

Almost Zero Waste: follow-up info sheet with Councillor Cate Cody

This information sheet contains resources linked to the online talk and Q&A event on 26/06/20 with Cate. [You can listen/watch again here on YouTube.](#)

This document contains:

1. [Cate's petition to recycle medication blister packs](#)
2. [Cate's full answers to the questions submitted to her in advance and during the event](#)
3. [Ethical consumer websites/products](#)
4. [Films about zero waste](#)
5. [Blogs/articles on zero waste/plastic free](#)

1. Cate's petition and social media

Sign Cate's petition to recycle medication packs! She has almost 24,00 signatures!

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/provide-recycling-for-medication-blister-packaging>

Stay in touch with Cate by following her on:

- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/ecocodyofficial/>
- Twitter <https://twitter.com/catecodyeco>
- Blog: <http://www.ecocody.com/>

2. Q and A transcripts

Pre-event

Q1 David Brockaway: What can we do to pressure supermarkets to reduce plastic packaging, particularly at a local level? I love things like the Refill Pantry and the Market in St Albans town centre (where much less waste is produced), but they will never compete with the volume of people who use supermarkets, this is therefore a vital ground for us to influence. I also ask specifically about a local level as supermarkets are such giant organisations, so getting change at an organisational level will likely take years - getting our local supermarkets to act independently may achieve a small change quicker.

A1 Cate Cody: Personally I'm on a mission to not use supermarkets. It is do-able, but needs some organisation, so I'd definitely encourage the use of the independents, however, I appreciate your comment about the volume of people and agree about the local level too. I would suggest that you arrange a meeting with the manager and speak to them directly. I have often asked to see the store manager and voiced my concerns and the response has often been positive and helpful. Sometimes it is of course national and organisational policy stopping them making changes, but they always say that they'll pass on my comments and of course higher numbers of people (customers after all) asking, will help. Prepare yourself with lots of stats and other examples: Iceland are working towards xyz, Lidl sell loose nuts, Waitrose are running trials with large loose food sections etc.

Q2 Diane Bell: Bin bags and so-called biodegradable food waste bags (which take years to disintegrate) are multiplying the plastics problem. I use paper bags for both. What do you use, and what is your town council doing to facilitate the transition for the people of Tewkesbury that St Albans could emulate?

A2 Cate Cody: I completely agree. I don't use a liner for our bin as nothing goes in there that is dirty or wet. It goes loose into the bin, which makes it easier when I go back through it. For example, three and a half years ago, crisp packets weren't recyclable. Now that they are, I was able to pop on some gloves and fish them back out. For food waste, I would use either newspaper, a second hand paper bag, a bag made from newspaper (origami), or a small paper envelope - very little goes out as we compost and have no food waste other than a few non edible, non compostable items such as a cooked bay leaf / roasted garlic skin / lemon peel (after eating and then using for cleaning) etc.

I have been a Town and Borough Councillor since May 2019. I chair the Climate Action working group at Town Council and so far we have done the following:

The Town Hall is now a collection point for:

- Toothpaste tubes, toothbrushes and dental floss packaging
- Plastic rings that hold together 4 or 6 pack drinks cans.
- Medical supplies - out of date but sealed bandages, ice packs etc - these will be sent to Vale Wildlife Animal Rescue Centre.
- Wine corks recycling (wip)

All items can be taken to the Town Hall during opening hours, or posted through the letterbox when shut. Money raised from the Terracycle items will go to the Mayor's Charities.

Water fill station - You can now fill your water bottle up in the Town Hall kitchen.

Town Council buildings are supplied by **Green energy companies** for both their electricity and gas.

The Watson Hall team is committed to **reducing plastics** - using carefully selected suppliers and offering alternatives wherever possible.

Paper use reduction - Councillors now have to opt-in to receive paper copies of agendas etc and many previously printed documents are now being circulated electronically.

TTC took part in **No Mow May** this year, we are also planting some fruit trees in the autumn.

Through the Town, I have also set up the Tewkesbury branch for **Plastic-Free** Towns, we're working our way towards accreditation with the parish of Tewkesbury Town as our scope.

