

# Bittern Countryside

Community Interest Company



## Fact Sheet 6.

**New for 2022**

### ***“The Problem with Plastic”***

Reduce waste,

Cut your carbon footprint,

Save the environment!



Supporting the

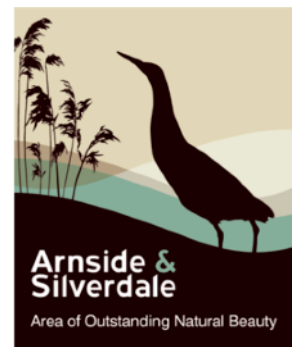
**Arnsdale Silverdale AONB**

Low Carbon Landscape Initiative

Bittern Countryside Community Interest Company  
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Website: <http://www.bitterncountrysidecic.org.uk>



**In association with Silverdale WI**

## Introduction

This is one of a series of leaflets\* prepared by the Bittern Countryside CIC to show how our actions affect our planet. This leaflet looks at what **we** can do to reduce our plastic use and its damaging effect both globally and in our AONB.

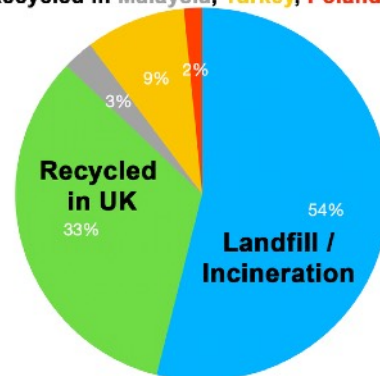
## What is plastic?

Plastic is an extremely useful and versatile material, transforming the way we buy food especially. It's lightweight, and doesn't rust. It is most commonly made from oil. But it's now clear that it is also very harmful to the environment in many ways. For decades Greenpeace warned about the massive raft of plastic debris in the middle of the Atlantic, yet it took David Attenborough's TV programme 'Blue Planet' to spark public horror at the scale of ocean plastic and the harm caused to marine life. That comes in three forms mainly: plastic items that are ingested by fish, mammals and birds, mistaking it for food; floating plastic including nylon netting and rope, that creatures become entangled in; and micro-plastics that form a kind of soup that gets into everything. Morecambe Bay and the beaches of the AONB are affected the same as everywhere else.

## How much plastic do we use in the UK?

We produce around 5,000,000 tonnes of plastic waste in the UK each year. Around half of this is from single use plastic packaging<sup>1</sup>. Of this 2.5 million tonnes of plastic packaging, only 1.1 million tonnes is recycled. Much of the rest is burnt or goes to landfill. Even more disturbingly there is good reason to think that much of the plastic exported for recycling finds its way into the environment.

**Plastic Packaging in UK**  
Recycled in Malaysia, Turkey, Poland



## Why can't we just recycle it all?

While certain kinds of plastic are collected and recycled, much of it is not. There is simply not sufficient industrial plant to cope with it, and quantities are exported. In some countries the imported plastic waste forms huge heaps on the beaches and in the countryside causing ecological carnage. China and Malaysia have refused to take our waste plastic. More countries are following suit.

The answer has to be consumers avoiding plastic whenever they can, and retailers offering alternative kinds of wrapping and containers. There are now affordable ways to avoid plastic, and many new small businesses

offering non-plastic consumer goods. Sometimes it's just a matter of going back to the methods we used several decades ago!

## Should we ban plastic altogether?

Plastic still has a place when used for items which are longlasting and also for certain small medical items which can not be made of any other material. However nothing should be allowed that can not be recycled and processes should be in place to ensure that it is easy to do so.

## What can we do?

Below you will find practical ideas on how to change your consumer habits and exist with minimal plastic. It does mean a bit more work and forethought, and many non-plastic items are a lot more expensive than the plastic variety. But, if we care enough, we'll make the changes.

