



## **DRAFT Merton CIL Consultation Response on Proposed Straw Ban**

November 2018

### **About us**

Merton Centre for Independent Living are a user-led Deaf and Disabled<sup>1</sup> people's organisation run by Disabled people, for Disabled people, across the full spectrum of disability. We deliver a range of services to Deaf and Disabled people in London Borough of Merton, such as advice and advocacy services, including support for people navigating benefits and adult social care systems and processes.

We would like to thank our members who helped us respond to this consultation via our Craftivism and Chat Group.<sup>2</sup> We would like to hear from more members. Please contact us on [info@mertoncil.org.uk](mailto:info@mertoncil.org.uk) to share your thoughts!

### **Introduction**

We asked for our members' initial responses to the proposed straw ban. Some people were really passionate about this issue. They said: "People need straws!"; "The government can't do that!"

Members talked about how straws were essential for access and independence for Disabled People who need them, and some members voiced their frustration at how they feel invisible in the debate on plastic, "Our voice must be heard".

Some older members remembered having to manage before straws and the group talked about how useful straws are for drinking and for medication. We talked about alternatives to straws, such as feeder cups, beakers, sippy cups, and sports bottles, but these come with a range of problems like how to clean them properly, and not everyone will be able

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<sup>1</sup> In the interests of brevity, throughout the document we tend to use Disabled People when we mean Deaf and Disabled People

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/getting-involved/craftivism-and-chat/>

to pick up and hold them, which is why straws are so useful for people who need them.

**FLEX-STRAW**  
THE INDIVIDUAL, PERSONALIZED DRINKING TUBE

- Sanitary—Disposable
- Bends to Any Angle
- Eliminates Sterilization and Breakage
- Saves Valuable Time at Current High Labor Costs.
- Lessens Possibility of Spread of Communicable Diseases.
- Treatment in High Temperature—Resistant Micro-Crystalline Wax Prevents Disintegration in Hot Liquids

**HOSPITALS**  
Accommodates to any position — no other drinking tube has this feature.

**SICK ROOMS**  
Eliminates danger of breakage when used by children, epileptics, etc.

After many years of intensive research, the FLEX-STRAW is presented for hospital use. It assures maximum comfort and efficiency for hospitalized and invalid patients, providing a personalized, disposable drinking tube for every need.

**FLEX-STRAW CORPORATION** 4300 EUCLID AVENUE, CLEVELAND 3, OHIO, U. S. A.  
PLANT LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Image from Twitter showing historic poster with benefits of positionable straws

The group acknowledged that plastic is more or less there forever and some worried that it can be hard to have an impact on reducing plastic because lots of things apart from straws contribute to plastic waste, like fishing nets and plastic bottles. People also worried that it can be hard to have an impact when plastic waste is produced by countries all round the world.

### Detailed Consultation Reponse

The consultation asks whether the straw ban should be implemented on Oct 2019, April 2020 or Oct 2020 - there is no option to say no. Our group said:

“Are they for real?! They’re saying you’ve got no choice, no opinion, no consultation, it’ll happen regardless of what we say”

“They’re so determined to say straws are bad”

After much discussion the group felt that the longer the better so that people who need straws can make plans, but, the group weren’t sure what plans could be made because there are no alternatives.

The consultation asks what would happen if they started the ban in pubs and restaurants first?

The group felt that there was a risk that this would stop Disabled People who need straws getting out and socialising. They talked about whether Disabled People should carry their own straws, and decided that this wouldn't really be fair because "other people don't have to carry their whole lives with them", for example, no one is asking the public to carry their own cutlery if they want to go out to eat something. The group also felt that expecting Disabled People to always be prepared was unreasonable when other people can just be spontaneous.

The consultation asks about whether there is a difference between large straws and the small straws on drinks cartons. The group felt that they were more concerned about big straws. However, they did wonder whether removing little straws from drinks cartons might unintentionally lead to more plastic being used, for example if manufacturers stop using cartons and use sports bottles instead.

The consultation asks about medical exemptions and proposes that:

- You'll be able to buy straws in pharmacies,
- bars and pubs will only give them to people who ask for them for medical or access reasons
- you can use them in hospital to take medication.

