



Keep Scotland  
Beautiful

Your charity for Scotland's environment

# Time for a new approach to tackling litter



Towards a Litter-ate Scotland  
2020

# Contents

Executive summary .....	3
1. Introduction .....	4
2. Tracking the decline .....	6
3. The wider impacts of declining local environmental quality .....	10
4. Local environmental quality in decline in Scotland: pre-Covid-19 .....	12
5. Stories from lockdown .....	14
6. What we have been doing since March to tackle litter .....	16
7. What is driving the decline? .....	18
8. What needs to change? .....	20
Appendix 1: References .....	23



# Executive summary

We have an emergency looming, hidden in plain sight. With all the focus, quite rightly, on the climate and nature crises, we run the risk of forgetting to deal properly with the most publicly complained about environmental problem – one that is at its worst state in years. But it is a problem that can also, if overcome, lead to important, positive impacts on efforts to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.

Local environmental quality, defined by the indicators of litter, dog fouling, graffiti, vandalism, flytipping and weed growth, is an important measure of the state of our places and spaces – green and blue. For 17 years we have been monitoring and auditing these indicators across Scotland and until 2014, the picture was positive: indeed, in 2013 we recorded our cleanest, most litter-free year.

In 2016, we started to record and report a worrying decline across Scotland and between 2018 and 2020, standards dropped to their lowest ever recorded levels. Even more worrying, we revealed that the decline is more rapid and significant in the poorest parts of Scotland. More than one million people in Scotland are now living in places where the decline is more rapid than the national average. Furthermore, we know that in these places there are likely to be wider and significant health, economic and social justice and wellbeing issues.

Whilst admirable efforts have been made by us and by local authorities, communities, Scottish Government, agencies and people across Scotland, this can only go so far to help if there are fundamental problems that must be resolved. New data and evidence gathered during the pandemic restrictions suggest that standards have deteriorated further – specifically with increases in flytipping, littering and dog fouling.

There are three main components of the system that exists to deal with local environmental quality: enforcement, behaviour change initiatives and infrastructure provision. Our evidence and data points to a failure across all three components and highlights that unless we reverse the trends of decline, Scotland faces the prospect of a litter emergency. Supported by a range of agencies and stakeholders we are calling for:-

- **A litter summit in early 2021 to agree a collective approach across sectors to tackling this issue;**
- **A commitment to publish a new national strategy by the end of 2021 at the latest;**
- **Sustained national campaigns with consistent messaging;**
- **A programme of education and behaviour change to create a Litter-ate Scotland;**
- **Establishment of a behaviour change innovation fund to develop and test new infrastructure solutions;**
- **A review of the failing model of enforcement;**
- **A national, collective network of people, organisations, communities and agencies working together to jointly reverse the decline.**

**We need you to join us in our renewed effort to better protect and look after the places and spaces that are so important to us all – for our environment, our wildlife, our health and our wellbeing. If we cannot respect and look after the places that we love and live in, we have no hope of solving the climate and nature crises. Tackling the first can help the latter. Join #TeamKSBScot and be part of the solution.**

# 1. Introduction

**Over the last 17 years, Keep Scotland Beautiful has worked in partnership with stakeholders across Scotland to track the key indicators of local environmental quality, including litter, dog fouling, graffiti, vandalism and flytipping.**

Over recent years, we have seen these indicators decline at pace across all communities from the least to the most deprived, blighting neighbourhoods and potentially impacting on a wide range of policy areas including health and wellbeing, education and the local economy.

Local environmental quality is inextricably linked with some of the most fundamental environmental challenges of our time. A key driver of poor local environmental quality is the same unsustainable use of resources which is driving the climate crisis, as exemplified by the multitudes of disposable items which are used just once before being carelessly disposed of as litter.

In addition, litter contributes to the global marine litter crisis – over 90% of plastic in Scottish seas comes from littering on land<sup>1</sup>, with disastrous consequences for species and habitats in our oceans and seas.

Local environmental quality is also fundamental to the concept of 20 minute neighbourhoods, rapidly growing in popularity in Scotland and elsewhere: if we really do want to create the kind of communities in which people can meet all of their needs within a 20 minute walk, it is crucial that every neighbourhood in Scotland is of an environmental standard which people can take pride in and enjoy spending time in; both with regards to the cleanliness of local streets and pathways and the beauty of local parks and waterways.

