



# FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT SINGLE- USE PLASTIC IN LINLITHGOW – A SURVEY OF LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ORGANISATIONS

Transition Linlithgow is a community-led Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) & member of the international [Transition Network](#)

Our charity registration is Transition Linlithgow SCIO ([SC048006](#))

## EXEC SUMMARY

As part of the 'Plastic-Free Linlithgow' project, we surveyed local businesses and groups in May and June 2018, to find out what types of single-use plastic they make use of and how this is disposed of. The survey also gathered examples of how these businesses/groups are using alternatives to single use plastic, and gauged the appetite for potential future changes.

Twenty three local businesses responded to the survey and we are grateful to them all for their time and the helpful information that they provided. The responding businesses included a mix of cafes, restaurants, pubs, takeaway establishments, independent shops and leisure facilities.

The most common types of plastic used by the responding businesses were plastic bottles, disposable cups with plastic lids and plastic containers.

Encouragingly, many of the businesses/organisations were already taking active steps to enable their consumers to reduce their plastic waste. The most popular steps were offering drinking water so that people could refill their own water bottles (18 respondents), recycling (18) and offering alternatives to plastic bags (16 respondents).

Many of the businesses were interested in further reducing the use of single-use plastics in Linlithgow, with the majority supportive of the 'last straw' campaign and more than half interested in helping Linlithgow to achieve "plastic-free town" status (defined as at least 6 businesses removing at least 3 single-use plastic items and replacing them with sustainable alternatives).

Some businesses also identified a number of barriers to further reducing the use of single-use plastics. These included:

- A potential increase in costs, compared to plastic items
- Challenges sourcing suitable alternatives and/or dependency on suppliers to reduce their own plastic use
- Uncertainty about whether health and safety legislation would allow them to let consumers use their own containers
- The potential for increased food waste that might be associated with using condiment bottles, rather than individual serving sachets
- A lack of space available for storing bulk purchases
- A perception that customers prefer plastic items (e.g. utensils and in the case of some pubs, straws) to the alternatives available
- Concerns about the safety of using glass items where children are around.

## INTRODUCTION

The need to reduce single-use plastic consumption has gained increasing attention in recent years, with the Scottish Government introducing a number of measures at a national level, including the plastic bag tax and plans for a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles. They have also set up an expert group to look at options for environmental charging and other measures.<sup>1</sup>

At a local level, Transition Linlithgow is interested to better understand where single-use plastic is being used within the town and to identify steps that could be taken to help reduce this. Earlier this year, we therefore launched the “Plastic-Free Linlithgow” project, which aims to reduce the use of single-use plastic within the town. The project has three goals:

1. Conduct some research on the consumption of single-use plastic in Linlithgow, and to look at potential alternatives.
2. Identify and run a campaign to reduce the use of plastic. Ideas include a ‘Linlithgow’s Last Straw’ campaign to reduce the use of plastic straws which are a prime source of plastic pollution and an easy target for change.
3. The third, longer term goal is to explore the viability of Linlithgow becoming a ‘Plastic Free Community’, as defined by ‘[Plastic Free Coastlines](#)’. Going completely plastic free may be a step too far, but this organisation is encouraging local communities to set and work towards objectives for reducing use of single-use plastic.

## THE RESEARCH APPROACH

As part of the research, we surveyed local businesses and groups in May and June 2018, to find out what types of single-use plastic they make use of and how this is disposed of. The survey also gathered examples of how these businesses/groups are using alternatives to single use plastic, and gauged the appetite for potential future changes.

The survey was advertised via the Transition Linlithgow website, the Plastic-Free Linlithgow Facebook Page and an article in the local community “Black Bitch” magazine. Volunteers also distributed copies of the survey local businesses, with a particular focus on ensuring surveys were delivered to eating and drinking establishments around the town.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

Twenty three local businesses responded to the survey and we are grateful to them all for their time and the helpful information that they provided. The responding businesses included a mix of cafes, restaurants, pubs, takeaway establishments, independent shops and leisure facilities.

The findings of the survey have been aggregated and anonymised.

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<sup>1</sup> Further details about policy initiatives to reduce plastic pollution in Scotland can be found on the Zero Waste Scotland website: [www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/](http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/).

## Use of single-use plastics within the business/organisation

Businesses and organisations were asked about their own use of single-use plastic. The most common item was plastic bottles, with almost all the respondents (20 out of 23) stating that they made use of plastic bottles. This included milk in plastic bottles, other drinks and cleaning products. Eleven respondents provided details of how they disposed of these products, with 9 stating that they recycle them/send them to a waste management company and 2 reporting that the plastic bottles were sold to consumers who would then dispose of them themselves.

Disposable cups with plastic lids were also high up the list, with 13 of the respondents stating that they made use of these within their business/organisation. Only 4 businesses/organisations provided details of how these are disposed of, with 1 noting they were recycled, 1 reporting they were collected by a waste management company and 2 reporting that consumers disposed of them themselves.

Nine of the businesses offered plastic straws at the time of the survey. Following the survey and a competition with local schools, posters were designed to encourage people to “say no to plastic straws” when ordering drinks. These have been distributed to local cafes, pubs etc. as well as displayed on public noticeboards. It would be useful to follow up with local businesses next year to see whether they have noticed any drop in plastic straw use as a result of the campaign.

