

Tackling Plastics, Packaging and Waste in Floriculture

Coventry Cathedral
26th September 2024

Workshop Report



SUSTAINABLE
FLOWERS RESEARCH
PROJECT



UNIVERSITY OF
SURREY

Research Centre
Creative Economies

Coventry
University 

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The **images** used in this report were provided by Fresh@CU, David Bek, Angela Coulton, Jill Timms Nicola Hill and Saffron Dodds-Smith.

If you would like to know more about the Plastics, Packaging and Waste Working Group or the Sustainable Flowers Research Project then please get in touch with David and Jill. You can also sign up to receive updates on the Project website.

Project website: www.sustainableflowersresearch.org



The guide for sustainable floristry can be accessed at:

<https://sustainableflowersresearch.org/publications/ppw-guidance-2024/>

A short video showcasing the event can be found at:

<https://youtu.be/HRFJfKrBonM>

Tackling, Plastics, Packaging and Waste in Floriculture

Resource booklet Launch Event, 26th September 2024

Coventry Cathedral

Executive Summary

Sixty people drawn from different parts of the cut-flower industry attended an event at Coventry Cathedral organised by the Floriculture Plastics, Packaging and Waste Working Group. The **key objective** of the event was to launch a new resource booklet which provides guidance for florists on sustainable floral design practices. The event included a series of interactive displays led by professional floral designers demonstrating how floristry can eliminate plastics and engage in better waste management. Panel discussions featuring key industry stakeholders also enabled information to be shared, questioned and debated about the sustainability journey being practiced by large scale retailers, online floral suppliers and floristry networks.

Key takeaways:

- There are viable, cost-effective alternatives to plastic-based accessories within the floristry sector. However, awareness of these alternatives needs to be raised amongst florists and there needs to be better provision through sundries suppliers.
- Florist training needs to be updated so that the next generation automatically adopt sustainable practices.
- Government policy and consumer preferences are crucially important drivers of shifts in commercial practice. Robust policy targets are critically important for driving shifts in usage of packaging materials.
- Retailers are setting increasingly exacting targets for reuse, recyclability or compostability, as well as pledges concerning reducing virgin and single-use plastics.
- UK waste collection systems are confusing and need to be better co-ordinated to enable florists and others in the industry to better manage their waste so that circular economy principles can be achieved.
- Labelling of plastics and packaging needs to be made easier to understand.
- Further technical research is required to support the development and adoption of viable bioplastics.

Event Agenda

10.00 **Demonstrators set-up**

11.45-12.30 **Registration and networking**

12.30- 12.35 **Welcome from Professor Nick Henry** (Director, Centre for Creative Economies, Coventry University)

12.35-12.50 **Introduction and launch of the Guidance Booklet** by Professor David Bek (Coventry University) and Dr. Jill Timms (Surrey University)

12.50-2.30 **Participants circulate around the demonstration stations** spending 15 minutes at each station. Demonstrators will talk about their designs and how these have been created with sustainability in-mind. There will be opportunities for Q&A at each station. The demonstrators included: Saffron Dodd-Smith and Verity Porter (The Bath Flower School); Carol Patilla (Tuckshop Flowers); Dr. Angela Coulton (Petal and Twig); Shane Connolly (Shane Connolly and co); Nicola Hill (Gentle Blooms); Katherine Birtles (Zinnia Floral Design).

2.30-3.30 **Expert panel discussions and audience Q & A.**

Panel 1: Jonny Young (JZ/Dutch Flower Group); Edmund Timm (MPS) and Pete Schofield (Bloom and Wild)

Panel 2: Dr. Anna Bogush (Coventry University), Zara Taylor (Interflora), Dr. Angela Coulton (Petal and Twig)

Facilitators: David and Jill.

The panel discussions included the following themes:

- (i) reflections on the demonstrations and what can be done **now** to move the dial on sustainability regarding plastics, packaging and waste;
- (ii) the challenges and opportunities in relation to PPW in large-scale retail and online settings
- (iii) discuss the policy implications and what changes are needed to embed sustainability in the floriculture sector.
- (iv) the future role of the PPW Working Group – what should be the focus going forward?

3.30-3.45 **Concluding thoughts and thanks** – Professor David Bek, Dr. Jill Timms

3.45-4.30 **Networking**

Part 1: Welcome and official launch of the guidance booklet

Nick Henry, Director of the Research Centre for Creative Economies

Good afternoon everyone. And may I welcome you, on behalf of Coventry University, Coventry Cathedral and the city of Coventry, to today's event. In particular, it is great to welcome such a range of the floriculture industry alongside research colleagues and our research partners and co-leads University of Surrey. It is wonderful to celebrate the creative design and inspiration here today. And within such a magnificent setting.

