

So much on the Horizon - Plastic Action Workshop

9.11.2018

Key messages from presentation

- Plastics escaping into nature are clearly a global and local issue.

Results of Beach Marathon which counted 8015 items of litter found on 11 Suffolk beaches found the 10 most common items were:

1. Plastic film packaging
2. Caps and lids
3. Plastic pieces
4. Crisps and sweet wrappers
5. Cotton bud sticks
6. Shredded plastic cups
7. Cigarette butts
8. Polystyrene
9. Tissue
10. Plastic drink bottles

Great British Beach Clean 2017:

1. Plastic and Polystyrene pieces
2. Packets- crisps, sweets, lollies
3. Glass
4. Cigarette butts
5. Caps and lids
6. String/Cord
7. Wet Wipes
8. Cotton Buds
9. Fishing line
10. Cutlery/trays/straws



Our plastics industry is important to us because it employs 1259 people (1% of the total estimated employed in the East Suffolk Economic Growth Plan) . It is a diverse sector using a wide range of polymers for a wide range of uses – some of the items we are finding in street and beach cleans are the same types of products that are produced or sold locally (although clearly we are not saying items produced locally are the ones we are finding as these could be bought in from further away by currents and some are traded global (41% of our companies publically state themselves as having global reach)). We want to support the industry by encouraging them to further understand and champion the issue and by only buying from companies that as far as we can tell are trying their best. It is worth noting that at this time only 5 (38%) have a website that mentions sustainability and

just one states it has an externally verified environmental management system – this is not to say others are not taking action just that they have not expressed it on their websites.

Question asked that could not be answered on the day: what is pyrolysis? It is a high temperature process to decompose organic materials in the absence of oxygen, one that according to research carried out by Axion consulting had been around for 20 years or more in 2013 but was up until that time commercially challenging to run due to low oil prices.

www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/Plastics%20to%20Oil%20Report.pdf

For a video showing the process at a plant in Japan go to https://youtu.be/Zk_k18AOfCc please note inclusion of this is simply a case if it being the most helpful video I found (although the music is annoying) it does not promote the technology or the company that created the video.

This is where you come in

We are looking to recruit Plastic Action Champions in East Suffolk (and surrounding areas) and together develop our knowledge of the key plastics that are a local environmental issue. Champions within or leading organisations, champions within communities/sports clubs, colleges and universities. People who are willing to learn and/or share their learning and/or take action or feedback to policy consultations on Plastic. We are not asking for much just 20 hours of your time thinking or talking or acting on this issue.

Email greenissues@east Suffolk.gov.uk if you think that this could be you.

The Round Table Output

What the handbook should include – items that were not included but which we will over time be able to include within our existing resource which you can access if you become a champion:

1. Pull out guides for special occasions and events
2. Balloons and sky lanterns
3. Explanation of why we recycle
4. Why size is an issue for items and what you can do to ensure smaller items get recycled
5. Scrap stores and suggestions for reuse of non recyclable items
6. List of other plastic action champions to create support network
7. Guidance on how often you can safely reuse bags/containers and what for
8. Physical examples of plastic
9. What are the health concerns relating to water fountains

Suggestions raised that the handbook already contains and which you are welcome to if you sign up as a champion:

10. What can you recycle and where and where does it go
11. What is the plastics industry doing to minimise impacts
12. How can we reduce plastic consumption/use at home?
13. How can we educate local community on what types of plastic can be recycled?
14. A definition of degradable, biodegradable, disposable, compostable

15. What Refill is and where locations are (handbook links to the refill site <https://refill.org.uk/>)
16. Frequently asked questions
17. List of resources
18. Single use is not just plastic and all single use have an environmental impact – provide comparisons.

Outside scope of existing project but raised as topics delegates would like to see covered should resources become available:

1. Plastic action business/product comparison site/app
2. Ensuring provision of recycling for all products produced and sold/not closing recycling centres or reducing collections
3. Warning on dangerous plastics
4. How to lobby supermarkets and others e.g. returning plastic packaging
5. Video explanations (version of the guide)
6. Educational materials for schools

What are the main challenges/concerns Plastic Action Champions may have?

