

Plastic Pots, Tubs and Trays Briefing September 2024

For many years across Greater Manchester (except in Wigan), the only type of plastic collected for recycling was plastic bottles. This is because plastic bottles are made from high-quality plastics (PET and HDPE) which is widely recycled by plastics reprocessors in the UK, however, there were limited sustainable markets for other types of plastic packaging.

By April 2026, the government requires all councils in England to recycle a consistent set of materials as part of its Simpler Recycling Policy. This means that wherever you live in England you will be able to recycle the same at work and at home.

As part of the government's drive to improve recycling several other policies are also being introduced to simplify plastic packaging, encouraging manufacturers to design packaging that is more easily recycled and to make packaging out of recycled materials to close the loop. This is part of the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, which passes the cost of disposal and recycling on to manufacturers.

Due to these changes, we are upgrading our materials recovery facility where the mixed recycling is sorted and separated. This will allow us to collect and sort a wider range of plastic packaging.

Marking National Recycle Week, from 14th October 2024 all residents living in Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford will be able to recycle plastic pots, tubs and trays, as well as plastic bottles in their mixed recycling bin at home.

This means that you will be able to recycle the following materials in your mixed recycling bin at home:

- Plastic pots (e.g. yoghurt, soup, cosmetics etc)
- Plastic tubs (e.g. margarine, laundry powder, chocolates etc)
- Plastic trays including black plastic trays (e.g. raw and cooked meat, fruit and veg punnets etc)
- Plastic bottles (e.g. milk, pop, bleach, cleaning products, trigger sprays, shampoo)
- Glass bottles and jars
- Food tins and drinks cans
- Aerosols
- Foil

No plastic film, carrier bags, crisp packets or pet food pouches

All items must be clean and empty of any food or drink

As a reminder, this list shows what items go in your other bins.

Paper and Cardboard bin

- Newspapers and magazines
- Cardboard boxes
- Cardboard packaging (e.g cereal boxes, ready meal sleeves)
- Junk mail
- Envelopes
- Tetra Pak (drink cartons)
- Pizza boxes (no food)
- Books
- Greetings cards, wrapping paper (no glitter)

Food and garden waste

- Grass cuttings
- Hedge trimmings
- Small branches and twigs
- Flowers and plants
- All food waste (cooked and raw), including plate scrapings.
- Teabags and coffee grounds
- Fruit and vegetables
- Meat and fish including bones

General Waste

- Nappies and sanitary products
- Soft plastics like bread bags, salad bags, film
- Crisp packets
- Pet food pouches
- Carrier bags
- Compostable or biodegradable packaging
- Tissues and kitchen roll
- Cat litter
- Hard plastic such as plant pots

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is also investing in the construction of a new materials recovery facility (MRF) using state of the art sorting technology and AI to sort and separate mixed recycling materials more efficiently. This will allow us to better adapt to changes and innovation in household packaging and it will accept a larger volume of recycling, however the new facility won't be built and fully operational until 2026.

Upgrading our current materials recovery facility allows us to collect, sort and recycle plastic pots, tubs and trays sooner helping to reduce confusion about what can be recycled and prepare for the changes coming as part of the Government's Simpler Recycling Policy.

Although the materials recovery facility includes clever technology such as optical sorters and eddy currents to separate the recycling, hand sorting is still an essential part of the process. This is where the operatives remove some of the larger items that are found in peoples recycling bins because unfortunately many people don't recycle correctly and often put items in their recycling bin that cannot be recycled.

It is therefore important that you help us to provide a consistent message to all residents about what they can or cannot recycle at home.

To help you do this, we have provided a standard set of questions and answers below, and from 14th October more information will be available on our website R4GM (add link to plastics page)

Questions and Answers

Why can I now recycle plastic pots, tubs and trays, what's changed?

In July, GMCA extended the waste disposal contracts with SUEZ recycling and recovery UK, (SUEZ UK) until 2034. SUEZ UK operate the waste sorting and treatment plants and run the household waste recycling centres. This provides certainty for making long term changes and means we can invest in our waste technology by upgrading our Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) and in building a new one that can cope with a growing population and changes in packaging policy.

What happens to the pots, tubs and trays?

Once your bin has been collected and emptied into the back of the council bin wagon, the wagon tips off the load at the transfer loading station and the mixed recycling goes to the materials recovery facility at Longley Lane, Sharston, Manchester.

Here, the recycling goes through a series of conveyors where magnets, eddy currents and optical sorters separate the recycling into separate materials, including glass, steel, aluminium and plastic. The plastic bottles and pots, tubs and trays are sent to a plastics recycler in the UK who sort the plastic into different types of plastics (HDPE, PET, PP).

Then it's washed and forced through small holes (extruded) to make plastic pellets. These are supplied to manufacturers, who use the plastic pellets to make new products with a recycled plastic content.

Find out more about how the MRF separates your recycling by booking on a tour of the materials recovery facility to see behind the scenes. [Site tours and visits | Recycle for Greater Manchester](#)

What do the numbers on the bottom of the plastic containers mean?

The little numbers in a triangle that you see on the bottom of rigid plastics are a “*resin identification code* “

The symbol tells you what type of plastic the item is made from. It DOES NOT tell you if it is recyclable or not. The symbol was adopted in the 1980s before the triangular arrows became linked to recycling. The numbers range from 1 to 7 and are all different types of plastic, some of which can be recycled easily, but not all of them. Please refer to the information given to you by your Council for what is accepted in your mixed recycling bin.

Why can't we accept soft plastics like plastic bags and film?

In Greater Manchester, we currently only recycle plastic pots, tubs, trays and plastic bottles. Other types of plastic packaging (such as plastic bags, bread bags, film and polystyrene) are made of lower grade plastic or made up of layers of different polymers which are difficult to separate and recycle. For that reason, plastic bags and film are currently collected in the general waste bin, which is sent by rail to an energy from waste plant in Runcorn where it is burned to generate electricity.

Can I recycle lids?

Lids from plastic bottles fall off the bottles during the separating process and end up getting mixed in with the glass which can ruin the glass recycling.

If you can easily remove a lid, we ask that all plastic lids are left off the bottles and placed in the general waste bin.

What is hard plastic and why can't that go in my mixed recycling bin?

Hard plastics such as old plastic garden furniture or children's toys that are broken or no longer usable can be recycled at your local Recycling Centre. The hard plastics are bulked up and taken to a reprocessor where they are recycled into new plastic products.

Hard plastic cannot be recycled in your mixed recycling bin as they are too large and have a different recycling process compared to your plastic pots, tubs, trays and plastic bottles.

Find your nearest recycling centre [Find a recycling centre - Recycle for Greater Manchester](#)

I'm worried that my mixed recycling bin might get too full, what can I do?

If you stack your plastic pots, tubs and trays inside each other in your bin it should take up a lot less space. You can also squash your plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays to make more space in your bin. If you find your mixed recycling bin is still getting full, take a look at our tips for reducing waste or contact your council to see if you can get a bigger recycling bin.

Can I recycle Plastic Pots, Tub and Trays at the Household waste recycling centres (local tip)?

Yes, plastic pots, tubs and trays can be recycled in the mixed recycling container along with plastic bottles, glass bottles and jars, food tins, drink cans, empty aerosols and foil.

I live in a flat or apartment, can I recycle plastic pots, tubs and trays?

Yes, anyone living in a flat or apartment where you share recycling bins with your neighbours, can recycle plastic pots, tubs and trays in the mixed recycling bin. The signage and stickers on the bin may not change straight away but these will be updated over the coming months.