

A photograph of a wooden park bench with black metal armrests. The bench is surrounded by a thick layer of fallen autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and brown. On the left side of the bench, there is a crumpled newspaper and some other pieces of litter. On the ground to the right of the bench, there is a blue plastic bag and a small black can. The background shows more trees and foliage.

# Scottish Litter Survey

Tracking public perceptions and attitudes towards litter  
and littering behaviour

November 2022



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# Foreword

Welcome to Keep Scotland Beautiful's annual Scottish Litter Survey, a comprehensive assessment of public perceptions and attitudes towards litter and littering behaviour.

**This report highlights the significant public concern that people in Scotland have about litter in their communities and neighbourhoods, and across the nation.**

For almost 20 years we have worked in partnership with local authorities to coordinate the Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS) which provides valuable data and analysis regarding local environmental quality and a national picture of current standards. As we move to a new Litter Monitoring System (LMS) to improve consistency and transparency, we continue to measure indicators including litter, dog fouling, graffiti, vandalism, flytipping and weed growth.

The findings of recent years are stark. Our 2021/22 audit data highlighted that the decline in standards nationally continues, driven by global, national and local issues including budget cuts, our unsustainable consumption and a growing disconnection with our environment.

This report confirms that the ongoing decline in the quality of our local environments and the increase in litter reported by our trained surveyors remains a matter of significant public concern. Combined, the actual litter we record on the ground and the perceived views captured in this report clearly evidence a major problem; one that is worse in our most deprived communities.

Since our last litter survey, published in December 2021, we have seen some positive national progress with a new National Litter and Flytipping Strategy for Scotland in development. We have seen local authorities and businesses join us to step up and try new approaches to address the growing litter and waste problem we face.

Despite a difficult two years our Clean Up Scotland campaign has supported more than 8,000 people to clean up litter in their neighbourhoods. We have also seen support grow for our Community Clean Up Hub Network with more than 100 now providing equipment and support to others to reduce litter.

We have supported educators, young people and children to learn about tackling litter and why it is important through our Climate Action Schools framework. We have also worked through our Upstream Battle® and My Beach Your Beach campaigns to raise awareness, gather data and take action on marine litter with people of all ages and backgrounds. Additionally, we

have celebrated with community action to tackle litter through our Beautiful Scotland and It's Your Neighbourhood programmes.

However, the same unsustainable consumption that is driving the climate and nature crisis is also driving an increase in litter that we are recording on the ground. This is also clear from the evidence we have of the public perception of a growing problem. The actions we outlined in our 2020 report – Time for a new approach to tackling litter – are still relevant and desperately needed.

We know that there is no easy fix. It is going to take a sustained and collaborative approach. One that is backed by appropriate funding over a prolonged period in order for tangible improvements to be made and seen.

We also know that there is much more that needs to be done, and urgently. If it isn't, then the problem will only worsen, and the fixes needed will be greater. That is why we welcomed the inclusion of ground litter in the forthcoming Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) proposals for Scotland.

We are committed to ensuring that perceptions of the public, on the ground data from our annual surveys and the support of so many volunteers, communities, charities, schools and businesses are used effectively to drive practical action to improve local environmental quality in our communities and to tackle littering behaviours.

Please get in touch if you want to discuss the findings in this report, or wish to find out how we can help you to keep your part of Scotland beautiful.

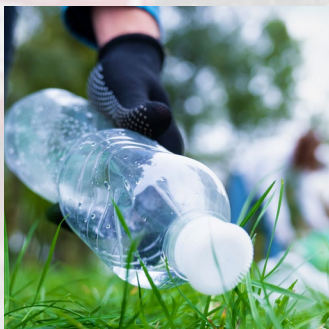
**Barry Fisher, Chief Executive, Keep Scotland Beautiful**

The Scottish Litter Survey was produced in association with The Diffley Partnership and part of their Understanding Scotland Series.





# Headlines



1

**Litter remains a significant issue of public concern** with **67%** believing that litter is a problem in their local area, and **87%** that it is an issue across Scotland.

