



PLASTIC FREE TALKING POINTS
HOW TO TALK ABOUT WHAT WE DO



sas.org.uk

Changing the status quo isn't easy. Anyone who's ever tried knows that. Sometimes it can feel like you get the same questions again and again and again...

So to help we've put together this Talking Points Guide. We've collected up all the burning questions that we all get asked – and put together information to help you answer.

You can use this guide to help you open up conversations where you live, answer questions and also prepare for events or interviews. And remember we're here to help if you need anything else.

**ISN'T IT UP TO
THE COUNCIL
TO MAKE
RECYCLING
AVAILABLE?**

**WHY WORRY ABOUT
PLASTIC WHEN WE
HAVE BIGGER THINGS
LIKE CLIMATE CHANGE
TO WORRY ABOUT?**

**WHAT ABOUT ALL
THE DISPOSABLE
ALTERNATIVES TO
PLASTIC? WHY DON'T
WE JUST USE THOSE?**

**ALL IT NEEDS IS
SMALL CHANGES,
ONE STEP AT
A TIME...**

FIRST OFF... WHAT IS A PLASTIC FREE COMMUNITY?

We're creating the Plastic Free Community campaign to free where we live from single-use.

Together we're tackling avoidable, throwaway plastic, from our beaches, rivers and green spaces all the way back to the brands and businesses who create it. It's not about removing all plastic from our lives. It's about kicking our addiction to single-use plastic and changing the system that produces it.

So we're on a journey. Being a Plastic Free Community does not mean there is no plastic. Being a Plastic Free Community means you are starting work to turn the tide on plastic pollution. It means you are pulling together different aspects of your community; collaborating and including everyone to bring about the culture change we need to see.

We are also part of a national network of communities all doing the same, backed up by the national campaigns and actions of Surfers Against Sewage. That's pretty awesome!

Together we can do this... and we are proud to have you and your community on board.

WHO ARE SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE?

Surfers Against Sewage was set up in 1990 by a small group of surfers who were fed up by getting ill from being exposed to chronic sewage pollution.

In the decades since we have grown to be widely recognised as one of the UK's leading marine conservation charities, dealing with a wide spectrum of issues from marine pollution to climate emergency. Today we have more than 100,000 volunteers and supporters involved in our campaigns and activities across the UK to protect our oceans, wherever we live.

Over that time, we have also seen a new pollution crisis rise on our shores. Plastic. In response, the Plastic Free Coastlines vision was born; resulting in campaigns such as Plastic Free Communities and Plastic Free Schools, supporting our Beach Cleans programme and enabling our existing voice in the corridors of power.

Together, we are the voice of the ocean. We inspire, unite and empower communities to protect oceans, beaches, waves and wildlife.

**PLASTIC FREE
COMMUNITIES**
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE
Freeing where we live from single-use



TALKING ABOUT...

GENERAL QUESTIONS



IT SAYS YOU'RE PLASTIC-FREE. BUT THERE'S PLENTY OF PLACES SELLING AND USING PLASTIC IN THIS COMMUNITY?



Being accredited as a Plastic Free Community does not mean we've eliminated all plastic (and that's not what our campaign is about). It means we've done the groundwork in setting up a group that really reflects the community we live in, and we're already tackling single-use plastic where we live; working with local government, businesses and beyond. We are creating a movement of people, businesses and organisations who want to kick their addiction to using avoidable single-use plastic.

HOW DOES SETTING UP THE GROUP WORK?

As part of becoming an accredited Plastic Free Community, the team have to meet five objectives.

1. They have to get their local council to commit to plastic-free initiatives.
2. They have to get local businesses to remove single-use plastic items.
3. They need to engage with the community and bring on board organisations like schools, employers and community groups.
4. They have to hold plastic-free events where they spread the word about reducing single-use and organise beach and river cleans.
5. Finally, they need to set up a steering group made up of various people in the community to meet regularly and keep reviewing their progress.

Once they've met all those targets, then they're accredited. And the real work starts.

SINGLE-USE
IS NO USE



SO ...YOU'RE NOT TRYING TO GET RID OF ALL PLASTIC?

