



in Lancashire

Waste management – carrier bag research

Fieldwork 15 October – 28 November 2008

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1 Executive Summary

This wave of the Life in Lancashire panel looked at residents' usage of plastic carrier bags, and measured their perceptions of how to reduce the amount sent to landfill. The survey was sent to all 3229 members of the panel. In total 2587 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 80%.

1.1 Key findings

- Most people go to the supermarket every week (85%), with one in ten going every other week (9%).
- On an average visit to the supermarket:
 - more than four times as many people always use their own bags (43%) as never use their own bags (9%) – particularly among the over 60s; and
 - most people use between one and three bags on a single visit to the supermarket (46%), though a third of people don't use any (33%).
- Most people say they are using fewer free plastic carrier bags than they did a year ago (83%), women and white respondents being more likely to have reduced the number they use. The main reasons given for their change in behaviour was because of the increasing awareness of their environmental impact (73%), and the easy availability of alternative bags (particularly in shops 56%).
- Reuse of plastic carrier bags is high (92%), though it is slightly lower among the over 60s (87%). The majority reusing all of their plastic bags (67%), particularly among women (73%).
- The most common secondary use for plastic carrier bags was to put rubbish in (84%) or use as a bin liner (66%).
- The most owned and used alternatives to free plastic carrier bags were supermarket bags for life (84% own, 79% use regularly) and material shopping bags (63% own, 62% use regularly).
- The environmental impact of plastic bags is recognised among members of the public (19% say they have the highest impact). The mean rating was 7.37. It is women and white respondents who were more likely to attribute a higher environmental impact to plastic bags.
- Respondents felt that it should be the responsibility of retailers (33%) and members of the public (25%) to take the lead in reducing the number of plastic bags sent to landfill.

1.2 Recommendations

Although people don't see local authorities as having a lead role in reducing the number of carrier bags sent to landfill, this doesn't mean the county council can't take action. It is positive that people are seeing the need to reduce plastic bag usage and this is starting to have a visible effect on behaviour patterns. This progress could be continued through a number of means.

- Promoting the negative impact that plastic bags have on the environment, as this is a key driver of behavioural change, and highlighting the importance of individual action by the public to tackle the problem. For example, by encouraging people to reduce the number of carrier bags they use, and also to reuse carrier bags.
- Making sure alternatives to carrier bags are readily available (eg by lobbying retailers to ensure they provide bags for life) to make it easy for people to switch to more environmentally friendly bags.
- Looking at ways of encouraging people to always use their own bags when they go shopping (half of respondents only sometimes use their own shopping bags), especially targeting BME groups.

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Life in Lancashire regularly since August 2001. A panel of willing participants is recruited and is approached on a regular basis to seek their views on a range of topics and themes. Panel members are voluntary participants in the research they complete and no incentives are given for completion.

The panel has been designed to be a representative cross-section of the county's population. The results for each survey are weighted in order to reflect the demographic profile of the county's population.

The panel provides access to a sufficiently large sample of the population so that reliable results can be reported at a county wide level. It also provides data at a number of sub-area and sub-group levels.

Each Life in Lancashire wave is themed. Firstly, it enables sufficient coverage on a particular topic to be able to provide insight into that topic. And secondly, it comes across better to the residents completing the questionnaires if there is a clear theme (or 2-3 clear themes) within each survey.

The panel is refreshed periodically. New members are recruited to the panel and some current members are retired on a random basis. This means that the panel remains fresh and is not subject to conditioning i.e. the views of panel members become too informed with county council services to be unrepresentative of the population as a whole.

3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this consultation are to:

- find out how people use carrier bags (ie quantity and uses);
- usage of alternatives to carrier bags;
- reasons behind changes in usage;
- perceptions of the environmental impact of carrier bags; and
- who should have the responsibility for reducing carrier bag usage.

4 Methodology

This wave of Life in Lancashire research was sent to 3229 members of the panel on 15 October. A reminder was sent on the 12 November, and the fieldwork ended on 28 November 2008.

In total 2587 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 80%.

All data are weighted by age, ethnicity and district to reflect the Lancashire overall population, and figures are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated. The weighted responses have been scaled to match the effective response of 2188, which is the equivalent size of the data if it had not been weighted and was a perfect random sample.

4.1 Limitations

The table below shows the sample tolerances that apply to the results in this survey. Sampling tolerances vary with the size of the sample as well as the percentage results.

