

How clean are our streets?

2024 / 2025



Contents

Foreword.....	3
Headlines.....	4
Methodology.....	5
How littered is Scotland?.....	6
Where is the litter found?.....	7
The inequalities of litter levels.....	8
What types of litter are most common?.....	9
Addressing specific litter types.....	10
Where is litter coming from?.....	11
How do we reduce litter?.....	12
What else is affecting street cleanliness?.....	13
Does this data match what people think of litter?.....	14
What's next?.....	15

We support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.



Foreword

The data presented in this report paints such a shocking picture of our beautiful country. We don't need to exaggerate it to secure headlines.

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

The litter emergency we declared in 2022 hasn't gone away. **More than 70%** of sites surveyed in 2024/2025 were littered, with **one in 12** being significantly impacted by litter. Once again this was significantly worse in our most deprived neighbourhoods.

And, while this year our data shows that slightly more sites across Scotland are litter free it also exposes the increasing number of more significantly littered sites.

For more than two decades we have supported and trained local authorities to ensure that expert surveyors audit thousands of sites across Scotland for litter and other indicators of local environmental quality. We provide bespoke reports to every local authority and use the unique national data set to monitor the trends, identify the need for policy change and provide information on which we base national approaches to inspire behaviour change and attract funding to inspire positive action and collaborations.

It is clear that local authorities, active volunteer groups and charities can't keep on top of the sheer volume of waste we create and litter – it seems that for every piece of litter picked up by someone that cares another piece is dropped by someone who doesn't.

For a proud nation we as citizens still don't seem to make the connection between a bit of litter here and there and the way it makes us feel, the way it impacts our health and wellbeing, the way it effects business or even how safe it makes us feel in our own communities. We certainly don't see people make the connection between what they buy – the packaging used on the products consumed – and the climate, nature and litter emergencies.

Yet litter is a highly visible indicator of the state of our communities – it should be an easy thing for us to address, but it isn't. It is a symbol of what is wrong with our society's throw away culture and its far-reaching impacts stretch into every part of life. Litter pollution is one of the greatest environmental challenges we face. If we can't crack the behaviours behind it, we have no hope of engaging people to combat climate change and restore nature and biodiversity.

We've said it before and will say it again – tackling the litter emergency in Scotland requires us all to acknowledge the scale of the litter problem and then for us all to commit to meaningful collaboration across sectors – voluntary, public and private. It needs Scotland wide engagement.

The data in this report confirms that we ALL need to do more. As a first step, we urge you to share the information in this report with others and join us as we call for urgent action to tackle our litter crisis.



Headlines



1

70.7% of all sites surveyed were littered.

2

1 in 12 sites surveyed were significantly littered.

3

There was a **higher proportion of sites with significant litter than the year before.**

4

9 items were counted **on average** in the most littered **100m²** at each site.

5

82.6% of A roads and bypasses were affected by litter, with **more than one in five** significantly littered.

6

84.8% of sites surveyed in the most deprived communities were littered compared to **60.4%** of sites in the areas deemed least deprived.

7

41.0% of litter counted was smoking related.

8

28.2% of litter counted was food and drink related.

We have made a few improvements and updated our [interactive report](#) on our website, allowing you to navigate the data yourself at both a national and local level and now compare the findings to last year.



Methodology

The findings within this report are based on surveys of the local environment undertaken between April 2024 and April 2025 in Scotland for [LEAMS \(Local Environmental Audit and Management System\)](#), the national monitoring programme.

LEAMS uses a combination of self and independent monitoring. Every year, each local authority conducts two audits annually in their own areas. These assess the cleanliness of a minimum random sample of 5% of streets/roads. In addition, Keep Scotland Beautiful conducts an annual validation audit, also assessing a 5% sample of streets within each local authority, ensuring independent evaluation. All assessors are trained by Keep Scotland Beautiful to ensure consistent monitoring across Scotland.

Grade A	Grade B+	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D
				
No litter	Predominantly free of litter – up to three small items	Predominantly free of litter	Widespread distribution of litter with minor accumulations	Heavily littered with significant accumulations

*Sites that score either a grade C or D are considered unacceptable.

Surveys assess types and sources of litter, servicing and coverage of public-use litter bins and local environmental quality (vandalism, graffiti, weeds growth, detritus, gum staining, flyposting and flytipping).

How littered is Scotland?

