

**CABINET - 24 MAY 2024****RECYCLING AND HOUSEHOLD WASTE SITES  
OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND PROPOSED SERVICE  
CHANGES****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet of the outcome of two public consultation exercises on proposals to make savings from the Recycling and Household Waste Site (RHWS) service and to recommend proposals to be implemented.

**Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that:
  - a) The Somerby Recycling and Household Waste Site be closed with effect from October 2024;
  - b) The opening arrangements at the Recycling and Household Waste Sites at Bottesford, Market Harborough, Kibworth, and Shepshed be as follows with effect from October 2024:
    - i. Bottesford - three days per week,
    - ii. Market Harborough - three days per week,
    - iii. Kibworth - four days per week,
    - iv. Shepshed - two days per week;
  - c) The summer opening hours at all the Council's Recycling and Household Waste Sites be reduced with effect from April 2025, to be as follows:
    - i. from 9.00am to 5.00pm on Saturdays, Sundays, or Mondays;
    - ii. from 9.00am to 7.00pm on other days;
  - d) All the Council's Recycling and Household Waste Sites be closed on Christmas Eve with effect from December 2024;
  - e) Subject to approval of a) above, the Somerby RHWS be considered for disposal.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

3. To note the outcome of the public consultation.
4. The recommended proposals will enable the savings target as set out in the 2024-28 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to be achieved.
5. The Cabinet in June 2023 accepted the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Panel including that if sites were closed, initially plans to decommission but not sell them be supported. Only the Somerby RHWS is now proposed for closure and the site is then likely to be surplus to requirement. If so, its future use or disposal would be a matter for the Director of Corporate Resources using his delegated powers.

### **Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

6. Reports were considered by the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 November 2023 and 11 March 2024. The comments of the Committee are included in Part B of this report.
7. It is anticipated that, following the approval of the recommendations, the closure of Somerby RHWS and part-time opening at some sites would be implemented in October 2024, with the Christmas Eve closures from 24 December 2024, and the summer opening hours changes from April 2025. The exact date of the changes is to be confirmed and members will be kept informed.

### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

8. The Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy, adopted by the Council on 24 April 2023, sets out how the Leicestershire Waste Partnership (consisting of the Council and the seven district councils) intends to manage municipal waste up to 2050.
9. Since 2013, there have been a number of service reduction and efficiency changes to the operation of the RHWS service to achieve MTFS savings of approximately £2.7m. The current RHWS service offer was approved by the Cabinet in November 2015.
10. The Cabinet agreed to a public consultation on RHWS summer opening hours changes in June 2019, but the changes were not taken forward at the time.
11. On 13 February 2023, the Scrutiny Commission appointed a cross-party Scrutiny Review Panel to test the assessment criteria used to identify sites for potential closure, and to consider how the closures would impact residents in the future. The report and recommendations of the Panel were supported by the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 June 2023 and by the Cabinet on 23 June 2023.

12. On 24 October 2023, the Cabinet agreed to commence a public consultation on:
  - a) The closure of three of the Council's RHWS: Market Harborough, Shepshed, and Somerby;
  - b) The change to part-time opening at Bottesford RHWS;
  - c) The reduction of summer opening hours at all RHWS; and
  - d) The introduction of Christmas Eve closure at all RHWS.
13. On 9 February 2024, the Cabinet considered a report setting out the proposed MTFs for 2024/25 to 2027/28 and recommended amended proposals in relation to the RHWS service, to be funded from the Service Investment Fund and to be subject to further consultation. The Cabinet agreed that, subject to the Council's approval of the MTFs, the Director of Environment and Transport be authorised to consult on the revised proposals for the RHWS service.
14. The MTFs 2024-28 was approved by the County Council on 21 February 2024.