The problems we face in Scotland are also global in nature, with litter and local environmental quality more broadly an issue which is growing in prominence amongst campaigners and governments, and one which is particularly referred to amongst the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The first target associated with Goal 14 on Life Below Water, for example, refers to the need to significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, and in particular that which is caused by land-based activities.

Over the last five years, Keep Scotland Beautiful has brought together public bodies and other stakeholders with an interest in this issue, connecting them with the hundreds of community groups we support every year. We have worked to see if we can find a common way forward to arrest and ultimately reverse the decline in the environmental quality of the places that matter to all of us.

We had started to see some evidence that this collaborative approach was having an impact: positive engagement with the Scottish Government and Zero Waste Scotland to review the National Litter Strategy, enthusiasm from councils and housing associations for new ideas and an increased willingness from local communities and businesses to step up to the plate. Leading on from this, we were ready to publish our latest progress report in June 2020, setting out the latest data we had gathered and outlining how we planned to roll out a range of innovations that would generate action at a community level. However, due to the unprecedented events associated with Covid-19, we decided to delay the publication of our report and reconsider the programme of action we had planned.

What has become apparent over the last few months, with all of us spending more time in our local areas and having more opportunity to appreciate the value of the places we live, is that there are real problems with the current approach to tackling litter and protecting the condition of our neighbourhoods.



## We need to create a litter-ate Scotland... before it's too late.

With places across Scotland suffering from a 'lockdown impact' (by which we mean an increase in the severity of Scotland's litter problem as well as a heightened awareness of the prevalence of poor environmental quality more broadly) the marginal improvements we have seen in recent years could be cancelled out and it will exacerbate the wider issues associated with the decline in local environmental quality, particularly in our most deprived communities. These are also the very communities most significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>.

We are extremely concerned that without action now Scotland faces the prospect of a litter emergency with levels of litter and other indicator levels spiralling out of control, and the condition of our communities and neighbourhoods going into further decline. This is also just as so many of us have come to realise how much we rely upon our local places and spaces to support our physical, mental and social wellbeing.

We want this report, and the evidence and proposals it contains, to mobilise a coalition with national and local stakeholders and communities developing and implementing a new approach to protecting the places that matter to us all, in turn helping solve the other connected issues of climate change and biodiversity loss. We also need to see local environmental quality prioritised and given enough status to be acknowledged in a future Scottish Government Programme for Government and its new Environment Strategy.

We can't just keep talking about the problem; we need to fix it. We need to review the broken system and we need you to be part of our effort to create a litter-ate Scotland - before it's too late.

**48%**

reduction in the number of litter free sites

**111%**

increase in significantly littered sites

**49%**

of people in deprived areas think litter is a problem, compared to 19% in the least deprived

**1:9**

streets with high density housing were blighted with dog poo

**28%**

decrease in the number of fines issued for litter

**18%**

decrease in the number of fines issued for dog fouling

**56%**

weed growth which has almost doubled

**33%**

increase in detritus on our streets

**1:10**

urban centres recorded significant graffiti

## 2. Tracking the decline

For the past seventeen years, we have collected national data on street cleanliness and local environmental quality using the Local Environment Audit and Management System (LEAMS)<sup>3</sup>. Following ten years of continual improvement between 2003 and 2013, our data in 2014 revealed that this positive trend had stalled. Results between 2018 and 2020 then showed that, across most indicators, standards had dropped to levels not observed in any of the previous years of national monitoring.

Now, the facts are indisputable – and paint a worrying picture for all of us who are concerned with making Scotland a place where everyone can lead a healthy, safe and sustainable life.



### Litter

In 2013, almost a third of sites audited were found to be completely free of litter (**31%**) - this has decreased sharply to only around one in six (**16%** 2020). As would be expected, this is more prominent in urbanised authority areas (**8.1%** litter free) compared to a quarter in more rural authority areas (**24.3%**).

Of concern, since 2013, issues of significant littering at sites (consistent or accumulating items that cause a visible negative perception of local environmental quality) have more than doubled, from **3.7%** to **7.8%** (2020).

