



House of Commons
Environmental Audit Committee

Disposable Packaging: Coffee Cups

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to the report*

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Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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Summary

The UK coffee industry is growing rapidly. Almost half of all coffees and hot drinks are now sold in disposable cups. There are more than four times as many coffee shops today as there were in the year 2000, and 1 in 5 of us visit a coffee shop every day. Coffee is also widely available in supermarkets and garages.

Disposable coffee cups are made from paper and lined with plastic, which makes them waterproof. This plastic lining cannot be removed by most recycling facilities. Once used, the paper part of the cup is usually contaminated by the cup's contents. There is no UK or European market for contaminated paper food packaging. 2.5 billion coffee cups are used and thrown away each year in the UK - enough to stretch around the world roughly five and a half times - but less than 1 in 400 - just 0.25% - are recycled. Around 500,000 cups are littered every day—an unsightly and damaging blight on our environment. Since litter encourages more littering, this creates a vicious cycle.

Our inquiry has been guided by the Waste Hierarchy - reduce, reuse, recycle. The most desirable method of waste management is the prevention of waste. We also took account of the 'Polluter Pays' principle; that those who produce pollution should bear the costs of managing it. The Waste Hierarchy and the Polluter Pays principle are enshrined in EU law, but are also internationally recognised sustainable development principles. The UK Government has commitments under the UN's Global Goals for Sustainable Development to responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), as well as protecting life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15) by 2030.

Most people mistakenly think that that disposable cups are widely recycled, and dispose of them in on-street recycling bins. This consumer confusion shows that retailers have failed to be clear with consumers about coffee cups. There is also a lack of infrastructure to recycle them. Disposing of coffee cups in on-street bins creates a costly waste contamination problem for local authorities. This adds to the financial burden on taxpayers, who already cover 90% of the cost of collecting, sorting and disposing of waste coffee cups.

Some cup manufacturers and coffee shops have made voluntary commitments to recycle coffee cups. However, the various commitments are inconsistent, and lack quantifiable targets and structure. There is no excuse for the reluctance we have seen from Government and industry to address coffee cup waste. To kick start consumer awareness, we recommend that the Government sets a target that all single use coffee cups should be recycled by 2023. If this target is not achieved, the Government should ban disposable coffee cups.

If more people used reusable coffee cups there would be less waste, which would reduce the burden on local authorities. This would cut costs for coffee retailers, who would need to purchase and dispose of fewer cups. We heard that large coffee retailers offer a 25p discount if customers bring their own cups, but awareness and uptake is very low (around 1%). We heard evidence that consumers are more responsive to a charge than a discount and that a charge on disposable cups could reduce use by up to 30%.

We therefore recommend that the Government introduces a minimum 25p levy on disposable cups. The revenue should be used to invest in reprocessing facilities and “binfrastructure” to ensure that the remaining disposable cups are recycled.

Coffee cups are the tip of an iceberg of issues around packaging recycling. Through the Producer Responsibility Obligations, businesses currently contribute only around 10% of the cost of waste disposal, leaving the taxpayer to foot the bill for the rest. To respect the polluter pays principle, the UK should make producers and retailers of disposable coffee cups more financially responsible for their waste production. We recommend that the Government introduce a varied compliance fee structure that rewards design for recyclability and the use of recycled and compostable packaging material and raises costs on packaging that is difficult to recycle. We also believe the *de minimis* level for companies covered by PRO schemes should be reduced. This would give the industry a greater financial incentive to produce and use only packaging that can be recycled within the UK’s current recycling infrastructure.

1 Introduction

1. This is one of two reports published as part of our Disposable Packaging Inquiry. This inquiry was originally launched in the 2016 - 2017 Parliamentary session and closed when Parliament was dissolved for the 2017 General Election. We decided to relaunch the inquiry in September 2017. Written evidence accepted for the previous inquiry was brought forward for consideration in the relaunched inquiry. Our examination of coffee cups and plastic bottles highlighted the difficulty of recycling packaging on-the-go. We also discovered issues specific to coffee cups which required separate analysis and recommendations, which are set out in this report.

2. The UK coffee shop industry is growing rapidly. Almost half of all hot drinks are now sold in disposable cups. There are more than four times as many coffee shops today as there were in the year 2000, and 1 in 5 people visit a coffee shop on a daily basis.¹ However, despite a common belief to the contrary, almost all disposable cups are not recycled due to their tightly bonded plastic lining which is difficult to remove, and the challenges of recycling packaging contaminated by beverages. This results in at least 2.5 billion coffee cups being thrown away each year in the UK; enough to stretch around the planet roughly five and a half times. Some disposable cups are littered—an unsightly and damaging blight on our environment which itself encourages more littering.

3. The 2016 BBC documentary ‘War on Waste’ brought to light the challenges of coffee cup recycling, prompting a growing public interest in the issue. Our inquiry built upon the findings in the documentary by examining consumer perception of the environmental impact of coffee cups. We chose to focus our inquiry partly on coffee cups because of their low recycling rate and the tangibility of this environmental issue. We were told that the total annual coffee cup waste in the UK is enough to fill London’s Royal Albert Hall.²

4. We also focused on industry actions to reduce coffee cup waste. Some cup manufacturers and coffee shops have recently made voluntary commitments or provide in-store recycling, some of which were introduced during the course of the inquiry. However, despite having spent years talking about the problem, industry’s voluntary commitments have been inconsistent and ineffective. They have failed to do anything which has effectively tackled the problem. We reject the suggestion, made by some in the industry, that this issue is unimportant or that action to reduce other areas of environmental impact means it can be put in the “too difficult” box.

5. Coffee cups are one element of disposable packaging waste. The Committee has found it helpful to use them as a starting point for discussion of wider recycling issues, in particular packaging producer responsibility obligations. Our focus on coffee cups and plastic bottles also revealed how recycling is often hampered by on-the-go consumption and disposal; an issue given careful consideration throughout the inquiry and in our final reports.

6. The terms of reference for the inquiry can be found on our website. We held four public hearings with academics, NGOs, coffee trade representatives, packaging producers,

1 Allegra Strategies, Project Café UK 2016

2 Local Government Association (PKG0076A), Frugalpac (PKG0050A). Written evidence accepted as part of the original Packaging Inquiry launched in the 2015 – 2017 Parliamentary Session is marked A, and evidence accepted as part of the relaunched inquiry is marked B.

local authority representatives and Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). In addition, we received 122 pieces of written evidence which are published on our website. A full list of witnesses can be found at the end of this report. We are grateful to all those who gave evidence. We would also like to thank Louise Smith and Elena Ares from the House of Commons Library for providing research assistance throughout this inquiry.

Progress during this Inquiry

7. During this inquiry, both Government and industry made several announcements about this issue:

- a) In September 2017, Selfridges announced that they had formed a partnership with cup recycling plant James Cropper to convert disposable coffee cups into Selfridge’s yellow shopping bags. Each bag will contain 20% cup fibre, and one large bag will contain the equivalent of one disposable cup. Bags can then be recycled in ordinary paper mills.³
- b) On 2nd October DEFRA established the Voluntary and Economic Incentives Working group to look at specific measures that can reduce litter and improve recycling and reuse of packaging.⁴ The working group has begun by looking at measures for drinks containers, such as deposit return schemes and will publish its findings shortly. For its next piece of work, the working group will look at coffee cups. Dr Coffey told us that the group’s terms of reference for coffee cups will now include “how we can enhance consumer understanding of what can be recycled, and how, including on-pack labelling.”⁵ We welcome this development in the focus of the working group.
- c) On 10th October 2017, the Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group announced a partnership with the Alliance of Beverage Cartons and the Environment (ACE UK) to incorporate disposable cups into ACE UK bring banks for drinks cartons.⁶ The scheme currently covers 97 local authorities, with more being added in early 2018. ACE UK is also working to include disposable cups in local authority kerbside collections. This partnership also brought with it the announcement of a third recycling facility for coffee cups within the UK; ACE UK’s plant in Halifax.
- d) On 24th October 2017, DEFRA announced that maximum litter fines will almost double to £150 from April 2018 and new fines will be introduced for owners of vehicles from which litter is thrown.⁷
- e) On 22nd November 2017, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt. Hon Phillip Hammond MP, announced in the Autumn Budget that the Government would “investigate how the tax systems and charges on single-use plastic items can reduce waste.”⁸

3 <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2017/09/selfridges-transforms-used-coffee-cups-shopping-bags-world-first/>

4 <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/call-for-evidence-drinks-containers/>

5 Q454

6 <https://ciwm-journal.co.uk/coffee-giants-sign-coffee-cup-recycling-agreement/>

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-steps-to-tackle-littering-announced>

8 House of Commons, Autumn Budget Statement, (Hansard, 22nd November 2017, c.1050)

2 Coffee Cup Waste in the UK

Scale of Coffee Cup Waste

A Growing Industry

8. Over the last 20 years, the UK has experienced a rapid growth in coffee shops. At the turn of the millennium there were only 5,000 coffee shops in the UK. There are now at least four times as many.⁹ The Paper Cup Recovery & Recycling Group (PCRRG) told us:

