



# Spotlight

## Reusable packaging pilot for community meal delivery project

March 2025



As part of the Highland Community Waste Partnership, Thurso CDT replaced the single-use packaging used as part of its Seniors Lunch Club meal delivery service, with reusable alternatives, as a way of reducing packaging waste.

### Background

The Thurso CDT meals delivery service started during the Covid19 pandemic and has now evolved into a monthly sit-down lunch, as well as a delivery service to around 25 people locally. Each meal consists of a main course and a dessert, using two biodegradable boxes and one disposable paper bag for delivery. This resulted in up to **75 single-use items going to waste per delivery**.

We knew we could do better than that, so we looked to move away from single-use containers, by replacing them with something reusable - and also something more colourful, that would bring a smile to peoples' faces.



### Choosing our reusables

In 2023 we started looking for reusable packaging to replace the single-use options, considering a number of criteria.

Firstly, it was important that the tubs were suitable for the ways they were being used. We give generous portions of food and customers often save half their meal in the fridge to reheat the next day. In addition, our desserts are sometimes batch-cooked and frozen. So the tubs needed to be microwave, freezer and dishwasher proof

Beyond this, it was also important that the tubs were light-weight, durable and easy to handle for the benefit of both customers and volunteers.

We chose the plastic IKEA 365+ 750ml food containers, based on positive reviews about the quality and longevity of this product, as well as the affordable price of £2 per item for our batch order.

This left budget available for us to look at reusable bags for delivery as well. We chose the Eco Chic thermal insulated lunch bags (£7), which we ordered through a local independent shop. The bags are insulated to keep meals warm, are made from recycled plastic and are the perfect size to fit our two reusable containers.

As an added bonus, they come in dozens of patterns and designs, adding a splash of fun and colour to our meal delivery service.

A member of our community donated a badge machine that we used to brand the bags and another local crafter designed and produced vinyl stickers for us to brand the tubs.

## The pilot

We ordered a total of 100 tubs and 50 bags, providing two sets of reusables for our each of our 25 customers, not all of whom participate in every service. The idea was that the reusable tubs and bag from the previous delivery would be picked up as part of the next delivery. Packaging loss was not a concern, given the closed-loop nature of this system.

In advance of rolling out new reusables in September 2023, we phoned each customer to explain the changes and also included an explanatory leaflet with each meal for the first couple of months, reminding people that their packaging was to be returned to us, and would be picked up at the next delivery.



This was tracked by delivery drivers, with an extra tick box added to their route sheets to mark whether packaging was returned or not.

Back in the kitchen, volunteers ran the used tubs through the dishwasher and sanitised each bag

We were keen that this pilot would not overburden our volunteers so processes were kept as simple as possible. This was also offset by removing the need to shop for and stock disposables.



## Impact

The shift to reusables was welcomed by our customers who, being of an older generation, are less accepting of modern throw-away culture. Many were delighted that their meals were no longer generating unnecessary waste.

In addition, the colourful packaging has also helped add a wow-factor to the service and, with a different bag design every time, it provides a bit of excitement and puts a smile on peoples' faces, which is one of the most important parts of the service.

The colourful packaging has also helped attract attention for the service, with more people signing up.

During the first 6 months of tracking this for the pilot, we did not lose a single item of packaging.

From its launch in September 2023 up until the end of the HCWP in March 2025, we estimate that we've diverted **702** single-use items from landfill.

## What's next?

Using reusable packaging has become second nature to everyone involved in this project, and we couldn't be happier that we got the opportunity to upgrade our community Meal Deliveries.

As the service continues, so will the impact of this switch to reusables increase.

**Learn more:** [www.thursocdt.co.uk](http://www.thursocdt.co.uk)

Also see: [Thurso High School reusables](#)

### **The Highland Community Waste Partnership (2022-2025)**

Funded by The National Lottery Climate Action Fund, and coordinated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP) brought together eight community groups in the Highlands to reduce waste and promote more sustainable consumption.

**Learn more here:** [www.keeptoscotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste](http://www.keeptoscotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste)