

Transcript of '5000 Giraffes of Plastic'

Season 2, Episode 18, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme Music]

Jan: In today's episode, you'll learn a load of rubbish. Yes, that's right. We're talking recycling, how local councils deal with it, and all the things you're probably doing wrong when disposing of your wastes. But perhaps more importantly, you'll learn something about New Zealand soap operas. So, let's get into our episode with Carly Sparks from Lancaster City Council.

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow, the podcast from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business here at Lancaster University Management School. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

Paul: We're almost done Jan. It's time for our last episode on the Plastic Packaging in People's Lives project.

We've covered a lot of ground in recent weeks, speaking to a lot of people, both from inside and outside the University. It's time to bring it all to an end.

Jan: And we're gonna bring it home as well 'cause we're going to be talking, uh, to Carly Sparks from Lancaster City Council, which is where we are.

Paul: Yes, it's a chance to discuss Lancaster as an area, to discuss how plastic packaging, recycling, et cetera, fits into that area. How councils have a role in what happens to recycling and how consumers, residents deal with it.

Jan: Excellent. So. Shall we get going?

Paul: Yes. Let's welcome Carly. Hello Carly, the Public Realm Improvement Lead at Lancaster City Council.

Carly: Hello, both.

Paul: Let's start off, just tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do within Lancaster City Council.

Carly: I have a really, uh, varied role actually at the Council. I work with a number of teams, some of them operational, carrying out statutory services.

And cover everything from cemeteries, uh, waste and recycling to events, prom, parks, lots of different areas really.

So in my role, I work with most of those teams, um, in some way, shape or another, uh, particularly supporting my management colleagues, really within the Environment and Place Directorate of the, the Council.

Jan: What I really liked about your job description is it said 'public realm'. So that's actually, that feels just like, so sort of wholesome and public facing and trying to build really nice spaces. Is, is that a typical role for somebody within the Council?

Carly: Really? No, it's not. [general laughter] Um, I'm, I'm quite fortunate that with my previous HR background, I'm able to use a lot of my skills and transfer them across into this role.

Um, I previously worked, uh, within HR at the Council and had, um, a lot of working relationships across different service areas, which really helps facilitate my role.

Paul: So can you tell us a little bit about Lancaster City Council, because there'll be some of our listeners who are not necessarily as familiar with this area as others.

So a little bit about...the area that Lancaster City Council covers geographically, and I guess also the, the people that are here as well.

Carly: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, um, Lancaster is classed as a, a relatively small district council. Um, and we are overseen really by Lancashire County Council.

So in terms of the geographical area, we cover 219 square miles within our district. The population is roughly 144,000, um, with about 66,000 dwellings. So there's the, it's quite, you know, a lot in, in a reasonably small area.

But obviously with our district council, we've only got small teams, so it's an awful lot to cover really from a day-to-day operational perspective. We've got really varying geographical, uh, landscape within our district, you know, so we've got coastline, you know, we've got very rural areas.

We, um, cover up to the borders of, uh, Cumbria, North Yorkshire and to Wyre. Incredibly rural areas involved in that and. Sometimes can pose quite a few challenges to, you know, especially operational teams.

Paul: in terms of places that people might have heard of in the area. You've obviously got Lancaster, you know, a very historic city that...

Carly: ...yeah...

Paul: ...you know, you go back as far as the War of the Roses and everything, and you've got Morecambe, seaside resort, one that we've talked about previously in the context of things such as the Eden Project and uh, the green transportation links there, we talked about that on this podcast.

What else is within the area then that people may or may not know about? 'Cause I'm guessing beyond the towns, there's quite a bit of a rural area too.

Carly: Uh, yeah, there is, I mean, you, you know, you've got the, um, the Lune Valley, um, you know, which encompasses quite a number of small rural villages, um, which takes you out to the, the, the edges of North Yorkshire, um, and up to kind of Kirby Lonsdale.

So you've got those sections there. You've got smaller areas edging into Cumbria. Um, so we, you know, we've got quite a lot of travel between some of these areas for our teams to work within.