Consumer demand for coffee continues to rise and the number of coffee shops in the UK is forecast to increase from 20,000 to 30,000 by 2025, bringing with it the associated economic benefits, with an associated increase in the demand expected for paper cups.¹⁰

9. In 2011, a Which? Report found that 2.5 billion disposable coffee cups are used each year in the UK.¹¹ However, as the coffee shop industry has grown considerably since then, this figure is likely to be an underestimate of usage now. Based on the estimate that the UK currently uses 2.5 billion disposable cups, by 2025 coffee shop growth will see the UK using approximately 3.75 billion disposable cups per year. However, Eunomia Research and Consulting have suggested that the UK may already use as many as 5 billion coffee cups per year.¹²

10. Market research has predicted that by 2025, the coffee shop industry will have an annual turnover of £15 billion.¹³ According to data from 2016, the largest retailer of coffee in the UK is Costa Coffee with 1,992 outlets, followed by Starbucks with 849 outlets and Café Nero with 620 outlets. Supermarkets have also been tapping into the market for coffee with Tesco and Morrisons the 4th and 5th largest coffee retailers respectively, followed by Pret A Manger.¹⁴ We received written evidence from the UK's two largest coffee chains, Costa Coffee and Starbucks. Costa Coffee's Energy and Environment Manager, Oliver Rosevear, also gave oral evidence. We were disappointed not to receive written evidence from any other major coffee retailers, despite attempts to engage with them. Their silence speaks volumes.

11. The UK produces 30,000 tonnes of coffee cup waste each year. This accounts for 0.1% of total UK waste and 0.7% of UK packaging waste.¹⁵ Although coffee cups do not make up a large proportion of UK packaging waste, we chose to focus our inquiry partly on coffee cups because of the growing public awareness of their low recycling rate, and tangibility as an environmental issue. We were told that the total annual coffee cup waste in the UK is enough to fill London's Royal Albert Hall.¹⁶

9 Paper Cup Recovery & Recycling Group (PKG0070A)

10 As above.

11 <https://conversation.which.co.uk/food-drink/recycling-disposable-coffee-cups-starbucks/>

12 Q1, Eunomia Research & Consulting (PKG0086A), Paper Cup Recovery & Recycling Group (PKG0070A)

13 Allegra Strategies, Project Café UK 2016

14 As above.

15 Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (PKG0054A), Foodservice Packaging Association (PKG0067A)

16 Local Government Association (PKG0076A), Frugalpac (PKG0050A)

Littering

12. Eunomia estimates that around 4% of disposable coffee cups are littered, equating to 500,000 each day.¹⁷ Keep Britain Tidy told us that, in a survey of litter on 900 sites across the City of London in 2016/17, 170 sites had some form of branded coffee item littered on them. Non-alcoholic drinks-related litter, including coffee cup waste, is the third most prevalent litter type after cigarette butts and chewing gum, according to Keep Britain Tidy's 2014/15 Local Environmental Quality Survey of England.¹⁸

13. Litter breeds littering. We heard that large litter items such as disposable coffee cups often act as 'beacons of litter' - a social norming cue which encourages further littering. Through a comprehensive, DEFRA-funded field experiment on beacons of litter, Keep Britain Tidy found:

While plastic bottles (and indeed coffee cups) are not the most littered items in the country, they are one of the most visible items littered, with instantly recognisable branding, and their presence creates disproportionately more littering as a result.¹⁹

14. The field experiment involved using test and control sites; some littered with so-called 'beacons', such as drinks containers and crisp packets, and others with no beacons planted. Keep Britain Tidy's Centre for Social Innovation suggest that the visibility of 'beacons' litter "appears to prompt others (either consciously or subconsciously) to do the same with their 'beacons' items."²⁰

Mixed Messages: Are Coffee Cups Recyclable?

Plastic Lining

15. While disposable coffee cups are recyclable in specialist facilities, they are not currently widely recyclable in most local authority recycling centres. In the UK, less than 1 in 400 (0.25%) coffee cups are recycled.²¹ The Confederation of Paper Industries told us that "paper cups cannot be regarded as generally recyclable."²²

16. In order to ensure that disposable cups conform to health and safety requirements, they are made with paper fibre and a 5% polyethylene lining which is bonded together under a high heat. This use of mixed material ensures the strength and safety of the cups, but it renders the cups difficult to recycle. Although both the paper and plastic components of disposable cups are recyclable, the materials need to be separated out, which is a more complicated process than traditional paper is recycling. Richard McIlwain from Keep Britain Tidy told us about the technical difficulties of recycling coffee cups with plastic linings:

17 Eunomia Research & Consulting (PKG0086A)

18 Keep Britain Tidy (PKG0084A)

19 As above.

20 Centre for Social Innovation, *Journal of Litter and Environmental Quality* (Volume 1, Number 1, June 2017)

21 Confederation of Paper Industries (PKG0037A), Frugalpac (PKG0050A), Transition Falmouth (PKG0035A), DS Smith (PKG0059A), PCS Union (PKG0042A)

22 Confederation of Paper Industries (PKG0037A)

It is because there is a very tightly bonded polyethylene liner that prevents the cup from basically soaking up the contents of the liquid. Because that is tightly bonded it is quite challenging to remove it in a normal paper mill process, is my understanding. For that reason, it can either contaminate the paper stream or it can slow the paper stream down in terms of having to operate a slower process to recover that polyethylene liner. For that reason, paper mills don't like to accept them. They would want paper and card without that plastic liner.²³

17. We have heard that due to these technical complexities of recycling disposable cups, there are currently only three recycling facilities in the UK which have the ability to recycle coffee cups; James Cropper PLC, ACE UK and Veolia.²⁴ The use of specialist facilities requires disposable cups to be separated from other materials for recycling at collection and sent through a separate waste stream. Therefore, even if a disposable coffee cup is placed in a paper recycling bin, it is unlikely to be recycled due to the logistical difficulties involved in processing coffee cups separately to other recyclable waste. The Local Government Association expressed frustration that disposable cups need to be dealt with separately to other paper waste:

Most coffee cups have a plastic coating that must be separated from paper before recycling, which ordinary paper recycling systems are not set up to do. In some cases, coffee chains are making recycling more difficult for councils because the coffee cup materials are getting mixed up with the paper that many householders have taken time and trouble over collecting, *resulting in more waste going to landfill.*²⁵

Contamination

18. Another significant barrier to the widespread recycling of disposable coffee cups is the challenges of recycling packaging that has come into contact with food or drink. This wider issue of all paper food packaging being regarded as 'contaminated' by waste reprocessors was raised by Oliver Rosevear from Costa Coffee:

One of the challenges we see in terms of recycling - Martin mentioned the contamination issue - is that a lot of paper recyclers in the UK will not take any food packaging if it has had food contact on it. Currently, under the good manufacturing practice that exists through CPI [Confederation of Paper Industries], there is zero tolerance on food or organic contaminants in paper that has had food contact. That is a much wider issue than just cups.²⁶

23 Q5

24 Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group (PKG0070A) Costa Coffee (PKG0107A)

25 Local Government Association (PKG0076A)

26 Q135

19. EN643 - the UK's manufacturing standard for the paper industry - classes all disposable cups as 'prohibited material' as they have been in contact with food or drink.²⁷ We heard that prohibited material cannot be used in the production of new food packaging, which is what most UK paper mills create.²⁸ We received evidence from the Confederation of Paper Industries that suggested that paper mills would still find it difficult to cope with the plastic linings in new disposable cup designs as they drag fibres with them, adding to the overall cost of the recycling process.²⁹

20. We received evidence from several manufacturers of disposable coffee cups who claim their cups could be recycled in the UK's current paper reprocessing mills.³⁰ British company Frugalpac told us they have developed a cup that can be recycled alongside other paper materials. The plastic liner in a 'Frugal Cup' is lightly glued in place so that it separates quickly, easily and in one piece, when the cup is repulped.³¹ Frugalpac CEO Martin Myerscough outlined the potential of recyclable cups:

The answer is quite simply to change the cups. If you change the cups, it does not cost you anything. There are other people designing cups. What we are calling for today is that we design a standard [...] You could switch in a couple of years, three years all over to recyclable cups.³²

21. **The use of disposable cups that are difficult to recycle and the lack of specialist reprocessing facilities in the UK results in fewer than 1 in 400 being recycled. Although we have heard that the introduction of a "recyclable cup" would present a simple solution to coffee cup waste in the UK, we heard little substantial evidence about how these cups would meet the manufacturing standards that prohibit contaminated containers from entering mainstream waste recycling. Therefore we believe that more research needs to be done to establish whether contamination is a significant and justified barrier to widespread uptake of these new designs of disposable cups. Although Starbucks has explored the potential of using Frugal Pac cups, there has been no widespread trial or collaborative research as yet. As a large and growing industry, coffee shop companies should work together through the existing Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group to agree the design of a disposable cup which can be easily recycled. Research should focus on how the design of paper cups can work around, or with, the manufacturing standard for "contaminated" paper packaging by exploring ways of recycling coffee cups with other contaminated food packaging.**