2

**81%** of respondents in the most deprived fifth of neighbourhoods report that they see litter 'very' or 'somewhat' often, compared to **68%** in the least deprived neighbourhoods.

3

**The impact of litter on animals and the environment was deemed the most concerning consequence**, followed by the negative perception of an area created and its effects on local residents' wellbeing.

4

There was majority support for all proposed measures to deal with littering with **4 in 5 people wanting to see more action taken** to both prevent and tackle litter. There was an evident preference for preventative approaches, with **nine in ten** supporting educational and behavioural campaigns while **97%** supported improving waste disposal facilities and **84%** supporting strengthening fines and penalties.

5

**50%** of people believed overall litter levels have stayed the same in the last 12 months. But, there has been a shift, with people perceiving litter in general, dog fouling, drinks bottles and cans, food containers, wrappers and packaging and single use drinks containers to be 'much more' or 'somewhat more' common.



# Attitudes to litter

Litter remains a significant problem with 87% believing that it is an issue across Scotland and 67% believing that litter is an issue in their local area.

This varies geographically, with the figure rising to 79% and 90%, respectively, in the Glasgow and Lothian parliamentary region areas. Correspondingly, people in urban areas report seeing litter more regularly, while 39% of people in rural areas report seeing litter 'rarely' or 'never', compared to 25% in urban areas.

Levels of litter also appear to be higher in more deprived areas, with 81% of respondents in the most deprived fifth of neighbourhoods reporting that they see litter very or somewhat often, compared to 68% in the least deprived.



## Attitudes to litter

Looking at the list above, how often, if at all, does each apply to you?

### Proportions of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the given statements

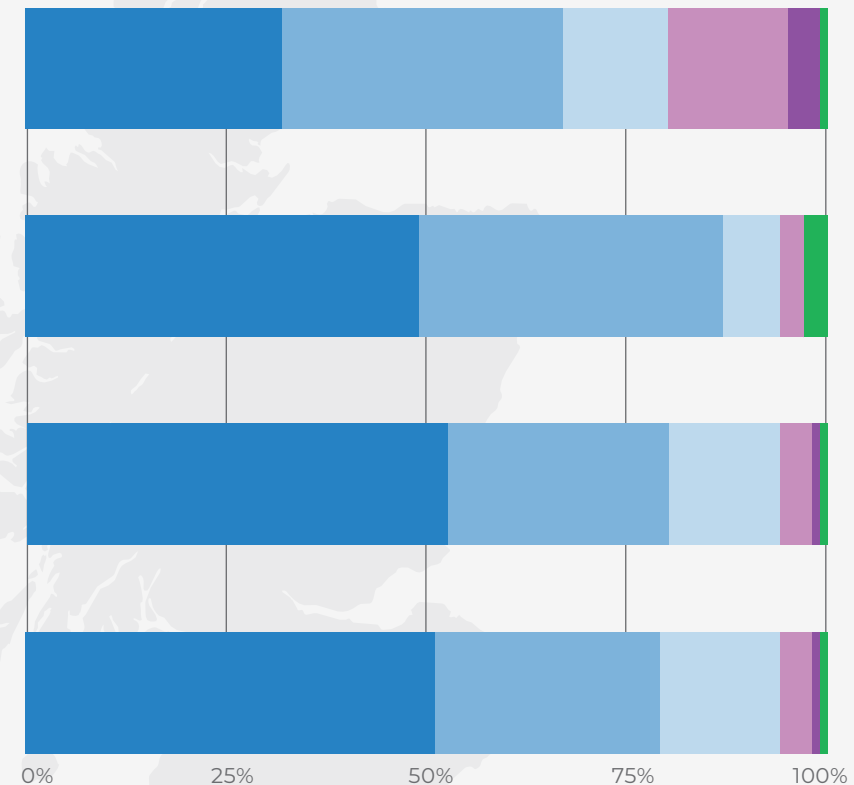
■ Strongly agree    ■ Neither agree or disagree    ■ Strongly disagree  
■ Somewhat agree    ■ Somewhat disagree    ■ Don't know