Um, so we, you know, we, we split teams up so that they're working kind of Lancaster, Morecambe or in the rural areas to try and cover as much as we can do really. Um, but it is a bit of a, a job juggling that sometimes.

Paul: So I guess now we need to discuss how you fit in with the Plastic Packaging in People's Lives project. Now, Lancaster City Council is a waste collection authority. That's the, the definition of it. Can you explain a bit about what that is and how it fits within Lancaster County Council as well?

Carly: Yeah. So, um, as a waste collection authority, we are responsible for the kerbside waste collections of household waste. Um, and, and we also provide trade collections to, you know, commercial businesses, um, on contracts with them.

We are required to provide a, a, you know, a fortnightly service to householders for residual waste, which is your general waste. In what we use as a, a grey bin, um, and also a recycling service.

And within that recycling collection service, we have two waste streams. So we have paper and card, and then we have glass, plastic, and tins in the second stream. In regards to the kerbside collections and, um, where we fit in with

Lancashire County Council, we are mandated by the County Council, um, to carry out those kerbside collections on their behalf.

And they are then classed as the processing authority. Um, so we'll collect, and, um, take items to a collection point, uh, which is our Middleton transfer station, and then they will be taken away by different means of transport to processors who can deal with that particular waste stream.

Jan: What's really interesting about that, Carly, is that already you can see that it has to be a partnership piece of working.

So it's a partner between you and the household as to what ends up in the, the kerbside collection...

Carly: ...yeah...

Jan: ...but then also that your control and responsibility is around a sort of like a subset of it and then it gets passed on to somebody else.

Carly: Absolutely.

Jan: So that, that, um, yeah, that makes it complicated, I'm sure.

Carly: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Jan: And we might talk about that, but it also gives you more people to partner with to try to make the whole system work well.

Carly: It, it does. I mean, we, you know, we are quite limited in terms of our influence within this process and the process of, um, you know, recycling, reusing, processing of waste that we collect.

Paul: I think this is really taking us, and we can see that we are at towards the end of our podcast series on PPIPL, towards the end of the plastic process as well. We're not quite at the end yet, you know, there, there's the processing that goes on afterwards, but this is...people have used the plastics, we've had it manufactured, we've had it sold by the retailers, like when we spoke to Booths.

We've had it used by the consumers, and we've spoken to James and Alex about how consumers use the, the plastics and their attitudes towards it. And then we've got the Council coming along. And for those, maybe not in the UK, your waste operations might be slightly different, but in this country we have recycle bins and we have waste bins, and the different types of recycle bins

you get vary by council, and I know that one of the things that the PPIPL project as a whole has highlighted is maybe the difficulties for residents in assessing exactly what they're able to put in these recycling bins and what they're not.

When a neighbour five miles away in a different council area might have different instructions.

Jan: Yeah, and the, the other thing I wanted to pick up, from what you've described as well, you talked about statutory services. So these are things that are required by law to be, uh, uh, you know, performed.

Carly: Mm-hmm.

Jan: This waste collection is a statutory service.

Carly: It is...

Jan: ...it is, right...

Carly: ...yeah...

Jan: ...so actually then there's a lot of rules about how that can happen and, and so it's not sort of like, just not this, like anything goes. It's actually a very well defined process.

Carly: It is. We, we're governed really by the central government overarching waste strategy, which all local authorities have to abide by.

However, there are nuances to that across the country, and as Paul's just mentioned about different local authorities using different bins, different waste streams, we are exactly the same.

So what one local authority might do 30 miles away might be completely different to what we do, and you know, very much we will be mandated by Lancashire County Council in terms of what we can collect due to who and where processes are and their, their ability to actually, um, you know, process the waste collected.

Jan: Mm-hmm.

Paul: So with that in mind, you're saying that there's the central government mandates, there's the overarching authority, who's then got their rules and regulations as well.

What rules and regulations are, what changes can be made at the level of Lancaster City Council?

Carly: In terms of what we can collect...not a lot because we, we can't, we have no jurisdiction deciding that. What we can do is try and encourage residents to, you know, dispose of their waste responsibly and in an inappropriate way, using the right receptacles, um, you know, and, and recycling as much as possible, but also following our local authority guidelines to do that.

