

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 recently 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 pan London 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. Both material 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

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;
- condiment and milk sachets; and
- packaging and punnets.

All the above are items that shops/ business offer to their customers. Back office single use plastic items that are used by businesses are outside the scope of this project.

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

In order 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. 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 shops/business need to make contact to participate.

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

Even if a shop or business has already implemented practices to reduce types of single use plastics, they can still tick the relevant box in the Charter of Commitment and as long as they have retained their commitment to eradicating 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:** Shops to ask customers whether they need a plastic carrier bag before they offer 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 straws and stirrers:** Businesses to ask their customers if they need a plastic straw before they offer one and not to have straws and stirrers on display. 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. Businesses will be encouraged not to leave straws and stirrers on the counter but only give them to customers that request one.
- **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.

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. After an initial visit there will be a second visit by NLWA officers which takes place two weeks after the first. At the second visit NLWA Officers will assess 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' and provided with a badge. 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 and depending on timescales for accreditation, a collective launch for all participating areas in north London is also being considered. If this takes place, we plan to create a visual stunt in order to highlight the initiative, galvanise residents to take action, and create positive publicity.

What publicity will businesses receive?

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