

# Plastic Smart Charlbury Guide

## What is Plastic Smart Charlbury?

Plastic Smart Charlbury is an initiative to unite local organisations and residents in reducing plastic waste and pollution in our community, while also tackling climate change. Charlbury is joining hundreds of communities around the world in demonstrating that change is possible, and creating the conditions for governments and industry to take action.

## Why “Plastic Smart”?

We recognise that plastics are valuable materials and that becoming “plastic free” is not realistic. Our aim is to move towards a circular economy, where materials are used sparingly, over and over again without losing their value. Being smart about plastics also means making sure that any changes we make do not create other problems – for example replacing plastic with paper-based products is often worse for the climate. Although the contamination of our natural environment with plastic is very damaging, climate change poses an even more urgent and catastrophic threat to wildlife, and to us. We need to make sure that we tackle both issues together.

## How does it work?

Households and organisations in and around Charlbury are invited to make commitments towards becoming more discerning in their use of plastics over the coming 12 months. They submit their action plan to the Sustainable Charlbury team and, once accepted, they are then affiliated to Plastic Smart Charlbury, can use the logo and will be celebrated in the local community in various ways. Participation is renewed each year.

We are looking for actions which support our **four goals**:

1. Reduce plastic use - e.g. by using own bags/containers, buying less stuff
2. Choose products made from recycled materials and which can be easily recycled
3. Recycle carefully
4. Keep plastics out of the environment

## Get involved!

Download the action plan template for your [household](#) or [organisation](#)

If you have children, you may want to download our [Kids' Guide](#).

Read this Guide and consider what actions would make the biggest difference to your (or your organisation's) plastic and carbon footprint.

Get in touch if you would like any individual support or to talk through ideas

Email or post your completed action plan to [plasticsmart@sustainablecharlbury.org](mailto:plasticsmart@sustainablecharlbury.org) or Sustainable Charlbury, c/o The Curiosities Company Ltd, 39 Sheep Street, Charlbury, OX7 3RR

Join us! If you could spare a bit of time to help engage with Charlbury residents and organisations on joining Plastic Smart, please get in touch - we need you!

## The problem with plastic

Plastics are valuable materials for many uses but are essentially indestructible, ending up in rivers and oceans. There they break down into smaller fragments known as microplastics - but no further. High concentrations of plastic materials, particularly plastic bags, have been found blocking the airways and stomachs of hundreds of species. Microplastics are also polluting - they can absorb other chemicals and are eaten by marine animals, entering the food chain.

The most common single-use plastics found in the environment are cigarette butts, plastic drinking bottles, plastic bottle caps, food wrappers, plastic grocery bags, plastic lids, straws and stirrers, other types of plastic bags, and foam take-away containers.

Only 9% of the 9 billion tonnes of plastic the world has ever produced has been recycled\*. About 13 million tonnes of plastic leak into our oceans every year\*. In the UK, we are lucky to have a managed waste system, and yet plastic still gets into our waterways: through littering, flushing (wet wipes and other items), washing (synthetic clothing) and wear of tyres, masonry paints and road markings.

\*Source: "The State of Plastics" World Environment Day Outlook 2018. UN Environment Programme (2018).

## Plastics and climate change

Plastic production is expanding rapidly and plastics are now found in almost every product that we buy - from cups to clothing, cars and computers. The energy used in manufacture, distribution and disposal of the growing amount of "stuff" worldwide is a major driver of greenhouse gas emissions which cause climate change.

In addition, plastics are generally made from crude oil, so disposing of plastics by burning (as we do with non-recycled waste in Oxfordshire) releases carbon dioxide just like burning any fossil fuel. Meanwhile, composting can release methane - an even stronger greenhouse gas.

One alternative is to produce plastics from plant matter, such as cornstarch. However, growing crops for plastics (or indeed replacing plastic with paper or cotton substitutes) has knock-on effects on land clearance, food production and use of water and agro-chemicals.