NO, AND WE WOULDN'T TRY TO. Some plastic is useful. Some is downright essential. It's how we use plastic that is the problem. When we say plastic free we mean the avoidable single-use stuff that's everywhere. Things like throwaway coffee cups and lids, drinks bottles, carrier bags and food packaging. For example, did you know **WE USE 38.5 MILLION PLASTIC BOTTLES EVERY DAY IN THE UK?** So, we're working on long-term, sustainable change. We want to free where we live from single-use plastic. It won't happen overnight but it will happen.

PLASTIC POLLUTION

WHY IS PLASTIC SO DAMAGING TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT?

We've all heard stories of turtles getting tangled in plastic rings from beer cans, and seen images of sea birds with their wings trapped in discarded nets... but it doesn't stop there. Plastic is commonly mistaken for food in the wild, and it is completely indigestible. Ingested plastic often results in toxic poisoning, malnutrition and ultimately death. The tiny bits of microplastic can be ingested by organisms as small as zooplankton, starting the journey of plastic accumulation up the food chain, ultimately to us.

Plastic particles also pollute the soil and the air and have been found from the deepest part of the ocean to the tops of mountains. All the plastic **EVER** made still exists in one form or another. We need to start realising that there is no 'away' and this growing waste mountain needs tackling.

IT'S PREDICTED THAT BY 2050 THE MASS OF PLASTIC IN THE WORLD'S OCEANS WILL EXCEED THE MASS OF ALL THE FISH THAT LIVE THERE

WEF, THE NEW PLASTIC ECONOMY, 2016

<https://bit.ly/39xK07W>

PLASTIC IS FOUND IN THE GUTS OF 90% OF THE WORLD'S SEA BIRDS

WILCOX ET AL., THREAT OF PLASTIC POLLUTION TO SEABIRDS IS GLOBAL, PERVASIVE, AND INCREASING, 2015

<https://bit.ly/3fyspfc>



HOW DOES THE UK DEAL WITH PLASTIC WASTE?

1. BURIES IT



A large proportion is simply buried in landfill sites. The conditions in landfill prevent degradation, meaning a minimal amount of toxins and gases are released back into the environment (if they are well managed sites). If they are poorly managed the toxins released can be extremely dangerous, contribute to global warming, damage surrounding ecosystems and contaminate ground water. On top of this, the UK is by no means a large island - burying plastic is not sustainable going forwards.

The UK simply doesn't have the space for all its waste, and as a result a large proportion is exported to other countries.

AN ESTIMATED 611,000 TONNES OF PLASTIC PACKAGING WAS EXPORTED BY THE UK IN 2018. Since then countries have started to put the brakes on importing plastic, China started the trend by putting a ban on anything that wasn't 99.5% pure. With no more space for landfill and exportation opportunities dwindling we face a growing crisis.

2. SENDS IT ABROAD



3. BURNS IT



An increasing proportion of the UK's plastic is burnt, releasing CO2 among other greenhouse gases into the environment – not ideal in a time when governments are trying to reduce carbon emissions.

4. RECYCLES IT



Recycling is a fantastic initiative; however, it is important to remember that it isn't a simple solution. Recycled plastic is still plastic, not all plastic can be recycled **AND** recycling often requires high energy inputs (using more fossil fuels).

Saying that... the UK doesn't have a comprehensive national recycling system in operation and recycling rates have stopped increasing in recent years.

➤ **UK HOUSEHOLDS PRODUCED JUST UNDER 27 MILLION TONNES OF WASTE IN 2017. THAT'S EQUIVALENT TO 409KG PER PERSON**

<https://bbc.in/2Povl3b>

ISN'T IT UP TO THE COUNCIL TO MAKE RECYCLING AVAILABLE?

YES. We're not responsible as a group for recycling, that doesn't mean we can't make a difference though. As a group we want to be reducing what we use wherever possible as a first step. We also want to be reducing our plastic miles (sending our waste overseas) and making sure we set up circular systems here in the UK. We are in touch with the local council to make them realise how important recycling and waste management are.