### **Resource Implications**

15. The revised proposals recommended for implementation in this report are estimated to achieve annual savings of £300,000, and it is anticipated that the project will deliver these savings by 2025/26. The revised savings target of £300,000 has been included in the MTFs 2024-28, approved by the Council on 21 February 2024.
16. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.
17. As requested by the Scrutiny Review Panel, work was undertaken to identify Section 106 developer contributions that has been received but not yet spent for Market Harborough RHWS and Shepshed RHWS as well as monies not yet received but where a legal agreement is in place. The revised proposal to keep Market Harborough RHWS and Shepshed RHWS open part-time has now superseded this work. Somerby RHWS is unaffected as it has no Section 106 money allocated.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

18. This report has been circulated to all members.

### **Officers to Contact**

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

19. The Council has a statutory duty under Section 51 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA) to provide places at which residents in its area may deposit their household waste free of charge. The EPA requires that each place provided is open at all reasonable times including at least one period on a Saturday or Sunday. The Council has discretion to determine the number of these facilities, the location of such facilities, and the opening hours to be operated.
20. There are currently 14 RHWS located across the County, all of which are directly operated by the Council. There are 70 operational staff working across the sites. A map showing the location of Leicestershire's RHWS is attached as Appendix A.
21. The total operational budget for waste management in 2023/24 was £30.7m. The current net revenue budget for operation of the RHWS is circa £4.7m (excluding waste disposal and treatment).
22. The Cabinet approved in November 2015 opening times for all RHWS as follows:
  - a) 9.00am to 7.00pm, five days a week from April to September (summer hours) (Saturday to Wednesday or Thursday to Monday dependent on site);
  - b) 9.00am to 4.00pm, five days a week from October to March (winter hours); and
  - c) All sites are closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Note: due to staffing pressures following the Covid-19 pandemic, not all sites have reopened in line with the above agreed service offer. Bottesford and Shepshed sites are currently open three days per week and Somerby RHWS is open two days per week.

### **First Public Consultation**

23. The Cabinet agreed on 24 October 2023 that the following proposals be taken forward for public consultation:
  - a) The closure of three of the Council's RHWS: Market Harborough, Shepshed, and Somerby;
  - b) The change to part-time opening at Bottesford RHWS (three days per week);
  - c) The reduction of summer opening hours (April to September) at all RHWS; and
  - d) The introduction of Christmas Eve closure at all RHWS.

24. In relation to paragraph 23 point c) above, the proposed summer opening hours included in the consultation were:
- a) 9.00am to 5.00pm where the RHWS is open Saturday, Sunday or Monday;
  - b) All other days that the RHWS is open to remain as 9.00am to 7.00pm.
25. A twelve-week public consultation was undertaken between 1 November 2023 and 24 January 2024. The consultation consisted of an online questionnaire accessed via the 'Have your say' page on the Council's website and a series of focus groups were undertaken with members of the public.
26. A variety of other stakeholders were consulted, such as district councils, parish councils, neighbouring Waste Disposal Authorities (Leicester City Council and county councils), and the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group (LECG).

#### Online Questionnaire Headline Findings

27. Full findings from the 'Have your say' online questionnaire can be found in the Consultation Survey Analysis Report (Appendix B).
28. There were 5,638 responses to the online questionnaire. The Table 1 below shows the headline demographic data for questionnaire respondents, compared to the general population of Leicestershire.

| <b>Demographic Characteristics</b>  | <b>Questionnaire Respondents</b> | <b>Leicestershire Population</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Female                              | 53%                              | 51%                              |
| Aged 45-74                          | 64%                              | 38%                              |
| White ethnicity                     | 96%                              | 88%                              |
| Heterosexual                        | 93%                              | 92%                              |
| Not Disabled                        | 81%                              | 83%                              |
| Population data source: 2021 Census |                                  |                                  |

Table 1 Demographic data for first online questionnaire respondents

29. The majority of respondents strongly disagreed/tended to disagree with the proposed closure of Market Harborough RHWS (73%), Shepshed RHWS (67%), and Somerby RHWS (40%). The proportion of respondents who strongly disagreed/tended to disagree with the proposed closures increased significantly for those who either lived in the local area or were regular users of the sites. The key response themes were:
- a) Concerns about environmental impacts such as increased fly-tipping and driving further to alternative sites.
  - b) Concerns that the Market Harborough RHWS and Shepshed RHWS are in areas of housing development.