The group felt very strongly that this approach was unworkable and possibly discriminatory.

"oh please, will I need Straw ID now?"

"This is blowing my mind, it is so ridiculous"

"I use a wheelchair so I already get gawped at by all and sundry. If I have to ask for a straw everyone will look at me. It will make me different to everyone else, it isn't right."

The group raised concerns about how practical it would be to get straws for example, they worried about straws moving onto prescription or becoming very expensive, "will it be £10 a straw now? No thank you!". They raised concerns that the straw ban was about making money for

companies involved developing alternative materials, and they felt that this was making money off the back of Disabled People who could ill afford it.

The group raised concerns about whether expensive and hard to get straws might lead to behaviours like straw sharing and whether pubs and restaurants would really dispose of them properly or whether they would try to reuse them.

“They’re putting all the pressure to fix plastic waste on to Disabled People.”

“Banning straws is going too far. Someone is making money, and it is driving me potty. We’ll need permission to breathe soon.”

The consultation asks about non-plastic straws. The group felt that if an alternative material with all the benefits of plastic existed, then that would be fine. The issue is that a suitable alternative does not yet exist. Many alternatives contain allergens, are not positionable, and could cause injury. “How about glass? That could smash!”, “Pasta straws? Will they melt?”

*“Just use \_\_\_\_\_ straws!”*



	Allergy Risk	Choking Hazard	Injury Risk	Not Positionable	Not Hot Liquid Safe	Dissolve w/ Long Use	Hard to Sanitize	High Cost
Metal	X		X	X	X		X	X
Paper	X	X		X	X	X		
Glass			X	X			X	X
Silicone	X			X			X	X
Acrylic	X		X	X	X		X	X
Pasta/Rice	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Bamboo	X		X	X				X
Biodegradable	X	X			X	X		
Single Use								

♦ Many disabled individuals require straws for food, meds and to be social with friends. ♦  
 We can ALL reduce plastic use, but banning items many depend on harms a very vulnerable population.  
 Pressure companies to make safe alternatives available to all and reduce waste in larger ways.  
 Hurt turtles are devastating. So are children and adults aspirating liquid into their lungs.



Image from Twitter showing issues with plastic straw alternatives. All alternatives have disadvantages compared to single use plastic straws.

The group were also surprised to find that the same consultation was also looking at banning cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers. They didn't feel that these items are really comparable to straws.

"Cotton buds are good for babies' noses but they won't die without it"

Finally, the consultation asks what steps should the Government take to ensure Disabled People are not disadvantaged or stigmatised? The group said:

"Listen to us!"

"Listen to people, let us have a say"

"There has to be a proper alternative before a ban is even considered!"

"There are more important things to deal with, ban knives, ban balloons, ban microbeads"

### **In conclusion**

Our group felt very strongly that straws should not be banned until a suitable and comparable alternative exists, which it currently doesn't. They also felt that Disabled People were being unfairly targeted.

"Is this all over a turtle with a straw up its nose? I didn't shove it up there!"

"All this talk about straws instead of how badly Disabled People are treated."

"Why are they putting all this pressure on Disabled People, go find a proper solution before banning straws"

