



Scottish Litter Survey

Tracking public perceptions and attitudes
towards litter and littering behaviour

October 2025

Contents

Foreword.....	3
Key stats.....	4
The hard-hitting truth.....	5
(Un)Changing attitudes to litter: A half-decade of trends.....	6
What are the most common types of litter?.....	8
Drinks containers.....	9
Packaging.....	9
Cigarettes and vapes.....	10
Plastic carrier bags.....	10
Flytipping.....	11
Looking forward.....	13

We support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.



Foreword

Scotland has a massive litter problem which is polluting our environment.

The reality, painted by the views of the thousands of people who make up the diverse communities of our country, is that we have a long way to go until Scotland is litter free.

What is clear from both the public perception views highlighted in this report and the data we collect from litter surveys the length and breadth of Scotland and present annually – captured in our '[How clean are your streets?](#)' report – is that we still have a massive litter problem. And, that our litter problem impacts us all at a greater level than we might initially think.

Litter is more than waste items discarded on our streets and open spaces. It is an indicator of a poor-quality local environment. Its impact is huge: making people embarrassed of their neighbourhoods; feeling spaces are unsafe for children and animals; putting visitors off returning; and impacting local economies. Litter is also associated with higher levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

For the fifth consecutive year the views of people across Scotland on the prevalence, distribution, composition and impacts of litter which pollutes our country are shocking. The evidence in this report and the clear links between litter and wider societal problems cannot be dismissed.

There is once again overwhelming support for action to clean up and prevent litter and with a Scottish election scheduled for 2026, we believe now is the time to ensure litter is elevated up the priority list for the next Scottish Parliament.

We hope you will use the evidence in this report to join us as we call for greater, more urgent funding and action to tackle Scotland's litter emergency.

Barry Fisher, Chief Executive

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



Key stats



88%

of people believe litter is a problem nationally



72%

of people believe litter is a problem locally



42%

believe that litter became more common over the past year



65%

agree that flytipping is a problem in their local area



81%

in our least affluent areas believe litter is an issue compared to 66% in the most affluent



79%

of younger people (aged 16-24) agree litter is a problem locally, compared to 68% of those aged 65+



74%

of people in urban areas believe litter is an issue, compared to 62% in rural area



83%

of people stated they wanted more to be done to clean up and prevent litter

The hard-hitting truth



76% agree litter makes public spaces unsafe for animals.



73% agree litter makes spaces unsafe for children.

73% agree litter damages the reputation of their local area among tourists.



67% agree litter makes them feel embarrassed about their own neighbourhood.

63% believe litter contributes to other anti-social behaviours.

(Un)Changing attitudes to litter: A half-decade of trends

Over the past five years, a large majority – around nine in ten – of people in Scotland have viewed litter as a problem across the country, indicating that this is an issue that really matters, and continues to matter to people of all backgrounds and ages.