Litter is a problem in my area

Litter is a problem across Scotland

I would like to see more action being taken to prevent littering in my area

I would like to see more action being taken to clean up litter in my area

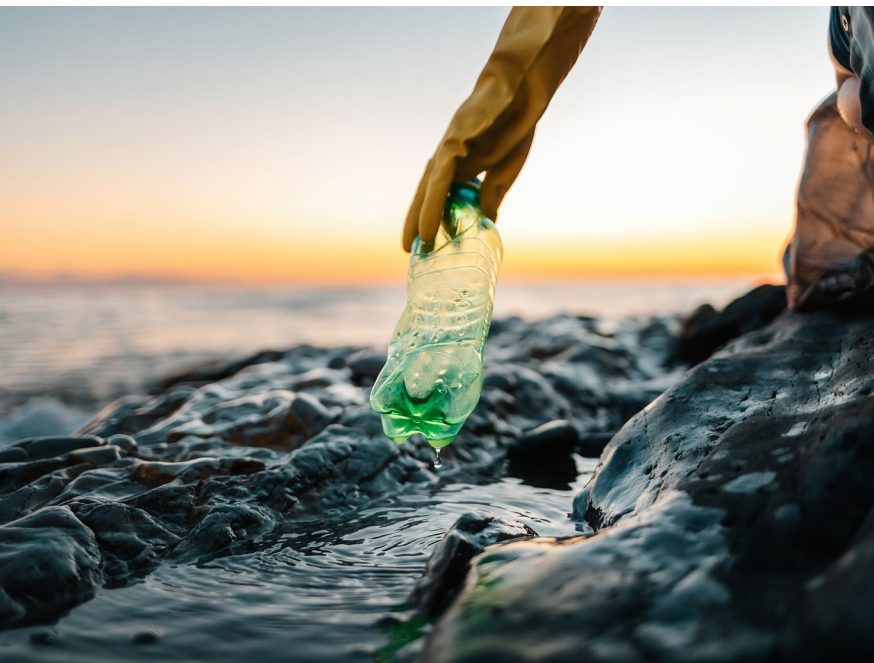




# What are the most common types of litter?

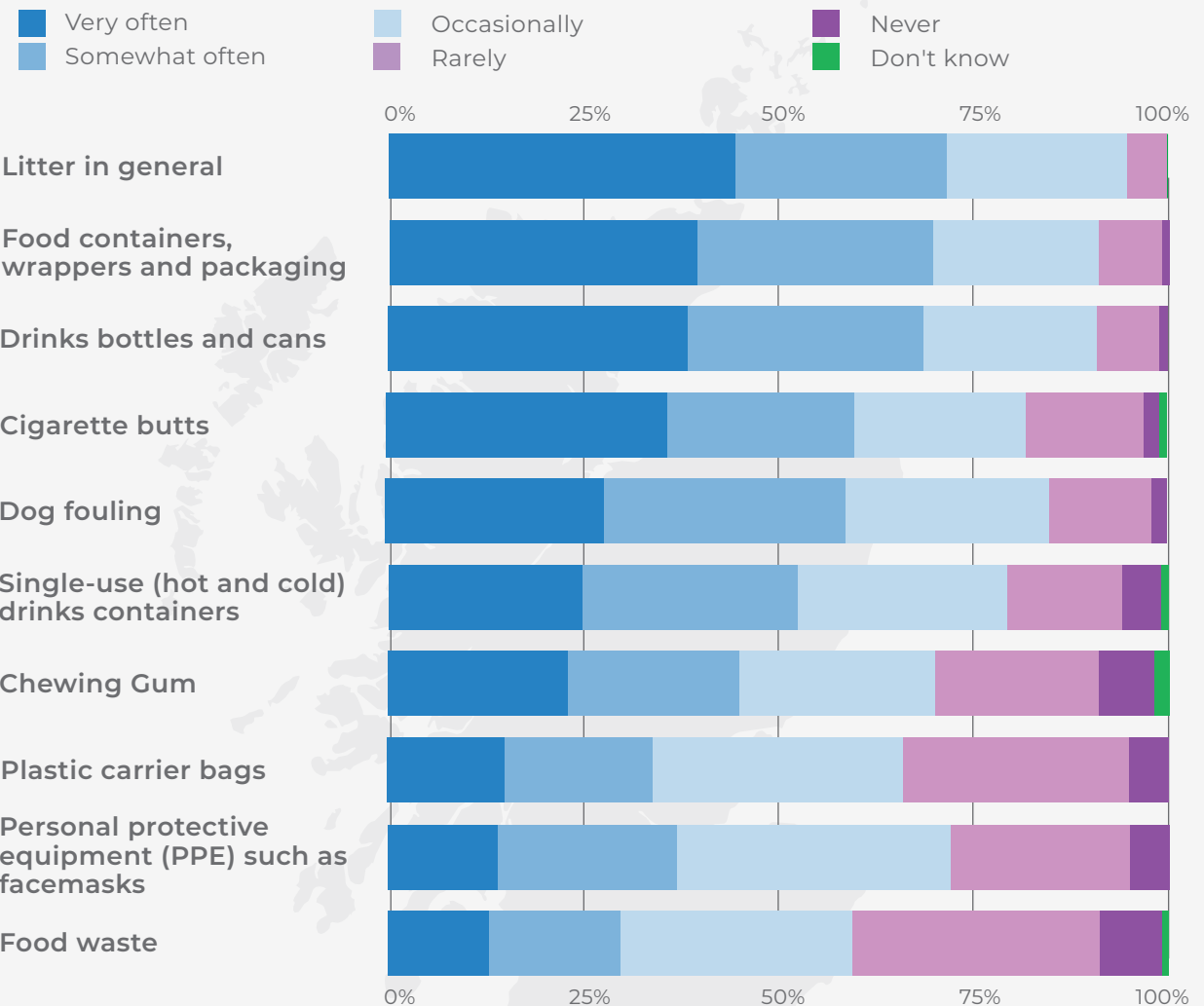
Food and drink packaging were perceived to be the most frequent types of litter.

Of all people surveyed 20% perceived cigarette butts to be 'much more' or 'somewhat more' common since last year while 57% perceived cigarette litter to be the same as last year. With Personal protective equipment (PPE), food waste and plastic bags among the least commonly seen.



## Types of litter reported regularly

How frequently, if at all, do you see the following types of litter in your local area?



# Changes in the levels of litter

## All areas reported a rise.

The Highlands & Islands region saw the smallest proportion of respondents citing an increase in levels of litter in general (31%), compared to 20% reporting a decrease. People in Glasgow reported the largest increase in litter in general, with 49% of respondents saying that levels had increased in the past 12 months.

