



Report of the County Durham Environment Partnership

Phasing Out Unnecessary Single Use Plastics (SUPs)

For Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Overview

1. Plastic pollution is an international scourge on our environment, and the scenes of harm it does to our beaches, oceans and wildlife bring a sense of collective shame. The consequences, are much more than visual as plastics enter the foodchain and can eventually reach the whole ecosystem including us.
2. This report however is not intended to be anti-plastic, as it is recognised that it is a highly versatile material, utilised in a wide variety of products from the computers on which this report was written, to the pens with which pledges are signed. What this report however focuses on is the **unnecessary** and **single use plastics** which might range from drinking straws, cotton buds, stirrers, wetwipes, excessive wrapping to water bottles and disposable cutlery.
3. We live in a country and a county with excellent waste management systems which largely avoid contributing to the worst of the high level marine pollution we see on our television screens. That is no cause for complacency however. Small items, such as cotton buds, disposed of (incorrectly) down the toilet can still make it out to our seas. Notwithstanding, it still makes environmental (and financial) sense to seek avoid using these items in the first place, thereby avoiding the costs of the item being recycled, the wastefulness of it being sent for disposal, or worse still ending up as a discarded pollutant either as litter or fly tipping. Surveys from September 2018 found 82% of pollutants on Durham Heritage Coast are plastic materials. We all have to play our part in reducing this.
4. The County Durham Environment Partnership have been asked to consider a County Council resolution on reducing Single Use Plastic, not just for the Councils own activities, but as far as possible involving for Partners too, and collectively using our influencing position to change behaviours.
5. A Task Group comprising a range of Council services and Partners was established and through an early audit, found SUP use across a variety of Council Services from catering to events. What was most encouraging however was to find a “quiet revolution” occurring across not just Council services but also from Partners, which has ranged from the withdrawal of disposable cups, promotion of water refill schemes, to on street recycling. Even Snow White has now gone green in stopping use of plastic confetti at the Council pantomimes.
6. The Council resolution calls for consideration of a pledge which is examined in the report, and subject to members views it is considered that there is appetite for this, not just from the County Council, but from a range of partners too, potentially through a joint declaration. The report goes on to describe the range of measures that would be implemented should a commitment to further reductions in single use plastics be made, including a “single use plastic free network” referenced in the resolution. Many of the measures

described are in advance of any national guidance or regulations that are anticipated in a forthcoming national Waste and Resources Strategy.

7. The Government has recently announced consultation to seek views on banning the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, plastic-stemmed cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers. Whilst there are some exceptions to this (e.g. medical drinking straws), it is felt that this should be welcomed.
8. Finally and subject to the County Councils Overview and Scrutiny Committee inputting their own views, it is suggested that this report and its recommendations be submitted to the County Councils Cabinet for consideration.

Purpose

9. For the Environment Partnership to provide a report which responds to a County Council Resolution of 24th January 2018 namely:

Request that a report be brought to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on the options for bringing an end to the use of unnecessary Single Use Plastics (SUP) in County Durham, taking account of the following measures to:

- a) enable Durham County Council to become a full signatory of the 'Plastic Free Pledge', by phasing out the use of unnecessary SUPs in all County Council buildings, and working with commissioning partners to end the purchase and procurement of SUPs through the DCC supply chain;*
- b) encourage the County's businesses, organizations and residents to go 'plastic free,' working with best practice partners across the County to explore the creation of a 'plastic free network,' that could provide business support, practical guidelines and advice to help local businesses transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives;*
- c) to incentivise traders on Council land to sell re-usable or non-plastic biodegradable containers and invite customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out SUPs; including investigating the possibility of requiring food and drink vendors to avoid SUPs as a condition of their event permission, strengthening DCC's existing guidance for exhibitors and traders*

