

Response from the Nappy Alliance: Conservative manifesto for conservation

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Overview

The Nappy Alliance welcomes the Government's target to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042 as contained in the 25 Year Environment Plan. In our view it is imperative that Government looks to enact policies and promote messaging which ensures that this target is met. We believe that the Government is right to look at reducing the reliance on disposable nappies along with other single-use plastics including plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds as part of this strategy.

About the Nappy Alliance and key messages

The Nappy Alliance is a coalition of independent providers of reusable nappies which exists to promote the environmental and financial benefits of reusable nappies and encourages greater consumer choice for new parents.

At present the average baby uses 4,000 nappies up to potty training. This amounts to 8 million disposable nappies a day across the UK or three billion nappies during the course of a year. The majority of these go to landfill where they can take more than 300 years to break down while the rest are incinerated contributing to climate change and poor air quality. The plastics used in nappies include polypropylene and polyethylene, along with elastics, tapes and adhesives to secure the product. Together these make up over 30% of the materials used in a nappy.

The Alliance does not seek a ban on disposables and recognises the important role that they play for many busy parents. However, we strongly believe that there is a lack of consumer awareness and understanding around the alternatives available to disposable nappies and the economic and environmental benefits reusable nappies bring.

The reusable nappies market

The reusable nappy industry has revolutionised in the past few years, with companies reporting 100% growth in sales year on year over the past three years. Reusables are now stocked in all major retailers including Boots, Mothercare, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Tesco, Aldi, Morrison, and Asda. Current sales in the UK are £15m with large manufacturing operations in the UK, Europe, China, the US, Central America, Mexico and Egypt. The industry therefore has significant infrastructure in place to allow for increased market growth.

Benefits for parents and babies

- Modern reusable nappies are easy to use and wash, and do not contain chemicals which may come into contact with the baby's skin. Disposable nappies are made of superabsorbent chemicals, paper pulp and plastics while real nappies are made of natural fabrics.
- Because reusable nappies can be used again and again they help parents save considerable amounts of money. The Real Nappies for London study shows that for the first 130 weeks of a child's life parents save between £308 and £488 by using reusable nappies rather than standard disposable nappies and between £854 and £1,034 by using reusable nappies rather than eco disposable nappies.
- Using reusable nappies encourages children to potty and night train at a younger age. As the reusable nappy material gets wet babies are stimulated to experiment with bladder control developing the necessary muscles.
- Having a baby is a significant moment in anyone's life and a key time to make new lifestyle choices. Engaging with parents and carers who are about to have a child provides an excellent opportunity to encourage behavioural change and instil environmental good practice.
- Making use of reusable nappies and cutting the use of disposable nappies shows children from a young age the need to limit the use of single use plastics and take a responsible approach to the environment.

Advantages for local authorities of using reusable nappies

- The Real London for Nappies Scheme involves reusable nappy providers working in partnership with local authorities across London (including the two most deprived local authorities according to the IMD– Hackney and Tower Hamlets) to offer parents of children up to 18 months reusable nappy vouchers.
- According to a study by The Institute of Civil Engineers and The University of Northampton, the scheme delivered savings of £320,791 over nine local authorities between 2012 and 2016 based on reduced landfill tax and disposal costs. This is particularly significant at a time when local authorities are coming under increased financial pressure and more waste is entering systems stretching waste disposal services.
- The councils that have used the scheme have reported on greater community cohesion and an increased awareness amongst residents of the need for behavioural change that supports the environment.

What about recycling disposable nappies?

- The Nappy Alliance supports new research and development around the recycling of disposable nappies however nappy recycling plants are not widespread and have historically had limited success.

- There are currently no nappy recycling facilities operating in the UK. Even if these sites were to develop it would take some time for these facilities to account for a notable proportion of UK nappy waste considering the long lead in times for sites to be developed.
- A new nappy recycling plant has developed in Italy, however, by P&G's own admission, this is the first plant of its kind and unproven on a large scale. In view of this, we believe that the UK cannot solely rely on nappy recycling technologies to reduce the amount of plastic waste generated in the environment by disposables.

Key asks of government:

The Nappy Alliance would like to see the following initiatives taken forward by government:

- 1) To work with industry to develop a comprehensive information sharing campaign for consumers providing information on the impact that disposable nappies have on the environment, even when they are responsibly removed to landfill and the financial advantages of reusable nappies for parents, families and local authorities.
- 2) A government requirement on local councils to report on the number of nappies put into landfill and set targets for them to reduce this.
- 3) A central government campaign to encourage local authorities across the country to roll out reusable nappy schemes following on from successful programmes such as the Real Nappies for London Scheme.