

Background on Plastic Free Kinvara

Through community engagement, Plastic-free Kinvara (Pfk) creates small, achievable projects that educate, inspire and promote sustainable buying habits and a rethink of our disposable lifestyle. Our mission is to permanently reduce consumption of single-use plastic in our community, and to influence consumers, retailers, suppliers, and governmental agencies to take meaningful action towards this goal. We raise awareness and campaign for reduction of single-use plastic.

Founded in March 2018, our first activity was the launch of a week long Plastic-free Challenge in April 2018. Since then, we liaise with Kinvara Youth Council and Tidy Towns, and meet with Kinvara schools green officers to streamline our efforts, supported by volunteer fundraising and grants.

We recognise that Plastic was created as a durable, robust material, which, when used as a single use disposable manner is a biohazard with a lifespan of centuries.

Plastic Free Kinvara's perspective

Plastic Free Kinvara has reviewed the county development plan and the input collated from the PPN meeting on the 20th July 2020,

In relation to the topic of the environment Plastic Free Kinvara would like to see Galway lead the way as an ecological beacon in the post COVID recovery.

Galway enjoys a stellar reputation as a tourist destination. Our beautiful landscape and beaches are integral to that. The Galway community depends on the reputation and quality, of our environment, waters and shoreline, for tourism, oyster harvesting, sea swimming and many other recreational and business endeavors.

Members of the Galway public want to protect their right to live in an environment which is adequate for personal health and well-being and protects the county's stellar natural assets into the future.

Plastic Free Kinvara endorses the thoughts and requests included from sections 1 through to 5 of the PPN submission, with the additions outlined below.

Topic 2 & 3:

Urban living and Placemaking and Rural Placemaking and the Countryside

Plastic Free Kinvara support the PPN proposal of turning rural hand pump locations into drinking water fountains and promoting these as meeting points (in a post COVID world!). We recommend these amenities, where developed, include a bottle refilling station for filtered drinking water.

We strongly endorse the promotion of cycling as a means of transport in our villages and specifically recommend that road widening and traffic rerouting be undertaken in villages including Oranmore, Athenry, Ballinasloe and Gort to allow easy and safe cycling access from all parts of the villages' suburban environments to the local schools, railway, and bus stations.

On the remainder of the plan PFK has the following input

Topic 6:

Environment, Renewable Energies and Communications

Plastic Free Kinvara wishes to see a strong emphasis in the Plan on raising awareness of current environmental concerns and requests that the plan includes accountability and deadlines for all targets and aims described therein.

Plastic Free Kinvara agrees that the Covid 19 pandemic has contributed to additional waste in landfill and our water ways. In relation to facemasks, or coverings sold for protective use the public should be encouraged to use reusable masks as their first choice preference. We recommend that reusable face-coverings be promoted for use by the general public, and suggest reusable facecoverings be sold tax free to make them a more cost efficient alternative to single-use, plastic containing, facemasks.

In relation to Single-use, plastic containing, facemasks, which are a litter blight across the county, we recommend that the incremental cost of litter collection, and clean-ups, associated with this be passed directly to the producers in line with the principles of producer responsibility outlined in EU directive adopted in July 2019. We recognise that a ban on single-use, plastic containing, facemasks, is not feasible until equivalent, plastic-free alternatives, are readily available.

Hence, we recommend that Galway, a hub of Medical Device research, prioritize and incentivise the research and development of a plastic free alternative to the currently non-biodegradable mask materials.

Plastic Free Kinvara endorses the removal of single-use plastic from the supply chain wherever possible. In specific, we strongly request that the following items, when they contain plastic in any format, be restricted for sale, use, and distribution in Galway;- fast food packaging, disposable cups, condiment containers, disposable hotel room mini-bottles of shampoos, washes, lotions, water etc., cutlery, wipes.

Galway schools should reduce the use of plastic packaged markers and crayons like "twistables".

Nappies and sanitary products containing plastic (Which is almost all of those on the market) should bear clear and prominent labelling making that information, and the lifespan of the material, clear and evident and stipulating that they CANNOT be flushed.