A full summary of the responses to the question about the use of single-use plastics can be found in the table below.

| Use of single-use plastic within the Business/Organisation - Do you do any of the following? |    |
|--|----|
| Buy items in plastic bottles   | 20 |
| Sell items in plastic bottles?   | 14 |
| Use disposable cups with plastic lids?   | 13 |
| Use plastic containers?  | 13 |
| Use plastic bags?  | 12 |
| Use condiment sachets?   | 10 |
| Offer plastic straws?  | 9  |
| Use polystyrene containers?  | 8  |
| Use plastic cutlery/utensils?  | 6  |
| Use other plastic packaging for your goods? (please specify)                                 | 6  |
| Use polystyrene cups?  | 4  |
| Use plastic stirrers?  | 2  |

Source: TL Survey of Linlithgow Businesses, n=23

## Providing consumers with alternatives to single-use plastics

Businesses and organisations were also asked which of the following alternatives to single-use plastic they made use of, or were interested in finding out more about. Encouragingly, many of the businesses/organisations were already taking active steps to enable their consumers to reduce their

plastic waste. The most popular steps were offering drinking water so that people could refill their own water bottles (18 respondents), recycling (18) and offering alternatives to plastic bags (16 respondents). The latter may well be a reflection of the introduction of a Scottish Government's levy on plastic bags in recent years, with research by Zero Waste Scotland<sup>2</sup> finding that this has led to a shift in retailer and consumer behaviours and a drop in plastic-bag use.

Whilst only four businesses currently offer compostable packaging for carry out items, 11 businesses expressed an interest in finding out more. Vegware, the compostable packaging company, are already in touch with local businesses to provide information on their products. This is as a direct result of the survey. Interestingly, there was not much interest in encouraging customers to return packaging to the business for recycling.

Four businesses currently offer discounts for customers bringing their own cup whilst 6 more are interested in offering this.

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<sup>2</sup> Zero Waste Scotland (2015) *Carrier Bag Charge 'One Year On'*, Available at: <https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/SUCB%20Charge%20One%20Year%20On%20Report.pdf>

| Do you offer any of the following?  |                  |   |                |                                       |
|---|------------------|---|----------------|---------------------------------------|
|   | Already doing it | Not offering this, but interested in finding out more | Not interested | Not relevant for our type of business |
| Ensure drinking water is readily available for people to refill their own bottles | 18               | 0   | 1              | 4                                     |
| Recycle plastic bottles and containers  | 18               | 0   | 0              | 4                                     |
| Use paper bags  | 16               | 1   |                | 4                                     |
| Use reusable storage containers   | 12               | 2   | 2              | 6                                     |
| Don't give out straws unless asked, and then use re-usable or paper straws        | 10               | 5   | 1              | 7                                     |
| Use glass bottles   | 9                | 0   | 6              | 7                                     |
| Use wooden stirrers   | 7                | 3   | 2              | 10                                    |
| Encourage customers to return packaging to you for re-use/recycling               | 5                | 4   | 8              | 4                                     |
| Use compostable packaging for carry out coffee cups, cold drink cups and foods    | 4                | 11  | 2              | 5                                     |
| Sell items which offer alternatives to plastic ones                               | 4                | 8   | 3              | 4                                     |
| Offer discounts to customers if they bring their own cup                          | 4                | 6   | 4              | 7                                     |
| Promote the option of customers bringing their own containers for food            | 3                | 5   | 5              | 8                                     |
| Replace sachets with refillable and reusable containers                           | 3                | 4   | 6              | 8                                     |
| Ban plastic cutlery and introduce alternatives                                    | 3                | 2   | 4              | 12                                    |
| Buy compostable packaging in bulk with other businesses to reduce costs           | 1                | 11  | 5              | 5                                     |

Source: TL Survey, N.B. Not all respondents completed every question, hence not all rows will sum to 23.

## Barriers to change

Some businesses were able to provide helpful explanations as to why they were unsure about making changes. Barriers mentioned included:

- A potential increase in costs, compared to plastic items
- Challenges sourcing suitable alternatives and/or dependency on suppliers to reduce their own plastic use
- Uncertainty about whether health and safety legislation would allow them to let consumers use their own containers

- The potential for increased food waste that might be associated with using condiment bottles, rather than individual serving sachets
- A lack of space available for storing bulk purchases
- A perception that customers prefer plastic items (e.g. utensils and in the case of some pubs, straws) to the alternatives available
- Concerns about the safety of using glass items where children are around.

In addition to the barriers mentioned by the businesses, it became apparent during the survey period that there are infrastructure challenges around the disposal of compostable packaging. Current Council facilities for composting food waste are not able to take compostable packaging such as carry out coffee cups. Such items therefore end up in general waste tips, where they are covered from sunlight and hence do not decompose as intended. Companies such as Vegware have their own composting facilities which one local business is using but this comes at a cost.

### Other current activities for reducing the use of single-use plastic

A number of local businesses and organisations are taking an active interest in reducing their waste and offering alternatives to single-use plastic for their customers. We have therefore begun pulling together a series of case studies, which provide more detail about their experiences. These are available to download from the Transition Linlithgow website.

### Interest in future campaigns and activities

The businesses and organisations were also asked about their interest in other activities that could potentially take place as part of the Plastic-Free Linlithgow project. The responses yielded positive results, with:

- 16 businesses/organisations willing to support Linlithgow's 'Last Straw' campaign
- 13 businesses/organisations supportive of making Linlithgow a single-use plastic-free town (defined as at least 6 businesses removing at least 3 single-use plastic items and replacing them with sustainable alternatives).

## CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS

- Very encouraging to see how much has already been done by local businesses and organisations to reduce single use plastic
- Many businesses are also interested in making further changes. The local Cafes are generally very keen to reduce their single-use plastic consumption, but less so some of the pubs. This could be because many are part of a bigger chain and hence have little authority.
- Whilst there's appetite for using compostable packaging, the disposal of such packaging remains a challenge.
- Encouraging the use of customer's own coffee cups is of interest to many businesses.
- There is a plenty of interest in this topic locally and it would be helpful to share the results of the survey and to provide an opportunity to discuss findings and agree further actions that could be undertaken over the coming year.