



ENVIRONMENT

## Leading A Nation In Waste Management

### Summary

Delivering a waste collection and recycling service to a sparsely populated, large, rural area presents specific and mostly financial problems. And yet a small district authority, with a combined general budget fund and capital programme of less than £17million now leads the nation with an impressive 51.5% recycling and composting rate.

North Kesteven District Council represents a sprawling rural district in the heart of Lincolnshire. The district's 45,500 households are spread throughout 100 mainly small communities, most with populations of less than 3,000 people.

### Quote

***“North Kesteven’s 51.5% recycling and composting rate is remarkable considering that it’s been achieved without external funding, and solely through the willingness of North Kestevens District Council and its taxpayers.”***

Helen Richmond,  
Projects Officer,  
East Midlands Centre of Excellence

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## The Story So Far

In January 1990, North Kesteven District Council changed from a weekly black sack collection to a weekly roadside collection of 240-litre, black wheeled bins.

Seven years later, 5,000 households were asked to trial 100 litre recycling boxes that were emptied fortnightly. This scheme set the ball rolling and, combined with its many recycling banks throughout the district, a 3.4% recycling rate was achieved. This, clearly, was not sufficient and Members needed to think of an alternative. The scheme was halted after only six months, despite growing demand from residents.

In 2002, a funding bid to Defra to implement a district-wide recycling collection service was unsuccessful. Despite disappointment, the Council chose to commit to recycling and introduced 240-litre, green-lidded wheeled bins for paper, cans, cardboard, plastic and textiles.

All residents had to do was put everything listed in one bin - the sorting was done after the bins had been emptied. This proved to be a real winner compared to existing systems in other areas of the country where residents were expected to sort the waste themselves.

At the start, the recycling and collection service was monthly and North Kesteven's recycling rate rose to 16.1%, but residents kept asking for more. This was due to North Kesteven's most ambitious publicity programme to date.

Prior to introducing the dry recyclables collection service, North Kesteven used a cartoon creation called 'Kenny the Can' in an intensive 12-week radio advertising campaign. The programme was also taken into local schools and direct to residents via leaflets and the Council newspaper, Linkline.

Residents quickly became convinced of the importance of recycling, the promotional campaign was a huge success and residents let the Council know in clear terms that they wanted to recycle more.

In 2003, a second bid was submitted to Defra as part of the National Waste Implementation Fund. As in 2002, the bid was unsuccessful.

North Kesteven listened to its residents and decided to meet public demand by increasing the collection frequency for the green-lidded wheeled bins from monthly to fortnightly. This move helped raise the 2003/04 recycling rate to 20.1%.

## Public Private Partnership

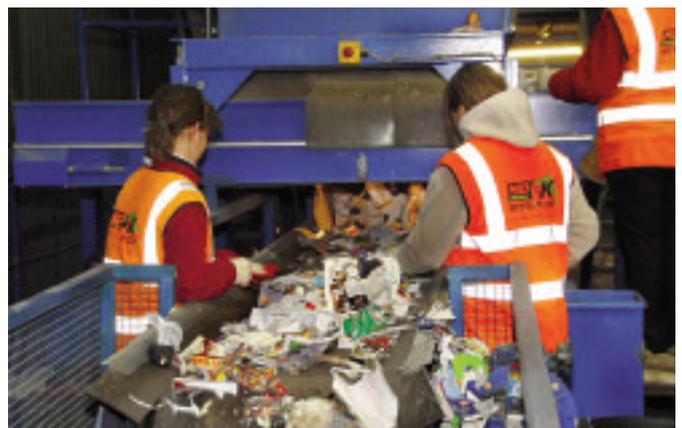
In the background, the Council was hatching a groundbreaking plan with its recycling business partner, Mid UK-Recycling Ltd.

North Kesteven and Mid UK Recycling explored the possibility of providing a green waste collection service. In discussing green waste collections, an exciting and innovative plan to collect green waste and glass in one wheeled bin was born. North Kesteven had previously decided that a 'glass-only' collection was simply not cost-effective; however, trials of the new process showed that the glass content could be removed, leaving Grade II Agricultural compost.



In August 2004, North Kesteven chose to further its commitment to recycling and introduced the 'green waste and glass recycling scheme'. A third 240 litre, wheeled bin was distributed to residents to take green waste and glass. At the same time, North Kesteven introduced a three bin scheme that still enabled a weekly collection, but which meant that two bins would be emptied one week and the third the next week. By August 2004, 98% of North Kesteven's households were on a three bin collection service.

In April 2006, Mid UK Recycling informed North Kesteven that revised processes meant that a higher grade of compost could now be obtained, because it was possible to accept glass mixed with dry recyclable materials. Managing this change in collection criteria was critical to the success of the project.



## Critical Success Factors

### Sometimes the news was good

– “The Council is giving you what you want – recycling”

### Sometimes the news was bad

– “...it can only be done if you go with fortnightly collections.”

