

# THE BY BROOK SUSTAINABILITY CALENDAR - APRIL - WASTE

Welcome to the latest edition of the By Brook Sustainability Calendar, a local initiative to encourage local people to live in harmony with our planet. Each month we'll tackle a topic covering facts and innovations, then we'll provide tips and advice.

This month we look at waste, by which we mean domestic or household refuse, commercial waste, and everything else that humans produce which is not sustainably used.

## Why are humans unique regarding the waste they produce?

No other living creature creates waste and other by-products which can't in turn be used by other species. Why do we say 'oh, just throw it away', when there is no such thing as 'away'?

## Why is this a problem?

We are consuming resources at a much greater rate than our planet can replenish them. This is leading to climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as the devastating direct impacts of waste in our environment.

## What is the scale of the problem?

It's big. In the UK we produce 26.4 million tonnes of household refuse per annum, whilst commerce and industry produce another 42.6 million tonnes. Together this equals 1 tonne for every single one of us -- and the number continues to rise.

Food waste and plastic waste get lots of publicity and for good reason:



Humans waste over 30% of the food we produce. The 6.6 million tonnes of household food waste thrown away in the UK annually accounts for nearly 25 million tonnes of CO2 emissions. It requires an area almost the size of Wales to produce all the food and drink currently wasted in the UK.

Globally 353 million tonnes of plastic waste were produced last year, and only 9% was recycled. It is estimated that 8 million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean every year. The problem is so serious that UN members have just agreed to start work on a global treaty to tackle plastic waste.

## Is recycling the answer?

Most definitely not; there are other steps we can consider first. This is known as the 'waste hierarchy':

First, we should try to avoid buying anything we don't really need. Second, we should ensure that whatever we buy lasts as long as possible and can be re-used or repaired when we have finished with it. We should also choose products that have minimal and recyclable packaging.

Recycling is important, but it sits well down the hierarchy because it is resource- and energy-intensive. Very often recyclable materials don't get recycled at all (recycling rates in England for domestic refuse have stalled around 45%) and simply go to landfill or incineration.

## What can businesses do?

For centuries, the dominant economic model has been linear, based on the assumption of infinite resources with waste being the inevitable endpoint. It is now acknowledged that waste is a design fault and we need to move to a circular economy.

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With this in mind, an increasing number of companies are making big strides on waste solutions. For example, Vivo Barefoot enables customers to repair their shoes or have them regenerated for another customer when they have finished with them. [vivobarefoot.com](http://vivobarefoot.com)

Another good example is The Little Loop, which has a rental model for children's clothing. This allows the use of secondhand clothes, and enables worn-out garments to be recycled, countering the common problem of unwanted clothing going to landfill, especially kids' clothes because they grow up so fast. [thelittleloop.com](http://thelittleloop.com)



In the tech arena (infamous for inbuilt obsolescence) Fairphone produces mobile phones with replaceable modules which allow easy DIY repairs, a five-year warranty and software updates. [fairphone.com](http://fairphone.com)

### What can we do now?

Inspired by these forward-thinking businesses, as consumers we can do a huge amount to reduce waste in our lives. Here are just a few tips:

- Learn more about the circular economy, and how it can tackle global problems such as waste, pollution and climate change, at [ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](http://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org)
- Support local businesses committed to waste reduction. For example, Squeeky at Home Shop in Emery Gate in Chippenham offers organic cleaning products in refillable bottles. [squeekyshop.co.uk](http://squeekyshop.co.uk)
- Join the campaign against plastic waste at City to Sea. [citytosea.org](http://citytosea.org)
- Buy used timber or get rid of your un-needed wood at Wiltshire Wood Recycling near Castle Combe. [wiltshirewoodrecycling.org.uk](http://wiltshirewoodrecycling.org.uk)
- Use the Chippenham Freecycle for moving on or finding unwanted items. [freecycle.org/town/chippenham](http://freecycle.org/town/chippenham)
- Learn more about local recycling (what goes in what bin) at Wiltshire Council's website [wiltshire.gov.uk/recycling](http://wiltshire.gov.uk/recycling) (and please don't forget to wash out jars and other containers; contamination can lead to the rejection of large quantities of material).
- Opt out of junk mail via MPS, the mailing preference service. [mpsonline.org.uk](http://mpsonline.org.uk)
- Check out Love Food Hate Waste for a feast of good ideas. [lovefoodhatewaste.com](http://lovefoodhatewaste.com)
- Try out Good Club for waste free groceries [goodclub.co.uk](http://goodclub.co.uk)
- Lobby businesses to reduce waste whenever something bugs you! An email or – even better – a comment on their social media may result in positive action.

**Next month** we cover Nature.

Meanwhile, if you have comments or ideas about waste, or any of the other topics we've covered so far in the By Brook Sustainability Calendar, contact us at [mike@vertigosdc.com](mailto:mike@vertigosdc.com)

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