

# Press release: Plastic carrier bags: Gove sets out new measures to extend charge

The 5p plastic bag charge will be extended to all retailers and increased to 10p to cut their use further, under plans put forward in a [consultation](#) launched by the Environment Secretary today.

Plastic bags have a significant impact on the environment. Government scientists believe plastic in the sea is set to treble in a decade unless marine litter is curbed – with one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals dying every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

Currently, the 5p charge applies only to big businesses, but it is estimated over 3.6 billion single-use plastic bags are supplied annually by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Trade bodies representing around 40,000 small retailers have already launched a voluntary approach to a 5p charge, but this accounts for less than one-fifth of England's estimated 253,000 SMEs.

The consultation launched today will also explore the possibility of increasing the 5p minimum charge to encourage further behaviour change, potentially doubling it to 10p.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The 5p single use plastic carrier bag charge has been extremely successful in reducing the amount of plastic we use in our everyday lives. Between us, we have taken over 15 billion plastic bags out of circulation.

But we want to do even more to protect our precious planet and today's announcement will accelerate further behaviour change and build on the success of the existing charge.

Association of Convenience Stores chief executive James Lowman said:

We welcome the Government's plans to extend carrier bag charging to all shops.

This has been shown to be highly effective at reducing waste, whilst also raising money for local, national and environmental charities. Around half of small shops in England already charge for plastic bags voluntarily, with wider support for a mandatory charge.

The move follows the success of the 5p charge introduced in 2015, which has seen single use [plastic bag sales in major supermarkets drop by 86%](#). This is equivalent to just 19 bags in 2017/18 per person in England, compared with 140 bags each before the government introduced the charge.

Smaller stores are often at the heart of a local community providing a range of essential services to local people, and will be encouraged to donate proceeds to good causes. [Latest figures show](#) that for 2017/18 5p plastic bag sales contributed over £51m toward charities and other good causes.

Today's announcement is the latest move in a government crackdown on plastic, with the UK continuing to be a global leader in protecting seas, oceans and marine life. On the same day, Education Secretary Damian Hinds has urged all schools to eliminate their use of single use plastics by 2022.

The government has recently announced a range of measures to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste underpinned by the landmark [Resources and Waste Strategy](#) launched earlier this month. Other key government actions announced over the past 12 months include a [world-leading ban on microbeads](#), a consultation on restricting the sale of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds, and plans for a [deposit return scheme](#) to increase recycling rates of drinks bottles and cans subject to consultation.

At the Autumn Budget, the Chancellor announced a world-leading tax on plastic packaging which does not contain a minimum of 30% recycled content, subject to consultation, from April 2022.

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## [News story: British space tech transforms education for 34,000 students in Africa](#)

Due to poor internet coverage, teachers in remote schools previously had to travel long distances to access educational material. Some schools have already reported improved confidence in their teachers and better exam results from their students.

Launched in 2015 the iKnowledge project, led by British satellite operator Avanti Communications and supported by the UK Space Agency aimed to equip rural areas with satellite internet to improve education in Tanzania and develop innovation and technology in the UK.

The project has now completed its first phase of funding and the next step is to leverage the robust iKnowledge infrastructure for new educational projects to scale up.

Dr Graham Turnock, Chief Executive at the UK Space Agency said,

By providing teachers with the skills and capability to adopt new technology, we are making a practical and significant difference to the lives of children in rural Tanzania whilst encouraging innovation and growth back in the UK.

Avanti and UK Space Agency have been awarded a Certificate of Education Appreciation from the Tanzanian Education Authority (TEA) for the iKnowledge Project.

Graham Peters, Managing Director of Government Solutions at Avanti said,

Technology and internet access can transform teaching and learning in schools by providing teachers and students with access to a huge range of educational resources that are normally unavailable to rural African schools.

High speed internet by satellite can make every school a digital school and enable school children to become digital citizens no matter where they live.

This capability was delivered by Avanti's HYLAS 2 Ka-band communications satellite. The satellite is specifically designed to provide high-speed broadband internet in areas lacking poor terrestrial or mobile coverage.

