



Recycle right:

HOW BETTER RECYCLING SYSTEMS CAN REDUCE COSTS,
COMPLAINTS AND OPERATIONAL HEADACHES



The compliance deadline has passed.

NOW THE REAL WORK BEGINS.





Simpler Recycling came into force in March 2025. Most hospitality venues scrambled to get something in place. Bins were ordered, waste streams were labelled, boxes were ticked.

Except for many hospitality operations, the compliance rush created a new set of problems. Systems were designed to satisfy a regulation, not survive a busy hotel or restaurant. Equipment was bought on price, not durability, and it's already showing. Recycling arrangements that look fine on paper are generating contamination surcharges nobody budgeted for, and staff who were trained once in the spring have long since reverted to old habits.

And with Digital Waste Tracking becoming mandatory in October 2026 and plastic film packaging segregation required from March 2027, your current system is about to come under scrutiny it may not be ready for.

This guide is for Operations Managers and Executive Housekeepers who would rather fix that now than explain it later.

IN THIS GUIDE, YOU'LL FIND:

-  The hidden operational costs of poorly designed recycling systems in hospitality.
-  What the next regulatory deadlines mean for your venue.
-  A practical framework for auditing and improving your waste management.
-  Real results from hospitality venues that got it right.



The Regulatory Roadmap

COMPLIANCE ISN'T A DESTINATION. IT'S A MOVING TARGET.

The standard landfill tax rate rose in April 2026 to:

£130.75 per tonne*

*Source: GOV.UK

Simpler Recycling was the start of a regulatory shift, not the end of one. The direction of travel is clear, and two more milestones are fast approaching.

OCTOBER 2026: DIGITAL WASTE TRACKING BECOMES MANDATORY.

All permitted and licensed waste receiving sites must record and report waste movements through a centralised government digital platform, replacing paper-based waste transfer notes. For hospitality venues, this creates something new: an auditable, real-time digital record of your waste, including its origin, classification and destination.

If your contamination rates are high, your data quality is poor, or your waste streams are inconsistently managed, that will show up in timestamped, auditable records that regulators can access in real time.