Plastic Free Kinvara would like to see the obligation on retailers and producers to

- Provide facility for the disposal and recycling of their packaging at site of purchase
- Cover the cost of packaging disposal on items they sell

(At a national level, and not specific to the County development plan, items imported should have a customs tariff that covers the cost of any packaging which will require disposal and/ recycling in Ireland.)

Plastic Free Kinvara agree that, as part of its environmental strategy, **the Plan must include a strategy to reflect a stronger commitment to recycling of hazardous waste and promoting this across the County.**

The cost of waste recycling should be assigned to the producer, so that correctly disposing of Paint tins, electrical goods etc. is free, or incentivised, and the cost is borne by the producer.

Plastic Free Kinvara requests frequent WEEE recycling collection events. WEEE collection events should be free of charge and more frequent.

Littering and dumping needs to be tackled more systematically. The Plan should therefore include an awareness and educational campaign and allow for a stronger enforcement of relevant laws (higher fines, for example).

- Additional Recycling Centres have been proposed (e.g. Gort) and this is supported by Plastic Free Kinvara.
- We want transparency and accountability on all items received at county centres, meaning the manner in which they are disposed of or recycled, needs to be set out by the county council.
- The method of processing for items not incinerated or sent to landfill need to be agreed in consultation with independent environmental scientists with no vested interest in the industry of recycling.

In relation to the recycling of plastic, the emphasis should be squarely on reduction, rather than recycling.

Plastic Free Kinvara caution that any introduction of incentivisation for the recycling of plastic consider the following

1. When plastic regrind is used, it is combined with virgin polymer material, meaning that items containing a target percentage of recycled plastic are also using fresh plastic and adding to the ecological burden of plastic on the environment.
2. Plastic cannot be recycled indefinitely, with each regrind and reprocessing cycle, the ability of the plastic material to be reprocessed deteriorates. This means less of the regrind can be used with each subsequent polymer reprocessing. Despite the deterioration of the plastics' material properties, its lifespan to complete biodegradation is not reduced.
3. Incentivising the recycling of plastic bottles may help with casual littering, but it does not make the plastic any less toxic to the environment. It creates the false impression that the issue has "gone away" or been dealt with, when, in fact, it just removes the issue from the public consciousness and provides manufacturers and distributors, a smoke screen.

We are especially wary of recycling "targets" as a means to achieve waste reduction. As a simple example; if today we produce 100kg of waste with 30% recycled, the direct scrap waste amount is 70kg. With increased waste production, we can meet a recycling target of 50 % in the future, while producing more than 70kg of direct scrap waste, all we have to do, is increase the overall waste generated to more than 140kg.

This is exactly what will happen if we focus on a recycling target without a stipulation that the total overall waste produced be reduced.

This is beautifully illustrated in REPAKs' 2019 annual report, which highlighted the increased production of packaging by their members, as having an positive overall effect on their bottom line due to the incentivisation of recycling, see below

"The outturn for 2019 was positively impacted by revenue arising from new Member recruitment and increased packaging placed on the market by existing Members."

REPAK, a government supported agency, with a full time staff that ostensibly is "not for profit", is funded by retailers, manufacturers, and waste producers with a vested interest in recycling as a growth industry.

These influential government advisors have a vested interest in increasing the production of waste so they can increase the volume they are paid by the government to recycle.

We think the recycling of glass bottles should be the focus of an attractive incentivisation scheme. We would like to see retail, and hospitality outlets, throughout the county encouraged, through whatever means are available, by the county council, to promote the sale and consumption of drinks, and food, in biodegradable, environmentally friendly, alternatives, rather than in plastic packaging.

Section 11

Plastic Free Kinvara strongly endorse an emphasis on supporting biodiversity though the replanting of native species in lieu of Sitka Spruce, wherever possible, throughout the county.

Role of Youth representation in the county council

Plastic Free Kinvara heartily endorse the PPN suggestion of inclusion of a youth representative in County level strategy, and policy planning and governance, In specific we would like to see the PPN representation updated to include a third seat on the SPC for Climate Change and Biodiversity reserved for a representative of the youth, perhaps nominated, though the Comhairle na nÓg network.