***“The most important task in the whole of this journey was to keep residents informed in such a way that they wholeheartedly supported the Council’s efforts.”***

Nina Camm,  
Environment Manager  
North Kesteven District Council

Bad news could have caused North Kesteven some serious headaches, especially since the authority was announcing a 5.9% rise in the District Council's element of Council Tax. The additional £100,000 needed for the new scheme represented almost 3% of that rise. The Council “sold” the idea to residents by explaining that it worked out at around £1 per person per year. It was also pointed out that this more than compensated for the cost and time spent visiting bottle banks and civic amenity sites.

Following the decision to provide additional means of collection, a number of residents telephoned the Council to say that none of their bins were actually full after a week – some even went so far as to suggest a fortnightly collection.

Other residents told the Council they needed a bigger dry recyclables bin. North Kesteven listened and for a small one-off charge, households were able to obtain a larger 360 litre bin.

## Key Challenges

### Bin colour

One of the key challenges for North Kesteven was to limit the amount of confusion caused by on-going changes to the waste collection and recycling service.

North Kesteven felt this problem was compounded by the fact that the dry recyclables bin had a green lid, and the green waste bin was actually brown. The Council considered sticking new labels over those already in place, but this would have proved too expensive.

To conquer this problem, North Kesteven mounted a promotional campaign including house-to-house leaflet drops that explained what could and could not be put in the new bins.

## Opting Out

Before the Council introduced its dry recyclables scheme in 2002, it invited residents to ask for the second wheeled bin. Those who failed to opt for the second bin were contacted individually, prior to delivery of the third bin, to make sure they fully understood the implications of a reduction to fortnightly collections of non-recyclable waste.

In total, only 800 households refused the third bin, and almost 500 households who had previously refused the second bin asked for the second bin as well as the third.

## Local media support

The local media were approached. The Council knew from past experience that it could obtain positive coverage on inner pages, whereas a resident revolt would hit the front page in banner headlines. To their immense credit, the local media, in particular the Lincolnshire Echo, Sleaford Standard and Sleaford Target, supported the Council.

Although never stated, it soon became apparent that the local media were going to help with the campaign. The press coverage was 99% in the Council’s favour. Adverse comments remained on the letters pages, never in follow-up stories, and there was always a contemporaneous balance with letters from supporters.

Both local radio stations, BBC Radio Lincolnshire and Lincs FM, also helped out whenever asked. If the Council had an operational problem, they helped immediately; acting as a public information service.

With the media on its side, providing significant and positive assistance in the information battle, the Council could concentrate on any operational problems.

## Promoting a consistent message

It was decided very early on that a dedicated telephone and email hotline needed to be set-up. A temporary member of staff was also employed to solely answer residents queries.

In addition, all Members, parish councillors and staff were fully briefed on the changes. This ensured that the same message was delivered to all residents, regardless of their access channel.

The Council also took advantage of any public event to deliver its message, and especially targeted children who are typically more receptive to the concept of recycling.

## Risk

Having planned the promotional campaign carefully, the biggest risk the Council faced was the tight timescale it set itself.

On the face of it, the timetables seemed unrealistic and, unachievable. However, Members believed officers could do it and promised every support to achieve success. They delivered their promise and the officers delivered the challenging timetable – on both occasions.

## The Future

North Kesteven District Council remains firmly committed to providing a waste collection and recycling service that meets both government targets and the needs of its residents. North Kesteven is willing to listen to its residents and offers a flexibility that allows it to adapt its waste collection and recycling service to meet its residents needs.

The cost involved in delivering a 51.5% recycling and composting rate has been neither prohibitive nor exorbitant. Households in North Kesteven are paying less than £1 per week for their waste collection and recycling service.

***“If North Kesteven had one wish, it would be that Central Government had entered the arena earlier and made it possible to standardise a few things, even if they had merely defined bin colours and capacities.”***

Nina Camm,  
Environment Manager  
North Kesteven District Council

North Kesteven’s priorities have already been set for 2007/08 – the Council aims to minimise waste, improve energy efficiency and reduce demand for landfill.

North Kesteven District Council is now working with its neighbouring waste collection authorities and with Lincolnshire County Council. By working with its neighbouring authorities North Kesteven aims to minimise the effect of new European legislation regarding landfill quotas.

The problem of waste and landfill is a problem for the environment, residents and local authorities, however, North Kesteven is confident that, together, its residents and the Council can tackle the global challenge of climate change by acting locally to create a sustainable future.

## Contact

**Nina Camm**  
Environment Manager  
North Kesteven District Council  
tel: 01529 414 155  
email: [nina\\_camm@n-kesteven.gov.uk](mailto:nina_camm@n-kesteven.gov.uk)

**Helen Richmond**  
Projects Officer  
East Midlands Centre of Excellence  
tel: 07921 491 696  
email: [helen.richmond@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:helen.richmond@nottsc.gov.uk)