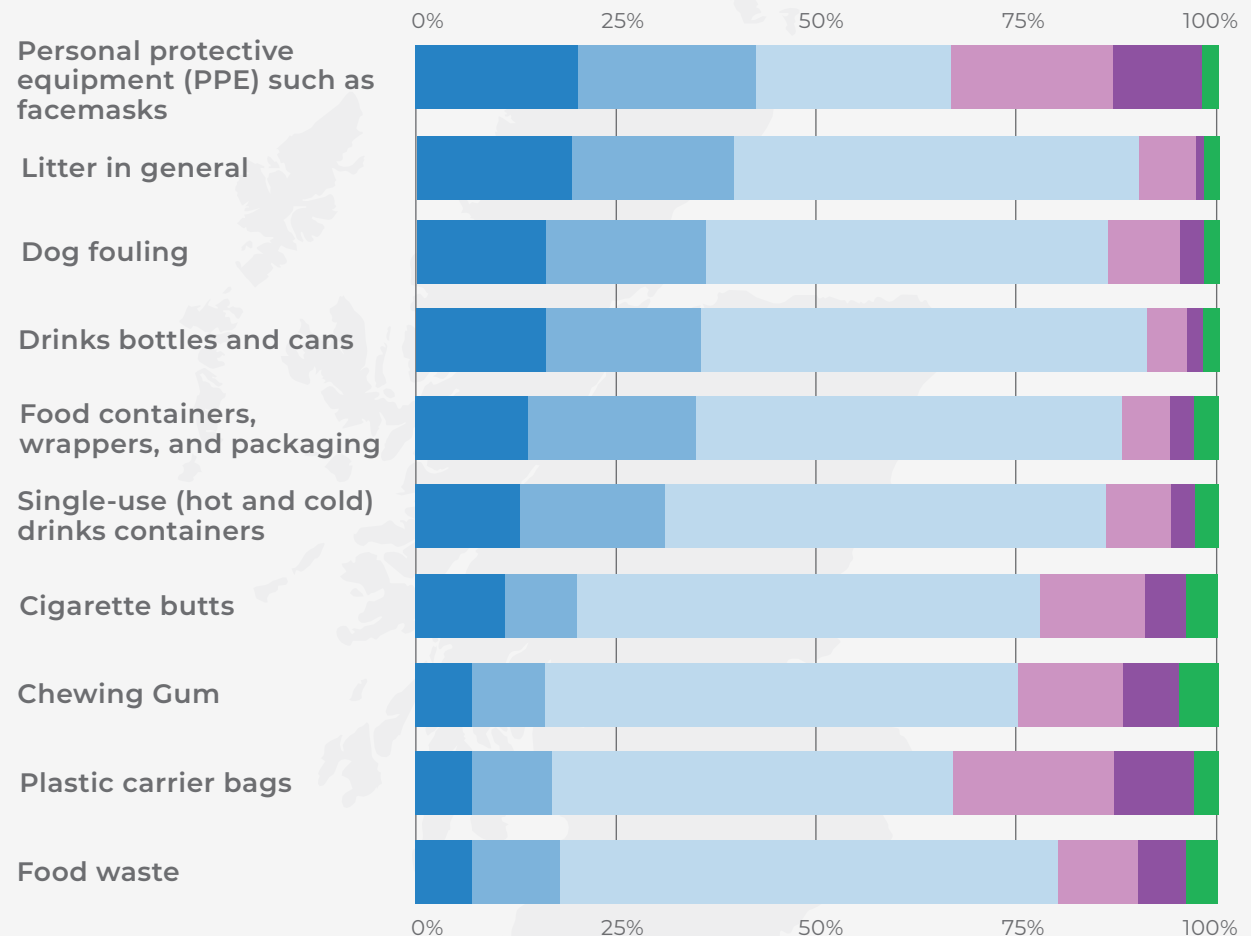


## Changes in levels of littering

And thinking about the same types of litter, do you think they have become more or less common in your local area over the past 12 months?

### Proportions of respondents reporting seeing more and less of certain types of litter

■ Much more common    ■ About the same    ■ Much less common  
 ■ Somewhat more common    ■ Somewhat less common    ■ Don't know



# Impacts of litter

The impacts of litter on animals and the environment were deemed the most concerning.

Followed by how people perceive their neighborhood, and its effects on local residents' wellbeing. Impacts on local businesses were deemed less concerning, as were its effects on house prices.

