Keep Scotland Beautiful

Inspiring action for our environment



NOVEMBER 2026

Scotland's national litter report

What you told us and what we found

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HOW TO READ THE FIGURES

= Public perception data
What you told us

= Technical data
What we found

- % of sites
- % of litter items
- % of people

Keep Scotland Beautiful

Technical data (Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS) survey) – from audits carried out during 2025/2026.

Diffley Partnership

The Scottish Litter Survey is produced in association with The Diffley Partnership as part of the Understanding Scotland Series. Questions were asked between 2–5 August 2026 with a total of 2,186 completed responses. The survey data is weighted to the age and gender profile of the population in Scotland.

Foreword

Litter levels have stagnated. Our streets, open spaces and communities remain polluted.

This isn't a new story; we first highlighted the growing challenge of litter and littering behaviours in communities picked up through our street surveys a decade ago.

But it's now crunch time – time to ask ourselves if we're happy accepting that Scotland has a litter problem. Or if we want to see real, concerted action by national government and agencies, by local authorities and at a hyper local level by schools and communities to finally change behaviours and clean up our country?

Every year, for 10 years, we've used data gathered from across the country to paint a picture of a dirty Scotland – for the past five years we've also published data confirming 90% of us believe litter is a national problem.

All the research and data points to a desperate need for greater prioritisation and more significant investment. Yet, despite the clear and overwhelming evidence that we need to tackle litter – a significant cause of pollution and contributor to the climate and nature emergencies – we are stuck.

Despite the thousands of people across Scotland doing litter picks regularly to try and keep on top of things, the local authorities doing their best to maintain infrastructure and remove litter from our streets (with some localised successes), and us doing our best to deliver the Scottish Government's National Litter and Flytipping Strategy and Marine Litter Strategy, we can't shift the dial. While litter levels on the ground have slightly improved since the pandemic, they appear to have stagnated in the last three years.

But we do have hope. A Deposit Return Scheme will tackle littered plastic bottles and cans, and there is positive movement around enforcement and roadside litter. This is a start, but it's not enough. We need to keep pushing, challenge ourselves and those who make decisions on priorities and investment, and not accept the status quo if we are to ensure that we, and future generations, have a country and communities that are truly beautiful.

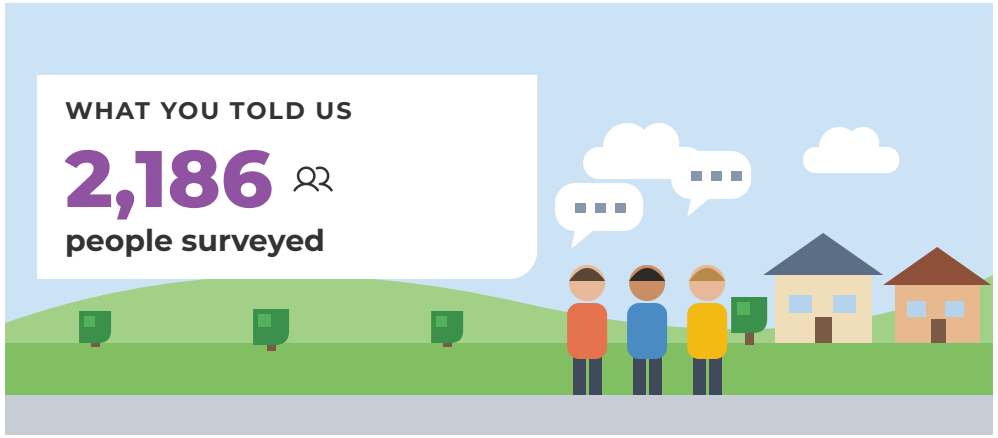


Two data sets. One report

The majority of the data is comparable, but it doesn't align perfectly.

This report highlights the issues but also makes recommendations on where we need to focus efforts to tackle litter and littering behaviours.

DATA SET ONE



DATA SET TWO



Public perception data tells us the types of litter people are concerned about, why and what they want done.

Technical data tells us the types of litter recorded, the number of sites impacted and how badly.

There are three sample sizes within data set two:

- 3,407 street sites audited for litter composition and % of sites with litter and types.
- 7,054 street sites audited for % of sites with litter and types.
- 1,592 roadside sites audited for % of sites with litter.

Key stats

PUBLIC PERCEPTION DATA

What you told us

88% of people believe litter is a problem nationally.

83% of people in the most deprived communities think litter is a problem in their area.

68% of people in the least deprived communities think litter is a problem in their area.

45% of people believe litter is more common than 12 months ago.

61% of people agree that flytipping is a problem in their local area.

TECHNICAL DATA

What we found

70% of all sites surveyed were littered.

87% of sites surveyed in the most deprived communities were littered.

56% of sites in the areas deemed least deprived were littered.

41% of litter counted was smoking related.