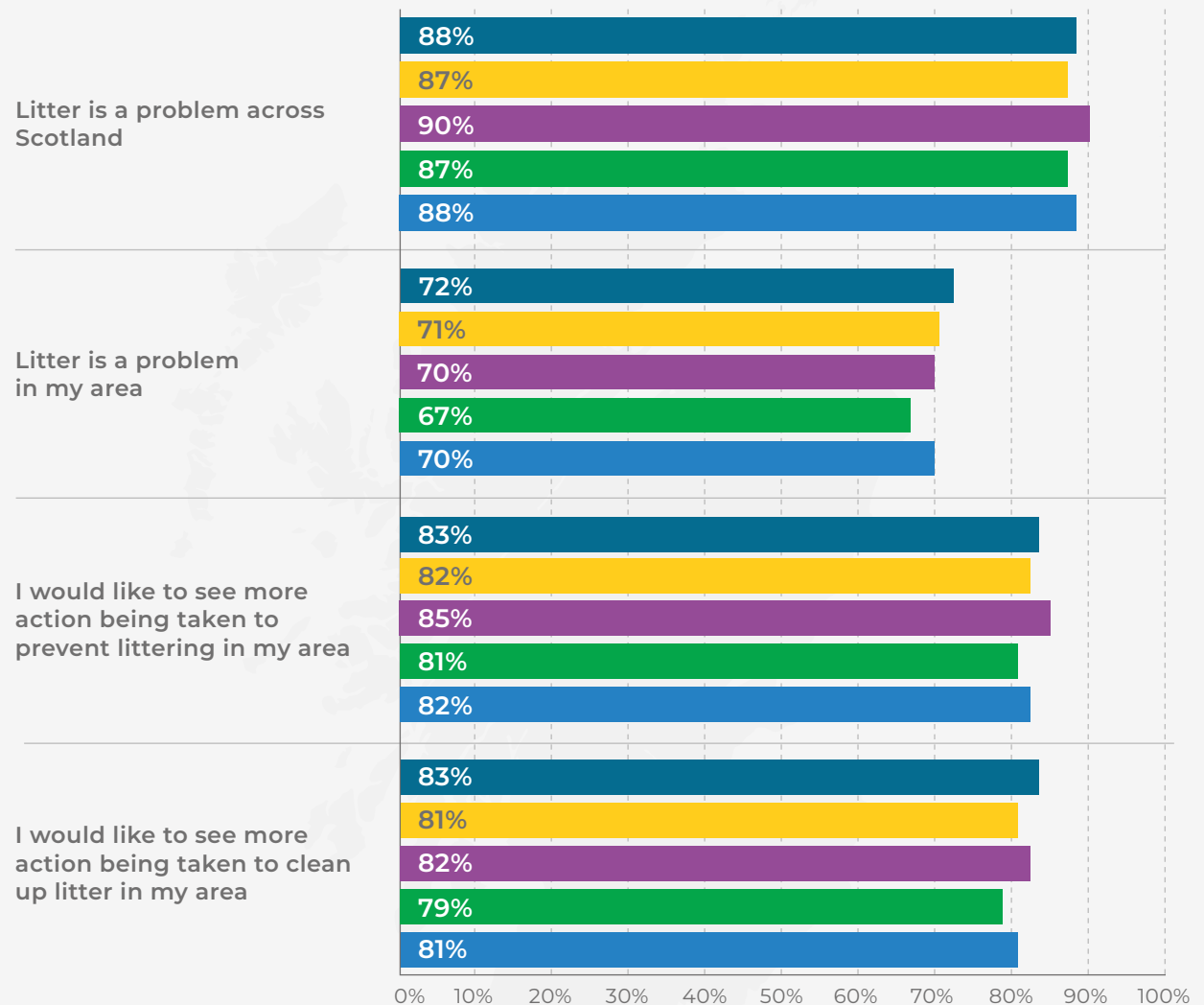
There has been consistent ongoing support for greater action to address litter. Eight in ten people would like to see more action to clean up and prevent litter.



