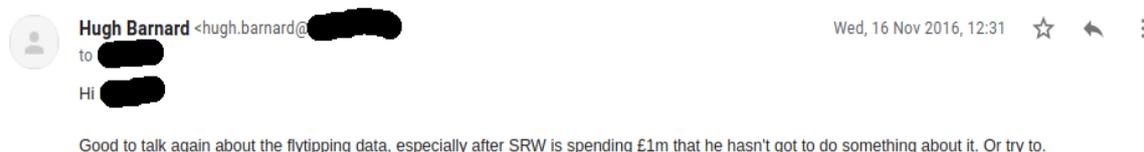


Fly-Tipping in Newham

Table of Contents

Fly-Tipping in Newham.....	1
No Open Data.....	1
Assuming Open and Detailed Data.....	2
Behavioural and Communication Interventions.....	3
Night of Heavy Objects.....	3
Mobile Web or Specific App: Rewards.....	3
Rubbish as Wider Problem.....	4
Honesty Eyes.....	4
Mobile CCTV.....	4
CCTV Stickers.....	4
Reusing Newham Signs.....	5
Conclusion.....	5

I checked my emails for my first contact with this problem was in 2016, almost five years ago:



Difficult to say whether anything has changed since, I suspect 'very little' read on.

No Open Data

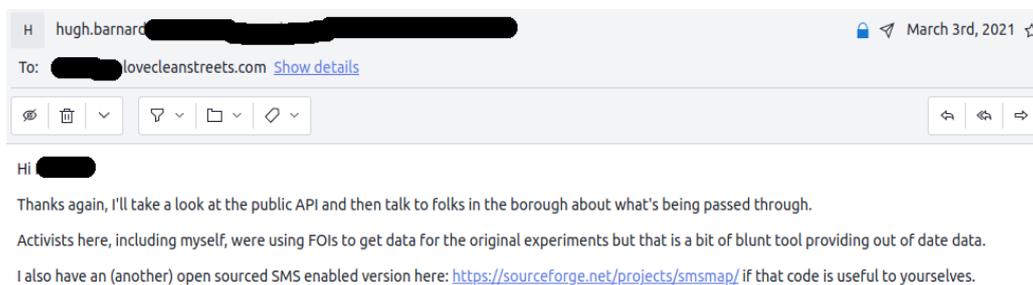
One persistent problem is *lack of open citizen accessible data*, that's why 'we' can't see whether anything is moving or do any citizen science work on the problem. In fact, the first experiment that we made, three years ago, the experimental data was obtained via a Freedom of Information request¹, usually pretty tortuous in Newham. However, for project work, this is clearly unsustainable and onerous, the data is limited, stale and often in inconvenient formats (there's an obsession with spreadsheet data, for example).

The data appears to come from several sources, the incredibly over-complicated and misnamed Love Newham 'app', reports made directly onto the Newham.gov.uk website and (I'm guessing) direct input from the trucks. Interaction with the system on the trucks is not clear (to me), though there's clearly a facility for updating the status of reports.

The Love Newham 'app' (ugh, ugh) was written or modified by developers Bbits who ingest the data into <https://lovecleanstreets.info/> and (I'm guessing) from there to Newham. There's an API for <https://lovecleanstreets.info/> but if an individual wants full data, *I'd have to pay for it (twice, since I presume Newham are using my council tax to pay Bbits)*.

¹ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/flytipping_database 4 January 2018

The 'free' data that we can see is partial and unsatisfactory for any ambitious analysis². Still, I guess cash is changing hands, maybe I'll FOI to find out how much.



Love Newham itself is a complex mess and a disgrace, in my opinion, like most 'apps'. It requires 'registration' too, discouraging in this hostile environment and probably takes more data than necessary. No-one can easily check, since it's closed source. Plenty of scope for mobile HTML solutions too, no downloads³.

So, if Newham would like 'us' to participate in some serious (rather than engagement tokenism, with nice presentations) work, this needs changing around quite radically.

Assuming Open and Detailed Data

If we were (note the subjunctive⁴) in possession of timely, complete and easy to access data, what could be done? The first thing is a return to 2016-2018, clustering and time/type based clustering using a z-axis (somehow, probably leaflet.js⁵) to develop some intuitions by simply eyeballing the development of clusters. It's clear that some type of place (corners, telecoms boxes, walls) are favoured, for example.

The second thing is a little experimental crunching with the new, copious data, this is so computationally 'cheap' now and the world is full of scientific, statistical and statistical ML libraries, SciPy⁶, Tensorflow, and Torch for example. Voronoi, k-means and some kind of time series prediction are probably obvious ones. Can any forward predictions be made? Are there places where it would be useful to concentrate?

The third thing from published maps, that we actually observe informally, is that this will lead to an informal ecosystem of picking and re-use if there's more public data. I run and cycle in the borough and see both cyclists (admittedly, some are probably spotters for burglary) and folks with prams searching and picking. For 'nice' pieces of wood and chairs, *I do it myself*, repurposing the famous Gibson quote 'the street finds its own uses for things'⁷.

