



No more time to waste

A policy for Single-Use Plastics and Textiles



**KEEP
NORTHERN
IRELAND
BEAUTIFUL**

This policy brief is designed to help you as our local legislators understand the problems that Northern Ireland is facing when it comes to different types of waste and what we need to do about them. Our two main issues of concern are Single Use Plastics and Textiles.

On previous environmental issues, Northern Ireland has at times lagged behind the other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland in taking decisive action. We cannot afford to delay action that is necessary to help improve our local environment and protect our wildlife.

This policy brief will outline:

- ✓ **The problems we have with plastic and textile waste,**
- ✓ **What is being done in other parts of the world to tackle these waste streams and**
- ✓ **What all of our policy-makers can do about these issues.**

Who we are

A message from our Waste and Pollution Solutions Team



Chris Gourley
Strategic Lead

We want to help you as policy-makers take Northern Ireland forward to a future with a thriving circular economy and environment. It is critically important that our devolved assembly and local councils play a leading role in tackling these important issues. In previous years, we have led on issues such as the Carrier Bag Levy, which have yielded impressive results. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful warmly welcomes the Climate Change Act and the move towards adopting a long-term environmental strategy.

We want to build on this progress and ensure that we continue to develop the policies and new innovative ideas to drive down our waste and change our single-use culture. The Waste and Pollution Solutions department in Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful will be producing research and campaigns to help shape the conversation about where we need to go as a community. I am looking forward to working with each of you to help make this happen.



Siobhan Purnell
Tackling Textiles Coordinator

Our use of clothing and textiles is something we do not always think about in terms of our environmental debate. Yet, it is a growing issue that is having real consequences for our planet. This is one of the more direct actions that all of us as citizens can do to help make a real difference. As we tackle the cost of living crisis, it is clear that we need to conserve our finite resources and find better ways of reusing them.

Together we can tackle textile waste. With the right policies in place, including better understanding and information on how our textiles are made, education around consumption and supporting reuse, repair and reimagining our clothing and textiles, we can ensure that Northern Ireland leads the way in this area. Other parts of the world are beginning to move on this issue and it is important that we play our part. We want to create a circular economy that is an example for others to follow. The future is redolent with possibilities, and with the right policies and investment; we can turn the tide on textile waste.

The Northern Ireland Overview

Plastics

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful believes that we need to act to tackle our misuse of plastics. Whilst plastics have some important uses in society, we need to tackle this growing problem in Northern Ireland. Too many of us in our society misuse plastic and do not think about the consequences.

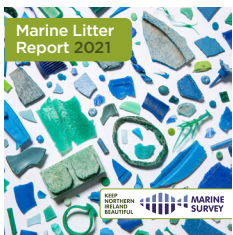
It is important that we take coordinated and concerted action now. We want all levels of government to work together and take the important steps forward that we need to turn around this situation.

In previous years, the Assembly has brought in positive policies such as the Carrier Bag Levy and has taken steps to reduce Single Use Plastic within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. We want to recognise these positive steps and more importantly build on them.

Simply using and throwing away plastic has real issues for our environment and local wildlife.

Here are the facts:

81%



Our recent Marine Litter Report found that 81% of all litter found was plastic. That is up from 67% in the previous year.



7.5bn

Over 7.5 billion tonnes of plastic has never been recycled. If measured in plastic bottles, this could cover the whole of Northern Ireland.

1.2m

Humans use about 1.2 million plastic bottles, per minute, in total.

2050

It has been said by the World Wildlife Fund that there could be more plastic in our sea than fish by the year 2050.

50%

Our recent Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report found that 50% of areas surveyed were recorded as having some form of drinking litter present, ranging from plastic bottles and metal cans to caps, lids and straws.



The Northern Ireland Overview

Our clothes and textiles

Another important issue is textile and clothing waste, quite often we buy new clothes regularly in our shops without thinking about how we reuse what we have more effectively. We want to raise awareness of the growing issue of clothing and textile waste. Fashion should not cost the earth.

As local policy-makers, we need your help to show the public how they can reuse, repair and reimagine their unwanted clothes. The public should not just think about their clothes in terms of fiscal cost, but also the carbon footprint each of us has due to our consumption habits. The recent Circularity Gap Report noted, "Through close collaboration and systemic changes that permeate government, the private sector and individuals, 'going circular' can become the country's new reality."⁶

Here are the facts:

17%

Only 17% of people in Northern Ireland we surveyed say they regularly buy second-hand or preloved clothes.



5x

We have 5 times more clothes than our grandparents.

1m

Across the UK, including Northern Ireland, we throw away 1 million tonnes of textile waste each year with 300,000 tonnes ending up in Landfill.