At Borough, I tabled the motion to declare a Climate Emergency. This was eventually passed (with, unfortunately some watering down), but it's a start and we have now had an audit completed. I am vice-chair of the Climate Action and Flood Risk Management working group at Borough. I can't share any further details of the audit until its published next month, but there are some excellent and relatively easily achievable suggestions for some huge improvements.

Q3 John Wills: My wife uses a lot of fresh water cleaning empty cans and food containers before putting them in our household waste. Hopefully to be recycled and not end up in a landfill site. I don't see the logic in this. To my mind she is expending a valuable resource, fresh water, to clean things which may end up in a landfill. Is this sensible?

A3 Cate Cody: Firstly, I'm pleased that you both care about this. Personally, I wouldn't waste clean water on this, although recycling does of course need to be clean. We don't use many tins, mainly tinned tomatoes when fresh ones aren't in season and the occasional tin of coconut milk. With both, I would empty the contents either in cooking or if only using some, the rest into a container for the fridge, or freezer for the coconut milk. Then I would rinse the can out (Carefully!) using boiled water and add to the cooking pot. This means everything goes into the cooking and fewer, if any food particles end up in the drainage system. I'd do a similar thing with other containers, depending what the material was. If this really isn't an option, I'd save these items for the end of the washing up. Answering the second part of the question, the majority of tins will be recycled. Plastics I'm more sceptical about. Best avoided wherever possible.

Q4: How has Cate managed to avoid disposable items during lockdown? Has she been able to enjoy takeaway coffee in her own cup? Have shopkeepers been ok with her reaching out with her own bag whilst trying to social distance?

A4 Cate Cody: This is a lovely, easy question for me to answer. The only things we bought during lockdown were: food, some veg seeds / plants (food) and one book. The veg pots were returned to the (local, independent) supplier. Just before lockdown, we stocked up on library books (you can have up to 20 each) and have used two village 'libraries' which are both within cycling distance (repurposed phone boxes), but they were a bit low on French books, hence the purchase. I don't drink coffee, but if I did, personally I would rather go without than use a single use cup, (I carry my water bottle everywhere). Some providers have allowed people to use their own cups and pots, so I'd use one of these. I do a mixture of making my own bread and buying from the deli, they have been fine about us using our own bag using very long tongs and outstretched arms from both parties.

Q5 Amanda Yowarth: Also I'd like to know Cate's thoughts about plastic recycling and whether we are wrong to think that recycling our plastic items is a good thing to do?

A5 Cate Cody: I believe that wherever humanely possibly, we should avoid plastics. Only 2% of plastics are ever recycled and unlike paper, they cannot be recycled several times, so eventually they have to end up somewhere. For example, bags for life are better than single use plastic bags, but bags made from canvas, hemp etc can be used a zillion times more and at eventual end of life, these will biodegrade. Plastics have their place (sometimes in medical use etc), but where we can find alternatives, I think we should. I would recommend watching the film *The Story of Plastics* and if not already done, consider setting up your 'Plastic-free' town via (Surfers against Sewage) who provide an excellent toolkit.

During event

Q1 Diane Bell: You mentioned recycling bubble packs which medicine comes in. Great idea. Perhaps even more important though is finding a way to recycling the medicine itself which tends to get incinerated. There are infection-related concerns but I believe that a system could be developed to overcome this. Would you help drive this forward?

A1 Cate Cody: I agree Diane there is such waste. It seems ludicrous that unopened, in-date medication can't be given to someone else, but I think there can be serious H&S implications and sadly the costs to manage would be huge as well. I'm sure a better computerised system could flag up where over excess stocks of medication is ordered. I think one huge thing would be to treat the bigger picture - the general health of the nation, both mentally and physically. This could heavily reduce the need for medication (for many).

Q2 Ian & Angela Troughton: Will you tell us what the alternative Marmite is?

A2 Cate Cody: The marmite alternative is Natex, which also comes in a low salt version.

Q3 Amanda Yorwerth: Have you been able to use your own pots in supermarkets during COVID?

A3 Cate Cody: I only used one of the supermarkets a couple of times during lockdown and they let me use my own pots at the Deli counter.

Q4 Ian & Angela Troughton: Is it true that supermarkets waste a lot more food than households?

