How Coffee Shops Can Cut Down on Packaging Waste in Twickenham

Understanding the Waste Problem in Coffee Shops

Every coffee shop generates packaging waste, from the cups and lids used for takeaway drinks to the bags that hold coffee beans and the wrappers around pastries. For a business aiming to be a sustainable coffee shop, reducing that waste is one of the most visible and impactful changes you can make. Customers notice, and they increasingly expect it. This article walks through the practical steps a coffee shop in a town like Twickenham can take, starting with the easiest swaps and moving toward more complex changes in the supply chain.

Step 1: Audit What You Throw Away

Before you change anything, you need to know what you are sending to landfill. Spend a week looking at your bins. Separate the waste into categories: cups, lids, straws, takeaway food containers, coffee bean bags, milk cartons, sugar wrappers, and so on. Weigh each category or at least estimate the volume. The goal is to identify the biggest sources of waste, because those are where a small change will have the largest effect.

What to watch for: You may discover that most of your waste is actually from back-of-house operations, the packaging your supplies arrive in. That is a different problem from what customers see, and it needs a different solution. Also note whether your current "compostable" items are actually being composted. Many compostable cups and lids end up in the general waste because the local council does not accept them in the green bin. If that is the case, they are no better than plastic.

Step 2: Switch to Reusable Systems for In-Store Use

The simplest win is to stop using disposable cups for customers who drink in the shop. Use ceramic mugs, glass cups, or sturdy reusable tumblers for all dine-in orders. For takeaway, offer a discount or loyalty incentive to customers who bring their own cup. Many shops find that a small price reduction (like 10 or 20 pence) encourages the habit.

View the location on Google Maps

What to watch for: Make sure your staff are trained to ask every customer, "Is this for here or to go?" before reaching for a takeaway cup. It sounds obvious, but in a busy rush the default can be to grab a disposable cup for everyone. Also, if you offer a discount for reusable cups, track how many people actually use it. If the uptake is low, consider raising the discount or promoting it more visibly at the counter.

The Press Room is also on Facebook.

Step 3: Choose Better Takeaway Packaging

For customers who do need a takeaway cup, look for options made from materials that are genuinely compostable in industrial facilities. Sugarcane fibre (bagasse) and cornstarch-based materials are common alternatives. They look and feel different from plastic or paper cups, but they work well for hot drinks. Lids are trickier, many "compostable" lids are still made from plant-based plastic (PLA) that requires high-temperature industrial composting to break down. Check with your local waste authority whether they accept PLA in their green waste stream before committing to it.

What to watch for: Compostable packaging often has a shorter shelf life and can degrade if stored in a hot, humid cupboard. Order smaller batches more frequently. Also, some customers complain that compostable cups feel flimsy or leak. Test a few brands before buying in bulk. A cup that fails in the customer's hand is worse for your reputation than a plastic one.

Step 4: Rethink the Coffee Bean Packaging

If you buy roasted coffee in bulk, the bags are a major source of waste. Many roasters now offer delivery in returnable steel drums or large paper sacks that can be reused. Some roasters also take back their empty bags for recycling. If you roast your own coffee, consider switching to a bag that is made from a single material (like paper with a thin compostable liner) rather than the multi-layer foil bags that are difficult to recycle.

What to watch for: The barrier properties of the packaging matter. Coffee beans need to stay fresh, so a bag that is fully compostable may not keep oxygen out as well as a foil bag. You may need to adjust your roasting schedule to sell beans faster, or invest in a nitrogen-flush system to extend shelf life. Talk to your roaster or supplier about what is available for your volume.

Step 5: Work With Your Suppliers on Returnable Containers

Milk is one of the heaviest contributors to packaging waste in a coffee shop. Instead of buying milk in single-use plastic bottles, some shops now receive milk in returnable stainless steel churns. The milk is delivered fresh, the churn is collected on the next delivery, and the dairy sanitises and refills it. This eliminates the plastic bottle waste entirely. The same model can apply to syrups, sauces, and even cleaning products.

What to watch for: Returnable containers require more space for storage and a system to make sure empty churns go back with the right driver. They also tie you to a specific supplier,

which can be a risk if that supplier's service drops. Start with one product, milk is usually the easiest, and see how the logistics work before expanding.

Step 6: Educate Customers and Staff

All the packaging changes in the world will not reduce waste if customers throw compostable cups into the wrong bin or staff forget to sort recycling. Put clear signage above the bins showing what goes where. Train your team on why each change matters and how to handle customer questions. A customer who asks "Why is my cup different?" should get a quick, honest answer, not a shrug.

What to watch for: Customer education works best when it is gentle and positive. A sign that says "We no longer use plastic cups" is better than one that says "Please recycle properly or the planet dies". People respond better to being part of a good thing than to being scolded. Also, do not assume that every customer cares about sustainability. Some just want their coffee fast. Keep the system simple for them.

Step 7: Join or Start a Circular Economy Initiative

This is the most ambitious step, but it can have the biggest impact. A circular economy means keeping materials in use for as long as possible. For a coffee shop, that could mean partnering with a local composting service that will collect your used coffee grounds and packaging and turn them into soil. Or it could mean joining a cup-sharing scheme where customers borrow a reusable cup from one shop and return it at another. Some towns have started local networks where businesses share waste streams, one shop's cardboard becomes another's packaging.

What to watch for: These initiatives take time and coordination. You need at least one other committed business to make it work, and you need a reliable partner to handle the collection and processing. Start by talking to your local council's waste officer or a nearby zero-waste shop. They may already know who is interested in such a scheme.

The Role of the Coffee Shop in Twickenham

A sustainable coffee shop is not just about the cup. It is about every piece of packaging that comes through the door, from the bean bag to the milk bottle. The Press Room, a speciality coffee shop and roaster on London Road in Twickenham, has been part of the local community since 2012. Like many independent shops, it faces the challenge of balancing quality, cost, and environmental impact. The steps above are achievable for any coffee shop in the area, whether you are a single outlet or part of a small group.

Closing Thoughts

Reducing packaging waste is not a one-time project. It is an ongoing process of testing, learning, and improving. Start with the audit, make one or two changes, see how they work, and then move on to the next. Your customers will notice the effort, and your business will be part of the shift toward a more sustainable coffee culture. For more information about the approach taken by a local roaster and coffee shop, you can reach The Press Room at 29 London Rd, Twickenham TW1 3SZ, UK, or call them on +442086179600.