

Reduction in the Use of Single Use Plastics

A Strategy for Somerset County Council

November 2018

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Somerset County Council will move towards becoming a “Single Use Plastics-free” authority, and will work with partners and providers to help them do the same

1. Introduction

Nationally and globally the need to take action on Single Use Plastics is a growing concern due to their negative impacts. Although there is not yet a nationally recognised definition of Single Use Plastics, the Strategic Management Group of the Somerset Waste Partnership agreed to adopt the following meaning: **“Plastic that is designed to be used only once before it is recycled or thrown away”**.

During its meeting in February 2018 the County Council made the following resolution:

This Council resolves to ask the Cabinet Member for Resources:

To work with partners, suppliers and customers to develop a strategy and timetable to make Somerset County Council (SCC) a ‘single-use-plastic-free’ authority, specifically the phasing out of sales of SUP bottles and other SUP products across all premises and events;

To present the strategy and timetable to Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place before consideration at Full Council in November 2018;

To actively encourage the institutions, businesses and residents of Somerset to adopt similar measures;

To lobby the Somerset MP’s for national legislation on reducing the use of SUP’s;

Actively encourage additional plastics recycling facilities through the Somerset Waste Partnership.

A focus on plastic

Plastic is an incredibly useful and versatile material; it plays an important role in helping foods last longer and thus reducing food waste. Although providing major benefits, there are significant negative impacts which need addressing with plastics. The cost of a reliance on plastic go beyond the financial; there are significant environmental costs to take into account.

The figures are staggering.

- Around a million plastic bottles are bought around the world every minute and it's predicted that figure will rise by another 20% by 2021, with far too few being recycled;
- Here in the UK the average household uses 480 plastic bottles a year but only recycles 270 of them. This means nearly half (44%) are NOT put in the recycling, meaning over 35 million plastic bottles are used every day but almost 16 million of them aren't being put out for recycling;
- Between 8 and 12 million metric tonnes of plastic waste ends up in our oceans every year;
- In Somerset the cost of collection and disposing of our waste is over £176 for every single household in the county.

One major and highly visible and intrusive issue is that badly designed and unrecyclable plastics end up as litter in the environment, which ultimately ends up in the sea. It is estimated that up to 13 million tonnes of plastic leak into the global marine environment every year through deliberate littering, escaping unintentionally from a waste management process, or nurdles being washed down drains and falling overboard from ships. In 2016-17 the Great British Beach Clean initiative found on average 744 items of litter per 100 metres of beach. This has adverse implications for our environment, economy and human health.

What are Nurdles?

Nurdles are raw plastic granules/pellets similar in size to a lentil. These are used in the manufacture of a wide range of plastic products.

It is estimated that up to 53 billion of the tiny pellets escape into the UK's environment each year. This happens during the manufacture, transport or use of plastic products.

The nurdles are often spilt accidentally into rivers and oceans or fall into drains where they are washed out to sea.

Nurdles can soak up chemical pollutants from their surroundings and then release toxins into the animals that eat them.

Nurdles are one of the main sources of "primary microplastics" - small pieces of plastic which have come from larger items broken down - in European seas.

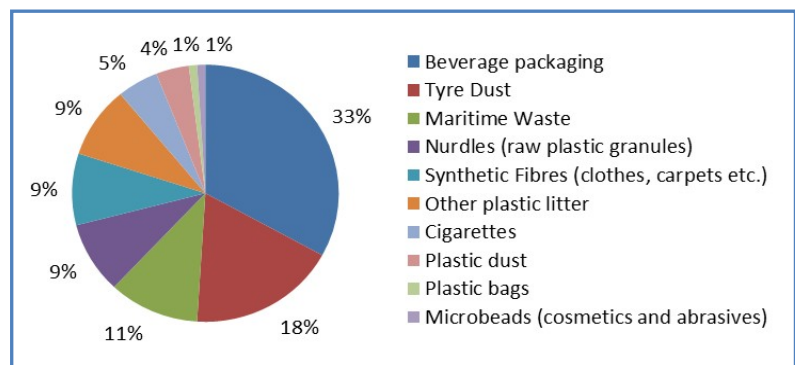
The amount of sea birds and mammals entangled or killed every year and suffocation is huge, with litter being responsible for the death of over 1million sea birds and mammals annually. Recently the unseen effects of plastic have become more understood and are equally concerning: larger plastics break down into very small particles over hundreds of years and become “microplastics” which do not biodegrade but instead accumulate in the environment. It is possible that wildlife ingest these and it could cause harm to human health.

