

‘The Big Plastic Count’ – Results

You shall not pollute the land in which you live. *Numbers 35:33a*

Did you join in this year’s *Big Plastic Count*? Back in March, thousands of people from schools, households, community groups and workplaces across the UK counted their plastic waste for one week as part of what’s described as ‘the UK’s biggest people-powered investigation into plastic waste’.

The environmental charity *Everyday Plastic*, which organised the count, has since published the results, and they make very interesting reading. (If you’d like to see the full report, which references all the evidence which was used to prepare it, you’ll find it on their website thebigplasticcount.com.)

Here are some of the key results.

- UK households throw away an estimated **82 billion pieces of plastic waste** every year.
- **More than 4 out of 5** pieces of household plastic waste come from **food and drink products**. Cleaning and toiletries account for 8%, and everything else 10%.
- The most common type of food and drink packaging is plastic from **fruit and veg** (13 billion pieces –16%).
- **Two thirds** of the fruit and veg packaging items are soft film plastic

which is almost impossible to recycle on a large scale in the UK.

So what happens to all this plastic waste?

- Only 16% is recycled and made into new products.
- 9% ends up in landfill sites.
- 16% is sent abroad, where its final fate is often unknown.
- **A large majority – 59% – of UK households’ plastic waste is burned in incinerators.**

This amount of incineration is worrying because burning plastic

- ☹ emits large quantities of CO₂, directly worsening the climate crisis;
- ☹ releases harmful air pollution which affects human health;
- ☹ locks the UK into a system of waste disposal contracts that depends on a continuing supply of plastic waste in large volumes; and
- ☹ disproportionately harms already disadvantaged communities because of where the incinerators are often located.

‘The answer to the problem of plastic waste is not better waste management. It’s about preventing waste in the first place.’

The Big Plastic Count report argues that it's very difficult for consumers to reduce their plastic waste while the big super-markets insist on putting unnecessary plastic packaging on so many of their food and drink products. Relying on voluntary initiatives by retailers hasn't worked because the retailers want a level playing field, which can only be achieved through legislation.

The report makes three policy recommendations to the government:

1. Legislate to remove plastic packaging from uncut fruit and vegetables by 2030.
2. Stop the construction of new waste

incinerators immediately, and focus on waste reduction and recycling instead.

3. Introduce a phased ban on plastic waste exports, so the UK takes responsibility for its own waste and doesn't expect poorer, less well equipped countries to deal with it.

The report concludes:

'Cutting plastic production has huge social, economic, and environmental benefits. *The Big Plastic Count* reveals the scale of the UK's big plastic problem. Now the government must act.'

Roger McFarland



To find out more or to share your ideas on Eco Church please go to the website www.allsaintsspringfield.org.uk/church-life/eco-church or speak to one of the Eco Church Group – Roger McFarland, Nicky Morecroft, Chris McFarland, Ian Poston, Dave Gauld, Beth Cornish, Ann Salmon, Shirley Duggan.

This month's eco suggestions

- **'How Green is our Lifestyle?'**
– it's time for us to fill in All Saints' eco questionnaires for this year *[available on line]*
- **Adjust heating controls** if possible to save energy and money