

A young girl with dark hair is shown in profile, blowing on a dandelion seed head. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with green grass and a clear blue sky. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

# Waste not want not

attitudes to waste  
in Surrey

There are 3**R**s in Surrey: reduce reuse recycle



# Our green and pleasant land

**Surrey is undoubtedly a great place to live. A recent survey by Channel 4's 'Location, Location, Location' placed seven Surrey districts and boroughs in the top 20 places to live in the UK<sup>1</sup>. According to the Office of National Statistics, Surrey (along with West and East Sussex) enjoys the highest household income of any region outside London<sup>2</sup>.**

Unfortunately there is an environmental downside to Surrey's enduring economic prosperity. The county's residents generate an average of 538kg of household waste per head against a national average of 511kg per head<sup>3</sup>. And with consumer spending set to increase, the threat to the green and pleasant land so cherished by residents is real and immediate.



Surrey is England's most wooded county with 22% cover<sup>4</sup>. Almost three quarters (73%) of the county is greenbelt land and the Surrey Hills was one of the first areas in the country to be designated an area of outstanding natural beauty - now 25% of the county. However, if we increase rubbish at past levels we are set to generate almost twice as much waste in the county by 2025 with obvious implications for the environment. It is far better if the waste is not created in the first place - meaning fewer

lorries on the road, less need for waste treatment and a lower carbon footprint for the county.

It is imperative we act now to secure these natural treasures for future generations. Local authorities in Surrey want to bring about a major shift in our attitude to waste

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.channel4.com/4homes/ontv/best&worst/2007/top20/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1552>

<sup>3</sup> 2005/6 figures

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.surreybiodiversitypartnership.org/xwiki/bin/view/Woodland/ActionPlan>

and how it is best managed. Recycling is still a very important method for reducing waste but it is vital that people now recognise that on its own it is not enough.

Surrey has an ambitious target: a 0% growth per head in waste. Councils recognise that this will only be met by capturing the imagination of everyone in Surrey and getting them fully involved in waste reduction. A consensual approach is the only solution to a problem which, left unchecked, will be felt by every resident. Surrey County Council and the 11 district and borough councils have ambitious plans to tackle waste by improving waste treatment and recycling facilities. But solving this problem will need participation and determination from residents, businesses and local authorities alike. To reduce the dependency on waste disposal, everyone in the county needs to manage their waste better by taking preventative measures: reducing the amount they buy and throw away, reusing what they can wherever

possible and recycling only what they can't reuse. By taking these steps every Surrey resident can also cut their carbon footprint. In August 2007, an independent survey of 2071 Surrey residents aged 16 and over was commissioned to uncover the attitudes and opinions of residents towards waste. This report outlines some of the findings and has been used to guide the county, district and borough councils' strategy for helping people change their behaviour when it comes to waste minimisation and management.

### **An enthusiasm for change**

The good news is that there is a huge willingness to reduce waste among Surrey residents: nearly nine in 10 (89%) households questioned would be willing to decrease the amount they waste. The clear message emerging from the findings is the real need to help people understand how they can reduce waste and to promote practical actions that are easy to adopt in busy households.

- There is high awareness of and positivity about recycling.
- However, awareness of what reducing and reusing involves is much lower - 66% of residents say they could do more to reduce waste.
- Over half of Surrey's residents would like more information on reducing waste.
- Most people in Surrey are keen to do more to protect the environment. But it is clear that people need support to understand how they can help and make a difference.

The time to act is now. If every person takes steps to minimise what is thrown away, it can make a real and lasting difference to Surrey. Recycling is essential for cutting waste but should come after reducing what is bought in the first place and reusing whatever possible.

## What are the 3Rs?

**Reduce** - Think carefully about the amount of waste created by everything people buy or use, from plastic bags to food. This tackles the root cause of the problem.

**Reuse** - Think before throwing things away and consider whether items destined for the dustbin can be reused in some way or repaired. For big unwanted items like furniture, consider whether someone else may be able to use it in their own home.

**Recycle** - With what's left over, recycle as much as possible.

# What do Surrey people know about reducing waste?

## Understanding the issue

It's encouraging that many people think they're 'doing their bit' to help the environment by recycling, but there is more to be done to reduce the waste created in the first place.

Two thirds (66%) of Surrey residents believe they could do more to reduce waste. Larger households such as groups of house-sharers and families with four or more children appear to be the most wasteful - seven in 10 (70%) households with four or more adults think they could do more.