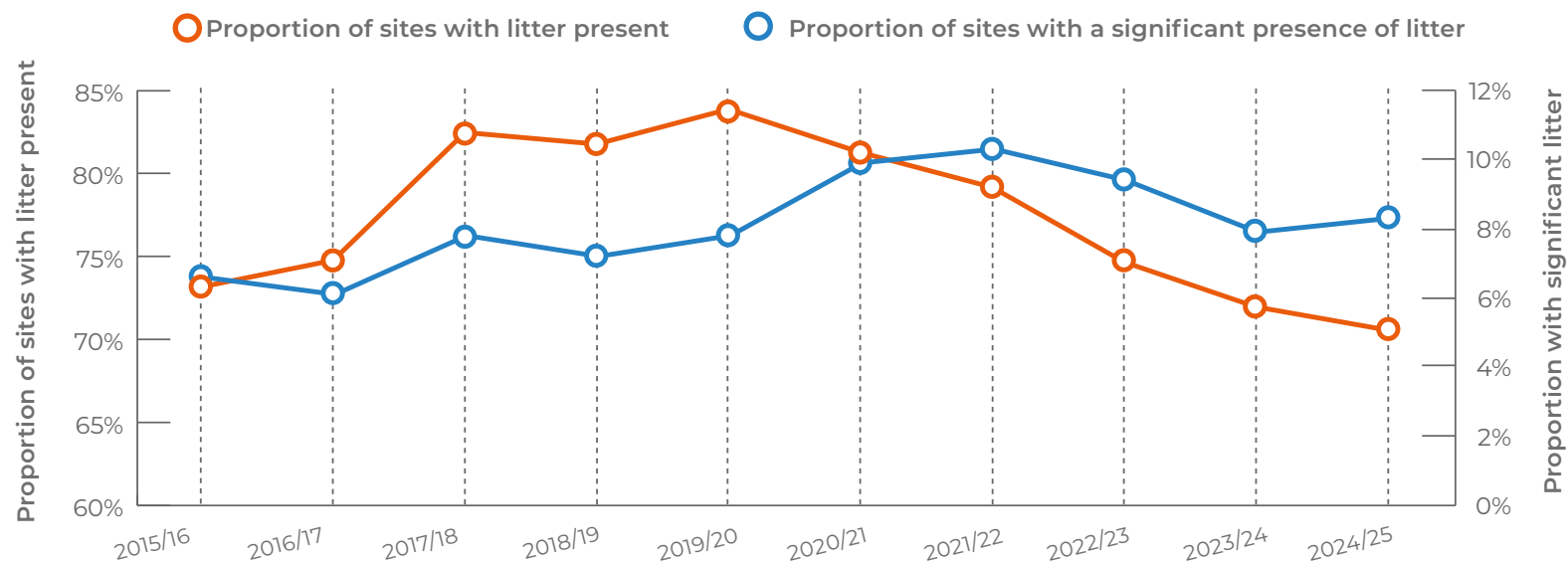
In 2024/25, litter was found at 70.7% of sites surveyed. Most sites with litter recorded small amounts. However, one in twelve sites surveyed (8.3%) were significantly littered - graded as having widespread litter and/or having accumulations of litter.

What are the trends in Scotland?

LEAMS has been running for 22 years so litter levels can be tracked in Scotland more long-term. The proportion of sites with litter has decreased for the fifth year consecutively and is the lowest for 10 years. Whilst this is encouraging it shows that litter is still widespread.

As the proportion of sites with litter has decreased, the number of sites with significant litter has increased. The proportion with significant litter increased in 2024/25, reversing two years of improvements since the highest score nationally in 2021/22 (which was significantly impacted by the pandemic), and litter remains higher than pre-pandemic levels.

These trends may indicate that a gap is widening in standards with more areas completely free from litter at the same time as more areas are significantly littered.