31 MARCH 2027: PLASTIC FILM PACKAGING MUST BE SEPARATELY COLLECTED.

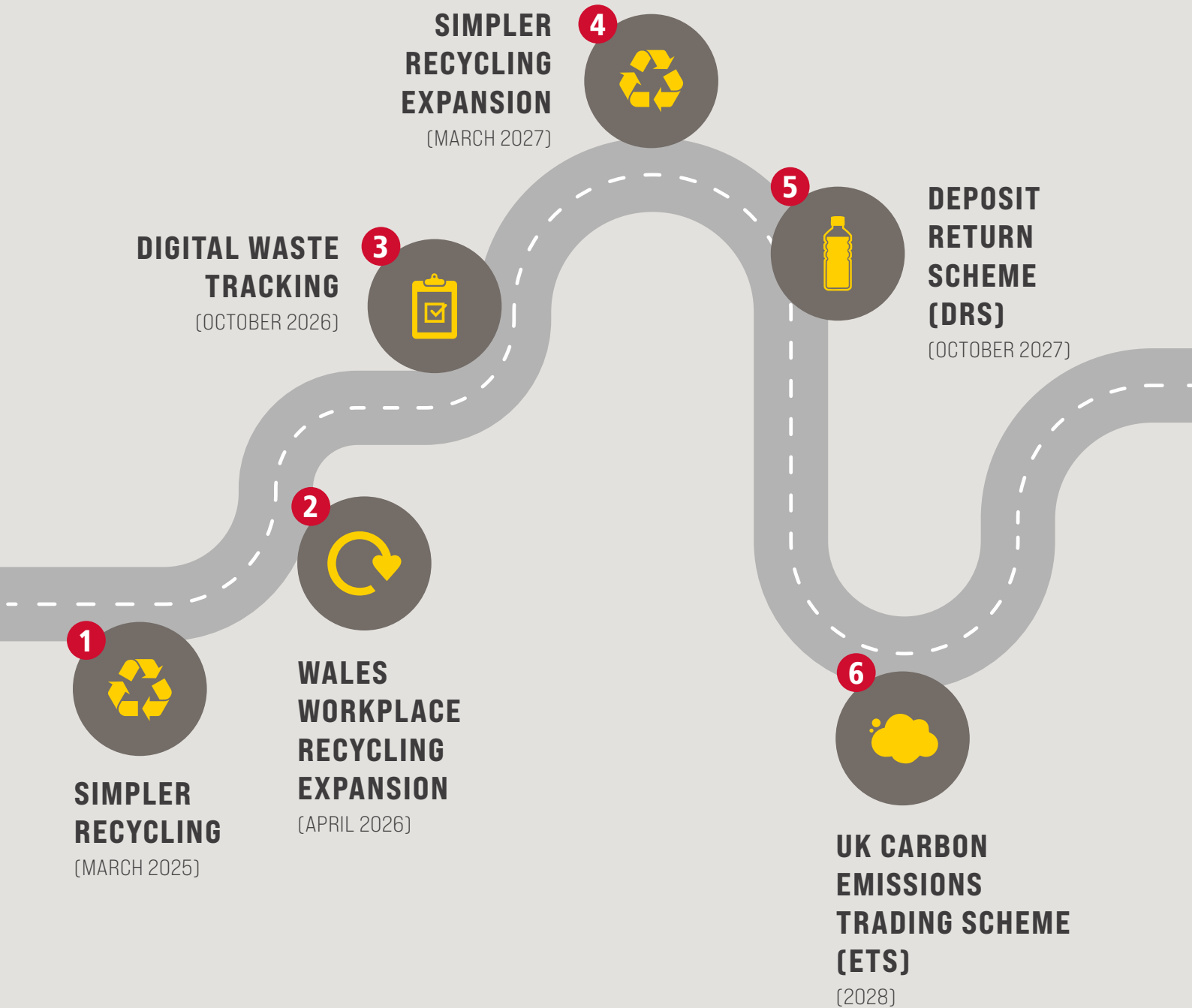
For hospitality operations, this is significant. Laundry wrapping, amenity packaging, cleaning supply packaging, kitchen cling film: all of it becomes a legally mandated separate waste stream. Housekeeping departments alone generate substantial volumes of plastic film, and yet most hospitality venues haven't begun to quantify it, let alone plan for it.

Tip: The plastic film mandate is one of the most underestimated challenges currently facing hospitality operations. Housekeeping is likely your biggest generator and most venues haven't started planning. Use the 2027 deadline as a prompt to audit your entire waste management. You're likely to find other problems worth fixing at the same time.

Taken together, these deadlines don't just raise the compliance bar. They increase the visibility of how well, or how poorly, your waste infrastructure is actually performing.



Recycling Legislation Roadmap



1



SIMPLER RECYCLING

All businesses in England with 10 or more full-time employees must now separate different waste streams on site, prior to collection from a waste contractor. These waste streams are food, mixed recycling (glass, plastics, metals), paper and card, and general waste.

2



WALES WORKPLACE RECYCLING EXPANSION

Wales' workplace recycling rules apply to NHS and private hospitals. In addition, all workplaces need to recycle small electricals (items with a plug, battery or cable which measures 50cm or less on every side) from this date.

3



DIGITAL WASTE TRACKING

All businesses with a permit or licence to receive waste will be required to log movement and disposal of waste in an online platform to help crack down on waste crimes like fly-tipping.

4



SIMPLER RECYCLING EXPANSION

Simpler Recycling will also apply to 'micro-firms' with fewer than 10 full-time employees. All businesses will need to separate plastic film and plastic bags in addition to the existing waste streams introduced in 2025.

5



DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME (DRS)

Businesses who produce or sell bottled / canned drinks will need to provide a refundable deposit on recyclable single-use drinks containers, including plastic bottles and metal cans.

6



UK CARBON EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME (ETS)

Waste incineration and energy-from-waste industries will be included in the ETS, meaning they will be subject to a cap on carbon emissions. This may cause the cost of incinerating non-recyclable waste to increase.

The cost of getting it wrong

INEFFECTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT RARELY ANNOUNCES ITSELF. IT JUST QUIETLY DRAINS.

Here's the thing about a poorly designed recycling system: its costs rarely appear as a single line in your P&L. They're absorbed into the working day through contamination surcharges, the time housekeeping spends correcting guest errors, and the slow bleed of reputation damage that nobody's properly attributed to the bins in the corridor.