A few selected iKnowledge schools have been installed with Wi-Fi Hotspots to give schools the flexibility to buy internet only when they need and without the monthly internet subscription commitment. When not in use by schools, the system can be used by the local community.

iKnowledge was one of the first projects to be awarded through the UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme (IPP) in 2015. IPP is a five-year, £152 million programme designed to partner UK space expertise with overseas governments and organisations.

It is funded through UK aid from the department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's Global Challenges Research Fund. GCRF is a £1.5 billion fund which forms part of the UK Government's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment.

Through partnership projects like these, UK aid is tackling some of the biggest global challenges of our time to help make communities across the world safer better, safer and more prosperous.

There are currently 33 projects funded through IPP, ranging from tackling deforestation in Latin America to increasing disaster resilience in South East Asia.

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# Press release: £675 million fund to transform high streets and town centres opens to communities

- High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP launches Future High Streets Fund to help modernise high streets and town centres
- Announcement follows recommendation from retail expert Sir John Timpson to help local authorities adapt to the changing nature of the high streets
- £55 million to restore historic buildings and put them back into use

Towns across the country are urged to bid for a share of £675 million to transform their local high streets into modern vibrant community hubs.

The Future High Streets fund which opened today (26 December 2018) will help local leaders implement bold new visions to transform their town centres and make them fit for the future with co-funding to consolidate properties on the high street, improve transport and access into town centres and converting retail units into new homes.

At October's Budget, in response to interim recommendations from Sir John Timpson, Chair of the High Streets Expert Panel the Chancellor announced £675 million [Future High Street Fund](#) as part of the government's [Plan for the High Street](#).

High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP said:

We all know high streets are changing, we can't hide from this reality. But we're determined to ensure they continue sit at the heart of our communities for generations to come.

To do this we have to support investment in infrastructure, boosting local economies and ensuring people are able to get the most out of their local high streets. Empowering leaders on the ground is key too – they best understand the challenges facing their areas.

Our Future High Streets Fund will drive forward this change, transforming our town centres into the thriving community hubs of the future.

Chair of the Town Centres Expert Panel, Sir John Timpson said:

I have learnt, from my own business, that the best way to get things done is to give people on the front line the freedom to get on with the job in the way they know best.

I am pleased that the government has acted on my panel's recommendations to set up a Future High Streets Fund to help local leaders turn their plans into reality.

By helping our towns create their own individual community hub, I believe we will have vibrant town centres to provide a much-needed place for face to face contact in the digital age.

Places bidding for the Fund will be supported by the High Streets Task Force, which will be established in 2019 and will support local leadership.

Up to £55 million of the Fund has also been allocated to support the regeneration of 'heritage high streets'. Bids will help to restore historic high street properties for new work spaces or cultural venues. More details of this will be announced in due course.

To apply, please read the prospectus and download an application form.

All forms should be completed and submitted electronically with any supporting material to [highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk](mailto:highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk).

Applications for Phase 1 of the Fund must be received by midnight on Friday 22 March 2019. This stage calls for local authorities to submit Expressions of Interest. We will assess these and make an announcement on places moving forward to Phase 2 in summer 2019.

For further enquiries about the Fund, please contact [highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk](mailto:highstreetsfund@communities.gov.uk).

Read the [High Streets Expert Panel report](#).

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## **[News story: Foreign Secretary announces global review into persecution of Christians](#)**

Yesterday my family and I walked a short journey to our local church, and enjoyed an uplifting Christmas service. We attend as a simple matter of personal choice, but since being appointed Foreign Secretary, it has struck me how much we take that choice for granted: others around the world are facing death, torture and imprisonment for that very right.

It is distressingly poignant at Christmas to hear recent warnings that the persecution facing Christians across the globe is now most stark in the region of its birth.

