



Welcome to our 30th Anniversary Celebration Newsletter - November 2019

The North East Recycling Forum is 30!

The NERF is 30! Which, I feel is testament to the role we play in the sector. We (NERF) are a constant presence, a place for waste professionals to attend, to share best practice, network, meet up with friends, old and new and often just feel part of something. I've been involved with the NERF for 20 years and although there have been huge changes in the industry, the NERF has continued to offer consistently well attended, high quality quarterly meetings.

In the early days, the NERF was funded through various sources and relied on volunteers and ad hoc sponsorship from local companies. When funding became scarce and unreliable we developed our [Friends of NERF scheme](#). This enabled the NERF to continue offering quarterly meetings to the waste and recycling sector free of charge, and helped raise the profile of our supporters. Our Friends of NERF is still popular today and secures the future of NERF, we really couldn't do what we do without them so thank you Friends of NERF.

Each [quarterly meeting](#) is directed by our NERF Executive, which is made up of volunteers from Local Authorities, private sector and Third Sector organisations. Our Executive members give their time for free to ensure each meeting is relevant, up to date, high quality and meeting the needs of the industry. Our biggest achievement is the open, friendly atmosphere we create at each

meeting. Offering all attendees an informative, informal experience that enables them to widen their knowledge, increase their network and make some friends along the way, I know I have. We look forward to welcoming everyone to this year's [NERF Annual Conference](#), it's going to be a good one! Happy 30th Birthday NERF.

Jo Holmes, NERF Manager



A Word from the Chair

NERF was originally set up by recycling advocates at British Hydro Polymers and Proctor & Gamble in the area, with the aim of bringing together interested parties to share knowledge and network.

Thirty years ago waste and recycling was in another era. Most recycling in the region consisted of local scrap and knackers yards. Households typically had one 90 litre metal bin that was emptied manually once a week for transportation and disposal at the local tip (landfill site) that invariably had some sort of open fire burning. Businesses generally operated a throw and pay waste policy.

Today in the UK we have graduated to sophisticated complimentary waste storage, collection and processing systems underpinned by legislation that contribute massively to the economy and in helping to protect and preserve the environment.

Over the years NERF has attracted international, national, regional and local speakers to its events to share outlooks and insight into how society is responding to the challenges of increasing recycling and reducing waste in the face unrelenting growth in consumption, consumerism and pollution.

In the 25+ years that I have been involved the NERF I have seen many regional

recycling and environmental groups around the country come and sadly go. People tell me that the NERF is 'unique' and provides a hugely important high quality platform for sharing information on innovation and best practice.

The strength of the NERF is in the people who support it by turning up at meetings, providing speakers and financial support to enable it to operate. It is truly a diverse and multi sector group made up from representatives of international conglomerates, national and local businesses, public/third sector and one person businesses.

NERF operates an open door policy enabling anyone with a genuine interest in waste, reuse and recycling to participate at no cost.

Looking forward to the next 30 years the waste, resource and recovery sector will continue to evolve, develop and expand to meet ever rising challenges that a sustainable society demands. As an old saying goes 'one man's waste is another man's opportunity'. Hopefully the NERF can be at the forefront of inspiring people, recognising opportunities, promoting success and showcasing innovation.

Jeff Moffitt, Chair, NERF

Thirty Years is a Long Time

Firstly – thanks to Jo Holmes and the NERF Board for inviting me to pen a short piece looking back over the 30 years they have led this group. Much has changed, but there's more change to come.

I don't often look back. Certainly not thirty years. But once in a while it does you good to reflect on where you've come from so you can concentrate better on where you're going. When I do look back I'm surprised what an old-fashioned world the past is! What I see is that thirty years is a very long time; the past seldom is the "good 'ol days"; and what you thought was important at the time often turns out not to be. It's important to learn lessons from the past but it's what you're doing today and where you're going tomorrow that counts.

