

Ban plastic bags – in Edinburgh

✘ Edinburgh is set to be the first Scottish city to work towards banning the use of plastic bags in our shops. At a meeting of the Transport, Infrastructure and Environment committee of the council last week, Councillor Alison Johnstone proposed a scheme that will reward customers who choose to avoid using plastic bags. This scheme was first introduced and successfully run by [Greener Leith](#) and was highlighted in the [Guardian Edinburgh blog](#).

Councillors have agreed to carry out a feasibility study concerning this scheme and if it goes ahead, participating shops will sell or give away organic cotton bags with a 'We heart Edinburgh' logo to shoppers. It is planned that these bags will then act as a sort of club or discount card, and the customer will be rewarded in form of a freebie, a voucher, or some kind of discount every time they used those bags.

✘ Gordon Millar who runs an online campaign to [ban plastic bags](#), played a crucial part in introducing the bonus bag scheme to the Council. Through the movement ["Global We"](#) Millar is connected with other environmentalists around the world and currently has 17,000 followers. Through the use of social media, the movement has been able to gather huge momentum.

Millar said that the Council's support is a huge step towards his ultimate goal of banning all kinds of disposable plastics.

"As an environmental campaigner, I think it is the best scheme in the world," Millar told The Edinburgh Reporter. "We are a global capital, a progressive city, with history of arts, culture, and independent movements. Let's do it here first in Edinburgh."

"It is our goal to leave a positive legacy for our community",

he said. "Plastic is a unique compound which didn't exist before the last century. It is designed for single use but build to last forever. Disposable plastic will be there for centuries and there is nothing we can do about that.

"Plastic bags are the most used consumer item and they are a metaphor for our throwaway society."

It is Millar's goal to raise awareness of this issue as most people have become blind towards the pollution that is caused by disposable plastics. He said:- "If you go to Princes Street Gardens, if you go to Holyrood Park, wherever you go, you will find plastic bags. And that is not just around Edinburgh or Scotland, it is around the entire planet."

More and more countries around the world realise that this unsustainable lifestyle is a serious issue. Ireland introduced a tax on plastic bags in 2002.

"They have had a 90 percent reduction in the first year.", said Mr Millar. Both Wales and Northern Ireland are also planning to launch a plastic bag tax. And Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, has announced that for the 2012 Olympics he wants London to be a plastic bag free city.

Scotland is one of the countries which has not yet stopped excessive usage of these disposable plastics. According to [the BBC](#), the UK is the highest user of landfill in Europe.

"There is a landfill tax for the land fill site in Edinburgh. Taxpayers are currently paying £7m a year to put our waste into a hole in the ground and this is, in effect, taking £7m of taxpayer's money and burying it. This is going to go up by millions of pounds in the next few years. This money can be better spent", said Mr Millar.

If asked whether it was likely that The Scottish Government would introduce legislation to ban plastic bags, Mr Millar pointed out that to ban disposable plastics successfully it is

important that people first become aware of the importance of a sustainable lifestyle:- “We want to encourage autonomy first of all. We want to encourage people to be more environmentally aware and ultimately we would like legislation.”

“If this happens successfully in Edinburgh it will then spark over to other Scottish cities”, he continued, “we don’t need many people to do this to reach a big audience. A small group of people can change the world and we have proved this now.”

In case you are wondering Gordon Millar is holding some blue marbles in his hands in the photo. These were a personal gift to him from the leader of the Blue Marble global movement, an environmental group which aims to carry out random acts of ocean kindness, and which you can find out more about [here](#). It is a site worth a visit – even just to see that the site knows where in the world you are.....!