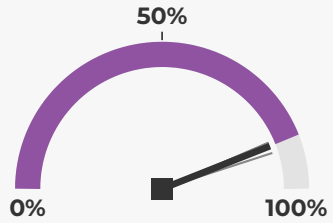
28% of litter counted was food and drink related.

Trends over time across Scotland

The dial isn't shifting. Our data shows very little variability year-on-year.

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND

Say litter is a problem across Scotland

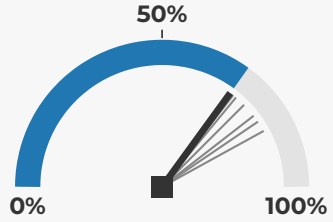


88%

2025/2026

Earlier years, 2020 – 2025

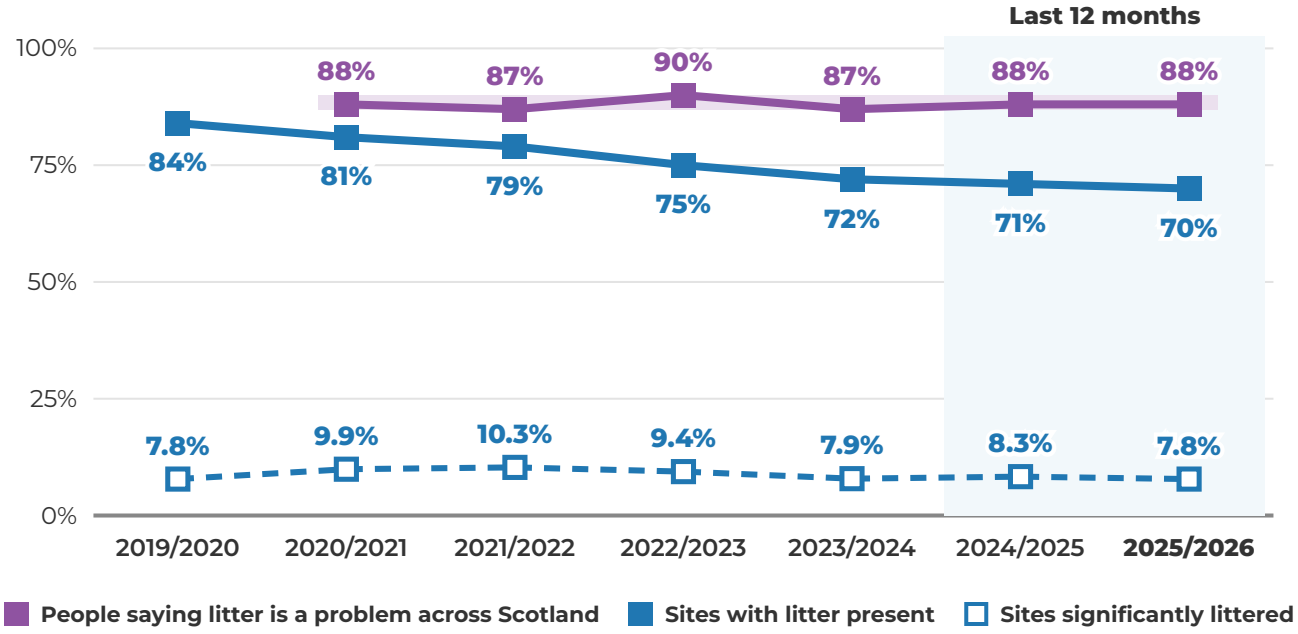
Sites with litter present



70%

2025/2026

Earlier years, 2019 – 2025



Over the last 12 months there's been just a 1% improvement in the percentage of sites where litter is recorded. More worryingly the number of significantly littered sites recorded has stagnated over the last three years and public perception of the litter problem has remained at a consistently high level for six years now.

