

TO: **ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8<sup>th</sup> June 2004**

SUBJECT: **Campaign for a tax on plastic bags in Warwick District.**

FROM: **ACTION 21**

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1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform the Committee of possible ways of implementing a campaign for a tax on plastic bags and to seek comments on this for passing to the Executive.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 This report follows a motion proposed to Council on 25 February 2004 by Cllr Mrs Margaret Begg, as set out below:

"That this Council agree due to the environmental damage which plastic shopping bags generate in their production and lifetime, to launch and lead a vigorous campaign for the introduction of a tax on plastic shopping bags similar to that which has been successfully introduced in other countries and that revenues generated be used to finance work to protect and enhance the environment."

- 2.2 The motion was referred to the Executive, on 5 April 2004, which requested a report be submitted to this Committee from Action 21.

- 2.3 **Environmental Impact:** Plastic carrier bags are a global litter problem. Roughly 8 billion are handed out in the UK each year, that's over 300 per household or 134 per person each year. Total waste polyethylene accounts for 800,000 tonnes per year. Since they can take hundreds of years to degrade and only 1 in 200 is recycled, the vast majority accumulate in the waste stream where they pose environmental hazards. Our use of plastic bags also places demands on oil resources and a significant amount of energy to be spent on their production.

- 2.4 **Other Disposal Options:** When bags which contain chlorine inks and other additives are **incinerated**, hydrogen cyanide, dioxins and heavy metals are emitted. At the moment, **recycling** facilities in the UK are inadequate for the number of bags that are used so this is not a viable option for the majority of plastic bags.

- 2.5 **Irish plastic bags tax:** Ireland introduced a tax on plastic bags in March 2002 following a national education campaign. Prior to the tax, around 1.2 billion free plastic bags were given to shoppers every year. The levy was set at 15 cents (9 pence) and in the three months after it was introduced, shops handed out just over 23 million plastic bags - about 277 million fewer than normal. The 15 cent levy raised over €3.5m in the first 4 months and this money is currently being used for environmental projects. The Irish scheme has also been very successful at increasing public and consumer environmental awareness, encouraging reuse and the increased sales of alternative and more environmentally friendly bags.

- 2.6 **Policies in other countries:** In Denmark, Germany, Finland, Norway, Belgium, Sweden and Italy charges have been introduced to reduce plastic bag use. Bangladesh, India, South Africa and Taiwan have gone even further by banning plastic bags completely because of the adverse effect they can have on the environment and on wildlife.
- 2.7 **Public Support in the UK:** a recent MORI poll has shown that 63% of the UK public would support a 10 pence charge on plastic bags. Such widespread support seems to demonstrate that the public is much more sympathetic to new charges if there is a clear environmental benefit and any revenue is ring-fenced for environmental initiatives 'Public support for tax on shopping bags', MORI, April 2003 <http://www.mori.com/polls/2003/meb1.shtml>

### 3. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 **Corporate Strategy:** The Motion directly supports the council's own corporate aim to "Improve our services to provide a cleaner, greener environment."
- 3.2 In order to be effective such a scheme would have to be taken forward on a national scale, which means campaigning is the most effective action which could be done in Warwick District.
- 3.3 The only budgetary implication is officer time.

### 4. WHAT WE COULD DO

- 4.1 The District Council could write a letter to the LGA (an appropriate National level organisation) expressing our support for a plastic bags tax and urging the LGA to take the campaign forward on a national level. Action 21 could also formally write to the LGA.
- 4.2 The District Council could formally write to Central Government through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Environment Minister, Elliot Morely, and MPs James Plaskitt and Andy King. Action 21 could write similar letters as well.
- 4.3 Action 21 could also do a press article about the campaign, encouraging members of the public to write to their MP.
- 4.4 It is proposed that the above actions be undertaken by Jenny Sansom of Action 21 in liaison with other WDC officers.
- 4.5 If Councillors or other individuals wish to become more involved in this campaign and dedicate some of their time, there is an opportunity to do so through the Action 21 recycling group. A campaign involving recycling group volunteers could involve regular press articles, more liaison with other local authorities encouraging them to pass similar motions and more liaison with central government and other NGOs on the issue.

## 5. OUTCOME REQUIRED

To agree a strategy to take this matter forward for consideration by the Executive.

Jenny Sansom  
Sustainability Officer, Action 21

### BACKGROUND PAPERS

'Irish bag tax hailed a success', BBC News, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2002

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2205419.stm>

'Plastic Bags are choking the Life out of India', Robert Edwards, Greenpeace India, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2000 <http://www.mindfully.org/Plastic/Polyethylene/Bags-Choking-India22oct00.htm>

'Planet Earth's new nemesis?', BBC News, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2002

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1974750.stm>

'Irish success paves way for UK plastic bag levy', Guardian Unlimited, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2002

<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/green/story/0,9061,777732,00.html>

'Waste Not, Want Not', Strategy Unit, November 2002 [http://www.number-](http://www.number-10.gov.uk/su/waste/report/downloads/ai.pdf)

[10.gov.uk/su/waste/report/downloads/ai.pdf](http://www.number-10.gov.uk/su/waste/report/downloads/ai.pdf)

'Meacher floats plastic bag tax', May 2002, <http://www.endsreport.com>

Best Foot Forward 'an estimate of the effect on CO2 emissions of the Irish plastic bag tax', March 2002 <http://www.bestfootforward.com>

'The Impacts of Degradable Plastic Bags in Australia', Department of the Environment and Heritage, Australian Government, September 2003

<http://www.deh.gov.au/industry/waste/degradables/>

'Public support for tax on shopping bags', MORI, April 2003

<http://www.mori.com/polls/2003/meb1.shtml>

'Plastics in our Environment', The Science Education Website, April 2002,

<http://www.sciencedotcom.co.uk/T742%20plastics%20in%20our%20environment.pdf>

**Areas in District Affected:**

All areas

**Executive Portfolio Area and Holder:** Environmental Services Cllr Mrs Margaret Begg

#### **For further information about this report please contact:**

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