Attitudes towards litter

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

% agreeing with each statement



(Un)Changing attitudes to litter: A half-decade of trends

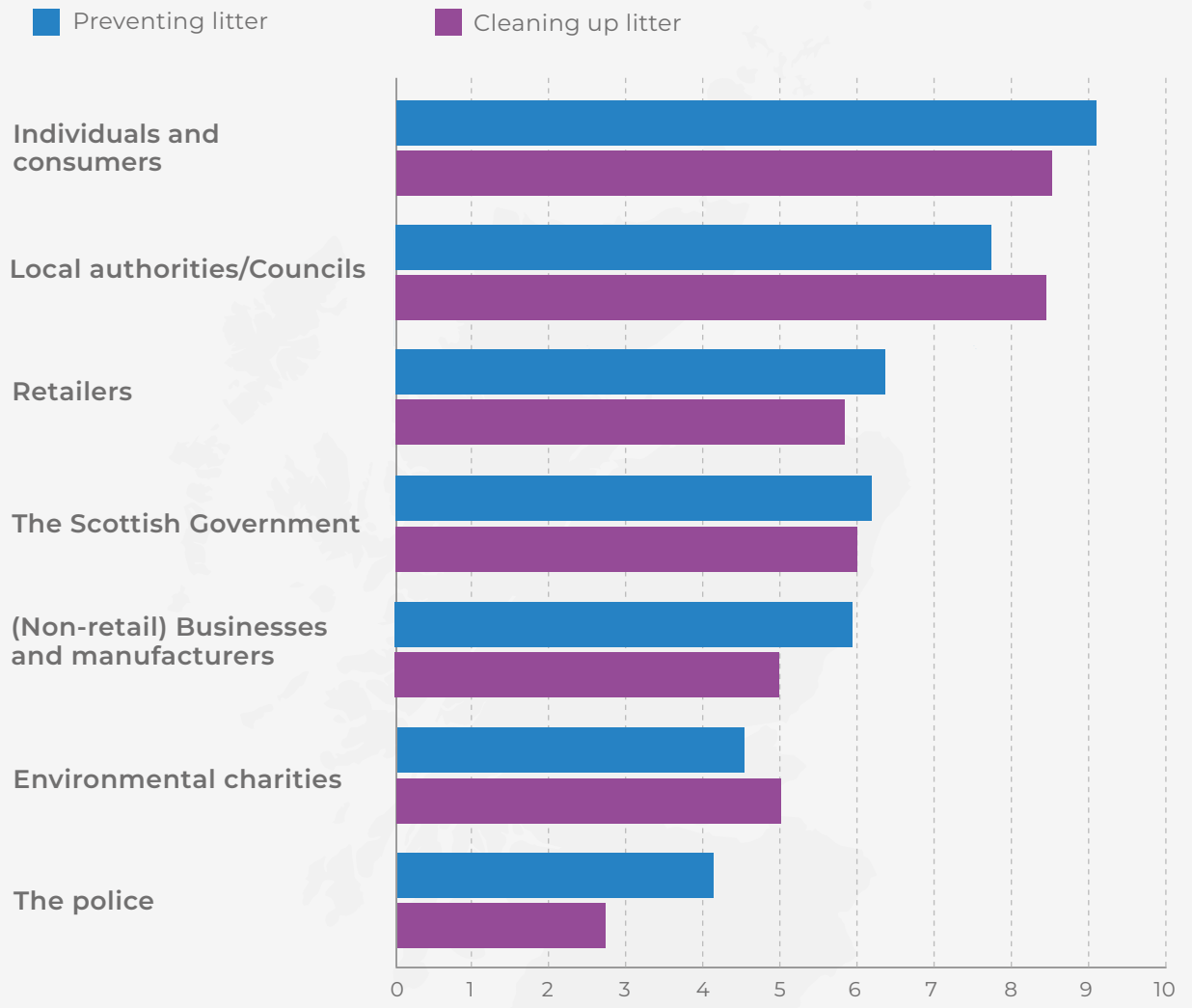
When asked who has responsibility for preventing and cleaning up litter, people place the greatest emphasis on individuals and consumers.

Through our work we see individuals taking action themselves. More than **30,000** people took part in this year's [Spring Clean Scotland](#) and we have a network of over **100** [Community Clean Up Hubs](#) actively supporting improvements to their local neighbourhoods.

But whilst there is overwhelming evidence that across the country litter is viewed as a significant issue, there are variations across demographics. Our research has consistently shown those in our most deprived communities see this issue more, alongside younger people (aged 16-34) and those living in urban areas. Whilst we need to tackle litter at a national level, we know that locally the problem is more nuanced, and each community faces specific issues, behaviours and sources that need targeted.

Responsibility for preventing and cleaning up litter

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



What are the most common types of litter?

The vast majority of people (79%) report seeing litter in general in their local area either very or somewhat often. About one in six report seeing litter occasionally in their local area, and only 5% rarely or never see it.