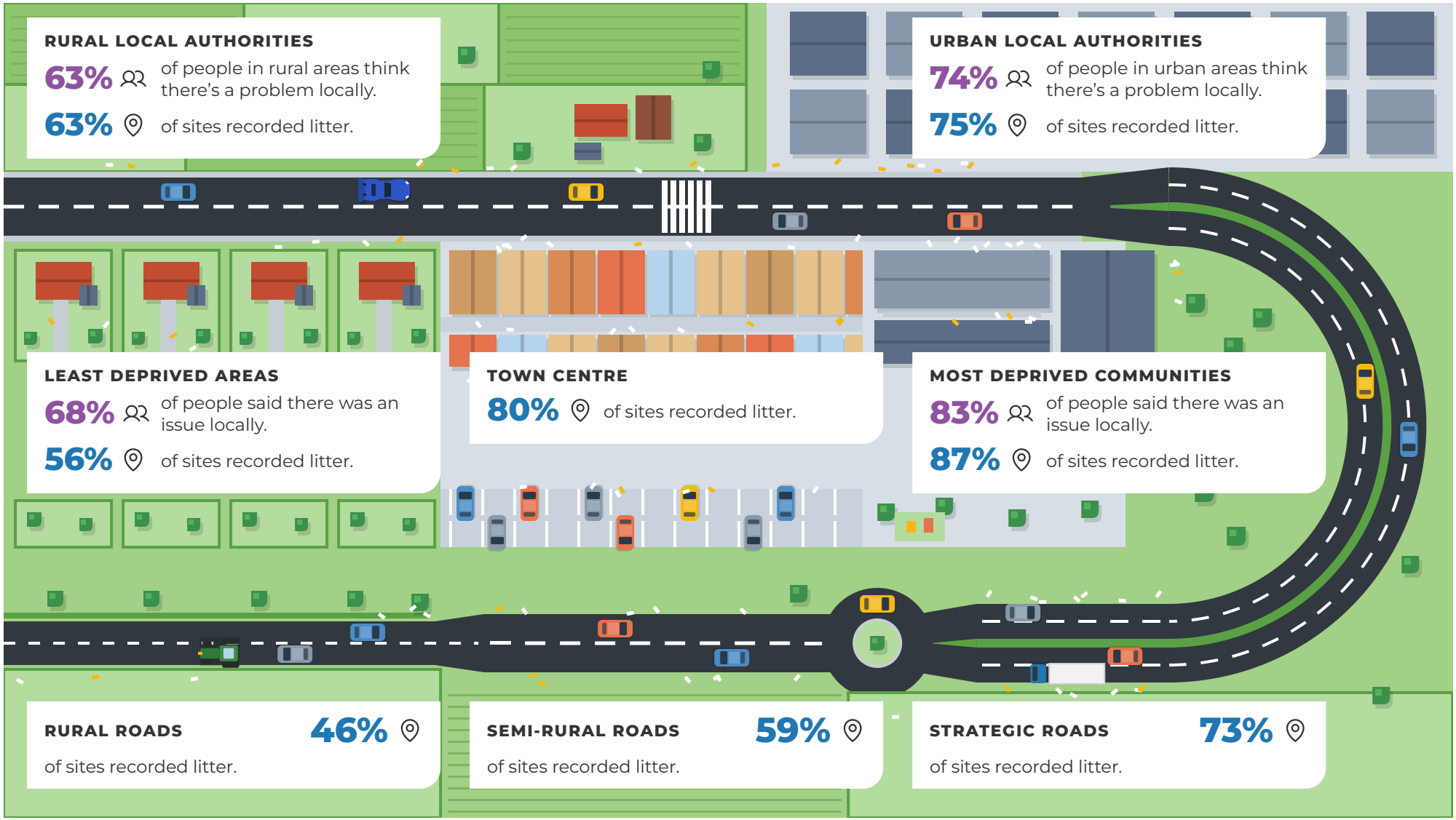
We have had two litter strategies in place for a number of years – the National Litter and Flytipping Strategy and the Marine Litter Strategy. Despite this, things aren't improving as fast as we need them to. After some positive national improvements – showing a 14% improvement in the number of sites with a presence of litter recorded, we are failing as a nation to significantly reduce the perception of the litter problem in our communities and are recording similar numbers of significantly littered sites year after year.

And this is despite excellent work at local community and regional levels by volunteers removing litter from their neighbourhoods, local authorities trialling innovative responses, new infrastructure and local campaigns, and businesses stepping up to play their part. If this wasn't happening things would be worse. People don't think Scotland is getting noticeably cleaner, and something has to change.

Trends across Scotland

Litter is an extremely difficult issue to tackle, we know that different contexts or locations have unique challenges that need addressed and that new, problematic types of litter appear every year.

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND



Most common types of litter

WHAT WE FOUND

Our audits reveal the composition of litter in Scotland. Smoking and vaping related litter were the most common litter type making up almost half of litter counted. Alongside that food and drink related litter makes up around a third and the rest is paper and "other".

41%	Smoking related
17%	Paper related
12%	Confectionery
12%	Other
11%	Drinks
5%	Fast food
2%	Vaping

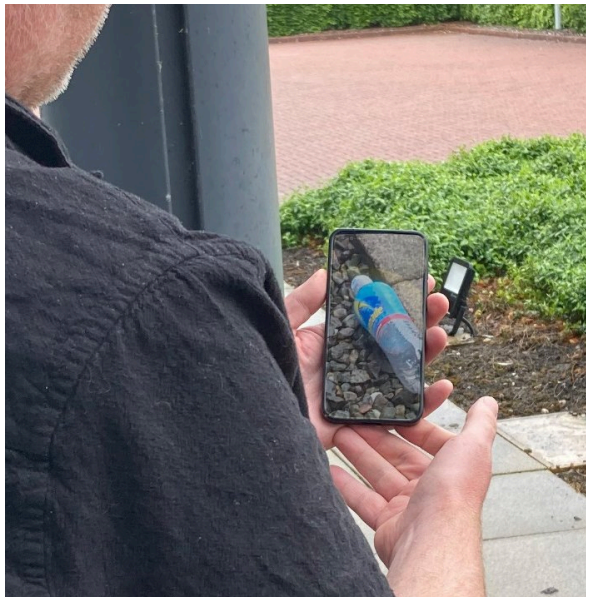
For every 100 litter items we count



What we're counting and what people see

Are we finding the same items on our streets as people perceive are there?