But this is an event also which **at its heart has a very serious intent** – to support the cut-flower industry to meet the epochal challenge of environmental sustainability. To make this journey, David and Jill have brought together the academic disciplines and knowledges of art and design, business and management, geography and the natural sciences. To my mind, this reflects the need for such transdisciplinary expertise to understand **how** the 'socially constructed thing' called 'consumer taste' will - through its supply chains and production - **impact** on the places and shores of continents **here and far**. And, vice-versa, how the '**discovery**', sourcing and extraction of new materials and plants will, in turn, influence the bouquet designs of the future.

Sitting within these complex chains criss-crossing localities, regions, nations and continents are a balance of myriad benefits - and harms. Today's event, and the industry research it is presenting, confronts that balance of benefits and harms and seeks – with clarity - to explicitly guide how to ensure benefit soundly outweighs harm. But of immense importance to understanding the problem of plastic packaging and waste - and seeking solutions - is to understand the industry and its stakeholders – their expertise and voices alongside that of academics. The result, in this case, is a jointly developed set of guidelines – clear actionable steps – to reduce plastic, packaging and waste in the British cut-flower industry.

What is especially pleasing for me personally also is how this reflects the ethos of the new Research Centre for Creative Economies I direct here at Coventry University – and of which David is a part. Our ethos is:

“To be a leading centre of transdisciplinary and impactful research on creative economies and their outcomes for people, place and planet AND to seek to see how that impactful research can generate the possibilities for more prosperous, liveable, sustainable and socially just places.”

David and Jill's work excitingly reflects such an ethos – as does our other work in the Centre on such things as: creative freelancing and ethics of care, cities of culture and placemaking, community-driven digital archives and creative accounting - where we seek to recognise the full value of the more-than-human – such as flora and fauna - in accounting mindsets.

I end by offering thanks to all those who have made today's event possible.



David Bek, Professor of Creative Economies and Ecological Sustainability, Coventry University

Thank you Nick for that uplifting introduction to our event! Welcome everyone and thank you so much for attending this event today. As Nick has outlined there are many levels to our activities today – fundamentally we are embracing people's – our - love of flowers but we are also considering how the process of enjoying and celebrating flowers can be done in ways that enhance the physical environment within which we live rather than damage it.

If we step back 18 months, an event was held at Coventry bringing together a range of stakeholders to consider how the industry could collaborate more effectively to meet some of the wider challenges facing the floriculture sector. The idea being to create a formal group within the UK which could connect into the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative in Holland. Whilst the majority of stakeholders fully embraced the idea of a collaborative group, there were some teething problems which slowed down the formal process. So, Jill and I decided to focus upon the 'art of possible' – what could we do that could create such a group organically? The result was to announce the creation of the Plastics Packaging and Waste Working Group – on the principle of 'build it and they will come'. And come they (you did) – in no time at all we had over 20 members from across the industry, our respective Universities contributed funding so we could focus on delivery of outputs. And here we are today - ready to formally launch the booklet promoting sustainable floristry practices; to participate in a range of demonstrations of sustainable floristry in practice and very importantly to engage in expert panel discussions which will in part help us to drive the agenda in terms of lobbying, policy, practice and, of course, research for the group going forward.

In the wider context the challenges are large and at times feel almost insurmountable – the impacts of climate change and biodiversity destruction are becoming ever more apparent, never mind the divisive nature of modern politics which seems to have killed off informed debate. In this context groups such as ours are invaluable – collaboration, co-operation are crucial – bringing people together from across the spectrum of interests to work together.



Dr. Jill Timms, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Surrey

Thank you to Dave, Nick and all who have made today possible. I am delighted to be here and to have got to this point in launching this Guide is really to be celebrated. And what a place to be celebrating this in...

As many of you might know Coventry Cathedral has a very significant history in terms of work on peace and reconciliation, with the new Cathedral building we are together in today being built from the ashes of that bombed so heavily in World War II. Indeed, these wonderful windows allow us to see that site, from the viewpoint of what has been created since. I would also encourage you to explore all parts of the Cathedral today as it really is so fitting for our meeting, with its Chapel of Industry in the far corner and the Chapel of Unity behind me, which offers a quiet space for reflection at any point. But I also want to mention this amazing artwork that happens to be next to us – The Thorn Flower, by Charlotte Mayer.