Furthermore, in high priority areas (high public use) where local authorities tend to focus resources, one in nine sites (2020) recorded a significant litter issue (**11.3%**), and only **8%** were litter free, despite regular cleansing by authorities, indicating that drivers leading to the presence of litter are a constant challenge.

The number of significantly or severely littered sites has more than doubled in Scotland's most deprived communities since 2014<sup>4</sup>, and **49%** of people in our most deprived areas think litter is a problem in their neighbourhood, compared to **19%** in the least deprived<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, recently published data from the Scottish Household Survey revealed animal nuisance and rubbish/litter lying around as being the two most commonly perceived neighbourhood problems across Scotland as a whole in 2019, with levels of concern over the latter rising to levels not seen in at least 15 years<sup>6</sup>.

Cigarette related litter (predominantly butts) continues to be the most frequent item, affecting around four out of five high public use areas audited (retail and residential). While these have a significant damaging environmental impact, particularly the plastic filters, they are generally not readily visible to the public.

Food and drink packaging make up a significant proportion of other litter items that affect street cleanliness (three quarters of high public use retail/residential areas audited). This reinforces the crucial importance of moving towards more sustainable, circular ways of using resources in our society, particularly with regards to harmful plastics and single use items.



## Dog Fouling

While the frequency of observations has increased since 2013 (from **5.4%** nationally to **7.9%** in 2020), the 2020 result is a continuing improvement since 2018 (where **11%** of sites recorded a presence).

The issue is skewed to high density residential areas, with more than one in nine (**11.4%**) of these areas audited recording a presence in 2020 (again, an improvement since 2018, from **15.9%**).

But we know through our #TurdTag citizen science work earlier this year that dog fouling is still a persistent problem in our green and open spaces and beaches – with **12** dog poos every **100** metres and bagged poo being **1.5** times more common than unbagged.

## Enforcement

Since 2014 there has been a decrease in the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued for both litter and dog fouling offences with a consistent payment rate of less than **50%**.

**28%** decrease in the number of fines issued for litter since 2014.

**18%** decrease in the number of fines issued for dog fouling since 2016<sup>2</sup>.

## Weed Growth

Weed growth has almost doubled since 2013 (from **31.8%** to **56.1%** in 2020). Of more concern, significant presentations (clear negative cleanliness impact in area) have almost tripled over the same period (from **3.6%** to **9.4%**).

## Detritus

Compared to 2013, there has been a **33%** increase in 2020 (from **46.2%** to **61.5%**). With regards to significant issues with detritus, there has also been a **33%** increase since 2013 (from **6.9%** to **9.2%**).

## Graffiti

Almost one in ten urban centres recorded a **significant** and visible presence of graffiti in 2020.

## Gum

Similarly, in 2020 one in ten urban centres recorded a **significant** and visible presence of gum staining on the footpath.

Our previous two reports on the standards of Scotland's local environments, published in 2016 and 2017, painted a worrying picture of decline, highlighting how worsening environmental quality was threatening communities across the country. In this report, we show that there has been little improvement in the years since – and that some indicators have fallen to their worst level yet recorded.



### 2004/2005

We started monitoring local environmental quality consistently across Scotland using the Local Environment Audit and Management System (LEAMS).



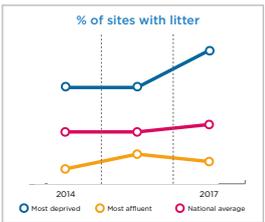
### 2013/2014

Scotland recorded its cleanest / most litter free year.



### 2016

We published our first report highlighting the decline in local environmental quality.



### 2017

Our second report was published highlighting that Scotland's most deprived communities were seeing a more severe and faster rate of decline in standards and that the gap between the most deprived and least deprived was widening.



### 2018/2019

Our data showed that the number of significant or severely littered sites have almost doubled in the most deprived communities since 2014/15.



### 2020

Lockdown effect experienced across Scotland with 30% believing the overall condition of their local neighbourhood has deteriorated over the lockdown period.



"The amount of flytipping has been unreal."