Um, you know, which has involved things such as our sort wash and squash campaign, uh, just to ensure that the quality of the recycling particularly is of the highest standard and enables as much of that recyclate to be processed and, and reused.

Paul: I guess that takes us sort of to the next question, which is how much recycling there is.

So you talk about doing fortnightly collections, so maybe if we talk on a fortnightly basis, how much waste do you collect over a fortnight and as a, an authority and how much of that is likely to be plastic waste that's being put in recycling?

Carly: Well, if I give you a bit of a, a summary of what we collected in 2023, just to give you an idea, because I've got annual figures really that I can share with you.

So, in terms of kind of the general or what we class as residual waste, we collected 36,534 tonnes of that. Recycling, we actually collected 8,998 tonnes, and things such as green waste, 'cause we do have a green waste, uh, subscription service during the summer, we collected 6,874. In terms of that recycling figure so that just shy of 9,000 tonnes.

What I can say is in terms of our recycling rate at Lancaster City Council, the current rate as it stands is, is standing at 36%, which isn't great. Um, and that's including waste that's sent for reuse, recycle, composting. However, the national average class it being 45%, so we're a reasonable amount lower than other local authorities.

So for us this is something key that we can try and influence and try and improve as much as possible.

Paul: Is this one of the reasons then why the City Council wanted to get involved with the PPIPL project?

Carly: Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, we, we know, you know, in terms of the level of waste we see strewn about in the district. Um, you know, there's an awful lot there that could be recycled, um, and repurposed.

And also, you know, in terms of people's behaviours around disposal of waste. And contamination as you know, people putting recycle, perfectly good recycle, into the residual bin. Um, and it's just trying to educate and support those residents to try and do the right thing and to do it in the correct way, really.

Jan: And it's quite tough 'cause you've got responsibility for it, but, but the responsibility, but you can't make people, uh, do stuff. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'd like to assure you I do, because I'm in your, your jurisdiction. I'm very, very conscientious. [general laughter]

Carly: I'm very glad about that, Jan. Glad to hear that.

[general laughter]

Paul: Well, I can give you no such truth because I'm not one of your residents so that that's, I could be doing anything and you'll never find out. [inaudible cross chatter] But I'm quite good though, I will say we're quite good.

Jan: And the information's really good, 'cause I know that you, you send us things to our household and, and, um, because we're sabbos, we read them, but also we read the, the, you know, the packaging we've got and the guidelines and whatnot.

But it, it's, well, it's not, it's not that hard to, to be able to read and figure it out. But if you're, say, really busy or if you're not motivated, then you can kind of see how people just sort of go, oh, well, I'll just throw it away here.

Carly: Absolutely, and at the end of the day, because we have got, you know, varying degrees of ability and prioritisation within the local population. You know, there's areas of high deprivation and actually their priority's just putting food on the table at tea time for their kids. It's not which bin they're putting, you know, some packaging in.

But I think it's trying to take out some of that confusion for residents as well. And we do try and work really hard in terms of that education piece. And to try and persuade people to do the right thing, are they putting things in the right bin?

It sounds simple enough, but actually in practice it isn't always that easy.

Jan: Yeah, and I suspect, suspect lots of our listeners also at this stage will be thinking about their bins and their recycling as well with exactly the same sort of things on their minds.

Paul: And it's a key thing that's been highlighted by the PPiPL project generally, which is all about the need for clear communication across the board so that everyone understands.

But also Jan, the project highlights the need for people to be exemplars within their own community and to spread their knowledge. So if you are reading these leaflets, if you know what you are meant to be doing and when you are meant to be doing it. You need to be sure that you tell all of your neighbours so that they can then have this knowledge as well. And they can do this...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...I mean, I don't know if you get along with your neighbours [Jan laughs] but just go knock on their doors and tell them what you're meant to be doing.

Jan: Well, I maybe got along with them before I did that, I suspect. Um, well, but. It's a really good point though, 'cause there's an older lady that lives next to us and so, um, we sometimes help her with some of those things because she doesn't move around so much.