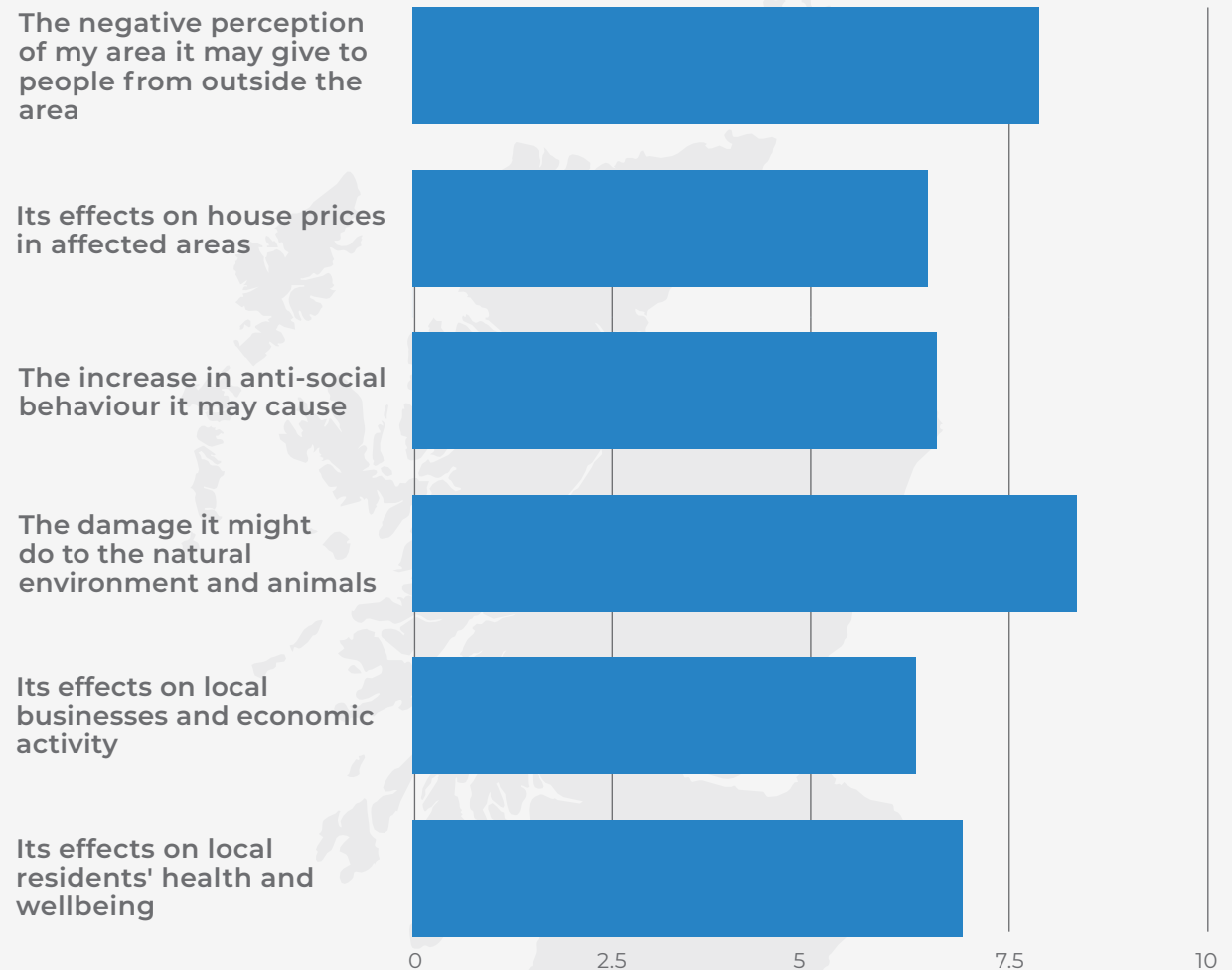
Reputational impacts were a greater concern for those aged under 65, while older respondents were more concerned by the ways in which it might increase anti-social behaviour. Younger people were especially concerned by environmental impacts, with 53% of those aged 18-34 describing themselves as 'extremely concerned' by this.



## Attitudes to litter

On a scale from 0-10, how much of an impact do you believe litter has on the following?

### Weighted averages of perceived impacts out of 10





# Responsibility for litter

Individuals and consumers were considered most responsible for preventing and cleaning up litter, followed by local authorities and then the Scottish Government.

Respondents aged 35-54 were more likely to hold retailers, businesses and manufacturers responsible than other age groups, and young people afforded significantly less responsibility to individuals.



## Responsibility for preventing and cleaning up litter

How responsible do you believe the following are when it comes to preventing littering/cleaning up litter?



# How to tackle litter

There was majority support for all proposed measures to tackle littering, especially for improving waste disposal facilities which 97% of people supported.

There was an evident preference for preventative approaches, with nine in ten supporting educational and behavioural campaigns, though 85% also supported strengthening fines and penalties, and two thirds supported introducing litter wardens and/or increasing police presence.

