

## Chaddesley cares about Planet Earth

I was prompted the other day, on seeing a whole pack of “biodegradable” plastic bags hanging in a shop, to wonder yet again whether they are truly what they say. Certainly originally they were not. But perhaps things have moved on?

Well, I have been doing a little research! As you might expect the “facts” differ. What remains the same is that no sooner has one body announced something is a vast improvement and the solution to the problem, than another declares it awful!! What follows is what I have gleaned.

Tesco, amongst others, are handing out biodegradable bags, so surely they must be alright? The European Plastic Recyclers Association is not so sure - “they have the potential to do more harm to the environment than good”. Tesco’s supplier says that the bags will degrade completely within 3 years; Tesco says within 18 months, without leaving anything that could harm the environment. Problem – if the bag ends up in landfill, it is unlikely to degrade at all; during the 18 months or 3 years that it is supposedly degrading, and there are a lot of ways in which it could re-enter the food chain and/or harm small animals.

**All** plastic bags are technically biodegradable: But the older ones may take a 1000 years to do so fully! There seem to be two sorts of degradable bag – oxo-degradable and bio-degradable. The former is less desirable than the latter. Oxo- bags need oxygen, light and heat to degrade – which is mostly not available in landfill which is where they go. Truly biodegradable bags are made out of 100% cornstarch, but these must go into compost. International standards require such bags to break down completely within 12 weeks and fully biodegrade within 6 months, but they will only do so if treated as compost – turned over regularly and kept well aerated. Such bags cannot be recycled

- Paper bags take more energy to produce than plastic ones
- It has also been suggested that making plastic bags that self destruct is wasteful of the energy and oil used in creating them in the first place
- Some biodegradable bags have been found to contain an additive (manganese) that actually stops the break down when the bag is put into compost
- What we really ought to be addressing is the consumption of such bags, in enormous quantities, not how they destruct later on in life
- Biodegradable bags cannot be mixed with other types of plastic bag when it comes to recycling. Entire batches of recyclable plastics can be rendered useless through the presence of such bags

Getting confused? – I am not surprised!! I think the main messages are still these –

- Avoid using and throwing away any sort of ordinary plastic bag
- Remember that compostable bags do not recycle well and must be treated as normal compost
- If a bag is not 100% cornstarch, the chances are that it contains some plastics that may prevent it degrading fully – it does not take much to affect adversely a small animal
- Use your own, reusable bag, made from cotton or fibres and avoid all plastic if possible

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For the Working Group set up by the Parish Council