### Plastic bottles.

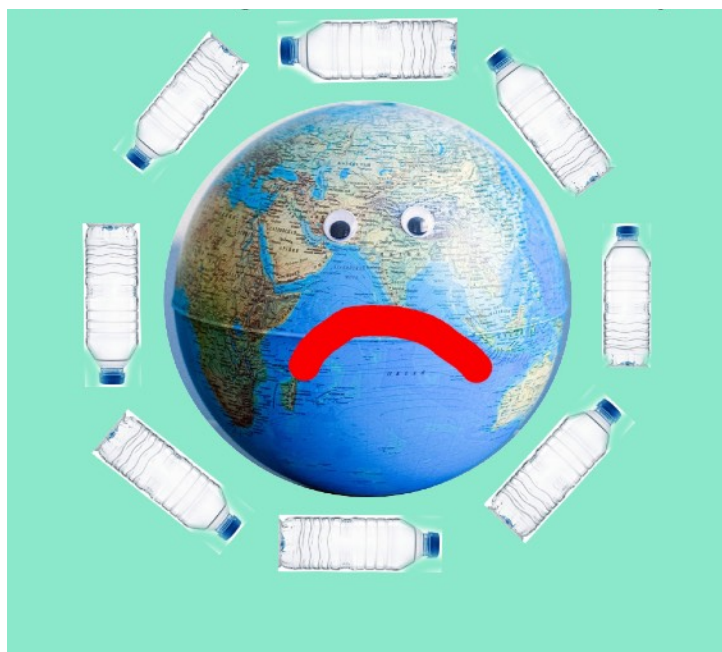
In the UK we use enough plastic water bottles (7.7 billion<sup>2</sup> every year) to go round the world every nine days if placed end to end. If we include plastic milk containers and other bottles the number almost doubles to a staggering 13 billion single use plastic bottles a year.

### The Answer:

Don't buy bottled water. Have a refillable container; all food and drink outlets should fill it with tap water for free. Buy fruit squash and dilute with water rather than buy it ready to drink.

Get your **milk** delivered in returnable glass bottles – we have that privilege in the AONB!

For laundry liquids, take your empty containers for re-filling – in Silverdale there is 'Fill' at 6A Lindeth Road, or the Post Office.





## Cling film.

This is nearly always impossible to recycle. It is often contaminated with food waste and very hard to clean. It gets caught in recycling machinery and very few plants can cope with it. This means it nearly always ends up in landfill or being incinerated. Over 1.2 billion metres of cling film is used in UK homes each year<sup>3</sup>. This enough to wrap round the world over 30 times each year. This does not include the shrink wrap used by the retail sector.

We use enough cling film in a year in the UK to wrap round the world over 30 times..



## The Answer:



Save your glass jam jars, margarine cartons and ice cream cartons and use them over and over again to store food in the fridge. Ice cream cartons and bags from frozen vegetables can be washed and used over and over again. You can buy re-usable silicone bags for the freezer.

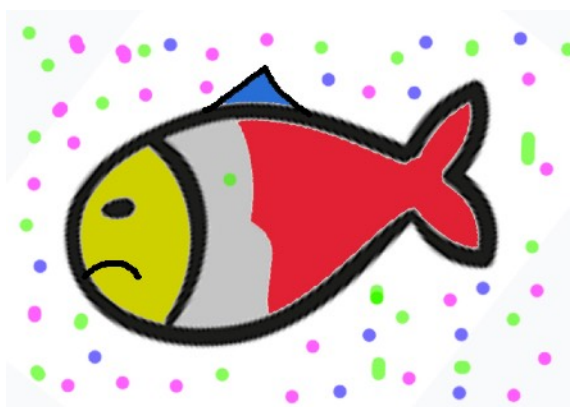
Waxiwraps (cotton impregnated with beeswax) are ideal for packing sandwiches, and can be rinsed in warm water afterwards. They can also seal food placed in dishes in the fridge.

## Microplastics

These are plastic pieces that are smaller than 5 mm across. They come from all sorts of sources. Many of them end up in our rivers and seas as they are so small that they can't be collected.

The biggest source of microplastics in UK waters is thought to come from vehicle tyres. Over 50% of the rubber in tyre treads is synthetic ie plastic. As these wear down the plastic dust collects on the roads and is then washed down into the drains when it rains. The second largest is from washing manmade fibre garments. All these pieces of plastic can be ingested by fish and other marine life.