Our spotlights showcase the ongoing issues with food and drink packaging and e-cigarettes/vapes, but there are other items which need our attention and action as highlighted.

Smaller and less visible items are still regularly seen by people. Cigarette butts are seen by 66% of people and chewing gum by 54% of people.

Other, lesser discussed items are also common including dog fouling and food waste.



The top 10 types of litter seen by people surveyed:



77%
Food containers,
wrappers, and
packaging



70%
Plastic drinks
bottles



69%
Drinks cans



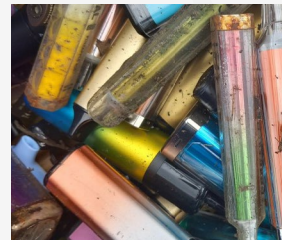
66%
Dog fouling



66%
Cigarette butts



59%
Single-use (hot
and cold) drinks
containers



59%
E-cigarettes/
vapes



54%
Chewing gum



44%
Plastic carrier
bags



42%
Food waste

Drinks containers



Ahead of the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme in October 2027, it's important to highlight people's perceptions of plastic cans and bottles as litter.

70% report seeing plastic bottles often.

69% report seeing drinks cans often.

Many people think these items are more common than 12 months ago.

29% report plastic drinks bottles becoming more common.

27% report drinks cans becoming more common.

A well designed and managed Deposit Return Scheme will encourage people to hold on to items that are currently littered and recycle them which will support a litter free and circular economy.

Whilst the current scheduled Deposit Return Scheme doesn't include glass drinks bottles we have always called for an all-in Deposit Return Scheme. With **40%** reporting seeing glass bottles and a **17%** increase in sightings over the past year, and the inherently dangerous nature of broken glass to children and animals, we believe that glass should be included in a Deposit Return Scheme in the future.

Packaging



Alongside drinks containers, other forms of packaging are prevalent. Littered food and drink packaging has consistently been reported over the years. This year:

77% see food containers, wrapping and packaging very or somewhat often.

59% see single-use (hot and cold) drinks cups very or somewhat often.

Many people think these items are more common than 12 months ago.

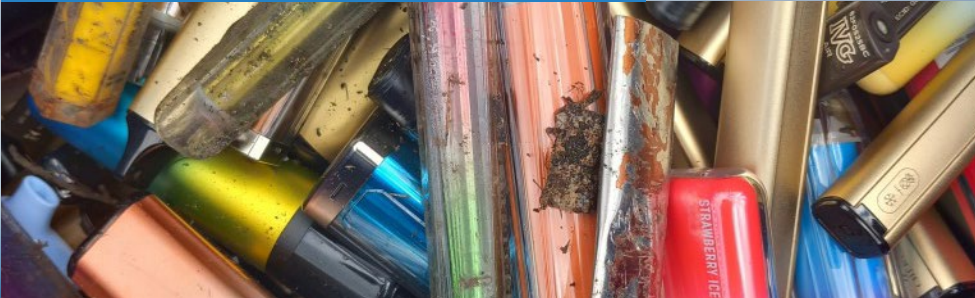
35% report food containers, wrapping and packaging becoming more common.

30% report single-use (hot and cold) drinks container becoming more common.

Many of these litter items should be reduced with the recent introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging regulations; however, we believe this should be extended to include ground and binned litter.

Likewise, we also await a decision on the introduction of a charge for single-use beverage cups.

E-cigarettes and vapes



On 1 June 2025 single-use vapes were banned across the UK. Despite this change people are not reporting a meaningful drop in the perceived frequency of vape litter since 2024.

