



# Driving Operational Waste Improvements

Changing the approach by Extra Motorway Service Area

January 2026

This document is the property of WRAP and may not be reproduced or reused without permission.



# Introduction

Extra Motorway Services Area (MSA) is one of the UK's leading motorway service operators, providing fuel, food, and hospitality across ten locations nationwide. Their sites serve millions of customers every year, making them a vital part of the UK's transport infrastructure. With such high footfall and diverse amenities, sustainability is not just a priority - it's a necessity.

Extra MSA has embedded sustainability into its core business strategy through a robust ES,G framework. This includes reducing waste, improving recycling rates, cutting carbon emissions, and supporting the circular economy. Their commitment goes beyond compliance; it's about creating positive environmental impact while enhancing customer experience.

This case study explores how Extra MSA tackled the challenge of managing varied waste streams in busy, customer-facing environments.

**Note:** This case study sets out one potential option for dealing with waste from customers. Over time, we expect citizens to better understand and follow separation of waste. Providing bins to segregate waste streams at source is considered best practice, and ensures material is captured on site rather than risking it ending up in **correctly disposed of elsewhere**

## Problem

Despite investing in recycling bins, customer confusion and lack of engagement led to widespread contamination. Misused car park bins meant that contaminated recycling had to be treated as general waste - wasting valuable resources.

## Solution

All customer bins were removed from food courts and instead sorting system was introduced. Trained staff now handle waste in a dedicated recycling facility, which has reduced contamination and improved recycling rates. Removing outdoor bins aims to encourage customers to return waste inside or take it home. This approach has cut costs and reduced vermin without increasing litter. However, MSA is not able to determine how much material is taken home for correct disposal.

## Impact

The recycling rate increased from 18% to 51%, while waste costs dropped. Staff feel more engaged and have greater pride in their role in sustainability. All this has been achieved without adding extra labour hours.

# Problem

Managing waste in a busy, customer-facing environment is never simple. With multiple amenities and high footfall, ensuring effective recycling can be a real challenge. Despite best efforts, the issues faced here are ones that many businesses in the food-to-go and retail sectors will recognise.

**Complex waste streams:** A wide range of amenities generates diverse waste types, making segregation essential.

**Clear guidance, tough reality:** Regulations require businesses to separate waste before collection but achieving this consistently is difficult.

**Customer behaviour:** Despite investing in bins designed for source segregation, customer understanding and appropriate usage remained an issue.

**Cross-contamination:** Significant contamination meant that recyclable materials ended up as general waste.

**Traditional approach failed:** Scattered bins in car parks didn't work - virtually all waste streams were mixed.

**Lost resources:** Contaminated recycling must be treated as general waste, meaning valuable materials were wasted.

**Need for change:** It was time to rethink waste management, drive behaviour change, and deliver real value for customers and communities.



# Solution



Rather than placing the emphasis on customer behaviour change, Extra MSA chose to tackle these challenges by transforming how waste is operationally managed across their sites, starting with a bold trial at their flagship Beaconsfield location;

**Food court overhaul:** Removed all customer bins and introduced a “Litter, we’ll sort it for you” system.

**Employee-led sorting:** Trained team now separates waste in a dedicated recycling facility, ensuring materials are properly recycled.

**Clear signage & trolleys:** Made disposal easy for customers while improving recycling quality.

**Reduced contamination:** Shifted responsibility from customers to staff, cutting cross-contamination and boosting recycling rates.

**Liquid capture:** Collecting ~10 litres of liquid and ice every 15 minutes, reducing waste weight and disposal costs.

**Removed outdoor bins:** Encouraged customers to return waste to food courts or take it home.

# Impact



These operational changes delivered measurable results by improving recycling rates, reducing costs, and boosting team engagement.

## The key outcomes of these changes are;

**Recycling rate increase:** From 18% before the trial to an average of 51% after removing food court and car park bins.

**Immediate impact:** Rates doubled overnight following food court changes, with consistent improvement over time.

**No extra labour:** Time-and-motion studies confirmed no increase in staff hours, as efficiency gains made this possible.

**Employee engagement:** Staff feel proud of their role in driving sustainability, improving job satisfaction.

**Cost savings:** Partnership with the waste management company reduced bin bag use and operational overheads.

**Lower waste weight:** By removing liquid from the recycling and waste streams, disposal costs were reduced further.

# Future considerations

Although Extra MSA has achieved improvements with this trialled approach, greater benefits are expected as customer waste-sorting behaviour continues to mature. As Simpler Recycling becomes part of everyday life, separation at source will play an increasingly important role in delivering cleaner recycling streams and reducing contamination.

**Citizen behaviour is changing:** As Simpler Recycling regulations become embedded, people's confidence and accuracy in sorting materials will steadily improve.

**Rising expectations:** Customers will increasingly expect to separate their waste at the point of disposal—mirroring behaviour at home, work, and in public spaces.

**Even better recycling performance:** When materials are separated before they enter the bin, contamination drops dramatically, leading to higher-quality recycling streams and increased recycling rates.

**A pathway to future-proof performance:** Long-term success lies in moving toward segregation at source, keeping materials cleaner and more recyclable from the outset.



# Impact



**We're proud to take bold steps that not only meet but aim to exceed Simpler Recycling legislation — boosting our recycling rates while keeping our external areas spotless and free from any increase in litter.**

**Ross Mendenhall  
Group Operations Director  
Extra MSA Group**



**THE BUSINESS  
OF RECYCLING**

# Make recycling your Business

For more information and support on business recycling and legislations visit [businessofrecycling.wrap.ngo](https://businessofrecycling.wrap.ngo) or email us on [businessrecycling@wrap.ngo](mailto:businessrecycling@wrap.ngo) for expert advice from our policy team.