

# THE CHALLENGE OF PLASTICS RECYCLING

## THE SITUATION TODAY

**We use plastic for many things in today's society due to its versatility, in particular for packaging a huge variety of products – but the challenge lies in what happens to it after we're done with it.**

The use of plastic is a controversial issue currently due to its environmental impact – the majority of plastics are not biodegradable and are not used in a sustainable manner. Without widespread reuse or take-back schemes in the UK, it is essential that as much plastic as possible is collected for recycling – the 'out of sight, out of mind' philosophy adopted by many needs to be tackled head-on and the recycling of different types of plastic needs to be simpler. This challenge is one faced by government and local authorities, businesses including manufacturers, retailers and consumers, and recycling companies alike.

New UK plastic packaging recycling targets were announced by the government in its 2012 budget. We are now in the second year of this five-year plan for plastic packaging waste, which runs from 2013 to 2017, aiming to reach a 57% recycling target by 2017 (up from a 38% recycling rate in 2014 (source: Recoup UK Households

Plastics Collection Survey 2014).

Collecting the material is a critical first step in the recycling process. Recoup UK Households Plastics Collection Survey 2014 reports that 99% of UK local authorities provide a collection for plastic bottles at the kerbside, with 67% of all UK households having access to a plastic pot, tub and tray kerbside collection scheme too. 60% of collection authorities provide 'bring banks' for plastic bottles, of which 37% also collect pots, tubs and trays.

Recoup report that in 2014, the total consumption of plastics packaging by households was 1,218,308 tonnes with 464,433 tonnes being collected by local authorities for recycling (38%). Of this 1.22 million tonnes, 325,945 tonnes was plastic bottles, with 192,308 tonnes being collected for recycling (59%).

It is worrying to note, however, more than 6.28 billion household plastic bottles are not recycled each year, and this costs local councils £24.3 million in disposal costs when they could create a revenue stream from the onwards sales of this valuable resource – recycled plastic bottles can fetch in the region of £200 to £300 per tonne. The first challenge is therefore how to increase the capture rates of these material streams.

## OTHER CHALLENGES

Inevitably, the mixed plastics challenge does not revolve solely around recycling. A huge part of the solution is to reduce our consumption of plastics through clever product design and manufacturing.

Technology is next on the list. Great strides are currently being made forward by the waste and recycling industry in regards to development of technology that is able to recycle trickier plastics such as dirty plastic films and black plastics.

And then there is communication. There is no doubt that there is widespread understanding that plastic plays a very important role in packaging, protecting our goods and extending the shelf life of food products. But the fact that, once it has been discarded, it remains a valuable resource is something less widely understood. Targeted communications campaigns are necessary to ensure that consumers understand the 'complex' world of plastics recycling and know what they can and can't recycle, and where.

With UK recycling rates still a long way off the target of 57% by 2017, there is undoubtedly still progress to be made in tackling mixed plastic waste and recycling it – and this is a challenge shared by government, local authorities, producers, manufacturers, retailers, consumers, and recycling companies alike.



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› Tonbridge & Malling plastic bring bank

# COLLECTION CASE STUDY:

Last year, Tonbridge and Malling council in Kent introduced new 'Plastic Bring Banks' to encourage residents to increase their recycling rate of household plastic packaging within the borough. This service, delivered by Kent-based waste and recycling specialists, Countrystyle Recycling, started in May 2014 and sees Countrystyle collecting a wide range of plastic containers (from fizzy drinks bottles, milk bottles, washing up liquid bottles and bathroom product containers such as shampoo and bubble bath bottles, to yogurt pots, margarine/butter tubs and food trays) from public 'Plastic Bring Banks' located at 10 strategically positioned sites across the borough.

Tonbridge and Malling recycling kerbside collection service does not currently include plastics so these new 'Plastic Bring Banks' are essential in order to capture mixed plastics for recycling. Countrystyle provided specialist containers (pictured) which are emptied multiple times per week. The company aims to recover over 300 tonnes of the public's plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays each year for onward reprocessing and recycling. With the good residents of Tonbridge and Malling doing their bit to separate their mixed plastics, it is expected that over 90% of the material collected will be recycled.