Consumer Confusion

22. We received evidence highlighting that consumers mistakenly think disposable coffee cups are widely recycled. A Which? Report from 2011 found that 8 in 10 consumers

27 Regulation EN643 http://www.cepi.org/system/files/public/documents/publications/recycling/2013/CEPI_EN%20643_brochure_FINAL_0.pdf

28 Confederation of Paper Industries (PKG0042B)

29 As above.

30 Frugalpac (PKG0050A), Smart Planet Technologies (PKG0049A), Delipac Ltd (PKG0011A)

31 Frugalpac (PKG0050A)

32 Q134

believed disposable cups were being recycled³³ and, in line with this, a Mintel report found that 9 in 10 consumers try to dispose of their disposable cups in recycling bins.³⁴ The Confederation of Paper industries said in their written evidence:

Consumers have been led to believe that laminated cups are widely recyclable and widely recycled through conventional systems when in fact, relatively very few pass into a reprocessor and even fewer are properly processed to extract the full value of the resources they contain.³⁵

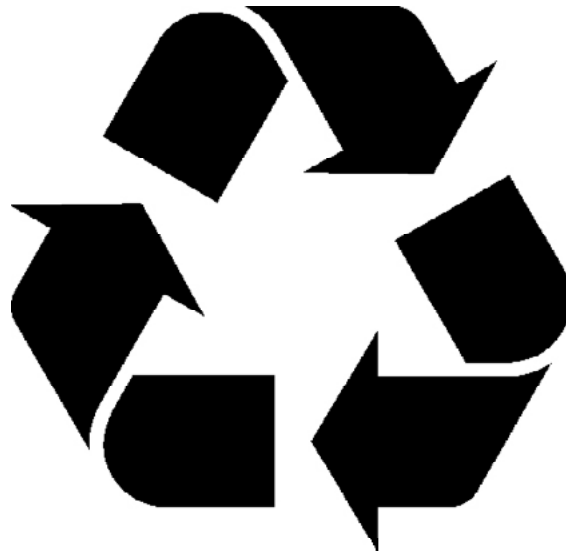
23. Consumers dispose of their cups in recycling bins, which creates issues for councils who have to use extra resources to sort through the contaminated recycling waste. The Local Government Association expressed frustration at the continuing use of disposable coffee cups that cannot be easily recycled in the current recycling infrastructure:

It is frustrating that the hard work of councils in improving recycling rates is being damaged by a lack of recyclable paper cups. Councils are doing everything they can to try and tackle the challenges around recycling coffee cups but they need the industry to take more responsibility.³⁶

24. We heard evidence that the use of the Mobius Loop symbol (see Fig.1) on some coffee cups has contributed to public misunderstanding that coffee cups are widely recycled. Gavin Ellis, Co-Founder of environmental charity Hubbub explained:

Most consumers would look at that and think that if they put that in their mixed recycling bin, let's say, on the street, that it will get recycled. That is likely to not be the case.³⁷

Fig. 1: Mobius Loop Symbol



33 <https://conversation.which.co.uk/food-drink/recycling-disposable-coffee-cups-starbucks/>

34 <http://www.mintel.com/press-centre/food-and-drink/uk-coffee-shop-sales-enjoy-a-growth-high>

35 Confederation of Paper Industries (PKG0037A)

36 Local Government Association (PKG0076A)

37 Q3

25. Richard McIlwain from Keep Britain Tidy also told us that where the symbol is printed can cause confusion:

With coffee cups as well, there has been some confusion often where the cardboard sleeve is recyclable and may have a recyclable symbol on it, and people interpret that then as the whole cup being recyclable. There probably is some work to do on labelling.³⁸

26. We found that the coffee shop industry is keen to emphasise that their disposable cups are recyclable.³⁹ While it is true that disposable coffee cups can be recycled in some in-store bins and bring banks, we believe that emphasising the recyclability of disposable coffee cups risks confusing consumers further about whether they can be recycled in on-street mixed recycling bins. Richard McIlwain from Keep Britain Tidy emphasised the need for more consistent messaging around coffee cup recycling:

Can we create a more consistent mechanism - coming back to the stakeholder chain - around how we recycle cups? Once we have a more consistent mechanism the process of explanation and education is very much more straightforward than we have now with a very complex picture.⁴⁰

27. Several coffee shop chains in the UK have recently launched in-store recycling schemes for disposable cups. Starbucks and Costa Coffee, the UK's two largest coffee shop chains, established in-store recycling systems for coffee cups in early 2017. This is a welcome innovation. Costa Coffee told us that they now have in-store recycling points in all 2,000 of their stores in the UK.⁴¹ These in-store systems work by collecting disposable cups returned by customers and sending them to a dedicated coffee cup recycling facility. However, we heard that use of these in-store recycling facilities is currently very low as consumers are still disposing of their cups in on-street recycling bins.⁴² The usage rate of these in-store recycling schemes is discussed later in the 'Targets and Policy for Coffee Cup Waste Reduction' chapter. Professor Wouter Poortinga, Cardiff University told us that more explicit and informative labelling would mitigate consumer confusion:

Clearer labelling, of course, will help and it does not only mean that you label what can be recycled but that you also label what cannot be recycled. There is a clear demand for that from consumers because consumers always express this confusion about what to do with paper cups.⁴³

28. While disposable coffee cups are recyclable, they are not recycled. However, we have found that there is a significant public belief that disposable coffee cups are widely recycled. Coffee shops are communicating to customers that disposable cups are recyclable, but it is not clear that they need to be disposed of through separate recycling systems. This confuses the consumer, resulting in the contamination of on-street and office bins and local authority collections as people dispose of disposable

38 Q10

39 Costa Coffee Supplementary Evidence (PKG0040B)

40 Q10

41 Q62

42 As above.

43 Q11

cups in mixed recycling. We believe that greater clarity and consistency around recyclability and contamination issues are vital to ensure that consumers do not unknowingly contaminate recycling bins.

29. It is unacceptable that coffee sellers are perpetuating customer confusion through their use of recycling labels and emphasis on the recyclability of coffee cups, despite the shockingly low recycling rate. Coffee shops with in-store recycling schemes should place a 'recyclable in stores only' label on their coffee cups. Those without in-store recycling should print their cups with a 'not widely recycled' label. We believe this greater consistency will enable the public to make more informed choices about their use and disposal of packaging that cannot be recycled in most public recycling bins.

3 Targets and Policy for Coffee Cup Waste Reduction

30. Waste management and litter collection are devolved matters in the United Kingdom. The devolved nations set their own recycling targets. However there are two key areas where the UK has a joint approach to ensure that waste prevention and recycling commitments are met. There is also an EU target to recycle 50% of household waste by 2020.

Sustainable Development Goal 12

31. Under UN Sustainable Development Goal 12, the UK has committed to improving resource and energy efficiency through sustainable and more responsible consumption and production.⁴⁴ The SDG12 goal includes 12 targets, of which two are particularly relevant to the issue of coffee cup waste:

- a) By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.
- b) Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.

32. The Government does not yet publish a comprehensive assessment of the UK's progress against the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In the meantime, the National Well-being Indicators provide a useful proxy for progress on sustainable development, as they cover environmental, social and economic issues. Of the 41 indicators measured by the Office for National Statistics, the amount of household waste collected for recycling was the only deteriorating indicator.⁴⁵ This suggests that the UK is not on track to meeting its target to substantially reduce waste generation by 2030 under SDG12. When asked about how the UK will ensure it reaches this target, Dr. Coffey told us:

In the Clean Growth Strategy, we said we wanted a zero-avoidable waste ambition; we need to work towards that. I have been particularly focused on trying to get our cities to do see what we can do to explore what the issues are, what the barriers are because you have neighbouring councils where their recycling rates are drastically different ... We are exploring, potentially, ways about bringing in food waste [collection] for every household in the country.⁴⁶

33. We are concerned that the UK is not on course to meet Sustainable Development Goal 12 and that more needs to be done to encourage business to adopt more sustainable practices. The issue of disposable coffee cup waste highlights the importance of applying the waste hierarchy as set out in the first target, and the need to encourage design for recyclability as a sustainability best practice.

44 United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, Targets 5 and 6

45 National Audit Office, A Short Guide to Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development (September 2017) <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Short-guide-to-Environmental-protection-and-sustainable-development.pdf>

46 Q416

Producer Responsibility Obligations

34. The EU Waste Framework Directive is the legislative framework governing the collection, transport, recovery and disposal of waste, and includes a common definition of waste.⁴⁷ The Directive requires all Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure waste is recovered or disposed of without endangering human health or causing harm to the environment and includes permitting, registration and inspection requirements. It sets targets for 50% of waste to be recycled by 2020.