What's on offer differs in each area – some regions are better than others. If you have questions, or are unhappy about what's on offer, talk to your local council. The more of us who make our voices heard, the more pressure on them to improve things. It's shocking that the UK doesn't have a comprehensive national recycling system in operation and that our recycling rates have stopped increasing in recent years.

'WHEN WE GET TO THE STAGE OF DECIDING WHETHER TO BURN OR BURY WASTE, WE HAVE ALREADY FAILED'

BBC NEWS

<https://bbc.in/3rFHn5n>



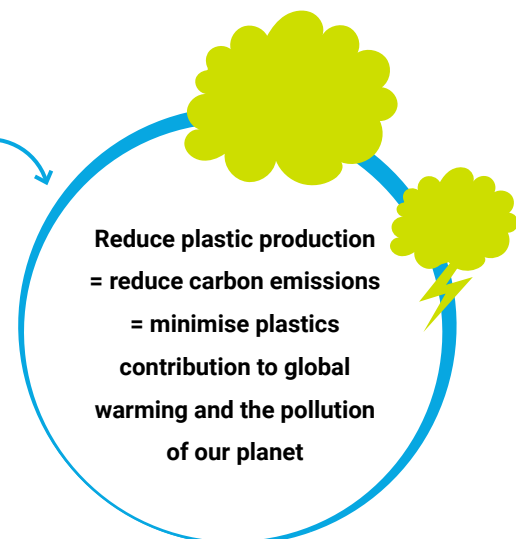
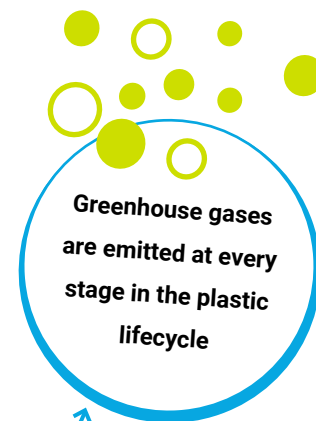
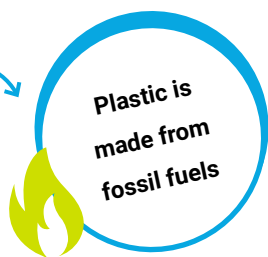
CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND PLASTIC POLLUTION

WHY WORRY ABOUT PLASTIC WHEN WE HAVE BIGGER THINGS LIKE THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY TO WORRY ABOUT?

Because it's all linked. Globally, nearly one in every ten barrels of oil being drilled out of the ground is used to make plastic, and this includes the type of single-use plastic we all buy and throwaway each and every day. So reducing our consumption of single-use means less oil, which means less pressure on the environment. We want to stop using virgin plastic (brand new plastic) as this uses up precious fossil fuels.

IS THE PLASTIC POLLUTION PROBLEM AS WORRYING AS CLIMATE EMERGENCY?

IN SHORT, YES!
AND IT CONTRIBUTES TO CLIMATE CHANGE TOO. LET'S BREAK THIS DOWN



▶ SINGLE-USE PLASTICS ACCOUNT FOR 40 PERCENT OF THE PLASTIC PRODUCED EVERY YEAR. MANY OF THESE PRODUCTS HAVE A LIFESPAN OF MERE MINUTES, YET MAY PERSIST IN THE ENVIRONMENT FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
<https://on.natgeo.com/2PhNHmB>

SO... IF IT'S ALL LINKED, HOW MUCH DOES PLASTIC ACTUALLY CONTRIBUTE TO CLIMATE CHANGE THEN?

At the current rate plastic is set to be responsible for 13% of the total 'carbon budget' by 2050. Recycling simply isn't enough, we need to drastically reduce the amount of plastic produced to give planet ocean a chance to recover.



DOESN'T RECYCLING HELP TO REDUCE THESE IMPACTS?