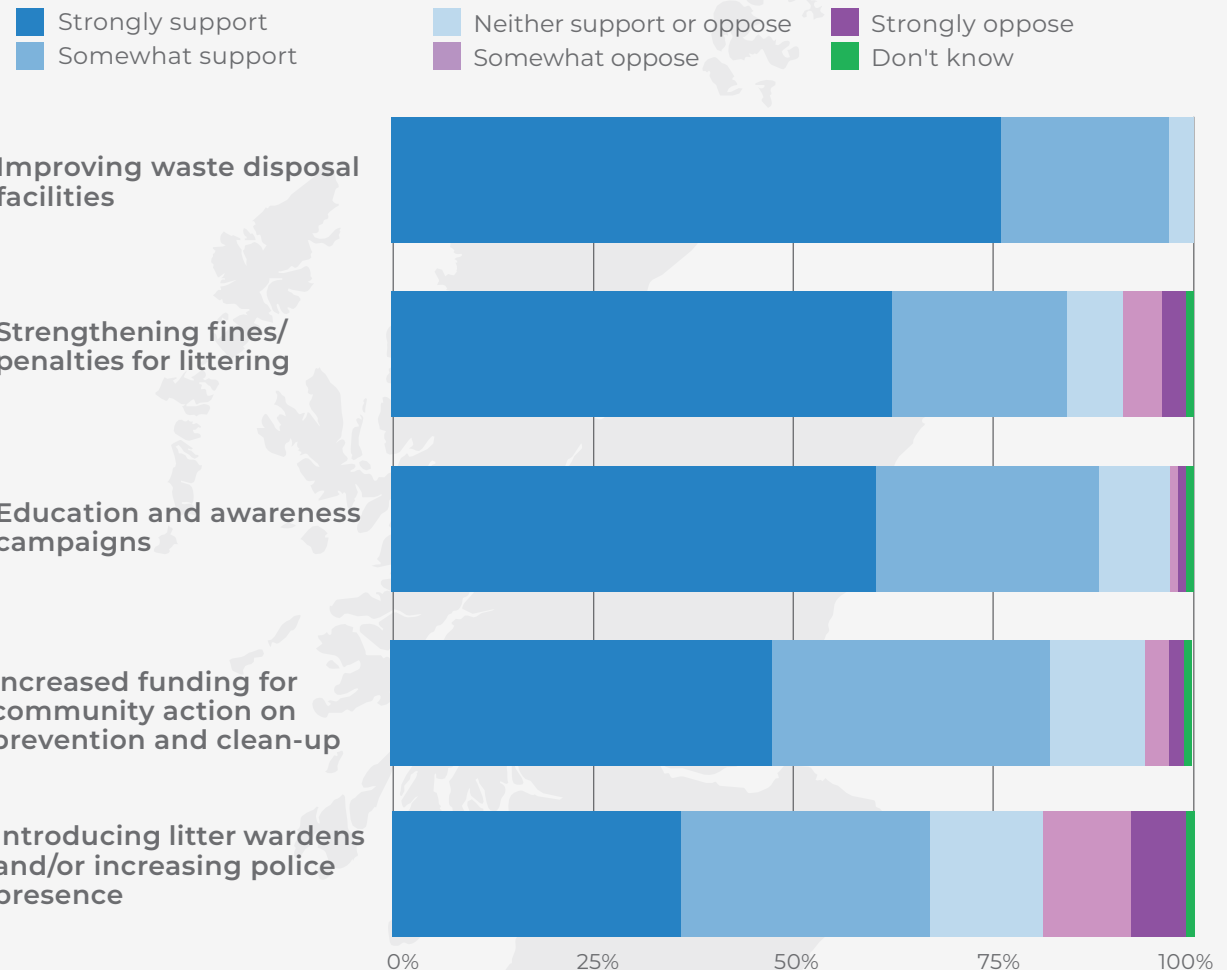
Younger respondents are less supportive of punitive measures such as policing and penalties than older people.