There is broad alignment between how often items are seen during our audits and what people report seeing. However, overall people perceive there to be higher levels of all litter types than we record through our audits. Larger and bright boldly branded items – in particular food and drink packaging, single-use vapes and bottles and cans – are perceived to make up much more of the litter than they actually do.



TYPE OF LITTER	ITEM	WHAT YOU TOLD US	WHAT WE FOUND
Litter generally	All litter		78%
	All litter		70%
Smoking related litter	Cigarette butts		62%
	Smoking related		51%
Vaping	E-cigarettes/vapes		56%
	Vaping		10%
Food stuffs	Food containers, wrappers and packaging		76%
	Single-use (hot and cold) drinks containers		62%
	Confectionery (wrappers)		35%
	Fast food (inc coffee cups)		17%
Drinks	Plastic drinks bottles		70%
	Drinks cans		69%
	Glass drinks bottles		37%
	Cans, plastic and glass bottles		33%
Paper related	Paper related		46%
	No public survey figure		
Other	Food waste		44%
	Plastic carrier bags		42%
	Other		32%

SPOTLIGHT

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND

Drinks containers

In October 2027 Scotland, and the rest of the UK, will have a Deposit Return Scheme for plastic bottles and cans.

It is important that we understand how many littered plastic bottles and cans are found scattered across our communities, how many could be removed and captured for recycling and what the potential is for reducing litter levels in the future.

Plastic bottles



70% of people say they see plastic bottles as litter often.

21% of sites were littered with plastic bottles.

Cans



69% of people say they see littered cans often.

17% of sites were littered by cans.

Drinks containers, including plastic and glass bottles and cans, are the fourth most common type of litter found on sites.

What needs to happen now

A well-designed, managed and communicated Deposit Return Scheme will encourage people to hold on to items that are currently being littered and recycle them in exchange for their 20p deposit. This will support a litter free and circular economy in Scotland and across the UK. We will work with Exchange for Change to support this in Scotland.

The Deposit Return Scheme will not include glass drinks bottles when it launches despite us, and many other environmental bodies, calling for this. But there is a need for this to be considered in the future. We will continue to monitor levels of drinks items up until, and following the go live date for the UK wide Deposit Return Scheme in October 2027 and will use our data to measure success and keep the conversation alive.

Based on 3,407 street samples across Scotland, undertaken by Keep Scotland Beautiful staff in tandem with the LEAMS programme.

SPOTLIGHT

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND

Packaging





Almost half of all streets we surveyed were littered with food and drink packaging. It is one of the most visible and common litter categories, and people recognise sources, brands and items found.

A successful Deposit Return Scheme will help remove some drinks packaging from our streets, but it won't address the other packaging items recorded.

Our data makes a compelling case for those that put packaging on the market to be held accountable for the packaging they produce that becomes litter dropped on the ground and placed in bins.

We believe that the regulations relating to packaging extended producer responsibility (pEPR) should be extended to include payments that help meet the costs of dealing with food and drink packaging litter in bins and dropped on the ground. This would help remove food and drink packaging from our streets and open spaces.

76% see food containers, wrapping and packaging very or somewhat often.

62% see single-use (hot and cold) drinks containers very or somewhat often.

70% of people[1] in Scotland agree producers should bear financial responsibility for managing packaging waste that becomes litter.

Excluding drinks containers, which will be captured in a Deposit Return Scheme, food and drinks packaging made up:

13% of litter counted

38% of sites

What needs to happen now

Given the prevalence of packaging items recorded and seen as litter we believe litter payments must form a key component of pEPR regulations, something we have called for repeatedly, alongside colleagues at Keep Wales Tidy. We welcomed the positive commitment from the Scottish Government to continue to look at extending the scheme in Scotland in March 2026 and will continue to call for strong leadership in this area.

Single-use beverage cups remain a visible litter item, a poster child of our wasteful society. We have campaigned for action to reduce single-use cups, to increase recycling and to encourage reuse. However, unless policy changes, infrastructure is invested in and people change habits there is likely to be no significant change. A single-use cup charge, with proceeds invested in systems and behaviour change, could play a significant part in reducing this litter item. We will continue to call for action.

Based on 3,407 street samples across Scotland, undertaken by Keep Scotland Beautiful staff in tandem with the LEAMS programme.

[1] Tackling the litter emergency, June 2024

SPOTLIGHT

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND

Smoking, vaping and tobacco products

The most littered items, recorded on the highest number of sites, are smoking related – either cigarette butts, vapes or tobacco products. In our most deprived communities and city centres smoking related litter is even higher. However, despite being the most littered item we record in our surveys people only rank smoking related litter as the fourth most commonly seen item, alongside single-use cups.