A4 Cate Cody: That may depend on the household ;) Supermarkets have got a lot better at stock control, but yes, they still waste far too much. However, they can be very cooperative and certainly here, community groups have been working closely with some of them, collecting near to sell by date items and distributing them to those in need. It would be good to have these systems working with every supermarket in every location.

Q5 Ian & Angela Troughton: If you don't use bin liners, what do you do with the millions of charity plastic bags that come through the door?

A5 Cate Cody: You can put a sticker on your door, asking not to receive them. Sometimes I take them back to the shops so that they can give them to someone else. I use them occasionally for charity items and for scrap material / clothes (that can't be composted).

Q6 Julie Grant: batch cooking and freezing is a great way to save food and time waste

A6 Cate Cody: Yes, definitely. If applicable, we'll make at least double and then freeze / eat another day. Also there are some things that can be added to the soup pot that work well like leftover mashed potato, rice or hummus.

Q7 Alison Carter: we like butter or alternative on bread. packaging is a problem. any suggestions for alternatives to a avoid plastic etc

A7 Cate Cody: Oil (in a glass bottle) is often the continental choice with bread. You can sometimes buy butter from farmers' markets or directly from the farm and they should allow you to take your own container. Apparently Kerrygold USA butter wrappers are recyclable..... worth lobbying Kerrygold UK / or the company who sell the one you like.

Q8 Diane Bell: Very interesting to hear of your personal impact but would like to hear more about what you've done as a town councillor to multiply your impact please.

A8 Cate Cody: Some of the Town / Borough Councillor work is answered in full in one of the pre-sent questions. When I worked for a tech company, I reduced all sorts of waste streams and set up some reuse and recycling as well. The company reduced their waste by 90-95%. Much of what we can do personally can be transferred to businesses.

Q9 David Brockway: Do you have any version of a "toolkit" of suggested recommendations for meeting with a supermarket manager? I would be worried that with my lack of knowledge they could run rings round me and the meeting wouldn't get anywhere.

A9 Cate Cody: I'd recommend visiting a few different supermarkets and picking out any good things they're doing (get photos), then you have evidence that alternatives are possible. Keep up the public pressure - this has meant that crisp packets are now recyclable and Easter egg packaging is better (although you could argue that Easter eggs are completely unnecessary and a classic example of capitalist consumerism - and before I'm labelled a bah humbug, one or two would be ok, but when every member of every family in every street everywhere buys one for each other, it's becomes pretty sad and a complete waste of resources).

3. Links to ethical consumption

Remember, it's always good to support/shop local rather than the big stores and online shopping.

Ethical consumer: <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/> and a tab for supermarkets <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/retailers/shopping-guide/supermarkets>

LoofCo washing-up pad: <https://www.ethicalsuperstore.com/products/loofco/loofco-washing-up-loofah-pad/>

Luffa Sponge seeds: <https://www.premierseedsdirect.com/product/gourd-luffa-sponge/>

WUKA period pants: <https://wuka.co.uk/> (local St Albans entrepreneur too)

Natex yeast extract: <https://www.realfoods.co.uk/product/7336/yeast-extract>

Terracycle: <https://www.terracycle.com/en-GB/>

Surfers Against Sewage: <https://www.sas.org.uk/>

4. Links to films:

- Story of Plastic: <https://www.storyofplastic.org/>
- The economics of happiness: <https://www.localfutures.org/programs/the-economics-of-happiness/film/>
- Demain: <https://www.demain-lefilm.com/en/film>

- That Sugar Movement: <https://thatsugarmovement.com/film/>
5. Blogs and articles on zero waste, plastic free
- Cate Cody's blog: <http://www.ecocody.com/>
 - Keeping your bathroom clean and green: <http://www.ecocody.com/2017/09/how-to-keep-it-clean-but-green-in-your.html>
 - 37 things you can do to be plastic-free: <http://www.ecocody.com/2018/07/thirty-seven-things-you-can-do-to-be.html>
 - Using keepcups in a pandemic: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/22/reusable-containers-safe-during-covid-19-pandemic-say-experts>
 - Centre for Alternative Technology: <https://www.cat.org.uk/> (including short courses)
 - Committee on Climate Change (report from May 2019): <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>