

# Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022

## Visit to Materials Recovery facility (MRF)

at Great Blakenham

Led by Craig Renton, Waste Advisor,

Suffolk County Council

The MRF is the place to which the material placed by all residents across Suffolk into their domestic recycling bins for collection by their district council, is brought to for sorting.

The facility has undergone a programme of refurbishment in the past couple of years, during which time the contract to run the site has been acquired by Biffa,

and public visits to the site have been suspended, firstly due to Covid, but also whilst the refurbishment took place. Biffa do not accommodate public visits to any of their many other facilities across the country, so this visit was arranged to give members of the Greenprint Forum the opportunity to experience one of the early tours and contribute feedback to help inform the Suffolk Waste Partnership's work with Biffa to develop a model for the resumption of these visits. Ten of us attended this specially organised visit.

Unfortunately the site experienced a breakdown forcing a full stoppage of operations just before we arrived, so we did not get to see the actual workings of the site as planned, however we still received an in depth explanation of the process of the newly refurbished plant which stimulated a discussion and questions.

The plant processes over 53,000 tonnes of material each year, including 15,600 tonnes/year from east Suffolk. Whilst the recent refurbishment has achieved a greater emphasis on mechanical sorting, it still requires some manual intervention to identify and remove items that should not be entering the plant at all or transfer them to the correct line (with operatives working in the pre-sort cabin to remove non-recyclable contraries such as black sacks, and nappies, or divert large but recyclable items like big cardboard boxes that might cause blockages further along the process, and at the ends of commodity lines to ensure quality control) but the reliance of the plant on manual picking is reduced compared to the situation pre-refurbishment.

The materials sorted by this plant into separate single-stream commodities is then sold on the global market of recyclable commodities. In recent years there have been significant systemic changes to this global market; whereas in the past much of our plastics for example would have ended up in the Far East, as those economies have closed the door on imports of post-consumer plastic from the West this has compelled European countries to develop more reprocessing capacity and demand for these materials, meaning that more of Suffolk's plastics now ends up being recycled much closer to home in countries including Germany, Romania and Turkey, with the majority actually being recycled within the UK itself as of 2020/21.

The Suffolk Waste Partnership publishes an End Use Register to illustrate where our recyclable rubbish ends up each year: [Where recycling goes - Suffolk Recycling](#)



## Some key messages to share with others in your networks:

- **All items need to be clean** as food and drink residues can easily spread and cover other items potentially spoiling other good material and wasting the efforts of others. A rinse using the water left over in the washing up bowl after cleaning the dishes is usually sufficient and is a good way of avoiding using additional hot water especially.
- It may seem obvious to you and I but **too many nappies** still end up at the MRF where they can be a health hazard for the operatives who have to recover and divert them to disposal. **Real, reusable cloth nappies** can be comfy, easy to clean and work out cheaper and better for the environment than disposables; for more info and mythbusting visit: [Cloth nappies - Suffolk Recycling](#)
- **When it comes to plastics**, don't spend time trying to decipher labels, symbols, codes, and numbers as this can just lead to confusion. If it is a single-use container that you would normally discard once you have finished with the contents, such as a **pot, a tray, a tub, or a bottle, it can go in your recycling bin. Leave the tops on bottles**, to ensure they get captured (items smaller than 5cm are too small to capture). [Together we can get our recycling right - Suffolk Recycling](#)
- Whilst the site will do its best to divert for recycling **non-target recyclable items** such as "hard plastics" (e.g. watering cans, buckets) and large metal items (e.g. ironing boards) that householders have managed to ram into their bins, it really is not designed to cope with these items and dealing with these items is a costly diversion of manpower for the plant to have to absorb – they can potentially cause blockages and even breakdowns if missed – and these costs are ultimately passed on to the Council Tax Payers. These items can of course be taken to any of Suffolk's eleven [Recycling Centres](#) , with the key point being not to make a special journey for one or two items, but to wait until you have a vehicle full (you may wish to help out a neighbour who doesn't have transport and needs to get rid of something too) and try and combine the journey with another journey you need to make.
- If in doubt why not consult Suffolk's **A-Z of Recycling**, which covers a broad range of items including advice on options for avoidance, reuse and composting, as well as where and how to recycle, in accordance with the principles of the waste hierarchy: [What to do with? \(A-Z\) - Suffolk Recycling](#)
- **A short informative film** which guides viewers through the journey taken by items as they travel through this plant can be viewed here: [Where recycling goes - Suffolk Recycling](#) At the MRF, plastics are differentiated into PET, HDPE and mixed plastics, with further identification and re-processing of plastics being undertaken at Biffa's dedicated Plastics Reprocessing Facilities at Seaham and Redcar. [Plastic Recycling Facilities | Recycling Plastic | Biffa](#)
- If you would like to organise a visit to the MRF **for your own group** (minimum 8, maximum 10) please contact [waste.management@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:waste.management@suffolk.gov.uk) (note you will go on a waiting list for when public visits resume)
- **To go on a waiting list to join the next visit arranged by the Greenprint Forum** (as and when sufficient people show interest) please email [greenissues@eastsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:greenissues@eastsuffolk.gov.uk) with your name and contact details.