Microplastics and Microbeads

A type of microplastics, **microbeads**, are extremely small pieces of plastic (less than 1mm in size) that are added to everyday cosmetic products such as face wash, toothpaste, abrasive cleaners and a lot more. They are most frequently made of polyethylene but can be of other petrochemical plastics such as polypropylene and polystyrene. Microbeads are small enough to go down your plughole and easily pass water filtration systems and could be eaten by fish and other marine animals, some of which may end up on our plate.

Plastic is a non-renewable material, made largely from fossil fuels. Simply discarding it is a waste of an extremely valuable material.

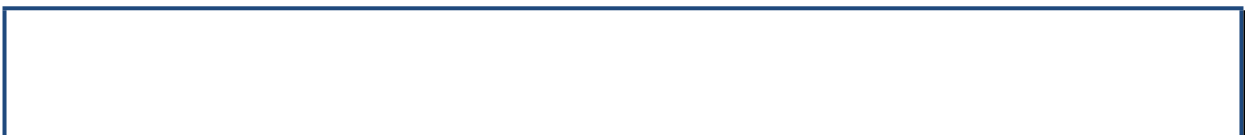
The direct economic costs of this marine litter to maritime industries, the cost of clean-up and on tourism in the UK are estimated at £103m per year.



Sources of Marine Plastics

The problem is a global one, but in the UK we can do our bit, and in Somerset we can certainly provide leadership on this growing environmental problem.

Plastic is extremely widespread in our society and 50% of plastic by weight is ‘single-use’, by definition it is used once before being thrown away or recycled. Drinks packaging makes up a third of marine plastic



“Environmentally friendly plastics”

So-called "environmentally friendly" plastics fall into three types:

- Bioplastics made from natural materials such as corn starch
- Biodegradable plastics made from traditional petrochemicals, which are engineered to break down more quickly
- Eco/recycled plastics, which are simply plastics made from recycled plastic materials rather than raw petrochemicals.

Products which claim to be compostable or biodegradable often aren't and some of these new materials, such as 'bioplastics', can cause more problems than they solve.

Not all bioplastics compost easily or completely and some leave toxic residues or plastic fragments behind

Some will break down only at high temperatures in industrial-scale, municipal composters or digesters, or in biologically active landfills

Some bioplastics are virtually indistinguishable from traditional petrochemical plastics, but cannot be processed with normal plastics and hence cannot be recycled and will invariably end up in landfill.

2. Policy context – setting the framework for taking action on plastics

My Pledge Against Preventable Plastic

- ✓ **Remember your things to bring:**
bag for life; reusable water bottle; coffee cup.
- ✓ **Ignore the straw:**
sip from the glass.
- ✓ **Choose to re-use:**
no plastic cutlery; take condiments from a bottle or pot – never a sachet!
- ✓ **Be a local litter hero:**
organise a beach, street or park litter pick in your community; if you see litter on the road proudly pick it up and bin it.
- ✓ **Say yes to less:**
only pick the packaging you really need; buy loose fruit/veg; avoid unrecyclable black plastic.
- ✓ **Lobby locally:**
let local shops and businesses know what's important to you, ask them what they can do to help.

Do what you can. Every little helps!