35. The Directive also requires Member States to take appropriate measures to encourage firstly, the prevention or reduction of waste production and its harmfulness and secondly the recovery or waste by means of recycling, re-use or reclamation or any other process with a view to extracting secondary raw materials, or the use of waste as a source of energy. The importance of this ‘Waste Hierarchy’ has informed our consideration of recommendations to tackle disposable packaging waste.

36. Within the EU Waste Framework Directive there is a specific directive on packaging and packaging waste which is implemented in the UK by the Producer Responsibility Obligations regulation (PRO). The regulation places a legal obligation on businesses over a certain size which make or use packaging to ensure that a proportion of the packaging they place on the market is recovered and recycled. Relevant businesses then discharge their responsibilities by purchasing evidence of packaging recycling in the form of a Packaging Recovery Note (PRN) or Packaging Recovery Export Note (PERN). DEFRA’s Deputy Director for Waste and Recycling, Chris Preston, explained how this system applies to producers and users of disposable coffee cups:

Coffee cup producers and plastic bottle makers, who put things on the market, are required to show that they have recycled through purchasing a PRN, a percentage of the packaging that they have put on the market. It will not necessarily be their plastic bottles, because it is not an individual thing, or their coffee cups, but in terms of the totality of packaging, they will have to show that they have contributed financially, through the PRN system, for some of that to be recovered.⁴⁸

37. The price of PRNs fluctuates according to the market for that particular type of material. The average fee charged to producers per tonne of packaging waste in the UK is around €20 per tonne. Other European countries have an average producer responsibility fee of €150 per tonne.⁴⁹ Throughout this inquiry we have heard evidence from environmental researchers and local authorities that the UK’s current compliance fee contributes less than 10% of the cost of collecting, sorting and disposing of packaging. The Local Government Association noted:

The UK’s limited packaging producer compliance scheme generated £111 million of compliance revenue in 2013, only £37 million of which went towards collection. This compares to the £550 million cost to local authorities for collection and sorting of packaging material.⁵⁰

47 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/waste-legislation-and-regulations>

48 Q451

49 http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/pdf/target_review/Guidance%20on%20EPR%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf

50 Local Government Association (PKG0076A)

38. Producer Responsibility Obligations are intended to make producers of packaging responsible for the cost of disposing of their packaging. On this point, Lee Marshall from the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Service told us “I think at the moment in the UK the producer responsibility scheme fails the Ronseal test.”⁵¹ When asked about raising the UK’s packaging producer compliance fee Dr. Coffey told us:

Traditionally, the UK has been very proud of the fact that we had decent recycling rates, less going to landfill, but recognising that we are looking at this again.⁵²

39. We have also heard that other European countries have more robust producer responsibility schemes that incentivise design for recycling through modulated fee structures. Nick Brown from Coca-Cola explained this:

Typically in other countries it is a modulated fee structure. There will be a certain contribution for packaging that meets a certain design criteria; there will be a higher contribution for packaging that does not meet that criteria; the same for recycled material usage.⁵³

40. Industry bodies such as the Foodservice Packaging Association, the British Soft Drinks Association and the British Plastics Federation expressed desire for reform to producer responsibility in order to incentivise design for recyclability.⁵⁴ Nick Brown from Coca Cola explained further:

A good producer responsibility scheme can encourage people to use eco design, design for recyclability principles that people were talking about before; some kind of credit for people who are using easy to recycle packaging.⁵⁵

41. We asked Dr. Coffey about whether a modulated fee structure will be introduced in the UK. The Minister told us:

I am not saying it is a definite policy, I am just saying that these are some of the ideas that could come through. Then if you have the manufacturers [saying] that they are the only person using a polymer and they have not created a scheme for it to be readily recycled, you might choose to have a higher charge, in effect, to deal with that. These are some of the ideas we are looking at now. I am afraid it is just a little bit too early for me to be able to say definitely what we’re doing.⁵⁶

42. The Government recently committed to exploring potential reform to producer responsibility schemes in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy’s October 2017 Clean Growth Strategy:

51 Q368

52 Q450

53 Q244

54 Foodservice Packaging Association (PKG0067A), British Soft Drinks Association (PKG0069A), British Plastics Federation and Plastics Europe (PKG0058A)

55 Q243

56 Q424

We will explore how we can better incentivise producers to manage resources more efficiently through producer responsibility schemes.⁵⁷

43. Additionally, major packaging industry stakeholders including producers, brands and retailers have signed a voluntary commitment to reduce waste and improve packaging design. The Courtauld Commitment supports the UK Government's policy goal of a 'zero waste economy' and is managed by resource efficiency charity WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme). The third and most recent phase of the Courtauld Commitment includes the following target:

Improve packaging design through the supply chain to maximise recycled content as appropriate, improve recyclability and deliver product protection to reduce food waste, while ensuring there is no increase in the carbon impact of packaging by 2015, from a 2012 baseline.⁵⁸

44. *We welcome the Government's commitment to explore reforms to the current UK's producer responsibility schemes. Currently, taxpayers cover around 90% of the costs of packaging waste disposal, indicating that the producer responsibility scheme does not make producers responsible for packaging disposal. Given that the mixed material design of disposable coffee cups prevents them from being widely recycled, leading to a recycling rate of less than 1%, a different compliance fee structure would encourage the development of disposable cups which are easier to recycle. We recommend that the Government introduce a compliance fee structure that reduces the cost of recyclable and sustainable cups, and raises costs on cups that are difficult and costly to recycle. The increased revenue should be used to invest in more reprocessing facilities and local authority 'binfrastructure' - on-the-go collection services.*

45. *The Government should also reduce the de minimis requirements for participation in the PRO scheme to include companies that place more than 1 tonne of packaging on the market. This would give producers and retailers - the polluters - greater financial responsibility for the type of packaging they are putting on the market, and an incentive only to produce and use packaging that can be easily recycled within the UK's current recycling infrastructure.*

Recycling Targets

46. The Government does not currently have a target for coffee cup recycling. It does have targets for paper and plastic recycling provided by the EU Waste Directive; the targets for 2020 are 69.5% and 51% respectively.⁵⁹ It is unclear which category disposable coffee cups fall into. Whichever one it is, we are set to miss it without radical action of the type we recommend in this report. We were concerned to hear from Dr Coffey that at present there are no confirmed UK recycling targets for paper or plastic after we leave the European Union:

Chair: So you are saying these are EU targets, not UK targets.

57 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-growth-strategy>

58 <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/courtauld-commitment-3>

59 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/packaging-producer-responsibilities>

Chris Preston: We go a little bit further, in terms of the overall targets that we set, to make sure that we hit the overall EU target, but yes, these are derived from the European Packaging Directive that sets a trajectory of targets to achieve by 2020 and possibly beyond.

Chair: But we have no target set for post-2020, do we?

Dr Thérèse Coffey: Not yet.

Chair: When do you think those targets will be set?

Dr Thérèse Coffey: I am expecting probably not until the middle of next year.⁶⁰

47. When asked about setting a target for coffee cups, the Minister told us “I think we will probably release that in our waste and resources strategy next year.” However the Minister qualified that rather than a specific target for coffee cups, the strategy would include a “specific ambition.”⁶¹ As ambitions have historically been weak around coffee cups, we recommend a target to focus minds.

48. Some coffee shop chains in the UK have made voluntary commitments to recycle more disposable cups. Starbucks and Costa Coffee, the UK’s two largest coffee shop chains, established in-store recycling systems for coffee cups in early 2017. We welcome this and congratulate them on their initiative. Costa Coffee is the only UK coffee shop to have a recycling target for disposable cups through this system, which was detailed in both written and oral evidence we received. Costa has a target of recycling 30 million cups a year through this system. However, we heard that they are not currently on track to meet this target.⁶² Oliver Rosevear, Energy and Environment Manager at Costa, explained:

From Costa Coffee’s point of view, all 2,000 of our stores do have recycling points in store. This is something we introduced in February of this year and to date we have recycled over 9 million cups through that system. We expect to enter, at the back end of the year, around 15 to 20 million cups recovered through that system [...] That 30 million was based on our trials of 40 stores in Manchester and London, which are obviously higher volume stores. What we are seeing, since we introduced this, is that obviously in certain more regional areas those take-ups are lower.⁶³

49. If Costa met its target of 30 million cups per year, this recycling scheme would only recycle 1.2% of the 2.5 billion disposable cups used in the UK each year

50. We heard evidence from NGOs, environmental researchers and local authorities to suggest that the main issue with in-store recycling systems is that they require customers to return to shops to recycle their cup, rather than being able to recycle them in on-street bins. Professor Wouter Poortinga told us that these in-store schemes “defeat the purpose of the on-the-go use of coffee cups”⁶⁴ and Gavin Ellis, from environmental charity Hubbub, explained:

60 Q465, Q466, Q467

61 Q516

62 Costa Coffee (PKG0107A)

63 Q62

64 Q7

A lot of the focus has been on recycling cups in-store, but the very nature of on-the-go coffee is that most cups aren't disposed of in the store. They are disposed of either out in the street or, what we found through a lot of our work, they are disposed of at work. Some morning commuters will buy a cup on their way out of the station or out of the Tube and it will end up at work and often get disposed of at work.⁶⁵

51. The coffee shop industry has shown some initiative in setting a collaborative target. In 2014 the Paper Cup Recovery & Recycling Group (PCRRG) was formed by the Foodservice Packaging Association (FPA). The PCRRG is made up of organisations from various parts of the paper cup supply chain with an interest in setting priorities and determining direction around the key opportunities and challenges that face the paper cup supply chain. We received written evidence from PCRRG, and heard evidence from the Chair Neil Whittall. We also heard evidence from Martin Kersh, Executive Director of the FPA.

