

Best Practice Guide for UK Plastics Recycling Communications



Aims and Acknowledgements

This guide has been produced as an aid to those communicating plastics recycling to individuals and communities who are seeking to drive up the quantity and qualities of collected recyclable items. The content within this guide is a key output of the Kent Understanding Plastics 'Live Lab' project.

Plastics packaging provide consumer benefits that would otherwise be unachievable. However, given the broad range of packaging applications and the wide variety of kerbside recycling service provision it has proven practically impossible to find a one size fits all approach for communication to the public on the correct method of disposal of end-of-life plastic items. While more needs to be done we see encouraging moves towards more harmonised kerbside collections schemes by local Authorities, as evidenced by them all offering kerbside collections of plastic bottles and almost 90% collecting pots, tubs, and trays. This project has identified several key messages for use with the public that catalyse changes in behaviour resulting in the better sorting of their waste into recyclable and non-recyclable streams. Increases in the qualities, quantities, and accompanying reductions in the number of non-compliant loads of plastic entering the recycling facility have been demonstrated. Our learnings have shown that it would be a simple matter to transpose these key measures at a national level. This project took as its start point county wide agreement on plastics packaging target material collections and initially asked the question, 'if kerbside plastics recycling is based on the same target/non-target materials, what other factors influence recycling rates?'

This guide outlines the key influences in terms of recycling rates and top tips in terms of communications basics, based on the fact of how plastics packaging journeys UK collection, sorting, and reprocessing systems. This is based on the work conducted under Pledge2Recycle Plastics, online surveys, and conversations with citizens in Kent during the Understanding Plastics 'Live Lab' project. All insights and recommendations are rooted in the knowledge and experience of plastics recycling charity, RECOUP.

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OPRL
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*This guide has been peer reviewed by
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as well as the RECOUP Citizen
Communications Advisory Group*

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KENT UNDERSTANDING PLASTICS 'LIVE LAB' PROJECT

The UK needs to be able to recycle more of its plastic waste domestically. This is driven by:

- Public concern over exports and material end destinations.
- The need for high quality plastics recycle to satisfy voluntary and legislative recycled content requirements.
- The wasted economic opportunities for growth and job creation.

This project aimed to increase awareness on how plastics can be recycled in a domestic setting and answer the following research question, 'if kerbside plastics recycling is based on the same target/non-target materials, what factors influence recycling rates?' The 12 Kent councils were divided into 3 test areas (Mid, East and West). 678,000 leaflets were delivered alongside 170,000 community magazine copies, 700 schools engaged with, 16 shopper locations visited, a total of 3000 questionnaire responses from on-line and face-to-face, social media reach from organic posts of 680,000, as well as focus and advisory group discussions. All Kent Councils have the same agreed target/non-target list for plastics packaging, which is a necessary requirement for consistent communications.

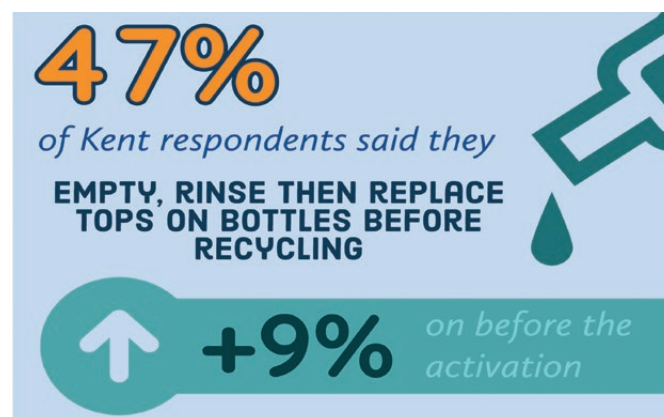
The guide has been produced by RECOUP as a key output of the project and aims to assist those communicating plastics recycling to individuals and communities.

The work highlights the need for greater transparency on reported recycling rates alongside consistency in the base data gathered from UK sorting facilities.

Accurate data is fundamental to communications development, delivery, and measurement of success. Communications themselves need to be factual, consistent, with messages delivered regularly and over a variety of mediums until saturation point is reached. Analysis of the methodologies used in Kent did not give clear evidence to substantiate the success of one method over another. Social media has a clear role to play as the most cost-effective methodology, with Local Authorities having healthy resident twitter followings. Sustained behaviour change takes time as individuals strive to keep up the momentum on desired behaviours, while at the same time, continuing their convenience driven lifestyles.

The communications in Kent 2021 demonstrated an upshift in plastics recycling knowledge and understanding by Kent citizens post-delivery. Before the campaign 38% of Kent residents declared they empty, rinse, and replace the tops on bottles before recycling. This increased to 47%, an upshift of 9%, following the communications.

How best to prepare plastic bottles for recycling was the most debated issue when engaging with the community. As such this topic should remain a high priority in any plastics recycling communication content. Residents also keenly discussed the issue of Tetra Pak recyclability



When analysing data of individual Council Districts, the treatment of target/non-target materials had a strong bearing on reported contamination and recycling rates. This highlights how classification of materials is crucial and how treatment of objectionable materials fluctuates on a local level.

Compost represents a high proportion of overall recycling rates. Where there is the opportunity for a high take-up of garden waste services a Local Authority can considerably improve their league table position.

Plastics packaging remains high on the government and public agenda and therefore, it deserves investment both in accurate communications and recycling collection strategies to aid recovery and resource efficiency. Citizens are keen to know about plastics and the complex nature of the packaging means that plastics require a more targeted and detailed approach than other material types. The engagement of Kent Councils in the 'Live Lab' project has been rewarded with a positive impact in resident awareness, contamination decreases, and a plastics collection rate that is 8kg per household higher than the rest of the UK.

Looking at contamination rates there are commonalities sufficiently strong to suggest a national contamination reduction campaign would help raise awareness of this issue and its impact on the cost of providing household waste services. On a local level the project demonstrated some regional successes with Maidstone showing an 11% reduction in average contamination rates over the period of the activation (July 2021 – April 2022) compared to the same time period the previous year.

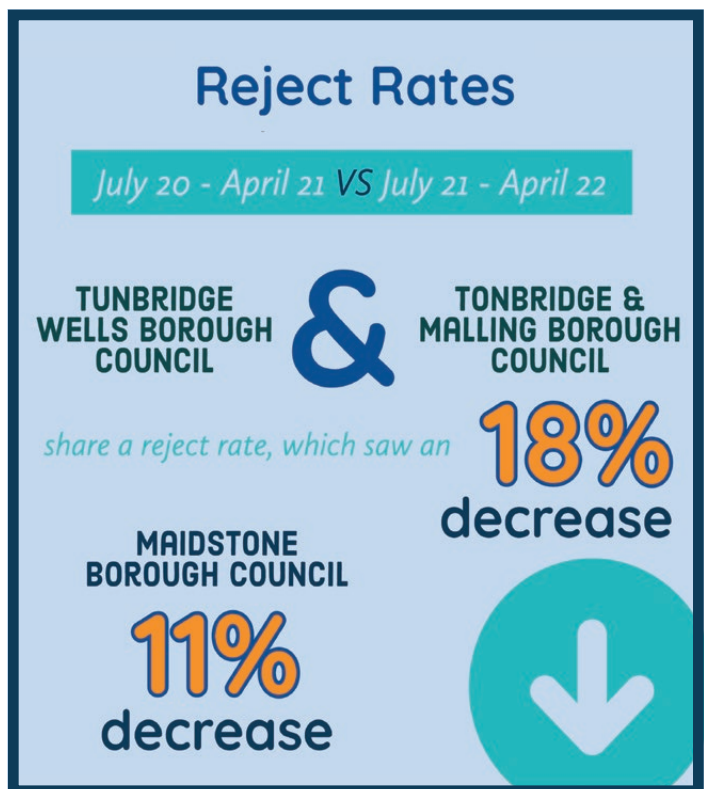
Tonbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Councils both saw an 18% decrease in average contamination rates.

The project analysis concluded that there were 'Five Key factors of Influence' that impact on plastics recycling kerbside.

1. Consistency in data collection and analysis is needed as well as consistency in messaging.
2. Citizens need to understand more about how recycling works if they are to buy into the message.
3. Local authorities are a key touch point in terms of communications and websites are heavily relied upon in terms of industry data collection. All touch points should be relaying the same message with the same terminology.
4. Contamination is a nationwide issue and as such could have a national communication strategy.
5. The climate change debate offers the recycling industry opportunities to influence the mindset of citizens as the appreciation of what plastics can offer in this regard forms part of the wider debate.

Taking the learnings of the project alongside RECOUP's knowledge and experience of the plastics recycling value chain, as well as Pledge2Recycle Plastics experience in behaviour change a 20 Top Tips for Easy Wins in Plastics Recycling Communications has been produced. Ensuring consistency in messaging across all information points is crucial to citizen engagement and sustained behaviour change.

How are the 'objectionable' items recorded?		
	RECYCLED?	COUNTED IN REJECT RATE?
ACCEPTABLE <i>Target kerbside recycling materials</i>	✓	✗
OBJECTIONABLE <i>Recyclable but non-target kerbside</i>	?	?
PROHIBITIVE <i>Non recyclable materials</i>	✗	✓

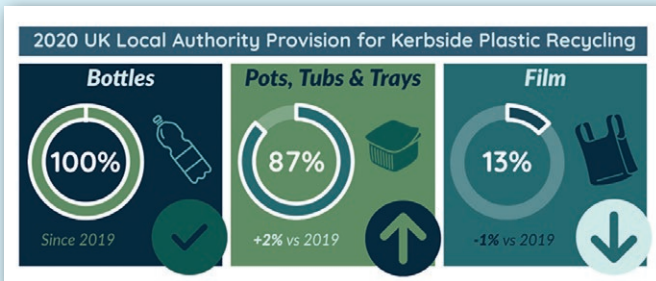


In conclusion when communicating the recycling message it is important that we:

- Agree the same recycling advice on what can be recycled and how best to prepare packs before disposal.
- Measure the same categories of recyclable materials in the same way to enable fair comparisons and a level playing field to facilitate sound legislation and policy decisions.
- When communicating with the public, the content must be factually correct and accurate as inconsistencies in messaging can negatively impact behaviour change.

