

# Make a change

## How to cut down on plastic waste

A guide to reducing avoidable single-use plastics in the tourism and hospitality sector



#PlasticFree<sup>GM</sup>

# A new straw joins the hive!

Introducing the Manchester Bee paper sip straw!

The Manchester Bee Paper Sip Straw is offered at a specially discounted price for hospitality operators and is available from local catering supplier [Stephensons](#).

Before you order your Manchester Bee Paper Straws, please sign the [PlasticFreeGM pledge](#).

## Contents

Introduction – The plastic problem	4
Plastics policy – EU and UK	6
Things to consider	9
Key principles – prevention, reuse and recycling	12
8-step guide to reducing single-use plastics	14
Frequently used single-use plastics and their alternatives	16
Glossary	20

### Did you know ...

Scientists predict that by 2050, if we don't change our ways, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish.





# Introduction

## The plastic problem

**‘Our environment in Greater Manchester underpins all aspects of our daily lives. We face urgent and significant environmental challenges in Greater Manchester. They require us all to take action now.’**

The damaging effect that single-use plastic can have on our environment is now well known. Whilst plastic has an important part to play in the tourism and hospitality industry, all too often a lot of single-use plastic is used out of habit rather than actually being needed.

We are asking for your support to help us eradicate avoidable single-use plastics in our city region. As we navigate through challenging times it is important that this sector continues to make sustainable choices when it comes to plastic, packaging and single-use plastics.

Pledge your support and commit to taking action by signing the [PlasticFreeGM pledge](#).

### PlasticFreeGM Pledge

We support Greater Manchester in its aim to eradicate the use of avoidable avoidable single-use plastics in our city region and become carbon neutral by 2038. We will review our practices and make more sustainable choices about the products we use, and the way we deliver our services.’

We recognise that this is a big challenge and, to help you make a change, we have produced this guide to support you on your journey – whether that’s choosing to remove some products, choosing a reusable alternative or switching to easily recyclable items.

### Small changes count

By making just a few small changes you can help to reduce the amount of single-use plastic that is currently used in Greater Manchester. This guide will help you to create your own action plan for the reduction of avoidable single-use plastics in your organisation. It provides information, practical advice and suggested alternatives on many single-use plastic items that are commonly found in this sector - including a practical 8-step guide to get you started.

We look forward to your continued support and working together to reduce plastic pollution in our city region. The action you take will help to make this happen.

### Plastic free GM

#PlasticFreeGM  
[www.plasticfreegm.com](http://www.plasticfreegm.com)

### GM Green City

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# A brief guide to EU and UK plastics policy

Currently the EU has the most complete and advanced regulation on plastics globally, with the European Parliament voting in favour of a complete ban on several single-use plastic items, such as straws and cutlery.

In the UK, the government (despite Brexit) has pledged to meet or exceed these requirements. Legislation to ban plastic straws, cotton buds and stirrers was passed in October 2020. Other measures currently being consulted on include a revised Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging and the introduction of Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), to encourage consumers to return drinks containers after use for recycling.

## 1. EU plastics regulations include:

- [EU Plastics Strategy](#)
- [Waste Framework Directive](#) and [Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive](#) - this will increase plastics recycling/reuse and result in higher fees that reflect the full cost of waste management
- [Single-use Plastics Directive](#) - includes a complete ban on many single-use plastic items and requires a minimum 25% post-consumer recycled content in plastic bottles from 2025 (30% from 2030)

## List of items that will be banned by 2021:

- single-use plastic cutlery (forks, knives, spoons and chopsticks)
- single-use plastic plates
- plastic straws
- cotton bud sticks made of plastic
- plastic balloon sticks
- food containers made of expanded polystyrene, such as fast-food boxes
- beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene
- all products made from oxo-degradable plastic

## 2. England's resources and waste strategy outlines a number of key objectives and actions the government will take over the next few years. The key objectives relevant to packaging are:

- 2023 – significantly revised Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging
- 2025 – all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable
- 2030 – 75% recycling rate for packaging
- A tax on plastic packaging with less than 30% post-consumer recycled plastic content

## 3. UK plastics pact (co-ordinated by the waste and resources action programme - WRAP)

The UK Plastics Pact launched in 2018 and is a voluntary agreement that brings together businesses, UK governments and NGOs to tackle plastic waste.