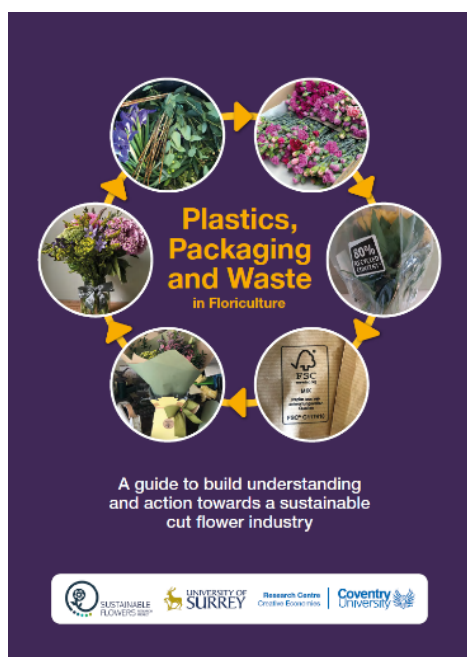


Her beautiful sculpture reminds us that flowers have such special meaning to us mortals, here bringing together the sharp thorns of pain and struggle, right next to the beautiful flower representing joy. And today we are here together to face the struggles involved in developing a more sustainable industry for those beautiful blooms.

In fact, it is coming together through collaboration, which has been at the very core of our Working Group it has been at the heart of the work that has gone into this Guide and what we are all here for today.

Collaboration has always been essential to the way Dave and I have run the Sustainable Flowers Research Project, looking for where we can work with others to have an impact, trying to give space for different voices to be heard. Because for us it only makes sense if we work together, whatever part of the supply chains people are from, and no matter how large or small your organisation is, it really is in everyone's interest to work towards a flower industry that not only survives the future, but thrives – and we all need our planet to survive for this to happen!

So, a heartfelt thanks for your contributions, for being here today and for being open to conversations, to taking an active part and learning with others.



I would like to now take a moment to introduce you to the Guide we are launching, to showcase a little of what is included.

We are presenting this as '*A guide to build understanding and action towards a sustainable cut flower industry*' and it is intended for use by florists, wholesalers and anyone who buys, sells or works with flowers. We then set out clearly the key problems associated with packaging and waste, before offering practical suggestions on the importance of and how to audit your own waste, then offer guidance for improving your decisions and practice.

There are three themes we delve deeper into. Firstly, we focus on **retail packaging**, then on **funerals** and thirdly, on **weddings, events and church flowers**. For each we look at some of the specific challenges involved and offer tailored advice for what steps can be taken to improve sustainable practice in each area.

We then complete the guide by discussing the importance of making better choices in floral packaging and mechanics. We

importantly explain that our digital guide is an extended version from the hard copy, which we hope to keep updated. Our digital version is slightly longer and provides further information on products and techniques available, as well as links to other very useful resources. The Guide is available free to all via our Knowledge Exchange Hub on the [Sustainable Flowers Research Project](#).

We truly hope you find the Guide interesting, useful and inspirational. We invite you to share it as widely as possible and also to send your own feedback from using it and ideas you have. It really has been a collaborative effort and we hope in that spirit we can begin to help more people understand the issues, to give them confidence about what they can do and ultimately to change practices. This needs us all to work together and so again, we are delighted you are here as part of this.



Part 2: Demonstrations of sustainable floristry

Saffron Dodd-Smith and Verity Porter (The Bath Flower School)

We constructed a broken arch using no single use plastics. Half of the arch was flowered using all local to Somerset grown flowers, the other half was left bare, in order to show the mechanics beneath the flowers.

All flowers and foliage were in water which was contained in re-usable plastic trumpets. The base structure for the broken arch was made of metal and was weighed down with large metal plates.

The metal structure was stuffed with Welsh sphagnum moss which is held in with chicken wire. Both the moss and chicken wire are reusable and in fact have been part of these particular mechanics for over a year.

We wanted to highlight that not using floral foam is one of the easiest ways to work towards being more sustainable as a florist. Often florists that work on weddings and large flower installations think that large structures can't be made without using floral foam.

But with a few bits of technical information, very large, show-stopping pieces of floral work can be achieved with all flowers being hydrated and in water.

We teach courses in Large Scale Installation at The Bath Flower School and have been teaching these designs and methods for over 6 years , so it's not something new and many wedding florists do use these methods now. What did catch my attention on the day at Coventry, was that so many people were surprised when I demonstrated using ribbon to attach branches etc securely without using cable ties.

We teach using ribbon to safely secure large bits of foliage, metal structures, hanging installations. Ribbon is reusable, can be tied and untied and is as strong as a plastic cable tie which are single use.



Carole Patilla, The Farewell Flowers Directory/Tuckshop Flowers/Green Funeral Flowers.