So actually yeah, that's a really good example of being able to help somebody do it. But I don't as a habit, uh, uh, coerce my, my neighbours and go and see them and tell 'em, what are you doing with your recycling?

But I do chat to them so it could come up.

Paul: But it could come up in the workplace as well. You could be having conversations here about, someone's just had the, am I allowed to put this in the recycling? And if, you know, you say. Actually no, that can't go in the recycling. Oh, yes. That, yes, that can. Yeah. So it's, it's when the conversations arise.

Yeah. Maybe going and knocking randomly on every door on your street. Not the best idea if you don't want to become the pariah of the neighbourhood, but it's, you know, that that kind of like general conversation is gonna be real useful.

Jan: Absolutely, absolutely. And in fact, I, can I do a wee like side thing? Um. So there was some people I knew that were doing a research project in New Zealand and it was called Greening the Screen.

And so this was for like New Zealand soap opera operas, which believe me are dreadful. I mean, I'm sorry, New Zealand listeners, you know it's true. And so what they got is that the, this was a project to get like recycling bins in the back of shots and to have people discuss their, their relationship problems while they're putting the recycling out.

'Cause as a way of sort of making it seem like this happened everywhere, 'cause otherwise you're, you know, your, your TV things that people are watching have no, none of these actions in it. So that's another way of indirectly without knocking on people's doors.

Paul: So Shortland Street...

Jan: ...for example, yes...

Paul: ...I do believe that may be the only New Zealand soap that ever made it to these shores...

Jan: ...wow....

Paul: ...or at least certainly the only one I'm aware of. Lots of Australia ones. But the New Zealand ones, obviously those few extra miles and getting across the Tasman Strait caused all kinds of issues that we mean we don't get to watch them.

Jan: Indeed, it does indeed. But it's a really good, it's a good example of this normalisation...

Carly: ...it is...

Jan: ...of chatting about waste. So rather like, out of mind out of sight, I'm never gonna actually deal with it again. Actually being part of a con, not everyday conversation necessarily, but part of the conversation space

Carly: And it's part of everyday life. We all create rubbish, we all have rubbish to dispose of. How are we actually doing it?

And I think, you know, there's a key thing to that is actually instilling some of that behavioural, attitudinal, um, element at a younger age, you know, and we

do work with schools. It's been slightly trickier since Covid because we haven't been able to get in there, um, quite as much.

But we work with schools, you know, we work with, um, the general public. We do a lot in the centre of the city, you know, to promote, um, you know, the service and what we can do to help, whether it's, you know, obtaining receptacles, if they're struggling, if people are not sure. We also do campaigns on social media, you know.

We've, we've film crews doing, you know, all sorts of stuff and, you know, try to bring it to life for people really. Um, but there is a lot of guidance on our website that people can use as well, if there is any confusion. And I appreciate there's a lots of different types of packaging out there, which, you know, sometimes you can still go yourself, well, I'm not sure, should I be putting it in that bin? You know, and hoping for the best.

Paul: Yeah. 'Cause you end up with the idea of wishcycling. I hope that can be recycled. So I will put it in the recycling, and let's see what happens.

Carly: And we do see a lot of that, to be fair, you know, and crews will come across things within recycling bins and then that technically, you know, some of that and also contamination.

So it might be food contamination because people haven't necessarily followed the sort wash and squash process that we really want them to do, can cause an issue in terms of it contaminates a whole load and therefore that's going to landfill because it can't necessarily be processed then.

And I think people just think, oh, well it'll get washed. Some, somebody at a processing plant will pick things out and it, that doesn't necessarily happen.

Jan: It's always somebody else, isn't it? [laughs]

Carly: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Paul: So. What did you find out then, Carly, your, your involvement with the PPiPL project. What has this shown you that maybe you didn't know before the Council started taking part?

Carly: The interaction with this project has been fantastic and it has provided us with an opportunity to work with lots of different stakeholders that are part of...the whole cycle, you know, whether it's been consumers, uh, retailers, processors, um, you know, we've had a valuable opportunity really to be able

to hear the differing opinions and views and also difficulties that people have around, you know, waste, you know, and, and their experiences with waste, and how they dispose of it.