- c) Concerns about the suitability of alternative sites such as traffic safety at the A6 entrance to the Kibworth RHWS and increased usage at other already busy sites.
30. The majority of respondents (59%) neither agreed nor disagreed with part-time opening at Bottesford RHWS. The proportion of respondents who agreed with the proposal increased for those who were regular users of the site (70%). The key response themes were:
- a) Support for the proposal as part-time opening is preferable to closure.
  - b) Concerns about increased fly-tipping.
31. The majority of respondents (56%) tended to agree/strongly agree with the proposal to reduce summer opening hours at all RHWS. The key response themes were:
- a) Support for the proposal as an alternative to closing sites.
  - b) Support for the proposal as it is a sensible way to save money.
  - c) Suggestions of alternative opening hours to those proposed.
32. The majority of respondents (92%) tended to agree/strongly agree with the proposal to introduce Christmas Eve closure at all RHWS. The key response themes were:
- a) Support for RHWS staff having Christmas Eve off.
  - b) Support for the proposal as people are unlikely to prioritise visiting an RHWS on Christmas Eve.
  - c) Support for the proposal as visitor numbers are lower on Christmas Eve.
33. The questionnaire asked respondents for alternative suggestions on ways of making savings. The key response themes were:
- a) To reduce hours and opening days at the sites proposed for closure and the RHWS around the County.
  - b) To reduce staffing levels at RHWS, to utilise volunteers to staff sites, and the greater use of automated systems at sites.
  - c) To generate income via reuse and recycling of items.
  - d) To charge to visit sites and to dispose of specific types of waste.
  - e) To improve the range and quantity of kerbside collections to reduce demand on RHWS.

### Focus Groups

34. Full findings can be found in the Focus Group Report (Appendix C) and a summary is given below.
35. Six online focus groups were held with a mixture of Leicestershire residents and residents from the areas specifically affected by potential RHWS closures. Feedback from the participants is summarised as follows:

- a) On the closure of Market Harborough, Shepshed and Somerby sites:
- i. Participants who were regular visitors to the sites were the most affected and unhappy about the plans.
  - ii. The closures were considered short-sighted due to the housing development around Market Harborough and Shepshed.
  - iii. The savings were considered to be small, especially if fly-tipping was to increase.
  - iv. There were concerns regarding closing Market Harborough RHWS as it is seen as a good site with good access; participants would have preferred closing Kibworth RHWS which is seen as having less good access.
  - v. It was felt that closures should have been thought through before investing in the Kibworth site (the redevelopment of which took place between November 2021 and March 2023).
- b) On the part-time opening at Bottesford RHWS:
- i. Site users were relieved that the proposal was to keep the site open part-time rather than to close it.
  - ii. Weekend access to the site was considered to be crucial.
- c) On the reduction of summer opening hours:
- i. This was considered to have a low impact on households.
  - ii. There was a preference for more evening opening times in the summer, instead of opening early in the morning.
  - iii. It was suggested that winter opening hours were reduced, and that sites were kept open for longer in the summer instead.
- d) On the Christmas Eve closure:
- i. No participants had visited sites on Christmas Eve, and some assumed that the sites were shut, whilst others stated they had 'better things to do'.
  - ii. Participants felt that it was a very reasonable change and would have a low impact on households.

