The problem

The monthly Street food event held at Haddenham village hall generates a lot of waste, both in food, and waste from vendors who sell food in disposable pots.

The solution

The Zero Waste Street Food project wanted to improve recycling through offering a recycling/waste station, and also by encouraging vendors and the bar at the village hall to use reusable options.

Recycling

-All normal bins/recycling bins removed.
-Replaced with two 'waste stations' indoors and out, staffed by a volunteer to advise.
-Separate containers for individual waste streams clearly labelled, rather than just a bin for 'recycling'.

Reusables

-Talked to the traders to see if they would hand out reusable serve-ware to 'eat in' customers rather than their standard disposable packaging.
-Encouraged them to provide a stock of our metal forks for people to help themselves, rather than offering wooden ones
-Supplied the bar with reusable glasses to replace their stock of disposable vegware glasses.

The results

Recycling

-We regularly collected c. 6 kg of food waste that would have gone either into general waste (most likely) or contaminated the recycling.
-We were able to hugely improve the collection of things like pizza boxes for recycling, as most aren't aware they can be recycled
-Contamination of unsupervised recycling bins is a major issue for the venue – we were able to ensure it remained uncontaminated
-A significant increase in the amount of recycling collected, although difficult to quantify

Reusables

-Proved it is possible to do street food without disposables, and raised awareness of the issues with even 'eco-friendly' disposables
-Sample numbers from one event (May), 135 forks, 40 bowls, 58 plates and c. 250 glasses washed up

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Issues noted

Recycling

-Having to have a volunteer in place by the bins is very labour intensive. Clear labelling helps, but is not enough!

-Identification of the containers used by different traders: they use a variety of disposable serve-ware, much of it not labelled to indicate disposal method

-Industrially compostable serve-ware is popular with traders as it is marketed as eco-friendly, but frustratingly there is no viable route for it to be collected for composting

Reusables

-Stocks of both glasses and trays diminished rapidly, some due to breakage, but mostly because they still look disposable. For the project to be viable long term (and not generate more, rather than less waste) we would need items that are very clearly reusable (eg thick plastic glasses, ideally labelled as returnable)

-Traders use a huge variety of different formats of serve-ware, which we can't match, so our solution works better for some than for others.

-The need to ask whether people are eating in adds complication for the traders

-When they get busy, they tend to revert to their standard MO

Conclusions

Recycling

-given the difficulty with different types of container, and the fact that many of them will be contaminated with food residue anyway, the project reinforced our belief that reusables are the way forward! However, for things like glass bottles, a clearly labelled bin saying 'glass only' would be a better solution than a general recycling bin. Where pizzas are served, reusables would be impractical to implement, but collection for recycling could be quite easily managed.

Reusables

switching over to reusables will not be easy, but we will keep trying. The event organiser has agreed to a trial 'zero waste' event, where traders will be asked to serve all eat-in customers only with reusable serve-ware.

Further impact

The project inspired the organisers of the Winterfest and Summerfest beer festivals to work on improving recycling (and in the long run consider a switch to reusable serve-ware).

We have taken the reusables and food waste collection to other events, such as the HYFC Festival of Football.

There are also early-stage discussions of a community composting scheme that could handle food waste from around the village as well as industrially compostable containers.

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