And of those households with more people, parents with younger children particularly struggle with reducing waste – seven in 10 (71%) of those with children under three years of age, and similar numbers (73%) of those with four to six year olds, believe they could do more.

## Waste not, want not

There's a clear disparity between how the people of Surrey believe they act and the reality when it comes to wasting food.

Seven in 10 (70%) families claim they only buy what they need, despite national figures from WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) estimating that more than a third of food bought is thrown away.

Large households waste more. Only half (51%) of households with five or more people over 16 buy only what they need and less than one in five (16%) admit they stick to this approach. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, households with fewer children tend to waste less – 67% of households with one child buy just what



they need compared to 57% of households with three children.

Having younger children makes reducing waste more difficult, perhaps because of their tendency to reject food they don't like. Around 60% of those with children under three buy only what is required compared to about 70% of those with 11-13 year olds. Younger age groups appear to be more wasteful. Less than half (49%) of 16-24s and 60% of 25-34s buy just what they need compared to 87% of 65-74s and 81% of over 75s.

House-sharers waste the most food. Just over half (53%) buy only what is needed compared to around three quarters (71%) of couples. A significant minority (15%) claim they never buy just what they need.

### Shopping locally

Buying food from local shops and producers has great benefits. It not only helps local communities thrive, but also means Surrey residents reduce their carbon footprint. By shopping locally it's arguably easier to buy

products with less packaging such as fresh fruit and vegetables, and only buying what is needed – perhaps because of carrying it home! Currently only two in 10 Surrey residents say they tend to shop locally (22%) and 15% say they never do.

### Bulk buying

Bulk buying of common household goods and storing food properly can make a real difference to the waste people generate. Proportionally, the amount of packaging used for bulk items is much less than that used to contain smaller quantities. Almost seven in 10 (67%) do bulk buy and only one in 10 (12%) say they never do.

Surprisingly, around a third (28%) of large families – who could benefit most from bulk buying – say they rarely do so.

The key consideration when bulk buying food is proper storage to stop food going off. Special offers, such as 'buy one get one free', are only good value if the products don't end up in the bin. The correct fridge temperature is also critical as warm fridges result in spoilt and wasted food.

## Only 2 in 10 Surrey residents shop locally



### Packaging

It appears that the amount of packaging is still not swaying the buying preferences of Surrey residents – more than half (51%) don't regularly choose products with less of it. Many people are getting the message when it comes to plastic bags however, with 75% opting for reusable ones instead.

Getting milk delivered helps by reusing glass bottles and reducing the number of plastic milk cartons. Yet almost two thirds (65%) of households say they never have milk delivered in glass bottles.

### Read all about it

Newspapers are the scourge of commuters across the land, littering train platforms and streets. It would appear that inhabitants of Surrey could make more use of technology to cut down on newsprint waste – almost half of those surveyed (45%) never read their news online.

### Is Surrey reusing enough?

The battle against waste is far from won.

However, many residents believe their work is done: four in 10 of those surveyed (42%) claim that they already reuse enough.

But this statistic should not be mistaken for a lack of enthusiasm – the good news is that an overwhelming majority want to do more. Nearly nine in 10 (88%) residents surveyed said they would be willing to step up their reusing efforts.

The missing link is information and the tools to know exactly how to do it. For example, charity shops and local schemes such as ‘Swap It Surrey’ are ideal for furniture, clothes and books – local authorities and

other organisations need to do more so people know how to dispose of these items.

### Levels of reuse in Surrey

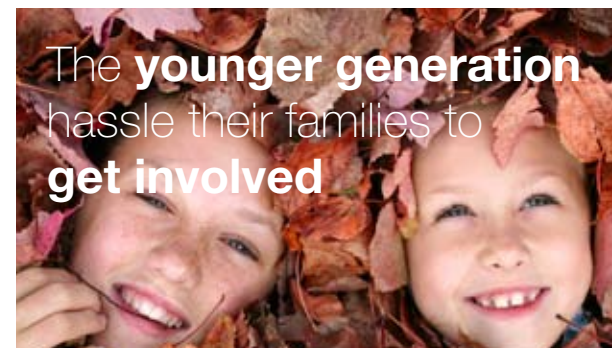
- **Rechargeable batteries:** 35% always and 30% sometimes
- **Milk delivery:** 23% always and 7% sometimes
- **Bags for life:** 44% always and 31% sometimes

### Sweet charity

Surrey is one of the most affluent counties in the UK and as a consequence, charity shops are ideal for picking up a bargain. They also give unwanted goods a new lease of life and help raise funds for good causes. And of course they’re the perfect place to shop for those wanting to reuse. The good news is that the majority of Surrey’s residents (63%) do take unwanted goods such as clothes, books and toys to charity shops.