Project Need

There is wide agreement that the UK must be able to process more of its plastic waste domestically thereby reducing the need for exports and enabling greater transparency on reported recycling rates. UK exports have, and will continue to gain, considerable negative media



RECOUN UK Household Plastics Collection Survey 2021

attention. The Basel Action Network reported in April 2022 that 467,000 tonnes of plastic had been exported 2021/22. To increase the recycling of materials in the UK investment in infrastructure is essential. Improved capture rates, sorting, collection, Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility will play a key role in generating the qualities of materials to support the commercial viability of additional plastics recycling in the UK.

UK markets exist for Clear PET, Natural HDPE, PS/EPS, and PP; however, the challenge remains to collect and sort these materials which is particularly true for more complex plastics fractions. This complex picture is not helped by a lack of consistency in collections both in terms of who is collecting what and how. UK kerbside plastics collection rates have only demonstrated small increases over recent years with contamination levels continuing to be an issue kerbside.

This is also set against legislative drivers such as the UK packaging tax which incentivises the inclusion of 30% recycled content in plastics packaging being placed on UK markets. Consultations on Extended Producer Responsibility, Deposit Return Schemes and UK consistency continue to be delayed and if we are to achieve the required recycling targets investments and initiatives need to happen now. The whole system in recent years has been put under further pressure by fluctuating PRN prices as well as questions of the system's effectiveness. By acting now and bringing UK citizens on the journey to increase the volume of plastics packaging collected for recycling we are more likely to achieve our recycling goals.

Category	Price Range (per tonne)	Average (per tonne)
PRN	£25-£170	£75
COLOURED PET	£-30-£20	£-1
HDPE MIXED COLOUR	£220-£520	£353
CLEAR & LIGHT BLUE PET	£220-£520	£354
HDPE NATURAL	£400-£820	£602
MIXED BOTTLES	£60-£250	£144
PTT	£-10-£100	£43

Packaging Recovery Note and Plastic Tonnage Prices 2021/22 as per www.letsrecycle.com/prices/

It is estimated that, in 2020, 1,412kt of household plastic packaging was placed on the market in the UK. 584,000 tonnes of household plastic packaging were collected for recycling and 828,000 tonnes was therefore presumed to be either sent to landfill or energy recovery.



RECOUN UK Household Plastics Collection Survey 2021

In 2022 the capacity for food grade recyclate was forecast to have a 250kt demand shortfall.

The situation of being unable to fulfill that shortfall via domestically produced recyclate because we nationally fail to inspire citizens to do their bit is disappointing. This represents a lost opportunity in sustainability and the economy. In real terms it highlights opportunities for infrastructure growth and employment.

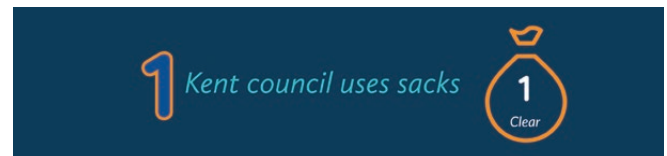
The Kent Understanding Plastics 'Live Lab' project looked at plastics recycling through the lens of citizen communications, taking a deep dive into addressing the barriers and challenges to behaviour change particularly in relation to residents' perspectives on plastics packaging. The dissemination of the project results is based on the process of what happens to plastics packaging in UK recycling systems.

UK Citizen Recycling Behaviours

An essential requirement of kerbside collection schemes is to recognise the importance the citizen plays in determining the quantity and quality of recycle. The RECOUP 2020 UK Household Plastics Collection Survey estimated that citizens were placing in their kerbside recycling bins a total of 59% of plastic bottles, 33% of plastic pots, tubs, and trays, and 7% of film that they purchased. The 2021 survey reported that this had risen slightly to 61% of plastic bottles, 36% of pots, tubs, and trays, and 8% of film.

National insight work conducted by RECOUP⁴ demonstrated that 95% of UK citizens feel they are recycling plastic drinks bottles every time. However, only 43% of individuals claimed to empty, rinse, and put the tops back on bottles before recycling. What was established by the study was that individuals felt they recycle more than they do. Perhaps this is because that is their intention and their desired behaviour i.e., **they want to recycle every time**. The current negative media around plastics can also make citizens feel guilty about using plastics packaging and therefore less likely to declare their true behaviours.

The explanation of the differences between kerbside collection rates and declared recycling behaviours by citizens may be as a result of the fact that they think it is the right/ethical thing to do. To avoid cognitive dissonance they think they behaved in the way they were planning to.



Why Kent

The County of Kent was chosen for this research initiative as it allowed for engagement with over 1.5 million people, 678,000 households, across 12 local authority districts and one County Council. There was also a pre-agreed 'target/non-target' list for plastics recycling kerbside for all districts.

Kent in Numbers

- One local authority operates weekly collections for residual and recycling waste, and one provides a weekly residual waste collection.
- Six of the authorities' source separate paper and cardboard.
- One authority requests separation of glass.
- Five authorities are co-mingled collections.
- Ten authorities have food waste collections.
- All areas have garden waste - provision varies in terms of bins, bin sizes and sacks.
- There is no link between bin colour and collection rates.
- One authority collects recycling in sacks.
- Tetra Paks were removed from the target list of the remaining Kent Councils who collected kerbside and as a result such packs were no longer collected across Kent as of July 2021.⁵

64	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council	51.6%
70	Ashford Borough Council	50.5%
76	Maidstone Borough Council	49.7%
98	Folkestone & Hythe District Council	48.10%
103	Dover District Council	47.8%
107	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	47.5%
145	Gravesham Borough Council	43.7%
178	Swale Borough Council	41.4%
184	Canterbury City Council	40.9%
234	Sevenoaks District Council	36.6%
254	Thanet District Council	32.5%
328	Dartford Borough Council	24.5%

Table 1: Kent League table positions derived from Waste Data Flow & Defra's statistical department for the period covering the financial year 2020/21⁶

⁴ Citizen & Stakeholder Engagement - RECOUP Recycling

⁵ <https://www.dover.gov.uk/Recycling--Waste/Tetra-Pak>

⁶ As published League Tables - letsrecycle.com

Existing Communications

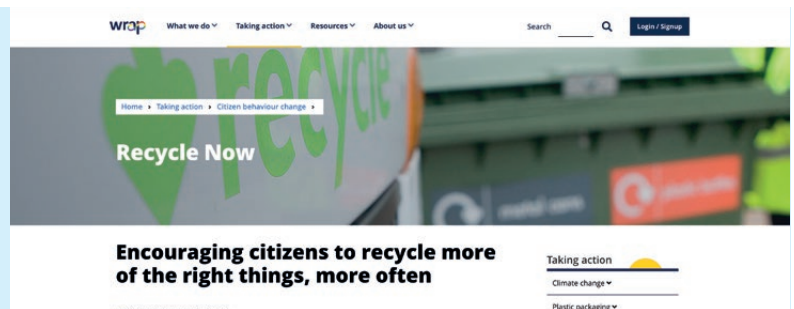
Each authority is responsible for their own communications on plastics recycling including website content on target and non-target materials. This includes content produced for any service provision changes or any education or engagement with communities.

External Pressures

Throughout 2020/2021 there were several external pressures on Local Authorities and Kent was no exception, with the impact of working from home, Covid, Brexit, issues with shortages of HGV qualified drivers, fuel supplies and costs as well as local contract changes.

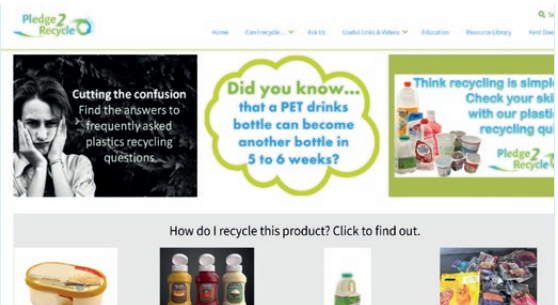
UK Plastics Recycling Communications

Plastics packaging is a complex area of recycling with many citizens declaring to be confused. WRAP's Recycle Now drives the waste hierarchy message across all material types. Social norming is at the heart of the resources.⁷ Recycle Now has been a key point of reference for UK local authorities for kerbside recycling communications.



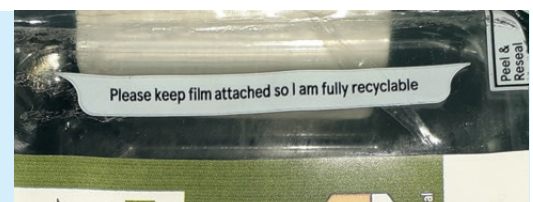
The Plastic PACT communicate directly to consumers, via social media⁸ through Clear on Plastics. The narrative is aimed at dispelling the myths on plastics with brand input on their single use plastics reduction strategies.

RECOUP engages with local authorities and the public through their consumer facing brand, Pledge2Recycle Plastics. Free resources and education materials are available at www.pledge2recycle.co.uk. The content is based on expert knowledge of the plastics recycling value chain and on the proven and tested facts of plastics pack capture, sorting, reprocessing, and end markets. The narrative has been tested in targeted campaigns and materials are adjusted in line with technical advances, innovations, and industry research.



