

**Response of Devon County Council to The House of Commons
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee inquiry into Plastic
Waste,**

This is the Devon County Council response to the cross-party Committee, chaired by Neil Parish MP, who are exploring the measures announced by the Government to achieve both its 2042 goal of eliminating all 'avoidable' plastic waste and of working towards only recyclable, reusable or compostable plastic packaging being placed on the market by 2025. MPs will also question how alternatives to plastic can be found and supported, and what more can be done to ensure that plastic waste is not sent abroad simply to be dumped.

Response to questions

1. What measures should the UK Government take to reduce the production and disposal of single-use plastics in England? Are the measures announced so far, including a ban on certain single-use plastics and a plastic packaging tax, sufficient?

It is noted and welcomed that the Government is proposing a considerable range of legislation to combat the proliferation of single use plastic. There is already legislation in place making it illegal to supply plastic straws, cotton buds, drink stirrers and the Government has recently announced that, subject to consultation in the Autumn, it plans to ban single-use plastic cutlery, plates and polystyrene cups in England. This consultation is welcome.

The Plastic Tax will come into effect in April 2022 whereby any plastic packaging manufactured or imported into the UK with less than a 30% recycled plastic content will be subject to a £200/tonne tax. Depending on the impact of this measure perhaps the % recycled content could be increased over time.

This authority has concerns about the viability of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) which it voiced in our response to the consultation. The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging proposals, however, are welcomed and should make considerable inroads into a reduction in plastic packaging actually placed on the market and an increase in recycling and recyclable packaging.

Whilst the Plastics Pact is commendable there is concern that voluntary agreements are not as effective as legislation and does Government have any evidence that they bring results as quickly as legislation would? The targets for 2025 seem very ambitious for a voluntary agreement

- Eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging through redesign, innovation or alternative (reuse) delivery model
- 100% of plastics packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- 70% of plastics packaging effectively recycled or composted.
- 30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging

2. How should alternatives to plastic consumption be identified and supported, without resorting to more environmentally damaging options?

Funding for research and development is required to look at alternative materials. A full life cycle assessment should be undertaken for any alternatives to ensure that there are no unintended consequences including any increase in carbon footprints.

3. Is the UK Government's target of eliminating avoidable plastic waste by 2042 ambitious enough?

It is not clear what 'avoidable' actually means and how this definition may change in the future. However, once the currently proposed legislation is in place, this will leave 20 years to meet this target. Given that plastic has been a key material in use for many years it is not unreasonable to think that it will take this long to implement measures to eliminate avoidable plastic waste without its removal having unintended consequences. However, the recent draft Waste Prevention Plan published by Government for consultation lacked ambition in most areas and this Authority would like to see much more emphasis on waste prevention and re-use for all materials rather than focussing solely on recycling.

4. Will the UK Government be able to achieve its shorter-term ambition of working towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025?

This timescale seems to be short and it needs to be considered in the wider context of all of the other measures that are being consulted upon and their implementation.

This authority is concerned about the development of compostable, biodegradable, degradable and bio plastics. There are currently no facilities in Devon that can deal with these wastes because they are neither accepted at garden waste composting facilities nor at AD plants designed to deal with food waste. The public assume that biodegradable is a good feature but in terms of recycling and composting plants these materials cause problems in processing and have to be extracted as contaminants and sent for energy recovery. The EPR for Packaging consultation addressed this issue with modulated fees being proposed for compostable packaging along with the need for infrastructure to be in place to manage these materials.

5. Does the UK Government need to do more to ensure that plastic waste is not exported and then managed unsustainably? If so, what steps should it take?

The plastic waste recycled by Devon collection authorities is dealt with by reputable permitted companies in the UK. Devon Authorities are confident that all of the waste collected is managed in a responsible manner and sent for either for reprocessing or disposal. The plastic waste included within the kerbside residual bins is generally sent for energy recovery in Devon.

However, it would appear from the media that some plastic waste is making its way to other countries where it is not being managed sustainably. Government should continue to work with the EA to monitor and prevent this practice. Steps set out in the EPR for packaging for managing export of recyclable waste including waste tracking should help to reduce the occurrence of this. The EA will need the necessary resources to be able to be effective in this area and Government should make sure that the EA does have this support.

The position in Devon

The Resource and Waste Strategy for Devon & Torbay (2020 – 2030) was approved by Devon County Council's Cabinet on 8th September. It notes that *the public interest in reducing the use of (single use) plastic has exploded in recent years. The*

Written evidence submitted by Devon County Council (PW0054)

local authorities have always encouraged householders to reduce their plastic use (e.g. use a reusable bag instead of a single use plastic bag) and will continue to do so. Plastic is a very useful material but making single use plastic items can be a waste of valuable resources, and some plastic, often light and voluminous can end up as litter, polluting our streets, waterways and oceans. In fact, 80% of marine litter originates on the land.

32.6% of the plastic waste collected in Devon was recycled which is similar to the national average. The District Councils have all improved their collection of plastics to include pots, tubs and trays when back in 2017 most would have only collected plastic bottles. From the end of 2021 all the local authorities will be collecting plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays.

Plastic film is difficult to recycle because it is easily contaminated and there is a lack of suitable markets. The local authorities will keep up to date with research and technological developments in relation to plastic film and consider their future options if the situation changes. Government have recently consulted on all plastic films requiring to be collected from the kerbside by 2026/27 but the outcome of the consultation has yet to be published.

In order to support the reduction of single use plastic the Devon local authorities will:

- Promote Refill Devon <https://www.recycledevon.org/RefillDevon>*
- Promote alternatives to single use plastic where appropriate*
- Work with partners e.g. Environment Agency, North Devon Plastic Free, in plastic partnerships*
- Implement internal plastic strategies.*

DCC's plastic strategy, single use plastic work and Corporate Waste Action Plan show the considerable progress made on reducing single use plastic in Devon.