

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Case studies.....	4
Local government feedback.....	6
Beachwatch organiser feedback.....	8
Conclusion.....	14
Appendix.....	15

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to scope the potential of voluntary groups recycling the materials collected from the Suffolk coastline as a result of the Beachwatch initiative. Currently there is no coordinated county-wide scheme for recycling such materials and a variety of waste disposal measures are taken by the respective volunteer groups.

This report seeks to provide greater understanding of the feasibility and desirability of recycling Beachwatch materials by investigating case-studies of groups that regularly recycle and analysing the feedback from key administrative figures and local volunteers.

Beachwatch in context

Beachwatch is a national coastal environmental initiative organised nationally by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) as part of their Clean Seas and Beaches campaign. The scheme supports local individuals, groups and communities from across the UK in caring for their coastline by undertaking up to four beach cleans and surveys each year. It operates in conjunction with the Beachwatch Big Weekend which is a national beach clean and survey taking place once a year.



Figure 1. Beachwatch volunteers with representatives from Suffolk County Council, the Crown Estate and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB on Bawdsey Beach, 2012.

Beachwatch in Suffolk

Beachwatch was launched in Suffolk in 2005 and Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) works closely with MCS to promote and coordinate the scheme in the county with the support of the Crown Estate.

In Suffolk, over 650 volunteers currently belong to Beachwatch groups that care for over 30 beaches and are each managed by a voluntary organiser. From 2005 to 2011, volunteers collected and recorded 12253kg of materials from across the Suffolk coastline.

The composition of materials recorded is varied and reflects the broad origins of litter found on beaches, with sources ranging from public users of the coast to the fishing and shipping industries. The predominant types of material found are small fragments

of various plastics, food and drink containers and maritime industry accoutrements such as fishing line and rope.

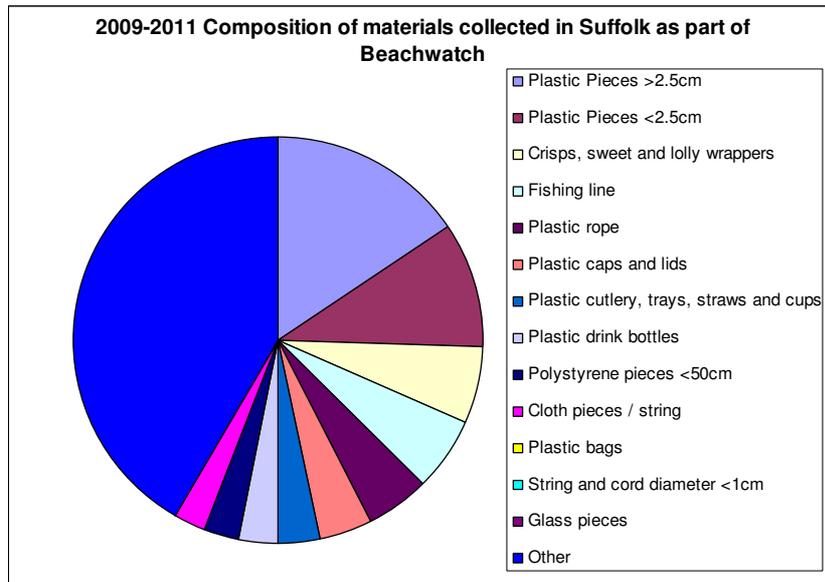


Chart 1. Pie-chart showing the composition of materials collected through Beachwatch in Suffolk from 2009 to 2011.

Case studies

During the research for this report, no examples were found of regular and coordinated recycling schemes amongst Beachwatch groups in Great Britain. However, two useful case studies of systematic recycling were identified in the Isle of Man and Guernsey and their lead organisers were contacted for further information which is summarised below.

Isle of Man 'Beach Buddies'

On the Isle of Man, Beachwatch is practiced through the voluntary 'Beach Buddies' organisation which was founded in 2006 and currently has over 700 volunteers. Bill Dale, founder and organiser, of the scheme states that volunteers regularly recycle collected materials including plastic bottles, drink cans, glass pieces and miscellaneous metal materials such as wire or barbecue grills whilst bottle tops are reused for children's' craft activities. Materials are normally sorted during collection by groups of two to three volunteers using three different plastic bags for plastics, metals and general litter in addition to re-usable buckets to collect glass. The organiser is hoping to utilise re-usable buckets for all waste but has yet to find a sponsor.

The groups tend to sort items as they go along the beach but the organiser suggested that such sorting can be difficult and dependent upon having an adequate numbers of participants present to make up the necessary groups of two to three volunteers.



Figure 2. 'Beach Buddies' volunteers on the Isle of Man following a beach cleaning event at Ballaugh Cronk beach in 2013. Note the three different types of bag used.

The majority of recyclable materials collected are transported by the lead organiser in their 4x4 vehicle and trailer for deposition at the four government-owned household waste recycling sites on the island. The recycling sites are spread evenly around the island and the maximum distance for the organiser to travel is 7 miles, however fuel still remains a major cost to the organisation at present.

Guernsey

In the Channel Island of Guernsey, Beachwatch groups are coordinated by the States of Guernsey Environment Department. Richard Lord of Sustainable Guernsey

describes how recycling is fairly common-place amongst the various groups primarily due to volunteers having convenient access from the beaches to over 30 bring-banks in Guernsey.

Items such as whole plastic bottles, large plastic containers and sizeable metal items are often recycled whilst volunteers are encouraged to re-use nylon twine, rope and string. Clothing has been taken by the Salvation Army in the past and shredded for insulation.

The means of sorting materials is dependent upon the preferences of the separate groups. Materials tend to be collected using flexible plastic tubs instead of disposable plastic bags in order to reduce the amount sent to the one remaining landfill on the island, however Richard Lord notes that these containers often fill up quickly and can crack easily.

Conclusions from case-studies

The two case studies show that taking a coordinated approach to how Beachwatch groups dispose of their waste can successfully lead to regular recycling.

The close proximity of numerous recycling centres and bring bank sites to the coast was identified as being a major factor in this success by both organisers. This factor can potentially have a direct influence on encouraging rates of recycling and may explain why the only two examples of regular Beachwatch recycling found are located on relatively small islands whose populations and infrastructure are located closely to the sea.

The utilisation of re-usable plastic buckets by both sets of groups is a positive measure that reduces the number of disposable bags going to landfill. Adopting such a measure may be desirable in Suffolk but is dependent upon a sponsor being found and further research into the complaint that such buckets can fill quickly and crack.

Local government feedback

The issue of recycling materials collected as part of Beachwatch was discussed with various figures from local government in order to develop a clearer understanding of the administrative and technical context.

Contact was also made with MCS to discuss the issue; however the MCS Pollutions Campaigns Officer suggested that they had no knowledge of any existing recycling schemes.

Suffolk County Council

The Suffolk Waste Partnership Support Manager at Suffolk County Council was supportive of the concept of recycling the Beachwatch litter but expressed concern over the amount of recycling that could practically be achieved. In their view, the most common finds were either too small or degraded for effective recycling, such as the miscellaneous plastic pieces, or cannot be recycled in the local area, such as polystyrene.

They suggested that the most appropriate items for recycling are undamaged full size recyclable items, such as Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic beverage bottles, but such items form a limited proportion of materials collected overall. Therefore, the manager offered the approximate estimate that only around 10% of materials collected could be effectively recycled.

District Councils

In Suffolk, waste disposal is the responsibility of the district councils. The managers for waste and recycling in Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils were supportive of the concept of recycling Beachwatch waste but conveyed doubts over the feasibility of such recycling.

The manager of waste and recycling for the Waveney District questioned the practicality of introducing a coordinated system of recycling for Beachwatch groups due to a belief that only a limited number of items could realistically be recycled at present due to the fragmented and degraded condition of waste collected.

The manager of waste and recycling at Suffolk Coastal District Council suggested that whilst around 80% of Beachwatch waste is in theory technically recyclable actually only around 15% can be recycled in practice in Suffolk due to the quality of the materials and current recycling technology in place.