One of the main aims of the pact is to eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging by 2025. Plastic packaging is defined as problematic or unnecessary if:

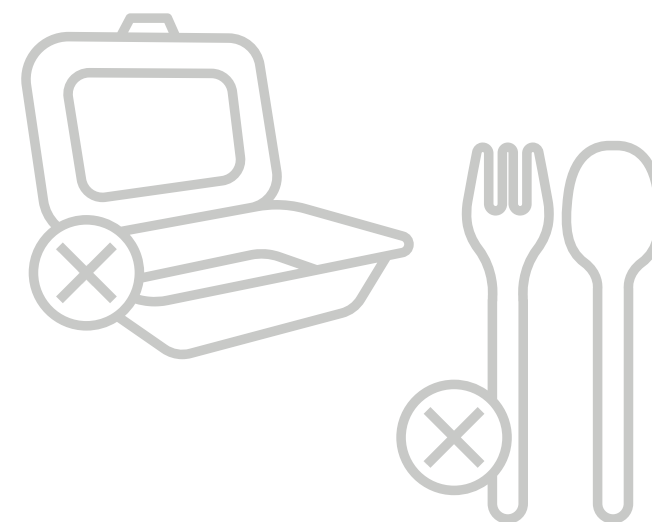
- its use is avoidable or reusable options are available
- it is not recyclable or hampers the recycling process or
- when it is commonly littered and pollutes the environment

Plastic items that have been identified for eradication by 2020 are similar to those proposed under EU legislation and include:

- disposable plastic cutlery
- disposable plastic plates and bowls
- plastic straws
- cotton buds with plastic stems
- plastic stirrers
- polystyrene packaging
- all products made from Oxo-degradable plastics
- PVC packaging.

## Other targets of the pact are:

- 100% of plastic packaging reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025
- 70% of plastic packaging effectively recycled or composted by 2025
- 30% post-consumer recycled content by 2025







## 250 Metric Tonnes

Scientists predict that in less than ten years there will be 250 million metric tonnes of plastic in the ocean and by 2050 more plastic than fish in the sea.



# Things to consider

The damage that plastic pollution has on our environment is largely caused by plastics that end up as litter. There are very few good alternative options available for replacing single-use plastic with sustainable disposable options. We would always advise removing these items completely where possible or moving to reusable alternatives.

### Types of plastic

There are lots of different types of plastics available. Very few plastics are widely recycled in Greater Manchester; those that can be are usually PET, HDPE and LDPE plastic, and generally come in the form of a plastic bottle. These plastics are non-biodegradable.

To find out more about the complexities of different types of plastics, take a look at WRAP's guide to [understanding plastic packaging](#).

### Recyclable versus recycled

If you can't remove single-use plastic items from usage and are looking to move to an alternative disposable product, it is important to consider and understand what these products are made of and how they will be disposed of.

There are also lots of products on the market that claim to be 'green' or 'eco-friendly' and in reality are not very good for the environment at all. Even if a product says it is recyclable, compostable or biodegradable the reality is that, in a lot of cases, it will not be recycled or composted because the recycling infrastructure simply doesn't exist in the UK. The general message is that biodegradable and compostable items are not the best option – so choose a reusable option where you can.





# Here are some terms to familiarise yourself with

## Oxo-degradable plastic

This is a plastic product that has chemicals added to it so it breaks down much more quickly. In theory this sounds good, but in practice all that's happening is that these products create microplastic particles far more quickly, and release chemicals into the environment along the way. This is because the plastic only degrades (into smaller pieces) rather than breaking down at the chemical level to its component parts. It is a very misleading product and should be avoided at all costs.

## Biodegradable

There are a number of products using the term 'biodegradable' which look like a good option for the environment, when this isn't always the case. Biodegradable is a general term covering materials that break down in a defined period of time in certain conditions. However, this does not mean that these materials should be freely released into the environment in an uncontrolled manner.

Biodegradable materials break down by the action of living organisms (e.g. bacteria) but this can take a very long time, and result in toxic chemicals being released - it just depends on what the material is made of and how it is treated. Most biodegradable materials do not degrade fully or quickly in natural environments and can only be composted when treated in the appropriate industrial in-vessel composting (IVC) facilities.

Before moving to biodegradable items you should always check with your waste and recycling contractor that they have a disposal route in place that can effectively compost this type of material. Biodegradable items should be clearly labelled and collected separately to avoid contamination in the recycling stream.

## Compostable

Compostable material that is certified to BS EN13432 for compostability will break down in around 12 weeks if it is placed in the appropriate industrial in-vessel composting (IVC) facility, leaving only organic matter behind. Compostable items will not breakdown if they become litter or end up in the sea because the conditions are not right. This is also the case for home composting bins.