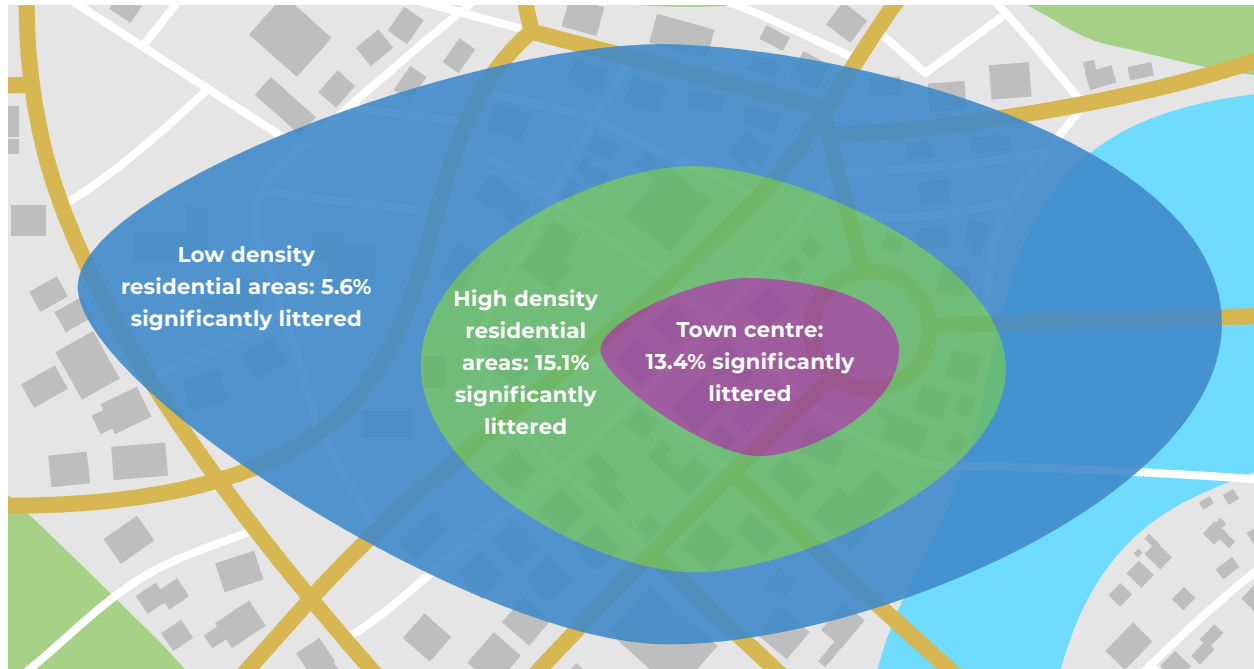


Where is the litter found?

Litter is found more in built up areas

Litter was more frequently observed in urban based local authority areas, where 75.2% of sites recorded litter and 12.5% were significantly littered. This can be compared to rural based local authorities where 62.0% of sites recorded litter and 4.3% significantly littered. This is somewhat expected due to generally higher footfall and areas deemed more deprived in urban areas.

Litter levels can be compared across different land uses too, with it more likely to be observed in high footfall and vehicle activity areas, regardless of whether the authority itself is more urban or rural in nature. On streets, as opposed to roadsides, high density residential had the highest proportion of significantly littered sites at 15.1% compared to 5.6% in low density residential areas.



Like national findings, all land types have seen the proportion of sites with litter decrease over time. In particular, 99.9% of sites in town centre areas were affected by litter in 2017/18 compared to 83.6% in 2024/25 – a reduction of 16.3 percentage points. However, the proportion of sites with significant litter has fluctuated in many zones over this time period but there have been more noticeable increases in town centres and particularly strategic roads.



Roadsides

The verges of three different types of road are monitored for litter. Rural roads were the least littered where less than half of sites surveyed found litter and 5.2% were significantly littered. Surveys on semi-rural roads found 51.2% were littered and 11.3% significantly littered. Strategic roads were more greatly affected by litter, with 82.6% littered. This is less than the previous year but a greater proportion, 22.1%, were significantly littered. It should be noted that there were only 86 sites were surveyed on strategic roads.

Circular Economy Act

In 2024 the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act was passed which has measures that can help tackle littering. We are calling for a consultation on how charges on single-use beverage cups will be brought about under this legislation and how a civil penalty charge for road users that litter from vehicles can be taken forward as a matter of urgency.