However, both managers suggested that their respective district councils would be willing and able to offer a service whereby refuse lorries transport recycling bins to sites of Beachwatch events in order to collect sorted materials. Such an offer would be dependent upon the agreement of a suitable collection point with organisers at least 24-hours before each event.

Conclusions from local government feedback

All three senior figures in waste management in Suffolk raised the same concern of low yields of recyclable materials being acquired from the coast. This is a very significant point which questions the feasibility of having local authority lorries being sent to each Beachwatch event, especially when one considers the possible cost and carbon emissions resulting from such collections and the relatively remote locations of some Beachwatch group activities. However, the support for recycling amongst all officials was significant and the offer of collections may be of great value to certain Beachwatch groups.

Beachwatch organiser feedback

In March 2013, the forty-five registered organisers responsible for organising the volunteers who implement Beachwatch and Beachwatch Big Weekend in Suffolk were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire that sought to establish the current practices of recycling amongst the groups they manage. Sixteen completed questionnaires were submitted by participants, the results of which are summarised below.

Nature of recycling

The majority of organisers stated that their groups did not regularly recycle collected materials at present. Nine respondents (56%) claimed that they either 'rarely' or 'never' recycled the material collected as a result of Beachwatch and only two (12.5%) asserted that they 'always' recycled.

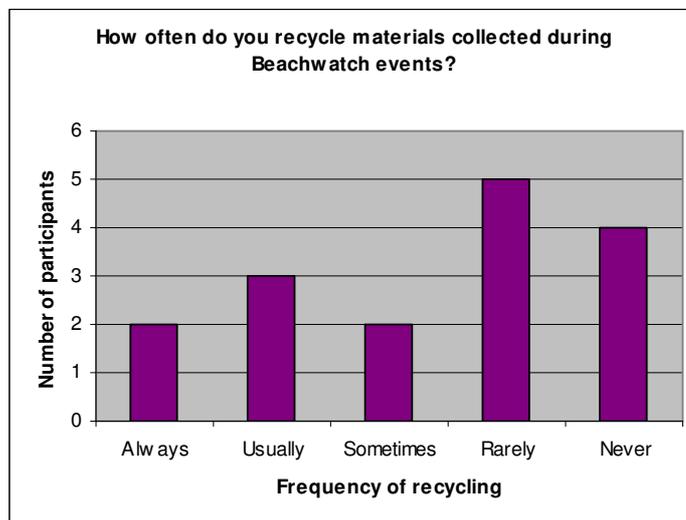


Chart 2. Graph showing the frequency of recycling amongst Beachwatch organisers.

There was wide variety in terms of the materials and amounts recycled by Beachwatch groups. A common pattern to emerge was that groups tend to recycle only discrete large finds such as whole bottles, cans and large pieces of metal but not the general waste collected in the bags. The primary reasons offered for this trend were the perceived difficulty of sorting the smaller pieces and the view that the condition of these items meant that they were not suitable for recycling.

Of the two respondents who stated that their groups 'always' recycle, one stated that their group recycled all glass, drinks cans, plastic bottles and metal whilst the other suggested that they tended to recycle larger items such as bottles and cans.

Amongst those who recycle, there was considerable diversity in terms of who actually undertakes the sorting of materials into recyclables and non-recyclables. 27% recorded that the organiser alone sorts the materials whilst 18% stated that all

participants. The two organisers who ‘always’ recycle stated that all participants take part in the sorting.