A century ago, 20 percent of the people of the Middle East were Christian; today the figure is below 5 percent. It is not hard to see why. On Palm Sunday in 2017, a suicide bomber in Egypt attacked a Christian Cathedral that has existed since the inception of Christianity, brutally killing 17 of the congregation. This is an extreme example, but it is by no means isolated. Last week, I met an Iraqi doctor who told me how patients had threatened her and her family with beheading when they heard she was a Christian who refused to convert. Step by agonising step, we are witnessing the erosion of Christianity as a living religion in its heartland.

Elsewhere, the situation is also deeply perilous. Across the world, about 215 million Christians suffer persecution, according to the campaign group, Open Doors. The International Society for Human Rights has found that Christians are the victims of 80 percent of all acts of religious discrimination. Like the Christian family I met recently who were accused of blasphemy in Pakistan; they told me how extremists targeted them, attacked their young sons by ripping school uniforms off their bodies, and shot at the mother. There were striking parallels with the case of Asia Bibi – a Christian Pakistani woman who was beaten, imprisoned, and despite being acquitted still lives under constant guard because of the threat of mob justice – whose plight has moved the hearts of the British public.

Britain has long championed international religious freedom, and the Prime Minister underlined our global leadership on this issue when she appointed my excellent colleague Lord Ahmad as her Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. So often the persecution of Christians is a telling early warning sign of the persecution of every minority.

But I am not convinced that our response to the threats facing this particular group has always matched the scale of the problem, nor taken account of the hard evidence that Christians often endure a disproportionate burden of persecution. Perhaps this is borne out of the very British sense of awkwardness at 'doing God'. Perhaps it's an awareness of our colonial history, or because Britain is a traditionally Christian country some are fearful of being seen to help Christians in desperate need.

Whatever the cause, we must never allow a misguided political correctness to inhibit our response to the persecution of any religious community.

So I have asked the Rev'd Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Truro, to lead an independent review of whether we are doing all we can. I would like this exercise to consider some tough questions and offer ambitious policy recommendations: Britain has – in my view – the best diplomatic network in the world, so how can we use that to encourage countries to provide proper security for minority groups under threat? Have we been generous enough in offering practical assistance, and does the level of UK support match the scale of the suffering? Have we always got our foreign policy priorities right in terms of advocating for and expressing solidarity with this group?

I am far from the most eloquent person to speak out about this problem – from Prince Charles, to the Archbishop of Canterbury, to parliamentarians across the political spectrum, we have been warned many times – but with Christianity on the verge of extinction in its birthplace, it is time for concerted action that begins to turn the tide. I have asked Bishop Mounstephen to report back to me by Easter.

Britain has a strong history of standing up for the rights of all religious communities. I am proud of the way the UK has led the world in condemnation of the ethnic cleansing of the Muslim Rohingya community in Burma; as well as our response of passionate anger to the recent resurgence of anti-Semitism in our own society.

It is not in our national character to turn a blind eye to suffering. All religious minorities must be protected and the evidence demonstrates that in some countries, Christians face the greatest risk.

We should be willing to state that simple fact – and adjust our policies accordingly.

The Apostle Paul foretold of the suffering that Christians would face through the ages, but still saw reason to hope: ‘We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.’

It is time to echo that message of hope to the persecuted church around the world; with our deeds as well as our words.

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## [News story: Foreign Secretary's Christmas message 2018](#)

The Foreign Secretary said:

“As 2018 draws to a close I want to [look back](#) at just some of the work the Foreign Office has been doing around the world to ensure the safety and prosperity of the UK, and to defend the values we all believe in.

From securing international backing to uphold the ban on chemical weapons to our [support for a political solution](#) to end the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

British diplomacy has continued to respond to some of the biggest issues affecting the world today.

We have hosted landmark events at home too, galvanising international focus on ending the [illegal wildlife trade](#) this autumn, and reinforcing our bonds across the Commonwealth family with a hugely successful [Summit in April](#).

Next year will of course bring further significant challenges with Brexit. I do not underestimate them, but we have faced bigger challenges in our history and will always find a way to thrive and prosper whatever the outcome.

As Christmas approaches I also think of all Foreign Office staff and members of the intelligence community working overseas to keep all of us safe. I want to thank them and wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.”

**Watch the message:**

[Christmas message 2018](#)