


The Wycombe Strategic Partnership, of which your organisation is a member, is currently engaged in a project to reduce excess packaging. As part of this, during early 2010 we are working in association with Wycombe Friends of the Earth to reduce the use of single-use bags (especially plastic) within the District. The two-pronged approach involves persuading shops to amend their practices, and encouraging shoppers to carry their own reusable bags – which is where you come in!

The problem of plastic bags

- In 2007 UK supermarkets alone gave out 17.5 billion plastic bags
- 200 million end up as litter on beaches, streets and parks
- Average consumer uses 290 bags every year
- Average use is 12 minutes before disposal
- Worldwide, we use between 500bn – 1.2tr plastic bags each year
- Plastic may take 400 years to degrade—or up to 1,000 years in the sea, gradually breaking down into small particles
- They harm wildlife - on land, in rivers and at sea, from entanglement or ingestion
- Beachwatch 2008 found 8,174 bags on 374 UK beaches - average 46 bags/km
- Since 1994 average density of bags found by Beachwatch has increased by over 30%

Whilst noting that bags only form a proportion of plastic litter

- 90% of floating marine litter is plastic. Four-fifths comes from land, swept by the wind or rained off highways and streets, down streams and rivers, and out to sea
- during the period 1982 - 2001, 96% of dead fulmars in the North Sea had plastic fragments in their stomachs - with an average of 23 pieces per bird
- 177 marine species (including 95% of the world's sea birds) have eaten plastic litter. Oceanic microplastics now out-weigh plankton. Plastic toxins eaten by filter feeders will pass up the food chain to bigger fish and eventually to human consumers



Although a number of national chains took steps to improve matters after the issue of single-use plastic bags came to national prominence a couple of years ago, much remains to be done, and millions of plastic bags are still being handed out unnecessarily every day.