



**Report To:** Climate & Environment Advisory  
Committee

20 September 2018

**Lead Officer:** Mike Hill, Director Housing & Environmental Services

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## **Avoidable Single-Use Plastics at South Cambridgeshire DC**

### **Purpose**

1. To brief Climate & Environment Advisory Committee (CEAC) on the use of avoidable single-use plastics and opportunities to reduce their use at South Cambridgeshire DC.

### **Recommendations**

2. That CEAC discuss this matter and make recommendations to Cabinet on action that could be taken to reduce the use of avoidable single-use plastics at South Cambridgeshire DC.

### **Background**

3. During Summer 2018, Mariana Vicente, a student from Cambourne Village College, undertook a research project into the use of avoidable single-use plastics at South Cambridgeshire District Council. Her report is attached at Appendix 1.
4. Following discussion of this research with the Chair of CEAC, work has been undertaken by officers to identify opportunities to reduce and eliminate the use of avoidable single-use plastics within the Council. A verbal update will be provided to Committee meeting by the Head of Facilities Management, but opportunities explored include:
  - (a) Ending use of single-use plastics in meeting rooms and the Council Chamber and replacing plastic containers with glasses.
  - (b) Phasing out single-use plastic cutlery and drink bottle sales in the canteen and vending machines, to be replaced by drinks in aluminium cans that can be more easily recycled with a higher recyclate value.
  - (c) Introducing improved recycling facilities across Cambourne and Waterbeach offices by replacing desk bins with a number of recycling and waste stations on each floor and in main meeting rooms.
  - (d) Replacing current disposable coffee-machine cups with products more easily recycled or re-used.

### **Considerations**

5. The report at Appendix 1 includes consultations with SCDC staff on the impact of reducing or eliminating avoidable single-use plastics from use with Cambourne and Waterbeach. Overall staff welcomed the idea and felt there would be little or no adverse impact from such an initiative.

6. It has been identified that some wheelchair users find straws a very useful aid to consuming drinks. As a result, a small stock of disposable straws will be retained at SCDC for use on request. These straws will not be made generally available to staff and visitors.

### **Options**

7. CEAC can make recommendations to Cabinet on this matter, amending and adding to the issues discussed in the report at Appendix 1 as agreed.

### **Implications**

8. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

#### ***Financial***

9. The options researched so far can be delivered with existing budgets and officer time.

#### ***Legal***

10. Discussion have taken place with suppliers within current contracts to support delivering change on this issue.

#### ***Equality and Diversity***

11. As noted in para 6 above.

#### ***Climate Change***

12. Reducing the use of avoidable single-use plastics will contribute to improving the global environment.

### **Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)**

13. Consultation was undertaken with staff across Cambourne and Waterbeach offices who supported the reduction in use of avoidable single-use plastics.

### **Effect on Strategic Aims**

#### **Aim 1 – Putting the Environment First**

### **Background Papers**

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

No other documents link to this matter.

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# Appendix 1

## Avoidable Single Use Plastics at South Cambridgeshire District Council

Mariana Vicente, Cambourne Village College, July 2018

### 1. What are single use plastics?

Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These items are things like plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.

We produce roughly 300 million tons of plastic each year and half of it is disposable! World-wide only 10-13% of plastic items are recycled. The nature of petroleum based disposable plastic makes it difficult to recycle and they have to add new virgin materials and chemicals to it to do so. Additionally there are a limited number of items that recycled plastic can be used.

Petroleum based plastic is not biodegradable and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds it's way into the ocean. Although plastic will not biodegrade (decompose into natural substance like soil,) it will degrade (break down) into tiny particles after many years. In the process of breaking down, it releases toxic chemicals (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic) which make their way into our food and water supply.

These toxic chemicals are now being found in our bloodstream. And the latest research has linked them to cancer, infertility, birth defects, impaired immunity and many other ailments.

“We produce hundreds of millions of tons of plastic every year, most of which cannot be recycled. It's obvious that we need to use less plastic, move towards sustainable products and services and come up with technology that recycles plastic more efficiently.”

**-Free Plastic Challenge**

“As Highlighted in the BBC Blue Planet 2 series, the consequences of plastic pollution on the marine environment are severe. Once in the ocean, plastic waste injures and kills fish, sea birds, and marine mammals. Marine plastic pollution has impacted at least 267 species worldwide, including 86% of all sea turtle species, 44% of all sea bird species and 43% of all marine mammal species. The impacts include fatalities as a result of ingestion, starvation, suffocation, infection, drowning, and entanglement.”