Number of respondents	50/50 + / -	30/70 + / -	10/90 + / -
50	14%	13%	8%
100	10%	9%	6%
200	7%	6%	4%
500	4%	4%	3%
1000	3%	3%	2%
2000	2%	2%	1%

On a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 1000 respond with a particular answer, the chance are 95 out of 100 that the answer would be between 47% and 53% (ie +/- 3%), versus a complete coverage of the entire Lancashire population using the same procedure.

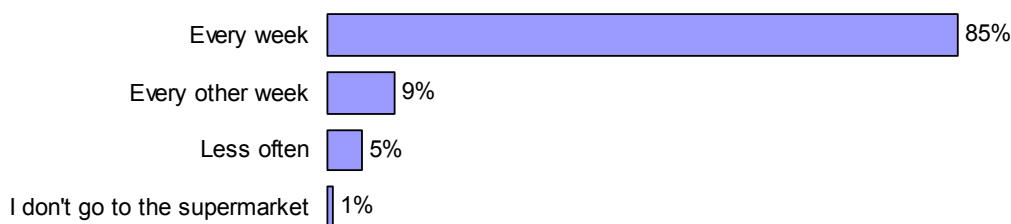
In charts or tables where responses do not add up to 100%, this is due to multiple responses or computer rounding.

5 Main Research Findings

5.1 Usage of plastic carrier bags

The first section of the questionnaire looked at residents’ usage of plastic carrier bags. The first question asked how often they go to the supermarket. Most people go to the supermarket every week (85%), with one in ten going every other week (9%), and fewer going less often (5%). Only a minority of respondents don’t go to the supermarket (1%).

Chart 1 - How often do you normally go to the supermarket?

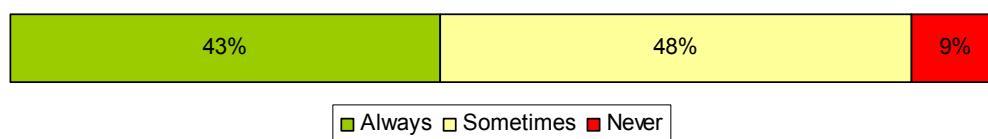


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2548, Weighted 2169)

The only difference in the frequency of visits to the supermarket for different respondents is that white respondents visit the supermarket more regularly (86% every week), compared to BME respondents (75% every week).

Respondents were then asked if they use their own bags when they go to the supermarket. More than four times as many people always use their own bags (43%) as never use their own bags (9%) when they go to the supermarket. Almost half of respondents sometimes use their own bags (48%).

Chart 2 - When you go to the supermarket, do you use your own bags?

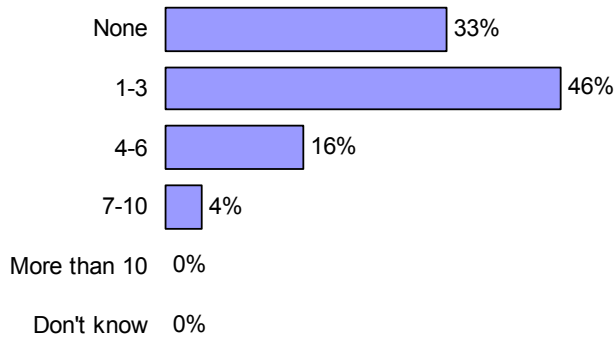


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2525, Weighted 2146)

It is the over 60s who are more likely to use their own bags when they go shopping (56% always use own bags). It is BME respondents who were less likely to use their own bags when they go to the supermarket (11% always use own bags).

The next question looked at usage of free plastic carrier bags supplied by supermarkets. Most people use between one and three bags on a single visit (46%), though a third of people don't use any (33%). Fewer people use more carrier bags (4 to 6 bags 16%, 7 to 10 bags 4%).

Chart 3 - On a visit to the supermarket, on average how many free plastic carrier bags do you use?

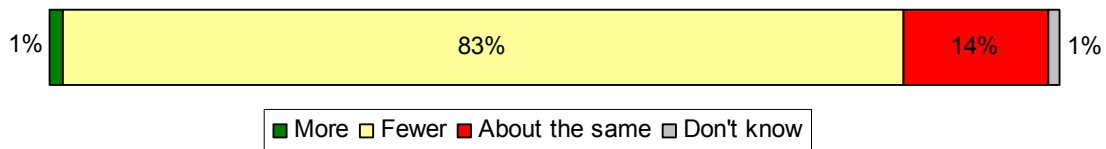


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2524, Weighted 2148)

Tying in with the usage of their own bags, it is the over 60s who are less likely to use free plastic carrier bags (42% use none) and white respondents (34% use none). Respondents from a BME background are more likely to use 4 to 6 free bags (41%). It is people who work (either full- or part-time) who are more likely to use free plastic carrier bags when they go shopping (28% and 29% respectively use none), and those who have children in the household (27% use none) – most likely a consequence of the age profile of these groups.