Definitions

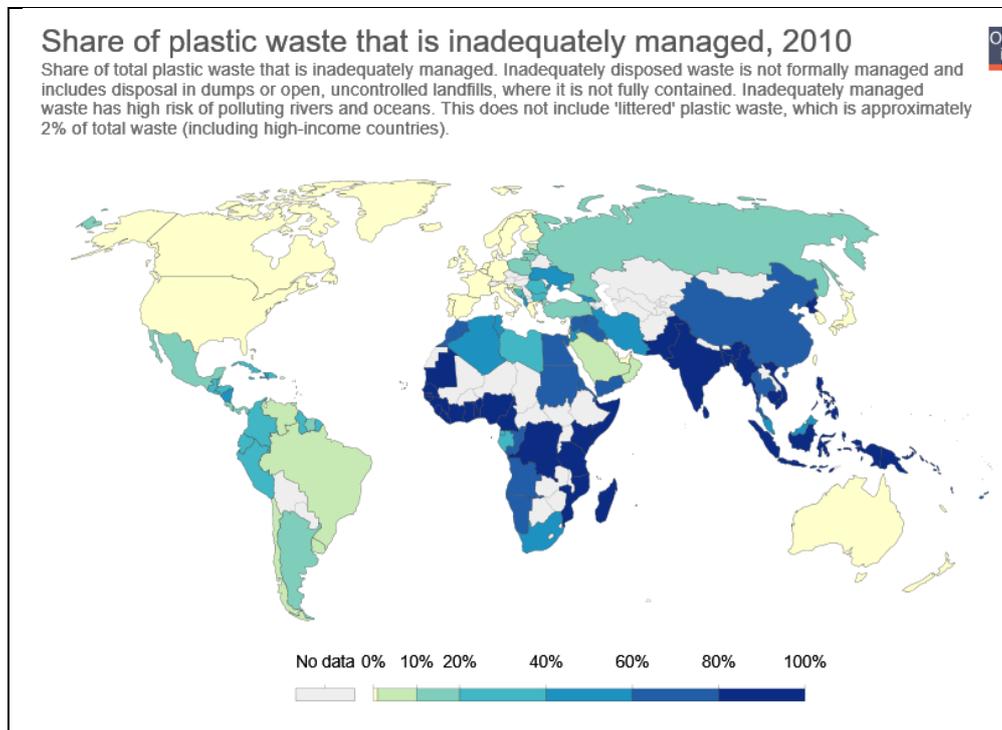
10. The definition of **Single Use Plastic** adopted in this report is from Institute of European, Environmental Policy 2018 which is:
'Any disposable plastic item which is designed to be used only once'
11. The key emphasis here is that it is designed to be used only once. Examples of plastic materials readily meeting this criteria include drinking straws, vending cups, cotton buds. Many water and drink bottles would also fit into this category as they would be designed with immediate disposal after use in mind. Water bottles made of more rigid plastic, intended for re-use would not fit into this category.
12. The definition of "**unnecessary**" referenced in the resolution to Single Use Plastics is much harder to define, and there is no national definition. The best fit can however be gained by using the term "**avoidable**" which is defined in the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) 25 year plan 2018.

"Avoidable means what is Technically, Environmentally and Economically Practicable"

This means therefore that in theory for some single use items there are no current viable alternatives. This may become more relevant as a Council we search for alternatives and find that either they are not available or too costly.

Context – International Position

13. In 1950 the world produced only 2 million tonnes of plastics per year. Since then, annual production has increased nearly 200-fold, reaching 381 million tonnes in 2015 (source Our World in Data/Ocean Unite). This is expected to grow further to 400 million tonnes by 2025.
14. The United Nations Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution (GESAMP), estimated that land-based sources account for up to 80 percent of the world's marine pollution, 60 to 95 percent of the waste being plastics debris. Television programmes such as Blue Planet II bring home to our living rooms the shocking realisation that parts of our seas and oceans are becoming “plastic soup”. More worryingly what is found on the surface is estimated to only 5% of the pollution with 95% submerged.
15. With the largest population, in 2010 China produced the largest quantity of plastic, at nearly 60 million tonnes. This was followed by the United States at 38 million, Germany at 14.5 million and Brazil at 12 million tonnes. High income countries typically have well managed waste streams and therefore low levels of plastic pollution to external environments. Low income countries even though they produce less plastic, have higher levels of pollution.



16. The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and globally the highest-level decision-making body on environmental issues. In December

2017 a Resolution on Marine Litter and Microplastics was made which seeks to contribute to the process of reaching Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) and its target 14.1 which aspires to “prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities including marine debris and nutrient pollution” by 2025. The Resolutions of the UNEA are not legally binding on Member States. However, the biennial Environment Assemblies have an important role in guiding future policies and setting priorities concerning global environmental issues.

17. The United States Marine Conservancy has published statistics on the estimated longevity of plastic materials, and they are as follows:

- Foamed plastic cups: 50 years
- Plastic beverage holder: 400 years
- Disposable diapers: 450 year
- Plastic bottle: 450 years
- Fishing line: 600 years.

Increasingly therefore some initiatives are looking at methods to collect the marine pollution from the bays and seas where it accumulates.

18. Microbeads are tiny pieces of plastic (diameters usually less than 1mm) used as exfoliants and cleansers in personal care products such as shower gels and tooth pastes. They are recognised as being especially harmful to the environment as they are deliberately designed to wash/rinse off and accordingly go direct to watercourses without treatment - sewage plants are not designed to extract them either. The small particle size renders these plastics to be easily digested and enter the food chain.

19. Whilst many countries have in recent years banned the production of these products (e.g. United States, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom) there remains no international ban, It is estimated that 209.6 trillion microbeads (306,900 kilos) enter the water from China every year (source Water Research, 2017).

