

Wrekenton Recycling Centre



On 12 August, eleven of our members visited the recycling centre at Wrekenton. This facility deals with waste from Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland councils as well as private firms.

The site consists of skips where local residents can dispose of their waste items (like the site at Blaydon) as well as a huge shed where items from bin lorries dump garden waste and waste from our blue recycling bins. General household waste is sent direct to an Energy for Fuel site in Stockton where it is burned, converted into electricity and sold to the national grid. No rubbish goes to landfill.

The majority of items at Wrekenton are recyclable, even soil. Items are sorted by machine according to their predominant type e.g. coat hangers are predominantly wood or plastic so the metal hook is removed and recycled with metals. Mattresses are torn up, the metal

springs removed then shredded. Hard plastics can be shredded, melted down, dyed and made into other things e.g. There is a lovely blue picnic table in the garden and old tyres have been dyed and used as planters.

The shed itself has lorries in and out all day long. They are weighed when they arrive and again when they leave so that statistics can be compiled. They dump their load on the floor and a digger scoops it to one side to make room for the next lorry before the waste is sorted. The cabs of the machines are sealed and some of the lorries have an air conditioning unit attached. The shed also has a constant stream of air freshener blowing to keep the smells at bay. Some of the waste is sent to other companies to be dealt with.



The site is open every day except Christmas Day and is run by a company called Suez. This was an interesting and informative tour. I've learned a few things about recycling:

1. NEVER put batteries, vapes or electrical items (even small ones) in ANY of your bins. They can set fire to the lorries and in 2019 caused one of their buildings to be burned down.
2. If an item is lost it cannot be retrieved once your bin has been collected. The site deals with tons of rubbish each day and it is not sorted by hand!
3. Bin lorries have a metal plate that pushes the rubbish back to make room for more. They also have a weighing machine and once they reach a certain weight must stop collecting, even if they don't look full.
4. Collection of food waste is not planned until about 2030. Meanwhile ideally you should compost your own food waste. Do not put it in the recycling bin.
5. Do not put plastic carrier bags or any soft plastics in your recycling bin.
6. Do not put greasy cartons or cardboard in your recycling bin (e.g. pizza boxes). Put them in your general waste bin.

Our thanks go to our two guides from Suez and Groundwork's for their clear explanations and answering our many questions (and for providing tea and coffee). **By Maggie Hynes**