3%

76% of residents in the one bag areas felt there was not enough space provided versus 50% in the two bag areas. It should also be noted that some residents felt that while the space provided by the bag(s) might be enough for them, they would not be enough for larger families or that there would not be enough space at peak times such as Christmas. The issue of amount of space provided is an important factor in colouring the views of both the one bag and two bag areas.

Table 8 Size comments

The amount of space in the bag was:	One Bag Areas	%	Two Bag Areas	%
Too much	0	0%	0	0%
About right	3	18%	9	45%
Not enough	13	76%	10	50%
Not answered	1	6%	1	5%
Total	17	100%	20	100%

Apart from the capacity of the bag, a range of other comments were received, and these are shown in Table 9. Most were negative comments about the blue bags but there were also positive comments about them and both positive and negative comments about the pink bags along with some more general comments.

The negative comments can be split into four areas:

- Design – with the insecure flap being the main area of concern, together with the quality of the bag.
- Operational issues - with the bags not being returned properly or the perception that crews were working slower.
- Issues relating to how the resident manages the bags, with the issues of the bags getting wet, of cats or dogs urinating on the bags, having to retrieve the bags and not the bags fitting into their current system being of most concern. Note that many of these comments were received early and were issues that the resident perceived would happen in the future rather than had actually happened; these have been indicated by the bold “Will” in the comment.
- More strategic /political issues such as whether the bags are a waste of money

The proportion of comments in each area is as shown below:

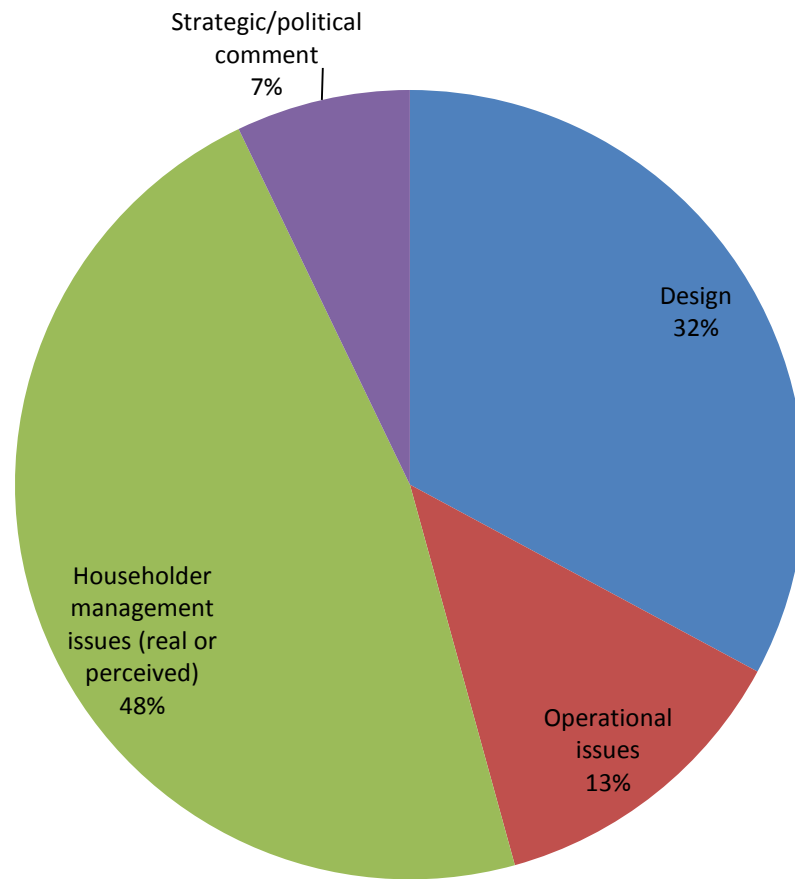


Table 9 Issues (other than size) raised by residents (both areas)

Negative Comments Blue Bags	Number of residents making the comment
Cover is not very secure/flap not very good/zip would be better/can't tie	11
Bag will get wet - where/ how to dry out	6
Contents will blow away when windy inc shredded paper issue/only good for heavy stuff	5
Badly made/shoddy/cheap	5
Issues with dogs and cats (urinating etc)	5
Don't like having to retrieve them	4
Not practical in house	4
Blown away - found in bushes/middle of garden etc	3
Could be delivered back to the property better/isn't put back	3
Bin collectors do not like them/heard them moaning	2
Not easy for elderly/disabled	2
Not fit for purpose	2
Unsightly in the house	2
Waste of money	2
Will be thrown back into middle of garden	2
If you go ahead with this we will put recyclables into black bags	2
Will need cleaning	2
Rubbish will blow out of back of vehicle	1
Takes a long time for operators to empty & replace	1
Bag is heavier	1
Can't put the bags into bins	1

Negative Comments Blue Bags continued	Number of residents making the comment
Invitation to burglars	1
Couldn't fold the sides in	1
It's a con (and related to losing black bags)	1
Can't fit in bin cupboard	1
Bags were stolen	1

Positive comments Blue Bags	
Strong, ideal for us, good, kept in kitchen/good for normal use	3
It's a good idea/great	2
No problem - as easy as a pink bag	1
Easy to store	1
Things fit better in the blue bags	1

Postive Comments Pink Sacks	
Pink sacks are more flexible re size of household or easier to handle	2
Pink sacks are taken away, do not litter street	2
Pink bags are OK (with qualifications)	1

Negative Comments Pink Sacks	
Pink sacks rip easily/poor quality	3
Pink sacks are not eco friendly	1

Other Comments	
Would prefer a wheelie bin instead	6
What will happen when they tear/wear out	2
If the bottom was perforated would be good replacements for boxes	1
Would be better to return to boxes	1

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Consideration is given to the size of the bag, providing as much space as possible, and in particular that consideration is given as to how to address the capacity at peak times.
- At least two bags should be provided per property and provision made for a system to replace lost bags as they have already been recorded as going missing.
- The flap on the bag and its general quality is improved.
- That consideration is given to the main concerns of householders, how they may be helped to make the change to the new bag and generally more information about the bag and why the change is being made. This would include for instance, information on what will happen at Christmas and other peak times and what to do if they have problems with bags. A detailed communications plan should be put together involving the Council's media team.