But they're real. And in a sector where margins are tight and guest perception is everything, they add up.

CONTAMINATION AND SURCHARGES

One misplaced item can compromise an entire waste stream, turning careful separation into costly contamination. Your waste contractor will notice before you do, and the penalty comes straight off your operational budget. As separation requirements tighten and Digital Waste Tracking creates better data for enforcement, tolerance for contamination is only going to decrease.

PEAK SERVICE BREAKDOWN

When a restaurant hits 80 covers on a Saturday night, or housekeeping is turning 50 rooms before a conference check-in, waste sorting compliance is the first thing that goes. Staff default to the nearest bin, regardless of what it's labelled for. Systems that can't hold up under real operating conditions aren't systems. They're suggestions.

GUEST CONTAMINATION

International visitors, families on holiday, conference delegates who don't know or don't care. Guest rooms and public areas are contamination hotspots. And unlike a warehouse, you can't train your end users. Your system has to work despite guest behaviour, not because of it.

REPUTATION AND GUEST PERCEPTION

Overflowing bins in a corridor. Mismatched containers in a lobby. A TripAdvisor review that mentions the state of your waste management. In hospitality, appearance is everything, and waste management that looks chaotic undermines the experience you've worked to create.

THE COST OF BUYING CHEAP

Procurement decisions made under compliance pressure in early 2025 are already coming home. Bins cracking. Lids jamming. Equipment that looked fine in a catalogue but can't survive a hospitality environment. The upfront saving disappears quickly. The replacement costs don't.



The solution

HOW TO BUILD A RECYCLING SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR HOSPITALITY

Whether it's food waste from the restaurant, cardboard from deliveries, glass from the bar, or packaging from housekeeping, hospitality operations produce recyclable waste constantly, across multiple areas, multiple shifts, and spaces that range from a five-star lobby to a loading bay. Getting it right means building a system designed for how your venue actually operates, not how an auditor expects it to.

The difference between a recycling system that merely exists and one that performs comes down to a handful of decisions. Get these right and waste management stops being a compliance cost and starts delivering genuine returns.

FIND OUT WHERE THINGS ARE FAILING FIRST

Before changing anything, you need to know what's actually happening. That's where a waste walk comes in: a systematic, physical tour of your venue that maps waste generation points, identifies where contamination is occurring, and surfaces the gaps between what your system is supposed to do and what it's actually doing. Most venues haven't done one properly, and the ones that have almost always find something they didn't expect.

On average, recycling rates can be improved by

30% when effective multi-stream recycling is implemented*

*Source: RCP Recycling Audit Tool

Tip: Schedule your waste walk during a typical busy period, a Friday night dinner service or a full-house check-in day, not a quiet Tuesday. You want to see the system under real operating conditions, because that's when the problems show up. Take photos, note volumes, and talk to the people using the bins every day. Frontline insight is often more useful than any audit report.





CHOOSE THE RIGHT SOLUTION FOR EACH AREA

Different spaces in your venue have different waste profiles, and your recycling provision needs to reflect that. In busy communal areas like staff rooms, kitchens and back-of-house corridors, centralised multi-stream recycling stations and large containers handle high volumes and multiple waste types in one place. In areas where staff work individually, such as housekeeping routes or room service corridors, smaller individual bins positioned at the point of use keep recycling within the workflow rather than adding extra steps to it. The key is matching the right bins, in the right sizes, to the right locations.

MAKE IT EASY TO GET RIGHT

The single biggest driver of contamination isn't bad intentions. It's unclear systems. Colour-coded bins and stations with visual signage rather than text-heavy instructions reduce the cognitive load on everyone using them. In sites with multilingual staff, image-led labelling is essential. It removes the guesswork at the point of disposal. RCP's Label Customisation Portal lets you tailor your labelling to your specific venue, featuring icons that match how your guests and staff actually use each area.

INVEST IN QUALITY THAT LASTS

Recycling infrastructure in a hospitality environment is not office equipment. It needs to withstand constant use, heavy footfall and regular cleaning. Bins that aren't built for that will fail, and the long-run cost of replacements, contamination penalties and maintenance time can invariably exceed the cost of buying better from the outset. Modular systems with bins of different sizes give you the flexibility to configure each area to its needs, and reconfigure as legislation changes what you're collecting, without requiring wholesale replacement.