**-Mendip District Council**

- The 10 most found single use plastic items on European beaches account for 43% of total marine litter
- Fishing gear represents an additional 27% of all marine litter
- The commission is taking action in these two areas, which represent 70% of all marine litter found on Europe's beaches

### -European Commission

## 2. What is national and global “best practise” in reducing the use of such plastics? (Alternatives for single use plastic)

- **Plastic Bags**
  - Carrier bags, keep these in your car so when needed, you won't need to spend money on plastic bags
- **Plastic Straws:** 8.5 billion plastic straws are thrown away each year in UK
  - Steel, glass, paper, bamboo straws
  - Lids on drinks that don't need straws
- **Cotton buds:** the plastic from cotton buds has been discovered in the stomachs of loggerhead turtles and seabirds
  - Earwax drops
  - Clear ear
- **Plastic bottles & coffee cups**
  - Mugs
  - Reusable water bottles (eg. steel)
  - Reusable cups
- **Take-out eating utensils** (food containers, cutlery, stirrers)
  - Carrying reusable cutlery
  - Get packed lunch
- **Flip-flops**
  - These pose a huge hazard to ocean life, instead find yourself some eco-friendly sandals
- **Plastic Toothbrushes**
  - Bamboo toothbrushes
- **Yoghurt and milk plastic containers**
  - Glass jars
- **Microbead exfoliators**
  - Natural alternative
- **Sandwich wrappers**
  - Replace disposable cling film with reusable sandwich wrappers
- **Cigarette butts**
  - Use of electronic cigarettes, to avoid cigarettes being left on the ground

### **3. Which other councils have banned “single use plastics” and how have they done this?**

**Bournemouth council** has pledged to cut the amount of single use plastics used across the town.

Councillors voted unanimously to introduce measures to tackle plastic waste and the threat it causes to the marine and coastal environment.

At the moment, all council-owned catering outlets are using only plastic-free, compostable or biodegradable cups, stirrers and straws.

New segregated waste bins have been introduced along the promenade, in addition to the bins also installed as part of the Pier Approach revamp.

All of this has been backed up by a town-wide awareness campaign to encourage residents and visitors to reduce their reliance on single use plastics.

Instead, people were encouraged to use the Dorset Refill website and app to find water taps where they are able to fill their bottles

**-Daily Echo**

Bournemouth Council ended single use plastic by:

1. Removing plastic straws from Council catering kiosks
2. Council-owned catering outlets only use plastic-free, compostable or biodegradable cups and stirrers
3. Phased out plastic cutlery in Council run catering kiosks
4. Introduced reusable cups in the café and diner outlets
5. Replaced plastic ice cream spoons with wooden ones
6. Participated in the ‘Refill Bottle Scheme’, allowing visitors and residents to refill their own water bottle at Council run premises

**-38 Degrees**

At the moment, South Cambridgeshire District Council spend £20 a month on 2000 plastic cups. That is £240 on 24000 plastic cups every year. We could instead use this money on glass cups for meeting rooms and stationary for staff if required.

**Cornwall Council** are planning to end their use of 'single use plastics' by 2020. They are going to try and do this by having the café staff members stop using plastic cutlery, offer reduced price hot drinks for people with reusable cups, wrap sandwiches in biodegradable paper, and replace bottle water with a self service water cooler. Additionally, they are trying to encourage the residents in Cornwall to this as well by doing the following:

- Using a glass bottle instead of a plastic cup
- Saying no to plastic cutlery and straws
- Sourcing milk in reusable glass bottles
- Having leftovers for lunch
- Using a reusable bag
- Switching cling film for bees wax wraps
- Using a bread maker
- Using a reusable flask or mug to avoid disposable coffee cups
- Buying fruit and vegetables without plastic wrappers (from a market or a veg box scheme)
- When shopping, switching plastic wrapped items for things sold in glass, paper, card or tins
  - Example: switching liquid laundry tablets for washing powder in a cardboard box or squeezey ketchup, oil or mayonnaise for a glass bottle or jar

**Lancaster City Council** launched a new campaign to reduce single use plastics. Members of the working party set up to oversee the campaign, at the stall in Market Square. The city council set up a stall in Lancaster's Market Square to introduce the campaign and talk to members of the public on how they can play their part in tackling the problem. Alongside this, the council created a visual representation of just how many plastic bottles are needlessly thrown away each day, many of which end up in landfill.

The campaign focussed on reducing single use plastic bottles and disposable coffee cups with the simple message of reduce, refill, recycle:

- Reduce – Cut down our use of single use plastic and disposable coffee cups
- Refill – Use a refillable water or coffee mug instead of single use plastic or cups
- Recycle – Plastic bottles are recyclable, make sure you recycle all you can

“The problem is that while you're out and about it's very easy to buy a bottle of water or a takeaway coffee and none of the waste that's thrown away in litter bins is currently recycled.”