NOT REALLY...
IN 2015 ONLY

9%

OF PLASTIC
WAS RECYCLED

12%

WAS INCINERATED

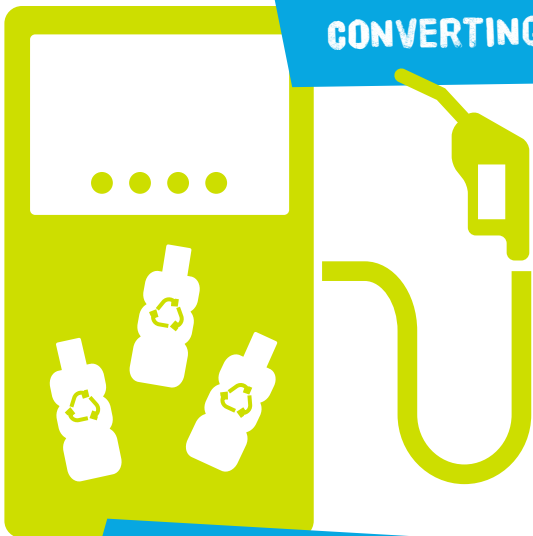
AND A WHOPPING
79%

ENDED UP IN LANDFILL
OR THE NATURAL
ENVIRONMENT

(GEYER, JAMBECK & LAW, 2017)

<https://bit.ly/3mcfAZ9>

CAN'T WE OFFSET THE DAMAGE DONE BY CONVERTING PLASTICS BACK TO FUEL?



It's a romantic idea, but in practice it's not quite as simple as that. Plastic is made from fossil fuels and re-using them as fuel has the same harmful environmental effects as burning regular fossil fuels (such as petrol). Get into more detail about this from the link below, but the bottom line is that we need to move away from fossil fuel consumption, not towards it.

<https://bit.ly/2PtFX5s>

SO, WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

#REDUCE

#REFILL

#RECYCLE

WHEREVER
POSSIBLE!



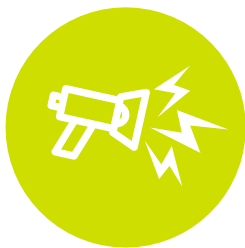
WE CAN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
THIS PROBLEM IS TOO

BIG!



That's exactly why we don't just work locally. All **PLASTIC FREE COMMUNITIES** have the campaign group Surfers Against Sewage behind us and together we are part of a much bigger campaign that stretches across the whole UK and around the world.

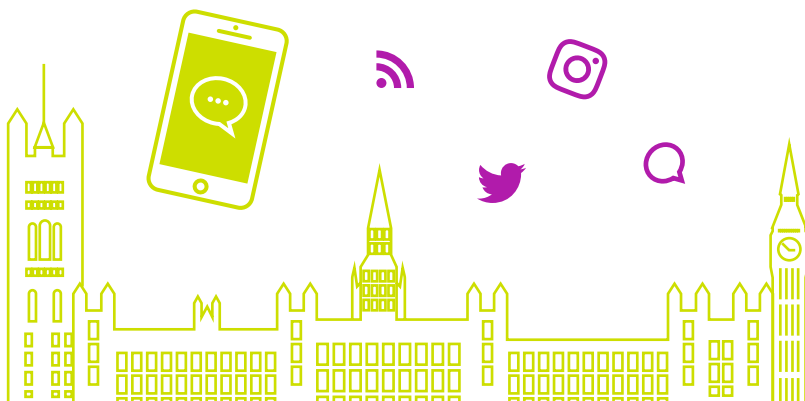
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE campaigns for changes in laws, policies and markets that can deliver massive results. We do this through people power – campaign actions like petitions, collecting evidence from beach and river cleans and targeting the big businesses and supermarkets who create so much of the single-use plastic in our shops and streets, yet hold so little responsibility. The more we do locally, the more power we give SAS to influence nationally.



We have also established the first ever **OCEAN CONSERVATION ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP**

which brings together MPs from all parties to look at these issues and where we can share the voice of communities in our discussions in Westminster.

And together we put pressure on politicians, lawmakers and business leaders to make real changes, from introducing charges on bags and a new deposit return scheme for bottles, to looking at taxes for single-use plastic.



ALTERNATIVES TO PLASTICS

WHAT ABOUT ALL THE DISPOSABLE ALTERNATIVES TO PLASTIC? WHY DON'T WE JUST USE THOSE?