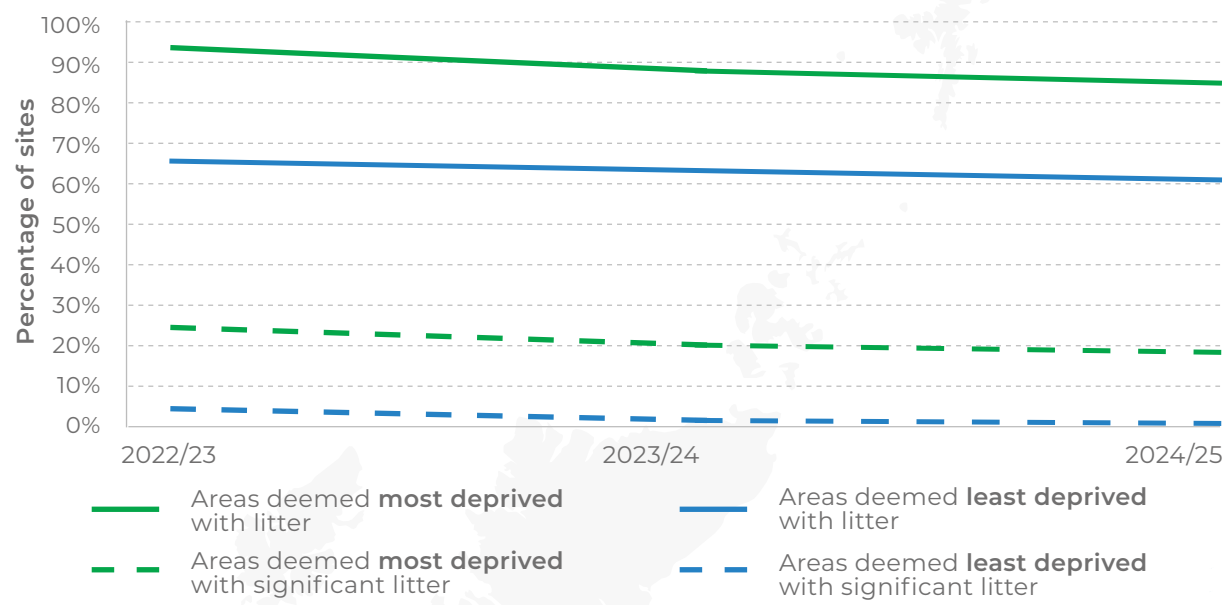
The inequalities of litter levels

Over the years our data shows there is an inequality in where litter is found between areas deemed most deprived and areas deemed least using national data from the LEAMS programme and the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\)](#).

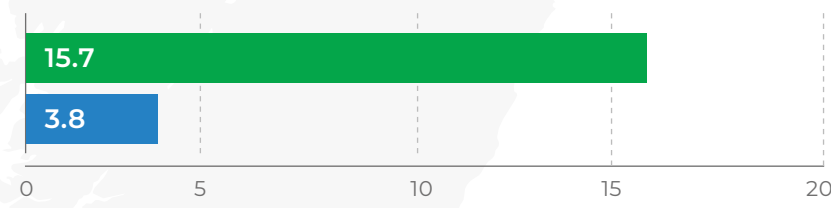
Through this report we compare data to the areas deemed most and least deprived which are representing quintiles 1 and 5 of the SIMD respectively. Compared to the previous year, the average counts of litter and the percentage of sites with litter decreased in both areas, although the noticeable gap remains similar. The percentage of sites with significant litter decreased in areas deemed most deprived and increased in areas least deprived which may indicate a narrowing gap in this measure.



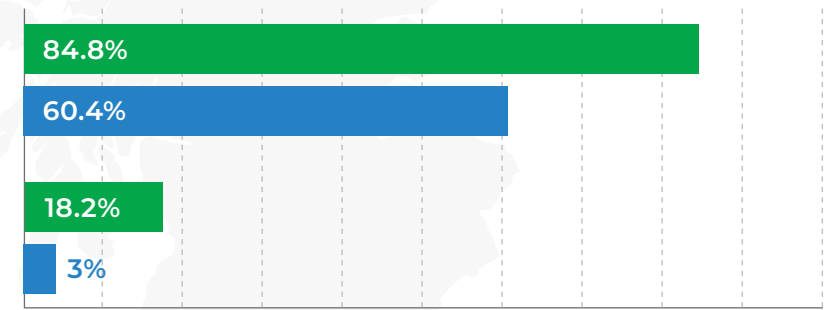
Proportion of sites littered over time by deprivation levels