## It looks like food but!!!



A study in 2019<sup>4</sup> estimated that there were between 7,000 and 19,000 tonnes from tyres, 1,500-2,900 tonnes from clothing, 2,000-5,900 tonnes from plastic pellets (nurdles) and 1,400-3,700 tonnes from paints on roads and building entering UK rivers and seas each year. This does not include the microplastics from degrading plastic already in the sea. There are plenty to be found on the beaches around the AONB. These were found on Cove beach at Silverdale. They are a real draw for birds who see them as berries and snail eggs etc. Can you spot the real seeds, tellin shells and snail shells?



### **The Answer:**

**Tyres:** Reduce wear and tear as much as possible by having them correctly inflated and driving carefully. Avoid potholes and kerb edges. Cut down on your mileage.

**Bathing:** Millions of ‘sponges’ (actually plastic) are thrown away every year. **Loofas** are a good alternative, although they might be a bit scratchy for washing the car! Being a natural product, they do tend to harbour mould unless you put them through very hot water every week.



**Clothing:** Spurn ‘fast fashion’ that ends up in landfill. Make your clothes last and don’t wash them if they don’t need it; buy second hand; repurpose old garments. ‘Fleeces’ and other clothing made of plastic (acrylic, polyester etc.) are the worst offenders, creating micro-plastic pollution of drainage water when laundered in a washing machine. Best to gently hand-wash. When buying new clothes **look for natural fibres** – cotton, wool, silk, hemp etc.

Use your school Uniform Swap Shop; start one if there isn’t one already. Perhaps we could help you.

**Gardening:** Choose zinc-coated metal **watering cans**. Exposed to sunlight, the plastic ones soon become brittle and break into tiny bits.



## Hidden Plastics

These are among the most dangerous. Things that look perfectly innocent like wet wipes. These are made from polyester and contain millions of microfibrils impregnated with chemicals. They are very strong, hence their popularity for wiping up messes. However when flushed down the drain they combine with waste fat to form giant fat burgers. If they make it to the water treatment plant the fibres get past the filters and into the rivers and seas. You can buy plastic free wet wipes but even these should be disposed of in your household waste and not flushed away.

Another is chewing and bubble gum. Look on the packet and you will see Gum base: this used to be made from the gum of a tree but now is a mixture of polymers such as polyethylene, resins and plasticizers. Some manufacturers are going back to the original gum base from the Chicle plant.



“Silver” plastic such as is used for loose tea is sometimes confused with aluminium foil (such as wraps chocolate). Tip: If you can crush it into a tiny ball it’s aluminium, if it just springs back it’s plastic.

There are lots of others: Glitter, Xmas decorations, self-sealing gum on envelopes, some tea and fruit tea bags.

### The Answer:

Always look at ingredients and reject those with plastic. Some manufacturers are producing plastic free alternatives.

### Compostable Plastic<sup>5</sup>:



There are 2 sorts, Industrial compostable and Home compostable. You can put plastic with one of the 3 logos shown in your home compost bin.

The rest is only suitable for industrial composting. However neither of them can be recycled with ordinary plastic and will result in the whole batch being sent to landfill. They use a different process.

## The Answer

Put home compostable material in your compost heap. Otherwise **Put it in your general waste bin.**

## Choosing Alternative Products

### Toiletries and Hygiene

**Go back to bars of soap** – no more ‘handwash’ in plastic containers. A half-way house would be to refill your handwash containers from Fill. Hair-washing: You can now buy shampoo and conditioner that comes in blocks, looking just like soap. Generally sold in little cardboard boxes.



**Teeth-cleaning:** Toothpaste (or powder) is now available in glass jars, or in aluminium tubes. (Costs £12 unfortunately). Bamboo toothbrushes are widely available.

**Look for toilet rolls** that are not wrapped in plastic. ‘Panda’ rolls (made of bamboo) come wrapped in paper, but bamboo has to be shipped across the world. ‘Serious Tissues’ are recycled from paper waste and made in the North West; they can be bought on the web and come, unwrapped, in a cardboard box.

