



A Green Tea Shop

Working everyday in [Yumchaa](#) tea shop I was constantly aware of the amount of waste produced and frustrated by the fact that none of it was being recycled. I decided for my LAC project that I would work with the tea shop's owners to try and implement a recycling scheme in the shop. The aim of the project was not only to improve the ecological footprint of the shop but also to find out what the barriers exist when implementing a recycling scheme in a small businesses such as Yumchaa.

Step 1: current waste management

Yumchaa waste is disposed of using the Westminster Council pre-paid standard bag service where special colour coded bags are ordered in advance at a cost. Currently Yumchaa only buys in the 'red' standard bag for mixed rubbish in which all our waste is disposed of. The only exception is cardboard which is sporadically recycled when staff remember, have time to sort and have cardboard recycling stickers in stock.

Type	Quantity	Lasts on average
Red bag	50	2.5 weeks

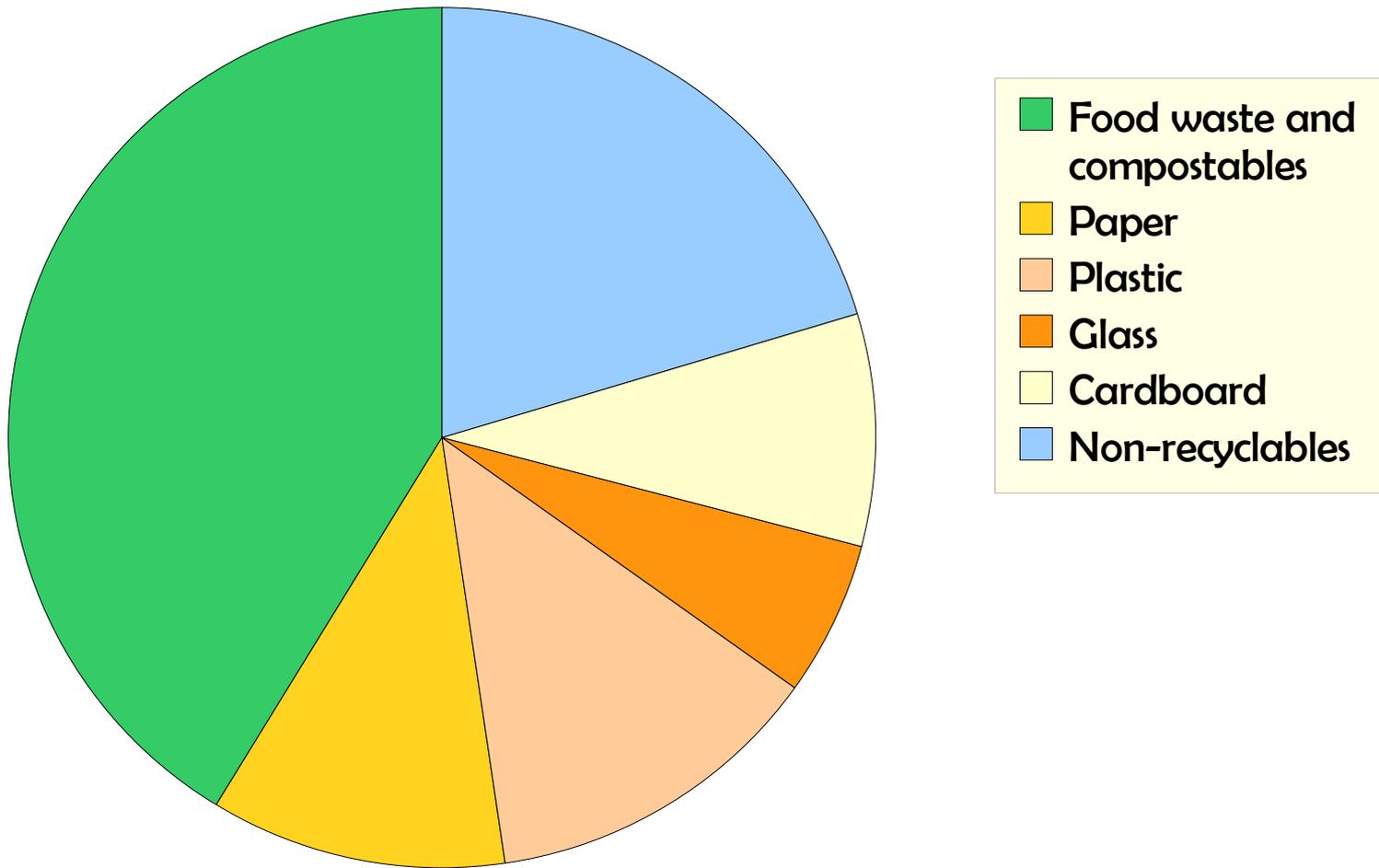
Step 2: getting dirty

In order to devise a suitable recycling strategy for the cafe I needed to understand our waste. So I spent Thursday April 24th dividing the various components of our waste (paper, plastic, glass and compostables) into separate bags and weighing it, keeping a tally as I went along.



Total weights at the end of the day 14/04/11:

Total combined waste	17.2
Total potential recyclables	6.6
Total compostables	7.1



Step 3: the alternatives

My initial research showed many recycling options were available. The most obvious being Westminster councils commercial waste pre-pay recycling bags which would be simple to implement as the supplier and the disposal system would be the same. However further enquiry revealed that the council, although providing the bags does not offer a pick up service meaning that commercial recycling is only collected once a week with domestic rubbish – pretty disgraceful. So I made lots of calls and eventually found a supplier that offered a suitable service at a price the owners felt acceptable. So we settled on London based waste disposal company Orian who provide pre-pay bags and most crucially collection of the bags.

Step 4: implementation

A trial using standard (non-recycling) bags was run for a couple of weeks to see how a two bag system would work in the shop and to make sure it did not impede service and hygiene. Overall the trial was a success and the owners, pleased with the results have decided to order in a batch of recycling bags from Orian. They are in the post so watch this space!

Step 5: afterthoughts

During this project I came up against a few barriers which I feel are worth a mention:

Inertia: I had many discussions with the owners about my project and while they were very much in support of it there was somewhat of a lag between ideas and action. Even if all are agreed the end result would be preferable, breaking out of habits is very hard – not recycling is a strong habit.

Staff participation: When talking to other members of staff about my project and about recycling in general there was a very mixed response. While the majority thought recycling in general was a good idea when it came to action, issues of inconvenience and hassle came to the fore both in relation to my project and to recycling at home. While some staff were very diligent about what they put where others showed little interest. Of course this situation is not peculiar to Yumchaa staff. In general UK society has not yet internalized environmental values as part of everyday life. Practices such as recycling are not yet naturalized for many people and are thus perceived as an unnecessary and avoidable hassle.

Lack of infrastructure: My experience with Westminster council illustrated to me just how token many environmental initiatives are in the UK. Councils are obligated to offer recycling services but there is no obligation to make them user friendly. Councils still show little genuine interest in improving the environmental

performance of their boroughs, providing the bare minimum required of them even if it is of little practical use and will thus have little real impact. Lack of appropriate facilities and services make it very difficult for small businesses wishing to be more environmentally responsible to do so.

Composting: 41% of Yumchaa waste consists of compostables yet there was no service available in the Soho area which collected compostable waste a small business scale. So there is no choice but to send it to be incinerated along with the general non-compostable waste.

Next steps

I am very interested to see if the recycling scheme implemented is successful. I have many friends at the shop and so will continue to follow the progress of the project and help out where possible. Awareness of waste production and disposal is so important and having work places take responsibility is a crucial element in developing a society that takes responsibility.