So.....30 years ago. 1989. Half of NERF delegates weren't yet engaged in wastes or resources management. Some weren't even born. I was young(er) and fit; life was good but landfill was king and Jive Bunny were No1 in the charts – cheap and cheerful, but doesn't really stand the test of time.

There was a European Waste Framework Directive (1975) but few seemed aware of it. I certainly wasn't. Our world was fairly small and we focused on local impacts and DoE regulations and guidance. We had just seen:

- Waste Management Paper No26 – landfill (1986), (and 26(A) – landfill completion and aftercare in 1987)
- Waste Management Paper No 4 (1988) and
- Collection and Disposal of Waste Regs (1988).

We built, operated and regulated landfills - plus waste collections, transfer stations / Civic Amenity Sites, and a few treatment plants to supply them. We strived over the definition of waste and landfill gas and leachate. We reorganised. And we coped with whatever society, industry and commerce threw at us – we had to: the Winter of Discontent a decade earlier had shown us what happened when we didn't. We did our job quietly, efficiently and as far from sight as possible. We picked it up cheap. Carried it cheap and buried it cheap – whilst doing it as safely as we could. We'd learned lessons and had standards and efficiencies in waste collection and management that half of the world still wishes it could have. But it was a “coping” business – always on the back foot and reacting to an increasingly complex and wasteful world.

That's not to say it was a static world, though. Public sector dominance of the industry quickly dissolved through the creation of LAWDCs, direct divestment to the private sector and “Compulsory Competitive Tendering” (CCT). The Environment Agency was created and other deadlines, milestones, measures and regimes flashed by. Some grew and now form the building blocks for future resources management: extended producer responsibility for example – yet to have its finest hour. Some came and went, like LATS. Some – like many a minister – came and went almost un-noticed. And we frothed over many a strategy, consultation, and new intervention like Technical Competence, the

Duty of Care and over-hauled hazardous waste controls. New extended producer responsibilities were designed, introduced and honed and we struggled over the detail – like when and why tea bags are “packaging”, and simple rules for end-of-waste assessment. Each and every one a step forward in standards of operation and raised objectives, but “steps in the dance” all the same.

But underneath all that, two pieces of “machinery” ground away, tightening their grip and pushing us forwards: the Landfill Tax (1996) and the EU Landfill Directive (1998). The Tax came in fairly quietly at £2 / Tonne (inactive) and £4 / Tonne (active waste). It was intended to “internalise the external costs of landfill” – levelling the proverbial playing field of gate prices between landfill and other waste treatments. Its impact was modest at first as landfill was still so cheap (less than £10/tonne) compared to other technologies. But it had far to go. Government confirmed medium term escalation plans for the tax, giving an ever-clearer message that waste was being discouraged from the bottom rung of the Waste Management Hierarchy (we had definitely heard of the Waste Framework Directive by that stage!). Soon the Tax was £40/tonne, then £50. Now it's £91/tonne and soon to be £94, with WRAP reporting that landfill gate prices (inc tax) exceed those for energy recovery or materials recovery. Meanwhile the Landfill Directive amplified that squeeze on the waste market – driving up standards of site engineering, management and after-care, closing down hazardous / non-hazardous co-disposal and banning liquids, tyres and infectious materials from landfill. It was a tough but important transition. Waste was coming out of landfill – but into what?

The last 20 years has helped answer that. We've seen some pretty rapid changes. Waste management is growing up. It's becoming “resources” management. We've cut our landfill habit as recycling, bio-waste treatment and energy recovery have taken off. Recycling rates may have stagnated in England – and Government has done little to urge it forwards recently – but the change from the late 90's to now has been meteoric. Our world has grown, too. The environment we are protecting is now both local and truly global, as are the resources markets we work with. Our business embraces everyone – individuals and households, local authorities, retailers, manufacturers – as we shift cautiously towards a more “circular” resources world. And we seem to stand at an important point in our growth as governments around us pick up the

Circular Economy theme with varying degrees of commitment. Will we and they concentrate on detail? – “lets ban swizzle sticks!” – or seize the big issues like energy policy, the future of miracle materials like plastics, and the role of extended producer responsibility?

