

## **Draft: Single-Use Plastic Policy**

Reducing the amount of single use plastics in Council operations.

### **Introduction**

With its low costs, durability, and incredible versatility, plastic has become an indispensable material and is used extensively in most industries worldwide. However, huge amounts of plastic products become waste. It is estimated that around 50% of plastic waste we produce globally is packaging that is used just once. In the UK alone, it is estimated that around [100 billion](#) pieces of plastic packaging are thrown away every year.

Plastic production has sharply increased over the last 70 years. In 1950, the world produced two million tonnes. It now produces over 450 million tonnes.

Plastic has its place, and it is one of the most useful inventions in recent history. However, it can easily become an environmental pollutant. One to two million tonnes of plastic enter our oceans yearly, affecting wildlife and ecosystems.

Single-use plastic is found in many products: medical supplies, cigarette filters, chewing gums, disposable nappies, food packaging, balloons, cups, and straws, to name just a few.

### **National policy**

In January 2018, the UK Government set the target of “achieving zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042” in its 25-Year Environment Plan.

In 2020, the government restricted sales of single-use plastic straws, cotton buds and coffee stirrers. From October 2023, the ban was extended to plastic cutlery, polystyrene packaging for ready to eat food, and plastic balloon sticks. Single-use plastic plates, trays and bowls cannot be sold directly to consumers but are still allowed in food hospitality.

The enforcement of the ban in Darlington is carried out by our own Trading Standards officers.

### **The challenge we face with plastic:**

We have identified four key issues linked to plastic:

#### **1. Plastic Pollution and Littering.**

Plastic pollution is both a global and local issue. From oceans and seas to wildlife, local parks and roadsides, plastic littering affects both natural and urban environments and the health and well-being of the individuals that occupy them. If you have ever seen plastic littered in our town-centre and have experienced frustration or other negative feelings as a result, you are not alone. Recent studies have shown that being around littered plastic can have negative psychological impacts on individuals and community morale as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The most littered plastic items are those used ‘on-the-go’. When plastic is littered and turned into an environmental pollutant, it is costly to clear up and removes the possibility of managing its end of life effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://medium.com/@ayeshacuriouss/the-plastic-paradox-how-our-waste-is-wounding-our-mental-health-521e05ab8cc1>

## **2. Plastic as a Major Contributor to Climate Change.**

Chemicals derived from fossil fuel production are used to make almost all plastics. The more plastic made, the higher the demand for gas, oil and even coal. By reducing or removing single-use plastic, DBC will be helping to reduce the demand for fossil fuels, thereby reducing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. This will support our climate change emergency declaration.

## **3. Not all Plastics can be Easily Recycled.**

The types of polymers used to produce some plastic items are currently hard to recycle, so they often end up in residual waste.

## **4. Most Plastics are not Biodegradable.**

Rather than being broken down by living organisms and absorbed into the environment naturally, most plastics slowly break down into smaller fragments known as microplastics. Some studies suggest that plastic bags and containers made of expanded polystyrene foam can take thousands of years to decompose. This contaminates soil and water and poses significant ingestion, choking and entanglement hazards to wildlife on land and in the ocean. Microplastics have been found in marine animals, drinking water, and are spread widely on soils on land, potentially ending up in the food we eat.

### **Options**

Packaging is more difficult for us to directly impact. When we procure items, we can ask suppliers to work on reducing their single-use plastic packaging or change to compostable options.

Hopetown already uses reusable plastic cups, and The Hippodrome will be trialling reusable plastic glasses. We still use plastic cups in the Town Hall's Committee Rooms and foyer.

In principle, compostable cups appear to be environmentally preferable to the plastic ones that we use. However, under current arrangements, it is likely that the majority of compostable cups end up in landfill where their breakdown produces methane. Methane is a greenhouse gas with a warming potential at least 25 times greater than carbon dioxide.<sup>2</sup>

Waste facilities might also not be able to readily distinguish between compostable and non-compostable plastics, leading to the wrong thing in the wrong place.

It will be essential to ensure that reusable replacement products don't have a greater environmental impact than disposable alternatives.

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<sup>2</sup> The Global Warming Potential (GWP) was invented to allow direct comparisons between different gases implicated in global warming. It measures how much energy one ton of a gas will absorb over a given period of time compared to one ton of CO<sub>2</sub>. If a gas has a higher GWP than CO<sub>2</sub>, it means it will warm the Earth more over that period than CO<sub>2</sub> would. Since CO<sub>2</sub> is being used as the reference, it has a GWP of one. Methane has a GWP of more than 25 over 100 years, meaning it is significantly more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>.

Considering the above, we recommend focusing on waste prevention via reuse as the preferred option for cups.

### **The Policy**

Darlington Borough Council will act to remove and reduce the use of Single-Use Plastic from its operations and services, as well as working towards finding positive solutions for reducing unnecessary waste across Darlington.

We will go about doing this by following some key principles:

- **Lead By Example**
  - All Darlington Borough Council teams will work to reduce and remove single-use plastic across our buildings and services.
  - Where the use of plastics is unavoidable, DBC will encourage the use of recycled plastics, supporting manufacturers that make products from locally sourced waste plastics.
  - Encourage all staff and Members to use reusable water bottles or cups.
- **Work with our Suppliers and Contractors**
  - Ask DBC suppliers to demonstrate that they are minimising the use of single-use plastics in their service provision and are finding sustainable alternatives (where appropriate).
- **Support Darlington**
  - Continue to support local communities by sharing best practice, raising awareness, and supporting and promoting positive initiatives, campaigns and actions for reducing waste.