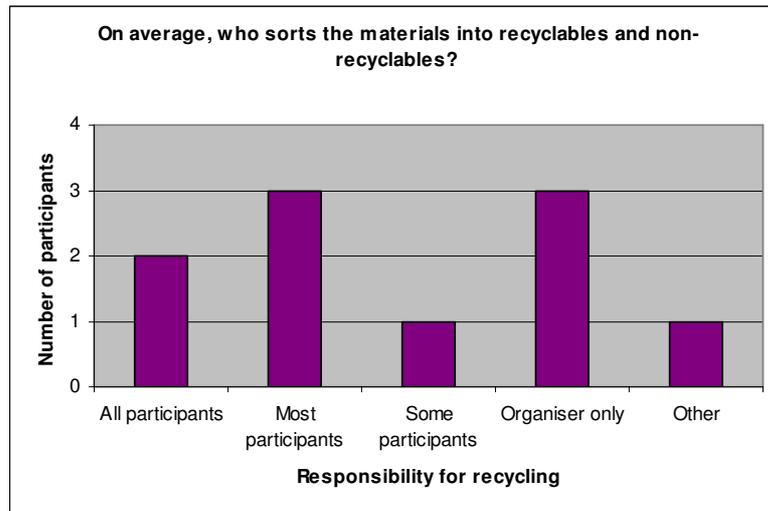


Chart 3. Graph showing which volunteers tend to sort the collected materials.

The majority of recycling organisers (10 respondents, 73%) would prefer that their group sort materials during collection rather than after. The primary reason offered for this opinion was that sorting through collected waste was an unpleasant and tedious task for volunteers. However, numerous respondents raised concerns regarding the sorting of waste during collection and many suggested that the simultaneous use of separate bags during collection could prove difficult, especially in windy conditions, and that it would require a separate volunteer responsible for each waste stream which was not considered an effective use of volunteer resources.

The most reported primary means of recycling was at recycling centres and bring banks (54.5% of respondents), followed by household kerbside recycling (27% of respondents). Of the two who identified as ‘always’ recycling, one group primarily disposed of waste through household recycling whilst the other used a nearby recycling centre. The means of recycling seems largely determined by geographical convenience with groups taking advantage of nearby facilities, for instance one organiser mentioned that recently installed recycling bins near their beach are used by their group. The items singled out as being most re-used by respondents were driftwood and twine.

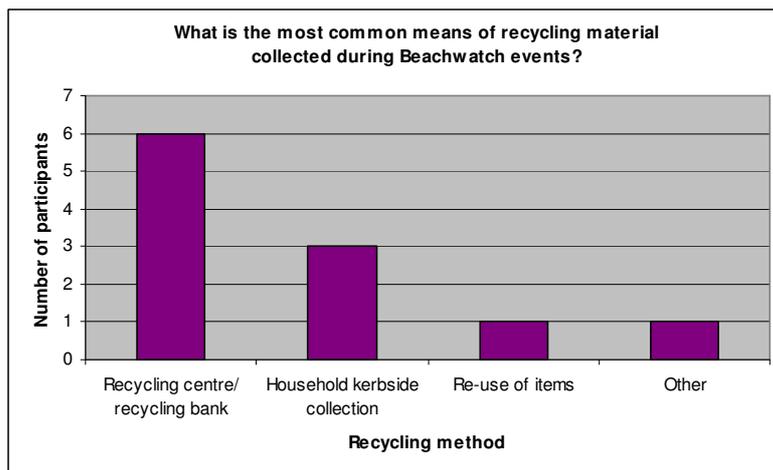


Chart 4. Graph showing the most common means of recycling amongst volunteers.

Of those who recycled, there appeared to be little dissatisfaction with the current rates of recycling with 8 participants (73%) being either 'neutral', 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied with their current level of recycling. Satisfaction appears highest amongst those who 'sometimes' recycle possibly suggesting little desire to increase rates of recycling amongst this group.