*Printed on 100% recycled paper



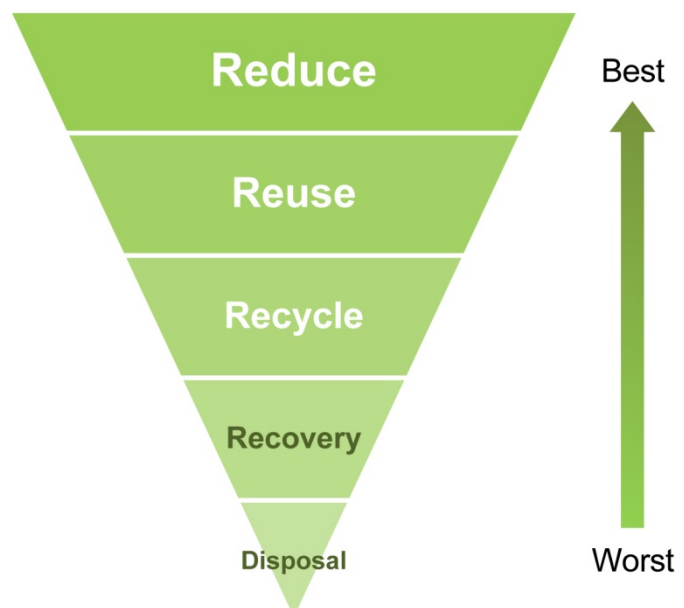
The direction of travel in policy is clearly towards the reduction of the use of plastic, and reflects that current levels of plastic use is unacceptable:

- In December 2017, 193 members of the UN [signed a resolution](#) committing to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds by 2025 and to prioritise policies and measures to avoid marine litter and microplastics entering the marine environment.

- The EU [Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy](#) was adopted in January 2018. It intends to transform the way plastic products are designed, used, produced and recycled in order to reduce the value of plastic

that is lost from the economy each year after a very short use.

- Also published in January 2018 is the UK's [25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#). The Plan outlines ways to reduce the use of plastics that contribute to pollution, and broader steps to encourage recycling and the more thoughtful use of resources. The aim is to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste by 2042.
- The 2017 [Litter Strategy for England](#) aims to change our culture, through education, enforcement and infrastructure provision, to achieve a substantial reduction in littering behavior.



- The Somerset Waste Partnership is running the “My Pledge Against Preventable Plastic” initiative. In addition, policy and operational decisions (such as the “Recycle More” initiative, which as the name suggests will deliver increased recycling) and their Business Plan has embedded a strong approach to tackling the issue of plastic in the county. As the Partnership delivers household waste collection and disposal on behalf of Somerset’s local authorities the Business Plan sets out how this waste will be managed, including plastic, through the well-known waste hierarchy – reduce, reuse, recycle and compost, energy recovery and final disposal.
- It is expected that Defra’s Resources and Waste strategy will be announced during the autumn of 2018. It is seen as a key element in the Government’s environmental policy and is expected to have a major focus on plastics, including the potential for a Deposit Return Scheme and the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility. While any new legislation will take time to come into force is key that all authorities in Somerset take the lead in addressing the issues
- **This Strategy is designed to complement the relevant national policies, and to work alongside the Somerset Waste Partnership’s efforts, to take meaningful action.**

3. The Strategy

This Strategy:

- sets out how the Council is and will work with partners, suppliers and customers to move Somerset County Council (SCC) towards becoming a 'single-use-plastic-free' authority;
- sets out how the Council is and will phase out of sales of single use plastic bottles and other SUP products across all premises and events;
- explains how the Council is and will actively encourage institutions, businesses and residents of Somerset to adopt similar measures to reduce/cut out their use of single use plastics;
- explains how Somerset MP's are and will be lobbied for national legislation on reducing the use of SUP's; and
- is part of the work to actively encourage additional plastics recycling facilities through the Somerset Waste Partnership.

The Strategy sets out the timescale for activity to deliver it, including "quick wins".

The Strategy is realistic about the Council's ability to deliver its objectives; the current and future financial framework is extremely challenging. This Strategy bears that in mind and does not impose tight deadlines or unaffordable targets that could impact upon the other priorities of the Council, particularly on the work to ensure its financial stability.