We look to Government(s) to lead, but some businesses are already picking up the initiative – they’re thinking about the future and the design of their products and services from an environment / resources perspective. We need to work with both to make better choices in everything from raw materials to design and separation / collection / re-processing systems and technologies. And we need to concentrate on our supply of secondary raw materials and energy back into the mix. We have been driven to feed ever greater quantities of secondary materials back into industries that are not always ready to accept them – or into countries poorly-prepared to manage them well. Too much “push” and not enough “pull” from the markets. We need to look at whole resources cycles and make sure that they include demand for the secondary materials we put back to work.

We still cope – we have to. We keep streets clean; we remove and manage waste. But our world has got bigger; more important. We learn from the past. As I said, looking back we have never yet been perfect, and we don’t always concentrate on the things that turn out to matter. Now we look forwards, and that’s something NERF does well. What IS the next big idea / intervention that will move us forwards? – what will have the “Landfill Tax impact” in the next 30 years?. Will it be DRS and/or beefed-up extended producer responsibilities (or new ones?). Maybe you favour invisible bar-codes on all packaging to streamline automated separation / re-processing, or raw materials taxes or products bans / standards. Defra say that 2020 will be a busy year for policy development, after we get over the General Election hiatus. That makes today a great opportunity for NERF.

So.....look back and be pleased with how far we have travelled. But don’t think the old days were so great – Jeff may have had more hair but we were still locked-in to a one-way resource street. Not so much now, but we can always improve. We all carry a degree of responsibility for Jive Bunny – we deserve better.

Steve Lee, Steve Lee Resources and Chair of the NERF Annual

Conference 2019



IS TRUST BROKEN?

Is trust broken? Does the householder believe that their plastic packaging is being recycled as their Local Authority claims? This year our TV screens showed examples of UK retail packaging in far eastern abandoned plastic waste dumps in Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's 'War on Plastics'. Which, at best served to dampen enthusiasm for recycling and at worst caused a complete loss in confidence of any recycling claims.

When Blue Planet II hit the headlines the world became electrified about plastic pollution; unfortunately, this has not manifested itself into better or more effective recycling by the consumer. The general public are largely unaware of the importance of plastics in reducing food wastage, ensuring food and medicine safety and the full life cycle environmental benefits of plastics over other material alternatives.

The 2018 RECOUP Household Plastics Collection Survey reported that in 2017, just over 350,000 tonnes of plastic bottles were collected for recycling from the consumer (59% collection rate) and 175,000 tonnes of pots tubs and trays were collected for recycling (33% collection rate). There have been minor increases in plastic packaging collection levels from UK households, both at home and away from home, but there is still far too much material not going to a recycling end destination to contribute to the Circular Economy systems we're trying to create.

So, where are the householders hoping the answer to the plastic pollution crisis, will come from? The RECOUP '[Watch Me Think Consumer Plastics Recycling Behaviour Observational Study](#)' highlights that citizens feel that responsibility lies between the company putting the product on the market (which in their eyes is the visible brand) and the Local Authority collecting the material.

The UK is now in the process of reforming its packaging producer responsibility system which should generate significantly more funding to ensure circular models are developed and the current litter levels are a thing of the past. However, these legislative changes must be well designed and ensure funding goes into the right areas in a transparent way.

Ultimately the whole of the plastics supply chain has a responsibility to ensure that plastic packaging is FULLY recyclable; that consumers have clear and unambiguous packaging instructions on what to do and how to do it and that they can have confidence that what is said is being done is done.

RECOUP, meanwhile have an important role to play to educate, inform and equip citizens to make the right choices to reduce plastic pollution and encourage collaboration across the plastics recycling supply chain.

