

# PLASTIC PERJURY

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Over 80 towns have introduced bans on plastic 'carrier bags'. Is Salisbury City Council going to come clean about why it won't?

London Councils, the umbrella group for 33 local authorities in the capital, claim that Londoners use at least 1.6 billion supermarket carrier bags every year. An estimated 13 billion are issued to shoppers annually in the UK and 4 billion end up in landfill sites. London Councils have now approved a Private Bill aimed at encouraging alternatives to them following a consultation in which 90 per cent of people called for action, with over 60 per cent wanting an outright ban.

Traders in 80 mainly small towns round Britain have either introduced a voluntary ban or are considering one as a way to reduce landfill. No Wiltshire towns or cities are in this list. Salisbury had the 3rd lowest carbon emissions of the UK in 2007, but it appears

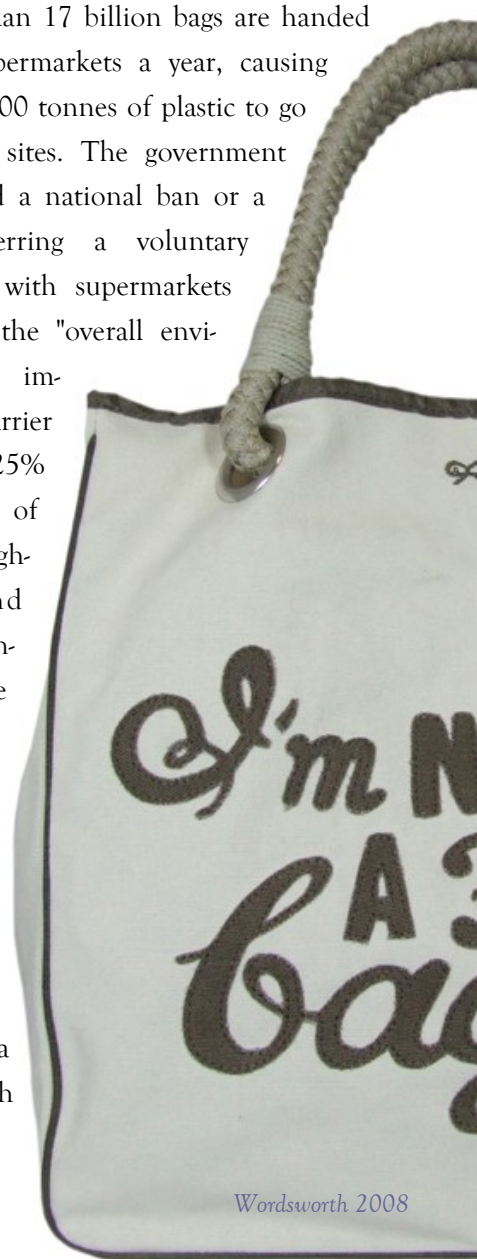
prices for them. Salisbury Council have also refused to recycle plastic bottles, admitting that the volume of the bottles would "result in fewer households being served by the resources available."

More than 17 billion bags are handed out by supermarkets a year, causing nearly 60,000 tonnes of plastic to go to landfill sites. The government has resisted a national ban or a levy, preferring a voluntary agreement with supermarkets to reduce the "overall environmental impact" of carrier bags by 25% by the end of 2008. Brighton and Hove council became the largest authority in Britain to offer support for a voluntary ban.

Any a Hindmarch

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that our city has decided to rest on its laurels, so far remaining ambiguous as to their position in relevance to the ban on plastic bags. Wiltshire has so far not agreed to back a bill on reducing plastic bags, or introducing





launched the limited edition £5 I'm Not A Plastic Bag this year. It has been criticized by some because it was made in China, but Hindmarch said they were careful to carbon offset the project and the intent was not to make a profit but "cast a spotlight on the issue". Taiwan is prohibiting not only plastic bags, but also disposable plastic plates, cups and cutlery used by fast food vendors. Threats of fines of up to £152 have resulted in a 70% reduction in the use of plastic bags, and a

25% cut in landfill waste. Ireland's 15p

"plastax" on carrier bags, introduced in 2002, has led to a 90% reduction in use. In France, reusable plastic bags

- heavier, easier to recycle and less likely to blow away - now account for more than half of

the market. San Francisco has become the first US city to ban plastic bags. The

ban will be enforced later this year.

Why all the fuss? Are carrier bags really such a problem? At first, they were considered a gift from God:

they were sturdy, cheap to produce and more convenient for carrying items. Today, almost 30 years on, hundreds of billions are produced each year worldwide. Many end up hanging from trees, clogging drains and are accidentally consumed by land and sea animals. In the European Union alone, 5-10 million tonnes of plastic waste ends up in landfills or is incinerated. However, the potential cost incurred on plastic bags is a matter which can only be insured with the back-up of the corporations themselves.

So what can we do? We need to make this an issue for our MP, Robert Key. If we can highlight the importance of re-using plastic bags, our MP, will make it a priority, and other regions should follow suit. Following the Bill deposited in Parliament on November 27 2007, parliament is aware that the environment is an issue to be concerned for and acted on. Another way of helping is by using bags that are durable and will not require replacing.

The sooner we get rid of plastic bags the better.

#### Join the debate

*To find out more about environmental issues in your local area, log onto:*

*<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/nov/13/plasticbags.pollution>*