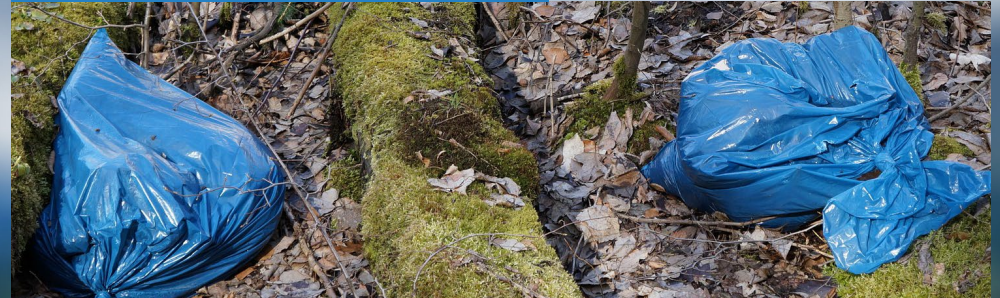
59% of people still see vape litter very or somewhat often.

51% have also said they are seeing vapes more often.

This changes when considering varying demographics. People aged 16-34 are more likely to see vape litter (**74%**) compared to people aged 65 and above (**48%**). Likewise, people living in urban areas are more likely to see them (**62%**) than people living in rural areas (**44%**).

Polling for this year's report was conducted in August 2025, less than three months after the ban on sales of single-use vapes. People still reporting seeing vapes could be a delayed response in perception. Alternatively, single-use vapes are likely still in circulation and being littered, or vapes that are meant to be reusable are still being used and discarded as carelessly as the now banned single-use version.

Plastic bags



In 2014 we welcomed the introduction of a charge for single-use carrier bags in Scotland. Yet a decade on and littered carrier bags are still seen by the public – and becoming more common.

44% report seeing plastic bags often.

15% report that this type of litter has become more common.

The charge has driven shifts in customer habits, reduced bags being taken at point of sale in supermarkets and generated much needed funds for a number of good causes.

But there are undoubtedly things that could have been done better over the last 11 years to maximise impact, raise awareness on an ongoing basis to maintain positive behaviours, evaluate the impact on litter and behaviour, and make sure it was kept in the public consciousness.

There is a need now to support retailers to move away from providing single-use bags completely because this would lead to a further reduction of these items in the waste and litter stream.



Flytipping

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

65% agree that it is a problem in their local area.

48% noticed an increase in flytipping over the last 12 months.

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

69% agree more should be done to clean up flytipping.

Perceptions of flytipping as a problem vary by a range of demographics

80% of those in less affluent areas are considerably more likely to view flytipping as a problem than those in more affluent areas (51%).

65% of people living in large urban areas view flytipping as an issue compared to only 46% in remote rural areas.

Looking forward

Litter is and continues to be a dirty topic. As an environmental issue it is often swept under the carpet, deemed less important than the big-ticket challenges.

Yet with **90%** of people in Scotland consistently pointing out year after year that Scotland has a litter problem it is clearly a matter of priority. If almost **70%** of people agree litter makes them feel embarrassed about their own neighbourhood it is surely time to do something about it.

It should be easy to fix. We know it isn't.



If we continue to fail to address the root cause of the climate, nature and litter emergencies – our consumption of 'stuff' - and we don't stem the flow of the phenomenal numbers of single-use items, especially packaging for food and drink we consume, we don't have a chance of reducing litter.

We can't address the issue in isolation. Litter and its impacts seep across all policy areas. But we can look towards Scotland becoming a more circular economy and we can show people another way by inspiring behaviour change.

We are on the cusp of seeing the implementation of a Deposit Return Scheme, Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging systems and a Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024 which will all deliver positive changes – but the commitment and timeframe for these must be maintained.

We claim to be a proud nation. The way we treat our country suggests otherwise. Join our mission to eradicate litter and keep Scotland beautiful.



How clean are our streets?

We've coordinated a national programme of local environmental quality surveys across Scotland for more than two decades. The data gathered provides a national picture and highlights regional trends which support local authorities to deliver services as efficiently as possible at such a challenging financial time. This year the data collected from more than 12,000 sites is presented in an interactive dashboard, allowing you to navigate the data yourself at both a national and local level.

[Explore the data](#)



We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is your charity for our environment. We work with you to help combat climate change, reduce litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places.



T: 01786 471333 E: info@keepscotlandbeautiful.org



www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org

