

WASTE AUDIT

Main Site

Monday 2 June 2025



Waste Audit

Introduction

We produce a substantial amount of waste every year from all our sites in Oxford. Waste is a global problem and has a devastating impact on the environment. It exacerbates climate change and threatens habitats, wildlife and public health. Wadham is committed to avoiding, reducing, reusing and recycling materials wherever possible. We all need to play our part by reducing waste where possible and recycling correctly.

Any of our waste that is not recycled is incinerated to turn it into energy, but it is better for the environment if we reduce waste as much as possible and recycle everything we can. Oxford City Council has reported that it experiences significant recycling contamination, leading to the rejection of approximately 3,000 recycling bins each month. When contaminated, recycling waste has to also be incinerated.

According to the Energy Saving Trust, humans waste an estimated 1.3 billion tonnes of food every year - around one third of all food produced for human consumption. To combat the climate emergency and help protect our environment, we all need to reduce the amount of food we waste. Where food waste is unavoidable, we need to put it in the food waste bins so that it can be taken to an anaerobic digestion plant near Oxford where it is processed to produce methane gas to generate renewable energy.

We are committed to reducing our waste year-on-year, reducing recyclable materials and food in our general waste to as close to 0% as possible, and undertaking waste audits to monitor progress. We will issue a report on our waste in Michaelmas Term 2025.

Wadham's first internal waste audit took place on Monday 2 June 2025 with fantastic support from the Housekeeping Team. The aim of the audit was to review our waste practices and understand whether any actions are needed. The audit provided valuable data. It is clear that more effort is needed to reduce our waste and improve our recycling.

This document provides a summary of the findings and recommendations. It is also designed to act as a resource to others thinking about undertaking a waste audit.

Frances Lloyd, Director of Sustainability

KEY FINDINGS

In the general waste we found:

- The equivalent of 17 bags of recyclable waste, which represented around 40% of the general waste
- 30kg of food waste
- Edible food including fruit, salad, vegetables, biscuits, cereals and sweets
- 8 items of clothing
- Vapes and batteries
- Usable items such as unopened plasters, face masks and makeup
- Unused coffee pods



In the waste to be recycled we found:

10 bags containing contaminated recycling, i.e. items that cannot be recycled.



Vapes and batteries can be recycled at the Lodge. Non-perishable foods, including rice/pasta, canned foods, cereals, biscuits, tea/coffee, sugar and spices, can be left in the boxes for a local food bank at the end of term. Unwanted items, including clothing, shoes, books, homewares, unopened plasters and face masks, can be left in the charity donation boxes at the end of term.

COMMON RECYCLABLE NON-FOOD ITEMS FOUND IN THE GENERAL WASTE

- Paper and paper bags
- Plastic cups, bottles and tubs
- Cardboard
- Tin cans
- Foil trays
- Plastic bags
- Glass
- Non-greasy/soiled cardboard
- Cardboard sandwich packaging

These items should be placed in the recycling bin.



COMMON FOOD WASTE FOUND IN THE GENERAL WASTE

- Leftover takeaway food, including pizza, noodles, pasta, burgers, sandwiches, chips and rice
- Bread
- Fruit and vegetables
- Yoghurt
- Out-of-date food
- Egg shells

All food waste should be removed from packaging and placed in the food waste bin.



COMMON CONTAMINATION FOUND IN THE RECYCLING WASTE

- Food waste*
- Takeaway coffee cups^
- Paper towels^
- Sheets of toilet roll^
- Tissues^
- Paper napkins^
- Blue roll^
- Black bags^
- Greasy/soiled cardboard, such as the bottom section of a pizza box^
- Plastic and glass bottles containing liquids~
- Food in plastic and cardboard containers~
- Soiled tins~
- Food in glass jars~

Key:

*Food waste should be placed in the food waste bin.

^Should be put in the general waste bin.

~Should be emptied, cleaned and placed in the recycling bin.



NEXT STEPS

- Explore more opportunities to reduce waste, such as reducing packaging and other materials.
- Identify ways to reuse more materials onsite.
- Find more opportunities for usable items to be donated.
- Develop a plan, with input from staff and student representatives, to improve recycling efforts.
- Continue to work with staff and students to reduce, reuse and recycle.
- Undertake a further audit in the 2025/26 academic year to compare the findings.

AUDIT METHODOLOGY

- Waste audit team: Director of Sustainability, Head of Housekeeping, Deputy Housekeeper and Housekeeping Supervisor, with support from all the General Assistants and Scouts.
- The waste audit was completed on a Monday to capture the weekend waste. Most waste was from accommodation areas.
- The Webb Quad was identified as the most convenient place to undertake the waste audit due to its location near many staircases, visibility, and proximity to the area where the waste leaves the site - Savile Road entrance. The weather was checked prior to the audit.
- Items for the audit: Table, safety gloves, whiteboard, pens, camera, list of staircases/buildings, food waste bin, recycling bags, general waste bags and two large sheets to lay on the grass for the waste audit team to work on when checking each bag.
- All the general and recycling waste bags were labelled as they were collected from each building. Members of the Housekeeping Team brought all the bags to the Webb Quad to be checked.
- Recyclable waste found in the general waste bags was taken out and placed in front of the whiteboard indicating the staircase/building it had come from. A photograph was taken of the items and then they were placed in recycling bags.
- Food waste found in the general waste bags was taken out, photographed and put in food waste bags.
- Contamination found in recycling bags was removed by the audit team where possible.
- All the recyclable waste found in the general waste bags (equivalent to 17 bags) was photographed at the end of the audit.
- The audit took 18 person hours to complete.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE NEXT AUDIT

- Ask the SU and MCR for support.
- Spot check general waste and recycling bags to reduce the time to complete the waste audit.
- Add weighing scales to the list of items to be available for the audit team.

Huge thanks to the Housekeeping Team for supporting the waste audit.