“About two thirds of the waste in litter bins is made up of plastic waste and disposable cups so that's a massive amount that has to go to landfill.”

To aid the campaign, the council drew up plans to install water fountains so people can top up their refillable water bottles. Initially these could be on the council's own land in Williamson Park, Happy Mount Park in Morecambe.

Biodegradable coffee cups have also been introduced in Williamson Park and measures have been taken to eliminate the sale of non-recyclable single use take-out cups, slush cups, plastic straws and cutlery. These products have been replaced with fully compostable 'vegware', vegetable oil, paper and bamboo products.

**-Lancaster City Council**

**Cambridge City Council** have become 'single use plastic' free by making sure that hot food and drink traders don't use single use plastics to dispense the food and drink that they sell. Therefore, all traders selling takeaway hot food or drinks must use cardboard or paper based cups, trays, dishes or other packaging for their products. However, the proposals are not seeking to ban, for example, plastic cutlery being provided.

**-Cambridge City Council**

**South Lakeland Council** will become a single use plastic free council by phasing out the use of single use plastic products such as bottles, cups, cutlery and drinking straws in council activities, by the end of 2018 and encourage their facilities' users local businesses and other local public agencies do the same by championing alternatives. Additionally, they plan on promoting the refill scheme, whereby retail businesses agree to free water refills, the app that allows businesses to sign up very easily. Furthermore, they will also have a free water fountain in their reception area and look to have them all around the area, as well as investigating on having locally branded water containers for sale.

**-ALDC**

**Ards & North Down** – single use plastic free since December 2017



**South Lakeland** – to become 'single use plastic' free by the end of the year

**Norwich** – 'single use plastic' free since January 2018

**Cirencester** - 'single use plastics' free since May 2017

**Frome** - Agreed to become 'single use plastic' free in December 2017, 'single use plastic' free since April 2018

**Gloucestershire** - 'single use plastics' free since May 2017

**Cambridge City** – 'single use plastics' free since January 2018

**Mendip** – 'single use plastic' free since April 2018

**Cornwall** - To become 'single use plastic' free by 2020

**Bournemouth** - Voted to become 'single use plastic' free in April 2018

**Lewes** - To be 'single use plastic' free by the end of the year



## Staff Interviews

Interview with Procurement Officer – Sean Missin

13/07/2017

1. What do you do?  
Gets paid to buy things such as stationary, trucks, bins, etc...
2. What kind of plastics do you buy?  
Soft and hard plastics
3. How often do you buy these and how much do they cost?  
9 oz in size  
2p each
4. What contracts with external suppliers do you have?  
Spreadsheet
5. Have you ever thought of replacing plastics? What could we replace them with?  
Yes, with other materials that are durable (long lasting)
6. Are you aware of the environmental affect the use of plastic has on wildlife and the atmosphere? Do you think it is important to make other people aware of these effects? How can we do that?  
Yes, most plastic ends up in the sea where fish ingest it, leading to death.  
Yes, it is important to make other people aware of this so that these events don't expand. We can do this by talking to the external suppliers before we make a contract, for example.
7. Do you think there are any disadvantages of getting rid of plastics? If so, what are they?
8. Why do we use plastics?  
Because they are durable and light. There's no point on replacing bins with steel because they wouldn't be easy to move around as they would be very heavy. Plastic bins are durable and easy to move around

## **Interview with cafeteria staff members**

**16/07/2018**

### **Materials used:**

- China plates
- Stainless steel cutlery
- Ceramic material mugs ( bone china, earthenware, porcelain, stoneware )
- Glass cups are encouraged to be used in the cafeteria
- Margarine tubs are reused once empty and filled up with sandwich fillings
- Tubs / containers are used when people want to take their food up to their desk, for example, as well as for freezing leftovers such as chilli
- Salt and pepper containers placed on the tables are filled up once they have run out, same as the containers used in the kitchen
- Biodegradable coffee cups are used when staff go on trips and they would like to take a drink with them, however this is rarely the case
  - Biodegradable means that a substance / object is capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms, thereby avoiding pollution
- Plastic bottles are sold however these are recycled
- Cling film is mainly used to wrap sandwiches when staff prefer to have their sandwich outside, for example, however if people are having these inside, using a china plate is preferable

### **Suggestions:**

- Polythene sandwich bags, these can be washed after being used
- Maybe using another type of plastic that is easier and quicker to break down
- Brown, paper bags

Whilst looking around the building, I have noticed that many people bring their own mugs and bottles into work which makes it a lot easier to end the use of 'single use plastics' in the Council as this won't affect many people. I have also become aware of some people using their own reusable coffee cups which reduces the use of paper cups being used in the building.