The On-Pack Recycling Label (OPRL) is a key touch point for citizens seeking recycling instructions. The symbol has recently changed to a binary system to eliminate consumer uncertainty as what to do with their waste packaging. To obtain the 'Recycle' logo 75% of Local Authorities must collect that item kerbside, and 'Don't Recycle' will apply when fewer than 50% of Local Authorities collect as part of their kerbside provision.

Brands and retailers are also communicating directly to their customers with instructions on bottle lids and on packs. Some of these directions may not be in line with local target/non-target advice particularly in the case of film lids, toothpaste tubes, plant pots.



⁷ www.wrap.org.uk/taking-action/citizen-behaviour-change/recycle-now

⁸ www.clearonplastics.com

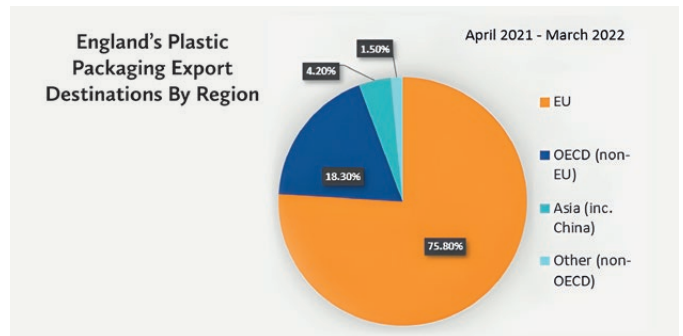
Media Attention and Plastics Sustainability Conversations

Communicating on plastics packaging recycling is a challenge as there has been considerable negative press and political pressure in recent years. Environmental groups have sprung up from the plastic free aspirations and many councils have signed their own plastic free pledges. The narrative is negative for single use plastics. Local Authorities and businesses are, quite rightly, nervous about their plastic recycling sacks or packaging appearing on TV. Conversations on the back of COP26, with an emphasis on carbon reduction mean that the debate is opening up with a greater appreciation that single use plastics could provide solutions which are sustainable and circular.



Due to restrictions and bans, UK plastic recycling exports have been driven from China to other far eastern countries and more recently into Eastern and Central Europe. Plastic exports to Turkey in 2020 drew negative press attention due to highly contaminated and non-target material being discovered during investigations. Export data for plastics from the Environment Agency for April 2021 to March 2022 for England only shows that 487kt of plastic was exported with 75.8% going to the EU. 18% went to Germany and 17% to Turkey. 18.3% was exported to non-EU OECD countries.

It is crucial for Local Authorities to be open and transparent about end destinations in a way that citizens can understand.⁹



Whilst the message of removing single use plastic at all costs may be counter-productive to the climate change debate comparisons appear to be made with other materials based on carbon savings on production alone. There remains no single agreed metric to assess the true impact of different packaging types. Comparisons with other materials need to be done in a meaningful and scientific way, taking account of the whole pack, its full life cycle and its impact on the climate and the product it contains. At the moment this is open to individual interpretation.

The Green Claims Code¹⁰ sets out to ensure that any environmental claims on goods and services do not mislead customers and can be substantiated.

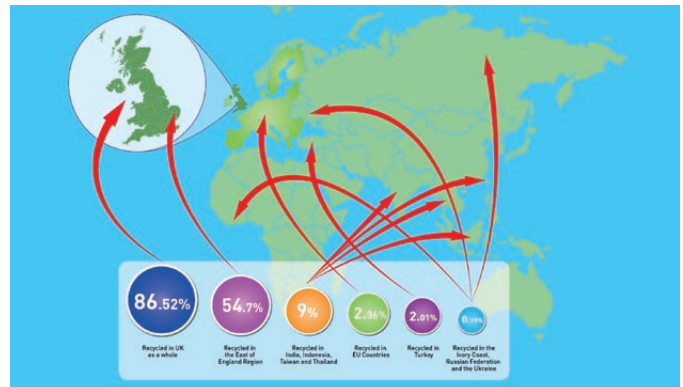
The rules are simple:

- Claims must be truthful and accurate.
- Claims must be clear and unambiguous.
- Claims must not omit or hide important relevant information, comparisons must be fair and meaningful.
- Claims must consider the full life cycle of the product or service and claims must be substantiated.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) have made some high-profile prosecutions, such as Lipton Iced Tea to the advert which appeared on a bus shelter.¹¹



Discussions across Kent point to citizens being open to understanding more about the wider sustainability issues and enabling individuals to make the right choices when purchasing products. Plastics packaging has a role to play particularly around food safety and extending shelf life. Individuals and communities are, we feel, open to information and discussions in this context.



⁹ What happens to your recycling? | Hertfordshire County Council

¹⁰ <https://greenclaims.campaign.gov.uk/>

¹¹ <https://www.asa.org.uk/rulings/pepsi-lipton-international-a21-1120048-pepsi-lipton-international.html>

Kent Understanding Plastics 'Live Lab' Communications Delivery

All plastics recycling communications were based on the same set of target/non-target rules in terms of plastics. There was also consistency in collections in relation to Tetra Paks and drinks cartons following recent contract changes. There was synergy and consistency in the plastics messaging for all 12 District Council and Kent County Council for all communications delivered under the Understanding Plastics project. Due to differences in bin provisions and collection frequencies this aspect was not mentioned in the communications narrative.

The total project budget was £198,000 including all communications and project management. The project came in under budget and to time frame.



KENT DOES

Most people in Kent are recycling plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays. Inside is a handy guide to help you recycle right

Kent Recycles **Pledge2Recycle**



maidstonebc @maidstonebc · Feb 10
Remember when you're #recycling your #plastic bottles to make sure to empty, squash and put the tops back on. This means the tops can be #recycled too. #Pledge2Recycle #KentDoes buff.ly/3gyuz22

47 views 0:11 / 0:12

Top media Tweet earned 640 impressions

Remember to empty, squash and put the tops back on all your household #plastic bottles when #recycling them. #Pledge2Recycle #KentDoes. pic.twitter.com/8dxZGep07N

KENT DOES

Pledge2Recycle

Plastics Recycling - Cutting the Confusion

Your Handy Guide to Plastics Recycling in Kent

Did you know you can now recycle the same plastics packaging across the whole of Kent?

✓ Yes please	✗ No thanks
<p>and more people in Kent are recycling plastic, is your handy guide to help you recycle right:</p> <p>BOTTLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Empty, rinse & squash ✓ Put lids back on before recycling <p>TRAYS & PUNNETS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Remove film lid, absorbent liner & put these into general waste ✓ Recycle the clean & empty tray or punnet <p>POTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Empty & rinse ✓ Put lids back on before recycling 	<p>All of the items below should be put in the general waste.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Nappies/sanitary/hygiene products ✗ Crisp packets or sweet wrappers ✗ Baby food / pet food products ✗ Squeezey toothpaste tubes ✗ Polystyrene packaging ✗ Biodegradable or compostable plastic (bags, coffee, cups etc) ✗ Black plastic trays ✗ Drinking straws ✗ Hard plastic toys, plant pots, buckets, etc.)* ✗ Food waste** ✗ Plastic bags & film*** <p><small>* Can be recycled at Kent CC's Household Waste Recycling Centres - check www.kent.gov.uk ** Must be your food waste if you are providing a food collection service *** Must be recycled in a dedicated facility of choice. Please see www.pledge2recycle.co.uk</small></p>

Why recycle?

- Recycling keeps plastic out of our natural environment
- Using recycled plastic to make products uses 75% less energy than using virgin materials - reducing greenhouse gas emissions

To find out more about recycling please visit www.pledge2recycle.co.uk/kent or visit your Local Authority website

YOUR PLASTICS RECYCLING

People in Kent recycle because it is a worthwhile way to help the environment and the community.

Facebook: /pledge2recycle
Twitter: @pledge2recycle
Kent Recycles
Kent Resource Partnership

www.pledge2recycle.co.uk/kent

Kent Does ... Plastic Recycling

Pledge2Recycle Plastics is the citizen and engagement part of the national recycling charity RECCOUR. We help people to cut the confusion when it comes to recycling household plastics and provide the facts behind the headlines and the facts. To help spread the word about plastic recycling we would like schools and clubs to encourage their members, friends and families to actively get involved in plastic recycling.

Are you confused about what plastics you can recycle? Pledge2Recycle Plastics are working with all Kent Councils to help reduce that confusion. Together we have produced a free to download, handy reference guide.

Did you know you can recycle ALL bottles whether from the bathroom and kitchen, as well as plastic packaging in the form of a pot, tub or tray? Remember when you recycle bottles, they should be emptied and have the tops back on. Pots, tubs and trays should have the absorbent liner and film lid removed as these need to go into general waste. You can also recycle carrier bags and other flexible wrappings at some local Sainsbury's stores.

PLEDGE2WIN
Pledge2Recycle are running a free draw for Schools, Sports clubs and Community Litter picking groups. Click and submit a Pledge2WIN today!

Think recycling is easy? Check your skills with our plastics recycling quiz!

LISTEN NOW CUTTING THE CONFUSION PLEDGE2RECYCLE PODCAST

Sort it Out

DOWNLOAD YOUR COPY

How do I recycle this product? Click to find out.





