

PROJECT PROPOSAL: PLASTIC-BAG-FREE CAMPAIGN

Background - The Opportunity

Single use plastic carrier bags are a significant environmental problem, as they easily become litter and are a choking hazard for land and sea animals, with many bags accumulating in the 'plastic garbage patches' in the middle of our oceans. Switching to reusable bags is a good first step to moving from a throw-away society to adopting a more sustainable way of living, both for traders and shoppers.

PACT's Resources & Waste action group has been campaigning for almost 2 years to reduce plastic bag use in Penrith. PACT has conducted 2 major surveys on attitudes in the town, and the responses gathered from 334 shoppers and 110 traders showed overwhelming support for limiting / replacing disposable plastic bags.

A recent 'Bag Swap Day' in October 2010 showed a keen demand from shoppers for alternative cotton carrier bags. There was also considerable support for our petition to the House of Commons, with over 600 signatures due to be presented by our MP Rory Stewart shortly.



Project Proposal

PACT proposes to continue this campaign with a pilot project, working with up to 30 interested traders in Penrith to provide alternative bags and advice to both traders and shoppers. Plastic bags in these shops would be replaced by alternatives such as cotton, paper and cornstarch bags. Publicity material supplied to the shops would explain the project to shoppers.

The project would first contact potential traders who were found to be supportive during our survey. Those interested would have their bag requirements assessed. Ideally various types of retail establishment would be involved. Next the project would distribute suitable alternative bags and publicity material, funding traders' initial costs for 3 months before then asking that they contribute thereafter to the on-going costs.

Benefits / Deliverables

The project would directly benefit the local environment for the people of Penrith through reduced litter in the town. More widely the reduction in single use bags would reduce the use of plastic & energy for this purpose, cutting related carbon emissions and reducing the non-recyclable waste going to landfill.

Many of the surveyed traders thought that a campaign to reduce plastic bag usage in Penrith would be good for the image of the town, and therefore could potentially increase trade in Penrith. As a high profile and very visual campaign this could also encourage shoppers to adopt other green measures.

This project could serve as a beacon to show that all of England can reduce plastic bag use further by the introduction of a bag charge by the government.

Projected Costs

This next phase of our campaign is budgeted to cost £8,000. A significant portion of this will be spent on alternative bags and publicity material. A part-time paid project officer will ensure the tasks are completed, with ongoing support 'in kind' from PACT volunteers.

PACT is supporting the project with its own funds, as well as pursuing grants from the Cumbria Waste Prevention Fund and Vitality of Penrith.

PACT (Penrith Action for Community Transition) is a Transition Town group formed in Cumbria during 2008, and is made up of an enthusiastic group of local volunteers.

PACT is working to promote a coordinated local community response to the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change, aiming to help develop a far greater resilience for Penrith and the surrounding Eden Valley.