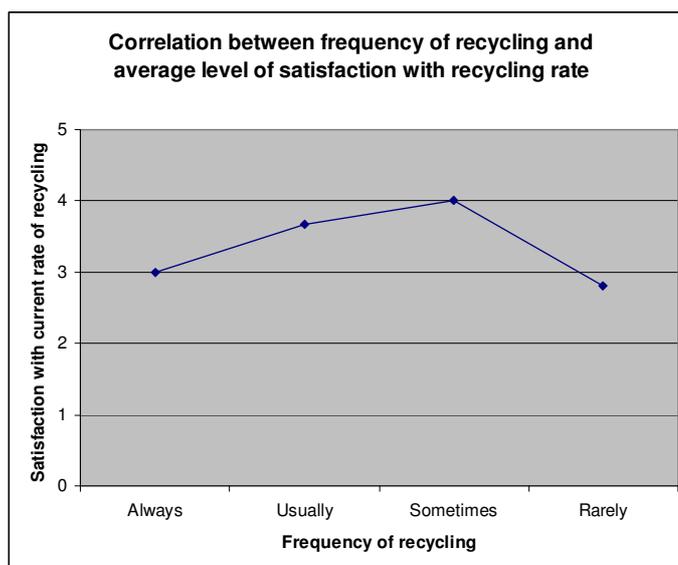
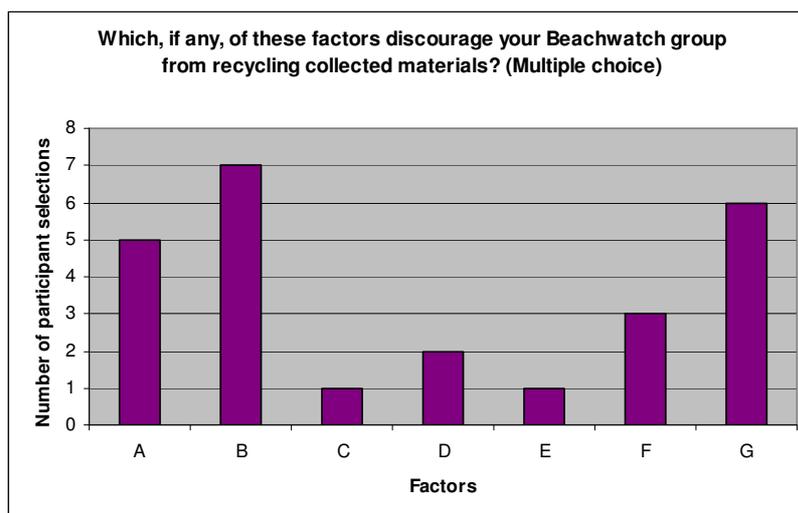


Chart 5. Chart showing the average satisfaction level for volunteers by frequency of recycling (1 = Very dissatisfied, 2 = Fairly dissatisfied, 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 = Fairly satisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)

Factors determining recycling rates

All respondents were asked to identify which factors, if any, discourage their group from recycling collected materials. The primary reasons chosen were that it was considered too time consuming to sort materials into recyclables and non-recyclables (64%) and that the respondents were not 'convinced that it would be worthwhile' (45.5%).



Key
 A - Not convinced that it would be worthwhile
 B - Too time consuming to sort materials into recyclables and non-recyclables
 C - Too time consuming to transport materials for recycling
 D - Not enough participating volunteers
 E - Not sure where to recycle
 F - Not sure what to recycle

Chart 6. Graph showing the factors chosen by organisers as discouraging their groups from recycling

In terms of ‘other’ discouraging factors, a notable suggestion made by two respondents was that asking volunteers to undertake the additional task of recycling would represent an unreasonable burden upon them and could risk discouraging future participation in Beachwatch events. For instance, one respondent shared their view that *‘I wouldn’t want to discourage them [volunteers] by asking them to make too much of an extra effort. I know quite a few volunteers ... don’t even enjoy recording the litter, so another task, i.e. sorting for recycling, might be a step too far’*.

Two respondents suggested that they had tried to provide volunteers with separate bags for recyclable and non-recyclable materials in the past but that their volunteers were either unable or unwilling to effectively divide the waste collected despite being supportive of recycling in theory.

Many respondents felt discouraged from recycling due to their belief that the materials collected were not suitable to be recycled as a result of their size, composition or current despoiled condition. For instance, one respondent noted that *‘I don’t think that for the type of rubbish we pick up recycling is sensible ... out of 6 or so bags we collect I doubt if even one small bag of what might be recycled would be obtained’*. One stated that *‘it [recycling Beachwatch waste] has never occurred to me as most of the things we pick up are wet and dirty and/or fragmented’* and another remarked that incorporating recycling into Beachwatch would be *‘a lot of work for very little benefit’*.

