

Waste not, want not

Genny Bove

Freeconomy Wrexham held its second Bring and Take event on 11 May. Putting up posters locally and delivering leaflets to homes and schools in the area definitely paid off; lots of people from the Brynteg area came along to find out more and went home laden with useful things, all for free. Bring and Take is a great thing to do - really happy and hopeful. We'd recommend it to anyone!

By quarter to ten, people are starting to gather at the door of the Brynteg Memorial Hall. Our day began a couple of hours ago. We've already been to the warehouse, loaded up the van with our 'stock', unloaded it into the hall, put out dozens of tables and chairs, organised the refreshments and we're just about ready for a cuppa and some cake. We're all set, so we throw open the doors a few minutes early; everyone pours in and starts rummaging, while we take a breather and watch the fun unfold.



There's an excited buzz in the air and a lot of happy, smiling faces. A woman who has recently been rehoused after being homeless collects all sorts of things for her new flat and the Community Service team sorts out delivery for her. Someone's found just the outfit they need for a fancy dress party. A couple of keen scouts have discovered camping mats under a table, while at the other end of the hall a group of children are cramming their carrier bags with clothes. Toys are being unpacked and tested on the tables in the kids' area, and a boy poses with a guitar. People keep arriving with donations of goods, and leaving with more. A warm glow of bonhomie pervades.

We ask a few people what they think about the event:

Freeconomy really works - people bringing and taking in equal measure, helping the community, the environment and each other. It's really good.

Brilliant idea. Long overdue. Thank you.

I think this is an excellent idea. Save the planet!

This is the way things should be: local and without commercialism.

Although the majority of people at the event today have walked from their homes, some have come from further afield. One man from Deeside says he had to come along and see what it was all about because he just couldn't imagine how something so totally non-commercial could work. He seems to have found a lot of useful things and is now very enthusiastic.

At the end of the day, we realise just how much of the stuff has found new homes. Even though donations have been arriving throughout, we have a good number of empty cardboard boxes, and less to take back to the warehouse, which is a relief. As the boxes of bric-a-brac are being carried out to the van, three little girls arrive. They look crestfallen that they've missed the event, but we give them each a carrier bag and they spend ten minutes happily sorting through the boxes on the pavement for trinkets.

In stark contrast, happiness and goodwill are in very short supply at the household 'recycling' site just down the road. Read on...



FUTURE BRING AND TAKE DAYS

Saturday 5 July, 10 am to 1 pm
Church of the Nazarene
Stryt Issa, Penycae

Saturday 12 July, 11 am to 4 pm
Caia Environment Day
Gwenfro School Field
Queensway, Caia Park

Bad Chair Day at the Skips

The facts are fairly straightforward, although whenever I recount the tale, my listener's jaw drops. "They did **what?**" But the authorities are deadly serious. This is what happened:

- Fri 2 May. While doing my recycling at Lodge household 'recycling' centre, I spot four good plastic garden chairs in the skip destined for landfill and decide to remove them so that they can be re-used.
- When challenged by the Waste Recycling Group (WRG) skip worker and his supervisor, I refuse to put them back because to do so will condemn these chairs to landfill, where they will poison the earth and the air, a real and far greater risk to human life than the hypothetical risk that, according to WRG, the chairs may be faulty and cause an injury.
- WRG discusses the matter with Wrexham Council and between them they decide to report me to the police for theft of said chairs.
- The police generously offer to get it all sorted out nice and quickly with a caution, but I refuse on the grounds that I don't think I'm guilty of theft, a serious offence carrying a maximum penalty of seven years in jail.
- The police decide it's in the public interest to invest their time and resources on the case, time and resources which - to date - include

two home visits by a police officer; an interview with an officer and sergeant at local police station; one arrest; a taped interview under caution with an officer from Coedpoeth police station at the main police station - incurring travel time and costs; photograph, DNA and fingerprints taken and filed; setting bail (four times so far); preparation of a file for the Crown Prosecution Service; collating video/audio evidence from media reports; loads of paperwork too, I guess.

- The police work also very nearly includes: obtaining a warrant to search my house and garden because, with not even a hint of irony, "we have to recover the stolen goods and return them to their rightful owner" (so they can go back in the landfill skip, presumably); setting up a video identity parade; bringing the sergeant down from Coedpoeth police station to record me reading out my typed and signed statement which apparently is not in acceptable format. Luckily, with a little persuasion they wisely abandon these additional policing tasks.

For me, the real issue is not whether I'm allowed to take good stuff out of a skip, but why the council is allowing good, re-usable things to be put into skips in the first place. The waste 'hierarchy', as described in the Regional Waste Plan and other council waste documentation, places a clear

priority on re-using waste items wherever possible; only items that cannot be re-used should be considered for recycling, recovery or disposal. How is it that Wrexham council is signed up to this plan, yet fails to provide any re-use facilities? Worse still, its recycling 'agents' WRG are actively preventing people from re-using, and reporting them for theft. Bikes that arrive at the skips are thrown into the metal recycling when they could be given to children who can't afford a bike of their own. Good furniture is sent to be turned into wood chip. Plastic chairs are sent to landfill. Shame on Wrexham Council.

The case also highlights the thorny question of how North Wales Police sets its policing priorities. It appears that, where discretion and common sense might once have prevailed, we now have a policing culture where every minor alleged infringement is pursued to hit government targets.

Last but not least, there's the huge issue of where the plastic to make our garden chairs comes from. No wars for plastic chairs!

Postscript: On 2 July, I should find out if I'm being charged. The chairs have been removed to a place of safety and I hope that they can have a long and useful life in someone's garden once all the fuss has died down. I've also been given a nice set of four matching cushions.