Waste walk first: Physically audit your venue during a busy period to map waste generation and find where your current system is breaking down.



Right solution, right place: Centralised stations for busy communal areas; individual bins at the point of use where staff work alone.



Clear labelling: Colour-coded, image-led signage removes ambiguity and cuts cross-contamination, especially with international guests.



Match product to area: The lobby, the kitchen, the loading bay and the spa all have different needs; use bins and stations of different sizes to serve each one properly.



Invest in durability: Equipment built for hospitality environments costs less over its lifetime than cheap alternatives replaced repeatedly.

HOW TO CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL WASTE WALK



TRACK YOUR BASELINE:

Establish your current recycling rates and disposal costs before you start. You can't demonstrate improvement without a starting point, and you'll need the numbers to make the case internally.



MAP YOUR VENUE:

List every area that generates waste, from guest rooms to kitchens to conference spaces, and mark key collection points on a site plan before you walk.



AUDIT DURING PEAK OPERATIONS:

Visit during a typical busy period to see the system under real conditions, not best-case ones.



TALK TO YOUR PEOPLE:

Housekeepers, kitchen staff and front-of-house teams see what the system is actually doing. Their observations are often more accurate than any formal reporting.



RECORD EVERYTHING:

Photograph problem areas, note volumes and waste types, and document where contamination is occurring.

WHAT ACTING NOW ACTUALLY DELIVERS

The venues that act now have a clear advantage: they fix the current problems on their terms, not under deadline pressure. They go into Digital Waste Tracking with clean data, not excuses. And they stop absorbing the hidden costs that have been quietly building since the 2025 compliance rush.

Multi-stream recycling has been shown to help hotels:

reduce waste management costs by:

32%

and improve recycling rates by:

30%*

*Source: RCP Recycling Audit Tool

Success stories

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT WORKS

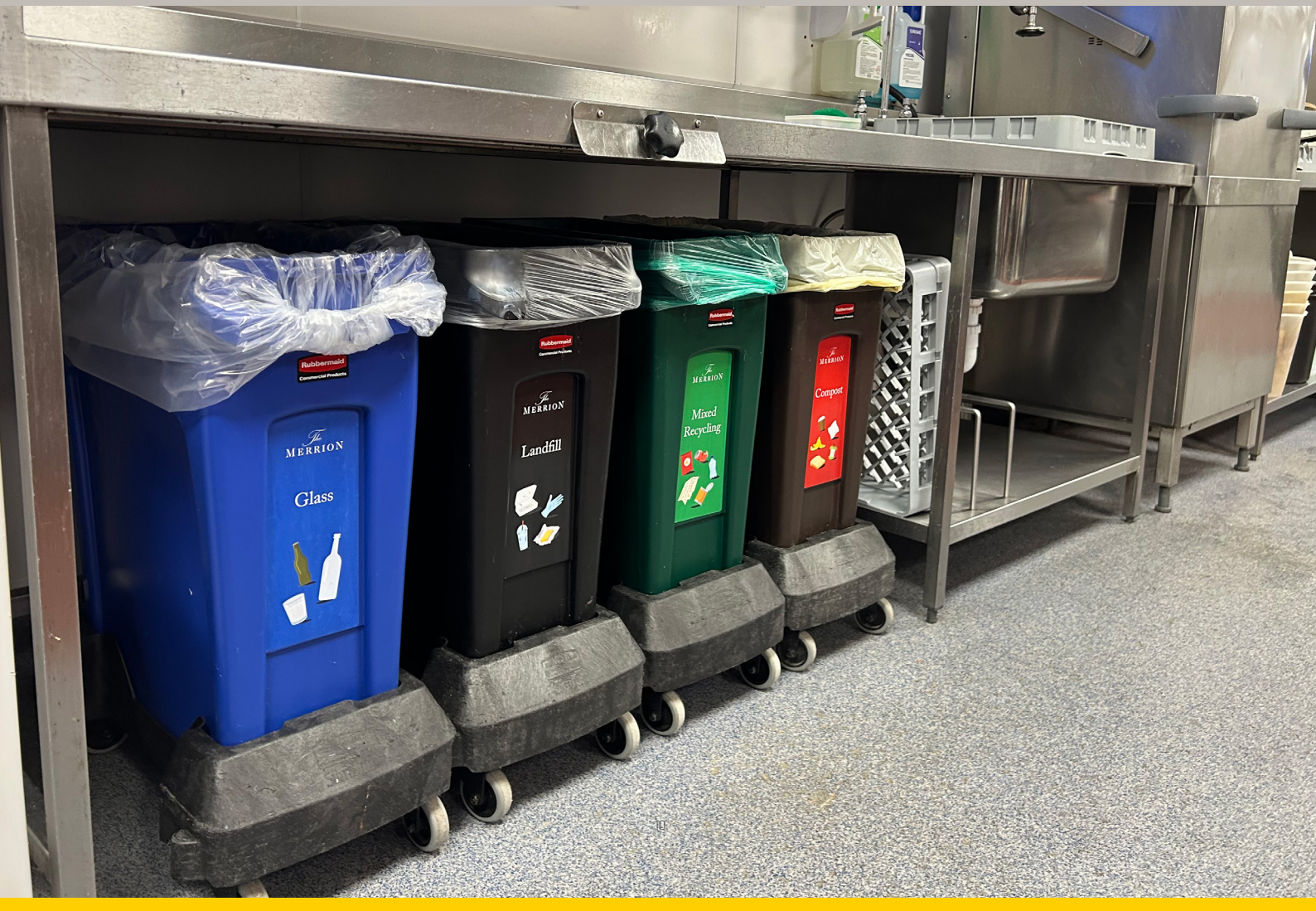
THE MERRION HOTEL: A UNIFIED SYSTEM THAT CHANGED THE CULTURE.