Smoking related

62% of people reported seeing cigarette butts frequently.

51% of sites are littered with smoking related items.

41% of all litter counted is smoking related items.

Vapes

On 1 June 2025 the sale of single-use vapes was banned across the UK, thanks in part to our data and campaigning efforts with ASH Scotland, Marine Conservation Society and Laura Anderson. We can see this policy change starting to lead to a reduction in items found as litter on the streets and slowly creeping into public perceptions.

10% of sites still being littered with vapes.



2024		2025 BAN	2026	
55%	reported seeing vapes more often as litter.		**47%**	reported seeing vapes more often.
2.3%	of litter counted was vaping related litter.		**1.8%**	of litter counted was vaping related litter.

What needs to happen now

Thanks to our collaborative partnerships over the last five years we have contributed to a data-led campaign which pushed hard for and succeeded in bringing in a ban on the sale of single-use vapes. With this now firmly in place our focus returns to measures needed to reduce all smoking related litter – from cigarette butts to the increasingly littered nicotine pouch.

We need to work more closely with businesses to target areas where litter from tobacco products accumulates. Ultimately we still want to see regulations for Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging extended to cover smoking materials and single-use vapes/e-cigarettes, not just the packaging.

SPOTLIGHT

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND

And the rest...

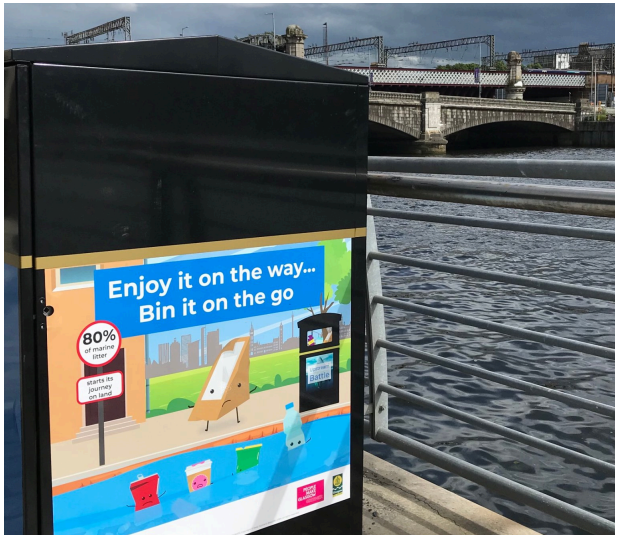
Almost a third of litter we record across Scotland's streets isn't addressed by any national policy, regulation or campaign.

Paper (receipts, tickets, bags) makes up almost 20% of what our surveyors record, and other items, including balloons and unidentifiable plastic pieces, including toys, elastic bands and pieces of textile and clothing, are not currently addressed, and yet make up a significant percentage of litter.

Then there are the emerging items, such as the nicotine pouch and nitrous oxide canisters – often highlighted to us by our volunteers who monitor litter in their communities and feed into our citizen science programmes, or our local authority partners and our own auditors.

Meanwhile old challenges still remain; the charge introduced on single-use plastic bags in 2014 has reduced littered bags in some locations, but they are still choking our waterways and being caught in hedges and trees.

Litter takes many forms, and requires many differing solutions.



42% still see plastic bags as litter often.

18% have seen nicotine pouches locally.

17% of litter recorded on our streets is paper related.

12% is "other". Unidentifiable plastic pieces, including toys, elastic bands and pieces of textile and clothing.

What we need to see happen

We need to remain vigilant and ensure we are identifying and monitoring new and emerging litter items, recently this has included nitrous oxide containers.

Our network of volunteers and citizen scientists play a massive role in flagging new categories for monitoring and campaigning on. Our monitoring systems are evolving too, allowing us to be more reactive to the way we collect data.

But, regardless of the items, we need individuals to still do the same thing – bin their litter or take it home.

Flytipping

Waste illegally dumped is called flytipping. It can vary from filled black plastic bags to items such as mattresses and white goods, to serious criminal waste disposal of industrial waste. Like littering, it has negative consequences for our environment and communities. It is unsurprising, given the visibility of this issue, that flytipping is widely seen as a problem.

Our current street surveying methodology doesn't record flytipping, in addition many flytipping incidents take place by roadsides, on neglected land, and on private land which we do not survey. However, when it is observed it is highly visible and has huge negative impacts on a place.

Perceptions of flytipping as a problem vary greatly across Scotland. Those in deprived communities are more likely to think that flytipping is an issue; 76% of those in our most deprived communities believe flytipping is a problem compared to just 53% in our least deprived communities.



From 12–25 October 2026 we ran a **flytipping campaign** reminding householders of their responsibility to dispose of their waste appropriately.



84%
of people believe flytipping is a problem nationally.

61%
of people believe flytipping is a problem in their local area.