4. Current activity

The County Council is already doing things which contributes a reduction in plastic use and increased recycling of remaining plastics:

- The Refill Initiative – the County Council supports this national initiative which encourages County Hall is already a Refill point, where members of the public can refill water bottles free of charge.
- Councillors don't use plastic bottles at public meeting; instead jugs of water and glasses are provided for Councillors meetings
- Plastic bottles recycling – separate bins are provided in the staff kitchens within County Hall.
- Printing –a reduction in printing has led to less plastic based waste.
- Individual, smaller plastic bottles of washing up liquid and hand soap have been replaced with larger containers, reducing plastics usage.
- Across Somerset the Household Waste Recycling Centres now accept Plastic Pots, Tubs and Trays.
- The Waste Partnership also raises awareness through its “Pledge Against Preventable Plastics” campaign aimed at promoting awareness of how to reduce SUP usage.
- The in-house repairs and maintenance team introducing waste sorting to maximise opportunities for recycling and re-use which is also leading to cost savings.

Despite these activities, there is scope for more action to reduce single use plastics use, to increase reuse and to increase recycling.

From a County Council perspective alongside the environmental benefit there is also the financial benefit of reducing waste disposal costs. Somerset County Council pay the costs of waste disposal; the less waste disposed of, the less charge to the County Council.

5. Strategic Objectives and delivering them

This strategy is based on activities that reduce the use of single use plastics and associated activities that will make most impact. To deliver these objectives, where it is the right choice and is appropriate economically and practically viable, the following over-arching themes will be employed:

- **The Council doing its bit and leading the way: reducing our own use of plastic and its impact**
- **Working with partners and suppliers/providers to reduce their use of plastic and its impact**

OBJECTIVE 1 – Reduce the use, and preferably stop, using all single use plastic food and beverage packaging, cutlery, cups etc and work with suppliers and service providers to make sure they follow this objective when working with SCC				
ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
Work with SCC's food and drink contractors to raise awareness and to identify how to phase out plastics use	By April 2019	Contract manager, Facilities Management, Property Services	Contract Managers to consider contractual ability to exercise change	Tangible reduction in plastics use in delivery, preparation and packaging of food and drinks across SCC estate

OBJECTIVE 2 – Review and improve existing practice and the recycling routes available to make sure plastic is not sent for residual waste disposal in SCC premises				
ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
Review existing recycling facilities at SCC premises to assess if the recycling of plastics by staff and visitors is maximized or if additional or alternative means can be practically employed	By June 2019	Facilities Management, Property	FM/site managers to review recycling facilities and implement	Increased breadth of recycling facilities available

OBJECTIVE 3 – Ensure that the first option is always re-usable rather single use plastics

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
Expand the availability of refill water at SCC sites and promoted through the Refill app and initiative	By Sept 2019	Facilities Management, Property Services	Find locations that are publicly accessible without difficulty, register on the Refill.org app	Increased number of locations of SCC sites registered on Refill app
Raise the awareness of staff to increase use of reusable plastic rather than single use	Ongoing, starting January 2019	Communications, All staff	Weekly Our Somerset, Yammer, Core Brief	Reduced use of plastic bottles and packaging for food/drink
Use invitations/ communications for meetings at SCC properties to reinforce the desire for visitors to bring/use reusable drinks containers etc	Ongoing, starting January 2019	All staff, standard advice provided to visitors, room booking system contain SUP advice as a reminder (if poss)	Core Brief, Yammer, room booking system	Range of comms used to get the message across to visitors

OBJECTIVE 4 – Raise staff awareness so that they can all make informed choices about their use of plastic food/drink packaging and cutlery choices

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
Communications to all staff to raise awareness and to signpost to the alternative options available other than plastic, including “hints and tips” communications	April 2019 and ongoing	Comms	Our Somerset, Yammer, Core Brief	Number of communications sent to raise awareness reduced use of plastic bottles and packaging for food/drink

OBJECTIVE 5 – Take steps that will reduce plastic use and its impact across all SCC sites