A majority (69%) either ‘strongly disagreed’, ‘somewhat disagreed’ or were neutral with regards to the suggestion that further information on what can be recycled would lead to an increased rate of recycling. This suggests little demand for a supply of additional information to volunteers.

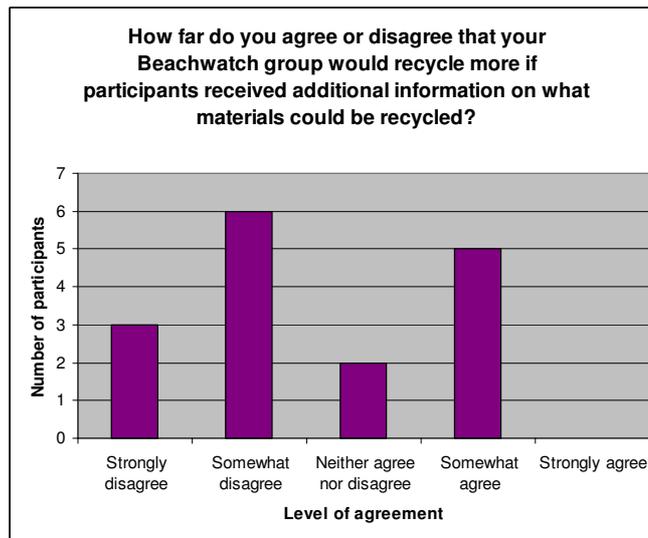


Chart 7. Graph showing the level agreement with the proposition that organisers' groups would recycle more if additional recycling information was provided

There was a mixed response to the question of whether respondents would be in favour of their local district council collecting sorted recyclable material following each Beachwatch event as offered by Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils. 44% stated yes, 31% no and 25% were unsure.

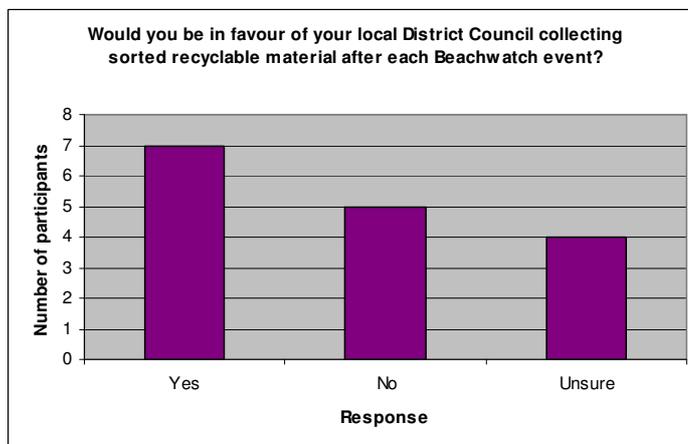


Chart 8. Graph showing organiser favourability towards local district councils collecting sorted material after each beach cleaning event

Despite a small majority of respondents favouring the option of their district council collecting waste, over half of the participants took the opportunity to express reservations about the offer. Seven respondents were particularly concerned that the small amount of litter they collected would undermine the feasibility of such council collections. For instance, one respondent stated that their local council would previously collect their Beachwatch recyclables around three years ago but that the group had since decided to decline the service due to the limited amounts needing to be taken away. Furthermore, two respondents suggested that council collections were not necessary due to a recycling facilities being located with easy reach of their beaches.

Two respondents stated that they already individually liaise with their district council to collect unsorted waste and so could not envisage any problems with them also collecting sorted recyclable materials.

Conclusions from Beachwatch organiser feedback

The acquisition of feedback from the Beachwatch organisers has proven very valuable in terms of revealing both the current means of waste disposal and the perceptions of volunteers with regards to how waste is collected and disposed of.

The key finding to emerge from this feedback was the sheer diversity of approaches taken by Beachwatch organisers with regards to waste disposal and how the types of materials recycled and frequencies of recycling varied markedly between different Beachwatch groups.