A lot of respondents are using fewer plastic carrier bags than they did a year ago (83%), one in seven people use the same amount (14%) and a minority are using more (1%).

Chart 4 - Do you use more or fewer free plastic carrier bags than you did a year ago?

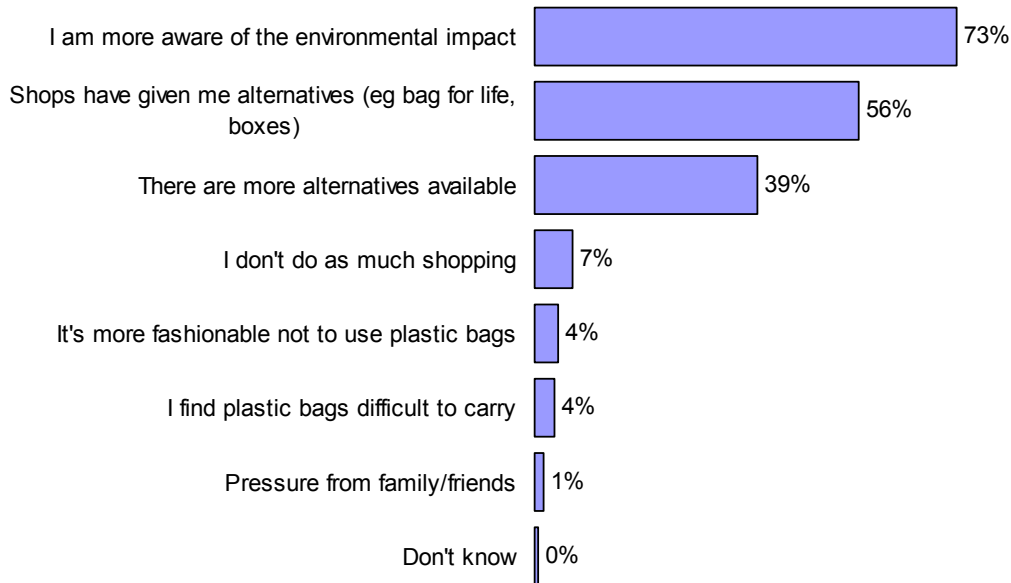


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2508, Weighted 2145)

Women are more likely to have reduced the number of carrier bags they use in the last year (86% use fewer) compared to men (79% use fewer). This is also the case for white respondents (84% use fewer) compared to BME respondents (49% use fewer).

The respondents who use fewer free plastic carrier bags were then asked their reasons for this change in behaviour. The most commonly mentioned reason was because they were more aware of the environmental impact they have (73%). Other important contributory factors are the alternatives, such as bags for life and boxes that supermarkets are giving shoppers (56%), and the increasing availability of alternatives to plastic bags (39%).

Chart 5 - Why do you use fewer free plastic carrier bags?

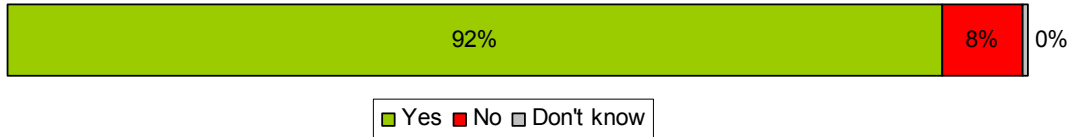


Base: All respondents using fewer free plastic carrier bags (Unweighted 2161, Weighted 1804)

Peoples' reasons for using fewer free plastic bags do differ between different groups. Among 16 to 24 year olds it is the availability of alternatives in shops that has encouraged them more (76%). Women were also more likely to mention the top three reasons compared to men, and BME respondents were less likely to mention the availability of alternatives (both from shops and more generally). It is residents of council or housing association properties who were more likely to say they have difficulty carrying plastic bags (11%), and people in the higher socio-economic groups who are more likely use fewer bags because they are more aware of the environmental impact (83% AB, 76% C1).

Almost all respondents reuse free plastic carrier bags (92%), only 8% saying that they don't. The majority of people reuse all of their free carrier bags (67%). A further quarter reuse at least half of them (18% more than half, 8% around half), only 6% reusing less than half, 8% around half), only 6% reusing less than half.

Chart 6 - Do you ever reuse free plastic carrier bags?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2524, Weighted 2140)

Chart 7 - How many free plastic carrier bags do you reuse?