1. Finding viable alternatives
2. Time commitments
3. Resistance from others
4. Costs to make a change
5. Where will training take place?
6. What will the cost of training be?
7. Embracing litter in general
8. Recognising that single use items are not just plastic and all have an impact
9. How will the Government ensure that biological approaches to plastic recycling/breakdown are monitored and controlled to ensure 'solutions' do not end up as more harmful than the original problem e.g. oxo-degradable.

Responses to DEFRA consultation on single use plastic:

The government has stated that it wants to leave our environment in a better state than they found it. The 25 Year Environment Plan that was published on 11 January outlines the steps that will be undertaken to achieve that ambition, including new measures to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste. A current consultation is on straws, cotton buds and plastic stirrers and although these are not the main items by count found on our beaches or streets in the snapshots given they have been found and are an issue so it is right that we respond as individuals and organisations to this consultation by the **3rd December 2018** – but also that we recognise the challenges lying beneath a seemingly simple suggestion.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/plastic-straws-stirrers-and-buds/>

We ran out of time on this – however all in the room agreed with a ban on the distribution and sale of all single use plastic (whether synthesised from plants, marketed as biodegradable or tested as compostable in an industrial composting situation) drinking straws, stirrers and cotton buds. Some went further and suggested a ban on all versions of these except for controlled medical use.

Suggested points from Deborah Wargate to consider should you respond and I urge you to do so

- 1) Will this stop people buying straws, stirrers and cotton buds online through market places that we do not control and getting them delivered straight to their home? If so how?
- 2) Will this stop people buying straws in other countries and bringing them into the country e.g. will it be added to the banned and restricted goods list so that if people are caught with them and don't have a medical reason they will have them confiscated?
- 3) Should single use plastic straws be prescription/licensed specialist use only? If so will it increase visits and costs to doctors? Or can they be put on a repeat prescription. Given it is around £5 for 100 flexible straws would people buy them off prescription from pharmacies but with the prescription therefore not costing the NHS anything additional? Will it be embarrassing or difficult for people who need them to access them and carry them round to use? If a 'leave it to the pub/restaurant' approach is needed how can they be expected to judge need and if not need but simply an on request basis will it actually reduce the use of straws? Would reusable straws be flexible enough to meet the requirements of people who need them? Feedback from some who need to use straws for medical purposes and carers is that paper and reusable straws cannot cope with medicinal shakes/drink or hot drinks and are not flexible enough to angle for safe drinking so are not a viable option for people who need them for hot drinks. Currently available sippy cups are seen as childish so are also not an option. Concerns have been expressed about ability to clean reusable straws sufficiently **(I have been unable to find independent scientific research into this – ideally we need research that highlights the risks and how they can be mitigated)**. A site that gave me good pause for thought while considering this was <https://themighty.com/2018/05/review-reusable-drinking-straws-disability/>
- 4) Should single use plastic cotton buds be prescription/licensed specialist use? If it could apply to all single use cotton buds would this help reduce ear injuries caused by cotton buds resulting in a saving to the NHS as well as helping people? www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1181836/
- 5) Research undertaken does not suggest local businesses manufacture straws, cotton buds or stirrers although some will retail them but as part of a larger product range therefore significant local economic impact of a ban is not anticipated.
- 6) A ban on sales through all bar pharmacies and the wholesalers they buy from will mean no increase in the workload on already stretched Local Authority environmental health officers who might be expected to enforce the ban through civil sanctions set out in part 3 of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act. If all food and drink establishments are allowed to continue to provide on request there would be a resource and practical challenge to overcome to identify non compliance. Would the 5* food rating inspection regime extend to cover this? Would customers be expected to report non compliance? Could this lead to conflicts between those who need to use straws for medical reasons where the reason is not immediately obvious and the untrained public eye?