

End Single-Use Plastics in Surrey.

This motion starts by calling on us to be a little unreasonable. To collectively not buy, use and throw away single use cups in our council meetings or plastic containers in our canteen. To replicate the switch to glasses here today in our council meeting across how we do business here at Surrey County Council.

Why act wider on this issue? Because our actions show the extent that our care extends not just to friends, family and those in need, but to our whole environment and future generations.

[Julia Butterfly Hill](#)<sup>1</sup> put it like this:

*“When you say you are going to throw something ‘away’ – where’s away? There’s no such thing. And where ‘away’ actually is, is social justice issues and environmental justice issues. Every plastic bag, plastic cup, plastic to-go container ... everything that we call waste or disposable is the way that we are saying that it is acceptable to throw our planet and its people away.*

*As we take for granted a ‘to-go’ coffee, put in an un-reusable plasticised paper cup, put a plastic lid on it, then drink it do we consider where it came from – or where it goes back to ... pollute nature or a human community at the end?”*

The [Blue Planet](#) series showed us that you can travel to the ends of the earth and still find our waste. When we fly-tip in Surrey in can end up being washed up on our beaches.

And I speak to you today because I still fail in my personal battle with plastic, and have seen the ‘wonders’ of persistent plastic first-hand:

- I’ve dug up small pieces of it on the allotment, as it becomes part of the soil we grow our food in;
- Last summer, I felt sick as I put on a face mask in the Mediterranean and found myself in a sea of floating plastic debris; and
- This week I threw away the week’s rubbish as a small carrier bag, mainly of unrecyclable plastic which will be incinerated by Surrey County Council because of how I live my life<sup>2</sup>. Almost all that I still cannot recycle is plastic, much is single-use food packaging. Film that is actually two sorts of plastic glued together – how difficult and costly is it to separate and recycle that!

But I am not alone. [2,000 people were asked in a survey reported on Saturday as to what can and what cannot be recycled](#)<sup>3</sup>. No one scored full marks.

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1 Adapted from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJARRREipml>.

2 Some good tips on how to cut down the amount we throw away is found at <http://myzerowaste.com/>.

3 See <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/16/kitchen-roll-among-things-britons-wrongly-think-they-can-recycle>.

- Do you know you need to clean before recycling stuff, like kitchen roll?
- That 95% of coffee cups are plastic coated so can't be recycled?
- That baby wipes don't just decompose but include single use plastics, so don't break down after they have been flushed away.

Last year a friend was in wellies on the Thames river beaches near Hammersmith before the boat race, collecting wet wipes. They found [150 wet wipes in just one square metre](#)<sup>4</sup> of beach.

The best way to stop us throwing away stuff that is used just once but will persist longer than our collective lifetimes – is to change – not just our individual behaviours, but what is normal, to not make it and use it in the first place.

That is why this motion ends with a challenge that we commit that our actions locally need to be supported by policy changes nationally, [not by 2042](#)<sup>5</sup> but now, in 2018.

As Dr Suess's Lorax once said: [Mr Gove], [UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not!](#)<sup>6</sup>

In summary, we know the problem. Plastic doesn't degrade and using it once then burning it emits toxic fumes and makes climate change worse. We can either be part of the problem or part of the solution.

We need to respond to this. That needs response-ability - to change the rules of the game that define the world we give to our children, not over the next 25 years, but right now.

I look forward to a future where our beaches are ranked safe again, not just free of sewage but also plastic free.

So how much action is good enough? We are all acting ourselves and are in different places on that journey. But this is the place we gather together to commit to act together. To show leadership across Surrey.

Last night a friend of mine, Ruth, challenged me to read a book called, "We make the road by walking." Today we talk. It's what we do next, after the voting that counts. I pray that today this vote commits this council, and those we see us taking this stand, to promptly act.

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Text of original motion:

Council notes that according to recent research, eight million metric tons of plastic waste ends up in the world's oceans each year, endangering marine life, and that there is a growing understanding of the risks posed to human health by toxic chemicals present in plastics.

4 See <http://www.thames21.org.uk/2017/04/17995/>.

5 See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>.

6 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISl2W3SxRo0> (The Lorax, by Dr Suess).

Council further notes that six months after the introduction of the 5p bag charge, use of single-use plastic bags had already dropped by 85%, while the TV programme Blue Planet II has raised public awareness of the problems of our throwaway culture. Norwich, Brighton and other councils in the UK have already passed motions committing to phase out the use of single-use plastic products where it is reasonable to do so and to encourage local businesses and other local public agencies to do the same

Council resolves to:

1. Develop a robust strategy to make Surrey County Council a 'single-use-plastic-free' authority by the end of 2018 and encourage the County's institutions, businesses and citizens to adopt similar measures by the end of 2018; 2. End the sale and provision of single-use plastic products such as bottles, cups, cutlery and drinking straws in Council buildings; 3. Investigate the possibility of requiring pop-up food and drink vendors at large council events to avoid SUP's as a condition of their contract and work with tenants in commercial properties owned by Surrey County Council to encourage the phasing out of SUP cups, bottles, cutlery and straws. 4. Write to the Secretary of State for the Environment to request that the Government commits to phasing out single-use plastics across the UK.

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Comments made during the debate included:

- Florida has banned the use of plastic straws
- The benefits of buying milk in reusable bottles from a milkman
- We have thrown away 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic globally and unless we change this could grow to 34 billion tonnes by 2050. 40% of this is packaging, 50% is used just once then thrown away. This includes 1 billion plastic bags a year, which are used for an average of 15 minutes.
- Micro-plastics have been found in the polar ice, in our rivers and in our drinking water
- Plastics are mentioned 160 times in the government's 25 year plan
- A select committee task group will be set up to develop a strategy in Surrey
- Only 57% of UK plastic bottles are recycled.
- The Queen has banned single-use plastics. We should too!