We are very concerned about the damage that plastics are causing to wildlife on land and in our oceans. But we also recognise that in reality, the most urgent and devastating threat to wildlife - and to us - is from climate breakdown. We need to make sure that we tackle these issues together.

"Right now we are facing a manmade disaster of global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years: climate change. If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon."

Sir David Attenborough, speaking at the UN climate change summit in Poland, December 2018.

# Goal 1: Reduce plastic use

## Why?

Plastics are amazing materials and have a vast range of uses, from crisp packets to synthetic heart valves. However, the massive growth in plastics production is not sustainable. If we stop buying stuff, people will stop making it – and we can save plastics for where they can really make a positive difference.

## Climate concerns

- Food production has a big climate impact, so we need to make sure that by reducing plastic packaging we do not increase food waste. For example, a shrink-wrapped cucumber may last three times longer than if unwrapped.
- Replacing plastic packaging with paper-based products often increases the carbon footprint – even more so when the paper or card is not made from recycled materials.
- Manufacture of **anything** has a climate impact: we need to find ways to reduce the total amount of stuff in our lives.

## Where to look

- Single use products, for example:
  - Food & drink packaging – especially take-away food
  - All packaging
  - Bottles for cleaning products or toiletries
  - Shiny wrapping paper and greetings cards
  - Sanitary products, nappies, wet wipes, etc.
- Synthetic clothing
- Toys and craft materials such as glitter, stickers and pens
- Electronic devices
- Plant pots, garden netting/fleece
- Building materials, including window frames, flooring, insulation and paints

## What can we do?

- Decide on things that we can do without and stop buying them
- Buy concentrated products to minimise packaging
- Try using less product, see how little we might need for effectiveness - often surprisingly little. Train young children to be careful with how much they use.
- Take our own containers when we go shopping: get a reusable water bottle/coffee cup
- Buy in bulk or get refills of dried goods, cleaning products etc. – available from the Charlbury Makers' Market (5-8pm on the fourth Thursday of every month), The Market Garden in Eynsham, Oats in Chipping Norton
- Buy second-hand, and make use of the Charlbury Bring & Takes, Charlbury [DIY Spares](#), [charlbury.info](#) or the [Freegle](#) app to find items locally for free
- Choose good quality items that will last well and may be more easily mended if they break
- Ask our favourite shops and brands to cut down on excessive packaging – have they signed up to the [UK Plastics Pact](#)?

# Goal 2: Choose products made from recycled materials, and which can be easily recycled

## Why?

One of the great things about plastics is that they can be recycled and used again. We can encourage this by choosing products that are made from recycled materials – boosting the recycling industry by making it more profitable. It also helps when we choose products that are designed with recycling in mind.

## Climate concerns

- Using recycled materials tends to be better for the climate too. This is true not just of plastics but also of other materials, especially paper, cardboard and aluminium.
- Composting is a form of recycling and can be helpful: for example, for heavily contaminated food wrappings. Most compostable plastics require industrial composting facilities to reach a high enough temperature to break down properly; in landfill, they can result in the release of methane, a strong greenhouse gas.

## What to look for

- Percentage recycled content – the higher the better!
- rPET stands for “recycled PET” – a type of plastic
- Mixed materials such as plastic bonded to paper (e.g. in coffee cups) or plastic bonded to foil (e.g. crisp packets) make things more difficult to recycle
- ‘Home compostable’ rather than just ‘compostable’ or ‘biodegradable’ (which currently have to go into grey waste bins for incineration)

## What can we do?

- Choose products with a high recycled content.
- Avoid mixed materials where possible; bottle tops should be made from the same plastic as the rest of the bottle, and any different materials should be easy to separate.
- Avoid black plastic trays, which cannot currently be recycled.
- Say no to foam/polystyrene containers.
- For those of us who compost at home, consider home compostable packaging.
- Rent rather than buy appliances – this creates the incentive to make products that don’t break down and are easy to repair and recycle.
- Encourage companies to sign up to the [UK Plastics Pact](#).

