

Where do the recyclables collected at the kerbside go?

Currently, the Council collect paper, cardboard, glass, tins and cans and plastic from the kerbside via the Maximise Recycling scheme. These materials are sent to a Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) in Tilbury, Essex for sorting and then the separated materials are sent to their corresponding reprocessors.

All materials except for paper, remain within England for re-processing. High quality paper is currently sent to mills in Sweden and Spain. The remaining paper and cardboard are sent to China to known reputable mills.

Plastics are sent for re-processing in Leicestershire, steel to Canning Town, aluminium to Warrington and glass to Berrymans Glass Ltd who own a number of sites throughout the country.

Where do recyclables from the recycling banks go?

The materials currently recycled at the Recycling Banks are not sent to Tilbury as they are collected by different companies. Plastic bottles go to Lancashire where in the majority of cases the material is used in national markets. Paper goes to a mill in Kent where it is recycled on site into newsprint. Glass goes to a furnace in West Yorkshire where it is melted down to make new bottles and jars. Textiles are used in either Charity shops, for humanitarian needs or exported to other markets. Cartons are taken to a mill in Sweden where they can be re-processed. Cans are baled and sent to Kent where they go on to both national and international (Spain/Turkey or China) markets.

Does sending materials abroad for recycling have an environmental impact?

Although it may seem at first that transporting materials to other countries for recycling has a large environmental impact, in order to get a more accurate picture, this needs to be compared with the environmental impact of sending materials to landfill in our own country and using raw materials to make new products.

A particular environmental concern is the emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) associated with an activity, as this is one of the main gases contributing to global warming.

A study commissioned by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has found that there are CO₂ savings to be made from recycling relative to the alternative of landfill and using virgin materials, even if the recovered materials have to be transported to China¹.

This means that the environmental impact in terms of CO₂ emissions is less if materials are recycled in China, compared to if those same materials are

buried in landfill in this country and virgin materials are used to make new materials.

The UK now recovers more paper for recycling than can be used by the UK paper industry, but there is strong demand for the UK's recovered paper from rapidly growing economies – such as China¹.

In addition, more container capacity is required to transport goods from China to the UK than is required in the opposite direction, which means that more than 60% of containers return to China empty¹. Using this capacity for transporting recyclables is therefore making use of an otherwise empty container.

Finally, the markets for recyclables are subject to the same economic models as any other commodity and so markets can vary depending on the market situation. The demand for materials such as paper, cans or glass, for example, is from re-processors who deem this material to have some form of economic value.

1. 'CO2 impacts of transporting the UK's recovered paper and plastic bottles to China', WRAP, August 2008.