At the Coventry launch for the guidance booklet on reducing plastic waste, I brought along two plastic-free funeral flower arrangements. These took the form of two flat back sheaves made with woody material as a supportive 'backbone'. Branching twiggy material and '3D' seasonal ingredients (e.g hydrangeas, large textural seedheads) to provided volume and separation for the flowers and this prevents sheaf arrangements looking 'flat' when viewed on a coffin.

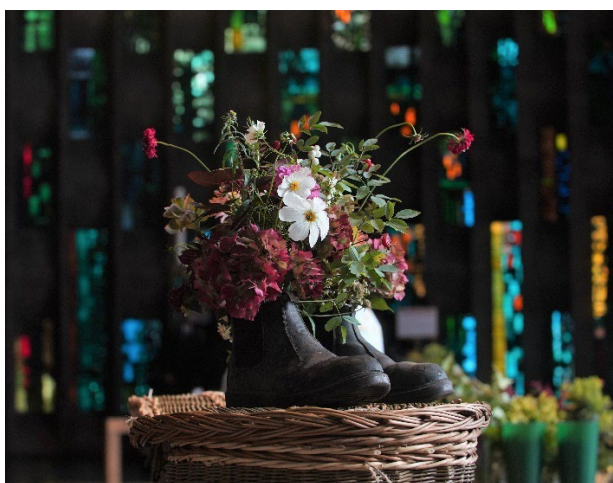
I demonstrated how sheaves can be simply layered on top of each other to create a longer casket display without the real need for any further mechanics. I also showed visitors Chrysal 'Arrive Alive' compostable cellulose wraps which can be used to keep bouquets hydrated if they're being created during the hot summer months or have to travel out of water for long periods. The sheaves were simply tied with natural raffia, though jute or twine could easily be used if preferred. They can be delivered to undertakers in water with a returnable florist bucket marked with your name.

I chose to demonstrate this style of arrangement because I wanted to show just how easy it is to create funeral flowers without the use of floral foam or other plastics and that there are no real barriers to prevent this being the case for casket sprays and displays. I was asked about creating letters and shapes for funerals without the use of foam but explained that getting away from these and offering alternatives to them was part of my rationale for offering funeral flowers in the first place – I'm sure with the use of cardboard letter forms or woody twiggy structures there are ways to create them but I simply don't want to!

I was also asked about the unsustainable use of moss for foam free funeral work and explained that I don't use moss to make bases for my funeral work, instead preferring to make creative use of bouquets (with cellulose wraps) as a means of constructing casket sprays which can be shared after the funeral service.

Getting the plastic out of funeral flowers involves educating florists, the public and the funeral trade about what plastic-free funeral flowers can be, and the many ways to personalise them beyond pictures and words. Gill Hodgson and I have set up The Farewell Flowers Directory as a plastic-free UK-wide florist listing for people seeking alternatives. We hope our website provides inspiration for the many different forms funeral flowers can take for both florists and the public alike.

The Farewell Flowers Directory is also working to get funeral flowers talked about in the public sphere and the media in order to broaden perceptions of what 'funeral flowers' can be: just lovely flowers like any others which are only 'funereal' by the context in which they're used and which don't leave a legacy of plastic behind. In the days before the booklet launch, we'd been speaking and exhibiting at the conference held by the Institute of Crematoria and Cemetery Management as we want to engage the whole funeral trade, not just florists, in the discussions about moving away from plastics.



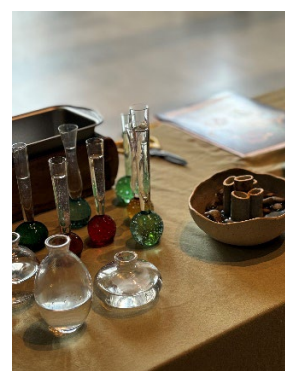
Dr. Angela Coulton (Petal and Twig)

My demonstration focused on smaller arrangements and containers and mechanics suitable for arranging into water, rather than floral foam or one of the substitutes. I feel this is an overlooked and underserved area of floristry. For decades, the standard for mechanics for table arrangements for weddings has been a shallow bowl or tray, usually plastic, with a block of floral foam standing proud of the container. This has influenced styles of design, enabling low to table arrangements or elevated designs on raised stands.

Arranging into water filled vessels requires deeper, water-tight containers, which are generally not available from floral sundries suppliers. I have instead searched homeware departments for cereal bowls, filled with horticultural grit and a pillow of wire netting secured with twine or nylon thread. These make a secure and relatively cheap plastic-free DIY base for table arrangements and can easily be taken home by guests after a wedding.