The material is taken to Countrystyle's local Lenham depot where the plastic is quality checked and baled prior to being sent on to specialist recyclers, ultimately being processed into new products such as milk bottles and plastic food trays.



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# SETTING THE STANDARD

**Kent-based waste and resource management specialist, Countrystyle Recycling Ltd, delivers a broad range of specialised services for both private and public sector clients across the South East and further afield.**

The company operates a network of facilities strategically positioned across the region to provide clients with innovative and reliable solutions for waste reuse, recycling and recovery.

“Our objective is simple – to provide tailored resource management services that exceed customer expectation, drive innovation and set the standard for sustainable end products,” said Chris Howard, managing director of Countrystyle. “We have a long track record of understanding the market, especially across Kent and the south east, and of developing cost-effective solutions for customers.”

## CUSTOMERS AND SERVICES

Using expert knowledge, Countrystyle helps organisations of all shapes and sizes work out how best to reduce and manage the waste they generate. Local authorities and businesses across the South East – from printing companies and food manufacturers to schools and local National Trust



properties – have all benefited from this bespoke advice.

Countrystyle’s brand is founded on quality, flexibility and reliability. Whether providing professional collection services from offices, factories, retail and other businesses, the professional expertise ensures the highest levels of customer satisfaction are delivered.

“We love a challenge,” Chris explained. “Handling everything from mixed waste and recyclables, food and green waste, through to specific industrial waste streams including wood and plasterboard, we offer a complete service from collection to processing - and we thrive on coming up with innovative solutions for the trickiest of waste streams.”

Countrystyle also operates a reliable and cost-

effective skip hire business for customers in the South East, offering a flexible service, environmentally friendly disposal and a local solution for a variety of waste streams.

## COMMUNITY

Chris says the company prides itself on its commitment to the local area and undertakes a number of charitable roles – partnering with Kent County Cricket club’s community department, sponsoring the KM Charities’ ‘Kent Cooks’ competition and raising money for Kent Air Ambulance, to name just a few recent initiatives. This commitment was rewarded at the 2014 Kent Excellence in Business Awards (KEIBA) when Countrystyle was awarded the ‘Business Commitment to the Community Award’ in recognition of its work within the local community.

## WIDER PICTURE

With significant investment in dedicated staff and new specialised equipment, Countrystyle is continuing the expansion of its resource processing capability in the South East in order to meet its aim of supporting customers to achieve zero waste to landfill.

# MORE THAN BEING SEEN TO BE GREEN

**When was the last time you looked at how well your business is managing its waste? We’d guess it’s probably been a while. Before you sweep it under the carpet, consider the amount of time, effort and money that your business has to spend on disposing of your waste.**

Research has found that when the cost of wasted energy and labour are included, the true price of waste management is five to 20 times higher than just the disposal costs – typically 4% of the turnover of a business. Now do we have your attention?

As a business, your duty of care legally requires you to put waste solutions in place and UK legislation encourages you to recycle as much as possible. But what if your local authority doesn’t offer a comprehensive trade waste service?

Many local authorities will collect trade residual waste, but may not offer trade recycling collections. Putting everything into a residual waste bin misses a huge opportunity to recycle, so private waste management companies can be used to fulfil this need.

The first step should be to undertake a waste audit. This will help you understand how you can reduce your overall waste volumes and then identify the remaining waste streams you generate. Putting smart bin solutions in your workplace will help your staff separate waste easily, reducing the amount of labour and time required. Spend time educating staff on what goes into each bin and why it is important. Regularly update them on the improvements, e.g. “So far this year we’ve reduced our paper waste by XX tonnes, this is the equivalent to XX fewer cars on the road!”

Improving how waste materials are handled enables companies like Viridor to help increase the UK recycling rate. Viridor has over 320 sites around the country dedicated to separating, treating and transforming waste into raw materials and energy.

## VIRIDOR

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