STOP THE  
WAR ON



Plastic STRAWS

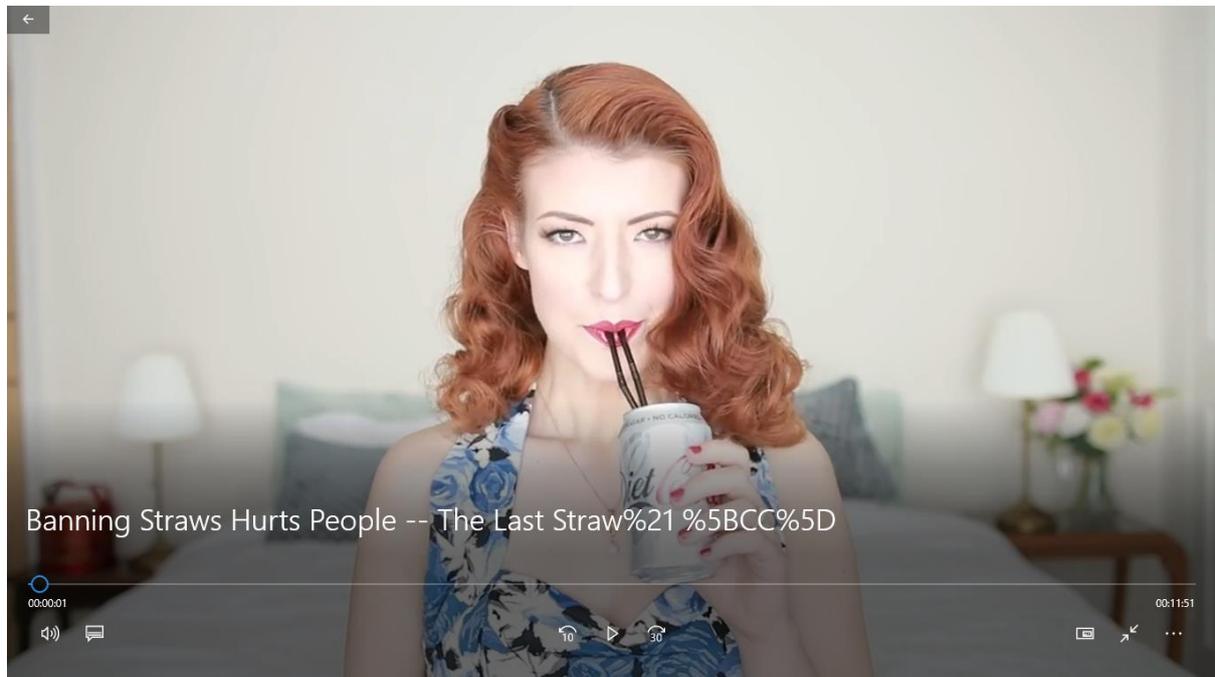
DISABLED PEOPLE REALLY NEED THEM!!

## Appendix

The group watched a film and looked at some articles to help with their response.

**Banning Straws Hurts People.** Film by Jessica Kellgren-Fozard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IBH0pcKzIY>



## The Last Straw by Alice Wong

<https://www.eater.com/2018/7/19/17586742/plastic-straw-ban-disabilities>

'I saw a Tweet that said: What did all you disabled people do before straws were invented? I believe it was a Doctor who responded: They aspirated liquids into their lungs and died of pneumonia.'

## The Final Straw by Laura Elliott

<https://medium.com/@lcelllott2/the-final-straw-90d9dd96d3c6>

'Today, single-use plastic straws are also vital for many disabled people to safely drink at home and in public—and the alternatives don't work. Paper straws disintegrate easily, metal, bamboo, and glass straws are choking hazards and pose a severe risk of injury for anyone with tremors or muscle spasms, and silicone straws are potent allergens for

people with compromised immune systems, as well as requiring frequent sterilisation to be used safely.

Without single-use plastic straws, disabled people will be denied equal access to public spaces, and the proposed ban is a prime example of policy-makers ignoring us in their legislation.'

### **The Final Straw – Personally Speaking Out by Chris Whitaker**

<https://www.disabilityspeaks.com/final-straw/>

'In this blog, I focus in on current developments around the proposed ban on plastic drinking straws. I look at this both as an issue in its own right and relate it to wider, more general matters. In summary, I think the straw ban illustrates how the needs of disabled people are increasingly marginalised, and how this can be responded to.'

### **Disability News Service – Anger over government's plastic straw ban plan by John Pring**

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/anger-over-governments-plastic-straw-ban-plan/>

Summary of why plastic straws are vital compared to alternatives. Highlights DEFRA's failure to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment.

### **The plastic backlash: what's behind our sudden rage – and will it make a difference? By Stephen Buranyi**

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/13/the-plastic-backlash-whats-behind-our-sudden-rage-and-will-it-make-a-difference?CMP=Share AndroidApp Email>

The story of plastics and the shift to personal responsibility rather than manufacturing.