52. The Paper Cup Manifesto, which was signed by more than 45 members of the PCRRG in June 2016, sets out a target for the provision of coffee cup recycling facilities. The Paper Cup Manifesto states:

By 2020, the greater majority of the UK population will have access to information, schemes and facilities that enable used paper cups to be sustainably recovered and recycled.⁶⁶

53. When we heard evidence from Neil Whittall, PCRRG and Martin Kersh, FPA, it became clear that the Paper Cup Manifesto does not include a quantitative target for an improved recycling rate for coffee cups, rather it has a target for “access to” coffee cup recycling facilities.⁶⁷

54. With the UK throwing away billions of disposable coffee cups per year, the Government needs to take decisive action. Although some members of the coffee shop industry have shown initiative in tackling coffee cup waste, we found their commitments are inconsistent and need targets. Some initiatives, such as in-store recycling, are well-meaning however they are not enough to tackle the level of coffee cup wastage in the UK. The voluntary approach is not working. Industry stakeholders need a clear recycling target to push them to plan and invest in greater recycling infrastructure and management. In-store recycling schemes should not be the responsibility of one or two coffee shop companies, they should be a matter of course for all large coffee shop chains. Coffee cups are far from meeting their share of either the paper or plastic targets set by the EU for 2020 and, in any case, it is unclear which category they would fall under. Therefore, we recommend the Government takes the opportunity to set a specific recycling target for disposable coffee cups in their upcoming Waste and Resources Strategy due to be published in 2018.

55. We recommend that the Government sets a target that all single use coffee cups disposed of in recycling bins should be recycled by 2023. If an effective recycling system is not established and achieves high levels of recycling by this date, the Government should ban disposable coffee cups. There is no excuse for the ongoing reluctance from

65 Q4

66 <http://foodservicepackaging.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2016/06/Manifesto-Presentation-P-27-June.pdf>

67 Q99, Q100, Q101, Q102, Q103, Q104

Government and industry to address coffee cup waste. Disposable coffee cups are an avoidable waste problem and if the UK cannot be confident of their future sustainability, the Government should ban them.

4 Coffee Cup Waste Prevention and Solutions

Incentivising the Use of Reusable Cups

56. Throughout this inquiry, we have heard that preventing the use of disposable packaging is preferable to recycling according to the ‘Waste Hierarchy’. The waste hierarchy ranks waste management options according to what is best for the environment. DEFRA’s guidance for businesses’ use of the waste hierarchy states:

It gives top priority to preventing waste in the first place. When waste is created, it gives priority to preparing it for re-use, then recycling, then recovery and last of all disposal (e.g. landfill).⁶⁸

57. Keep Scotland Beautiful explained how the waste hierarchy relates to coffee cups:

We believe that members of the public believe that standard coffee cups are recyclable and that recycling equates to sustainability. Therefore, depositing their cup in a recycling bin is seen as ‘doing the right thing’. The difficulty with the continued promotion of the recycling message, instead of promoting reduction (the top of the waste hierarchy) is that this is unlikely to reduce the use of disposable products.⁶⁹

58. There are many reusable coffee cups available on the market for consumers, some of which are coffee shop branded and sold in-store. We have also heard that disposable cups are often used in offices and workplaces, where it would be easy to keep a reusable cup.⁷⁰

59. Several UK coffee shops, including Costa, Starbucks, Pret A Manger, Café Nero and Paul, offer customers a 25p discount for using a reusable cup. However, just 1–2% of sales receive this discount.⁷¹ There are several reasons why this could be the case. Firstly, it could be because few people know about the offers. Gavin Ellis, co-founder of environmental charity Hubbub, explained “First, I would say that there is a difference between offering something and actively pushing and promoting it.” Mr Ellis went on to explain that people who do not work in the coffee shop industry are generally unaware of the available discounts.⁷²

60. Second, the low take-up rate could be because the discount is not big enough to change behaviour. Richard McIlwain from Keep Britain Tidy told us that in order to be more effective, the discount would have to be around 50p:

We polled 2,000 people in a YouGov survey to look at what additional [money] they would be willing to pay to continue using a disposable cup, as

68 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69403/pb13530-waste-hierarchy-guidance.pdf

69 Keep Scotland Beautiful (PKG0072A)

70 Professor Wouter Poortinga (PKG0026A), Q20

71 Costa Coffee (PKG0107A), Starbuck (PKG0089A)

72 Q12, Q13

opposed to having to take their refillable cup [...] some of the feedback we have had shows that once you get to 50p and beyond very, very few people are willing to pay that differential to carry on using a disposable cup.⁷³

On 6th December 2017, Pret A Manger announced that they will be raising their discount for using reusable cups from 25p to 50p in the first week of 2018.⁷⁴

61. Third, it could be because discounts are not an effective way to change behaviour. Research by Professor Wouter Poortinga, Environmental Psychologist at Cardiff University found that, in line with ‘prospect theory’, charges are much more effective than discounts.⁷⁵ A charge creates an incentive for consumers to find a more financially sustainable alternative, reducing the amount of disposable packaging used. This has been demonstrated by the success of the plastic carrier bag charge which saw an 83% reduction in use of plastic bags in the first year (2015 – 2016).⁷⁶ In much the same way that people now often carry a bag-for-life to avoid the 5p bag charge, we heard that there would be times when people could plan ahead and bring a reusable cup, for instance, on the way to work or throughout the working day when coffee purchasing is more habitual than impulsive.⁷⁷ A charge on disposable coffee cups would therefore encourage the use of reusable cups, or ceramic mugs, in offices and workplaces.

62. Professor Wouter Poortinga’s research suggests that a 25p charge on disposable coffee cups could lead to a reduction in use of disposable cups of between 50 - 300 million per year.⁷⁸ Irish Environment Minister Denis Naughten recently announced that the Irish Government was considering introducing a charge on disposable coffee cups.⁷⁹ Last year DEFRA said that there were “no plans” for a coffee cup charge.

63. However, Professor Poortinga has argued that a disposable cup charge could be a popular environmental policy, particularly following the success of the plastic bag charge. Poortinga explained this ‘policy spillover’ effect:

Our research found evidence for what we termed policy spillover. Not only did people become more supportive of a plastic bag charge after it was introduced, they also became more supportive of other charges to reduce waste. In particular those participants who increased their support for the plastic bag charge also increased their support for other charges.⁸⁰

64. Several industry stakeholders were concerned that a coffee cup charge would add an “unwelcome tax burden on UK consumers.”⁸¹ However, a YouGov survey recently found that 3 in 4 people across Britain would support a charge on disposable coffee cups.⁸² All UK taxpayers currently bear 90% of the cost of packaging waste disposal whether or not they purchase coffee. A small levy on coffee cups would mean that local authorities would

73 Q13, Q14

74 <http://www.pret.co.uk/en-gb/how-can-pret-encourage-more-customers-to-bring-a-reusable-cup>

75 Professor Wouter Poortinga (PKG0026A), Q17

76 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carrier-bag-charge-summary-of-data-in-england/single-use-plastic-carrier-bags-charge-data-in-england-for-2016-to-2017>

77 Q20

78 Professor Wouter Poortinga (PKG0026A)

79 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-41884727>

80 As above.

81 Costa Coffee (PKG0107A)

82 <https://www.mcsuk.org/news/support-for-coffee-cup-charges>

have more resources to spend on other priorities as the total amount of disposable coffee cups contaminating on-street recycling bins would decrease. Eunomia Research and Consulting also emphasised the important distinction between taxpayers and consumers:

The distinction between citizens and consumers is an important one. You may use no beverage containers in a year but you are still paying through your council tax for the collection and onward processing of those items.⁸³

65. A significant amount of revenue could be generated by a 25p disposable cup charge. Eunomia Research and Consulting have estimated a range of potential revenue totals that could be raised by a 25p charge. Eunomia estimate that a charge would lead to a 30% reduction in the use of disposable cups, generating £438 million of revenue.⁸⁴ Eunomia's findings are backed up by Professor Poortinga's that, if a charge was supplemented by the distribution of free reusable cups, there would be around a 30% reduction in the use of coffee cups.