Most deprived communities — 76%

Least deprived communities — 53%

In 2025:

72%
agree that there should be more done to prevent flytipping in their local area.

68%
of people were aware it is a legal requirement for individuals or businesses that transport, buy, sell or dispose of waste should carry a waste carriers licence.

62%
of people were aware it's their responsibility when paying someone to discard of waste to check the person removing it has a licence.

Source: Scottish Litter Survey 2025

OTHER INCIVILITIES

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND

Things that make you go boak (or yuck)

GRAFFITI AND VANDALISM

16% of sites in town centres had graffiti recorded.

11% of sites in town centres had flyposting recorded.

4% of sites in town centres had vandalism recorded.

And you are telling us that there is more sticker tagging of street furniture and bins being ruined by vape stickers too.

DOG POO

66% of people see dog fouling often.

3% of sites had a presence of dog fouling.

Dog poo isn't commonly found when we audit Scotland's streets, but we know that it's more prevalent in other open spaces like parks, sports fields and pathways because our citizen science data tells us so, as does our public polling.

CHEWING GUM

54% of people report seeing it often.

62% of sites in town centres had a presence of chewing gum.

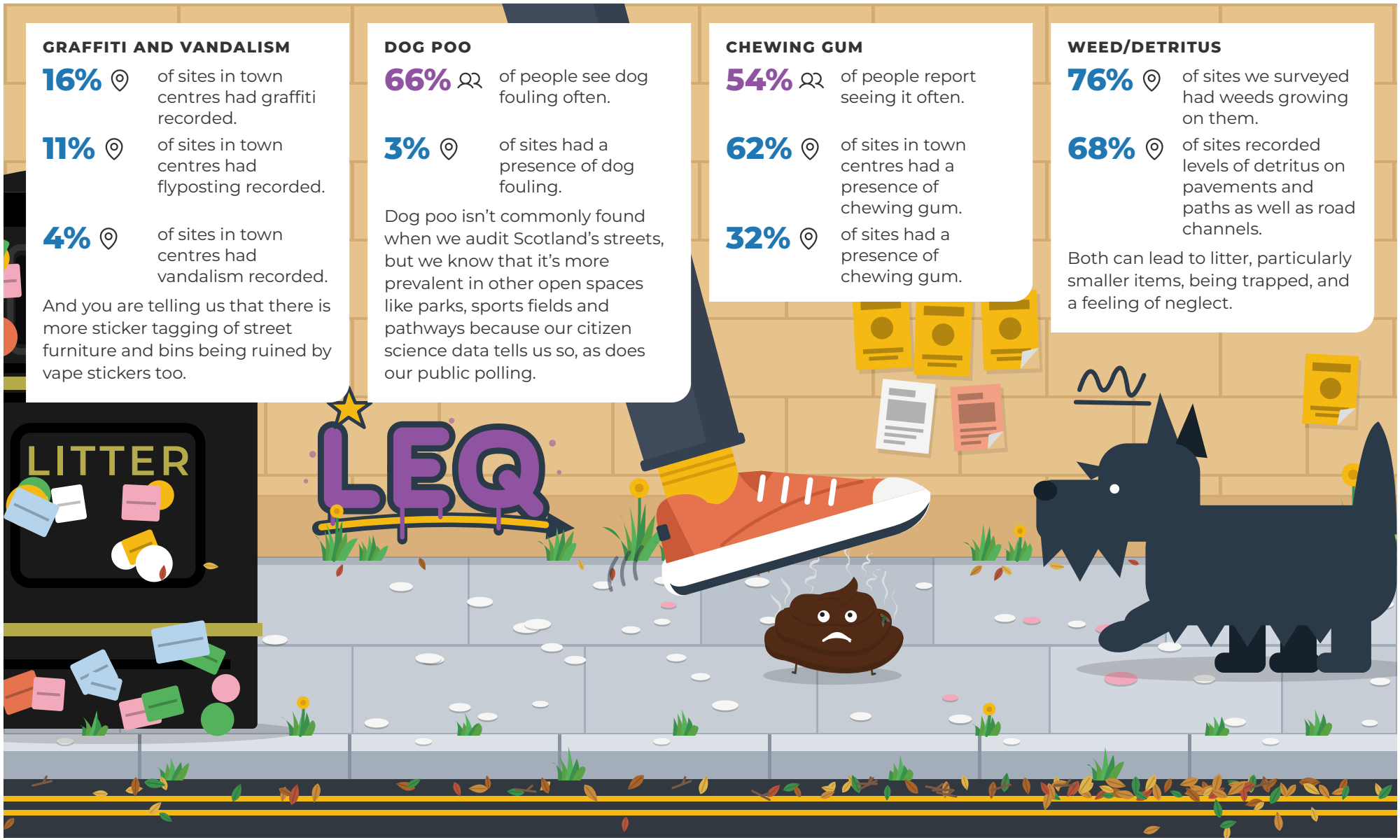
32% of sites had a presence of chewing gum.