# Goal 3: Recycle carefully

## Why?

The ideal recycling system would capture all plastic-containing products at the end of their useful lives, making them back into products of equivalent value (rather than down-cycling high grade plastic into park benches, etc.). We need to push the Government for a better national recycling system. In the meantime, we can get the best out of our current system by putting the right things into the right bins, and preventing contamination.

## Climate concerns

- Recycling tends to be better for the climate than extracting new raw materials. This is true not just of plastics but also of other materials, especially paper, cardboard and aluminium.
- In Oxfordshire, non-recycled waste is incinerated and used to generate electricity. As fossil fuel products, plastics that are incinerated contribute to climate change through release of carbon dioxide.
- Compostable plastics cannot be recycled and most require industrial composting facilities to reach a high enough temperature to break down properly; in landfill, they can release methane, a strong greenhouse gas. (In Oxfordshire, compostable plastics are currently only accepted in the grey wheelie bins, for incineration, although “Home compostable” plastics can be put in a home compost bin.)
- As well as plastic and metal, respiratory inhalers (the “puffer” type) contain HFCs, extremely strong greenhouse gases. People who rely on inhalers can minimise the environmental impact by ensuring that they use them correctly, returning used/unwanted inhalers to the pharmacy for recycling, and discussing with their doctor whether an alternative inhaler type would work for them.

## What can we do?

- Pass on as much as possible via friends, charity shops, [charlbury.info](http://charlbury.info), Charlbury DIY Spares, [Freegle](http://Freegle) or at the Charlbury Bring & Take
- Put cartons, Tetrapaks, plastic tubs, food trays, bottles and tops into the blue-lidded recycling wheelie bin (rinse out if heavily contaminated, but do not waste hot water and detergent by washing thoroughly)
- Be careful not to include polystyrene, plastic bags, bubble wrap, cling film, black plastic trays, plant pots, bonded plastics or compostable plastics as these will contaminate the recycling stream. If you are unsure, it is better to leave it out.
- Put out electrical items in a black recycling box
- Put old clothes/shoes in a carrier bag next to the recycling bin – keep them dry
- Collect plastic bags and take to larger supermarkets for recycling
- Put home compostables into a compost bin
- Take used/unwanted inhalers to the Co-op pharmacy in Charlbury for recycling
- Lobby our MP/parliamentary candidates for a national, standardised recycling system

West Oxfordshire District Council recycling guide: <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/residents/bins-recycling/household-recycling/>

# Goal 4: Keep plastics out of the environment

## Why?

Plastics become a problem when they escape into the environment. Once there, they may break up into smaller pieces but they do not disappear, and may persist unchanged for centuries – entangling wildlife or being mistaken for food and entering the food chain. Prevention is best, but if plastic is already contaminating our local environment, we have the opportunity to remove it before it gets buried or washed away downstream.

## Climate concerns

There is no doubt that plastic pollution presents a threat to wildlife. However, climate change poses a far more urgent threat to wildlife all around the world. So as well as tackling plastic pollution, it is **really** important that we also cut carbon by insulating our homes, switching to renewable energy, reducing meat and dairy consumption, minimising car use and avoiding air travel.

## How does plastic get into the environment?

- Litter
- Fly tipping
- Down the toilet: wet wipes, cotton buds, sanitary products
- Down the drain: fibres from synthetic clothing
- Wear from car tyres and paints on buildings/roads
- Via the waste system: e.g. erosion of landfill sites

## What can we do?

- Avoid littering – and speak up when we see it
- Do not over-fill public bins
- Bag up “fly-away” (lightweight) plastics
- Never put wet wipes, sanitary towels, tampon applicators, cotton buds, etc. down the toilet
- Avoid synthetic clothes where we can, especially fleeces; wash them less often and use lower temperatures and slower spin cycles
- Drive less
- Pick up litter as part of our day-to-day routines
- Join or organise a community litter pick