Our first report<sup>9</sup>, 'Scotland's Local Environmental Quality in Decline', was published in March 2016 and highlighted this worrying trend based on the analysis of data collected consistently across Scotland over ten years.

Almost two years later, based on data<sup>9</sup> from 2014 – 2017, we published a second report<sup>10</sup>, 'The impact of declining environmental quality on Scotland's communities', which highlighted a marked increase in the presence of litter, flytipping and graffiti in communities across Scotland. It also revealed that:



**Local environmental quality was declining more severely and at a faster rate in Scotland's most deprived communities.**



**The gap between the indicators for litter, flytipping and graffiti in the most deprived and the least deprived communities was widening.**



**More than a million people in Scotland were now living in places where local environmental quality was declining more rapidly than the national average.**

By 2017, it was clear that poor local environmental quality was not only affecting more and more people across Scotland, but also that this was an issue with a strong social justice dimension. Increasingly, those in Scotland's deprived communities were more likely to have to live with the consequences of poor environmental quality than those in the least deprived, reinforcing social injustice and inequality.

The lack of a substantial improvement in Scotland's local environmental quality since our last report means that we risk allowing litter, flytipping, dog fouling, weed growth and detritus to become permanent blights in the lives of people in communities in all parts of the country, and in particular those already experiencing multiple indices of deprivation.

# 3. The wider impacts of declining local environmental quality

Some of the impacts of poor local environmental quality are obvious. For instance, research shows that if an area is well-maintained and free of litter, it is considerably less likely to attract more litter than a place where there are no rubbish bins and where waste has already piled up.

However, what makes recent trends regarding litter and other indicators even more concerning is the array of wider impacts they have upon those for whom poor local environmental quality is an unavoidable part of day-to-day reality.

The evidence shows that the decline in the condition of Scotland's local communities, particularly in the most deprived areas, is likely to be having hugely detrimental effects across a broad range of policy objectives, in areas such as physical wellbeing, tourism, local regeneration, mental health and crime and the perception of crime:

- Poor local environment quality has a detrimental impact on individual behaviour, with people significantly less likely to litter in a clean local environment than in a dirty one<sup>11</sup>;
- High levels of litter are associated with increases in crime and social disorder<sup>12</sup>;
- Both actual and perceived local environmental quality have a significant impact on people's sense of life satisfaction<sup>13</sup>;
- Poor local environmental quality threatens the strength of Scotland's tourism industry: scenery and landscape are the most important factors motivating people to visit Scotland<sup>14</sup>, while 91% of Scots believe that roadside litter creates a negative impression of Scotland<sup>15</sup>;
- At least £53 million of public money is spent on dealing with litter and flytipping each year<sup>16</sup>, while the wider negative impacts of litter cost the Scottish economy and society at least a further £361 million a year<sup>17</sup>;
- Good local environmental quality has been shown to have positive effects on local economies, making investment in regeneration more attractive, encouraging retailers to open in vacant spaces, raising property values and even lowering the cost of living through lower car use<sup>18</sup>;
- Research has found that a clear majority of adults describe themselves as quite or very concerned about the appearance of their local area<sup>19</sup>, signifying how important local environmental quality is to people's states of mind;
- The evidence also shows that people deeply value the health and beauty of the places they live in<sup>20</sup>, and that access to high quality greenspace is positively associated with mental wellbeing<sup>21</sup>; for both these reasons, then, poor local environmental quality can negatively affect our mental wellbeing;
- Local environmental quality has also been shown to influence our physical health and levels of physical activity, with high quality local greenspaces able to provide particular benefits in this regard<sup>22</sup>. This positive effect on physical activity can in turn provide us with further benefits relating to our mental wellbeing, such as stress reduction – including amongst children and young people<sup>23</sup>.

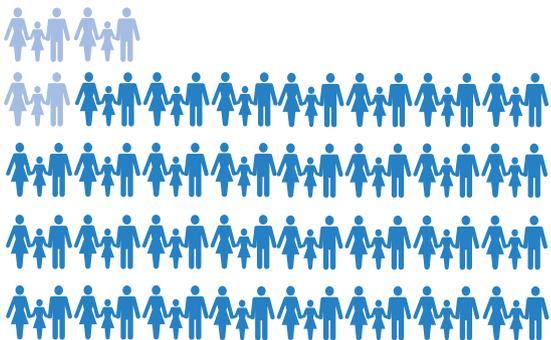


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"People don't seem to care about the place they live. I'd be ashamed to bring visitors to my garden and have them see the mess in the neighbourhood."