The majority of respondents did not regularly recycle and their relatively high rates of satisfaction with current rates of recycling suggest little obvious desire to increase rates of recycling amongst these groups. However, numerous positive examples of recycling did emerge and it is worth bearing in mind that 31% of respondents do already recycle in some capacity.

A number of clear and justifiable points were made with regards to not undertaking further recycling. Interestingly, factors such as the location of recycling facilities and knowledge of what can be recycled were not significantly highlighted by respondents as discouraging recycling. This pattern was reflected in the lack of strong support for either local government collections of recyclables or for the provision of further information on recyclable materials. Instead, most respondents articulated the more fundamental views that it was not possible or worth recycling the majority of waste and that sorting the material would represent an unjustifiable burden upon volunteers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to establish the feasibility of recycling the materials collected by Beachwatch volunteers and a number of tentative conclusions can be drawn following the analysis of case studies and consultations with key stakeholders.

A key finding to emerge was the apparent lack of recycling currently being undertaken by Beachwatch groups across the United Kingdom or at least lack of such activity being publicised. The two case-studies were important in proving that a coordinated approach to recycling can be possible but it is important to recognise that such examples are rooted in particular socio-geographic and organisational contexts that are not necessarily wholly transferable to other areas such as Suffolk.

The organiser feedback showed that a majority of groups in Suffolk did not regularly attempt to recycle the maximum amount of waste possible. Despite general good-will for recycling most organisers expressed the concern that the limited amount of recyclable material collected simply did not warrant the time and energy spent regularly sorting materials. This pragmatic reservation was supported by the views of the waste disposal officials from local government who suggested that only a fraction of the waste collected can effectively be recycled or re-used.

The fact that few Beachwatch organisers singled out a lack of understanding of what can be recycled suggests that a concerted drive to provide them with further information may not necessarily lead to increased rates of recycling. Similarly, the fact that few organisers identified the proximity of waste collection sites as a feature that discourages recycling suggests that council collections of recyclable materials may not necessarily be a certain way of encouraging recycling.

A complex pattern of recycling practices emerged from the groups which organisers appear to have developed over time in order to suit their groups' particular situation and needs. Instead of introducing a 'one-size-fits-all' approach it may be advisable for the AONB to recognise and build upon this diversity by facilitating organiser access to further information on how to undertake greater recycling, including the offer of council collections, in order for them to choose what practices that best suit them.

Greater publicity of recycling initiatives amongst Beachwatch groups by both Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB and the MCS would be of great benefit in raising awareness of the issue. A particular emphasis on less time-consuming measures such as the separation only of larger items, such as whole non-degraded plastic bottles, may encourage greater participation. The particular frequency and nature of recycling should be left with the volunteers themselves upon whose participation the whole Beachwatch scheme depends.

Appendix

Beachwatch Recycling Questionnaire

1. How often do you recycle materials collected during Beachwatch events?

If the answer is 'never', please skip to question 5.

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

2. On average, who sorts the materials into recyclables and non-recyclables?

- All participants
- Most participants
- Some participants
- Organiser only
- Other (please specify)

3. What is the most common means of recycling material collected during Beachwatch events?

- Recycling centre / recycling bank
- Household kerbside collection
- Re-use of items
- Other (please specify)

Please explain (optional)

A rectangular text input field with a light gray background and a thin black border. It features horizontal scrollbars at the bottom and vertical scrollbars on the right side.

8. Would you be in favour of your local District Council collecting sorted recyclable material after each Beachwatch event?

Note: This would involve Beachwatch organisers agreeing in advance with the local authority a suitable time and location for the provision of recycling bins.

Yes

No

Unsure

Comment (optional)

A rectangular text input field with a light gray background and a thin black border. It features horizontal scrollbars at the bottom and vertical scrollbars on the right side.

9. Please feel free to share any further comments regarding the recycling of materials collecting during Beachwatch events.

A rectangular text input field with a light gray background and a thin black border. It features horizontal scrollbars at the bottom and vertical scrollbars on the right side.