We are often asked for aisle arrangements and wooden crates filled with hessian wrapped tins or glass jars make an economical structure for a naturalistic upright meadow or garden border arrangement. Vintage glass bud vases or stoneware are also a popular and versatile choice for foam-free table arrangements, which can be returned and reused multiple times

In general, designing with these DIY and vintage options is not taught in floristry, and it can perhaps still be perceived as unprofessional to recycle tins and jars rather than use new containers. This attitude needs to change so that repurposing containers is seen as a positive, and designing without floral foam becomes standard practice.



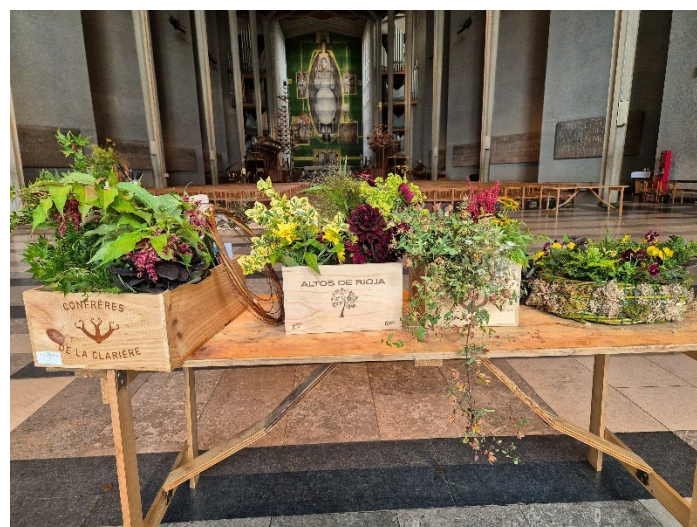
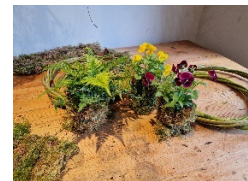
Shane Connolly (Shane Connolly and Co)

One of the biggest challenges to event flower designers, and particularly to church flower guilds, is making large arrangements without the use of floral foam. It leaves a trail of micro plastic waste which is avoidable. So, we decided to show that a very large-scale design could be achieved with a simple structure and shapely foliage. We set a piece of timber in concrete, covered it in chicken wire, and arranged seasonal British foliage in tubes of water into the chicken wire, to create the basic shape. Then we added more British grown ingredients...hydrangeas, Fennel and grasses...to show that flowers can be a minimal ingredient. Again saving on the high carbon footprint of many imported flowers and their inevitable plastic wrappings.



Nicola Hill (Gentle Blooms)

I made a sustainable funeral wreath with living plants. It is completely made with natural compostable materials. The wreath was made with two willow rings as a base. I used small plants which I wrapped in moss and tied with twine, they were then placed on the two willow rings and I filled the gaps with moss. I then placed two more willow rings on top being careful to pull the plant foliage through safely. I then tied around the rings, adding a few more bent willow sticks to form a sturdy base. I then sprayed the moss and decorated with flowers and foliage from my flower farm.



Katherine Birtles (Zinnia Floral Design)

I designed a certified home compostable funeral heart tribute using Oshun Pouch as the main water retaining mechanic and Oasis Floral Biolit tray. Alongside these I used jute string and some sustainably harvested (under license) Norfolk moss. Both the Oshun Pouch and Oasis Floral Biolit tray have TUV Home compostable certification which is important to show to burial grounds and funeral directors to illustrate your product will compost down effectively in home compostable conditions.

I used British willow to construct a frame and base to integrate with the other mechanics so collectively the entire frame was fully compostable. I use a jig which I designed to be convertible from wreath to heart and have undertaken workshop days to acquire the necessary skills to work with willow.

Everyone attending thought the design was beautiful and very suitable for its use and were interested in the commercially available products as well as the base I designed and made. Comments 'does it leak' were answered with asking them to place the tribute over their heads to show it did not!

Using these mechanics eradicates all plastics and ensures full compostability however this does come with increased cost for the mechanics. I suggested as a start to negate this and keep roughly within current prices one should design with plant materials that are less costly and fill space more productively.

I would like to see the availability of all of the mechanics used, including the hand crafted one so that other florists and floral designers can purchase easily and begin to use them to create sustainable funeral tributes.



