

Plastic in the oceans

During a question and answer session at a local school environmental issues dominated the exchanges about public policy as usual.

The two most important environmental questions they raised were plastic in the oceans and the need for more trees. I agreed with them about the importance of these matters.

Plastic in the oceans raise difficult questions both about responsibility and about who can remedy the problem.

I argued that the main blame must rest on all those people who threw the plastic away in an irresponsible manner in the first place. In the U.K. we combat this with laws against litter by adults, and with strong social pressures on parents and teachers to tell children not to litter. Some Other countries need to educate people against littering. The U.K. also spends taxpayer money on clearing up the litter where people do offend. Verges, streets and public places are regularly swept clean and the debris taken care of. More taxpayers money is spent on refuse collection, recycling and safe disposal so our plastic waste should not end up in rivers or the sea, even where it has been discarded wrongly.

In some other countries there is less pressure on people to avoid littering and a less good back up system to intercept litter before it finds it way via a river into the oceans. There are also bad boat crews who litter the oceans directly. This is especially difficult to police.

I explained that the U.K. and other rich countries use overseas aid to promote programmes for better refuse handling and for cleansing waterways. We cannot require other countries to do this. We have to persuade and encourage.

I set out how the U.K. government is promoting more woodlands, with local and National examples of tree planting. I also pointed out that if we continue to need more homes for more people there will be some counter examples where woods are removed to build on the land.