Within the current UK waste management systems it is hard to see any real benefit to compostable packaging as there are very few facilities that can accept and successfully treat this material. Before moving to compostable items you should always check with your waste and recycling contractor that they have a disposal route in place that can effectively compost this type of packaging.

It is our advice to think carefully before you switch to compostable items - Ask yourself is the packaging necessary or can you move to a reusable option?

New guidance from WRAP goes further to address the confusion over compostable packaging and offers practical advice to help businesses make informed choices when considering the use of compostable packaging.

## Household recycling in Greater Manchester

If you are moving your take-away items to compostable or biodegradable, it is worth noting that these materials are not accepted in household recycling collections run by the 10 Local Authorities in Greater Manchester. So if they are taken home these items will need to go in the general waste bin.

  
**9 Billion**  
Plastic straws

It is estimated that somewhere between 5 billion - 9 billion single-use plastic straws are thrown away in the UK every year.



# Key principles - prevention, reuse and recycling

It's not always easy to make the most sustainable choices, and any choice we make has an impact on our planet. By following the key principles of the waste hierarchy – prevent, reuse and recycle – you can significantly reduce the amount of plastic waste you create.



## 1. Create no waste at all

This applies to most items like drinking straws, where you could make the decision to simply do without and only offer straws to people that need them.



## 2. Go reusable where possible

As a general rule, moving from disposable to reusable is more sustainable. This applies to items like plates and cutlery. There are a number of studies that show that overall, reusable crockery and cutlery is better for the planet than any type of disposable items.



## 3. Choose items that can be easily recycled

If you are going to use single-use items, like take-out coffee cups, drinking straws, or napkins, try to make sure they are made from easily recyclable materials.

This is a really complex area and, as we've pointed out, many items that claim to be eco-friendly, compostable or even recyclable just aren't. Make sure you do your research, talk to your suppliers and your waste management company to make sure the alternative items you choose are better for the environment and can be properly recycled or composted.

### The best option

Don't create waste in the first place.



Look at which single-use plastic items are not necessary in your organisation and remove them.

### Next best option

Go re-usable wherever possible.



Consider which items can be easily replaced with reusable alternatives. This could be a reusable plastic cup, metal cutlery and ceramic plates.

### And if you have to choose a disposable option

Choose options that can be easily recycled.

Make sure any alternatives you choose can be easily recycled, like paper or aluminium. If you are using plastic items like plastic bottles choose ones that have a significant proportion of recycled content.



## Disposable cups

You may be looking to move away from fully plastic or polystyrene single-use cups to disposable cups that are made of paper.

## Did you know?

Whilst most of these types of cups look like paper, they actually have a plastic lining to stop the paper getting wet and soggy. This means they cannot be placed in your paper and cardboard recycling bins.

There are some specific services that will collect plastic-lined take-away cups and make sure they get recycled, like Simply Cups, but these can be expensive for smaller businesses.

If you are moving your take-away cups to compostable or biodegradable, remember that these materials are not accepted in household paper and cardboard collections in Greater Manchester, so they will end up in the general waste bin.

# 8-step guide to reducing plastics



## Step 1. Sign the pledge

If you haven't already, please sign the [PlasticFreeGM pledge](#).

Signing the pledge helps to support Greater Manchester's plastic-reduction aspirations and illustrates your commitment to working together to reduce avoidable single-use plastics in our city region.

## Step 2. Undertake an audit - How much and which types of single-use plastics do you use?

The next step is to undertake an audit of your organisation's plastic usage. This will give you an estimated baseline of the amount of avoidable single-use plastic items you currently use.

Make sure you identify and audit any of the items below that are used in your business. These are identified in the UK Plastic Pact as items to be eliminated or due to be banned by 2021 as part of EU legislation which is likely to be adopted by the UK government:

- cotton buds with plastic stems\*
- disposable plastic cutlery
- disposable plastic plates and bowls
- oxo-degradable that break down to microplastics
- plastic stirrers\*
- plastic straws\*
- polystyrene packaging
- PVC packaging

\*The UK government banned the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds from 1st October 2020.

## Step 3. Set your ambitions - Look at what you want to achieve and set realistic targets and timeframes

From your audit you will be able to identify any non-essential (avoidable) single-use plastic items that can be easily removed or significantly reduced from your day-to-day operations.

Where you can't remove or significantly reduce single-use plastics, identify those items that can be replaced with a more sustainable option. Remember to consider the overall 'life-cycle' impact of any replacement including disposal routes and cost implications to your business.

Once you have your priority list, set yourself targets and timeframes for what you want to achieve.