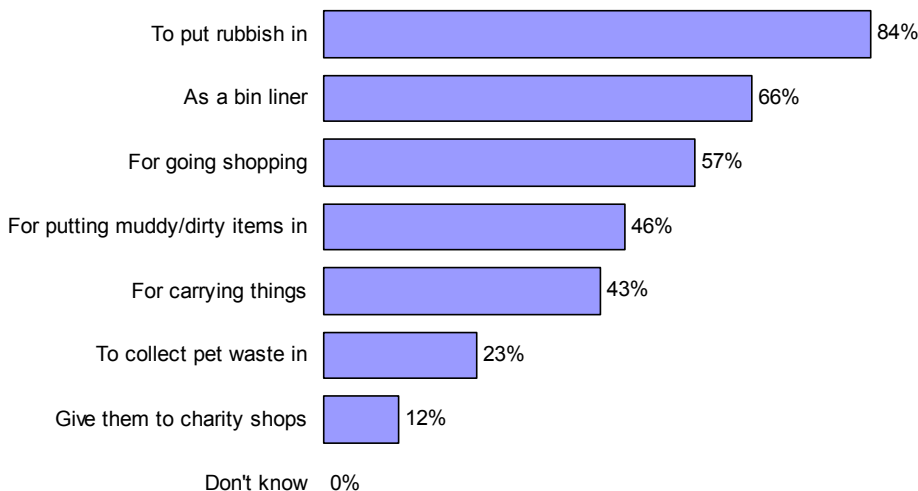


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2388, Weighted 2039)

The over 60s are less likely to reuse plastic carrier bags (87%) compared to people aged 25 to 59 (94%), and people in socio-economic group C2 who were least likely to reuse plastic bags (86%). Looking at the number of bags reused, it is women who reused more (73% all of them) compared to men (59% all of them).

The most common secondary uses of free carrier bags is to use them to put rubbish in (84%) or as a bin liner (66%). A further three-fifths use the same free carrier bags to go shopping with (57%).

Chart 8 - How do you reuse free plastic carrier bags?



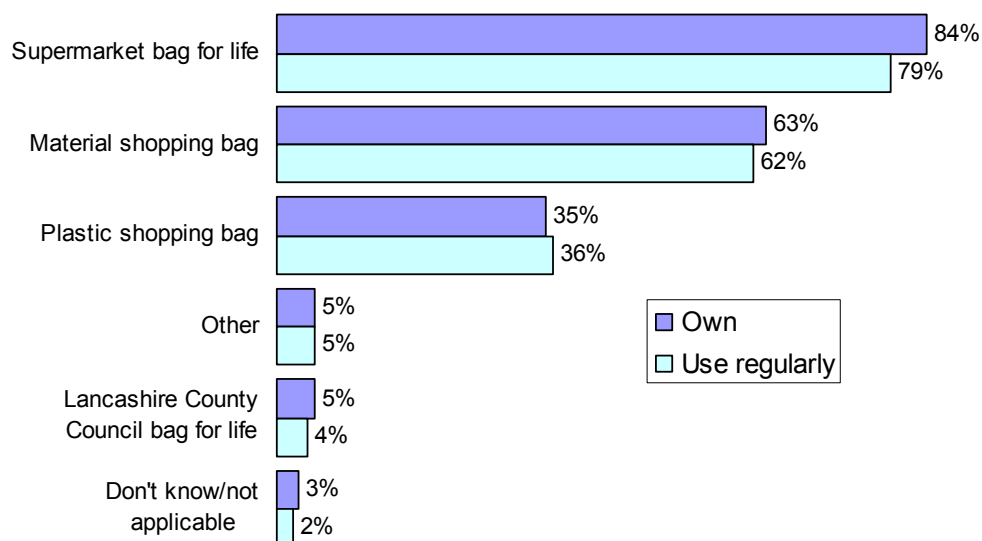
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2396, Weighted 2043)

Women are more likely than men to state each of the uses for plastic carrier bags, except for using bags as a bin liner. The over 60s were also less likely than younger people to use bags for going shopping (48%), putting muddy/dirty items in (30%), carrying things (25%) and collecting pet waste in (14%).

5.2 Alternatives to plastic carrier bags

Increasingly there are now alternatives to free plastic carrier bags becoming available to consumers. The following chart shows respondents ownership and usage of different types of reusable bags. The most owned and used were supermarket bags for life (84% own, 79% use regularly), and material shopping bags (63% own, 62% use regularly). For all types of bag ownership and usage closely matches, showing that intention is turned into action.