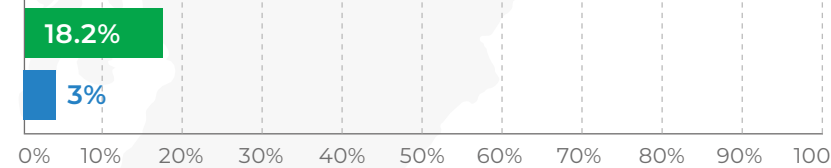
Average litter count (per most littered 100m² at each site)



Percentage of sites with litter



Percentage of sites with significant litter



■ Areas deemed most deprived ■ Areas deemed least deprived

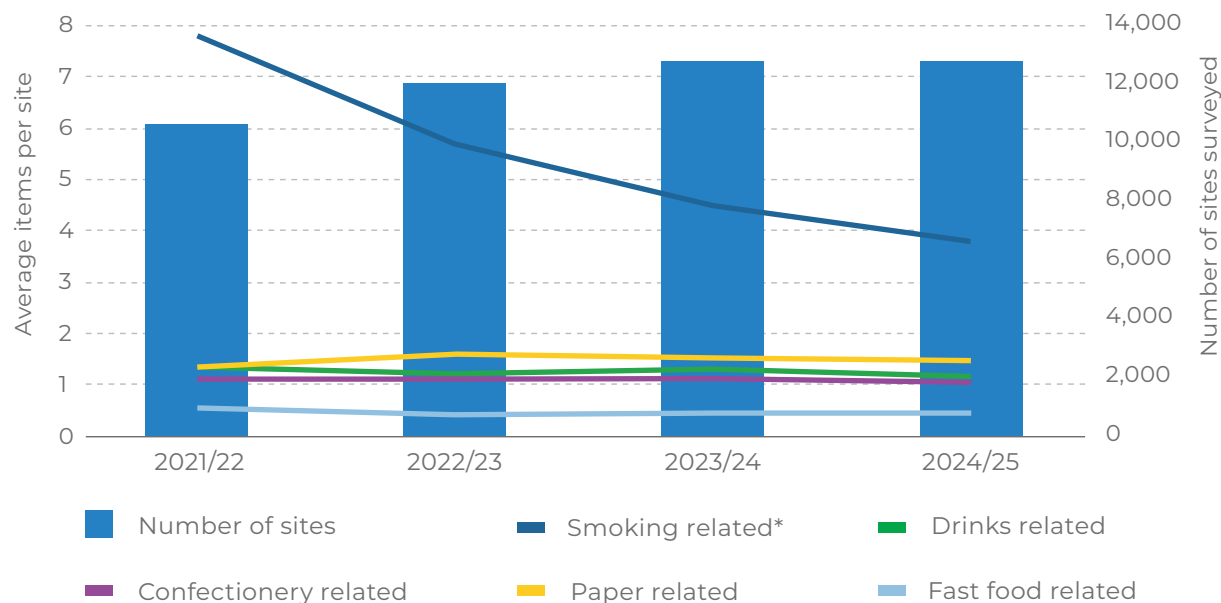
What types of litter are most common?

Smoking related materials were by far the most common litter type, making up 41% of litter counted. In 2024/25 vaping related litter was counted separately and made up 2.3% of all items counted – almost half of the count of the well-established fast food related litter.

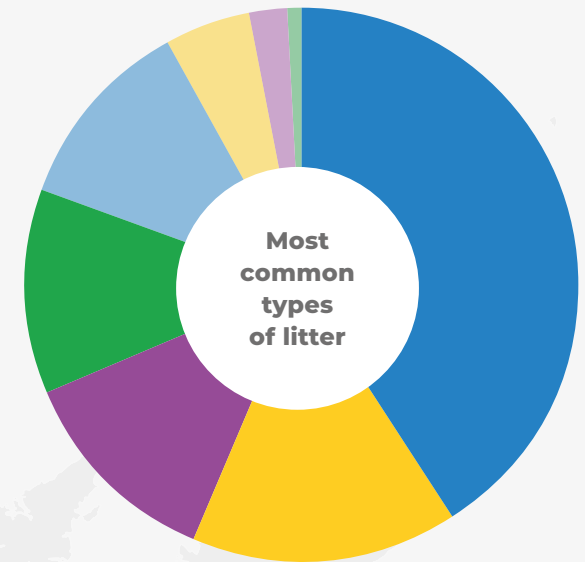
Food and drink items made up 28.2% of litter. Paper litter makes up the majority of other litter types, making up 15.5% of all litter counted.