Some of the, the information, you know, could be expected, the outcomes expected, you know, within some of the reports, and you're looking at the attitude and behaviour gap, you know, and that the report that was, that came out of the, the project itself.

You know, there's areas in there that we can really focus on to assist us and trying to shape the work we carry out with residents. Um, whether it's, you know, from, from that practical aspect or from a strategic perspective.

But again, going back to, you know, the point of education is key to this and, and improving people's knowledge around it and enabling people to do the right thing.

So, you know, it, it's helped us understand a little bit more around that and to actually have a look at different strategies that we might want to try and implement going forward.

Paul: Has it been useful for you as well to be working on this project, not just with the experts from the university, but with supermarket groups, like you've had Booths and Waitrose have involved. You've had smaller companies that produce goods that involve plastic packaging. You've got the Chartered Institution for Wastes Management in there, you've got lots of other organisations at different parts of this plastic supply chain.

Carly: Yeah, because what we wouldn't necessarily have that opportunity otherwise. You know, I mean, I can go and ask my friends as consumers what they do, um, but is it as meaningful as hearing from different people through, you know, um, you know, the, the population, there was different groups of people and different consumers involved in that.

But the supermarkets, you know, when do you get opportunity to do that? Um, and to speak to them, to find out what their opinion is and you know about the products that they're selling, um, and how they're packaged and, you know, whether they, what their thoughts are around that.

But it, it was quite enlightening, um, in terms of understanding where we needed to provide some clarity to residents because people didn't understand why we ask them to wash things. Um, you know, as I mentioned before, you

know, if there's a contaminated load, it goes to landfill and we can't really do much about that.

So we want to try and make sure that as much of the waste that we collect passed on to the processors, can be recycled and reused.

Jan: And when you say passed onto the processors, I mean, do they pay for a receipt of that or do you have to pay them to take it away? Because some of that material was really valuable.

Carly: We don't get involved with that unfortunately. So that, that is Lancashire County Council's remit within this process really. Um, so they, um, work with those different processors that come and collect the different waste streams. Um, and, you know, they utilise the, the byproduct for lots of different ongoing products, I suppose, really.

Jan: [softly] Yeah.

Paul: And while PPIPL itself may have finished, I believe you are carrying on some of the work as well, you're looking to where you can take it next.

With working with both the University researchers and also some of the organisations, and sort of making sure that it doesn't just stop because the project stopped, but your work carries on and you can carry on improving, uh, well closing that attitude-behaviour gap and improving things generally.

Carly: Yeah. Um, yeah, really, uh, looking forward to this really, uh, working with, um, hopefully Booths supermarket, um, as a, a local retailer, um, and looking at people's attitudes to the way things are packaged and those products on the shelves and in the, the fridges.

Um, you know, and how people feel about that and what would they rather see? Years ago you'd go into a greengrocers and you'd get fruit and vegetables, you know, either handed to you and you put it in your basket or your net bag. Um, you know, and then latterly, probably paper bags, but everything's wrapped in plastic now.

Why is that? Fruit doesn't need to be wrapped in plastic. I suppose some of the stuff that came out of the P-P-I-P-L, um, reports and people's attitudes were the whole washing items that might have the 'ick factor'. Um, and they don't wanna touch things that have had maybe raw meat on and all sorts of things.

So it, it is trying to drill down a little bit more about that.

Paul: Right, let's get down to it. Imagine I am one of your residents. Imagine I'm Jan's neighbour...

Carly: ...right... [laughs]

Paul: Uh, I won't be the old lady, I'll be the neighbour on the other side, the one you never talk to because they kicked a football over the fence once and that was just the end of the relationship.

[General laughter]

So, what are the best actions that I could take as a resident to help you as a council achieve your goals with respect to the waste?

Carly: Well, I think first off, try and recycle as much as you can of your waste from the household. There's lots of different ways of doing that. Um, you know, if people have got other family members in the household, try and encourage them to do that as much as possible.