✓ Yes please

More and more people in Kent are recycling plastic. Here is your handy guide to help you recycle right:

BOTTLES

- ✓ Empty, rinse & squash
- ✓ Put lids back on before recycling

TRAYS & PUNNETS

- ✓ Remove film lid, absorbent layer & put these into general waste
- ✓ Recycle the clean & empty tray or punnet

POTS

- ✓ Empty & rinse
- ✓ Put lids back on before recycling

✗ No thanks

All of the items below should be put in the general waste.

- ✗ Nappies/sanitary/hygiene products
- ✗ Crisp packets or sweet wrappers
- ✗ Baby food / pet food pouches
- ✗ Squeezy toothpaste tubes
- ✗ Polystyrene packaging
- ✗ Biodegradable or compostable plastic (bags, cutlery, cups etc)
- ✗ Black plastic trays
- ✗ Drinking straws
- ✗ Hard plastics (toys, plant pots, buckets, etc.)*
- ✗ Food waste**
- ✗ Plastic bags & film***

Starred items can be recycled as follows:

- * Can be recycled at Kent CC's Household Waste Recycling Centres - check www.kent.gov.uk
- ** Place in your food caddy if your area provides a food collection service.
- *** May be recycled via retailers at point of sale. Please see www.pledge2recycle.co.uk

www.pledge2recycle.co.uk/kent



Are you confused about Plastics Recycling?

Pledge2Recycle Plastics are working with all 13 Kent Councils to help reduce citizen confusion on plastics packaging and recycling.

According to the charity, you can recycle all plastic bottles, even those from the bathroom and kitchen kerbside. Plastic pots, tubs and trays can also be recycled across the whole of Kent.

All bottles should be empty, squashed and have the tops put back on. Putting the tops back on the bottles helps make sure they are captured for recycling as they need to go to the reprocessing plant attached to the bottles. Pots, tubs and trays should have the absorbent layer and film lid removed as these need to go into general waste. Residents are being asked to make sure their plastics are clean, dry and NOT to put into carrier or black bags or put inside other things. Recycling should only be put into CLEAR bags designed for recycling. There are also now opportunities to recycle soft plastics and wrappings which cannot be recycled kerbside, via some larger Sainsbury's stores across Kent.

Visit www.about.sainsburys.co.uk/sustainability/plan-for-better/our-stories/2021/flexible-plastics

Pledge2Recycle Plastics state that contamination of recycling continues to be an issue and they point out that all residents should not put toothpaste tubes, pill packs, nappies, textiles, batteries, or food into recycling.

Anne Hitch, Head of Citizen & Stakeholder Engagement, commented "the project offers Kent residents a fantastic opportunity to get involved with the issue of single use plastics to help reduce plastic pollution. We know that so many residents want to do the right thing but are often confused, we hope that this project will help cut through that confusion."

UK residents currently place for recycling around 60% of the bottles they buy and only 34% of the pots, tubs, and trays they purchase.

The Pledge2Recycle team are keen to engage with communities and have a competition running on their website where schools, or community groups can pledge to recycle and be in with a chance to win a bench made from recycled plastic or some team shirts. All they need to do is to get their members to pledge to recycle their plastics packaging when and where they can.

For more information visit www.pledge2recycle.co.uk/kent

Pledge2Recycle Plastics are keen to talk with residents and are holding a series of focus groups and meetings on the issue of single use plastics.

Residents are asked to get in touch via Twitter @Pledge2Recycle and Facebook or to email direct to enquiry@recoup.org



Let's cut through the confusion and find out what you recycle

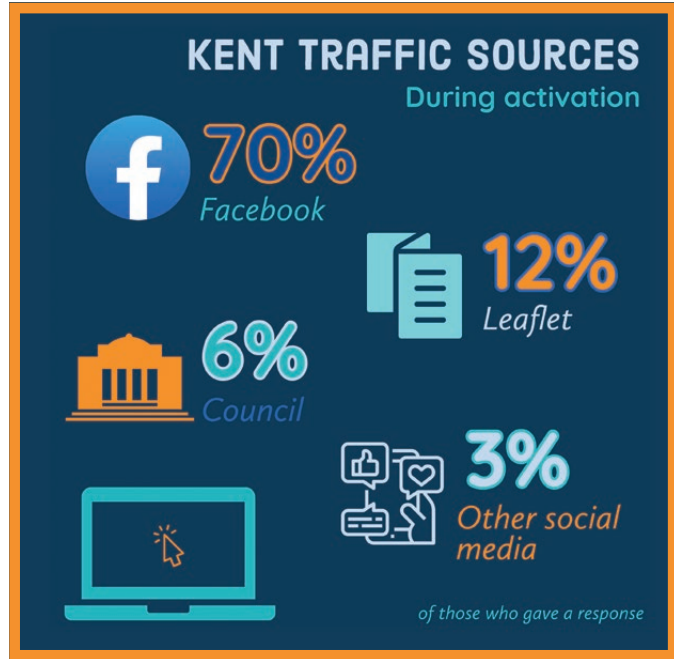
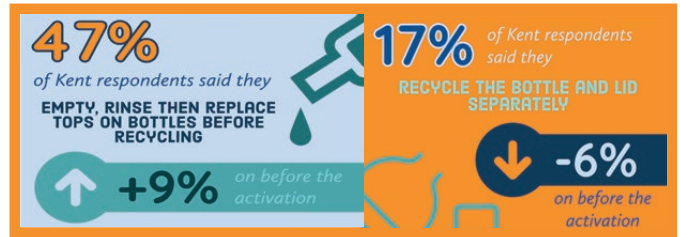
Hi, thanks for taking part in this independent survey by Pledge2Recycle Plastics. We are keen to find out how you recycle your household plastics. First up plastics bottles, how do you recycle your bottles when you are at home?

- I never recycle this item
- I sometimes recycle this item
- I normally put this item in whichever bin has the most room
- I am confused about if this item is recyclable or not, so I don't always recycle it
- I don't recycle this item if it is dirty and needs cleaning
- I try to recycle this item if it is convenient
- I recycle this item every time
- I don't use this item

Kent Citizen Insights

2000 responses were received to the citizen insights via the online questionnaire. The Pledge2Recycle Plastics team connected with local community Facebook groups in the Kent area to drive traffic. 70% of the responses came via Facebook with a 12% take-up via the leaflet distribution. Social media proved to be the most cost effective and successful way to drive questionnaire responses.

The knowledge and understanding of plastics packaging in Kent since the start of the activation has improved and is now statistically higher than those results from the rest of the UK.



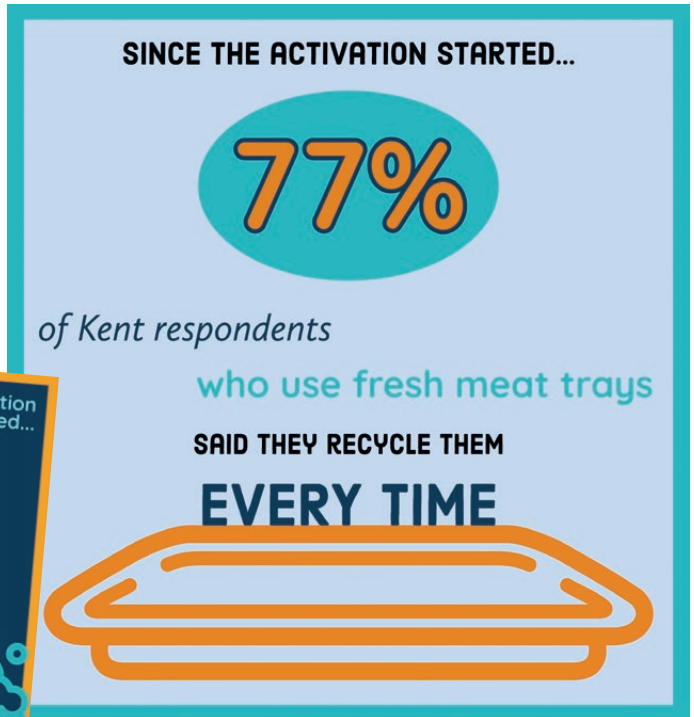
Before the campaign 38% of Kent residents declared they empty, rinse, and replace the tops on bottles before recycling. This increased to 47%, an upshift of 9% following the communications. Prior to July 2021 23% of Kent residents said they recycled the bottle and lid separately, this has now dropped to 17%, as opposed to the rest of the UK where the number of responses declaring that they recycle the bottle and lid separately rose by 5% from 14% up to July 2021 to 19% post July 2021.¹²

Kent residents were also less likely to dispose of bottle tops in general waste with only 9% declaring this behaviour compared to 13% for the rest of the UK.

The empty, rinse bottle, tops on message was a key narrative in social media posts as well as direct community engagement. The results demonstrate an overall improvement in the awareness of how plastic bottles should be prepared for recycling and an uptake of those messages.

77% of Kent residents said they were likely to recycle meat trays every time (12% higher than the rest of the UK). 65% of Kent residents declared they recycle cooked food and ready meal trays every time whereas for the rest of the UK this was 60%, an upshift of 5%.

89% of Kent residents now declare they recycle shampoo and conditioner bottles every time (+2% from the rest of the UK). Of the Kent residents who said they use these items, 85% declared that they are likely to recycle cleaning bottles every time (+3% compared to the rest of the UK), and 86% are likely to recycle sauce bottles every time (rest of the UK 84%).



¹² Bottle tops can only be recycled if they are recycled with the bottle.

Qualitative Insights

Focus groups, high street engagement and roadshows enabled Kent residents to ask direct questions on pack recyclability. These conversations would often result in individuals then declaring that they had just realised how much they had been recycling incorrectly and then seeking clarity on toothpaste tubes, crisp packets, black plastic, films and flexibles and Tetra Paks.