>EU

We buy more clothes than any other EU country.

Fast Fashion

has a negative effect on our environment creating carbon emissions, water, chemical and plastic pollution.



What is being done in other places?

Below is a brief synopsis of some of the policy measures being taken by other administrations in recent years.*

Scottish Government

As of June 2022, Scotland introduced a ban on many of the most problematic single-use plastics. The ban means it will be an offence for businesses in Scotland to provide the items – which include plastic cutlery, plates and stirrers. The ban does include exemptions for items such as single-use plastic straws, to allow those who need them for medical and independent living purposes to still have access. The responsibility for enforcing these new rules is the responsibility of local authorities.⁸ The Scottish Government worked with Zero Waste Scotland to run a business information campaign for six months to allow for preparation before these new rules came into force.⁹

Alongside this, a £2 million Circular Textiles Fund was launched in 2022 to provide support to improve the circularity of textiles throughout Scotland. The purpose of the fund is to help reduce textile waste.¹⁰

Welsh Government

In September 2022, the Welsh Government proposed the Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Bill which will make it an offence to ‘supply littered and unnecessary disposable single-use plastic products to consumers in Wales’ Enforcement of these new measures would reside with local authorities.¹¹ The bill will also give powers to ministers to add or remove products. This builds on previous measures that Wales has taken in the past such as the charge on single-use carrier bags, which was introduced in 2011.

United Kingdom Government

In 2020, a number of bans of supply came into force brought forward by the UK Government on a number of plastic-related items such as Plastic drink stirrers; Plastic stemmed cotton buds and Plastic drinking straws.¹² This builds on other bans that have been introduced in recent years such as those on products containing microbeads, which came into force in January 2018. Going forward from 2024, there will be a new extended producer responsibility in regard to packaging.¹³ The aim of this reform will be to ensure that producers meet the total cost of packaging, from design to disposal.

In the area of clothing and textiles, the UK government has announced plans to consult on options for textiles including Extended Producer Responsibility ‘which would ensure the industry contributes to the costs of recycling, supported by measures to encourage better design and labelling.’¹⁴

European Union

The European Green Deal set out policies and actions towards building a circular economy,¹⁵ The aim is to ensure plastic is used in a more sustainable way and that the waste impacts are diminished over time. The European Union has moved through measures such as the Single Use Plastics Directive with a number of restrictions on supply coming into force since July 2021.¹⁶ Currently, there are restrictions for member states in effect on the following items, Plastic drink stirrers, Plastic stemmed cotton buds, Plastic drinking straws, Disposable plastic plates, Single-use plastic cutlery, Balloon sticks and Expanded polystyrene cups and containers as well as all products made from oxo-degradable plastic.

*Some of these measures are evolving and subject to change.

What we want our local Assembly to do

As local legislators, we know that you want to take the lead in helping protect our environment and make a difference. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful wants to encourage you throughout the next mandate to take these steps to help us make progress. Northern Ireland can be a leader in this area and we can make it happen with determination and collaboration.

1 **Broadening of bans and levies**

Northern Ireland already has some levies in place for items such as Carrier Bags. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful wants to see the legislation in this area broadened to include a wider range of single-use plastic items. This will help us tackle commonly littered items such as cigarette butts, single-use plastic lined paper cups and a wide array of packaging.

2 **Extended Producer Responsibility must include litter**

From 2024, costs to councils for packaging in street bins will be met by producers of packaging. It is critical that this policy be implemented in full, as this will ensure that the recyclability of packaging will increase. It is critically important for EPR to achieve its full potential as a policy that both ground and bin litter is included within its remit. This will be a huge shift in how we tackle the growing litter problem in Northern Ireland. It will also be an important step forward in building a circular economy. We would also encourage the Northern Ireland Executive to support sectors to develop new approaches in reusing and repurposing textiles.

3 **Full implementation of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)**

A DRS would see consumers pay a deposit for a number of items such as drinks cans and bottles. When a consumer returns packaging to be recycled, they can redeem their deposit. The main benefit of this policy is that it would play an important role in tackling marine litter, which is seeing plastic packaging become a dominant feature.

4 **Introduction of a stand-alone Litter Strategy**

We welcome that a Litter Strategy is referenced within the draft Environment Strategy. However, in the next mandate of the Assembly, this needs to be turned into reality. Three core pillars need to underpin this strategy: public engagement, education and enforcement. It should also be linked in with some of the policy proposals set out above.

5 **Policy-makers need to understand that collaboration is key to success**

There are many different approaches being conducted across Europe and the UK. We would encourage MLAs to continue to monitor these differing approaches and seek to implement best practices in Northern Ireland.