You've got children, get them involved, you know, get them responsible for a bit of extra pocket money, maybe, to collect up the recycling. And ensure that, you know, you've washed things, you've given it a good squash, there's plenty of room in your bin to, to collect as much as possible, and make sure that it's in the right container.

You know, we see, as I mentioned, you know, quite a lot of contaminated loads or there's lots of different items that are in a particular bin maybe that aren't in the correct waste stream, so we want to make sure that that's, um, correct.

This is, this needs to be ongoing behaviour. And if you think about it, you know, recycling particularly is not a new concept. We've been doing this for years, we just need to get better at it. And obviously as consumers we are buying more and more things out convenience.

So you're seeing lots of, you know, drinks bottles, fast food containers, you know, microwave meals, um, things like that. So, you know, there, there is more waste being produced, but what you do with it is absolutely key.

Alternative, maybe milk substitutes that, you know, over the years, Tetrapak, you know, has kind of exploded really. And the materials within that so that you've got lots of milk alternatives and juice and everything else. What do you do with it?

Well, people just think, oh, well it's cardboard, so you put it in the paper and cardboard. But unfortunately because of the different products in the lining of the cardboard to ensure that it stays waterproof it can't necessarily go in that waste stream. So actually there's specific collection points, one in Lancaster and one in Morecambe that will specifically take Tetrapak.

Um, so that's just an example really, but that has to be collected separately, and it is collected separately and there's only two processing plants in the country for that.

Jan: And I suppose it's almost, because I'm gonna offer you some advice as well, Paul 'cause I feel you need it....

Paul: ...well, I did say you need to be sharing advice with your neighbours...

Jan: [laughing] ...so, so here's your football back again.

Um, I suppose as well is that, I mean, I sometimes, I'm sometimes horrified with the amount of recycling we put out. I'm pleased that we're recycling, but I'm kind of horrified by the volume when you see it every two weeks, you think surely not, but yeah, surely we did.

So actually I think one of the success factors for, for you Paul, would be put out less recycling because it wasn't necessary. And so I think that if you're, like, that's a biggest step again, um, but actually not having it in the first place would be the best outcome.

Paul: Uh, I like what both of you are saying from a couple of perspectives. One of which is, it's easily understandable what you are saying. And the second one is, it's doable. It's not just understandable, but it's doable.

It's not like, oh, but that's involving so much effort, I can't be bothered. Uh, it's what you are suggesting here is something that, yeah, it might take a little bit extra effort, but it's a little bit extra effort. It's not so much more that you're having to spend weeks figuring out what needs to be recycled.

And a third thing actually is that it's not just people in Lancaster and Morecambe that can do this, this could be anywhere. This, this could be people anywhere who can do this. Yes, there's gonna be slightly different rules in different places, but the general principles still apply no matter where you are.

Carly: It...you're right, it, it applies to everybody. Um, you know, people produce waste, don't they? They do. Um, but I think, you know, as a nation, we

need to improve our recycling rates. I mean, to say our target's 45%, you kind of think, well, that's really not good enough...

Jan: [laughing] ...it's not a pass...

Carly: ...it's not, do you know? And it, it shouldn't really be that difficult.

I think another element to this is around the flexible plastics side of things as well because there is still a lot of, you know, issues in terms of that being collected at, at kerbside. You know, we can't do that, and a lot of things are wrapped in those flexible plastics.

So it is how we get around that. It's having, looking at the, the, you know, the extended producer responsibility and it's continuing those conversations with central government in terms of the waste strategy, how things will be collected and what, you know, other local authorities can do to assist with that.

And, you know, where we go with it really, but there's more conversations needed, I think, around that and, and potentially legislating that those types of plastics really need to be reviewed and not necessarily used still.

Paul: So Carly, you've had events with people in a particular neighbourhood in Heysham. You've spoken to residents, you know, across the, the city. When it comes to that are there any particular issues that come up with maybe misconceptions that they have about how the recycling process works or questions that they commonly raise, issues that are particularly common amongst them that are things that really need to be...communicated maybe more with them to clear it up or other issues that maybe need resolving in another way?