#### Other Consultation Activity

36. Views on the proposals were also sought from parish councils, district councils, neighbouring local authorities, the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the LECG. Detailed feedback is given in the Consultation Survey Report (Appendix B) and summarised below.
37. A number of parish councils, district councils and neighbouring local authorities submitted responses as part of the online survey. Of those that responded via letter/email, the following concerns were raised:

- a) Harborough District Council's main concerns were the impact of closing Market Harborough RHWS on traffic safety at Kibworth RHWS, and the potential for increased fly-tipping.
  - b) North Northamptonshire Council's main concerns were that the closure of Market Harborough RHWS could create cross-over demand to their facilities, and the potential cost to them of implementing a residents-only permit system should cross-border use increase.
  - c) Hathern Parish Council's main concerns were the closure of Shepshed RHWS leading to increased fly-tipping, increased congestion in Loughborough due to people using the site there as an alternative, and the environmental impact of people making longer car journeys to alternative sites.
38. The LECG's main concerns were an increase in fly-tipping, closures causing congestion in built-up areas as people travel to alternative sites, closing RHWS while the population increases, queuing at alternative sites, and older people in Somerby having to travel further to an alternative RHWS.

#### Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee

39. The Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the proposals at its meeting on 2 November 2023 and its main concern was housing growth proposed for Harborough increasing visitor numbers at Kibworth RHWS and, therefore, placing increased pressure on local roads.

#### Kibworth RHWS Traffic Assessment

40. In December 2023, the Council's Network Data and Intelligence Team undertook work to understand the potential impact of increased traffic accessing Kibworth RHWS should Market Harborough RHWS close. The worst-case scenario was modelled to understand the impact of 100% of Market Harborough RHWS visitors using Kibworth RHWS as an alternative at peak times of day and year.
41. The data suggests that the right turn into the Kibworth RHWS on the A6 could cope with additional visits resulting from the closure of Market Harborough RHWS. However, future housing developments and Government legislation changes have not been factored in and may increase demand on Kibworth RHWS in future.

#### Consideration of Consultation Feedback

42. Having carefully considered the alternative suggestions for making savings raised in the public consultation, it was concluded that none provided a viable alternative to make the level of savings required. The RHWS already operate with the minimum staffing levels that are required to operate the site safely and efficiently. In addition, the Council is legally required to make the sites



accessible to residents free of charge and there are significant restrictions on which waste items can be charged for.

43. While it would be possible to design an alternative pattern of opening hours or days, there was no consensus from respondents on which alternative opening pattern would be preferable (i.e. it depended on the respondent's individual circumstances). It is not possible for the County Council to progress suggestions concerning changes to kerbside collections as these are the responsibility of the district councils.
44. Although there is potential to increase income from the sale of materials, particularly in relation to reuse, this is already included in the MTFs on another savings line and will be progressed in addition to the savings proposed in this report.
45. There was a high level of dissatisfaction with the proposals to close RHWS, particularly in relation to Market Harborough and Shepshed. As a result of this feedback, an alternative option to keep these two sites open on a part-time basis was proposed as outlined below. This proposal does, however, reduce the level of savings that could be achieved.

### **Revised Proposals**

46. The Cabinet on 9 February 2024 considered a report setting out the MTFs for 2024/25 to 2027/28 MTFs including amended proposals in relation to the RHWS service. It was agreed that, subject to the outcome of a further public consultation, the Service Improvement Fund would cover £100,000 of the planned £400,000 savings in relation to RHWS service. In light of this, and the public and stakeholder feedback from the public consultation on the proposals outlined above, the revised proposal was put forward to keep Market Harborough RHWS and Shepshed RHWS open part-time, and to reduce the number of opening days at Kibworth RHWS. The revised proposals are estimated to achieve the remaining annual savings requirement of £300,000.
47. It was proposed that Market Harborough RHWS would change from opening five days to three days per week and Shepshed RHWS would change from opening three days to two days per week. To make the proposal operationally viable, a reduction in opening days from five days to four days per week at Kibworth RHWS would also be required. As these changes had not been put forward for consideration as part of the initial public consultation, a further consultation exercise was required.
48. The revised proposal to keep Market Harborough RHWS open part-time would mean that a smaller proportion of Market Harborough RHWS visitors would be expected to use Kibworth RHWS as an alternative. This should reduce the potential impacts on the road network which were raised as a concern in the initial public consultation.
49. The original proposal to close Somerby RHWS remained, due to its high operational cost per visit and low visitor numbers, as did the proposal to reduce

summer opening hours for all RHWS, change to part-time opening at Bottesford RHWS, and close all sites on Christmas Eve and, therefore, these did not form part of the second consultation.

