



The Art of Sustainable Living *based on the principles of One Planet Living*

Principle 1 – Zero Waste – Plastic

- Talking about plastic is a complicated matter. Hailed as the 'wonder material' when it was created in the mid twentieth century, it was considered perfect for its ability to be moulded and for its light weight. It has now taken over our stores, shopping, cupboards and unfortunately, our environment too.
- Plastic is not a bad material. Use it the wrong way and it is catastrophic when it escapes into the world. Single-use convenience packaging and supplies are covered in plastic. It's incredible that something used for minutes will last 600+ years. It never degrades, instead micro plastics end up in our air, soil, and water.
- Recycling is not the answer. It is a destructive process and deeply inefficient. Unlike glass and metal which can be recycled without deteriorating, plastic can only be recycled a few times. Sometimes not at all. It deteriorates very quickly and then must be incinerated. Only around 9% of the plastic we have ever produced has been recycled.

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Managing waste

How we choose to manage our waste has an **enormous** impact on the environment. The **waste hierarchy** provides us with **basic** guidance:

- **REFUSE** – we try not to acquire it in the first place
- **REDUCE** – we try and cut down on what we are acquiring
- **REUSE** – we keep using things as long as we possibly can
- **RECYCLE** – as a last resort, we collect waste materials, transport them for sorting, transport them to be recycled, process into new materials, transport to manufactures to make new products, transport to retailers.
- **RECOVER** – this is the absolute end of the road, nothing else can be done but to bury or burn. Burning at least allows us to recover energy to make electricity.

A more sophisticated and more sustainable method for managing resources is the “**circular economy**”. Learn more about that in our “Circular Economy” factsheet.

Managing plastic waste

There are 398 councils in the UK. Each council collects and sorts your plastic waste and then must find a company who will accept it for recycling. This is **impossible** if the plastic is **heavily contaminated**. In this case it is refused by the recycling companies and most often incinerated. If the quality is good, recyclers separate it into different types, shred it, remove impurities, and then melt it into pellets which are sold on to be used in new products.

Each council has a different scheme for managing plastic waste. There are several reasons for this:

- There are **limited** opportunities for recycling plastic in the UK, so councils have been forced to look further afield to manage your plastic waste. Historically this has included China, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, and Vietnam. These countries have since banned plastic imports and now it is European countries who are bearing our load including Netherlands, Poland, and Turkey.
- Each council has a different profile; location, size, population, etc, determining how they manage their waste:
 - **Location** – is your council close to a plastic recycling facility? Do they have to look further afield? Ship it overseas? If so, is it better to incinerate it locally and recover energy to make electricity?
 - **Population** – Manchester City Council 586,000 v Chichester District Council 122,000. More residents, more waste, more expense. **Might** be offset by more council tax revenue **IF** ring-fenced for waste.
 - **Tourism** – Brighton & Hove attracts 11 million visitors v Bournemouth 6 million visitors. More visitors, more waste, more expense. Can't be offset by more council tax revenue. Visitors don't pay council tax.

Managing plastic waste in Brighton & Hove

The best place to start managing your plastic waste is . . . **at the end!** Find out who will accept your plastic waste, then and only then, can you start looking at how to reduce what you acquire and eventually refuse to acquire.

1. **Brighton and Hove City Council** – will accept plastic bottles only, because there is a good market for them. They do not accept other plastics as the market is too volatile and they do not wish to ship your plastic overseas.
2. **Magpie Recycling** – plastic numbers 1,2,3,4,5 and only yogurt pots in category 6. This is only possible because of the size of the organisation, their method of processing [by hand], number of customers, etc.
3. **The Green Centre** – variety of plastics including toothpaste tubes, toothbrushes, water filters, tubes and pots from personal & beauty care, CDs & DVDs, pens, etc. This is only possible because of the size of the organisation, their method processing [by hand], number of customers, etc.

N.B. Classifying plastic for recycling can be confusing. Sometimes it is explained by the description of the item, other times it is the category of plastic [there are 7 categories], other times it is a symbol and often it is a combination. The most important thing to remember is that your journey starts with the company, and you simply follow their instructions to the letter of the law.

Managing flexible plastic waste at supermarkets in Brighton & Hove

Supermarkets have operated limited plastic recycling schemes in the past but in 2021 most supermarkets introduced a more comprehensive collection of flexible plastics. Here's what we know so far:

- **Aldi** – still researching. Update to follow.
- **Asda** – still researching. Update to follow.
- **Co-op** – provide a detailed list of flexible plastics they will accept. They recycle their plastic with Jayplas which is based in the UK. **Green Centre recommendation.**
- **Lidl** – still researching. Update to follow.
- **Morrisons** – have great plans to open their own recycling plant BUT won't share details of when this will be.
- **M&S** – despite many phone calls and hours of research we have been unable to find out where M&S recycle their plastic.
- **Nisa** – still researching. Update to follow.
- **Tesco** – list is not very detailed. They recycle their plastic with Eurokey in Turkey, Poland, and the Netherlands.
- **Sainsbury's** - list is not very detailed. They recycle their plastic with Eurokey in Turkey, Poland, and the Netherlands.
- **Waitrose** – still researching. Update to follow.

Moving up the waste hierarchy

If recycling was part of the education system, it would be equivalent to GCSE waste management. It is not the answer to the plastic problem. We all need to move forward and start studying for "A" level and beyond: **reuse, reduce and refuse**. Start by looking at how you can **avoid** acquiring it in the first place. It won't happen overnight. You need to establish new habits. Here are a few ideas to help you get started:

- **Single use plastic** – is extremely damaging for the environment. The worst culprits are straws, stirrers, plastic ear buds, coffee cups & lids, cutlery, containers, and plates. Your goal is to eradicate these from your life.
- **Refill shops** – it's not an easy transition. Make a start even if it's just 1 item. Visit Harriet's of Hove, HISBE, Infinity Foods, Kindly of Brighton, Store Brighton, Grocer & Grain, Health Rebels, Roots & Hoots, The Source Bulk Foods.

Thank you for your commitment and contribution to the planet's **ZERO WASTE** challenge
Continue to build on, and note down, your progress by downloading another of these sheets for next year

Web: www.thegreencentre.co.uk Email: info@thegreencentre.co.uk

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