Even though paper cups have a smaller carbon footprint than plastic cups, these still have plastic towards the bottom to avoid leakage. Therefore, if staff could just take their own mugs / reusable coffee cups to the machine when getting a drink, we can reduce the amount of plastic being used.

Another thing that still needs to be taken care of is the use of plastic cups around the building. In general, most people have their own reusable water bottles, however some people still use plastic cups when having water. If people have water bottles with them they won't have to keep standing up to fill them up because a water bottle contains a lot more water, therefore they won't be spending time having to get up. Additionally, this will save the Council money because they won't have to be spending money on plastic cups anymore, instead they can focus on buying more useful things.

Furthermore, I have seen that some people use their plastic cups to store paperclips and many other things. Instead of using these cups, we could use some other things like mugs and reused containers.

**Suggestions:**

- At the moment the council is spending £240 every year on just plastic cups, if we could instead use this money to provide staff with containers where they can store their stationary, people won't have to use plastic cups for these
- Some people, particularly the ones who have lunch upstairs, don't have recycling bins where they can put their rubbish in, therefore they just end up putting it in the nearest bin which is most likely to be a general waste bin, meaning none of this will be recycled. If we could get some recycling bins in each department, it would be easier to get staff members to recycle
- To make it clearer for staff members who don't know much about recycling, it would be a good idea to have pictures on what goes into each bin, to make sure people are recycling correctly

1. What are your thoughts on the council ending its use of 'single use plastics'?

"Good idea"

"I think plastic cups are the big issue, in general we have a good recycling system, we reuse things like plastic wallets"

"I think it will take a long time to do that, it won't happen soon because of all the rubbish I see everywhere"

"It should have happened already!"

"I think it's a great idea, I'm very much into recycling"

"I think it's a good idea, it will help the environment"

"I don't think it's a terrible idea"

"It's a good idea, it will make people aware of the effects plastic has"

"It is a good thing to do because we have to try and reuse things"

"Very positive"

"Good idea, it is inevitable"

"I think it's a good idea"

2. Would this affect you? Would it be inconvenient?

"Not at all"

"Less convenient if people don't have their own bottle / mug"

"No, not at all"

No, it would only have good effects. I will finally stop seeing people having two sips from their cup and then throwing it away! I'm always telling people to bring their own bottle"

"No, not at all"

"No, not really"

"No, I've got my own bottle and mug"

"No, I've got my own mug that I use for everything"

"No but we would have to make people aware of when this is going to happen, so that they bring in their own stuff. We would also need to provide glasses in meeting rooms and we would have to wash them as well"

"I tend to use my own bottle so no"

3. What would you want the council to provide you with instead?

"We've all been provided with bottles and mugs, so I don't need anything else"

"Six months ago we provided everyone with their own SCDC water bottles and it's been working so far"

"No, I can't think of anything really"

"No, we've got everything"

"No, I've got my own mug"

"No, we can just get our own stuff, the Council doesn't have to spend any money on us"

"If I had a cool coffee mug, I would be happy to stop using plastic"

"We've all got our own bottles and mugs so nothing else"

"They have provided us all with bottles and I bring my own mug so no"

"Glasses and cups for visitors"

"No, I'm quite happy to bring in my own"

"Not for me but if we had people outside the council coming in for a meeting, we would have to make sure to provide them with glasses"

**1. Why do we use 'single use plastics'?**

"I think we use plastic because they solve packaging problems, mainly with food.

**2. Is it important for the Council to end its use of 'single use plastics'? Why?**

Yes I believe it is important for the council to end this because when we do it, we will then be able to show other councils that it is possible and encourage them to do this as well, "leading the way"

**3. Is plastic hard to break down? Why?**

"It takes hundreds of years to break down plastic. In the 1970s when plastic became popular, people didn't really think about how they would break these down so they just let them loose on the ground somewhere"

**4. What are the acceptable alternatives to 'single use plastics'?**

Compostable packaging: paper and cardboard

**5. Would there be any problems of banning 'single use plastics'?**

"Globally there will be some problems doing this, but within the council I don't see why there would be any problems, we just need to stop using plastic cups, straws, and everything else"

**6. Instead of using cling film, is there anything else we could replace it with? Is there a type of plastic that can be used which breaks down easier and quicker?**

"We can use paper and cardboard packaging instead. We could use biodegradable packaging however this wouldn't be any easier to break down"