

Notes from Stroud Valleys Action on Plastic Meeting, Feb 2019

Dear SVAP supporter,

I am hoping to be able to send you more detailed notes and handouts from Tricia Watson and Simon Pickering's talk last Saturday as and when they share these with me. In the meantime, here are some highlights that stood out for me.

Tricia Watson:

- Tricia has over 15 years' experience in waste management and is also an active volunteer for Terracycle and R4C.
- She spoke in praise of plastic as a material that has many good and important uses and that can help to lower carbon emissions and is cheaper to transport and process than other types of materials.
- Tricia pointed out the problem of proliferation of plastic and the problem of the end of life management and the extremely low recycling rates to date (10%).
- Recycling has been left to the 'market', so it is all about what pays and what doesn't rather than what is right for the environment.
- Another problem are PRNs (certificates of recycling evidence purchased to show that a company has met their obligations to fund the recycling and recovery of packaging waste) which have proven to be ineffective as they can be traded on the open market.
- She gave us an overview of types of polymers used in ordinary packaging and how these can or cannot be recycled. She emptied a bag of all sorts of plastic packaging on the table and talked us through the different layers that go into producing these and that make recycling difficult. For example, crisp packets have 3-4 layers of plastic and foil, including the print and lacquering. A springy type of toothpaste tube can have up to 14 layers of different plastic. Many of the items such as cleaning spray bottles have multiple types of plastic in them and it is usual that only one component can be recovered for recycling.
- Another difficult material is so called bio plastic or biodegradable plastic. Plastic made from plants can currently not be recycled through the council's food collection systems or at home (they require industrial, high heat composting) and are indistinguishable from other types of plastic. They can also cause a host of unintended consequences.
- Tricia also spoke about positive and hopeful new recycling technology (a company in Swindon can turn plastic into a synthetic oil that can be reused as raw material), packaging innovations, government regulations, the proposed bottle deposit scheme and other good news on the horizon.
- Tricia's message to us is to keep up consumer pressure as this is highly effective!

Simon Pickering:

- Simon is an Ecologist, Green Party Councillor and Chair of the Environment Committee at Stroud District Council (SDC).
- He took us through the vast improvements the council has achieved, bumping it from 150th place in the UK to No. 1 in terms of recycling rates.
- SDC has the least amount into landfill in the whole of the UK!
- Stroud District Council is responsible for collecting, the County Council is responsible for the disposal of waste and recycling.
- SDC has 52,000 households with 1 million collections a week – a lot of blokes and lorries!

- Simon says 😊 please don't put your bins out until they are full to help reduce the rate of injury and sickness rate of the waste workers and to reduce the number of collections across the county.
- Collections are done by UBICO, a not-for-profit, local authority owned environmental services company.
- The recently introduced food collection has been successful beyond their wildest dreams – in some areas there is a 90% uptake. Collections go to a local anaerobic digester (AD) plant where the food is converted into gas that goes into the gas grid and a residue which goes on to farmers' fields.
- Most of our recycling is processed in the UK, including paper, glass, metal and tin. Simon asks that we fold up cardboard to fit inside the kerbside boxes as there is so much more cardboard since internet shopping has taken off and it is hard to handle big pieces.
- Plastic goes to a company called Suez and is taken to a MERF (recycling sorting facility) in Birmingham. A small amount goes to Germany and Turkey.
- Black plastic is not recycled but is turned into fuel pellets.
- Since oil prices plummeted the council has been paying to get rid of plastic rather than getting money for it.
- Due to Brexit and other things, the county is very short of HGV drivers.
- Simon's big message: stop buying so much stuff!

Thank you to Kath at Atelier Stroud for continuing to host the meetings and for sharing the introductions by video on our facebook page.

If you wish to be on our mailing list, please contact me on svap@transitionstroud.org. Our drop-in meetings are at 1pm on the last Saturday of each month and we are always looking for volunteers on our various projects which range from litter picks to signing up shops/cafes to the national free tap water refill scheme.

If you want to read more about how to give up plastic at home, please read my blog: www.pfree.co.uk.

There is an extensive list of **where to buy** plastic food, toiletries, cleaning material, DIY & gardening items on my blog here: <http://www.pfree.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/shops-and-products-2.pdf>

Thank you,

Claudi

Plastic Free Community Leader for Stroud
Surfers Against Sewage
Stroud Valleys Action on Plastic Transition Stroud