WEED/DETRITUS

76% of sites we surveyed had weeds growing on them.

68% of sites recorded levels of detritus on pavements and paths as well as road channels.

Both can lead to litter, particularly smaller items, being trapped, and a feeling of neglect.



Enforcement

WHAT YOU TOLD US WHAT WE FOUND

Littering is illegal, and people know it. Despite this, our litter problem in Scotland persists.

This year we asked local authorities across Scotland about the number of complaints they receive about litter, dog fouling and flytipping, and the number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) issued to people caught behaving illegally. We heard back from half of the Scottish local authorities, representing a varied cross section of rural and urban Scotland.

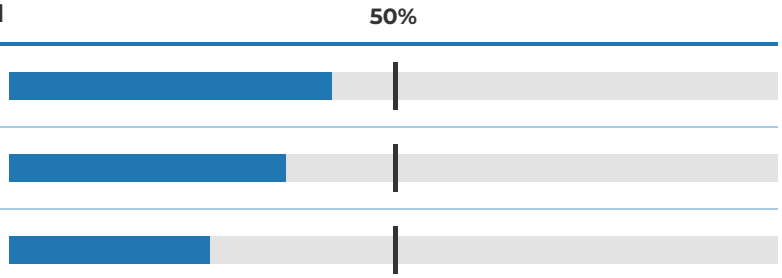
95% **know littering can be punished with a fine.**

And yet

50% **of people admitted to littering over the last 12 months[2].**

FIXED PENALTY NOTICES · LOCAL AUTHORITY RETURNS

	Complaints	FPNs issued	FPNs paid
Litter	**11,524**	**638**	**42%**
Dog fouling	**6,050**	**107**	**36%**
Flytipping	**48,500**	**768**	**26%**



As expected, the results are highly variable. The number of fines issued in 2025/2026 ranges from none to almost 500, making it hard to present a Scottish average.

What we do know is that the enforcement system has been broken for many years. Raising the fine level, changing the type of fine issued only work if the system – across local authorities and the COPFS can support and back up the processes needed. Once again, reiterating what we uncovered in 2019 when we last did this survey, the findings reveal that even when fines are issued, less than 50% are paid.

Enforcement is not consistent across the country, and it is not providing a real deterrent to those who continue to litter, flytip and leave dog faeces on our streets and open spaces.

A full review of the systems in place is still urgently needed, but until then those with a duty to carry out enforcement need the investment to do so, the support of the fiscal system and legislative framework, and for it to be given the priority politically that it deserves.

People want to see more investment in enforcement. When asked to rank what people would like to see investment in to tackle litter 'Increasing investment for local authorities to enforce penalties around littering' remains the top priority.

We continue to support local authorities with training officers to issue FPNs, training **174 officers** throughout 2025/2026.

[2] Keep Britain Tidy, YouGov poll 2026

Reasons to be cheerful

This report paints a fairly negative picture of the state of our local environment; litter levels aren't getting significantly better and how we feel about it and the condition of our communities remains pretty static.

However, it would be a lot worse if the volunteers across the country and passionate colleagues from other organisations didn't work hard to try and improve things.

We have three big reasons to be hopeful: the volunteers across the country regularly litter picking, collecting and reporting data and improving their neighbourhoods; the brilliant stakeholders, partners and funders we collaborate with to ensure all our efforts pull in the same direction; and those in local and national government evidencing the need for and working to support forthcoming policy and legislation changes.



1. Litter picking

34,000+
people took part in #SpringCleanScotland in 2026.

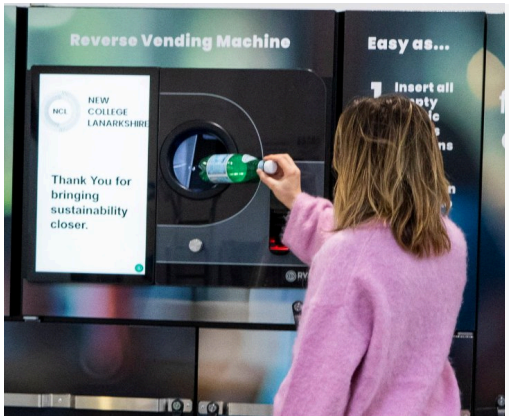
120
active Clean Up Scotland Hubs support litter picking activity across the country (and more incoming).



2. Stakeholder collaboration

70+
attendees from multiple sectors attended our annual Local Environmental Quality Seminar.

Along with Keep Britain Tidy, Keep Wales Tidy and Live Here, Love Here we sit on the Consumer Engagement Forum for Exchange for Change helping to shape the incoming Deposit Return Scheme.



3. Legislative and policy change

In October 2027 a UK-wide Deposit Return Scheme will launch, capturing plastic bottles and cans for recycling, reducing the chance of them being littered.

The Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs has assured us that she remains committed to expanding Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR) to include litter.

