

1 October 2020

The Rt Hon. George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to call on the Government to strengthen its commitment to tackling the Climate Emergency by taking urgent action to remove the roadblocks that prevent the UK from delivering a more sustainable approach to waste and resource management.

I am Chair of North London Waste Authority (NLWA); we serve over two million residents, managing 675,000 tonnes of household waste each year and providing a comprehensive recycling service to six of our seven boroughs.

In north London we also deliver an extensive programme of activity designed to support our residents to waste less and recycle more (and properly). This is a programme that leads the way within the industry, even with the challenges posed by COVID-19. Despite this recycling rates are stagnating at around 30%, and have been for several years.

I wrote to you last month to urge the Government to bring forward its plan for a higher plastic bag charge. In that letter I outlined the problems caused by the proliferation of single-use materials in our waste streams. Bringing forward the plastic bag charge is just one measure that would help tackle the shamefully high quantity of recyclable and single-use material that is currently thrown into residual waste bins.

This week we welcomed the introduction of the ban on some single-use plastic items. But the Government must go further, extending this list to include other problematic and avoidable items such

as black plastic trays, multi-level products (like tetra-paks), coffee cup lids, and polystyrene takeaway containers. We routinely see non-recyclable single-use items contaminating recyclable material – a problem with a financial cost to taxpayers that runs into the millions.

Plans to impose national recycling targets within the long-anticipated Environment Bill are likely to be meaningless if correct recycling remains voluntary. Only compulsory recycling, accompanied by real powers for local authorities to enforce correct recycling, will be effective. With the introduction of compulsory recycling, mandatory targets for recycling could also be set. This would not only help drive up recycling rates, it would also provide certainty about recycling volumes received by local authorities - even once the comprehensive Deposit Return Scheme, that we fully support, is introduced. This sort of certainty would stimulate the market for UK reprocessing and provide further confidence to residents about the end destination of their recyclable material.

NLWA is committed to delivering long-term, sustainable and environmentally-sensitive disposal routes for residual waste. That's why we're pressing ahead with the North London Heat and Power Project – our plans for a new energy recovery facility and associated recycling infrastructure at the Edmonton EcoPark. But this is only part of the solution for sustainable waste management. And we cannot do it alone. By taking real and timely action on waste and recycling in its Environment Bill, the Government can play its part in helping drive down the amount of waste that has to be disposed of, and in boosting the circular economy.

On the eve of the Conservative Party Conference, I urge you to consider how this Government can move beyond the sort of frightening slow-moving efforts we have seen on waste reduction so far and introduce some real 'pace' and innovation into this area. In so doing we can achieve the real change that residents, local authorities, yourself, and the environment, have been calling for and so desperately need.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Clyde Loakes
Chair, North London Waste Authority