66. Research therefore suggests that a charge could lead to around 750 million fewer disposable cups being littered, incinerated or sent to landfill, and an estimated £438 million of revenue.⁸⁵ Careful and transparent management of this revenue would be essential. We have heard several suggestions that it could be used to fund better recycling facilities and bininfrastructure for the remaining disposable cups in use.⁸⁶

67. In accordance with the waste hierarchy, we would like to see a reduction in the use of disposable coffee cups. A culture of using a reusable cup wherever possible should be encouraged to reduce disposable cup waste. Although some coffee shops have introduced discounts for customers bringing their own reusable cup, awareness and uptake of these offers has been low. We have heard that charges are more effective than discounts, and the use of a charge on environmentally damaging packaging has already seen success through the plastic carrier bag charge. A "latte levy" on disposable coffee cups would remove some of the financial burden from local authorities and council taxpayers.

68. The growing demand for coffee means that the Government should act urgently to tackle avoidable coffee cup waste. The charge on plastic bags prompted consumers to change their habits, reducing plastic bag use by over 83% in the first year. Additionally, the plastic bag charge saw an increased level of support for further charges to reduce waste. We therefore recommend that the Government introduces a minimum 25p levy on disposable cups, to be paid by the consumer on top of the price of the coffee. Coffee shops already reduce the price of their drinks to reflect the discount that they are already happy to offer their customers and consequently they could absorb some of the "latte levy." The revenue generated from producer responsibility compliance should be collected and managed by a central body and used to fund recycling infrastructure for the remaining cups in use. As the recycling rate for coffee cups improves, the levy could be lowered year on year. This would encourage good management of the revenue from the levy.

83 Q241

84 Eunomia Research & Consulting (PKG0086A)

85 As above.

86 Q42, Q535

Improving On-the-Go Recycling

69. The majority of disposable coffee cups are consumed and disposed of ‘on-the-go’ with very few making it back to the household waste stream. Throughout this inquiry, we have heard that there is a lack of ‘on-the-go’ recycling facilities for packaging used outside the home, despite the high level of on-the-go consumption in the UK. During our last evidence session, Dr Coffey, told us:

The UK has got the highest on-the-go consumption pattern. It is a thing that has evolved in relatively recent years.⁸⁷

70. Professor of Environmental Psychology at Cardiff University, Wouter Poortinga emphasised the way in which on-the-go consumption effects recycling rates for coffee cups:

It is often said that it is the on-the-go nature of coffee drinking which is the problem. I think it is one of the biggest factors in the low recycling rates ... there is no practical or convenient way of recycling it [disposable coffee cup] at the moment.⁸⁸

71. Members of the coffee shop and packaging industries have expressed a desire to ensure the current polyethylene lined cups, and other forms of disposable on-the-go packaging, are more widely recyclable. Martin Kersh from the Foodservice Packaging Association told us:

The issue for us is not so much the micro issue about recycling cups, which is very important, but attacking it on a bigger scale, that is, all of on-the-go.⁸⁹

72. However, we have heard that current industry initiatives to improve the recycling infrastructure for coffee cups are unlikely to capture coffee cups in the places where they are often disposed of. The ACE UK (Association of Beverage Cartons for the Environment) recycling scheme for coffee cups, which was announced by the Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group (PCRRG) on 10th October 2017, enables people to recycle their disposable cups at one of 382 bring banks in 97 local authorities. ACE UK are also hoping to include coffee cups in local authority household kerbside collection in the future.⁹⁰ In our evidence session on 10th October we asked Costa Coffee, signatory of the agreement, how the ACE UK recycling system would work.

Oliver Rosevear: So, bring-backs are your sort of bring-back clothing banks that you have at recycling sites. It allows—

Q71 Chair: Yes, but you have to bring it into a bank. You have to collect your coffee cups.

Oliver Rosevear: You do.

Chair: It is not like taking a quilt or a blanket. It is a coffee cup.

87 Q397

88 Q2

89 Q66

90 <https://ciwm-journal.co.uk/coffee-giants-sign-coffee-cup-recycling-agreement/>

Oliver Rosevear: I agree but, as that programme expands and that beverage carton system expands, it also looks at kerbside recycling.⁹¹

73. We asked representatives from local authorities about the feasibility of including coffee cups in kerbside recycling. We heard that the given the small number of coffee cup recycling facilities available in the UK and the small chance that consumers would collect and bring their cups home, including disposable cups in kersbide collection would be unlikely to increase coffee cup recycling rates. Lee Marshall from the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee told us:

As an organisation we have liaised and engaged with the industry and the discussions we have had are very quickly that it is the on-the-go areas that need the attention, not the kerbside side at the moment because the coffee cups are not finding their way, generally, back into the house and are not in any of the kerbside schemes. There are probably bigger, better wins that can be had in terms of coffee cups before we start looking at the kerbside arena.⁹²

74. Dr Coffey told us that she recognised the public demand for greater provision of on-the-go recycling facilities:

People do want to be able to recycle anywhere and everywhere. So that is where some of the litter strategy comes in. I recognise it is not that but it is about working with council and businesses about improving 'binrastructure' in order to make it as easy as possible for people to do these things.⁹³

75. The provision of on-street recycling bins is at the discretion of local councils, and their availability throughout the UK is patchy and inconsistent, due to the relatively recent phenomenon of on-the-go consumption and the issues created by contaminated waste. Less than half of all local councils provide on-the-go recycling bins.⁹⁴ Representatives from local authorities told us about the lack of provision of on-the-go recycling facilities and the difficulties that arise from collecting waste for recycling from on-street bins. Lee Marshall, Chief Executive of the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee told us:

On-the-go recycling is difficult generally. There are not many local authorities that have on-the-go recycling schemes and in the ones that do, the quality of material they get is very poor. People are interested in recycling and have got recycling to a point but not necessarily enough that they are prepared to take the time and effort, on the go when we are all busy and rushing, to put the things in the right places, which then causes problems down the line at the sorting facilities and reprocessors.⁹⁵

76. The Waste and Resource Action Programme (WRAP) which is partly funded by DEFRA, provides guidance for local councils on the provision of on-the-go and on-street recycling facilities.⁹⁶ However, as we have heard, providing on-the-go recycling is

91 Q70, Q71

92 Q392

93 Q478

94 46% of local councils provide on-the-go recycling facilities. RECYcling of Used Plastics Limited, 2017 RECOUP Household Collection Survey (June 2017)

95 Q391

96 www.wrap.org.uk/content/recycle-go-guidance-england

currently a financial and logistical burden for councils due to the rate of contamination found in on-street bins. As all food packaging waste is classed as contaminated due to its contact with food, disposable coffee cups often contaminate local authority on-street recycling bins.

77. We have also heard that disposable coffee cups can be recycled if they are made into non-food packaging, such as high quality paper or reinforced cardboard. This suggests that there is a need to provide on-street recycling bins, not just for coffee cups, but for all types of food packaging waste to ensure that it is effectively captured ‘on-the-go’ and transported to appropriate facilities for recycling. Richard McIlwain from Keep Britain Tidy suggested that the revenue from a charge on disposable cups could be hypothecated to fund on-the-go recycling facilities:

There is a role to have a discussion around things like extended producer responsibility and say, if we think on-the-go collection of coffee cups has to be a thing, how do we support local authorities to finance that? Is there a small element of charge, for instance, that could be applied to a coffee cup that could then be hypothecated—I know the Government does not like to hypothecate money—to support local authorities, who are clearly very hard pressed at the moment struggling with ever tighter budgets.⁹⁷

78. If many types of food packaging were able to be collected and transported in bulk to appropriate reprocessing facilities, more end markets would be created for food packaging. Martin Kersh from the Foodservice Packaging Association recognised that the “major development” of an on-the-go solution for all packaging would require funding, potentially from producer responsibility reform.⁹⁸ Equally, diverting revenue from a coffee cup charge would provide a direct funding solution fully in-line with the ‘polluter pays’ principle. The consumer who chooses to use a disposable cup rather than a reusable one pays a charge to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure to enable it to be recycled.

79. We also heard from Dr Coffey that the Government Voluntary and Economic Incentives Working Group will be looking at the possibility of using revenue from a disposable cup charge to fund more comprehensive on-the-go recycling:

The policy objective for considering the disposable cups I think at the moment would be about how we can get more recycling. It may be that a levy, perhaps a more modest levy could be used directly to improve some of the infrastructure that we have been discussing.⁹⁹

80. **Throughout this inquiry we have heard that on-the-go consumption and the UK’s lack of ‘binrastructure’ is a significant barrier to coffee cup recycling. We heard similar issues relating to plastic bottles, but the nature of coffee cup waste does not lend itself to a deposit return scheme. Industry initiatives have created a range of bins in which consumers can recycle coffee cups, however none of them address the on-the-go usage of disposable coffee cups. We have also heard that disposable coffee cups and other types of food packaging contaminate on-street recycling bins as they are classified as ‘prohibited material.’ However, there are some end markets developing for disposable coffee cups, suggesting that more research should be done to find similar solutions**

97 Q42

98 Q152

99 Q535

for various other types of food packaging waste, such as sandwich boxes and hot food containers. Consumers need simple ways of recycling on-the-go food packaging, so the instruction to put it in a dedicated food packaging recycling bin could be easily, and consistently communicated.