20. In the EU it is estimated that 150,000 to 500,000 tonnes of plastic waste (50% of which is SUPs) ends up in the oceans every year, equivalent to the content of 66,000 refuse vehicles full (Source: EU Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy 2018). Furthermore, whilst an estimated 25.8 million tonnes of plastic waste are generated in Europe every year, less than 30% of such waste is collected for recycling. Of this amount, a significant share leaves the EU6 to be treated in third countries, where different environmental standards may apply.

21. The EU Strategy for Plastics in Circular Economy calls for changes in the way plastic products are designed, used, produced and recycled in order to reduce the amount of waste and pollution. It also calls on national Government to improve the economics and quality of plastic s recycling, as well as implement measures to curb waste and littering.

In January, China stopped accepting a range of plastic waste from Britain and several other countries. This is seen as an opportunity to develop local domestic end markets, although there is also recent evidence of exports being shifted to Malaysia, Vietnam and Poland, Turkey and the Netherlands. Some of these countries have themselves started to introduce limits and controls, in order to manage.

22. On 24th October 2018 The European parliament has overwhelmingly backed a wide-ranging ban on single-use plastics in an effort to tackle pollution in seas, fields and waterways. Under the proposed directive, items such as plastic straws, cotton swabs, disposable plastic plates and cutlery would be banned by 2021, and 90% of plastic bottle recycled by 2025. Described by the European Commission as a clampdown on “the top 10 plastic products that most often end up in the ocean”, the proposed legislation passed 571 votes to 53. The measure still has to clear some procedural hurdles, but is expected to go through. The UK will also have to incorporate the rules into national law if the ban becomes a fully-fledged directive before the end of a Brexit transition period

Context - National Position

23. DEFRA in their ‘A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment’ have a target of “achieving zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042.” Furthermore they identify an ambition of “significantly reducing and where possible preventing all kinds of marine plastic pollution – in particular material that came originally from land.”
24. They propose achieving these objectives at the Production, Consumption and End of Use Stages.

Production Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with industry to rationalise packaging formats Reforming producer responsibility systems Banning problem materials in an approach similar to microbeads Encouraging biodegradable/eco friendly plastic
Consumer Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removing all consumer single use plastics from the central government estate offices Extending uptake of the successful 5p plastic bag charge to small retailers Supporting water companies, high street retailers, coffee shops and transport hubs to offer new refill points for people to top-up water bottles for free Working with retailers and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to explore introducing plastic-free supermarket aisles

End of Use Stage	<p>Continuing to support the industry led on-pack recycling labelling system</p> <p>Implementing voluntary and regulatory interventions that can cut the amount of commonly littered items</p> <p>Through the Framework for Greater Consistency, WRAP is working with industry and local authorities to ensure that a consistent set of materials are collected</p> <p>Working with the waste management industry and re-processors to significantly increase the proportion of plastic packaging that is collected and collected by all local authorities</p>
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25. Some of this work is already underway. For example across Central Estate Offices (i.e. all Central Government Departments, their Executive Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies with some exceptions e.g. Military Barracks) from 1st August 2018 a phased removal of single use plastics has commenced to be complete by 1st January 2020.
26. From a local authority perspective however, beyond seeking to contribute to the strategy objectives, there is currently no clear direction on the future of waste policy in England. More detail is anticipated in the Resources and Waste Strategy which is expected to be published by the end of 2018. It appears that in the short term, local decision makers will be required to continue to concentrate on improving recycling performance and saving costs in a manner most appropriate to their circumstances. It would not be surprising if the forthcoming strategy highlighted in the 25 year plan has some more detailed measures for Councils to follow, including eliminating avoidable SUPs from their own practices, similar to that of the Central Government estate.
27. In order to inform the Resources and Waste Strategy, the Government issued a call for evidence between 13th March – 18th May 2018. The government ran a call for evidence to explore how changes to the tax system or charges could be used to reduce the amount of single-use plastics we waste. It looked broadly across the whole supply chain, from production and retail to consumption and disposal, in order to gain the best possible understanding of the whole landscape to determine the best course of action. It also sought to explore how best to drive innovation in this area to achieve the same outcomes. The Council, as a member of Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC) provided comments as part of this call for evidence which are attached as **Appendix 4**.
28. The government will consider all options for using the tax system to address single-use plastic waste (including introducing a deposit return scheme) in order to drive innovation, and will use the evidence gathered from this call to inform that process.

On 22nd October 2018 the Government announced consultation to seek views on banning the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, plastic-stemmed

cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers. This also includes PLA (Polylactic acid) straws as whilst they are in theory biodegradable, in landfill the conditions are not right for this. There are certain exceptions in the consultation such as the use of medical enabled drinking straws.