There was a general appreciation for the challenge waste management faces and the pressure on front line workers. Citizens had empathy for the work of collection crews and in the main there was little criticism of the kerbside service provision. Concerns raised usually covered incineration of plastics, export of plastics, plastics in the natural environment (particularly oceans), how to make the right choices in terms of sustainable packaging, and how to recycle items not collected kerbside particularly multi-material products.



The good news is that the qualitative insights point to public confidence in recycling being positively influenced if citizens understand more about the recycling journey.

The work further supports the theory that citizens are more likely to trust that stuff is recycled when they receive information from the Council on what happens to their recycling and when they get information on how well the area is doing in terms of recycling.

The qualitative insights support the work conducted by IncPen 2021 Survey on Public Confidence in Recycling¹³

“ The radio says that only tennis ball sized plastics can go through the recycling system. ”

“ I sort it, but my husband says, why bother when it's all burnt. ”

“ No recycling at home, HWRCs don't recycle plastics. ”

“ I separate it out and then you put it all together again in the truck, so why do I bother. ”

“ Can you find me somewhere to recycle my alternative milk carton? ”

“ Why isn't it all in glass? ”

¹³ INCPEN – Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment

Kent Data

The recycling data was reviewed through the lens of a post-covid world. Kent authorities, as with many throughout the pandemic experienced a shift in terms of increased recycling rates as a result of covid lockdowns. As with the rest of the UK there is some leveling off as citizens are once more on-the-go and spending less time in the home.

Data Insights

Plastics recycling rates had increased in line with expectations during the pandemic, with an up-shift in plastics tonnages particularly around the time of the first lock down.

	Let's Recycle 2020/2021	Waste Data Flow 2020/2021		Population	Population Density	Contamination Rate	Contamination Rate	DMR KCC* data
	Recycling Rate	Recycle (DMR)	Compost	June 2020		Apr 21 -Mar 22	Jul 21 - Apr 22 post activation	Recycling Rate Jul 21 – Apr 22
Ashford	50.5%	27.6%	22.8%	131018	226	9%	8.9%	39%
Canterbury	40.9%	22.2%	18.7%	166762	540	5.1%	4.7%	23%
Dartford	24.5%	18.4%	6.1%	114051	1567	11.4%	11.5%	18%
Dover	47.8%	28.8%	18.9%	118514	376	14.2%	14.2%	23%
Folkestone & Hythe	48.1%	27.4%	20.6%	113320	318	13.6%	13.6%	23%
Gravesham	43.7%	23.6%	20.1%	106890	1079	11.4%	11.5%	28%
Maidstone	49.7%	25.1%	24.6%	173132	440	8%	8%	38%
Sevenoaks	36.6%	20.9%	15.4%	121387	328	8.1%	7.8%	19%
Swale	41.4%	23.1%	18.4%	151015	403	11.4%	11.3%	32%
Thanet	32.5%	22.5%	12.5%	141458	1369	10%	9.7%	17%
Tonbridge & Malling	51.6%	23.0%	28.5%	132571	552	10.9%	10.7%	20%
Tunbridge Wells	47.5%	28.2%	19.3%	118939	359	10.9%	10.7%	23%

Table 2: Kent district authorities recycling rates, population and contamination rates. Data from Lets Recycle, Waste Data Flow, Population and Population Density.

*Dry Mixed Recycling Kent County Council

Analysing data produced from different Materials Recovery Facilities also brings challenges due to how objectionable and prohibitive materials maybe recorded and dealt with. If elements of the objectionable are ultimately recycled and then counted back into the recycling total then this renders the area with a lower recycling rate than where that same component e.g., non-target metals, dealt with under another arrangement. This same item may not be added back to the recycled total but instead remain under the objectionable element as a non-recycled weight. Thus, it is evident, that nationally we are not comparing data which has been similarly recorded. (Please see page 18 for further details.)

Over the time of the project the analysis of Kent data also showed fluctuations in contamination rates which coincided with contract changes, ultimately, this did not reflect changes in behaviour, simply how certain items were dealt with in terms of their categorisation.

There are several key influences in terms of recycling figures and contamination rates that make data comparisons almost unfair.

This includes everything from

- Frequency of collections both residual and recycling.
- Type of collection (sacks as opposed to bins).
- Service provision such as co-mingled/source separated, or accepting materials like glass can impact on recycling rates and contamination rates.
- The level of garden waste/compost within the declared recycling rate has a huge impact on the overall recycling rate.
- Contract and target material changes.
- MRF data analysis and reporting including treatment of objectionable and prohibitive items.

The links between population, and population density are complex with no clear correlation here on recycling rates or contamination.

The amount of flats and whether they do or don't have a recycling collection or if this is limited can have a bearing and a link to the more densely populated towns and cities.

Please note that for the purposes of this document the recycling rates are the amount of material collected for recycling kerbside.

Recycling Tonnage Data

Overall, Kent County Council Dry Mixed Recycling Rates throughout the project remained stable with the expected peaks in January 2022.

Plastic tonnages collected for July 21 to April 22 showed a 5% increase on the same time period in 2019/20.

		Kent DMR Recycling Rate	Kent Plastics Tonnage Collected kerbside
Phase 1	July	24%	1568
	August	25%	1637
	September	26%	1577
Phase 2	October	26%	1438
	November	25%	1435
	December	26%	1455
	January	27%	1547
Phase 3	February	26%	1270
	March	25%	1585
	April	26%	1388

Table 3: Kent County Council average Mixed Dry Recycling Rate and Plastics Tonnages collected July 2021 to April 2022 for 12 Kent District Councils.

Overall Dry Mixed Recycling (DMR) Rate for the Kent councils stayed relatively consistent over the project time-frame, with an overall average of 25.6%. This is slightly down on the same time period the year before (26.3%), where both residual and DMR tonnages saw an increase, but especially DMR, which may have been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. The DMR recycling rate over the activation period however was very similar to the 2019/20 figure over the same time period of 25.8%.

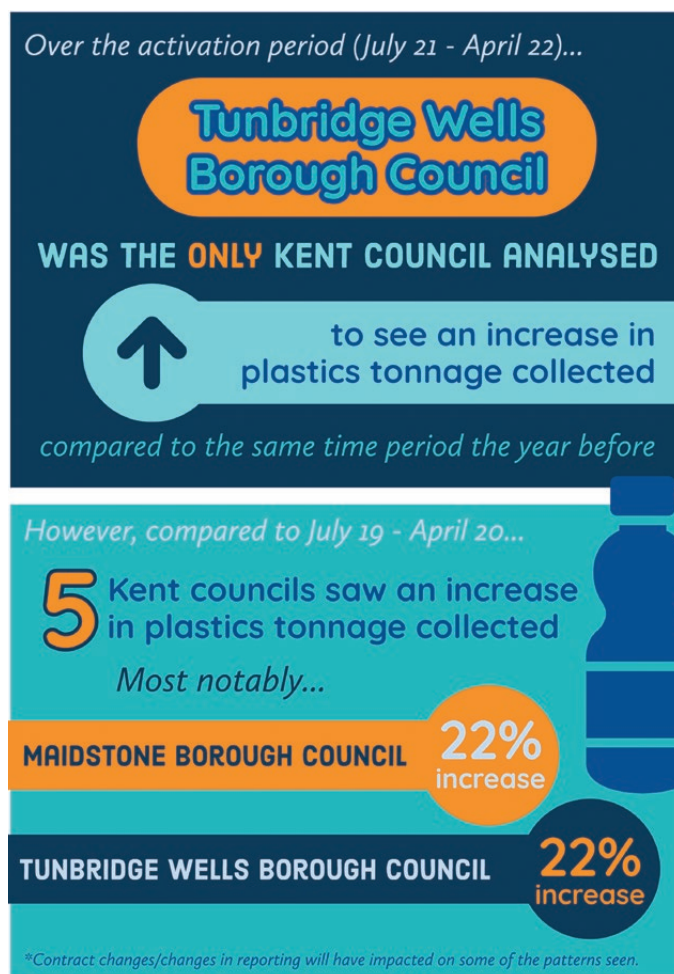
The UK citizen on average recycles 41%¹⁴ of plastics packaging purchased. In Kent that percentage is 15% higher at 56%. Which equates to Kent citizens placing for recycling around 8kg more per household than the rest of the UK.

The Mixed Dry Recycling rate of Mid-Kent Councils generally showed a greater increase when comparing the data with the July 2019 - April 2020 figures than the other two control areas.

There were some clear pockets of success from the activation with 5 Kent councils seeing an increase in plastics tonnage collected against the July 2019 to April 2020 rates.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council saw an increase over the activation period July 2021 to April 2022 of 3% more than the same time period the previous year and 22% higher than July 2019 to April 2020.

Recycling rates 2019/2020, 2020/21 and 2021/22 should always be set against the behavioural influences of the pandemic and lock down periods and the lifting of any working from home restrictions in January 2022.