What we want our local councils to do

Local Government plays an important role in dealing with waste collection and litter in Northern Ireland. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful wants to work with local councillors to help drive forward some important changes and policies in the years ahead.

1

Councils need to adopt a joined-up approach

Enforcement practices need to be fair, clear and consistent across Northern Ireland. We advocate a single NI-wide level for fixed penalty notices and a single agreed level for early payment discounts.

2

Promoting best practices so that good ideas spread and grow

Since 2019, all 11 councils have signed up for the Plastic Promise and embarked upon a number of internal campaigns to change the behaviours of staff. Referenced in case studies is the importance of communication, we want Councillors to play a leading role in showing leadership by promoting these campaigns and work of staff.

3

A consistent reduce single-use campaign to educate the public

Litter collection and waste management are big parts of every local council's budget. We want local councils to work together with relevant sector organisations to support a 'reduce single-use' campaign to encourage the public to think more about how we change our throw-away culture.

4

Local Councils need to plan now for changes coming in the years ahead

In the cases of Scotland and Wales, local authorities are at the forefront of enforcing rules around bans on single-use plastic items. Local Councils in Northern Ireland should begin the process of examining and scoping how possible changes here could affect their work and examine other jurisdictions.

Message from our Chief Executive



Dr. Ian Humphreys
CEO

Thank you for taking the time to read through this document. It is important that all levels of our government recognise their roles in helping Northern Ireland become leaders in tackling our throwaway culture.

By adopting new progressive policies such as a Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility, we can change the way key sectors operate locally and be to the fore in progress on these issues.

We should always seek to learn from other jurisdictions and bring those good ideas to here. Northern Ireland should aspire to a leadership position on building a circular economy and seeking new innovative ways to deal with waste. In the past, we have seen new policies such as the Carrier Bag Levy achieve a great deal and now become such a normal part of our retail experience.

Now we need to step up our progress. It's time to take the next steps forward for our environment.

As a new Assembly mandate begins and a new council mandate is on the horizon, we hope that a restored Executive, in partnership with our Local Councils can make real and lasting change happen in these areas.

Footnotes

- 1 Marine Litter Report 2021, available at: <https://keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.etinu.net/cgi-bin/generic?instanceID=50>
- 2 Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2021/22, available at: <https://keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.etinu.net/cgi-bin/generic?instanceID=48>
- 3 Queen's awarded £1 million to tackle plastic waste problems, available at: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/PolymerProcessingResearchCentre/News/Queensawarded1milliontotackleplasticwasteproblems.html>
- 4 Fact Sheet: Single-Use Plastics, available at: <https://www.earthday.org/fact-sheet-single-use-plastics/>
- 5 WWF; WILL THERE BE MORE PLASTIC THAN FISH IN THE SEA?, available at: <https://www.wwf.org.uk/myfootprint/challenges/will-there-be-more-plastic-fish-sea#:~:text=The%20amount%20of%20plastic%20in,rubbish%20even%20in%20the%20Arctic.>
- 6 The Circularity Gap Report, available at: [The Circularity Gap Report Northern Ireland \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/circularity-gap-report)
- 7 Figures from the Fixing Fashion, clothing consumption and sustainability report, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/1952/1952.pdf>
- 8 Single use plastics ban, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/single-use-plastics-ban/>
- 9 Scotland's single-use plastics ban: fully effective from 12 August 2022, available at: <https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/single-use-plastics/regulations>
- 10 Circular Textiles Fund, available at: <https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/content/circular-textiles-fund>
- 11 Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Bill, available at: [https://gov.wales/ground-breaking-bill-ban-single-use-plastics-wales-and-avoid-leaving-toxic-legacy-future#:~:text=The%20Environmental%20Protection%20\(Single%2Duse,plates](https://gov.wales/ground-breaking-bill-ban-single-use-plastics-wales-and-avoid-leaving-toxic-legacy-future#:~:text=The%20Environmental%20Protection%20(Single%2Duse,plates)
- 12 Single use plastic: How do bans differ across the UK and EU?, available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/single-use-plastic-how-do-bans-differ-across-the-uk-and-eu/>
- 13 Packaging waste: prepare for extended producer responsibility, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/packaging-waste-prepare-for-extended-producer-responsibility#:~:text=The%20way%20UK%20organisations%20responsible,data%20from%201%20January%202023.>
- 14 Government unveils plans for wide-ranging Waste Prevention Programme, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-plans-for-wide-ranging-waste-prevention-programme>
- 15 A European Green Deal, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en
- 16 Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/904/oj>