Local Context

29. Across County Durham there is a robust system of waste and recycling collection in place. Whilst some Councils are restricted on the type of household plastics for recycling they collect, those within County Durham are at the broader end of the spectrum and will accept for recycling most plastic materials. Furthermore, materials not sent for recycling are sent for incineration with energy recovery (rather than landfill) meaning that there is little scope for contribution to marine pollution, with the exception of incorrect disposal of plastics (e.g. contact lenses and cotton buds) down the toilet, littering and fly tipping.
30. Across the County in 2017 we collected 7,713 tonnes of plastics comprised of 6, 827 tonnes kerbside and 886 tonnes household waste recycling centres. Different plastic product types are sorted and sent for recycling. Photograph shows baled plastic bottles at the Council's contractor (Biffa) to be sent for recycling.



31. The Local Government Association has revealed (October 2018) that 20 per cent of councils have felt a direct impact from China's restrictions on imports of mixed paper and certain types of plastic over the last year. In County Durham the plastics collected are then taken to a range of UK destinations for processing, and markets so to date we have been largely unaffected by this. As a matter of policy our contractor Biffa only seeks to export materials where there is no viable UK outlet.
32. The Council has not undertaken waste compositional analysis of its residual bins for some time, however in 2014/15 our surveys found between 16% and 22% of a typical waste bin was target plastics (plastic bottles, pots, tubs) that could have been recycled. Whilst some benefit is gained (energy from waste) in incineration, overall it represents waste of resource and untapped potential to recycle more.

33. The fact that there are no significant links to home grown plastic marine pollution, does not give sufficient reason for the Council not to be involved. Plastics are a finite material, and even if they can be recycled the process takes up valuable energy, furthermore as an estimated 11% of household waste is plastic, 40% of which is plastic bottles (source University of Cambridge), it makes economic and environmental sense to reduce it in the first place, especially if single use can be avoided.

Approach

34. The Council resolution on Single Use Plastics was presented to Durham County Councils Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th February 2018 , who determined that the County Durham Environment Partnership be asked to prepare and submit the report requested in the resolution.
35. Working as one of the thematic groups of the County Durham Partnership, the Environment Partnership is tasked with delivering “Altogether Greener” objectives. It comprises a wide range of voluntary and statutory environmental organisations including Durham Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency, Voluntary Sector Organisations, English Heritage, Durham University as well as a range of Council services from waste to planning.
36. In response to the request the Environment Partnership established a Task Group, to consider all aspects of the County Council Resolution. It comprises a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in single use plastics. This includes:
- Durham County Council – Head of Direct Services (Chair)
 - Durham County Council – Strategic Waste
 - Durham County Council - Procurement
 - Durham County Council – Education
 - Durham County Council – Trading Standards
 - Durham County Council - Events
 - Durham County Council - Catering and Facilities Management
 - Durham Heritage Coast Partnership
 - Durham University – Procurement
 - Durham University – Catering and Facilities Management
 - Environment Agency
 - Durham Business Improvement District
 - Northumbrian Water
 - North East Nature Partnership
37. Clearly the membership of the group does not reflect the full community of stakeholders linked to Single Use Plastics, but was comprised to be of sufficient size to cover a range of key internal services for the Council, as well as the valued input from a selection of external obligations.
38. The Task Group has been meeting monthly since 26th April 2018. The Chair of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny

Committee, Cllr Eddy Adam attended this first meeting and as well as confirming the objectives, also set out a clear steer and support for “early wins” in advance of any pledge. This is further supported by the County Councils Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnership who endorsed the action concentrated approach.

39. The Task Group have addressed the three areas of the Council Motion separately as detailed in the rest of the report. Under each section we describe what has been done, and what remains to be done, culminating in an Action Plan (**Appendix 3**) for consideration.

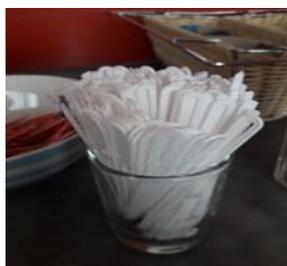
Durham County Council Motion Section A

Enable Durham County Council to become a full signatory of the 'Plastic Free Pledge', by phasing out the use of unnecessary SUPs in all County Council buildings, and working with commissioning partners to end the purchase and procurement of SUPs through the DCC supply chain;

40. This aspect of the resolution is interpreted to be about the Council getting its own house in order, and considering making a public commitment to change. The Task Group have approached this challenge in the following stages.
- A “field” audit of the current position to consider Council wide where we are using most single use plastics. This included catering services, events, facilities management, leisure centres, libraries and plant nursery.
 - Identification of and delivery of some “quick wins” in advance of the pledge with support from the Chair of Environment and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny and the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Partnerships.
 - A survey of suppliers to help identify their products to us and the availability of alternatives.
 - A consideration of the options, issues and implications of the Council becoming a signatory to the “Plastic Free Pledge”

Field Audit

41. This was carried out between June and July 2018 across a wide range of Council establishments including administrative buildings, leisure centres, libraries, staff and public cafes, as well as the Councils plant nursery.
42. It should come as no surprise that single use plastics were found across several locations. Examples include stirrers, plastic lids, and vending machine cups.