Carly: I think the key one really is about washing the items for recycling, that that's a big thing. So when we carried out the sort washing squash trial with, so we replaced recycling boxes with 240 litre wheelie bins so that people could get as much recycling in their bin as possible.

And the importance was making sure it's in the right bin, squashing it right down after you've washed it out so that you can get as much in your bin. And the expectation would be that the amount of residual waste in your grey bin reduces, and therefore your recycling increases.

But with that, what we were finding was as part of the trial, people had issues with the washing element of items. They either didn't have time, they found it laborious, but again, it's having that momentum and carrying on doing it,

making it part of a natural process of if you've taken some mince out or some corn or whatever it is, and you've been cooking with it you take the flexible plastic off the top. Um, if there's a cardboard sleeve, obviously put that in your cardboard and paper stream and then rinse the tray out as well as you can.

Um, you know, if you've got leftover washing up water, you might wanna save it until the end. Um and use that just to give it a, you know, a decent clean so that there's as much residue off the, the, the container as possible.

Jan: In the podcast, we often ask our guests about things that are inspiring them, positive change that's possible. So to sort of bring this conversation to a close, I wonder what evidence of positive change around plastic recycling in Lancaster that you are seeing.

Carly: I think we're slowly seeing a change in terms of people's attitudes to recycling and, you know, we've, we've carried out a lot of work on our website, the information we give to residents to help with recycling. We have clear guides for people to use. We've issued, um, and you know, we're kind of gradually rolling it out across the district, the larger size wheelie bins, which really helps residents with their recycling.

People have found them to be a lot better and easier to use than the boxes. Um, you can put an awful lot more in. People aren't presenting their waste quite as often because actually, you know, they're really squashing it and you know, putting it, getting it in the bin, which is brilliant. There is still a way to go with that and I think, you know, we just want to ensure that people know we are here to support them with that, to give them the right tools to do that.

And, um, you know. Hopefully if, you know, if anybody's struggling, we will, you know, help them. You know, there's, there's plenty of information out and about really, um, to assist people and to, to help them in endeavouring to, to do this in a better way. Um, you know, we won't be perfect, but there is, yeah, we're moving forward I think.

Jan: We will, we will do our bit to help you by putting some of that guidance on the podcast, um, website as well. So particularly people who are living in Lancaster, they can look back at that and have another chance to, to hear your good advice.

Carly: Yeah, that, I mean, that's, that's really helpful, Jan. I think, I mean obviously we want to positively, um, shape and influence residents, you know,

and, and hopefully enable them to have a sustainable legacy, you know, for everyone to enjoy in the future, you know, so working with partners such as yourselves.

You know, and the other stakeholders in, in the project is just, it seems to do that, really assisting us to do that. So, thank you.

Paul: Thank you very much, Carly. That's been a really nice way to wrap up our series on the Plastic Packaging in People's Lives project, a phrase I will not regret not saying again [Jan laughs] because it's very complicated with far too many 'Ps'.

Jan: But it's also nice, uh, a nice, uh, wrap up, um, leaving some of the action and the thinking and the, the innovation and the good stuff with our listeners as well. Over to you guys.

[Theme music]

Paul: Jan, I really do think that was a very good way for us to wrap up the PPIPL series.

Jan: Absolutely. And, um, we've done that whole life cycle, which I think is, um, I mean it's, it's, the point of circular economy is that it's not just one piece, but it's that whole long arc from things being manufactured, used, and finally, the, the councils who have the responsibility of sorting it out at the, the far end.

Paul: Mhmm. And at every step of the way I think it has become apparent though that 'cause while you say the councils have the responsibility at the end, all of it's interconnected. You can't have one action in one area without action in another area, without co-operating factors through that chain from production through to disposal or recycling.

Jan: Yeah. And the shared responsibility and the possibility for joint action to create outcomes is, is also really evident from that, that whole, the whole piece as well.

And then I suppose the other thing, Paul, that strikes me is that people at the heart of this. So I love the [forcefully] 'sort, wash and squash', I mean, that's just like a brilliant [laughing] campaign. I think I'm gonna make up a little song about it and sing it at home tonight just to annoy him indoors.