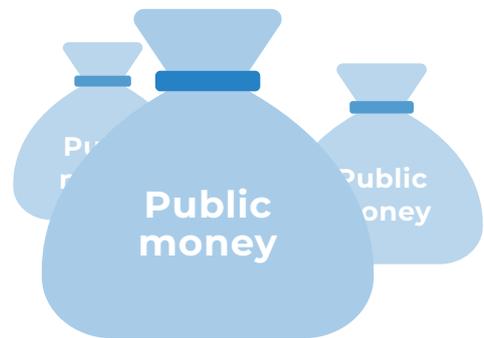
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## 91% of Scots



believe that roadside litter creates a **negative impression** of Scotland.

## £53 million



**£53 million** of public money is spent on dealing with litter and flytipping each year, while the wider negative impacts of litter cost the Scottish economy and society at least a further **£361 million a year**.

## 4. Local environmental quality in decline in Scotland: pre-Covid-19

In early 2020, we were pulling together a range of data, evidence, and case studies for inclusion in our latest progress report on the decline in local environmental quality, which we were planning to publish in June 2020.

We hoped to use the progress report to provide an update on key data relating to the decline in local environmental quality, outline how we planned to build on the developing consensus on this issue and roll out a range of innovations that would generate practical action at a community level, with support from the public and private sectors.

**We were also encouraged by the positive discussions that were taking place between the Scottish Government, Zero Waste Scotland, ourselves and other key stakeholders on the review of the National Litter Strategy and what any new strategy or framework would look like and include. We were also keen to acknowledge the positive impact that new systems and approaches will have, in particular the introduction of a Deposit Return System for Scotland and the extended producer responsibility reform.**

In terms of the data update, the progress report highlighted that, as of March 2020, the long-term trends in terms of key indicators of local environmental quality were still overwhelmingly downwards (see Table 1 opposite).

However, it also flagged up that since 2017/2018 – the worst year for many of the indicators – we had started to see some marginal improvements (see Table 2 below), which we believed reflected increased action in some areas by local stakeholders including councils, housing associations and, vitally, committed community groups. Between April 2019 and January 2020, for example, over 57,000 people across every local authority area in Scotland took part in registered Clean Ups through our Clean Up Scotland anti-litter campaign, including 26,500 young people who took part in Spring Clean 2019<sup>24</sup>.

### Linstone case study

We worked in Sandyflatts, an area in the lowest level of deprivation, to train the Linstone 2020 Project Team to support community engagement with workshops and one to one sessions with residents. As a result, a Tenants and Residents Association was established. They identified issues with their play park – including dog poo and broken glass – and have now set in place plans for an asset transfer from the council. They also have a group together establishing a growing space with support from our It's Your Neighbourhood programme.

### Wheatley case study

We have worked with Wheatley, Scotland's leading housing, care and property-management group, since June 2016, reviewing the environmental quality of over 400 of their tenement properties. We have provided training for staff, surveyed each property, reviewed the cleanliness of these areas along with any anti-social incivilities, aesthetic and waste issues. The immediate surrounds of each block are also evaluated, and any issues noted including graffiti, paintwork issues and aesthetics of building. Our work with Wheatley has so far helped bring about a 50% increase in the number of their properties achieving 5-star ratings in environmental quality assessments, reflecting a clear driving up of standards in local environment quality over the course of our partnership.