43. What is perhaps more surprising, is the breadth of use of these materials across Council services that hitherto may not have been considered. For

example plastic overshoes at leisure facilities, spoons in ice cream tubs and even plastic confetti for pantomimes.



44. This audit has been invaluable in allowing us to implement some early wins, (see below **many of the items in the pictures above have now been removed**) as well as form a view that it would be impracticable to eliminate overnight. Even when as a Council we would consider this complete, it is suggested that further field audit be undertaken to establish if this is the case in practice.

Quick Wins – Now Achieved

Outline of Initiative	Estimate of Impact
<p>Catering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moved to recyclable, compostable, biodegradable coffee cups, food takeaway packaging and hot food service containers as standard. Ceased use of plastic straws (with the exception of cartons), and plastic stirrers Introduced chargeable reusable plastic sip cups including a discount on your purchase when they are used in any site Joined Northumbrian Water’s Refill campaign in DCC civic sites and several public facing cafes. Use of glass bottles and reusable glasses when serving water for hospitality orders – no longer provide disposable cups. <p>Highways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piloted the use of recycled plastics into road surfacing materials <p>Procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveyed key suppliers in relation to current and future SUP issues <p>Culture and Sport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removed SUP confetti used within the Gala Theatre and replaced with paper alternative Ceased use of plastic straws. <p>Strategic Waste Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During recycle week (September 2018) the team promoted individual SUP pledges 	<p>Over 300 sold to date.</p> <p>6.5Tonnes of recycled plastic used in the scheme.</p> <p>Responses from 19 key suppliers. Confirmed appetite and opportunity for change.</p> <p>700Kg of SUP confetti removed</p> <p>143 pledges from DCC staff and 117 from residents</p>

Supplier Survey and Questionnaire

45. To complement the internal audit, the group also conducted an investigation into our main suppliers to see how they were addressing SUPs.
46. As Durham County Council is a significant purchaser of goods and products, it was felt that sending a survey to the top suppliers could influence the supply chain in the future and assist with working towards the substantial reductions in avoidable SUPs. In turn, as many organisations use the same suppliers, influence upon a regional scale could be established via NEPO. The task group developed a bespoke SUP survey and targeted communications electronically during July 2018, via the use of Survey Monkey.
47. **Appendix 5**, provides a copy of the electronic survey and the results which were obtained from 19 of the Council's main suppliers. In addition, face to face interviews were held by the Procurement Team directly with their suppliers in order to a) understand the issues associated with alternatives to SUPs and b) establish the changes (if any) suppliers were making in relation to reducing SUPs.
48. Although a relatively small number of respondents the survey does indicate that 40% (5 out of 9) feel they could remove SUPs from their products or services, with (not surprisingly) the same number indicating alternatives would be available. This can be viewed as glass half full vs glass half empty – some suppliers readily see SUP alternatives, whilst for other products they may not.
49. Many small scale local suppliers had recognised the fact that their customers were asking for changes to SUPs to be made and had started to make small scale changes where possible e.g. the introduction of paper straws rather than plastic ones by Embleton Diaries and the withdrawal of offering plastic straws by many Durham based bars and restaurants.
50. In the main, large scale, corporate organisations stated that they were awaiting the future strategic direction of travel from Government. Many reported that they hoped DEFRA's Resources and Waste Strategy would influence the wider plastics industry and key stakeholders.

Government Consultation on Banning Plastic Straws, Cotton Buds and Stirrers

51. From a local context this has now already been largely achieved. For example at Gala, we have stopped plastic straws, and giving out straws as standard, but we will give paper straws if people request them. For catering services we no longer provide plastic stirrers (wooden alternatives), and have stopped using plastic drinking straws. The only exception to this is the cartons of juice and drink that come with their own straws. For these we are engaging with suppliers to consider alternatives, or as a last resort may cease purchase altogether.

52. It is suggested that the Government proposed ban be endorsed through formal feedback from the Council and, if they wish, from key partners.