Part 3: Panel Discussions

Panel 1: Jonny Young (JZ/Dutch Flower Group); Edmund Timm (MPS) Pete Schofield (Bloom and Wild)

Summary

The first panel focused on sustainable practices in the flower industry, with panellists discussing their efforts to reduce plastic and packaging waste. Johnny from JZ Flowers highlighted their use of recycled content sleeves for Sainsbury's and Aldi, saving many tons of virgin plastic annually. Pete from Bloom and Wild detailed their use of FSC-certified materials and a 86% reduction in plastic waste. Edmund from MPS emphasized the importance of certification and the EU's 2030 packaging regulations. The discussion also covered the need for better labelling, consumer education, and industry collaboration to drive sustainable practices.



Johnny Young, JZ Flowers and Superflora

- Johnny highlighted the large volume of stems traded and the efforts to reduce plastic usage with retail customers.
- Around 700 million stems are sourced across the UK & IE Flora Group which is part of the Dutch Flower Group which sources around three and a half billion stems a year supplying into mainland Europe in both wholesale and retail.
- Since around 2017 each of the retailers have focused specifically on packaging and plastics with public pledges in place. We do monthly KPI reporting, to work to all those pledges and track progress with customers.
- We have been working on reducing the thickness of sleeves, the size of sleeves, height and since the start of this year increasing the recycled content of sleeves.
- Retailer targets really impact the way we can design a product in terms of the thickness, the types of packaging from a sustainability perspective, but commercial is still king. The commercial element is critical. We have had challenges such as the quality of recycled content sleeves.
- The discussion is always about consumer packaging. But one of the biggest challenges is supply chain, the amount of packaging coming onto our site. So, for this year, we will receive around 2000 tons of cardboard, 200 tons of plastic. It's enormous. The next phase of the strategy will focus on trying to reduce this.

Pete Schofield, Bloom and Wild

- Pete Schofield from Bloom and Wild discussed their commitment to reducing plastic and packaging waste.
- We've pulled together 1000s of data points to map the carbon footprint of individual stems so our floral designers can make choices that help us to reduce the impact of our bouquets by 7% every year, in line with our net zero target.
- With regards to our packaging, our cardboard boxes are recycled from Forest Stewardship Council certified suppliers. Our craft paper is also from FSC certified suppliers. The ribbon that we use is made from recycled plastic bottles. Every 1000 meters of ribbon saves 120 bottles for being chucked away to landfill. The greeting cards and care guides that we get with all our products are all FSC approved as well our flower food sachets. These are recycled FSC certified paper printed with non-toxic vegetable ink. The stickers that we use are printed on FSC certified paper,

- We have hundreds of suppliers from different parts of the world, and we're trying to educate them all to reduce this type of plastic so. In the past 12 months, reduced laminated plastic, waste by 86%. The problem is that it recycled plastic with a laminate that needs removing. It is becoming less financially viable for us to send on for further recycling as the value is low for the recycling company.
- Bloom and Wild is a B Corp company and therefore reports on the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit in our business practices.

Edmund Timm, MPS

- Edmund Timm from MPS in Holland explains their role in supporting growers to become more sustainable.
- MPS certifies about 3500 growers around the world from C to A+ based on environmental impact, crop protection agents, water, energy, and waste management including packaging.
- Edmund discussed how the new EU legislation on packaging and waste, requiring all packaging to be recyclable and 35% of plastic packaging to contain recycled material.
- MPS do carbon footprint of production and have calculations for the whole chain, the raw materials, cultivation, up to the end of life. There some great examples of reducing footprint by using only biodegradable or even no plastics and not actually, using materials cannot be reused. We have seen great examples here today.

Audience Questions and Panellist Responses

- Johnny explained initiatives to reduce plastic usage within the supply chain, such as using multiple use boxes and trialling new packaging solutions. They have reduced plastic usage by 50% from one supplier by putting more bunches in a box. The retailers are very focused on these sorts of changes.
- Pete Schofield and Johnny discussed the reasons for using plastic in flower packaging, including humidity and quality control.
- Each of the UK retailers has specific pledges on 100% of packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable, they'll have additional pledges around reducing virgin plastics and single use plastics.
- The panellists discussed the importance of consumer education and the challenges of balancing sustainability with commercial viability. Some consumers will understand that a bouquet wrapping is not perfect for sustainability reasons, but most won't have the knowledge.
- Edmund mentioned how certification processes encourage growers to track metrics including plastics/package usage and he has seen people respond by reducing their figures by 30% once they become aware of the problem.