¹⁴ 2021 UK Household Plastics Collection Survey compiled by RECOUP

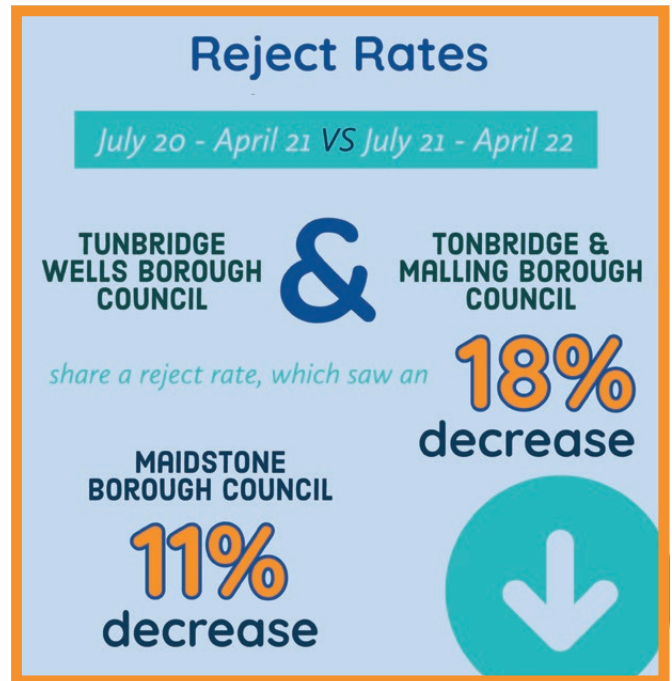
Contamination

Contamination or reject rates appear to show peaks and troughs which cannot necessarily be explained as being a direct result of changing behaviours. Contract changes and resulting changes in data analysis can demonstrate short sharp fluctuations. This can be a reflection of shifts in target/non-target recycle and subsequent data recording.

There was no indication that those areas with food waste collections were experiencing any more or less food waste in mixed dry recycling. There was evidence of plastics packaging being placed into DMR with out of date food still in the wrapper. In many cases there was no attempt to separate the food waste from the packaging and recycle accordingly.

There were some regional success stories with Maidstone demonstrating an 11% reduction in average contamination rates over the period of the activation (July 2021 - April 2022) compared to the same time period the previous year. Both Tonbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Councils saw a decrease of 18% in reject rates.

Issues with synchronicity in data collection and analysis means that direct comparisons with different authorities are difficult and it is almost impossible to know if we are looking at issues that can easily be compared. In the main contamination continue to be comparable with issues noticed elsewhere.



Whilst individual citizens might challenge on issues such as why they need to clean, and how clean items need to be before recycling, contamination problems appear to centre around five areas: -

- 1 Food waste, even if there is a separate food waste collection. This also includes out of date food disposed of still inside the plastic packaging**
- 2 Nappies and sanitary wear**
- 3 Textiles**
- 4 Tied up black sacks or carrier bags containing recycling**
- 5 Heavy and bulky items that should have either been recycled at Household Waste Recycling Centre or disposed of in general waste**

These 5 contamination issues could be part of a national message as they are not area specific and are not dependent on consistency of collections.

Whilst there are always going to be local differences and opinions from MRF to MRF on contamination there is a need for the industry to collectively support some messaging in this regard to raise general awareness of the issue to drive behavioural change. The challenge of this issue is genuinely a surprise to most individuals and communities and only through increasing awareness of the challenges contamination causes nationally can we begin to drive societal change.

Data Analysis

There are several influences that render any true data comparisons on recycling data challenging and possibly even unsound. Comparing data from MRF to MRF is difficult not only due to differences in operations and sorting capabilities but in contracts, varying treatments of materials, shifting commerciality and end markets.

The same materials may be categorised and dealt with differently depending on whether they are classed as acceptable (target material), objectionable (non-target material but recyclable), or prohibitive (non-recyclables).

Please see diagram below.

How are the 'objectionable' items recorded?		
	RECYCLED?	COUNTED IN REJECT RATE?
ACCEPTABLE <i>Target kerbside recycling materials</i>	✓	✗
OBJECTIONABLE <i>Recyclable but non-target kerbside</i>	?	?
PROHIBITIVE <i>Non recyclable materials</i>	✗	✓

If, for example objectionable material has challenging end markets the commercial opportunities to recover the material may influence whether it is counted as acceptable and reflected in the recycling rate or added to the non-recyclable material (prohibitive) and added to the contamination total.

Ultimately, whether a material is 'recyclable' or not does not mean it will be recycled and therefore counted as such. As this naturally fluctuates it is challenging and unsound to compare different Local Authorities against each other. There is no guarantee that we are comparing like for like. Thus it is evident, nationally, we are not analyzing comparable data.

Analysis of Kent data also shows fluctuations in contamination rates which coincided with contract changes. These fluctuations were ultimately not about significant events or changes in behaviour. There are several key influences in terms of recycling figures and contamination rates that make data comparisons almost unsound.

This includes everything from:-

- Frequency of collections both residual and recycling.
- Type of collection (sacks as opposed to bins).
- Service provisions such as co-mingled and treatment of glass, pamphlets and paper.
- Provision of garden waste, uptake of this service and its impact on recycling figures due to the weight of compost.
- Food waste service provision.
- Contract and target material changes.
- MRF data analysis and reporting including treatment of objectionable and prohibitive items.

The links between population, and population density are complex with no clear correlation here on recycling rates or contamination.

The question remains that if we are to have fair and comparable UK data then should the categorisation of material types for acceptable, objectionable, and prohibitive materials also be uniform and consistent.

It is acknowledged that dense urban areas with a high level of flats in the housing stock may have an impact negatively depending on service provision and residents uptake.

Grouping compost and mixed dry recycling together to form the overall recycling rate can lead to conclusions that in some areas citizens are recycling more materials such as glass, paper, plastics, aluminium when this is not the case.

Covid Impact

The impact of covid is, open to speculation. As with most areas the impacts of covid during the first lockdown lead to an increase in plastics collected kerbside. Almost all of the Kent districts show stable contamination, or a slight decrease post the activation January 2022 – April 2022. There does not appear to be any significant impact of the return to normality which points to changing behaviours being sustained. What is not known is the impact that the communications has had on achieving this underpinning of sustained behaviours.



Results and Recommendations

Results

This project demonstrates that consistency in collections must be accompanied by consistency in data categorisation and analysis as well as consistency in communications across all citizen touch points.

Out of date and incorrect information on plastics packaging only adds to consumer confusion. Aligning pack and local authority messaging, and ensuring this is both factually correct and in line with industry guidelines is essential if we are to remove citizen reluctance to engage due to conflicting and confusing instructions. It is crucial that the industry agrees and supports messaging of plastics packaging and recyclability as so often the value chain debate and disagree amongst themselves.

Plastics packaging by its very nature is a complex material as it allows packaging to be produced in many shapes, colours and combinations. Single-use plastics is an emotive subject and whilst it receives negative press attention it enables citizens to live the convenient lifestyles they seek. Citizens are beginning to understand the contribution plastics can make in the drive to reduce food waste as well as protecting health.

The recycling value chain is developing and changing to reflect innovation and technological advances. The instructions for target and non-target materials kerbside will continue to reflect these developments. Recycling communication should be based on the fact of the pack's journey through the system in order that the need for these instructions can be understood. The processes, systems and infrastructure involved to collect, sort, capture and reprocess material are part of the story and need to be imparted to citizens in a language they can understand.

Citizens want to do the right thing however their perceptions of their own behaviours to their desired behaviours do not align. As human beings we all want to think we are more committed to change than we are. Citizens are unsure about the detail of what plastics to recycle and how to prepare packs particularly when it comes to film lids, bottle tops, trigger sprays, pump sprays and labels. Individuals remain confused about coloured plastics, bleach-based product packaging, pill blister packs, toothpaste tubes, and packs that have contained raw meat. Drinks cartons and Tetra paks provide further complications.

- Citizens want to do the right thing and are keen to make sustainable choices.
- Nationally, citizens want to believe they are recycling every time however the kerbside collection data is at odds with this claim.
- Communications delivered in Kent demonstrated an upshift in plastics recycling knowledge. Kent residents are now more aware of how to prepare bottles for recycling and have an improved understanding of recycling options for soft plastics and wrappings.
- Citizens can be critical when delivering communications on recycling and on one hand can be critical of interventions that result in more waste such as leaflets, bin stickers and hangers. And yet, they still want something they can refer to daily at their convenience.
- Social media represents a low-cost methodology for nudge behaviour change principles and has greater take-up than leafleting. Keeping messages factual reduces the challenges from citizens. Facts can be backed up and supported by the plastics recycling value chain.
- It is all about momentum we need to keep repeating the message until we reach saturation point. We also need to ensure the message itself has longevity as sustained behaviour change cannot be brought about by constant adjustments in the narrative.
- The project did not find any link between contamination levels and food waste collections.
- Parish Councils can be a great way to engage local community leaders and educate on the wider sustainability discussions of plastics packaging. These groups can be very vocal and are at the heart of community action.
- When citizens understand the plastics recycling journey they are more likely to follow recycling instructions and recycle right.
- Citizens want to trust that their Local Authority and the recycling industry do what they say they are going to do. As a direct result recycling information on Local Authority communication channels needs to be wholly accurate.
- Citizens are interested to know the volumes of plastic they are recycling on a local/regional basis and the end destination of that material. This encourages citizens to keep recycling and makes them feel their efforts are worthwhile.



Recommendations

There are 5 key factors that influence plastics recycling kerbside. And these can be summarised as; data analysis, consistency and accuracy in messaging, citizens lack of understanding of plastics recycling process, climate change, carbon reduction strategies, and lack of awareness of contamination issues.

Sector strategy and legislation is based on the performance indicators of the sector and it is crucial that these indicators are not only accurate but that they reflect the true state of play. The emphasis on behaviour change needs to be targeted in the right direction and aligned with messages which are more receptive when it comes to the issue of plastics.

THE FIVE FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

1



CONSISTENCY IN DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Local authority performance data can only be compared if the measurements are like for like. Differences due to MRF technology, operations, and contract variations mean that this is difficult. Issues with end markets should not affect categorisation of target recyclable plastics. There are variations in the treatment of prohibitive (non-recyclable) and objectionable (recyclable although non-target) material categorisations which therefore impacts on national data.