## Step 4. Talk to your supply chain

Engaging with your suppliers can help you to cut down on the amount of single-use plastic that enters your business. Let your suppliers know that you want to reduce the amount of plastic waste in your organisation. You can ask them to use less plastic packaging in their deliveries, allow you to return plastic packaging to them, or look at adopting alternative ways of delivery including reusable options.

When looking for sustainable alternatives ask your supplier to provide specific details of what the product is made of. Then speak to your waste management company to see if the alternative product can be recycled within your current recycling collections or if a new system can be put in place.

With the proposed introduction of a tax on plastic packaging, begin to work with your suppliers to introduce the proposed minimum level of recycled content (30% post-consumer recycled content) in plastic items and packaging where used.

## Step 5. Ensure you have appropriate waste disposal and recycling collections in place

Not all materials can be recycled, even if the item says it can be. This largely depends on what local infrastructure is available and the disposal routes your waste management company has in place.

Make sure you talk to your waste management company to understand what materials can be recycled by them – especially if you are switching from single-use plastic to a different material type, for example wood. They may even be able to help you find alternative solutions or discuss options for the future. Some alternative recycling routes do exist, for example, Simply Cups offer disposable cup recycling.

Once you have all the facts, you can adjust your strategy accordingly to make sure you are making the right decisions and not causing any unintended consequences, for example, switching to a compostable item that can't actually be composted within our current UK waste management systems.

## Step 6. Communicate - Let everyone know that you are making a change and why

Remember to let your employees and customers know that you are making a change. Tell them what you want to achieve, ask for their support and give them the opportunity to get involved.

Encourage your staff to think about their own plastic usage, and promote the use of reusable food containers, cups and tableware choices. Remind staff to recycle in the workplace and make sure they know how to use your recycling system so products are disposed of correctly.

## Step 7. Monitor and evaluate your outcomes

Establishing a way to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of your changes will help you to let your staff, customers and suppliers know about your overall achievements.

Consider setting key performance indicators that go beyond plastic waste reduction and look to include cost implications, increased recycling and reduction in litter.

Look at what went well and what can be improved on. Remember to let everyone know about your experiences, including us!

## Step 8. Share your experiences, challenges and ideas

To help and support others to reduce avoidable single-use plastics it is important that we all share our experiences. Celebrating and sharing good practice is a key part of the PlasticFreeGM campaign.

We would love to hear from you – tell us what has worked, what challenges you have faced and the great ideas you have implemented to reduce your single-use plastic waste.

Email us at: [GreenCity@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk](mailto:GreenCity@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)



# Frequently used single-use plastic items

Working with campaigning partners, we have identified a number of frequently used single-use plastic items commonly found in kitchens, restaurants/cafes, take-away outlets and bars. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it is a good starting point to help you remove or replace avoidable single-use plastic items in your organisation.



## Beverage bottles

Replace single-use beverage bottles with cordial to be mixed with tap water or syrup-based drinks from a dispenser or filled from a tap behind the counter.



## Cups

Choose a reusable option - use glass cups or durable hard plastic cups that can be washed and used over and over again.

If you are using disposable cups for take-away drinks, buy in some reusable cups/bottles to sell, and offer a discount to customers who use them.

Charge for disposables - research has shown that adding an overt charge on top of the price of the drink for the use of a disposable cup has more of an impact than offering a discount for customers who bring a reusable cup.

We know this is a really complicated and challenging area. To help you in your decision making, take a look at the factsheets below:

[Take-away cups - hot drinks](#)

[Take-away cups - cold drinks](#)



## Milk bottles

Other alternatives include replacing plastic milk bottles with milk bags (pouches) or pergals (bulk storage of milk in a container that fits in a refrigerated dispenser e.g. bag in a box).

Bagged milk, offers up to 70% waste volume saving compared to the use of standard plastic milk bottles.

Pergal milk would bring a waste and a cost saving and reduce delivery miles.

# Waste plastics create significant environmental problems in our city region – particularly in our streets and green spaces

## Did you know ...

Up to 7 million coffee cups are thrown away every day in the UK.







**Plastic window take-away bags**

For freshly prepared sandwiches that are sold for consumption on-site, consider instead preparing on a ceramic plate and storing in the fridge.

For those sandwiches and other food items prepared for take-away, replace plastic window paper bags with 100% paper bags that have no plastic lining. This will reduce plastic waste which is difficult to recycle.



**Plates, bowls and cutlery**

Where possible, move to a reusable option like metal cutlery and porcelain/ceramic plates/bowls. Or look for durable hard plastic options that can be washed and used again and again.