Counts of litter have been part of the LEAMS programme since 2021/2022, allowing trends to be seen on quantities of different litter types. Using averages per site we can see smoking related has always been the highest recorded item but continues to decrease, inclusive of vaping items. The other main litter types have not noticeably changed in this time.

Litter types over time



*Includes vaping related items



- 41% Smoking related
- 15.5% Paper related
- 12.3% Other
- 11.9% Drinks related
- 11.3% Confectionery related
- 5% Fast food related
- 2.3% Vaping related
- 0.7% Dog fouling

Addressing specific litter types



Vapes

The sale of single-use vapes was banned in Scotland from 1 June 2025. It is hoped this will significantly reduce vaping litter and it will not be replaced by other litter types related to re-usable vapes of other smoking or nicotine related items. This will be measured through surveying on our streets and roads in 2025/26. It is especially important electronic waste like vapes are disposed of correctly, not littered or put in a public litter bin.



Packaging

The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024 passed in December 2024 means packaging producers take responsibility for the impact of their packaging waste. It is also important that people dispose of their litter in a bin.

Data collected in 2024/25 found packaging items made up 19.3% of all litter counted and these items were present at 41.0% of sites surveyed, higher in areas of high footfall and in areas deemed more deprived. Replace with: The introduction of Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme in October 2027 will hopefully encourage more people to recycle single-use plastic bottles and cans. Encouraging everyone to return single-use drinks items. Excluding glass, items in scope for the DRS made up 8.7% of litter we counted in 2024/25. These items were found at 29.5% of sites surveyed with a particularly high presence in high density residential areas where they were recorded at 40.7% of sites. Further almost half of sites (48.2%) surveyed in the areas deemed most deprived had at least one littered item which could be recycled via a Deposit Return Scheme.

These should both reduce packaging, particularly food and drink litter on our streets and roads.



Paper

Paper makes up a noticeable proportion of the litter on the ground but we need more data on the types found. Unfortunately this is difficult due to the state of littered paper items once they are wet and dirtied. We will strive to address this in our future reports?.



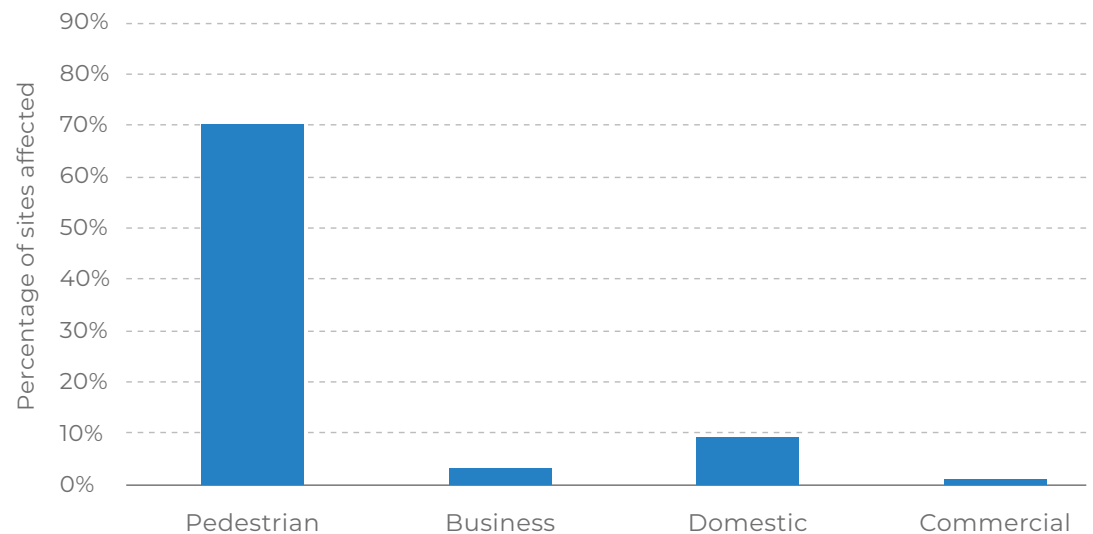


Where is litter coming from?

The majority of litter recorded was a result of pedestrian activity with 70.5% of sites surveyed affected by litter from pedestrians. Almost one in ten (9.6% of sites) were affected by litter from domestic waste, rising to 13.4% in high density residential areas and was highest in areas deemed most deprived (14.6%). This could be due to waste infrastructure, waste collection and external factors like wind and animals. Findings show that escaped business and commercial waste was present but not a major contributor.