**Table One – Long-term trends in key local environmental quality indicators: a picture of decline** (March 2020 compared to 2014/15 data)

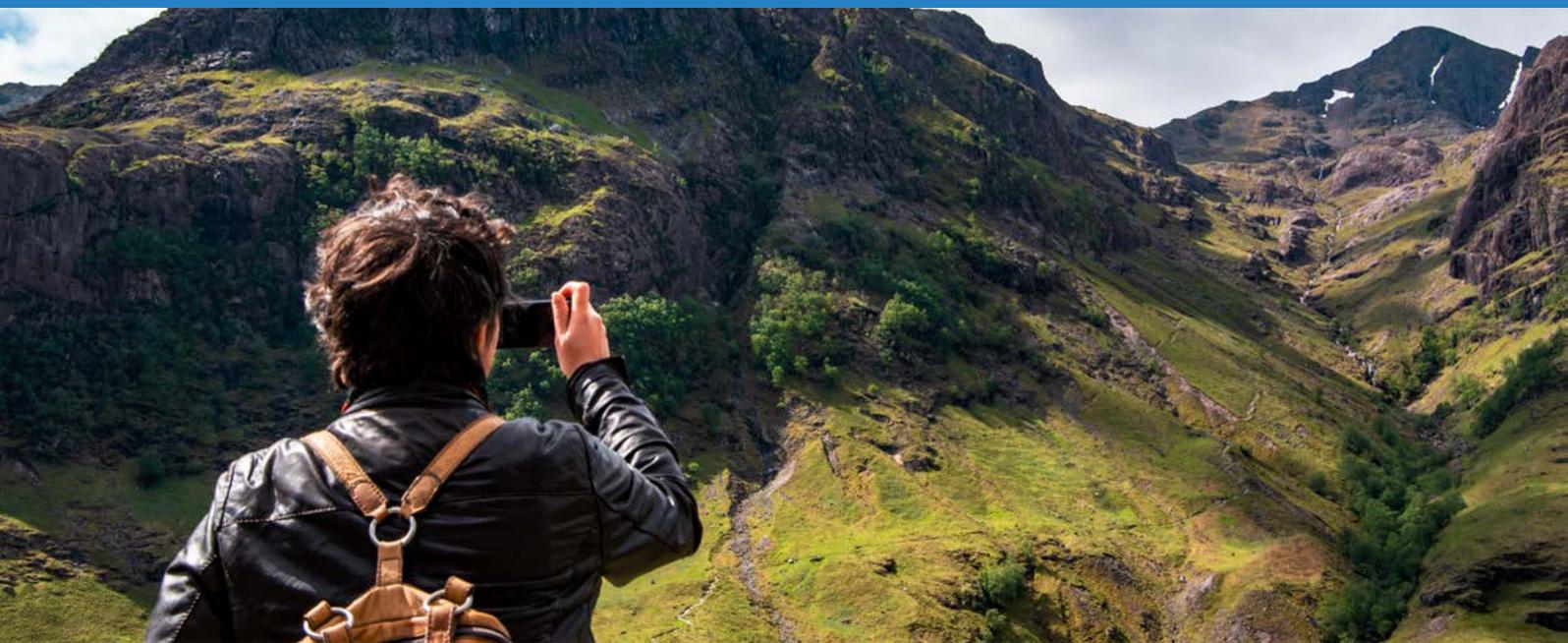
Indicator	National average	Most deprived	Most affluent
Litter	↓	↓	↓
Flytipping	↑	↓	↓
Graffiti	↓	↓	↓
Weeds	↓	↓	↓
Detritus	↓	↓	↓
Dog fouling	↑	↑	↓

**Table Two – Trends in local environmental quality indicators since 2017-18 low point: some signs of improvement** (March 2020 compared to 2017/18 data)

Indicator	National average	Most deprived	Most affluent
Litter	↑	↑	↑
Flytipping	↑	↑	↑
Graffiti	↑	↑	↑
Weeds	↓	↓	↓
Detritus	↓	↓	↓
Dog fouling	↑	↑	↑

In response to this data, as well as positive engagement with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders and financial support from the private sector, we outlined a proactive programme of action for 2020/2021. This included ambitious plans for Spring Clean 2020, piloting nationally the Anchor Group Model developed through our award-winning Upstream Battle Campaign, focusing on gathering evidence via Citizen Science by testing a new terrestrial litter survey toolkit with local groups and significantly increasing our engagement with communities and the public and private sectors.

Yet in March 2020, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions, we were forced to place much of this work on hold temporarily. Nine months on, we remain equally committed to driving community action and facilitating partnership working to tackle Scotland's litter problem. However, we also believe that the events of recent months have shone a new light on the need for a bold, revised over-arching approach to safeguarding and improving the beauty and cleanliness of Scotland's local environments. In subsequent sections we illustrate some of the actions we have been taking to tackle some of the problems we face.



