

Recycling briefing, updated May 2026

Neil Peters, Lewes DC's Community Recycling Engagement Officer

Improving waste & recycling, including understanding its journey after collection.

Neil explained that the purpose of his job is to get recycling rates up. He has worked for LDC for 4 years in the Environment First team. The team has five different sorts of vehicle and a team of around 100 people including operatives. They do occasionally miss bins but apologise for that!

Nothing collected by LDC has gone to landfill since the incinerator in Newhaven opened. This is an 'Energy reclaim' facility that creates enough power for the facility itself and for around 40,000 homes on average. The ash created by burning goes away to be used in road building. Stuff that doesn't burn, like pottery for example, is sifted out and used as hardcore. Metals are removed and put into a barge to go to Belgium for recovery. Fumes are recirculated through the fire again and they then use a lime carbon-capture process that collects larger waste particles to filter them out. Lime plus the waste is shaken out and stored until there is a balancing product available through a different process to neutralise the lime.

The calendar and letter we all received recently told us about the new fortnightly waste and recycling schedule - a reduction for black bins from weekly collections - with weekly food collections maintained. Collections are now on the same day of the week to make it easier for customers. (This doesn't apply to garden waste.)

Neil went through guidelines on what can be recycled and how best to do it. The LDC website has an A to Z of Reduce, Re-use, Recycle. <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/wasteAtoZ>. This site tells you how to reduce the waste by changing *what* we use, as well as how to re-use or dispose of containers.

Recycling is sorted by hand, and food gets onto vans, sorters, attracts pests etc, so please wash things out!

- Any plastic bottle - rinse out, squash if possible, put the lid back on and put into recycling bin.
- Can also recycle spray dispensers (the ones with metal springs within a plastic tube and spray top, for example). No need to break them up
- Pots, tubs and food trays - anything that has had food in it. NOT polystyrene trays! Films from top of ready meals can go in if clean. No cling film!
- *Recycling also takes bags.....* Carrier bags, plastic bread bags, frozen food bags (like peas etc). All okay to put into recycling. This is a rarity country-wide so the bag *may* say 'recycle with soft plastics at supermarkets'. Not silver foil lined bags (like crisps, hula hoops etc), but supermarkets take those.
- Aerosol cans, any cans - whether or not magnetic (as they use a light process to catch non-magnetic metals).
- Bottles and jars - take the lids off please. Any metal lids on glass jars need to be separated. Wash out any food residue
- Toothpaste tubes, ointment tubes etc. Make sure they are empty, leave the cap on and put into the recycling bin. No need to wash out.
- Any cardboard, paper, paperback books etc can go in. Please crush/fold cardboard boxes and no wet or greasy cardboard please. Don't put in metallic wrapping paper or glittered cards.
- Shredded paper needs to go into a transparent bag so it can be spotted. Bread bags or a plastic veg bag is fine.
- Plastic plant pots that are NOT black can now go into the recycling. Black pots must go into the household bin. However, it is always better to re-use a plant pot if you, or a neighbour, can.
- Tetra Paks (like juice cartons) can be put into recycling now.

NOT in Recycling bins!

Polystyrene

Foil-lined plastic bags, like crisp bags

Bric a brac

Food!

Nappies and sanitary wear

Cuddly toys

Upholstery

Wood

Greasy cardboard (like pizza boxes)

Cling film

Blister packs from tablets can't be recycled by the council. However, Boots and Superdrug will often take these. There may not always be a bin for them though..... Boots is a bit unreliable. May need to ask.

Metals like screws, nails - put in black bin as they'll be picked out as part of the process. If a lot, take to recycling centre.

Anglo Doorstep Collections (<https://anglodoorstepcollections.co.uk/lewes-district-council/>) will collect a bag of goods for charities from your doorstep. Can include small electrical items, bric a brac, clothes etc.

Collection and processing

Responsibility for bins prior to collection is ours, so if the contents get scattered we must pick it up. At collection, operatives may drop things and they do carry shovels, brooms etc to clear it up with, so *shouldn't* leave debris behind them.

Recycling goes to Light Brothers the other side of the Culfail tunnel. Recycling is emptied onto the floor, given a quick visual examination for contamination. Really important that contaminants are not put into the bin as a whole truck load will be rejected. LDC has one of the lowest contamination rates in the country! Neil showed us some slides of the recycling process and facility. Recycling is taken to Crayford in Kent for separation into specific materials. Conveyor belts lead into chambers that have people looking for specific types of waste that might clog up the mechanism. They also separate waste items to go into the 'magic' chamber where different mechanisms sort heavy from light, paper from heavier waste, small items are captured through holes (that then go to the 'smalls' chamber where sorted by hand). Cameras, infra red and lasers look for different types of materials. Plastics are sorted into type and then bailed up. These material-specific bails are then commodities to be sold. The destination of the various waste is tracked by Councils and by Government, and is known.

Garden waste goes to KPS in Isfield, to be composted into soil improver.

Food waste remains a weekly collection. See <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/foodwaste> It goes to a woodland facility at Whitesmith (Hailsham/Uckfield) directly opposite WRAS. Here it is composted, shredded with garden waste from other local authorities and is forced to mix together, and kept indoors till, within 8 weeks, it becomes soil conditioner that is then given to farmers.

38% of all household black bin waste, by weight, is food waste! Need to get it out of the black bin. Food bins for the roadside are lockable by pulling the handle forward and down. Almost any food can go in, including offal, bones, stalks etc. Please don't include liquids, fats or oils as these don't break down with other food. Put those into a container and then the black household bin or, if you have enough, you can take it to the recycling centre.

Please note - line bins with a *compostable* bag, not a biodegradable bag. Compostable bags break down on the same timescale as the food. We can collect free compostable bags from LDC in precinct, Climate Hub on School Hill (Lewes House), etc. Or Aldi sells very cheap compostable bags. Look for a bag with the seedling logo as this is compostable. Waitrose bags for loose veg are compostable. *Bags marked as 'biodegradable' cannot be put into the food bag.*

There were lots of questions from the audience. A few extra points are:

- 'Chemicals' in the leaflet means weed killers etc that are toxic to humans.
- The company processing our recyclables has made a commitment to process plastic etc themselves into the state where they can be sold to be used to make other things, like nurdles etc.
- Nobody at the meeting knew the overall balance of cost to income. Aluminium is valuable. Cardboard is over-produced and not valuable. ESCC is the disposal authority, not LDC. Wendy undertook to ask for the balance of cost to income.