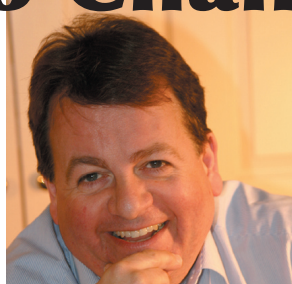


# Theo Chalmers



Theo Chalmers is managing director of Verve Public Relations and chair of Urban Eden.  
www.urbaneden.org www.vervepr.co.uk e: t.chalmers@vervepr.co.uk 01908 275271

## Waste site booking system leaves us in a spin

LET'S talk about waste tips. For here lies fertile ground for what can only be construed as attempts by Milton Keynes Council to make the simplest of tasks as hard as possible for the city's beleaguered citizens. Here is one man's recent experience - let's call him Mr X.

18 years ago Mr X moved to Milton Keynes and bought a new washing machine. A couple of weeks ago said washing machine finally

decided to give up the ghost. Irreparable. Dead. Mr X bought a new machine and decided to dump his old one. He had recently attempted to visit the waste tip in Bleak Hall and seen the notices saying it was by appointment only. So he went online.

The first site that came up after a relevant search was MKFM's which told him "Update: The booking form has now been taken offline - you can read more details

here." Their page still claims that but it's not true. However the phone number it gives as an alternative connects to the main council switchboard which, of course, is closed after 5pm and at weekends. So Mr X persisted and discovered that the online booking form is indeed live.

However, the site appears to require setting up an online account with the council and demanding a huge amount of personal information. However once through all of the initial

steps it only gives booking dates up to seven days ahead and if they are full; tough bananas. Mr X persisted and a day later when a new date was added secured a slot.

Of course he had to supply his car registration and was warned: "To make a booking (15 min slot) you need to confirm the registration number of the vehicle you plan to use, which site you wish to visit and your email address for the booking confirmation to be sent to. You will not be allowed on site without your confirmation email and proof of address e.g. driving licence."

There were several other onerous conditions too including: "Due to time and space restrictions, trailers are not currently permitted at any of our sites. Residents with vehicles over 2m tall must book at the Newport Pagnell site. Only bring manageable items you can dispose of by yourself as site staff are unable to help at this time. If you require assistance you may bring one additional person with you." And here's more:

### Household Waste Recycling Centre Site Rules

- Wear gloves when unloading waste;
- Wear sensible footwear (no flip flops or sandals);
- Wear trousers not shorts;
- Do not climb over the walls or into skips;
- Do not use mobile phones on site;
- No hot ashes or disposable BBQs;

- No smoking on site;
- Do not bring pets or children.

So Mr X made his booking, giving away his life's details to the council and relaxed for a week knowing that eventually he would get rid of the dead Whirlpool. But then Mr X's partner's car, the one whose registration number he had given, suddenly needed a new battery and possibly a new alternator. It was booked into a garage and therefore was not likely to be available on the day in question.

So, innocently, Mr X called the council waste booking department and spoke to a charming and patient council employee. Let's call him Mr Y so as not to embarrass him. Mr X asked him to transfer the booking from his partner's registration number to his. A simple matter, you would think. But, oh no. According to Mr Y that was impossible. Serco, which runs the waste recycling site, cannot be contacted to make the change.

According to Wikipedia: "Serco Group plc is a British provider of public services and operates in six sectors of public service provision: Health, Transport, Justice, Immigration, Defence, and Citizens' Services. It is listed on the London Stock Exchange and is a constituent of the FTSE 250 Index. The majority of Serco's turnover (which runs into hundreds of billions of pounds) is generated from UK operations, but the company also operates in Continental Europe, the Middle East, the

Asia Pacific region and North America."

But it cannot change a registration number and so that booking is entirely wasted.

Mr Y kindly and patiently ignored Mr X's shocked incredulity and offered a new booking about a further week ahead for the other car. Meanwhile, by good fortune, Mr X's partner's car was rush-fixed and, taking a gamble that nothing had changed the existing booking, they turned up with the dead Whirlpool and a small trolley to help with its movement at the originally appointed time. The road to the waste tip at Bleak Hall has bizarrely and most inconveniently been made one-way, with half the road coned-off for 'tip visits' even though far fewer vehicles are now visiting it than before lockdown when there were frequently ten or 15 cars queuing ahead of you. In fact, only one other vehicle was there on Mr X's visit.

Oh, and no one checked Mr X's driving licence or expensively printed-out booking form as required by the council. The staff clearly were very comfortable being 'low tech' and sitting in their padded chairs majestically waving you in.

So that was that. Whirlpool dumped. My simple question is this. Does the council wish to make it so difficult to visit the dump that the numbers will fall off a cliff, saving the council millions of pounds?

I think the answer is 'yes'. What do you think? Cheerio.

## MP urges hospitality venues to join scheme

BUSINESSES are being urged to sign up to the government's new Eat Out To Help Out scheme to protect jobs and boost the economic recovery.

Ben Everitt, MP for Milton Keynes North, said: "This will really help our local businesses bounce back."

Eat Out To Help Out offer diners 50 per cent off food and

non-alcoholic drinks on Mondays to Wednesdays throughout August to encourage people back into local bars, restaurants and cafes.

Applications for hospitality businesses to register for the scheme are open and Mr Everitt is urging every restaurant to take part. "This will not only protect the businesses

but also the jobs of people working there and it will boost our local economy," he added. "If you are a local restaurant, café or bar, please sign up for the Eat Out To Help Out scheme and if you are a diner please support our local establishments."

Businesses can sign up for the scheme at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).