Of sites surveyed, 13.8% had a litter bin. Most were well serviced with 2.3% overflowing, 3.1% in need of repairs and 3.4% in poor cleanliness.

Litter source



How do we reduce litter?

We need to stop littering at its source, encouraging alternatives to single-use items and reducing waste in general. We all need to reduce high consumption habits and be responsible for the materials we use and dispose of. To encourage this there is much happening nationally and locally, including the use of legislation to tackle litter.

Since our last [How clean are our streets?](#) report The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024 was made and The Environmental Protection (Single-use Vapes) (England) Regulations 2024 came into effect. The Circular Economy Act can also make charges for single-use items and penalise road users for litter from vehicles. However, neither of these have been moved forward – a consultation on charging for single-use beverage cups was completed but recommendations have not been made or taken forward, and the consultation on how vehicle owners could be fined for littering from their vehicles has yet to be launched. We urgently need the policy to ensure that we can wholistically tackle the issues our data highlights.

We are now in the third year of delivery of [The National Litter and Flytipping Strategy](#). A report on the [Causes of Litter and Flytipping](#), published in January 2025, found dozens of influences on littering. Those that have a strong direct effect are lack of bins, not wanting to be inconvenienced, lack of awareness on the impacts, attitude that it is someone else's problem and the abundance of single-use products and packaging. Further work is being undertaken to research the causes and effects of litter and the data required for targeted interventions which should be used in the increasing proportion of sites with significant litter.

We know there is a desire and a willingness from our communities to tackle our litter emergency. More than 34,000 volunteers took part in this year's [Spring Clean Scotland](#), removing 331 tonnes of litter from our environment in just four weeks.

Collaboration between Scottish Government, local authorities, businesses, charities and communities is key to address the litter emergency and progressing with these behaviours, policies and practices should help reduce the litter we see.



To learn more about littering issues in Scotland and investigate steps to tackle it we have a new [Community Litter eLearning module](#) for individuals, business and organisations. If you want to read about the topic and actions to take you can also explore the [Community Litter Hub](#).





What else is affecting street cleanliness?

Litter has a highly visible impact on our environment and, when combined with a range of other indicators such as graffiti, flyposting, weed growth and detritus, can heavily impact how we feel about where we live, work and spend our leisure time.

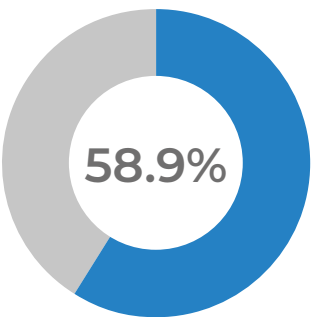
Are our road channels kept clean of detritus?

Our road channels are swept to ensure they are clear of not just litter but detritus as well. In 2024/25 over half of the road channels had a presence of detritus (58.6%) and 8.4% had a significant presence. Compared with the previous year, this is a higher general and significant presence.

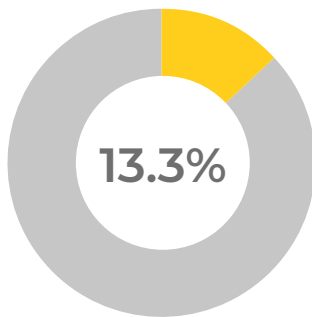
What are the other issues?

Detritus in general, on pavements and paths as well as road channels, was recorded at 65.0% of sites and more than one in eight (13.1%) had a significant build up - both higher than in 2023/24. Weed growth is similarly prominent, recorded at 68.9% of sites and 14.2% of sites had a significant or severe presence. Like litter, significant weed growth increases with levels of deprivation with almost one in five sites affected in areas deemed most deprived.

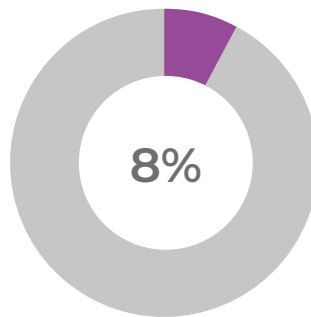
Gum staining was recorded at 31.2% of sites, although it was a minor presence at most sites. However, it was significant or severe in one in twelve sites in town centres where other local environmental quality issues occur more frequently.