Consideration of “Plastic Free” and other Pledges

53. The “Plastic Free Pledge” (PFP) which is the subject of the Council Resolution is a misnomer in that it is not about fully “plastic free”, but rather commits organisation signatories to:

“Commit to reducing single-use plastic waste in your organisation”

54. Each pledging organisation then describes the measures it intends to take. There is currently only 1 pledge in County Durham which is Market Place Ltd, Crook. They provide a commitment of only use paper straws have stopped selling plastic bottles of water and soft drinks. They no longer use polystyrene containers for takeaway food and have reduced the amount of plastic carrier bags we use by making customers aware. There are currently no North East organisations established as “Ambassadors” to promote the cause.
55. The PFP originated as a local eco campaign, based in Hove, proactive with a focus on removing straws from local businesses. It does have a strong plastic straw focus, and the local Council at Brighton and Hove have therefore signed up individual buildings and establishments, rather than the Council as a whole, although they do support the focus.
56. As part of their work, the Task Group also considered a range of other pledges that were potentially available as alternatives. These are detailed in **Appendix 6** and include:
- Greenpeace – pledge to stop plastic pollution
 - WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) Plastic Pact
 - Plastic Free Coastlines (Surfers Against Sewage)
 - Marine conservation Society Plastic Free for July
 - Bespoke pledges for the Council or County partnership area
57. The Greenpeace, and Plastic Free Coastline pledges were focussed on marine pollution, and indeed the Marine Conservation Society a time limited awareness raising campaign. All are very important issues, however the Task Group felt that a broader pledge that covered the wider impacts and wastefulness of single use plastics may be more appropriate.
58. WRAP Plastic Pact was considered, however it is not currently open for local authorities but rather targeted at businesses. Larger businesses are expected to financially contribute with this being recognised and promoted. It was felt that this may dissuade some from joining.
59. Consideration was given to a bespoke pledge established solely for the County Council and its partners. These can be as broad or narrow as the Council wants and can include a range of local commitments. Several Councils have adapted this approach from Monmouthshire to Plymouth. A

sample from Brighton and Hove is attached in **Appendix 7**, which has ambition to establish a “Single Use Plastics Free City”. Whilst these pledges do ensure local distinctiveness, they are not part of national campaigns, and Members may consider that they want to display unity of a common format of pledge.

60. Taking all the above into consideration, in the County Durham Context it is felt that either the Plastic Free Pledge or a Local Pledge is the most appropriate. Clearly this will be Members discretion, however the signature for a County Durham Pledge would have the advantage that it is clearly labelled as combatting unnecessary single use plastics, rather than the confusing term “plastic free”.
61. Such a pledge, could be designed not only with the Council in mind, but partners too. It may look like:

County Durham Single Use Plastics Pledge (Draft)

We the undersigned, pledge to significantly reduce and work towards ultimately removing the use of unnecessary single use plastics from our operations, and will encourage and enable partners, schools, businesses and the residents of County Durham to do their part.

Plastic pollution is an international scourge on our environment, and the scenes of harm it does to our beaches, oceans and wildlife bring a sense of collective shame. The consequences, are much more than visual as plastics enter the food chain and can eventually reach the whole ecosystem including us.

The UK government estimates that there are currently more than 150m tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans, and that some 100,000 sea mammals and one million birds die from eating or becoming tangled in plastic waste each year.

We will work towards significantly reducing use of unnecessary single-use plastics across our own operations and services and work with partners to maximise the effectiveness of this approach throughout County Durham. We will also work to maximise the reuse and recycling of other plastics to conserve resources minimise pollution.

To support this aim, signatory partner organisations commit to:

- Work in our respective organisations to ensure that unnecessary single use plastics are eliminated across our offices and service buildings, and from activities (where provided) such as catering and events.
- Where opportunity arises, promote and support the activities of schools, communities and residents in their efforts to reduce single use plastics.
- Support the establishment of a Single Use Plastics network within the County, to disseminate good practice and ensure the good work and pledge commitments are maintained.

Further Actions

62. Clearly, a pledge is meaningless unless it is followed up with actions. A full action plan is attached in **Appendix 3** for Durham County Council. These can be summarised as follows:

Key Future Actions for Durham County Council

Waste

- Engage with Inspire Programme "Change Advocates" staff network to raise awareness and alternatives to SUPs.
- Review recycling provision and utilisation across all Council buildings

Procurement

- Consideration to a centralised block on all procurement of Single Use Plastics without senior manager consent.
- Include in future DCC contract Specifications the consideration to use SUP where possible

Catering

- Expand the approach to reduce Single Use Plastics from Direct Services provisions to other Council catering services
- Design and implement new takeaway provision that eliminates SUPs

Highways

- Submit scheme to Department for Transport for roll out of successful road construction scheme incorporating palletised plastics.

Children and Young Peoples Services

- Engage with DCC schools catering provider to look at opportunities for further reduction in SUPs.

Culture and Sport

- Removal of blue overshoes from leisure centres.
- Consider options around phasing out foil balloons and strings from supply chain and licencing.