Um, but, but you know, that people at the heart of it have to be, you know, know what to do to be motivated to do the right thing, um, but also to sort of do it with a bit of joy and a sense of what they're getting at the end of the day.

Paul: Yeah, I don't think the joy is gonna be there if you are singing to them every time that you say it. [Jan laughs] But apart from that, I do believe that the process, yes, yeah, that's, there is very much positive benefits and that there's ways of seeing that it's been positive as well, as well as seeing that you've actually had an effect through what you've done.

And I think that, again, that applies all the way through everything that we've discussed in the last six episodes that, if you can see a positive result is having an impact wider than just within your small individual area, then that's even better.

Jan: And I mean, I'm hopeless with numbers as you know, despite being an accountant. Uh, 'cause I can talk about numbers, but I can't do them.

So the amount of, um, recycled materials that, that Carly mentioned, so almost, uh, 9,000 tonnes. How, how big is that? Is that...

Paul: I've, I've done some searching. You'll, you'll be delighted with this. Approximately 5,000 giraffes you can get in [Jan laughs] uh, in that. I dunno if that's helping you with your measurements at all.

Jan: [laughing] I don't really think in measures of giraffes, but I can see why you might...

Paul: [joking] ...okay, right, let me see, you've rejected my measurements in terms of giraffes. Two and a half thousand medium sized cars.

Jan: Oh yeah, I could imagine that.

Paul: So, yeah, you can imagine one car getting squashed...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...you know, and that's, you know, it's quite [inaudible]...

Jan: ...any other offers for size...?

Paul: ...any other offers...80% of the Eiffel Tower.

Jan: Now that makes sense...

Paul: ...so just chop the top off. [Jan laughs] The top of it can stay. It can be very small. It can be the Eiffel Plinth rather than the Eiffel Tower. And the rest of it though has just been turned into plastic recycling.

Jan: Now that I get more easily 'cause you can visually see it and you realise that...

Paul: ...no, you can't. It's just been, erm, chopped off. So that's the thing. You can't see it anymore. [Jan laughs]

Jan: Yep. No, I, that's, that's a decent amount every year. From the just one small place.

Paul: Yes. And that's, yeah, that's exactly that, that's just from those 144,000 people who live here, the 66,000 households that we have in the Lancaster City area.

When you consider that's part of a United Kingdom that's close to 70 million people and then the population of the world, somewhere between 8 and 9 billion people approximately. Yeah, probably closer to 8 billion in the world, that's a lot of people producing a lot of plastic waste, albeit at different levels from each other.

Jan: Yeah. I think the, the epicentre of volume of plastic waste will be, um, at our end of the world somehow.

Paul: And I don't think I want to burden Carly with 8 billion people and looking after all of their plastic recycling. I think that she might just break at some point there. [Jan laughs]

Jan: So, what are we gonna do next?

Paul: [mock whining] Jan, I don't want to leave plastics behind.

Jan: Well, let's not. Let's stay for a bit longer.

Paul: You sure, can we?

Jan: Yes.

Jan: Well, all right then, if you say so, let's not abandon plastics entirely, even if we have to say that is the end of the PPIPL podcasts. Shall we speak to Alexandra Harrington?

Jan: Yes. And what does Alexandra do?

Paul: Well, you may remember right at the very start of the PPIPL podcasts, she was mentioned by Alison Stowell, as someone who works on the plastics treaty. She's part of the Lancaster University Law School and she works towards plastic regulation globally.

Jan: And that's gonna be such a, a cool conversation because how do international treaties come into being?

Who gets to negotiate them? Why do they take so long? I feel that we'll find the answers to those questions.

Paul: What goes on behind closed doors and going back to previous analogies about sausage factories, do we really want to know?

Jan: I think we do want to know.

[Theme music]

Paul: Well, yeah, actually, if we didn't want to know, we wouldn't have her on the podcast [Jan giggles] so it'd be a bit pointless. Yes, let's find out.

Jan: Excellent.

Paul: Until then, thank you very much for listening. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]