

THE FOREST PLASTIC GROUP

# Avoiding a ‘knee jerk’ reaction

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One of the key aims of the Forest Plastic Group is to ensure adverse environmental impacts are reduced and that balanced and sustainable solutions are found when looking at alternative tree protection products.

A recent press release from the Green Alliance, Plastic is just the tip of the ‘single use’ iceberg\* highlights how public pressure on plastic pollution has meant that many companies are swapping plastic for other materials with new and sometimes greater environmental impacts, such as higher carbon emissions. Likewise, replacing single-use material for another single-use option doesn’t address the need for care with our non-renewable resources, and reuse and recycling should always be to mind in the search for alternatives.

We should also consider the toxicity of alternative materials both in production and disposal. For example, some of the alternatives to polymer tubes on offer include cashew nut products but in recent years there has been news coverage about the workers in the cashew nut industry suffering health effects from the caustic substances in the hard shell of the cashew nut. We must think carefully and fully assess all these aspects and impacts, alongside putting into perspective the relatively low level of plastic waste generated by the forest industry through tree tubes in comparison to the 31kg of plastic packaging waste produced by each person annually\*\*.

## Recycling

Some suppliers such as Berry with Tubex are offering recycling of redundant tubes to produce more tubes at factories based in the UK. This circular approach provides an excellent solution to the legacy of old tubes we have to dispose of, of course the transportation of tubes to recycling plants must also be



assessed and perhaps energy recovery is the better option where waste has to be transported any great distance.

As both an environment and health and safety professional all these aspects are forefront in my mind when we are looking at many of the alternatives being developed and presented to the Forest Plastics Group.

The Green Alliance also highlight that “Consumers ... are hugely confused about what bio-based, compostable and biodegradable mean”.

This issue has similarly come up within the Forest Plastics Group where we’ve had some interesting discussions on biodegradable plastic and the use of the term composting, what this actually means and whether a biodegradable alternative is really of any benefit if that doesn’t mean it will biodegrade in the open environment.

It is really good to be working alongside others in the forestry industry in such a collaborative way within the Forest Plastics Group to make sure that we have a joined up approach and find a sustainable

solution in the use of resource and management of waste for tree protection.

\* [www.green-alliance.org.uk/plastic\\_promises\\_press\\_release](http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/plastic_promises_press_release)

\*\* European Commission Eurostats 2018

See overleaf for Forest Plastic Group update



## The Forestry Plastic Group: an update

The Forestry Plastic Group, formed in early 2020, has continued to welcome members from across the forestry industry as it shares initiatives and good practice of managing plastic waste alongside researching the environmental impact and performance of alternatives on offer.

The Forestry Plastic Group is formed with Confor's support and includes members from Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT), Tilhill, the National Parks, Forestry England, Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales, Coillte - Ireland, Forestry and Land Scotland and the Woodland Trust.

Initial meetings framed terms of reference for the group that is currently focusing actively on researching new products, with the plan to analyse their effectiveness in field trials led by Forest Research.

A public vote helped Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT) secure funding

from the European Outdoor Conservation Association (EOCA) to begin trialing new products whilst progressing action in the short term to encourage a change in attitude towards tree protection and provide opportunities to recycle redundant plastic guards.

### Single use plastic

"As woodland creation in the UK gathers momentum we are very keen to reduce the reliance on single use plastic. Manufacturers are now responding to demand for sustainable solutions and several new products are under development", said Carol Douglas, Woodland Development Officer at YDMT.

"YDMT plans on trialing some of the new products over the next couple of winters and will feed into a national research project being developed by the Forestry Plastic Group. However, it will obviously be a several years before we

have conclusive results and so in the short term it is essential that appropriate management and disposal options are provided."

The Forestry Plastic Group is working in collaboration, and aims to improve communication, understanding and share expertise and experience within the forestry industry and to interested parties.

It wants to use a collaborative approach to look at concerns and problems with the use and management of plastic and therefore has welcomed several industry leading experts and companies to present at the meetings.

These include alternative tree guard manufacturers, and organisations like Tubex and Resource Futures - and one of the early conclusions is the real cost of removal and disposal needs to be considered from the start of any woodland creation scheme.

- Biomass
- Wood Chippers
- Crane Mounts
- Tractor Guarding
- Forestry Mulchers
- Forestry Winches
- Firewood Processors
- Portable Sawmills
- Grapple Saws
- Tree Shears
- Cone Splitters
- Sawdust Extractors
- Woodchip Blowers
- Timber Trailers
- Forestry Cranes
- Log Splitters
- Wood Saws
- Billet Bundlers
- And Much More



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