### The power of pestering

It’s hard to fault the younger generation’s green credentials – they’ve embraced everything from ‘bags for life’ to recycling



boxes, hassling their families to get involved. Just look at these statistics:

- Households with older children are more likely to shun plastic bags. Nearly half of those with 11-13 year olds (44%) and 13-15 year olds (47%) use a fabric bag or ‘bag for life’.
- They’re also more likely to reuse. For example, four out of ten (40%) households with 13-15 year olds reuse boxes and bottles compared to less than a quarter (24%) of those with under threes.
- A house of teenagers is an assiduous recycler of paper too: nine in 10 households with 11-13 year olds (89%) and 13-15 year olds (90%) revealed that they recycle paper most of the time.

- Fifty eight per cent of households with 11-13 year olds compost some or most of the time compared to only 44% of those with under threes.

### Recycling: what's hot and what's not

Nearly half (46%) of those surveyed feel they're doing their bit as far as recycling is concerned. However, the more detailed figures reveal there is a great deal of variation in recycling rates depending on the material in question.

Surrey people certainly deserve credit for using local facilities. More than eight in 10 use the home collection facility for recycling (83%), and almost three quarters (74%) use recycling banks in public areas. This underlines the importance of reminding residents about the range of council services available to them to help with managing and minimising waste.

Once again however, Surrey residents want to go further. A staggering nine in 10 (92%) would be prepared to increase the amount of recycling they do.

### What's hot?

Materials which can be recycled using the home collection facilities all do well, demonstrating the overwhelming benefits of bringing recycling to residents' doors.

**Paper:** in the vanguard in the war on waste with an excellent nine out of 10 (87%) households stating they recycle paper most of the time. If one material could set a recycling example it would be paper.

**Glass:** this is one of the easiest materials to recycle and does well with over four fifths (81%) of households revealing that they recycle it most of the time.

**Cans:** three quarters of households surveyed (73%) responded that they mostly recycle their food and drink cans.

**Cardboard:** another material which fares well: over three quarters of those surveyed (76%) mostly recycle cardboard.

These figures point to a strong awareness among Surrey's residents that certain materials are easily recyclable using local facilities.

### What's not?

Challenges remain for Surrey in its efforts to recycle more. There are a range of materials where there is scope for improvement.

Surrey people don't feel they're doing as well as they could as far as **plastics** are concerned. Six in 10 households (63%) mostly recycle plastic. One in 10 never do (13%). However, recycling plastics is a very complicated issue and residents may actually be doing better than they realise, given that some types of plastic can't be recycled at the moment.

Almost four in every 10 Surrey residents are missing out on the opportunity to be greener in the kitchen. Even though uncooked vegetable and fruit peelings, egg shells, tea bags and coffee grinds are all a perfect base for **compost**, over a third of the county's inhabitants (37%) never compost.

Only 55% of households recycle most of their **textiles**, despite charity shops and local authorities providing doorstep collections in many areas.

## What more can be done?

Residents cited a number of obstacles stopping them doing more to reduce and reuse their waste. The top reasons were:

- **excessive packaging** of products or difficulty finding products with little packaging
- **lack of knowledge** about how to reuse large items such as sofas and other furniture
- **forgetfulness!** for example, leaving reusable bags at home or letting food go out of date.

Overall, Surrey residents seem to be well aware of recycling facilities, but have a much lower awareness of how to reduce and reuse and its importance.

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**To find out more about the 3Rs, visit [www.surreywaste.info](http://www.surreywaste.info)**

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## Conclusion

**Surrey's green credentials are something of a mixed bag. While there are impressively high recycling levels of certain products, there needs to be greater emphasis on reducing what is bought in the first place and reusing existing materials.**

Recycling alone, while essential, is not enough and never has been. All residents need to have a role in reducing, reusing and recycling if Surrey is to meet the ambitious targets it has set itself on waste reduction.

There is a genuine commitment from Surrey residents to do more to make the county more environmentally friendly. It is vital that residents, businesses and local authorities all work together to make Surrey a national leader in this regard. The benefits to all are clear – the less dependency on landfill the better the environmental and financial health of the county.

**The 3Rs – reduce, reuse, recycle – are all essential in Surrey's campaign to minimise waste. Focusing on recycling alone is not enough and Surrey needs to work together to achieve its aims for waste reduction to keep the county a great place to live and work!**