2



LACK OF AWARENESS OF THE PLASTICS RECYCLING JOURNEY

Citizens have very little knowledge of the process of recycling and why they are asked to follow certain rules. There is a lack of understanding of the fact that recycling in the UK is still sorted manually as well as mechanically. There is little appreciation of the challenges faced by MRF operators and the Local Council in terms of how their behaviours affect operations. There is also little knowledge of bottle-to-bottle recycling (PET or HDPE) or why some types of plastic may end up being exported or sent to energy from waste. Other studies support the theory that citizens are likely to recycle more if they have confidence, knowledge and belief in the process.

3



LOCAL AUTHORITY WEBSITES ARE A CRITICAL REFERENCE POINT

Information is taken from local authority websites and used to formulate data on UK kerbside collection rates and service provisions by other organisations not just citizens. It is critical therefore that the sites accurately reflect any contract changed in target materials. Wording, descriptions also need to be normalised across the UK and made more intuitive to interrogate.

4



CLIMATE CHANGE AND CARBON REDUCTION STRATEGIES ARE SUPERSEDING THE PLASTICS NARRATIVE

The plastics recycling value chain has an excellent opportunity to educate citizens, and local and national governments in plastics resource strategies and how plastics can contribute in this space.

5



CONTAMINATION IS A NATIONWIDE ISSUE AND AS SUCH SHOULD BE PART OF A NATIONAL MESSAGE

There are common threads in the issue of contaminants which affect quality of recyclate and therefore end markets. The impact and cost of contamination is not understood by the wider public and creating awareness of this issue should form part of a national campaign.

EASY WINS – 20 TOP TIPS

It is crucial that all UK Local Authorities communication platforms are accurate and user friendly. Local Authority websites are used as a point of reference and data source to ascertain collection rates of specific materials. The information is not just viewed by citizens but utilized by others within the waste management and plastics recycling sectors. Local Authorities are seen as a trusted source¹⁵ by citizens.

These communications top tips are aimed at improving clarity for citizens and are based on the knowledge and expertise of RECOUP.

There are 10 messages which we feel are 'essential' to drive up recycling rates and improve quality of plastics recycling. The remaining are 'nice to do' if there is scope and capacity.

Item 2 was the most hotly debated topic both in direct citizen engagement, focus and advisory groups as well as discussions within the plastics recycling value chain. It is important that advice is based on the fact of what happens to plastics in capture, sorting, and reprocessing.

ESSENTIAL MESSAGING

1 ACCURACY AND CONSISTENCY ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS

All written communications, whether leaflets, websites, magazines need to be 100% accurate to agreed target and non-target recyclable materials.

Other organisations trawl Local Authority websites to gather data in terms of the collecting of certain materials kerbside collection such as black plastic, Tetra Pak, drinks cartons, and pots, tubs and trays. It is therefore crucial that websites accurately reflect any service or contract changes in a timely manner.

Confusion arises when materials remain on communication platforms as being target materials when this is actually no longer the case. Mis-communication in this manner can also cause citizens to lose faith in recycling systems.

2 PLASTIC BOTTLE RECYCLING AND TOPS ON

Citizens need to know what to do with the bottle tops. Be clear and precise. Bottle tops will not be recycled unless they are attached to a bottle. MRF sorting equipment has a pre-set fines sort at around 45-50mm¹⁶. Fines items will not be recycled.

Please do not state that bottle tops can be recycled separately this is incorrect and misleading.

There are ongoing discussions about when, and how much impact Deposit Return Schemes will have on kerbside recycling and how we will need to be communicate this to citizens. Previous communications have requested that bottles are recycled, empty, rinsed, squashed with lids back on. A DRS scheme is likely to result in citizens being told not to squash. The challenge is to drive sustainable behaviour change and understand the key calls to action that have an impact on plastics tonnage and quality captured.

Primarily, it is to be remembered that bottle tops will not get recycled if not placed back on bottles.



3 CLEAN

There is a lot of difference of opinion on whether citizens will respond best to the request to wash or rinse or whether a request to recycle clean and dry is sufficient. The aim is to remove the risk of food contamination.¹⁷



4 LOOSE

Contamination levels can be reduced by ensuring that citizens do not place recycling in tied up black sacks, or carrier bags or any other boxes and bags. Citizens do not understand that MRF operators are unable to retrieve and separate the items.

Putting items inside of other items or in black sacks renders them unrecyclable.



¹⁵ INCPEN – Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment

¹⁶ Recyclability by Design 2022, Small Plastic Packaging Items Case Study 2021, RECOUP evidence paper of caps on bottles, <https://www.recoup.org/p/173/recoup-reports-and-the-rubbish-book>, James Piper.

¹⁷ What can and can't be recycled - BBC Future

5 TRIGGER SPRAYS AND PUMP LIDS

Trigger sprays can be left in the bottles when recycling. Pump sprays should be removed as these generally contain metal components. The pump could be retained for reuse or put into general waste.¹⁸

Empty and recycle bottles with trigger spray left in.

Remove pump lids and reuse or dispose of in general waste.



6 SLEEVES AND LABELS

Labels on plastic bottles do not need to be removed before recycling, unless there are on the pack instructions to do so.

The bottle is unlikely to be captured for recycling if the full sleeve remains in place.

Drinks bottle and milk bottle labels should be left on when recycling



If the bottle has a full sleeve covering the whole of the bottle, follow the guidance on the pack. Place the film sleeve into general waste.



7 SOFT PLASTICS AND WRAPPINGS

Around 13% of Local Authorities collect film kerbside. Trials have commenced under Flex Collect with a limited number of local authorities looking at the options for household collections. In the meantime there are options for front of store recycling. Please direct your residents to Recycle Now or Pledge2Recycle Plastics where they can find out more.

Larger supermarkets now take soft plastics and wrappings front of store. Information is available at www.pledge2recycle.co.uk or www.recyclenow.com/recyclelocator



8 FILM LIDS

Film lids and absorbent layers should be removed from pots, tubs and trays and placed into general waste.

Please remove film lids and absorbent layers from pots, tubs and trays and place into general waste.



¹⁸ The Rubbish Book, A complete guide to recycling, James Piper

9 CONTAMINATION

Contamination continues to be a concern in UK MRF's. Citizens are not aware of the process that materials collected for recycling must go through to be sorted, captured, and baled ready to go to reprocessors, therefore it is difficult for them to understand the impact contamination has on the efficiencies of MRF operations. It is often useful to quantify the cost to the council of putting the wrong stuff in the wrong bin.

Please **DO NOT** put the following items into in your recycling.



- Nappies or sanitary wear



- Food
(use your food waste collection if you have one or place into general waste)



- Textiles
(take to second-hand shops or local Household Waste Recycling Centre [HWRC])



- Toothpaste tubes



- Pill Blister packs



- Crisp packets or pet food pouches
(recyclable at some front of store supermarket schemes, check locally)



- Hard plastics, such as garden furniture and plant pots
(Please take to HWRC)



- Electronic items and batteries
(Please take to HWRC or front of store scheme)



- Toys
(Please take to HWRC)

10 TETRA PAKS AND DRINKS CARTONS

Tetra Paks and drinks carton instructions need to be accurate. It is crucial that websites and other communications do not claim these items can be recycled if they are no longer 'target' materials.

Tetra Paks and drinks cartons can/cannot* be recycled in your household recycling collection.



*Please delete as appropriate and select image

NICE TO DO

11 SYMBOLS THAT MIGHT MISLEAD

Due to the international nature of packaging, there are many symbols on packs which confuse citizens.

The Green Dot Symbol is not an indicator of recyclability



The Mobius Loop indicates that an object is capable of being recycled not that the object has been recycled or will be accepted for recycling in kerbside collection systems. On its own it is no indicator of kerbside recyclability



12 ON PACK LABELLING (OPRL)

The majority of plastic packaging contains instructions on recyclability. The symbol appears on packaging and has recently changed removing the 'check locally' instructions on packs to a binary system. The scheme is based on a tipping point of the ratio of Local Authorities accepting a pack kerbside. To obtain the 'Recycle' logo 75% of Local Authorities must collect that item kerbside. 'Don't Recycle' less than 50% of Local Authorities need to be collecting that item kerbside. This is another reason why declared target/non-target material listings need to be accurate. There are special labels for items that need to be recycled via front of store schemes.

OPRL labels appear on items of packaging. Please check local instructions for what to do with pots, tubs and trays.



13 COMPOSTABLES

it is important that citizens know and understand what can be home composted and what they are able to include with any food or garden waste collections. Residents need to know if caddy liners are accepted and can go with food waste.

Only home compost packaging that contains the home compost logo.



You can / cannot use * compostable caddy liners for your food waste collection.

[*Delete as appropriate]

There is no doubt that as the use of compostable packaging increases services instructions to citizens will need to change to reflect this.

14 BIOPLASTICS AND BIODEGRADABLE PLASTICS

Biodegradable plastics should not be left in the open environment.

All biodegradable plastics should be put into general waste. Do not put into recycling.

Useful information is available at WRAP²⁰.

ALL BIODEGRADABLE PLASTICS should be put into your GENERAL WASTE. DO NOT put in your RECYCLING.



15 ENERGY FROM WASTE

Putting energy from waste into the perspectives of the waste hierarchy can help reassure individuals that this option is the least preferred but is preferable to landfill and provides a temporary solution while more recyclable packaging formats and recycling technologies are developed.

Kent County Council have full information on how the energy is created and a video of the Allington Waste to Energy Plant available to members of the public <https://www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/rubbish-and-recycling/reduce-waste-and-recycle-more/recovering-energy-from-waste>. Explanations also help individuals to understand that what comes out of the chimneys is steam and not smoke.

