

## **Low Plastic Zones**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Who is running the project?**

The project is delivered by North London Waste Authority in partnership with the seven north London Boroughs (Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest).

#### **Why are you running this project?**

The aim of this project is to reduce the amount of single use plastics thrown away across north London. Concern about the amount of single use plastics that we use is high on the public agenda. Once used, single use plastics can be a waste and littering issue, as highlighted in the national Resources and Waste Strategy published by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Reduction of single use plastics was identified as an area of focus in the North London Waste Prevention Plan 2018-20, approved by Members at the February 2018 Authority meeting. It is hoped that the project will contribute to wider Government and London wide initiatives and complement the work the seven north London boroughs and other key stakeholders are doing.

#### **Do businesses have to pay to take part?**

There is no cost to businesses that wish to participate. Materials and advice are completely free of charge.

#### **Do participating businesses have to take part in publicity about the project?**

No, but we are keen to collect details of businesses who are interested in being case studies and to talk about their experiences (if so, businesses will need to tick the box in the photo permission form).

#### **Why is single use plastic a problem?**

Single use plastic is not only a waste and littering issue, but often finds its way into waterways and oceans, releasing toxic chemicals before breaking down. The BBC 'Blue Planet' series may have raised awareness of the issue, although research released by the North London Waste Authority in July 2018 showed that people are confused about how best to reduce the impact on the environment of single use plastic products such as bottles, straws and cutlery. One in two people believe recycling as much as possible is the best way compared to 1 in 4 people who realise that prevention is the better option – i.e., to stop buying or using these items.

### **What is the definition of single use plastics?**

Single use plastics, often also referred to as disposable plastics, are commonly used for plastic packaging and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These include, among other items, grocery bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery (definition taken from the United Nations Environmental Programme, 2018 accessed at the following link:

[https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25496/singleUsePlastic\\_sustainability.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&xid=17259,15700021,15700186,15700191,15700256,15700259](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25496/singleUsePlastic_sustainability.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&xid=17259,15700021,15700186,15700191,15700256,15700259)).

### **What are the most common single use plastic items?**

Following an on-the-ground assessment in north London, we identified the most common single use plastic items as:

- bottles;
- food on the go and takeaway packaging;
- cups (including coffee, smoothie and alcoholic beverages);
- carrier bags;
- cutlery;
- straws and stirrers (these have been banned in England since the LPZ project was launched);
- condiment and milk sachets; and
- packaging and punnets.

All the above are items that shops/business offer to their customers. Only single use items that businesses offer/sell to their customers are the focus of this project, all 'back office' items are outside the scope of this project.

### **What is the Charter of Commitment?**

This document is used to record which single use plastic items a shop/business commits to reducing. It can also be used to record which items a shop/business is already committed to reducing.

### **What are the criteria for a shop to be accredited as 'low plastic'?**

To encourage as many shops/ businesses as possible to participate in the project, the condition to participate in the initiative will be to commit to eradicate **a minimum of one**

single use plastic item, from a range of options shown on the Charter of Commitment. Once this has been achieved, the shop/ business can then be accredited as being a 'low plastic'.

### **What is a 'low plastic zone'?**

For an area to be accredited with the status of 'low plastic zone' it would need to have more than 50% of the business operating in the area accredited as 'low plastic'. If less than 50% of the businesses have achieved a 'low plastic' status, then the area will be branded as 'working to be a low plastic zone'.

### **I know a business in a street close by. Can they participate?**

Yes, they can participate but the shop/business will need to make contact to participate.

### **What if a business has already put efforts into reducing single use plastics?**

A shop or business that has already implemented practices to reduce types of single use plastics they can tick the relevant box in the Charter of Commitment and as long as they are continuing with their commitment to eradicate at least one plastic item from their business.

### **What if businesses already recycle their plastic waste?**

This is a great step towards sustainable practices, but the items listed in the Charter of Commitment cannot be widely recycled and businesses will still be encouraged to reduce the use of these items.

### **What business categories have you identified?**

For the purposes of the assessment, businesses were categorised as follows:

- Retailers: (jewellery, clothes, opticians, mobile phones, charities);
- Hospitality: (catering, fast food, pubs, restaurants, cafes);
- Food and drink shops (off licence, food stores, butcher, vegetable stores, patisserie);
- Services (banks, pharmacy, hairdressers, beautician, cinemas, post office, nurseries); Markets stalls;
- Supermarkets; and
- Betting shops.

### **What is your rationale behind alternatives listed in the Charter of Commitment?**

Regarding alternatives, the focus is on those alternatives at the top of the waste hierarchy; five main criteria were selected, namely:

- The alternative can be implemented at low or no cost to the business;

- There is no cost to the consumer;
- There are no operational implications regarding waste and recycling collections and provision of recycling and waste containers to the Borough Council;
- The alternative is easy to implement; and
- The alternative can be implemented quickly.

The above criteria were based on a survey carried out by the London Borough of Waltham Forest which identified that although 92% of businesses surveyed would like to adopt environmentally free practices, 49% of businesses are willing to make changes as long as the alternatives are convenient and low cost.