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
As part of awareness raising ask all staff to question where plastic use can be reduced or negated, and where reuse or recycling can be improved	April 2019 and ongoing	Comms	Our Somerset, Yammer, Core Brief	Reduction in unnecessary use of plastics across the SCC estate (increased reuse and recycling, reduction in plastic waste)
Work with tenants of SCC properties, including County Farm tenants, to reduce the use of plastics on all SCC sites	April 2019 and ongoing	Property	Work to encourage responsible environmental behaviors	Reduction in unnecessary use of plastics across the SCC estate (increased reuse and recycling, reduction in plastic waste)
Working with the SCC Technology and People Programme, increase the use of technology to decrease the reliance upon plastics on all SCC sites	April 2019 and ongoing	SCC TAP Programme, Facilities Management	TAP Champions, Yammer, Core Brief	Reduction in the use of plastic stationery and other plastic office equipment

OBJECTIVE 6 – Work with our suppliers and potential future suppliers to help minimise use of single-use-plastic food and drink packaging and tableware and encourage them to do the same (to work alongside Objective A7)

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
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Review contractual ability to require suppliers to change practices to reduce plastic use	January 2019	Contract Managers	Review contract for existing clauses that allow delivery of plastic reduction	Reduction in unnecessary use of plastics at cafés/food stations etc on SCC premises
Where contractual requirements do not exist, where practical, negotiate with contracted providers and suppliers to deliver a reduction in plastic use in all food and drink packaging	January 2019	Contract Managers. Legal	Review contract for existing clauses that allow delivery of plastic reduction	Reduction in unnecessary use of plastics at cafés/food stations etc on SCC premises

OBJECTIVE 7 – Ensure procurement specifications and contractors’ activities consider, and where practical minimise, the environmental risks associated with plastics

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
Assess the feasibility of the inclusion of a mandatory condition for all future contracts to require the provider/supplier to adhere with SCC’s “no SUP” policy	By April 2019	Commercial and Procurement, Legal	Create a suitable clause/condition that would require the provider to opt out rather than opt in	As many contracts contain a “no or reduced SUP” clause as feasible

OBJECTIVE 8 – Work with the Somerset Waste Partnership to support educating school pupils and to engage with their local communities about waste

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
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<p>Work with the SWP to increase school engagement on plastics, reuse, recycling and sustainable methods of waste treatment</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>SWP, SCC rep, SSE</p>	<p>Use SWP's Strategic Management Group as a vehicle for delivery; SWP Board.</p> <p>Extend the education programme currently being delivered by SWP with team at Carymoor</p> <p>SSE to help with Comms to schools to raise awareness of the issues</p>	<p>Increased engagement with schools on waste</p> <p>Reduction in residual waste from schools</p>
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OBJECTIVE 9 – Working with the Somerset Waste Partnership, raise awareness with partners, businesses and communities on reducing use of single use plastics

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
Collaborative working with the SWP to ensure communication on the impacts of single use plastics and to inform of alternatives available	Ongoing	SWP, SCC rep SCC rep to identify partners to ensure message is communicated widely	Your Somerset SWP modes of communication (e.g. email, Facebook)	Measured number of communications Increased awareness of alternatives Increased reuse and recycling
Collaborative working with SWP and the Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards service to support local business to make the right decisions with regards to packaging	Ongoing	SWP, DSTTS Service	SWP to offer training DSTTS colleagues and to provide information on alternatives to SUPs	Increased awareness of alternatives Reduction in the use of SUPs in packaging used by local businesses

OBJECTIVE 10 – Working with the Somerset Waste Partnership on waste matters related to the reduction of use of plastics and their impacts, including litter, recycling, encouraging reuse, and taking action against activities such as launching sky lanterns from SCC land

ACTION	WHEN	WHO	HOW	MEASURING SUCCESS
Continuing active SCC involvement in SWP activities on work that advocates/delivers the reduction of residual waste and improved environmental performance in Somerset on waste	Ongoing	SCC reps (officer and Member), SWP	Through the SWP's SMG and Board	Upward trend of performance on reducing residual waste Increased levels of recycling Reduced littering

6. Reporting Delivery of this Strategy

- Progress on delivering this Strategy will be reported through the Council's performance management processes. This will ensure corporate awareness of delivery
- An annual report will be presented to the County Council's Policies and Place Scrutiny annually.

November 2018