The Merrion, a five-star hotel in Dublin, was struggling with a disjointed waste management system: different containers, inconsistent signage and employees who found recycling guidelines overly complex. Waste disposal costs were rising and the hotel's ambitious target of becoming a zero-waste operation by 2025 was stalling.

After partnering with RCP, The Merrion replaced its patchwork system with unified, colour-coded bins and stations featuring consistent labelling throughout the hotel. But the equipment was only part of the solution. The hotel developed a Level 1 Zero Waste training programme built around the new bins and labelling, and within two months, over 70% of the workforce had completed it. The result was a 13% increase in recycling rate, bringing The Merrion to 74% overall.

"Our holistic approach, encompassing equipment upgrades, staff training, and process optimisation, has transformed our waste management practices. By creating a supportive environment for recycling, we have not only reduced our environmental impact but also achieved substantial financial benefits."

Marcin Sady, Head of Procurement and Sustainability, The Merrion Hotel





THE VALE RESORT: RECYCLING COMPLIANCE, CLEANING EFFICIENCY AND A PATH TO GREEN KEY.

When Wales introduced commercial recycling rules in April 2024, the Vale Resort, a 143-room luxury hotel with a spa, golf course and multiple restaurants, used it as an opportunity to go beyond box-ticking. Working with RCP, they implemented multi-stream recycling with dual-language labels and clear symbols across the entire venue, and educated both employees and guests.

The changes moved the Vale Resort closer than ever to Green Key accreditation.

“RCP’s expertise in the hospitality environment, particularly in recycling and waste management, was a significant factor as to why we chose them for our product solutions. The Vale Resort is renowned for best-in-class guest experience and RCP’s products help us to achieve the high-end look that matches our facility.”

Procurement Manager, The Vale Resort

Speak to one of our recycling experts

READY TO GET A CLEAR PICTURE OF WHERE YOUR VENUE STANDS?

A waste walk costs nothing. And the data they generate gives you a clear, evidence-based starting point, whether you're preparing for Digital Waste Tracking, getting ahead of the 2027 plastic film requirement, or simply want to know what your current system is actually costing you.

We work with hospitality operations across the UK to improve waste infrastructure and deliver the kind of results you've just read about. If you'd like to talk through where your venue stands, get in touch.



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Tip: Not sure where to start? Ask about a waste walk. It's a structured, no-commitment audit of your current provision that gives you an honest picture of where things are working, where they're not, and what fixing them would realistically deliver.



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