63. Durham County Council Motion Section 2

b) encourage the County's businesses, organisations and residents to go 'plastic free,' working with best practice partners across the County to explore the creation of a 'plastic free network,' that could provide business support, practical guidelines and advice to help local businesses transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives

64. Given the widespread concern regarding Single Use Plastics, it was not surprising that many of the Partners around the table of the Task Group were already undertaking some excellent work. It is important to highlight this positive direction of travel. Examples illustrated in this section of the report include:

- Schools
- Environment Agency
- Durham BiD
- Northumbrian Water
- Durham University
- Nature Partnership
- Heritage Coast

65. There are undoubtedly a wide range of businesses and organisations across County Durham who have also made an impact in reducing Single Use Plastics. Within the timescale available to the group, it has not been possible at this stage to undertake a full audit of activity, however that is something that can be established going forward.

Schools

66. St Bede's RCVA Primary School, in Sacriston was the first school in the North East to achieve 'Plastic Free Schools' status from the Surfers Against Sewerage charity. The Eco Warriors led the whole school in the project with the aim of reducing our use of single use plastic and raising awareness of the dangers of plastic to our environment in our community.

67. The group completed a series of 'missions' to achieve the status including:

- 'trash mobs' in which children picked up litter around school and the local community;
- making changes to the kitchen e.g. getting a yoghurt maker to avoid plastic pots and using tin foil instead of cling film;
- having a 'plastic bottle boycott' and pledging to use reusable water bottles.

68. The project had a hugely positive impact, resulting in the Secretary of State for the environment writing to them, a visit from our local MP, and Tyne Tees news visiting school! The children were incredibly engaged

and motivated, feeling great passion about the subject. Other schools have since been in touch for more information about the project.



Environment Agency

69. The Environment Agency have been actively working to reduce the use of SUPs in their workplaces. The Facilities Management teams have replaced single use cups, straws, condiment sachets, plates and cutlery in their buildings. The next stage will be to eliminate single use plastic bottles on sale including in canteens. Facilities Management will also be working to understand how they can remove thousands of plastic milk cartons from offices at a reasonable cost.
70. They have produced a handy guide to plastic reduction at work to provide Environment Agency staff with some ideas of what they can do. Over the last few months more than 25 EA offices and depots have already made the switch to glass bottles from their local suppliers. So far, the changes have saved around 1,500 plastic bottles.

Durham BID

71. Durham BID has led on engaging with businesses in Durham on single use plastics. It has used its existing database of over 500 businesses to explore existing practices and identify the appetite to make commitments to reducing SUPs. It has also promoted campaigns such as refill and encouraged businesses to reduced plastic, e.g. straws in bars/restaurants.
72. It has also acted to improve waste awareness amongst Durham businesses, arranging presentations and meetings looking into improving recycling in the city centre.

Northumbrian Water / Refill

73. Refill is City to Sea's campaign to promote and encourage free tap-water 'Refill Stations' in cafes, bars and shops on every high street and transport hub across the UK.
74. Northumbrian Water are delivering the campaign locally and launched Refill in December 2018, in Durham – signing up over 30 Refill Stations in Durham City through volunteers on the first weekend.
75. Durham University and Durham County Council came on board in Spring/Summer 2018, signing up key buildings and running joint campaigns to encourage take up and participation. The County Councils Waste Team have assisted on this and during Recycle Week contacted 48 establishments countywide to encourage take up of the scheme.



Durham University

76. Durham University students in residences are offered meals as part of their accommodation fees and in some cases packed lunches are provided where students need to eat offsite.
77. Reusable hot drinks containers, drinking bottles and food containers are being trialled at Van Mildert College for the autumn term. These reusable containers are dishwasher safe, freezable and can be microwaved.
78. Whilst the trial is on going, there is good participation, with students returning their containers after use for washing and there is a reduction in waste plastics and less SUPs purchased as a result. Whilst cost savings are not the prime motivator, it is estimated that this will be £235 by the end of the financial year.

Nature Partnership

79. The Nature Partnership is delivering GENEE (Greening the Economy of North East England) package of environmental policy and process support from Capability North East. GENEE is a one year audit and review programme that will assist in achieving a corporate understanding and delivery mechanisms to meet sustainable and environmental ambitions, including addressing the use of SUPs. It will be rolling out the package from the autumn and the County Council will be one of the early adopters.

Heritage Coast

80. The Heritage Coast Partnership is a key organisation leading on actions to remove plastic litter from the beaches of Durham. It provides support for beach cleans and liaises with DCC for collection services afterwards.
81. Working with European partners it is investigating the problem of where the plastics originate from and how best to deal with them.



Police

82. Whilst not part of the Task Group is is also evident that organisations such as the Police are also playing their part in contributing to reductions in Single Use Plastics. This includes stopping using plastic bottled water when they have buffets for external guests. This has saved approximately 3,500 plastics bottles per annum. They are stopping using disposable cups for drinks within our training facility. This is estimated to save £2,000 per annum.