## Tackling litter

To what extent would you support or oppose the following initiatives to tackle littering?

### Support and opposition for initiatives aimed at tackling litter





# Individual Behaviours

Almost all people (96%) say that they always make an effort to dispose of their rubbish responsibly when out and about.

Most attempt to reduce their waste in advance, with 70% always or often switching to reusable containers in lieu of single-use products.

Fewer people have made changes to their shopping habits, with 48% saying they always or often avoid buying goods with excessive packaging, and less than a quarter (23%) say the same of avoiding brands whose products are regularly seen littered. Younger people were much less likely to do the latter, with half of those under 44 saying they 'never' do this.

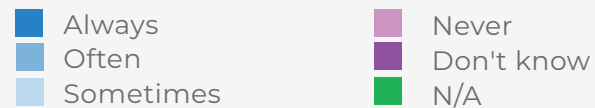
Even fewer take part in litter picking activities, with 58% overall saying they never do this.



## Littering behaviours

Looking at the list above, how often, if at all, does each apply to you?

### Reported behaviours people take to reduce their impact



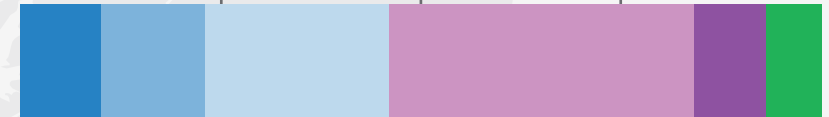
I make a conscious effort to dispose of my rubbish responsibly when I am out



I make an effort to switch from single-use products to reusable ones



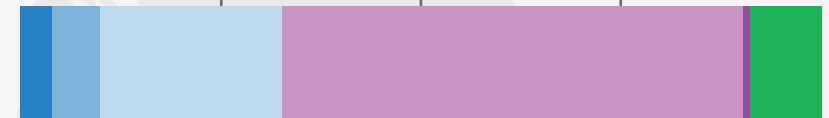
I avoid buying products that use excessive packaging



I avoid buying from brands /organisations whose products I regularly see littered



I take part in local clean ups / litter picking activities



0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

# Looking forward

During 2022 Keep Scotland Beautiful supported a range of stakeholders to contribute to the consultation on a new National Litter and Flytipping Strategy for Scotland. We share the concerns expressed by many of those who took part in the process and who are worried about our looming litter emergency and the impact it has on the condition of their communities.

We had hoped the new strategy would be published, along with a clear and well-resourced action plan by the end of this year. However we acknowledge that the Scottish Government faces a number of significant financial challenges and that it will now be published in early 2023.

Any further delay will be unacceptable to us, and those across Scotland who took the time to respond to the consultation.

In the meantime, we, along with many of the partner organisations and communities we work with, will continue to make significant efforts to tackle the litter crisis we are facing in Scotland.

Looking forward we are committed to increasing our engagement with people across Scotland and working to mainstream the issue with individuals, communities and businesses, in particular to support those looking to take meaningful action.

We all have it in us to do something, big and small, to drive the changes needed to make Scotland cleaner, greener and more sustainable.

If you want to find out more about our work and how we can support you to tackle litter, please get in touch via [cleanup@keepscotlandbeautiful.org](mailto:cleanup@keepscotlandbeautiful.org)



## Join #TeamKSBScot and be part of the solution.

We need sustained collaborative action to address our litter problem. So, Keep Scotland Beautiful will continue to work with all stakeholders to develop new approaches, to work differently to deliver a positive impact on the ground.

Individual actions can make a big difference on a local, national and global scale – if you are one of the 58% of people that has never taken part in a litter pick get involved with Spring Clean 2023.

Your support will help us to tackle litter, reduce waste, combat climate change and inspire community action to protect the places we love.

Visit [www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org](http://www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org) to find out how we can support you to get involved.





We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is your charity for Scotland's environment. We work with you to help combat climate change, reduce litter and waste, and protect and enhance the places we care for.



Keep Scotland  
Beautiful

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[www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org](http://www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org)