If you are considering replacing these with a more sustainable option (for example, waste wood, pulp or fibre), confirm with your waste collector that these can be recycled or composted within your current recycling collections.

Take-away cutlery



**Stirrers**

Simply remove these items and if needed replace with a reusable option.

Metal teaspoons are all you need for hot drinks! There are lots of reusable drinks stirrers made from metal, glass and other materials that are can easily replace the disposable plastic versions.

Drink stirrers



**Single-serve sachets and pots**

Replace single-use sachets like coffee, sugar, jam, butter, seasonings and sauces with refillable dispensers/pots. Aside from cost savings, this will also have a positive impact on the environment by reducing litter.

If you are using single-use pots like milk replace these with refillable dispensers or buy in larger quantities like multi-pint bottles or bagged milk and decant into smaller jugs/flasks.



**Straws**

The most sustainable thing you can do is not use any straws. That way there is nothing to throw away or recycle in the first place! You may like to keep a small stock under the bar for anyone who might need one, for example, someone with a disability who might struggle to pick up their drink.

If you are using straws, look for a reusable option that can be washed and used over and over again, like those made of steel. If you are moving to a recyclable option, look for a sustainable alternative like a FSC paper straw. Always check with your waste disposal contractor what can go in your recycling bin.

Drinking straws



**Take-away trays**

Stop the use of disposables for eating-in and choose a reusable option instead.

For take-away food, encourage your customers to bring their own reusable container and have a stock of reusable containers to sell. Don't forget to offer a discount to customers that use them.

At the moment there is not much choice for recyclable options and it's more a case of the best of a bad bunch. To help you make an informed decision, please take a look at our factsheet:

Take-away food trays

# Other frequently used items in the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Items wrapped in plastic – for example, cups and slippers**

Don't buy items wrapped in plastic. Take a look at your audit and see where you can easily remove or replace plastic wrappers with a sustainable alternative. Consider paper wrappings for cups or cotton bags for slippers.

**Plastic bags**

Where possible, don't provide or use plastic bags in bins.

Provide bags only on request and choose a reusable option, for example, paper bags for take-away items, and consider using a cotton/linen bag for laundry.

**Toiletries**

Look to replace your toiletries offered with refillable soap, shampoo and shower gel dispensers. If you have to use toiletries in plastic bottles, choose ones that have a significant proportion of recycled content.

**Water bottles**

Consider stopping the sale of water in single-use bottles where possible. Instead, offer free tap water from refillable jugs/carafes and/or install a water fountain/refill dispenser. Join the [Greater Manchester Refill campaign](#) to add your name to the growing network of Refill stations in our city region.

If you are using plastic bottles, choose ones that have a significant proportion of recycled content.

**‘Microplastics have already been found in our watercourses in Greater Manchester, where they cause pollution in local rivers all the way to our seas and oceans beyond.’**





# Glossary.

**HDPE**

High density polyethylene.

**In-vessel composting**

The composting of biodegradable materials in a closed reactor where the composting process is accelerated by optimising air exchange, water content and temperature control.

**LDPE**

Low-density polypropylene

**Life cycle Analysis (LCA)**

Used to identify and evaluate the environmental impacts throughout the life-cycle of a product, from raw material acquisition to production, use, transportation and disposal.

**NGO**

Non-governmental organisation.

**Packaging**

All products made of any materials, of any nature, to be used for the containment, protection, handling, delivery and presentation of goods - from raw materials to processed goods, from the producer to the user or the consumer. Non-returnable items used for the same purposes shall also be considered to constitute packaging.

**Pergals**

Milk containers, commonly three gallons (13.6 litres), used in catering facilities.

**PET**

Polyethylene terephthalate.

**Post-consumer waste**

Waste generated after use by consumers.

**Recycled content**

The percentage of materials sourced from waste that has been reprocessed to make it suitable for inclusion in new products.

**Recycling**

Involves the reprocessing of waste, either into the same product or a different product, material or substance.

**Reuse**

Items that are designed to be used a number of times without the need for repair or remanufacture. The processes contribute to sustainable development and can save raw materials, energy and transport costs.

**Single-use plastics/Disposable plastics**

Plastic items that are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.

**Waste Hierarchy**

Sets out a hierarchy of options for managing waste in terms of what is best for the environment. The most preferable option is to prevent the generation of waste in the first place.

Now retailers and businesses across Greater Manchester can offer their customers a fantastic dual-use carrier bag called the **'green carrier'**. The bag doubles as a strong carrier bag and can also be used as a liner in household food-waste caddies.

**Contacts**

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