## 5. Stories from lockdown:

It is our belief that the overall effect of the initial lockdown, and the ongoing restrictions since that time, has been to increase the severity of Scotland's litter problem, as well as to shine a spotlight on the prevalence of poor environmental quality more broadly across too many of our communities.

One consequence of lockdown – and the restrictions placed on our movements more generally – was that people spent a great deal more time within their local areas, working and shopping from home and enjoying local green and blue space. Indeed, polling for NatureScot revealed that 71% of Scots headed outside at least once a week during lockdown compared to 59% before lockdown, with more than one in three specifically citing managing stress as a reason for heading outdoors<sup>25</sup>.

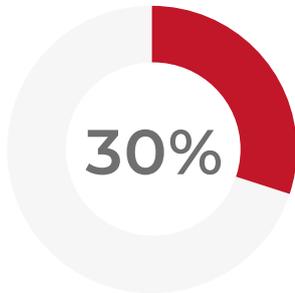
Some of the effects of this have undoubtedly been positive: polling for Scottish Environment LINK, for instance, has found that 76% of people in Scotland say they became more aware of nature in their everyday life during lockdown<sup>26</sup>.

However – perhaps precisely because of this increased appreciation of the value of our local spaces and places – it is also clear that recent months have brought about a greater awareness of Scotland's litter problem, and the blight it places on our communities and beauty spots.

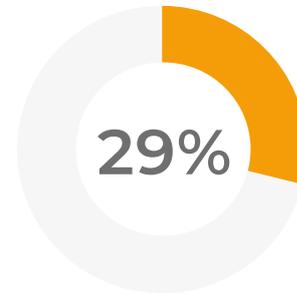
Media coverage of the prevalence of litter, flytipping and other indicators of environmental quality has soared as restrictions on our movement eased<sup>27</sup>, while an increasingly wide range of organisations across Scotland – from Scottish Water<sup>28</sup> to Forestry and Land Scotland<sup>29</sup> – have called attention to the devastating impacts of post-lockdown littering at beauty spots across the country.

Evidence and feedback that we gathered from the community groups and local people we work with has also made clear that these issues have grown in salience as lockdown has gradually eased. Our #TurdTag call out, for example, led to more than 100 volunteers across Scotland surveying the prevalence of dog fouling in their local communities during the two weeks following the 27th of April. The results revealed there to be an average of 12 dog poo incidents per 100 metres surveyed<sup>30</sup>.

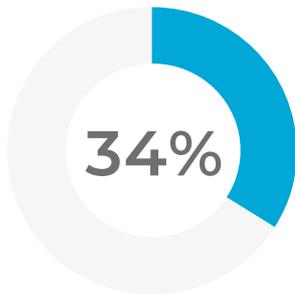
Following this, in June we decided to gain a measure of the nationwide picture regarding local environmental quality during lockdown by commissioning national polling to gather data on the public's perception of the condition of their local neighbourhoods before and the during lockdown period<sup>31</sup>. We believe the results clearly show there has been a 'lockdown effect' in communities across Scotland:



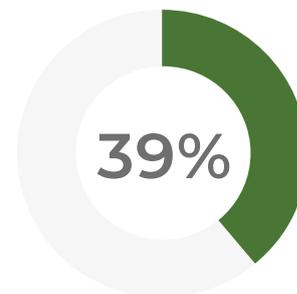
**believe the overall condition of their local neighbourhood has deteriorated over the lockdown period**



**believe that the amount of litter has got worse over the lockdown period**



**believe that the amount of dog fouling has got worse over the lockdown period**



**believe that the amount of flytipping has got worse over the lockdown period**

Yet this upsurge in awareness of the severity of Scotland's litter problem has also presented us at Keep Scotland Beautiful with the opportunity to refine and increase the scale of our fightback against litter, particularly through working productively and in partnership with stakeholders and community groups. In particular, we have had the opportunity to:

- Refocus and accelerate our work with communities;
- Complement national activity by Scottish Government and Zero Waste Scotland;
- Work in partnership with councils to support local action;
- Engage with supporters and identify what they need;
- Improve our advice and support;
- Maximise the impact we can have working together;
- Work in partnership with other organisations and agencies, including Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, Scottish Land and Estates and Scottish Water.