81. *To ensure that disposable coffee cups and other types of paper food packaging are captured and recycled, the revenue from the 25p coffee cup charge should be used to support local councils to provide food packaging recycling bins and waste management. Disposable food packaging collected in these bins could be recycled in a similar way to the initiatives shown through in-store recycling schemes. A proportion of the revenue could also be used to support a wide-reaching public communications campaign that would provide easily digestible information on best-practice recycling while on-the-go, therefore reducing litter and improving recycling of all types of food packaging waste.*

Conclusions and recommendations

Clearer Consumer Messaging

1. The use of disposable cups that are difficult to recycle and the lack of specialist reprocessing facilities in the UK results in fewer than 1 in 400 being recycled. Although we have heard that the introduction of a “recyclable cup” would present a simple solution to coffee cup waste in the UK, we heard little substantial evidence about how these cups would meet the manufacturing standards that prohibit contaminated containers from entering mainstream waste recycling. Therefore we believe that more research needs to be done to establish whether contamination is a significant and justified barrier to widespread uptake of these new designs of disposable cups. Although Starbucks has explored the potential of using Frugal Pac cups, there has been no widespread trial or collaborative research as yet. As a large and growing industry, coffee shop companies should work together through the existing Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group to agree the design of a disposable cup which can be easily recycled. Research should focus on how the design of paper cups can work around, or with, the manufacturing standard for “contaminated” paper packaging by exploring ways of recycling coffee cups with other contaminated food packaging. (Paragraph 21)
2. While disposable coffee cups are recyclable, they are not recycled. However, we have found that there is a significant public belief that disposable coffee cups are widely recycled. Coffee shops are communicating to customers that disposable cups are recyclable, but it is not clear that they need to be disposed of through separate recycling systems. This confuses the consumer, resulting in the contamination of on-street and office bins and local authority collections as people dispose of disposable cups in mixed recycling. We believe that greater clarity and consistency around recyclability and contamination issues are vital to ensure that consumers do not unknowingly contaminate recycling bins. (Paragraph 28)
3. *It is unacceptable that coffee sellers are perpetuating customer confusion through their use of recycling labels and emphasis on the recyclability of coffee cups, despite the shockingly low recycling rate. Coffee shops with in-store recycling schemes should place a ‘recyclable in stores only’ label on their coffee cups. Those without in-store recycling should print their cups with a ‘not widely recycled’ label. We believe this greater consistency will enable the public to make more informed choices about their use and disposal of packaging that cannot be recycled in most public recycling bins.* (Paragraph 29)

Producer Responsibility

4. *We welcome the Government’s commitment to explore reforms to the current UK’s producer responsibility schemes. Currently, taxpayers cover around 90% of the costs of packaging waste disposal, indicating that the producer responsibility scheme does not make producers responsible for packaging disposal. Given that the mixed material design of disposable coffee cups prevents them from being widely recycled, leading to a recycling rate of less than 1%, a different compliance fee structure would encourage the*

development of disposable cups which are easier to recycle. We recommend that the Government introduce a compliance fee structure that reduces the cost of recyclable and sustainable cups, and raises costs on cups that are difficult and costly to recycle. The increased revenue should be used to invest in more reprocessing facilities and local authority 'binfrastructure' - on-the-go collection services. (Paragraph 44)

5. *The Government should also reduce the de minimis requirements for participation in the PRO scheme to include companies that place more than 1 tonne of packaging on the market. This would give producers and retailers - the polluters - greater financial responsibility for the type of packaging they are putting on the market, and an incentive only to produce and use packaging that can be easily recycled within the UK's current recycling infrastructure. (Paragraph 45)*
6. *With the UK throwing away billions of disposable coffee cups per year, the Government needs to take decisive action. Although some members of the coffee shop industry have shown initiative in tackling coffee cup waste, we found their commitments are inconsistent and need targets. Some initiatives, such as in-store recycling, are well-meaning however they are not enough to tackle the level of coffee cup wastage in the UK. The voluntary approach is not working. Industry stakeholders need a clear recycling target to push them to plan and invest in greater recycling infrastructure and management. In-store recycling schemes should not be the responsibility of one or two coffee shop companies, they should be a matter of course for all large coffee shop chains. Coffee cups are far from meeting their share of either the paper or plastic targets set by the EU for 2020 and, in any case, it is unclear which category they would fall under. Therefore, we recommend the Government takes the opportunity to set a specific recycling target for disposable coffee cups in their upcoming Waste and Resources Strategy due to be published in 2018. (Paragraph 54)*
7. *We recommend that the Government sets a target that all single use coffee cups disposed of in recycling bins should be recycled by 2023. If an effective recycling system is not established and achieves high levels of recycling by this date, the Government should ban disposable coffee cups. There is no excuse for the ongoing reluctance from Government and industry to address coffee cup waste. Disposable coffee cups are an avoidable waste problem and if the UK cannot be confident of their future sustainability, the Government should ban them. (Paragraph 55)*

Reducing and Recycling

8. *In accordance with the waste hierarchy, we would like to see a reduction in the use of disposable coffee cups. A culture of using a reusable cup wherever possible should be encouraged to reduce disposable cup waste. Although some coffee shops have introduced discounts for customers bringing their own reusable cup, awareness and uptake of these offers has been low. We have heard that charges are more effective than discounts, and the use of a charge on environmentally damaging packaging has already seen success through the plastic carrier bag charge. A "latte levy" on disposable coffee cups would remove some of the financial burden from local authorities and council taxpayers. (Paragraph 67)*
9. *The growing demand for coffee means that the Government should act urgently to tackle avoidable coffee cup waste. The charge on plastic bags prompted consumers to*

change their habits, reducing plastic bag use by over 83% in the first year. Additionally, the plastic bag charge saw an increased level of support for further charges to reduce waste. We therefore recommend that the Government introduces a minimum 25p levy on disposable cups, to be paid by the consumer on top of the price of the coffee. Coffee shops already reduce the price of their drinks to reflect the discount that they are already happy to offer their customers and consequently they could absorb some of the “latte levy.” The revenue generated from producer responsibility compliance should be collected and managed by a central body and used to fund recycling infrastructure for the remaining cups in use. As the recycling rate for coffee cups improves, the levy could be lowered year on year. This would encourage good management of the revenue from the levy. (Paragraph 68)

10. Throughout this inquiry we have heard that on-the-go consumption and the UK’s lack of ‘binrastructure’ is a significant barrier to coffee cup recycling. We heard similar issues relating to plastic bottles, but the nature of coffee cup waste does not lend itself to a deposit return scheme. Industry initiatives have created a range of bins in which consumers can recycle coffee cups, however none of them address the on-the-go usage of disposable coffee cups. We have also heard that disposable coffee cups and other types of food packaging contaminate on-street recycling bins as they are classified as ‘prohibited material.’ However, there are some end markets developing for disposable coffee cups, suggesting that more research should be done to find similar solutions for various other types of food packaging waste, such as sandwich boxes and hot food containers. Consumers need simple ways of recycling on-the-go food packaging, so the instruction to put it in a dedicated food packaging recycling bin could be easily, and consistently communicated. (Paragraph 80)
11. *To ensure that disposable coffee cups and other types of paper food packaging are captured and recycled, the revenue from the 25p coffee cup charge should be used to support local councils to provide food packaging recycling bins and waste management. Disposable food packaging collected in these bins could be recycled in a similar way to the initiatives shown through in-store recycling schemes. A proportion of the revenue could also be used to support a wide-reaching public communications campaign that would provide easily digestible information on best-practice recycling while on-the-go, therefore reducing litter and improving recycling of all types of food packaging waste. (Paragraph 81)*

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 19 December 2017

Members present.