### **Second Public Consultation**

50. An additional four-week public consultation on the revised proposals to introduce part-time opening at Market Harborough RHWS and Shepshed RHWS and reduce the opening days at Kibworth RHWS was undertaken between 21 February and 20 March 2024. The consultation consisted of an online questionnaire available via a link from the Council's website. In addition, a variety of other stakeholders were consulted, such as district councils, parish councils, neighbouring Waste Disposal Authorities (Leicester City Council and county councils), and the LECG.

### **'Have Your Say' Online Survey Headline Findings**

51. Full findings from the second 'Have your say' online survey can be found in the Consultation Survey Analysis Report (Appendix D).
52. There were 566 responses to the second online questionnaire. The Table 2 below shows the headline demographic data for questionnaire respondents, compared to the general population of Leicestershire.

| <b>Demographic Characteristics</b>  | <b>Questionnaire Respondents</b> | <b>Leicestershire Population</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Female                              | 54%                              | 51%                              |
| Aged 45-74                          | 65%                              | 38%                              |
| White ethnicity                     | 97%                              | 88%                              |
| Heterosexual                        | 93%                              | 92%                              |
| Not Disabled                        | 79%                              | 83%                              |
| Population data source: 2021 Census |                                  |                                  |

Table 2 Demographic data for second online questionnaire respondents

53. In relation to the proposal to keep the Shepshed site open two days per week, 44% of respondents tended to agree or strongly agreed with the proposal, 22% neither agreed or disagreed and 23% tended to disagree or strongly disagreed. The key response themes included:
- a) Concerns that two days was not enough for the site to be open, particularly in light of the amount of housing growth in the area.
  - b) Concerns about increases in traffic and travel, both around the Shepshed site when it is open and at other sites when it is shut.
  - c) Support for the site remaining open rather than being closed and thanking the Council for listening to the views of residents.

54. Regarding the proposal to keep the Market Harborough site open three days per week and reduce the opening days at Kibworth RHWS to four days per week, 47% of respondents tended to agree or strongly agreed with the proposal, 17% neither agreed or disagreed and 25% tended to disagree or strongly disagreed. The key response themes were that:
- a) Many respondents felt that both Market Harborough and Kibworth sites should be open all weekend.
  - b) Some respondents felt that Market Harborough RHWS should be open more than Kibworth RHWS, as Market Harborough has a larger population.
  - c) Some respondents were still concerned about the safety of the A6 and the entrance to the Kibworth RHWS.
  - d) Some respondents felt that while the proposals were not ideal, they were preferable to closing the Market Harborough RHWS.
55. Respondents to the questionnaire were asked for any other options that would significantly reduce the running costs of the RHWS service. Response themes included:
- a) Suggestions of alternative patterns of opening hours / days.
  - b) Reducing staffing levels, using volunteers or having unmanned sites.
  - c) Introducing a charge for site use rather than closing sites.
56. A number of other comments about the proposal were submitted by respondents. The key themes included:
- a) Concerns about the impact of the proposals on levels of fly-tipping.
  - b) Concerns about increases in how busy the RHWS will be, traffic and road safety, and/or carbon emissions.
  - c) General dissatisfaction with the Council.
  - d) Recognition that the Council had listened to the results of the first consultation and had amended the proposals.
57. No additional written comments were submitted via letter/email as part of the second consultation.
58. No new viable alternative options were put forward as part of the second public consultation.

#### Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee

59. The Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the proposals at its meeting on 11 March 2024. The Committee noted the completion of a traffic impact assessment regarding the impact of the potential displacement of traffic to the Kibworth RHWS that showed that the junction on the A6 to the Kibworth RHWS could tolerate any potential displacement.

60. The Committee felt that the proposals contained within the second consultation were a good compromise and recognised the level of work that had been put in to determine the best approach for the service in light of the Council's challenging financial position.

### **Conclusions**

61. Taking into consideration the results of both of the public consultations and the need to make savings, the Cabinet is recommended to authorise the implementation of the revised proposals, in summary:
- a) Closure of Somerby RHWS;
  - b) Part-time opening at the following RHWS:
    - i. Bottesford (three days per week);
    - ii. Market Harborough (three days per week);
    - iii. Kibworth (four days per week); and
    - iv. Shepshed (two days per week).
  - c) Reduction of summer opening hours at all RHWS:
    - i. 9.00am to 5.00pm where the RHWS is open Saturday, Sunday or Monday;
    - ii. All other days that the RHWS is open 9.00am to 7.00pm.
  - d) Christmas Eve closure at all RHWS.
62. The exact opening days for each site will be determined by the waste service as needed to meet operational and legislative requirements.
63. When considering the initial proposals for making savings to the RHWS service, the Scrutiny Review Panel recommended that if any sites were closed, that initially plans to decommission but not sell sites be supported. The Cabinet (in June 2023) supported the Panel's recommendations.
64. At the time that the Scrutiny Review Panel was considering the proposals, five RHWS were being considered for closure. As outlined above, the proposals have been amended and only one site (Somerby) is now being recommended for closure. In light of this change, and subject to the approval of the recommendations in this report, the Waste Management Service is intending to declare the Somerby RHWS surplus to requirement once the site has been closed to the public and any appropriate decommissioning has been undertaken. The future use or disposal of the site would then be a matter for consideration by the Director of Corporate Resources in line with the Council's usual processes and procedures.

### **Equality Implications**

65. The Equality Impact Assessment has been updated (Appendix D) to take into account the revised proposals to keep Market Harborough RHWS and Shepshed RHWS open part-time and to reduce opening days at Kibworth RHWS.

66. The comments of the LECG are given at paragraph 38 above.

### **Human Rights Implications**

67. No human rights implications were identified.

### **Environmental Implications**

68. It has been noted that there could be environmental implications from residents driving further to an alternative RHWS should their current nearest site close. However, this has been largely mitigated by the revised proposal to keep Market Harborough RHWS and Shepshed RHWS open part-time. Somerby RHWS has low visitor numbers so its closure is unlikely to have significant environmental implications.

### **Background Papers**

24 April 2023 – Report to the Cabinet – ‘Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy 2022-2050’:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s175771/Leicestershire%20Resources%20and%20Waste%20Strategy%20Cabinet%20240423.pdf>

23 June 2023 - Report to the Cabinet - ‘Final Report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Recycling and Household Waste Sites’:

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/RHWS-Scrutiny-Review-Panel-report-2023.pdf>

24 October 2023 - Report to the Cabinet – ‘Recycling and Household Waste Sites Proposed Consultation’:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s179117/FINAL%20RHWS%20Savings%20Consultation%20Cabinet%20241023.pdf>

9 February 2024 - Report to the Cabinet – ‘Provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25-2027/28’:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7503>

11 March 2024 – Report to the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee – ‘Recycling and Household Waste Sites Consultation Outcome, Recommendations, and Further Consultation’:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s181789/RHWS%20Outcome%20of%20Consultation.pdf>

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Location of Recycling and Household Waste Sites in Leicestershire

Appendix B - Consultation Survey Report

Appendix C - Focus Group Report

Appendix D - Second Consultation Survey Report

Appendix E - Equality Impact Assessment (second iteration)

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