

Motion to Mendip DC Full Council on Monday 18th December

Single Use Plastics

"That this Council will become a 'single-use plastic free' council by phasing out the use of 'single-use plastic' (SUP) products such as bottles, cups, cutlery and drinking straws in all council activities by April 2018 and to encourage our facilities' users and local businesses to do the same by championing alternatives, such as reuseable water bottles."

Background Information.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century plastic has become the most commonly used material (1) and modern life is unthinkable without it. Unfortunately, what makes it so useful, such as its durability, light weight and low cost, also makes it problematic when it comes to its end of life phase.

* According to the latest scientific research, eight million metric tons of plastic waste makes its way into the world's oceans each year. (2) The same report predicts that the amount of plastic debris is likely to increase greatly over the next decade unless nations take strong measures to dispose of their litter responsibly.

* As highlighted in the BBC Blue Planet 2 series, the consequences of plastic pollution on the marine environment are severe. Once in the ocean, plastic waste injures and kills fish, sea birds and marine mammals. Marine plastic pollution has impacted at least 267 species worldwide, including 86% of all sea turtle species, 44% of all sea bird species and 43% of all marine mammal species. The impacts include fatalities as a result of ingestion, starvation, suffocation, infection, drowning, and entanglement.(3)

* Moreover, plastic is not inert and chemical additives, some of them are endocrine disruptors, can migrate into body tissue and enter the food chain ultimately ending up on our plates.

* The massive pollution of world oceans with plastic debris has therefore emerged as a global challenge that requires both global and local response. Mendip should be a showcase for how to build a coherent strategy to optimize plastic waste policy.

* Further issues around single-use plastics are the challenges linked to resources conservation, with 68.4% of plastic waste in the UK still being sent to landfill. (4) This problem could be solved by reducing the volume of waste in the first instance.

* As the majority of people move to cities and demand a more convenient way of life, our casual use of single-use plastics (SUPs) increases.

* Plastic fibres were found in 72% of the drinking water in European nations including the UK, Germany and France. (5)

* Obviously MDC stopping using SUP's will not solve the problem but will enable us to do, and be seen to be doing, our part.

Around the world we have seen inspirational changes:

2015: San Francisco introduced a ban which will phase out the sales of plastic water bottles that hold 21 ounces or less in public places.

2015: The leadership of New York City joined a growing group of cities in banning Expandable Polystyrene Foam (EPS). (Single-use EPS products including cups, bowls, plates, take-away containers and trays will not allowed to be possessed, sold, or offered in NYC.)

2015: Hawaii introduced a ban on single use plastic bags (with small exceptions, e.g. for medical use). The bill was passed by County Councils, rather than by the state legislature, which was a real victory for the local grassroots organisations.

2015: The US to ban personal care products that contain microbeads after the House of Representatives approved a bill that would phase out the environmentally-harmful items.

2009: Bundanoon in Australia banned the sales of plastic bottled-water and became the world's first 'bottled-water free' town.

2016: The Indian state of Karnataka completely banned the use of plastic across the state. No wholesale dealer, retailer, or trader can now use or sell plastic carrier bags, plastic plates, plastic cups, plastic spoons, cling film, or anything of the sort.

2017. UK Conservative government's charge of 5p per plastic bag leads to a 85% drop in use. (6).

2017. Michael Gove outlines plans to ban microbeads in UK in 2018 and consults on tax on SUP's. (7)

2017. France banned plastic bags and will ban plastic cutlery, straws, food packaging etc in 2020

References

1. http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/plastic_waste.htm
2. J. Jambeck, "Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean." (2015) <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/768>
3. D.W. Laist, "Impacts of marine debris: entanglement of marine life in marine debris including a comprehensive list of species with entanglement and ingestion records," in Coe, J.M. Rogers, D.B. (eds), *Marine Debris: Sources, Impacts, and Solutions*: Springer-Verlag, New York, (1997) 99-139.
4. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/485117/UK_Statistics_on_Waste_statistical_notice_15_12_2015_update_f1.pdf
5. https://orbmedia.org/stories/Invisibles_plastics
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jul/30/england-plastic-bag-usage-drops-85-per-cent-since-5p-charged-introduced>
7. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/07/21/microbeads-will-banned-year-michael-gove-announces-first-speech/>