Mary Creagh, in the Chair:

Colin Clark Anna McMorrin
Caroline Lucas John McNally
Kerry McCarthy

Draft Report (*Disposable Packaging: Coffee Cups*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Paragraphs 1 to 81 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[The Committee adjourned]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 10 October 2017

Question number

Richard McIlwain, Deputy Chief Executive, Keep Britain Tidy, **Gavin Ellis**, Co-founder, Hubbub Foundation UK, and **Professor Wouter Poortinga**, Professor of Environmental Psychology, Welsh School of Architecture

[Q1–57](#)

Oliver Rosevear, Energy and Environment Manager, Costa Coffee, **Martin Kersh**, Executive Director, Foodservice Packaging Association, **Neil Whittall**, Chair, the Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group, and **Martin Myerscough**, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Frugalpac

[Q58–161](#)

Tuesday 17 October 2017

Fiona Llewellyn, Project Manager, One Less Campaign, **Dr Sue Kinsey**, Senior Pollution Officer, Marine Conservative Society, **Hugo Tagholm**, Chief Executive, Surfers Against Sewage, and **Derek Robertson**, CEO, Keep Scotland Beautiful

[Q162–207](#)

Dr Chris Sherrington, Head of Environmental Policy and Economics, Enomia Research & Consulting, **Nick Brown**, Head of Sustainability, Coca-Cola European Partners, **John Mayhew**, Director of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, and **Sam Harding**, Head of Litter Programme, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England

[Q208–259](#)

Tuesday 24 October 2017

James Lowman, Chief Executive, Association of Convenience Stores, **Alice Ellison**, Head of Environment, British Retail Consortium, **Barry Turner**, Director of Plastics and Flexible Packaging, British Plastics Federation, and **Gavin Partington**, Director General, British Soft Drinks Association

[Q260–353](#)

Councillor David Simmonds CBE, Vice-Chairman, Local Government Association, **Lee Marshall**, Chief Executive Officer, Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee, and **Jakob Rindegren**, Recycling Policy Adviser, Environmental Services Association

[Q354–396](#)

Tuesday 31 October 2017

Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and **Chris Preston**, Deputy Director, Waste and Recycling, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[Q397–544](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

PKG numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 #OneLess campaign ([PKG0031](#))
- 2 38 Degrees ([PKG0037](#))
- 3 Andrew Brooks ([PKG0041](#))
- 4 Ask the Q ([PKG0004](#))
- 5 Ask the Q ([PKG0007](#))
- 6 Association of Convenience Stores ([PKG0014](#))
- 7 Axion Recycling ([PKG0021](#))
- 8 Bio-Based and Biodegradable Industries Association (BBIA) ([PKG0010](#))
- 9 BRITA UK ([PKG0008](#))
- 10 Chris Hesketh ([PKG0002](#))
- 11 Coca-Cola European Partners and Coca-Cola Great Britain ([PKG0033](#))
- 12 Confederation of Paper Industries ([PKG0042](#))
- 13 Costa ([PKG0040](#))
- 14 Defra ([PKG0017](#))
- 15 DEFRA ([PKG0045](#))
- 16 Delipac Ltd ([PKG0011](#))
- 17 Environment Agency ([PKG0043](#))
- 18 Eunomia Research & Consulting Ltd ([PKG0025](#))
- 19 Fidra ([PKG0019](#))
- 20 Field Studies Council ([PKG0013](#))
- 21 Green Alliance ([PKG0026](#))
- 22 Hildegard Hill ([PKG0029](#))
- 23 Marine Conservation Society ([PKG0030](#))
- 24 Mr Andy Ward ([PKG0034](#))
- 25 Mr Brendan Thomas ([PKG0003](#))
- 26 Mr James Marsden ([PKG0009](#))
- 27 Natural Hydration Council ([PKG0032](#))
- 28 Ofwat ([PKG0044](#))
- 29 Professor ERIC GOODYER ([PKG0001](#))
- 30 Recycle Waste International ([PKG0035](#))
- 31 Sue Duerdoth ([PKG0038](#))
- 32 Surfers Against Sewage ([PKG0027](#))
- 33 The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland ([PKG0015](#))

- 34 The Printed Cup Company ([PKG0005](#))
- 35 U.W.T.S.D. Lampeter ([PKG0023](#))
- 36 UWTSD ([PKG0006](#))
- 37 Valpak Limited ([PKG0012](#))
- 38 Vegware ([PKG0016](#))
- 39 Whale and Dolphin Conservation ([PKG0018](#))
- 40 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([PKG0020](#))
- 41 Wimborne War on Waste ([PKG0024](#))
- 42 Wine and Spirit Trade Association ([PKG0039](#))
- 43 WRAP ([PKG0036](#))

The following written evidence was received in the last Parliament by the previous Committee for this inquiry and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

- 1 #OneLess Campaign ([PKG0083](#))
- 2 Alison Finn ([PKG0025](#))
- 3 Alliance for Beverage Cartons and the Environment (ACE UK) ([PKG0043](#))
- 4 Andrew Ward ([PKG0041](#))
- 5 Anonymous submission ([PKG0001](#))
- 6 Association of Convenience Stores ([PKG0068](#))
- 7 Axion Recycling ([PKG0062](#))
- 8 Bericap UK Ltd ([PKG0060](#))
- 9 BIO BASED AND BIODEGRADABLE INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION ([PKG0052](#))
- 10 British Beer and Pub Association ([PKG0080](#))
- 11 British Plastics Federation & PlasticsEurope ([PKG0058](#))
- 12 British Retail Consortium ([PKG0109](#))
- 13 British Soft Drinks Association ([PKG0069](#))
- 14 Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) ([PKG0081](#))
- 15 Coca-Cola European Partners ([PKG0061](#))
- 16 Confederation of Paper Industries ([PKG0037](#))
- 17 Cornish Plastic Pollution Coalition ([PKG0028](#))
- 18 Costa Coffee ([PKG0107](#))
- 19 David Orr ([PKG0014](#))
- 20 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ([PKG0110](#))
- 21 Dr Jennifer Ferreira ([PKG0009](#))
- 22 DS Smith ([PKG0059](#))
- 23 Ecosurety Ltd ([PKG0075](#))
- 24 Ellon@Heart ([PKG0055](#))
- 25 Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) ([PKG0066](#))

- 26 Environmental Services Association (ESA) ([PKG0046](#))
- 27 Eunomia Research & Consulting Ltd ([PKG0086](#))
- 28 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([PKG0073](#))
- 29 Fidra ([PKG0044](#))
- 30 Floreon- Transforming Packaging Ltd ([PKG0071](#))
- 31 Foodservice Packaging Association ([PKG0067](#))
- 32 Frugalpac ([PKG0050](#))
- 33 Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures ([PKG0088](#))
- 34 Green Zone Community Climate Action ([PKG0002](#))
- 35 Greenpeace UK ([PKG0064](#))
- 36 GreenTech Corporation Ltd ([PKG0005](#))
- 37 Guy Hodgson ([PKG0113](#))
- 38 Have You Got The Bottle? ([PKG0078](#))
- 39 Hubbub Foundation UK ([PKG0079](#))
- 40 Hugh Counsell ([PKG0012](#))
- 41 Ian Nendick ([PKG0031](#))
- 42 INCPEN ([PKG0040](#))
- 43 Keep Britain Tidy ([PKG0084](#))
- 44 Keep Scotland Beautiful ([PKG0072](#))
- 45 LARAC ([PKG0054](#))
- 46 LINPAC GROUP ([PKG0039](#))
- 47 Local Government Association ([PKG0076](#))
- 48 London Councils ([PKG0045](#))
- 49 Marine Conservation Society ([PKG0074](#))
- 50 Michael M Armstrong-MacDonnell ([PKG0011](#))
- 51 Miss Harriet Cherry ([PKG0023](#))
- 52 Mr alexander melman ([PKG0020](#))
- 53 Mr David Perrow ([PKG0007](#))
- 54 Mr Ian Barr ([PKG0015](#))
- 55 Mr Michael Baker ([PKG0016](#))
- 56 Mr Robert Hickman ([PKG0108](#))
- 57 Mr Robert Shacklock ([PKG0019](#))
- 58 Mr Sam Elgar ([PKG0008](#))
- 59 Mr Thomas Cribb ([PKG0022](#))
- 60 Mrs Dawn Haig-Thomas ([PKG0013](#))
- 61 Mrs Marie Power ([PKG0034](#))
- 62 Ms Susan Hedley ([PKG0033](#))
- 63 Natural History Museum ([PKG0027](#))

- 64 Nicholas Cater ([PKG0032](#))
- 65 Penryn Town Council ([PKG0063](#))
- 66 Port of London Authority ([PKG0077](#))
- 67 Project Integra ([PKG0057](#))
- 68 Public & Commercial Services Union ([PKG0042](#))
- 69 RECOUP ([PKG0085](#))
- 70 Royal Holloway ([PKG0030](#))
- 71 RPC-BPI Group ([PKG0106](#))
- 72 Smart Planet Technologies ([PKG0049](#))
- 73 Starbucks Coffee Company ([PKG0089](#))
- 74 Surfers Against Sewage ([PKG0047](#))
- 75 Thames21 ([PKG0087](#))
- 76 The Big Green Pellet Co Ltd ([PKG0004](#))
- 77 The Independent Packaging Environment and Safety Forum ([PKG0029](#))
- 78 The Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group ([PKG0070](#))
- 79 The Renewable Energy Association ([PKG0048](#))
- 80 Transition Falmouth ([PKG0035](#))
- 81 Valpak Limited ([PKG0038](#))
- 82 Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University Wouter Poortinga ([PKG0026](#))
- 83 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([PKG0082](#))
- 84 Wilson Bio-Chemical ([PKG0065](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2017–19

First Report	Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide	HC 339
First Special Report	The Future of Chemicals Regulation after the EU Referendum: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2016–17	HC 313
Second Special Report	Marine Protected Areas Revisited: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 314
Third Special Report	Sustainable Development Goals in the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 616