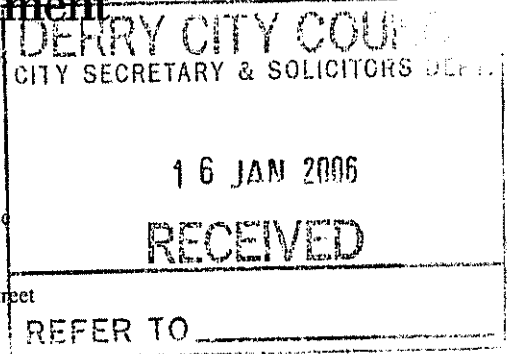




Department of the

Environment

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Your reference:

Our reference: COR/1094/2005

Dear Mr McMahon,

13 January 2006

Thank you for your letter of 19 December 2005 to Jeff Rooker about the resolution recently passed by Derry City Council urging him to bring forward urgent legislation to introduce a levy on the use of plastic bags in Northern Ireland. The Minister has read your letter with interest and has asked me to reply on his behalf.

Plastic bag litter and litter generally can have a significant adverse impact on the environmental quality of local neighbourhoods throughout Northern Ireland. In this context, you will be interested to know that the Department of the Environment is currently considering the wide range of measures in the recent Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and other local environmental quality issues with a view to making proposals on how best to drive forward a cleaner neighbourhoods agenda suitable for Northern Ireland. (The Act applies to England and Wales only).

The measures in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act are wide ranging – they are designed to give local authorities more power to tackle environmental crime, and make everyone think about the environment around them. Among other things, the Act gives local authorities in England and Wales improved powers for tackling all forms of litter, including plastic bag litter.

In considering how best to drive forward a cleaner neighbourhoods agenda suitable for Northern Ireland, the Department is taking into account developments in the Republic of Ireland following the introduction of the levy on plastic bags in March 2002, developments in Scotland where the Scottish Parliament's Environment and Rural Development committee is currently examining proposals for a levy on plastic bags and other issues such as the use by some UK retailers of degradable plastic bags.

The Department's clean neighbourhoods work is at an early policy development stage and further detailed consideration of the many local environmental quality issues, including plastic bags, is required. At this stage it is, therefore, too soon to indicate what the proposals will be.

In the meantime, the Department of the Environment continues to support initiatives designed to encourage reduced usage of plastic bags such as, for example, "bag for life" schemes introduced by supermarkets. Also the Department's innovative "Wake up to Waste – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" campaign is aimed at raising consumer awareness of waste management issues and the part each person can play in reducing the amount of waste we produce.

I hope this clarifies the Department's position.

Yours sincerely

Stuart McDougall

STUART McDOUGALL
Departmental Private Secretary
to Jeff Rooker