#### **What are the proposed alternatives for the most common single use plastic items?**

- **Plastic bottles:** Businesses are encouraged to sign up to the Refill London scheme- <https://refill.org.uk/>, offer free refills and encourage customers to bring their own reusable bottles.
- **Food on the go and takeaway packaging:** businesses are encouraged to promote the 'Bring your own lunchbox' message and support the 'Long live the Lunchbox' initiative from Global Action Plan- <https://globalactionplan.org.uk/long-live-the-lunchbox>. There are currently no alternatives for plastic wrappers and film for takeaway food that fit within the above criteria. Borough officers agreed that 'Vegware' type of containers should not be promoted as they cannot currently be recycled and represent a cost to businesses.
- **Plastic cups (coffee, smoothies, alcoholic drinks):** Where possible, businesses to promote the 'bring your own' message to their customers. It was accepted, however, that public houses may face operational challenges due to licencing issues.
- **Plastic carrier bags:** Since the launch of the project, UK legislation has been brought into England that requires retailers to charge 10p for single-use carrier bags. Shops to ask customers whether they need a plastic carrier bag before they offer to sell customers one. The main message to promote to customers is 'bring your own carrier bag' rather than offering other single use alternatives, such as paper bags.
- **Plastic cutlery:** Businesses to offer washable cutlery to their customers when eating in the restaurant/pub/café. However, as this approach will be challenging for takeaway shops, as an alternative it was proposed that they can ask customers if they need single use plastic cutlery rather than having it on display for customers to take- so that customers think a bit more before they take.

- **Plastic condiment and milk sachets:** Businesses will be advised to offer items such as milk, sugar, butter, jam and condiments in larger (ideally refillable) containers or dispensers rather than individual single use portion packs. Businesses may be able to make financial savings by using larger containers, which can also be recycled if they cannot be refilled.
- **Plastic packaging:** Businesses will be advised to avoid selling goods in single use packaging.
- **Plastic punnets:** Businesses will be advised to sell loose fruit and vegetables whenever possible rather than offering pre-packed alternatives. Market stalls often display fresh items in punnets but then tip them loose into a bag – this is to be encouraged.
- **Plastic straws and stirrers:** Since the launch of this project, single-use plastic straws and stirrers must no longer be supplied. Officers agreed not to propose to businesses that paper straws or wood stirrers are purchased instead, due to the cost implications to business and operational implications to the Council.

### **What are the timescales for the visits?**

Once the project lead Member of each participating north London borough visits businesses in the selected areas, encouraging business managers to sign up to Charter of Commitment, and pass on the Charters to NLWA, NLWA officers will liaise with the businesses directly and provide support if required. NLWA officers will work closely with the participating businesses to help them reduce single use plastic items and provide them with tips on how they can encourage their customers to choose sustainable alternatives. A follow up call will be carried out by NLWA Officers to offer support and advice to the business. The next point of contact is a visit by NLWA Officers during which an assessment will be made on the progress being made by the participating business. Business practices that are in line with the commitment made when signing up are certified as 'low plastic'. Once more than 50% of the business operating in the area are accredited, the area then achieves the status of 'single use plastic free'.

### **What happens once the area is certified?**

A press event will take place in each certified area to promote the commitment being made by participating businesses.

### **What publicity will businesses receive?**

All businesses that participate in the project will be listed on the [NLWA](#) website, on a dedicated page for the project. Once an area has been certified as a 'low plastic zone' NLWA officers will visit the certified businesses and collect case studies. These case studies will then feature on the NLWA website and quotes from shop managers will be used for press and publicity.

### **What is being done about single use plastics?**

Two consultations were carried out by Government in 2021 (results due in 2022) that will potentially impact on how single use plastics are produced and disposed of.

Government held a consultation on Packaging and packaging waste: introducing Extended Producer Responsibility. This focuses on packaging producers paying the full cost of managing packaging once it becomes waste. This consultation was about reforming the producer responsibility system for packaging waste to make the system more effective. The NLWA response to the consultation can be found here:

<https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/ourauthority/consultation-responses/extended-producer-responsibility-packaging>

Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This consultation was about proposals to introduce an additional cost (or 'deposit') on beverage containers which would be refunded if people return them for recycling. The aim of the scheme would be to increase the amount of beverage containers recycled. The NLWA response to the consultation can be found here:

<https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/ourauthority/consultation-responses/introducing-deposit-return-scheme-england-wales-and-northern>

### **Will any more single use plastics be banned?**

Government launched a consultation in November 2021 on new policy proposals to ban single use plastic items which they think may not be addressed sufficiently by existing policies or policy proposals. This ban would apply to England only. This consultation is called - Consultation on proposals to ban commonly littered single-use plastic items in England. Details for it can be found here <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/environmental-quality/consultation-on-proposals-to-ban-commonly-littered/>. The purpose of the consultation is to seek views on banning the supply of single use plastic plates, cutlery, balloon sticks,

and expanded and extruded polystyrene cups and food and beverage containers in England. Action is being taken against these items as they are either commonly littered, not commonly recycled, or both. The consultation document outlines that, current estimates suggest that only 10% of single-use plastic plates and cutlery are recycled upon disposal. Plastic cutlery were in the top 15 most littered items by count in Defra's 2020 Litter Composition Report.