Future Actions

83. It is clear that there is a significant appetite for reductions in Single Use Plastics across the County and that a wide range of organisations are doing some excellent work. Clearly there remains work to be done, these are captured in the Action Plan (**Appendix 3**) and summarised as follows:

Key Future Actions in Encouraging Wider Involvement

- The existing Task Group to be developed and expanded to become a “SUPs network” as advocated in the Council resolution.
- Consideration to a “collective pledge” of a wide range of organisations and partners with County Durham.
- Undertake an audit of all external activity regarding reduction in Single Use Plastics across the County

New Partners

- Active engagement and support to major employers providing advice and support, encouraging involvement in SUP network.

Children and Young Peoples Services

- Develop and promote circular economy learning resources with schools across the county

Northumbrian Water

- Working with partners significantly increase participants in the Refill Scheme across County Durham County Council

Business Improvement District

- Continue the development of a City “plastic Free network” providing advice and assistants

North East Nature Partnership

- Encourage organisations and partners to join the North East Nature Partnership’s Environmental Accreditation Scheme.

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c) to incentivise traders on Council land to sell re-usable or non-plastic biodegradable containers and invite customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out SUPs; including investigating the possibility of requiring food and drink vendors to avoid SUPs as a condition of their event permission, strengthening DCC's existing guidance for exhibitors and traders

84. This section of the Council resolution, calls on the County Council to use its influence in authorising activity on its own land, or through licencing to encourage or require vendors to reduce single use plastics.
85. The Task Group benefited from representatives from Environmental Health and Licencing participating, and whilst it is clear that there is potential for more to be done, it will not be of surprise that changes to policy and regulatory guidance in this area are not matters that can be changed overnight.
86. Given the above, it was recognised that for many outdoor public events there are high use of single use plastics for safety reasons (such as disposable plastic drink receptacles at Miners Gala). Whilst these might be regarded as unavoidable, there is however still an interest in collection for recycling, which is not currently the case. Furthermore people bring with them large quantities of plastic bottles drink bottles to sporting events, and whilst there is an opportunity to educate towards reusable bottles, opportunity should also be taken to recycle where possible.
87. This section of the report therefore advices of some early wins achieved in the furtherance of this resolution, as well as a description of key measures to come.
88. **Durham City Run**

In June 2018, the annual Durham City run held in the City Centre, attracted over 3,000 participants. During this event, a larger number of plastic bottles were used. The Council's Clean and Green Team arranged for 7 dumpy bags of plastic bottles to be immediately collected and sent for recycling via the Council's recycling contractor. This event and the collection of the plastic bottles afterwards, was covered on social media and generated local interest. It is planned that future DCC events can be managed this way.



On Street Recycling facilities

89. New public recycling facilities have been introduced in the market place at Durham, with the potential for wider expansion especially to areas where plastic items are likely to be disposed of. It does remain a challenge however, as the recycling only works with low levels of contaminants. If the plastic aperture has significant amounts of polystyrene, food boxes or other wastes then the load becomes unviable to sort. Apertures are clearly labelled. If the pilot is successful then it will be rolled out to other areas.

Proposed Future Actions

Licencing

- Review DCC's Licensing Act (which controls licensed premises including pubs, clubs, and takeaways with licences, restaurants, hotels etc. that supply alcohol, late night refreshments and regulated entertainments) to include the requirements where possible, for licensed premises to seek alternatives to SUP usage where practically possible (Note many licenses currently specify the use of SUPs due to health and safety requirements).
- Review the DCC Street Trading policy with a view to incorporating the requirement to recommend the uptake and use of SUP by street traders.
- Review DCCs market operators license in order to influence that alternatives to SUPs are considered

Events

- Promote the SUP message to producers and traders at both Bishop Auckland Food Festival and Seaham Food Festival, giving priority to those traders who demonstrate a commitment to the reduction of SUPs.
- Explore with organisers SUP collection at the Miners Gals
- Commitment to reduction of SUPs at Gala Theatre (c300,000 visitors per year). In addition to changes already made, this will include: replacement of plastic bar glasses with plastic-free alternative, elimination of the sale of water in plastic bottles, replacement of ice-cream and popcorn tubs with compostable alternatives.
- Roll out of successes at Gala to other Culture & Sport run facilities.
- Reaffirm the Council's commitment to prevent the use of balloon and lantern releases on its land and events.

Recommendations

1. To note the considerable work undertaken in the last 6 months towards reducing use of Single Use Plastics by the County Council and its Partners.
2. To welcome the Government consultation in banning plastic drinking straws, stirrers and cotton buds, which has already largely been achieved with some exceptions (e.g. straws attached to drink cartons), which are now being given attention.
3. To approve progression of a bespoke County Durham pledge to the County Councils Cabinet to further reduce Single Use Plastics across Council Services.
4. To extend an invitation to wider Council partners to also sign up to the same pledge, magnifying its impact.
5. To note and approve the establishment of a “Single Use Plastics Network” to build on the success to date, and oversee implementation of plans that make further substantial reductions in single use plastics.