It can also help if the outputs are put in a positive way for communications such as electricity produced, homes powered etc.

Typically, the range of net electrical energy that can be produced is about **500 to 600 kWh of electricity per tonne of waste incinerated.**

16 THE PLASTICS RECYCLING JOURNEY

Citizens are more likely to recycle if they understand the journey of plastics. There are several ways this can be included in communications. The bottle-to-bottle recycling journey helps to reinforce circularity in plastics recycling.

Did you know that PET drinks bottles can be back on the shelves as new bottles in 5 to 6 weeks?



Statistics on the energy savings that can be made as a result of recycling are also helpful. Here is an example:

One ton of recycled plastic saves 5,774 Kilowatt-hours of energy.

Every 10,000 plastic bottles recycled saves the equivalent of half a tonne of carbon, OR enough energy to power up 982 smart phones for one year; OR enough battery power for over 2 million hours of live music streaming.

²⁰ <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/compostable-plastic-packaging-guidance#download-file>

17 END MARKETS

All conversations in Kent with citizens support previous work by RECOUP,²¹ IncPen²² and others that citizens are more likely to recycle when they understand what happens to their recycling and what items contain recycled content

Plastics collected in your household recycling are firstly sorted into different types of plastics.

These different plastics go to reprocessors who turn the plastic packaging into pellets.

The pellets are sent to a manufacturer to be put into new products.

What happens to your plastic?



It is helpful to include a diagram of the journey of plastics and the end destinations to reassure residents that their plastic packaging is going to reputable end destinations. This helps build trust in that the Local Authority the plastics recycling value chain are doing what they claim to be doing.²³

The Recycling Journey of a plastic bottle



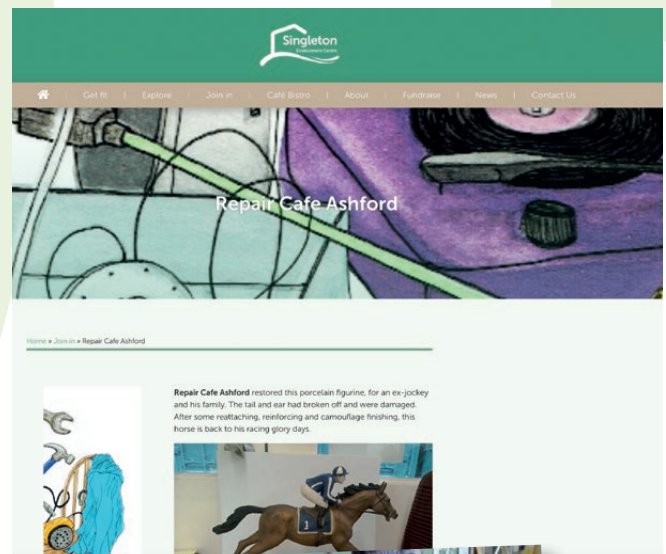
18 PLASTICS REDUCTION STRATEGIES

Encouragement to reduce plastics consumption should be in context against the alternatives and other material types. Ensuring that reduction efforts are concentrated in the right areas can help residents to understand that plastics have and will have a continuing role to play in our lives. Encouraging balanced plastics reduction linked to unnecessary plastic usage and single use plastics policies, alongside consistent plastic recycling messages is more beneficial than plastic free messages.

There are few changes we can all make to reduce our use of single use plastics:-

- Carry a reusable shopping bag instead of buying a plastic bag
- Carry a reusable and refillable water bottle
- Take a reusable cup – many cafes now offer discounts if you use your own cup
- Pack your lunch in reusable containers
- Swap to using unwrapped soap bars

19 REUSE - There has been considerable uptake in reuse and repair schemes across communities it is therefore useful to include links on Local Authority websites to initiatives in their area.



It is helpful if the businesses locally offering free tap water filling of water bottles are listed, on a Local Authority website, with reminders on social media that this option exists. Refill initiatives from water refill schemes by shops and businesses to options for individuals to use refill.

²¹ www.recoup.org/p/348/pledge-2-recycle-plastics-consumer-insight-recycling-study-2019 22

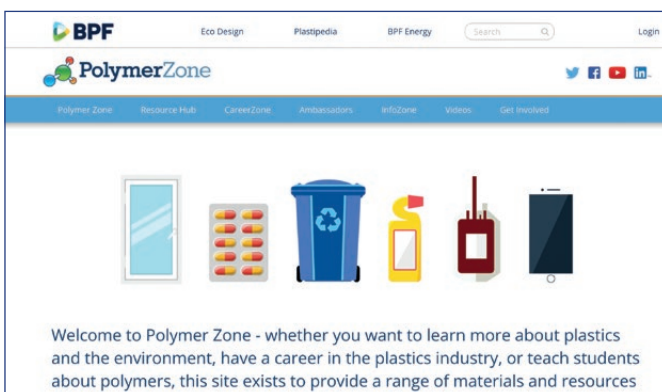
²² www.incpn.org/lack-of-information-on-what-happens-to-recycles-after-collection-risks-undermining-public-confidence-in-recycling.

²³ www.wychavon.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/bins-and-collections/what-happens-to-your-rubbish

www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/rubbish-and-recycling/where-our-waste-and-recycling-goes

20 EDUCATION MATERIALS

The British Plastics Federation and RECOUP have a wealth of education materials that are free and can be downloaded and utilized for schools' education, staff training or to link on web pages. Resources (bpf.co.uk)



RECOUP schools' education packs are of benefit to individuals beyond the target audience with businesses finding the content useful for all ages. Areas of interest being the plastics recycling journey and the explanations of how plastics is sorted and reprocessed into new products.



Legacy

Kent

This project has helped to kick start a number of initiatives within Kent for plastics recycling and plastics reduction strategies.

Kent Resource Partnership have commissioned a new website which will provide one source of information for all Kent Councils on recycling. The site will be a one stop shop for information across the County and RECOUP are working closely with KRP to develop plastics advice both for reduction strategies and recycling.

This will result in consistent and accurate messaging with on an intuitive platform. Visitors to Council District websites will be diverted to the KRP platform when viewing content on recycling.

Initiatives in the area also include the inclusion of Podback coffee pod collections in Kent.

The District Councils are continuing to utilize the social media messaging of the project and tapping into #KentDoes #Pledge2recycle allowing for traction and uptake to continue.

Individual Districts have received education resource packs which include information on the recycling journey with props in order that conversations with communities can continue.

Sustained behaviour change requires ongoing interventions and KRP are committed to ensuring that there are ongoing conversations and activations in this space.



Citizen Communications – Further Test of Learnings

RECOUP are in the process of developing a project where the learnings and theories of this project can be retested. The project will look to develop assets and work with communities to understand how knowledge of how plastic is recycled, where it goes to and recycling tonnages on a regional basis can influence behaviours.

This project will also look at how to combat the belief/misconception of individuals that they already recycle all that they can and will look at ways in which this can be challenged positively through social media and other digital interventions.

Recycling Useful Organisations

RECOUP

RECYCLING OF USED PLASTICS LIMITED (RECOUP)

RECOUP is a charity and leading authority providing expertise and guidance across the plastics recycling value chain. Built on a network of valued members, collaboration is central to RECOUP's activities. The organisation is committed to securing sustainable, circular, and practical solutions for plastic resources both in the UK and worldwide. RECOUP has been working in the arena of plastics recycling for over 30 years.

www.recoup.org



Pledge2Recycle Plastics

Pledge2Recycle Plastics is the citizen interfacing arm of RECOUP and is aimed at educating the facts of plastics and how it is recycled. The Pledge2Recycle Plastics resources and education tool kits are based on the knowledge and expertise of RECOUP.

www.pledge2recycle.co.uk



British Plastics Federation

The British Plastics Federation (BPF) is the world's longest running plastics trade association. Established in 1933, the BPF represent and promote over 80% of the UK plastics industry by turnover. BPF member companies include plastics recyclers, polymer suppliers and distributors, additive suppliers, service providers, plastics processors, packaging manufacturers, equipment suppliers and more.

www.bpf.co.uk



Plastics Europe

Plastics Europe is the pan-European association of plastics manufacturers with offices across Europe. For over 100 years, science and innovation has been the DNA that cuts across the plastics industry. With close to 100 members producing over 90% of all polymers across Europe, Plastics Europe are the catalyst for the industry with a responsibility to openly engage with stakeholders and deliver solutions which are safe, circular and sustainable. Plastics Europe are committed to implementing long-lasting positive change.

www.plasticseurope.org



WRAP - Recycle Now

Recycle Now™ is the national recycling campaign for England and Northern Ireland, which aims to motivate more people, to recycle more of the right things, more often.

www.wrap.org.uk



Plastics Pact

The UK Plastics Pact brings together businesses from across the entire plastics value chain with UK governments and NGOs to tackle the scourge of plastic waste.

www.wrap.org.uk/taking-action/plastic-packaging/initiatives/the-uk-plastics-pact



OPRL

The OPRL scheme aims to deliver a simple, consistent, and UK-wide recycling message on retailer and brand packaging to help consumers reuse and recycle more material correctly, more often. OPRL is a not for profit organisation. The On Pack Recycling Label is now recognised by more than 3 in 4 consumers, and the organisation has over 700 members now using it.

www.oprl.org.uk



Wastebuster

Wastebuster are a not-for-profit education resource provider for school children. The organisation has a range of resources aimed at educating children on sustainability and environmental issues including recycling. The organisation also offers schools options for recycling of items such as textiles and toys. RECOUP and Wastebuster have collaborated to develop some of the plastics resources and videos available at

www.wastebuster.co.uk

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