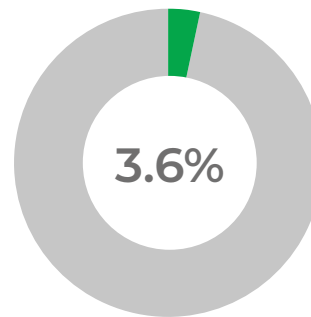
Chewing gum
presence in town centre sites



Graffiti
presence in town centre sites



Flyposting
presence in town centre sites



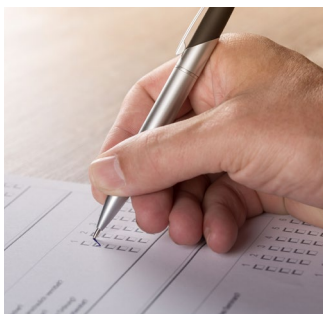
Vandalism
presence in town centre sites

Does this data match what people think of litter?

The data from LEAMS matches the perceptions of the public as we compare findings with our fifth Scottish Litter Survey. We have collaborated with Diffley Partnership to understand public perceptions on the prevalence of litter, attitudes towards litter and littering behaviour, and opinions on what measures the public would like to see to tackle litter and where responsibility for this lies.

Once again nine in ten people in Scotland view litter as a problem, 77% in their local area and 90% think litter is much more common or stayed the same in their local area over the past year.

What is more impactful is that 66% admitted that levels of litter in their area made them embarrassed of their neighbourhoods and more than 70% thought litter made public spaces unsafe for animals and children in their area.



[The 2025 Scottish Litter Survey is available to read on our website.](#)

[Read now](#)



What's next?

In 2026 a Scottish general election will take place. We have an opportunity to ensure that the next Scottish Parliament prioritises tackling litter and reducing waste and makes significant and sustained financial investment to do so.

Alongside polling data which shows just how embarrassed people are about the littered states of their communities, the data in this report will be used to evidence the need for systematic change in the way we view litter – not as something we tolerate and isn't important – but as something unacceptable, and far more indicative of the disconnection people have from places they should value.

Our polling also highlights the desire for us to tackle the source of litter pollution, rather than to continue cleaning it up. We need to see robust targets monitored and enforced, a clear focus on behaviour change and adequate resourcing to enable this to happen.

In the past year we have seen some progress made – data collected on single-use vapes highlighted it as the fastest growing litter category which in turn helped make the case for a ban to be introduced on the sale of these items.

We don't have capacity to lobby for a ban on every single-use item that becomes litter so we are calling for a more holistic approach to addressing the problem. We also need to see measures in the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act to help address single-use beverage cups and make it easier to tackle roadside litter through enforcement not stall further.

We are now delivering on a third year of actions aligned to the National Litter and Flytipping Strategy for Scotland. We have launched campaigns in three areas to tackle roadside litter, we will promote the Community Litter Hub to empower communities to take action, and we will continue to push for political parties to prioritise litter pollution as they seek votes in the coming year.

Our vision remains for a litter free Scotland, and we are committed to:

- Continuing to collect and report data which evidences scale of issue and success of any interventions by investing in AI technology and utilising Power BI and supporting people to collect information, particularly in areas not managed by a local authority.
- Inspiring changes in consumption behaviours, encouraging people to shift to reusable products where possible.
- Campaigning for a reduction in single-use packaging at source – pushing for Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (pEPR) payments to extend to litter.
- Pushing for the forthcoming UK Deposit Return System to be delivered without delay and support people to understand how to use it and why it is such an important tool in tackling litter pollution of cans and plastic bottles.
- Engaging with the housing, planning and community safety sectors.

But, the elephant in the room is always the lack of funding for us to lead this change. If we don't keep calling for greater collaboration and action we don't know who will. If we don't collect data and campaign for a litter free Scotland, we don't know who will. If we don't empower thousands of volunteers to litter pick each spring, we don't know who will. Yet, the funding we currently receive is inadequate to deal with the scale of the issue and impact on our communities. We can't possibly make the impact we are committed to deliver.

So we are calling for long term and sustainable investment from all sectors to support action and enable consistent campaigns and interventions which deliver real change for our communities

We don't want to be producing reports every year highlighting the worsening levels of litter polluting our beautiful country.

We want to celebrate success and live in a litter free country.



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