Looking forward

If we want to see action that delivers real change there needs to be a commitment from national and local politicians, and other decision makers, to prioritise and tackle litter and littering behaviours through prevention, behaviour change and enforcement – that is what the public wants to see.

We also need to adopt smarter policy, make better decisions, and create systems that keep up with the needs and consequences of modern life.

The ongoing debate about public sector reform cannot detract from the critical shift that is needed to focus and invest in behaviour change to stop litter. **We need to stop paying to clean up.**

And to do that it is clear significant multi-year and prioritised funding and increased collaboration across sectors is needed – especially to:

1

Support delivery of the actions laid out in the National Litter and Flytipping Strategy and Scotland's Marine Litter Strategy;

2

Invest in raising awareness of, and reducing, roadside litter via a national campaign; and

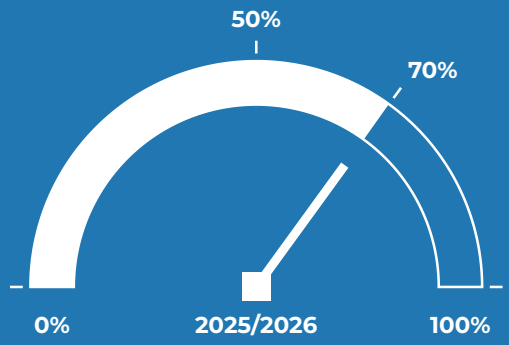
3

Take a source-to-sea approach to marine litter, helping prevent litter entering our rivers and polluting our seas.

Nine in ten people think Scotland has a litter problem.

Look through our previous reports and you'll see that figure has remained the same for a number of years. It is time we invested in action that will shift the dial significantly.

SITES WITH LITTER PRESENT

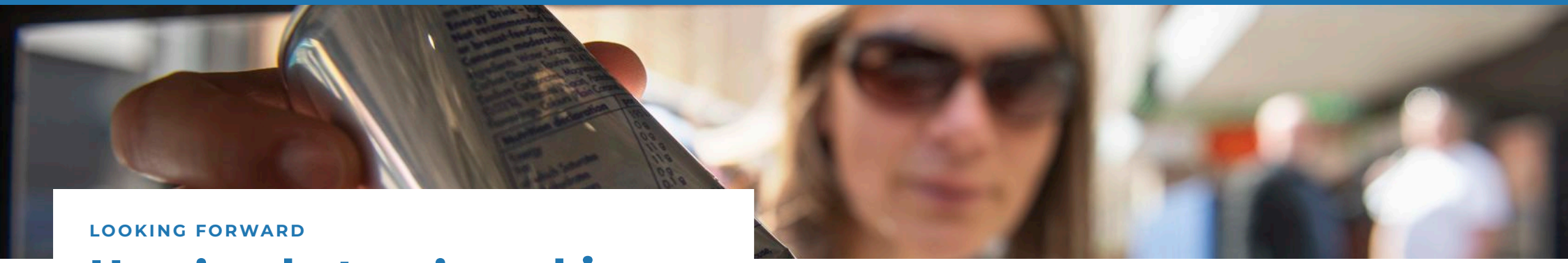


The dial isn't shifting.

70% **7 in 10 sites littered.**

Our aim is to shift the dial and reduce the number of littered sites in Scotland over the coming years.

We need people to love Scotland and take their litter home or use a bin.



LOOKING FORWARD

Here's what we're asking of you...

We've spoken of shifting the dial in this report. It would be so much easier if we all pulled in the same direction.

We need the Scottish Government to lead the charge, to align policy with infrastructure investment and national campaigns.

We need local government to identify and unlock the resources needed at a local level to support front line staff and add value to the work of volunteers and community groups.

We need industry to step up and accept that Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging needs to extend to litter on the ground and payments must be made to help deal with the packaging pollution we are recording across Scotland.

We need everyone to choose to reuse cups, bottles and packaging when possible, speak up at a local level to encourage greater action and to do the right thing when disposing of their waste.

We have the data, the ideas, the passion and the connections to really shift the dial on the litter emergency in Scotland. People want to see more action. We do too.

The question is do you? Or are you happy with the state of your community, the litter and dog poo on the streets in your neighbourhood and the endless amount of rubbish on your roadsides?

If you want to help, we need you. Politicians, teachers, business and community leaders and individuals too. We need you to call out the problem and support us, with time and resources, to implement the solutions that we know will work. We need you to raise the profile of the issue, to shout about how much a litter free Scotland means to you, and to help us make it impossible not to be heard so that we can unlock the resources needed to tackle the problem.

Scotland does not have to have a litter problem. With the right policy, partners and engaged population a cleaner, greener Scotland is in reach.

Choose to help keep Scotland beautiful.

We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful inspires environmental action.

Support us to combat climate change, tackle litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places.

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Keep Scotland Beautiful

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Carbon Literate Organisation Platinum

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