We'd encourage anyone to research what they'd be swapping to and make sure there are clear, solid reasons why it's better than single-use plastic. There are nearly 8 billion of us on the planet. Swapping one single-use material for another could just usher in 8 billion new disposable problems. It might not be a long-term solution.

That's why we encourage people to think how they can reduce what they use first, then look at refill and reuse before looking for something to swap for single-use plastic. Biodegradable plastics are still plastic – they just break down quicker. Or take compostable materials. Unless these are in a closed loop system – where a community has collections for them and they go to an industrial composter – then there's no solution for those either.

We have to cut back on our waste overall and also create systems that work for recycling, such as a Deposit Return Scheme for all plastic containers.

WHAT ABOUT BIODEGRADABLE AND COMPOSTABLE PLASTICS, SURELY ENCOURAGING A SWAP TO THESE WOULD HELP?



The world of so called 'good' plastics can be extremely misleading and confusing, and we don't accept them as alternatives to traditional single use plastics. Most biodegradable/compostable plastics require specific processes and heat conditions to break-down, and there are very few of these facilities in the UK. Put into normal household waste, landfill or left in the environment they can be just as resilient as oil-based plastic and just as harmful to wildlife. What's more, they pose an issue for traditional recycling streams. Also be aware that many of these products are takeaway so are hard to capture once they leave business premises.

OUR MESSAGE IS TO AVOID SINGLE USE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN – FULL STOP – BY ENCOURAGING REFUSAL, REFILL AND REUSE

WHY DON'T WE JUST BRING IN AN INDUSTRIAL COMPOSTER INTO OUR AREA?

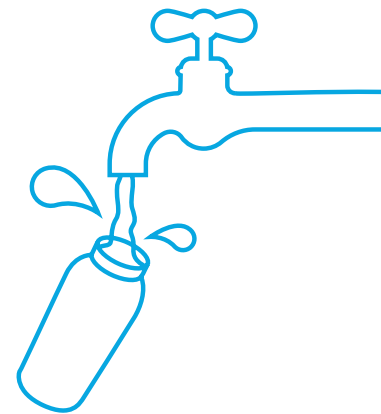
As a group, we're not responsible for our area's waste management, it's a job for our local councillors and council, which is why one of our Plastic Free Communities objectives is to engage our local council. We would also arguably be replacing one single-use problem (plastic) with another (compostables), at an industrial scale. None of it is as effective as helping people switch to refilling and reusing instead.

IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO SUSTAINABLY MEET CURRENT DEMAND FOR PLASTICS THROUGH BIO-BASED SOURCES, GIVEN THE ENORMOUS LAND-USE IMPLICATIONS AND THE ADDITIONAL RISK OF CONTAMINATING RECYCLING SYSTEMS.

PERSONAL LIFE

DOES IT MEAN I HAVE TO CHANGE MY LIFESTYLE?

It depends on how you already live. If you're like most of us, we race through each day, and that very haste fuels single-use consumption. The grab-and-run coffee, the supermarket lunch deal, it's all packaged for our convenience. So, it's also about a culture change. Surfers Against Sewage believe change comes from progress in four interlinked areas: attitudes, policies, laws and businesses. It's about looking at our own lifestyle, but it's also about challenging the systems in place that fuel our throwaway culture. We need to eliminate use wherever possible first then create a world-class circular system to reuse and recycle here in the UK.



I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR ALL THAT!



All it needs is small changes, one step at a time. No-one expects you to completely change how you live. Start small. Try swapping to a refillable water bottle and get used to that. Next try a refillable coffee cup... before you know it, you'll remember both every time you go out – you might even save a few quid, as a lot of coffee outlets give a discount for refill. So, it's a win-win!

You might find you notice the single-use items and plastic in your life more often and become more open to tackling them. Some people realise they don't want to buy plastic-wrapped fruit and veg anymore, others may stop using carrier bags or won't take a straw when offered. Find a thing that works for you and take it from there.

SMALL ACTIONS
CAN ADD UP INTO



**BIG
CHANGE.**

BUSINESSES

WILL LOCAL BUSINESSES SUFFER?