**Chart 9 - a) Which, if any, of the following types of bags do you own?
b) And which, if any of the following types of bags do you use regularly?**



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2131, Weighted 1799)

The propensity to use, and to own, a particular type of bag does differ between different groups of people. Looking specifically at usage of bags:

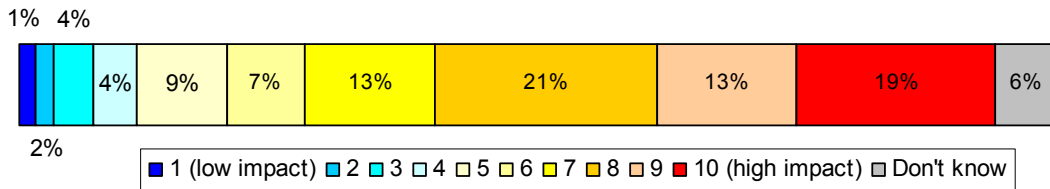
- a supermarket bag for life is used more by women (82%), and less used by BME respondents (58%) and the under 25s (61%);
- a material shopping bag is also used more by women (70%), and less used by BME respondents (31%); and
- plastic shopping bags are used more by the under 25s (61%).

5.3 Environmental impact of plastic bags

A couple of questions were asked around the environmental impact of plastic carrier bags. The first looked at perceptions of the environmental impact, asking respondents to rate it on a scale of one to ten (where ten is the highest impact).

Most people think that plastic carrier bags have a big impact on the environment, with one in five people saying they have the highest impact of 10 (19%). The mean score for the environmental impact was 7.37.

Chart 10 - How much of an impact would you say plastic carrier bags have on the environment, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is the lowest impact, and 10 is the highest impact)?

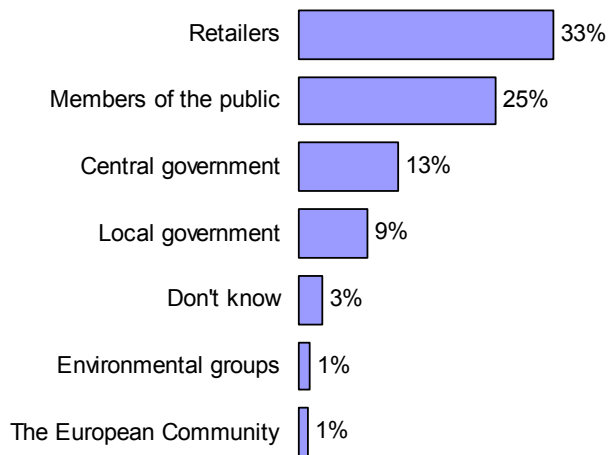


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2533, Weighted 2157)

Women are more likely to feel that plastic carrier bags have a bigger impact on the environment than men (mean 7.66 compared to 6.99 respectively); and also for white, rather than BME, respondents (mean 7.42 compared to 6.4 respectively). This difference could go some way to explain these groups different usage of bags.

The two main groups respondents felt should be taking the lead in reducing the number of plastic bags we send to landfill were retailers (33%) and members of the public (25%). Central and local government featured less highly (13% and 19% respectively).

Chart 11 - Who do you think should be talking the lead in reducing the number of plastic bags we send to landfill?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2530, Weighted 2145)

When looking at perceptions of whose responsibility changing attitudes to plastic bags, there are differences among individual groups of people. It is higher socio-economic groups who think that retailers should be taking the lead (AB 36%, C1 35%), white respondents are more likely to say that members of the public should be taking the lead (26%), and BME respondents who feel that local government should be taking the lead (18%).

6 Appendix

6.1 Socio-Economic-Group Definitions

These groups are based on Market Research Society definitions and on the respondent. They are graded as A, B, C1, C2, D and E.

Group A

- Professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.
- Retired people, previously grade A, and their widows

Group B

- Middle management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications
- Principle officers in local government and civil service
- Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments
- Retired people previously grade B, and their widows

Group C1

- Junior management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements
- Retired people, previously grade C1, and their widows

Group C2

- All skilled manual workers, and those manual workers for responsibility for other people
- Retired people, previously grade C2, with pensions from their job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group D

- All semi skilled and unskilled manual workers, and apprentices and trainees to skilled workers
- Retired people, previously grade D, with pensions from their late job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group E

- All those entirely dependant on the state long term, through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons
- Those unemployed for a period exceeding six months (otherwise classified on previous occupation)
- Casual workers and those without a regular income