Anne Hitch, RECOUP

Timberpak announces its new social enterprise partnerships



Timberpak is delighted to announce it is supporting Newcastle and Leeds Wood recycling social enterprises.

These “not for profit” enterprises operate in Timberpak’s heartland and share the philosophy that “waste” wood is a resource. Both recycling enterprises give the wood they collect another lifespan by using it to produce a range of wood products and furniture for sale.

In addition, they help marginalised members of their community who have been turned away from jobs due to prejudice or personal history by offering work experience, volunteering and training opportunities often leading to full-time employment.

Timberpak receives approx. 400 tonnes of wood that Newcastle Wood Recycling is unable to use. Leeds Wood Recycling has just begun operating and is already generating good levels of interest.

Timberpak is providing both enterprises free wood processing for delivered into Timberpak which equates to a significant saving for both enterprises each year.

Gavin Ball Customer Relationship Manager said: “Timberpak is extremely pleased to be supporting these social enterprises. With a common belief in adhering to the waste hierarchy and at the same time helping the local community we see this partnership as a perfect fit for both companies.”

Beth McDonough, business owner of Newcastle Wood Recycling added: “We are over the moon to be working in partnership with Timberpak and are very grateful for its support. We will be shouting about this on our social media!”

Charlotte Stanley, business owner of Leeds Wood Recycling commented: “Leeds Wood Recycling are proud to be working in partnership with Timberpak, diverting wood waste from landfill, saving resources whilst supporting and empowering people in Leeds by creating jobs, training and volunteering opportunities for the community.

To find out more about both social enterprises go to www.welovewood.org and www.leedswoodrecycling.co.uk or visit their Facebook pages @NewcastleWoodRecycling and @leedswoodrecycling

WARRENS GROUP ANNOUNCES MAJOR INVESTMENT IN NEW BIOFUEL POWERED FLEET

LEADING waste recycling and sustainability firm, [Warrens Group](https://www.warrens.co.uk) has announced that it has updated the company’s fleet with four new vehicles that run on biofuel.

The Newton Aycliffe-based business, which is committed to converting all of its distribution operations to fossil-free sources by 2025, has taken delivery of trucks that rely on biomethane gas and generate 84% percent less carbon

dioxide than diesel.

The vehicles make Warrens the first food waste recycling company in the UK to power its HGV waste collection vehicles with biogas converted directly from its own food waste customers.

Warrens Group director Antony Warren, said: “As a company, we pride ourselves on our forward-thinking, we’ve always been early adopters of the latest technology and methods. We took delivery of our first bio-fuelled vehicle in September last year and had always planned to add more.”

The new biomethane powered trucks will be in operation six days a week, with refuelling carried out on site at the Newton Aycliffe facility. They will collect food waste from existing customers including pubs, restaurants, schools and supermarkets across the North East.

Adam Warren, director of Warrens Group, said: “We firmly believe that a sustainable business is a better business. Sustainability is something we advocate to all organisations and communities, as we support their efforts to address the environmental issues caused by traditional methods of waste disposal. By powering our own fleet on the biogas it collects, we are demonstrating that when it comes to sustainability, we really do practice what we preach.

“We believe that if big business and industry fuelled HGVs on gas made from renewable sources, carbon emissions would be almost eliminated. This development is timely because the adverse effects of poor air quality on human health and climate change are two of the most pressing environmental issues we face today.”

Gas industry expert and managing director of CNG Services, John Baldwin, said: “The HGVs on the UK roads have a disproportionate environmental impact; whilst they represent only 5% of road vehicles, they consume around 25% of road diesel and are responsible for around 27% of roadside NOx and 18% of transport-related CO2 emissions.

“The acquisition of trucks that are powered by the biomethane gas they help to

generate means CO2 emissions are reduced by almost 100% – which could very possibly give Warrens Group the lowest carbon footprint for collection of food waste on the planet.”