**Disposable Nappies, menstrual products and incontinence pads** are huge plastic users. All over the country people are discovering that wash-

able items are comfortable and easy to use. They may be a little more expensive initially but will save money in the long run as well as being better for the planet. According to Which <sup>6</sup>, 3 billion disposable nappies are thrown away each year in the UK and biodegradable nappies are not much better than standard as there are no industrial sites to process them.

### ***Kitchen and bathroom waste***

Wrap messy unrecyclable waste in newspaper or put it in plastic wrapping from magazines etc., before you drop it in the general waste bin. Or buy **the compostable caddy liners** from the **Co-op** – look for the HOME Compostable label.

### ***Yoghurt***

Most yoghurt comes in plastic pots. We buy around 53 thousand tonnes<sup>7</sup> of it each year in the UK. Along with the yoghurt comes 1,000 tonnes of plastic pot.

Make your own **yoghurt** in jam-jars – incredibly easy, look on the web to find recipes. Or buy a yoghurt making kit that will have re-usable containers.

### ***Tins of drinks***

If you buy sixpacks of drinks held together by plastic rings, please cut each ring before you discard the plastic. Birds and animals are getting trapped by them. Most manufacturers are now phasing them out.

### ***Face masks***

Covid has had a huge impact on the amount of medical plastic waste. In the short term this was unavoidable but now plastic free alternatives must be found.

The present disposable masks are made from several layers of polypropylene. They are not recyclable and many are finding their way into our rivers and seas.

Make your own face masks out of cotton. There are lots of patterns on the web and they can be a fashion statement as well as plastic free. Washed carefully they should be long lasting.

Single use plastic gloves are needed in a clinical setting but something is going badly wrong as they are washing up on our beaches. Don't use them when painting the house or scrubbing the floor. If you must use them dispose of them securely in your general waste.



## **A few other practical ideas:**

***Always take a shopping bag.*** Booths sell nice cloth ones at the checkout. Avoid 'bags for life' - they are still plastic.

***Buying cheese or cold meats:*** ask for them to be wrapped in grease-proof paper. ***Fresh meat, or fish*** – take your own container and ask the seller to 'tare' the scales before the item is weighed.

***Opt for loose fruit and veg*** where possible. Use small **cotton bags** to take produce to the check-out, or ask staff for paper bags.

***Coffee*** while you're travelling? Equip yourself with a reusable lidded cup, and take on your journey. Even when cafes that say their disposable cups are compostable, use your own cup. Much of the industrial compostable material in their litter bins goes to landfill.

***Real butter.*** OK, it doesn't spread straight from the fridge. So, keep a small amount in a butter-dish, in a cupboard at room temperature. It's fine. (The vegetable-based spreads are in plastic tubs, and aren't as healthy as they make out.)

## **Looking after your dog:**

There are around 12,500,000 dogs kept as pets in the UK. If each of them is walked once each day and a bag is used to remove their poo that means a total of 4.5 billion single use bags are used each year. Is this really the best thing to do? Best practice seems to be to use home compostable bags and either put them in the bin provided or take them home and bury them or put them in your general waste. Do NOT put them in the toilet or throw them in a tree or under a bush. There are plenty of bags for sale and as long as they are plant based they should do less harm than the oil based equivalents.

## **New developments**

***Soft plastic recycling:*** The most recent initiative by some supermarket chains, is the recycling of soft plastic. That includes bread and biscuit wrapping, cheese and frozen food bags, film from hard-plastic meat containers, pet-food pouches, potato crisp packets etc. Such items are not currently collected from households and they take up a great amount of space in waste bins, so it seems a welcome idea. They must be clean as food waste can contaminate a whole delivery. Flatten them and store in a cloth bag. Empty them out of your bag into the In-Store container when you go shopping. Tesco at Carnforth do this and have said the plastic will be recycled into new wrapping<sup>8</sup>. **Do not** add in any items that are "compostable".

**Recycling of 'blister-packs'** – the plastic and aluminium packs holding medicinal pills. These can be recycled now by Teracycle, who arrange collections by Superdrug, the pharmaceutical chain. In our area, there is a Superdrug at Westmorland Shopping Centre.