Panel 2: Dr. Anna Bogush (Coventry University), Zara Taylor (Interflora), Dr. Angela Coulton (Petal and Twig)

Summary

Anna Bogush shared her insights on bio-based and biodegradable materials, highlighting the potential of polylactic acid and natural materials like palm leaves and bamboo. Angela Coulton emphasized the need for more innovation in reusable structures and training for florists to adopt sustainable practices. Zara Taylor from Interflora discussed their efforts to educate florists and introduce sustainable products, including removing helium balloons and hat boxes. The panellists agreed on the importance of collaboration, education, and innovation to drive sustainable changes in the industry. Zanna Hoskins raised concerns about misinformation regarding packaging and the need for clear labelling. Anna and Angela discussed the challenges of labelling and the need for a clear, consistent system for consumers. Zara highlighted Interflora's initiatives to support florists and encourage sustainable practices, including their British flower hub and sustainable forestry innovation award.



Dr. Anna Bogush, Coventry University

- Working together is so important, - scientists and florists, industrial partners and people from government, we can bring our ideas together. And work together and make this industry more sustainable.
- It has been great to see how to use alternative materials, like natural nature-based materials or specific constructions create beautiful designs.
- The main focus in research and development is related to bio-based and biodegradable materials, and also bio based and biodegradable plastic, for example, polylactic acids. Bio-based materials, like for example, palm leaves, bamboo leaves, hemp fibres can be used as well replacing plastic materials. There is a lot of innovation is taking place which could be used in floristry, for example, cellulose fibre, hemp fibre and coconut coir fibre.
- We have seen several amazing approaches and bio-based materials in in this workshop as well, and how people use it for specific approach for example, holding water and fixing flowers.
- It's very difficult to remove plastic from our lives. But we need to focus more on recycling and reuse. For example, polypropylene, polyethylene, they must be completely recyclable.
- People are very confused about all the terminology used in recycling. Compostable can mean home compostable or industrial compostable, for example. The main issue is labelling - we need to develop clear labels. But in that area, we need to work together in the whole supply chain - industry, government, consumers and scientists.
- Good labelling systems are needed, as is better infrastructure for recycling and composting. And this is, of course, it's not the responsibility of consumers. This is industrial partners and Government.

Dr. Angela Coulton, Petal and Twig

- There are so many different ways of approaching the basis for good design, whether that's for funeral flowers or for table arrangements or archways. I think there is a lot of really good work going on all over the country in terms of people coming up with their own designs and their own ways of doing things. I think sharing is really important. This idea of shareable funeral tribute is really fascinating. It's so important for the industry that we're able to upskill a lot more florists in particular to do this kind of work. Making your own bases and mechanics for arrangements and

tributes is a lot more work, but lots of them can be reusable, and I think getting away from that single use approach is really important.

- Most of the structures and bases and mechanics that are being made are not commercially available. Manufacturers of sundries need to enable and support florists who want to not use floral foam or floral foam substitutes, which are largely single use. So we need things that will enable arranging in water, whether that's structures or vessels that are watertight, the right depth, the right size, the right kind of reusable support structures. A needs florist needs to be able to look on a wholesaler's website, and be able to find a range of sundries that will support this type of design, and that's as well as skilling up florists who are training now, or maybe retraining.
- Things have changed a lot, but in the sundries and mechanics side of the business, sustainable alternatives are not in the mainstream, and they need to be in order for florists to make to be able to make the change.
- Managing these issues for retail florists, independent, small, independent businesses, is a huge learning curve, and it is very confusing. Wholesalers that florists buy from are probably part of the answer. The Dutch system uses a lot of reusable crates. You know, those have been in use for years. They're reusable, returnable. Our wholesaler has a massive cardboard recycling system, but we can't return cardboard to them. They largely send us things in crates, and we cannot send back any of the plastic sleeves currently that we receive from wholesalers almost every day. I think there needs to be a system that enables that, and that's partly going to be about having the sleeves made of the right kind of plastics in future. But I think that wholesalers have to be part of the answer and they need to be much more involved in this project to make it happen.

Zara Taylor, Interflora

- As a non-florist, working in a floristry industry, just the creativity of everything I've seen today has been wonderful. But from a sustainability perspective, I think it's about the innovation and the can-do attitude.
- Interflora, is a network of independent florists across the UK and Ireland and we are trying to help florists to understand different solutions that they can be using. But we're also trying to introduce different solutions into the products that we offer to our florist as well.
- One of the challenges that we see with the florist network is a little bit of fear about the cost of things. How much is this going to cost in terms of material and time? So, it's about helping them to understand that actually, sometimes making the different choices can save you money as a business.
- And one of the things that we do is to try and look at the products that we're selling into our florist shops to enable them to fulfil our orders. So, things like making sure our cardboard boxes and our paper is all FSC certified, making sure that we're removing as much plastic as possible from our products. We stopped selling helium balloons a couple of years ago. This is the last Christmas we'll be offering hat boxes, which have a plastic liner and require floral foam.
- Interflora have a big responsibility to support our network in being able to make more informed and better choices. A lot of florists don't know where to start are concerned it's going to cost money. We need to help our florists in our network to pick up some of those things that they can do relatively easily, and support them so that they can then move on to bigger challenges.
- The second piece is around collaboration and championing innovations that are out there. Last year we introduced our Sustainable Floristry Innovation Award, looking out for services, products, organizations that are working towards making florists more sustainable for the future.
- Interflora is also promoting British grown flowers and foliage including offering a 100% British sourced bouquet for the months when locally grown stock is readily available.