Quite the opposite. Our message has always been that your pound really matters. Where you shop counts, because small and medium-sized local businesses can reduce the amount of single-use plastic they use, whereas supermarket chains tend to make those decisions nationally. So, choosing to shop locally because they are tackling their single-use consumption not only boosts your local high street, but it also puts pressure on the big chains to follow their lead. It can also reduce the amount of food miles in your shopping, which is more environmentally friendly. If you're a business thinking about your single-use consumption, then the **SAS BUSINESS TOOLKIT** has plenty of advice.



SO, THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO LOCALLY ABOUT SUPERMARKETS?

No there is. Your Plastic Free Community is part of a national movement and as part of that movement you can link into national campaigns such as **MASS UNWRAP** and **#LESSPLASTICPLEASE**.

MASS UNWRAP is a friendly, non-confrontational way of letting your local supermarket know that they're using too much plastic. Sharing this message and action at a local level is really important. Mass Unwraps are organised by Plastic Free Communities and they help raise awareness in a positive way.

#LESSPLASTICPLEASE is the digital arm of Mass Unwrap. By taking the #LessPlasticPlease survey and using the hashtag in your social media posts we can make our voice louder! Here we are calling on supermarkets to reduce the amount of plastic surrounding their products.



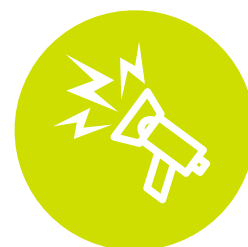
#LESSPLASTICPLEASE



UK SUPERMARKETS
CURRENTLY GENERATE
900,000 TONNES
OF PLASTIC PACKAGING
EVERY YEAR
(STATS: GREENPEACE)



Working together as a national network of Plastic Free Communities, our voices and actions will help change the decisions of businesses and politicians. This is something that Surfers Against Sewage coordinates nationally and as an organisation has already worked hard to help bring about the carrier bag charge, the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme, supported calls for plastic free aisles in supermarkets and a tax on business using new plastic rather than recycled plastic. We know people power works – let's help keep the pressure up.



YES BUT LOCAL BUSINESSES ONLY HAVE TO REMOVE OR REPLACE THREE PLASTIC ITEMS TO QUALIFY AS PLASTIC FREE CHAMPIONS. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THAT MAKE?

We're very clear that removing or replacing three items is just a starting point. All the businesses build on it and most end up doing much more. Some find it revolutionises their whole way of working. Again, it's not about perfection-or-nothing. It's about starting somewhere, doing what you can, and seeing where it leads. We never, ever stop participants from doing more. Our experience so far is that thousands of small local businesses want to be part of the solution.

11,980 SINGLE USE PLASTIC ITEMS HAD BEEN REMOVED BY PFC BUSINESS CHAMPIONS BY 2020.



THINK OF IT LIKE THIS – IF EACH ITEM WAS USED JUST ONCE A DAY IN EACH BUSINESS THAT'S 83,860 SINGLE USE PLASTIC ITEMS A WEEK... OR 4.3 MILLION ITEMS A YEAR.

SO, THIS ALL JUST COSTS BUSINESSES MONEY, RIGHT?

Plastic Free Communities are reaching out to thousands of local businesses across the country and plenty are happy to accept the cost of doing what they see as the right thing. Other businesses pass the cost on to customers and when they explain why, customers are happy to pay a little extra.

In plenty of cases a business can save money by not providing so much (by banning straws and stirrers, shower caps, carrier bags and more). It can be expensive to source disposable alternatives, so our advice would be to ban as much as you can and only swap to alternatives if you really have to.

For example, if you're a coffee shop you're going to be better off reducing your single-use impact and saving money by promoting refill and actively reducing the amount of single use cups you give out... rather than spending loads on compostable alternatives which aren't a solution yet.

Larger business needs to do its bit too, by covering the cost of its waste. At the moment it's estimated that 90% of the cost of waste and recycling is covered by the taxpayer and local councils, rather than supermarkets and businesses who produce avoidable single-use packaging.





This isn't an exhaustive list of questions you may get asked – but we hope it helps. If you have more specific enquiries you need support with or a press enquiry to deal with please do get in touch on

PLASTICFREECOMMUNITIES@SAS.ORG.UK