## Is Recycling the whole answer?

**No**, although it helps, we need to reduce our use overall. Much plastic can only be recycled around 5 times before it is too low grade to be recycled again. Then it goes into landfill, is incinerated or enters the general environment. Even if we tried to recycle all the plastic waste we produced in the UK in 2021, 1 million tonnes would be rejected as too low grade.

So should we encourage incineration for power? The answer is not immediately obvious. Plastic even burnt under ideal conditions produces a large amount of CO<sup>2</sup>. This comes originally from fossil fuel so we are in effect just burning oil. If it is stored safely in underground mines it will remain stable for generations. It is a form of carbon capture. This might be a use for the coal mines we have. However it must not be contaminated with other waste which will decay to form methane, another dangerous greenhouse gas. Another problem is that certain types of plastic could contaminate the ground water and hence our drinking supply.

## Litter:

Even if we reduce our consumption dramatically there is still a lot of plastic out there on the beaches, in the woods and along the footpaths. Why not go on a litter pick every week. Every bottle or takeaway carton you pick up will reduce the damage to our wildlife. Some of our councils have made it easy for you by providing litter pickers and bags. Look opposite the Albion at Arnside. Perhaps all the councils could do the same at litter hotspots.



## Does it make a difference? YES!

The Government's 5p charge on single use plastic carrier bags from the large retailers reduced their use by over 95% in the years from 2014<sup>9</sup>. The new 10p charge which covers all retailers should have the same effect on bags from smaller retailers. Money talks. Whether it is money the customer has to pay out for using unnecessary plastic or the manufacturers lose

because customers will not longer buy items with a high plastic footprint. So where do we go from now. Hopefully you will cut your own plastic consumption and discuss it with your friends and relations. Can we make the AONB into a low plastic area? Can you reduce your plastic consumption by 25%? 50%?

**If we all work together we can help reduce our carbon footprint and help preserve our AONB from the ravages caused by climate change.**

**If you have found this helpful please pass it on to a friend to read. All the fact sheets are available free of charge on our web site.**

### **Where did the CIC get its information from?**

All the information is drawn from recognised official websites, publications and from practical experience, many of them shown below - contact us at: [info@bitterncountrysidecic.org.uk](mailto:info@bitterncountrysidecic.org.uk) or by telephone on 01524 761034 for more information.

- 1 [Government report on Waste 1002246](#)
- 2 [Water UK: National Refill Day](#)
- 3 [Green Island report: Is cling film that bad?](#)
- 4 [Friends of the Earth: Lakes and Rivers study](#)
- 5 [Which? 5 things to know about biodegradable plastic](#)
- 6 [Which? Why biodegradable nappies might not be ecofriendly](#)
- 7 [Statista report: Yogurt in the UK](#)
- 8 [Tesco report: Soft plastic recycling](#)
- 9 [Government report on single use plastic bags](#)

\*The BCCIC has produced another 5 *Energy Fact Sheets and a directory*. They are all available free on our website at:

[http://bitterncountrysidecic.org.uk/?BCCIC\\_PUBLICATIONS](http://bitterncountrysidecic.org.uk/?BCCIC_PUBLICATIONS)

Fact Sheet 1 “**Electricity From Sunshine**” deals with PhotoVoltaic panels.

Fact Sheet 2 “**Heat from Trees**” deals with woodburning and multifuel stoves.

Fact Sheet 3 “**Woodfuel Wisdom**” deals with buying, storing and using wood.

Fact Sheet 4 “**Avoiding energy waste**” looks at small ways you can lower your carbon footprint.

Fact Sheet 5 “**Heat from Ground and Air**” deals with Heat Pumps.

“**Feel Good about Wood**” is a directory that gives more information about local wood management, wood products and wood suppliers in the AONB.

We also produce a series of 14 Nature Atlases about the flora and fauna of our AONB which are also available on our website. Hard copies can be purchased from the Landscape Trust Online Bookshop or from the RSPB Leighton Moss shop.





Join us in making the AONB a low plastic area by:  
Buying less plastic.  
Recycling all you can.  
Using alternatives.

Encouraging others to do the same.

Look at our website publications page for other up-to-date ideas at [www.bitterncountrysidecic.org.uk](http://www.bitterncountrysidecic.org.uk)