Concluding Remarks and Future Plans

- David Bek reflected on the importance of collaboration and working together to drive sustainable changes in the industry.
- Jill Timms encouraged continued engagement and collaboration to address ongoing challenges and drive positive change, inviting people to engage with the project social media and website, where you can sign up to receive future updates.
- The panellists and attendees discussed the need for clear policies, better infrastructure, and continued innovation to support sustainable practices.
- The session concluded with a call to action for continued collaboration and engagement to drive positive change in the flower industry. Attendees were asked to contribute ideas which can be taken up by the working group as action points in the coming year.



And finally, the event would not have been such a success without help from Coventry University's postgraduate community. Catherine Mazhandu brandishes a glorious bunch of flowers and birthday-boy Hillary Chindodo looks forward to enjoying his birthday cake!!

Thanks also to Julyan Levy and Heinrich Escano for all their help on the day, Jayne Beaufoy for managing the administration and, of course, huge thanks to Coventry Cathedral and their staff.

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The **images** used in this report were provided by Fresh@CU, David Bek, Angela Coulton, Nicola Hill and Saffron Dodds-Smith

If you would like to know more about the Plastics, Packaging and Waste Working Group or the Sustainable Flowers Research Project then please get in touch with David and Jill. Contact details are in the Guide and on the project website, where you can also sign up for updates.

Project website: www.sustainableflowersresearch.org

Industry royally champions sustainable floriculture project led by Coventry University



Professor David Bek and Shane Connolly in Coventry Cathedral

📅 Wednesday 09 October 2024

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Coventry University is leading a project to reduce plastic, packaging and waste in the British cut-flower industry.

The cut-flower sector is a significant user of packaging, with multiple layers of plastic and other materials used to protect and hydrate flowers from grower to consumer.

Led by Professor David Bek, from Coventry University's Research Centre for Creative Economies, an industry working group has produced a new booklet and other resources designed to guide the floriculture industry towards more sustainable practices.

The working group, which is co-led by the University of Surrey, comprises key collaborators such as the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI), Interflora, the British Floristry Association, Flowers from the Farm, JZ Flowers and Superflora, and Bloom and Wild.

An official launch event was held at Coventry Cathedral which showcased demonstrations of sustainable floristry design including by The King's florist, Shane Connolly.

Partly funded by an Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) awarded to Coventry University by the Economic and Social Research Council, the project aims to transform the industry by encouraging and promoting sustainable practices by offering practical guidelines for reducing environmental impacts, such as minimising the use of single-use plastics and improving packaging efficiency.

While important for product protection, the widespread use of single-use plastics poses a significant environmental concern, and as consumer demand for sustainable practices grows, businesses that adopt eco-friendly methods enhance environmental sustainability, improve efficiency and lower costs.

“ I have struggled for years with the idea that so many florists feel that nature is their inspiration and guide, yet so much of floral practice is damaging to nature.

It has been wonderful to see this dichotomy addressed at the event in Coventry Cathedral. We need to offer solutions to florists rather than bombard them with the issues and that's what we're starting to do.

For many years I have tried to promote more sustainable practice in the floral industry, so it was an honour to be part of this event where the solutions are being presented along with the issues, and in a way that is supported by robust academic research.

Shane Connolly, Florist by Royal Appointment to The Late Queen and now to both The King and Queen

“ The strength of this project lies in the commitment offered by industry and expert stakeholders. Their support not only lends credibility to our initiative but also amplifies the message of sustainability within the industry. This project represents a crucial step toward reducing the environmental impact of the cut-flower industry and the involvement of respected industry leaders is a testament to its importance.

Professor David Bek

“ For me, at the core of this project and our working group is collaboration. It has been challenging, but we have brought people together from across flower supply chains - both global and local. We have produced guidance which has been really useful to many different groups and sets a high bar for the ambitions we have to bring about significant policy and behavioural change for a more sustainable, and less wasteful and plastic orientated flower industry future.

Professor Jill Timms, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Surrey