Finally, we actually have a basis for a measurable, rolling and publically accessible project, rather than non-scalable local interventions, the 'environment crime' stickers and 'crime tape' for example.

² For example, there's no detailed chronology from the public API, reported, cleared, ended though there may be on the complete, 'paid for'.

³ I'm working on this: <https://sourceforge.net/projects/datamap/> currently. The mobile bit still leaves something to be desired though

⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/possible-worlds/#ModalLogicAndPWs> Hahaha!

⁵ <https://leafletjs.com/> Javascript library for manipulating maps

⁶ <https://www.scipy.org/>

⁷ [Burning Chrome by William Gibson](#)

Behavioural and Communication Interventions

My own, admittedly anecdotal, view is that the current set of interventions haven't made that much difference. They've cost some money in consultancy though. Where they have, they aren't scalable because labour intensive, for example. Some have probably worked via a relative of the Hawthorne Effect⁸.

One thing that did come out of the last set of meetings is that *many people didn't understand that fly-tipping (especially where black bags and small items where concerned) was both anti-social and illegal*. They also didn't know that large item pickups, for example, were free and bookable (but possibly too complicated or not accessible for digitally deprived). So there is probably some mileage in well-designed, *non-Orwellian* persistent communication.

Here, in no particular order, are some of my current/other ideas, given that I am totally against 'litter heroes' and other unpaid emotional blackmail/tokenism. Newham needs work and prosperity. In fact, Newham, which has always been 'comms heavy' now needs *De-Orwellisation*.

Night of Heavy Objects

This used to be used extensively in France. One night per month in each suburb (not in the centre, I believe) was designated as the 'nuit des objets lourds' and people could put out bits of furniture, fridges and bulky items for pickup. As above, this also led to informal recycling, I furnished my first studio flat in 1977 from pickings made in the richer, West side, of Paris.

It's actually worth having a look at Paris generally, they are generally a great deal more systematic⁹ I haven't had a look at DansMaRue but I suspect it is less of a mess than Love Newham.

Mobile Web or Specific App: Rewards

Worth considering mobile web (hence no 'app' download, people, including myself, are justifiably suspicious of these) or, at least, a simpler, non-registration or optional registration, single use app for reporting. Also, and I have mixed (ethical) feelings about this, look at gamification, scoring and possibly reward. Maidenhead used to do recycling rewards for example¹⁰, but the 'rewards' were more consumer goods, pretty ridiculous. I wrote about this, ten years ago, in more detail here¹¹.

8 [Hawthorne Effect and its controversies/associated ideas](#)

9 [Paris Cleaning Pages \(in French, use Google Translate\)](#)

10 [Maidenhead recycling rewards from 2010](#)

11 [Two Essays](#)

Rubbish as Wider Problem

The truth is, Newham is *one of the most littered, trash filled boroughs that I have seen*. I moved back from France in 1997, first to Hackney and then to Limehouse in Tower Hamlets. Both of these boroughs are 'poor', though Hackney (I have this from a Cambridge statistical geographer) is actually rather well-educated. Newham feels like the worst of these.

So rather than specifically fly-tipping, there needs to be a general campaign that includes fly-tipping as an important subset. Communication and financial blackmail about the actual cost, both in removal and externalities (folks won't spend, take leases or start businesses in Trashville). School level communication too, start them off 'right'.

Litter heroes and other bits of tokenism are post-hoc and probably actually amplify the problem. After all, if middle class, tut-tutting idiots are going to pick it up, *we may as well drop it*, eh?

Start doing some forensics too, QR and date/timestamps on chicken boxes, so that folks are not tempted to drop them. Also they signal that the borough is 'getting serious'.

Because of street and pavement (which may be illegal in some cases, width of passage) parking, some roads are never cleaned properly. So, as in the US, clear an odd and even side every week or month to clean.

Enough already, I think this point is made.

Honesty Eyes

This is a 2006 study about honesty boxes. It used a complete cut-out cardboard policeman, but they found that a picture of eyes worked pretty well too¹². So it may work on some of the places identified by the data that may (or probably will not) be provided.

Mobile CCTV

With good timely data, motion activated and (even) ANPR camera can go temporarily into hotspots, no need to put them everywhere in the borough.

CCTV Stickers

There's nothing wrong with lying about the CCTV and putting a sticker into the hotspots, without necessarily putting a camera there. Better than 'crime scene' tape etc. that like 'litter heroes' and 'environmental crime' stickers is all post-hoc activity.

12 [Eyes above Honesty Boxes](#)

Reusing Newham Signs

The ugly SRW epoch 'work, live and stay' (which are not factual, I've been tempted to report them to the ASA) can be repurposed as public information (and maybe public, limited wifi APs) signs. Again, France and Singapore does this very well.



Conclusion

Nope. There's no conclusion, just a possible project which requires continuous effort, trial and error, open data and progress reporting. The patchy, piecemeal, and post-hoc current approach just isn't working, is it?

Hugh Barnard July 2021