**The next section sets out in more detail the wide range of activity we have undertaken directly and collaboratively since March.**

## 6. What we have been doing since March to tackle litter

Over the last nine months we have been working with a range of organisations and community groups to provide advice, support and resources to help tackle the challenges associated with the increase in litter during lockdown and subsequent months both at some of our most famous beauty spots and in our local communities.

Having kept in close touch with the many community groups we support across the country we have been able to proactively provide them with advice, resources and recognition as well as responding to specific requests for help. This has included:

- The establishment of **31 community litter picking hubs** across Scotland during September and October equipped with the tools and knowledge they need to galvanise action in their local areas, including litter pickers, gloves, hi vis vests and posters. With the support of Zero Waste Scotland, we and the Marine Conservation Society have now expanded this model across Scotland to empower people to clean up the places that matter to them and help keep Scotland stunning.
- Pulling together our **Clean Up Scotland Supporters Pack** providing vital information and guidance to help local groups take proactive action in tackling our lockdown litter problem.
- Providing **new, regularly updated guidance** for our supporters and local authorities on how litter picking can be carried out in a safe and effective way, helping people to play their part while also fully complying with all restrictions on social gatherings.
- We supported those unable to litter pick to contribute by launching the **Clean Up Scotland litter survey**, aimed at using citizen science to capture a snapshot of data at the local level and thereby helping facilitate effective community action.
- We facilitated localised, community-led action through our support of the **Great British September Clean**, in collaboration with Keep Britain Tidy – encouraging people to contribute by organising private events within their local communities, pledging to pick up when already out and about, and doing litter surveys to help us build up a snapshot of litter in Scotland.
- We celebrated the efforts of **Lockdown Litter Heroes** Arron Uytendhal from Sauchie, Paul Richardson from Renfrewshire, seven-year-old Jack Silcocks from Doune and nine-year-old Lily Souter from Arbroath, whose efforts tackling litter in their communities over lockdown played a crucial role in helping protect the beauty of Scotland's environment over the summer months.
- We provided corporate partners with **campaign materials encouraging responsible behaviour** as restrictions eased, including by supplying McDonald's and Costa with materials from our Roadside Litter campaign as drive-thrus reopened.

“Litter has no place in a circular economy. Discarding resources like plastic, metal and glass not only blights our communities, it also wastes valuable materials that should be being kept in use for as long as possible.

“Whether it has been our local streets, parks, woodland, countryside or coastline, recent months have highlighted how valuable our environment is to so many of us and why it needs to be kept that way.

“It is a shame these are needed, but the litter picking hubs will give communities the opportunity to tackle the nuisance of litter and ensure the areas they love can continue to look their best.”

Iain Gulland, Chief Executive of Zero Waste Scotland



We have also been working in close partnership with a range of other national bodies to raise awareness of issues relating to local environment quality, and to maximise our collective impact in making a positive difference. When a clear rise in flytipping became evident across different parts of the country at the start of April, for instance, we made a [joint call to action](#) with Zero Waste Scotland, Scottish Land and Estates and the National Farmers Union Scotland to remind people of the huge costs of flytipping, as well as the importance of disposing of bulky waste responsibly and legally.



In addition, we have been working to support public agencies who approached us for advice and assistance including Scottish Water, Historic Environment Scotland and Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, providing them with resources such as collateral and messaging as they seek to tackle issues with litter at their sites across the country.



Finally, Keep Scotland Beautiful has also been an active partner in the national campaign Scotland is Stunning – Let's Keep It That Way, along with the Scottish Government and Zero Waste Scotland. This campaign launched at the onset of the relaunched tourism season in July, highlighting Scotland's natural beauty and wildlife and urging visitors not to spoil it by littering when they're enjoying the delights of our coast, countryside and campsites.

## 7. What is driving the decline?

We have been given a chance to see this problem through fresh eyes and to consider seriously about how we can start to fix it, but we need to have an open and honest conversation. Unless we act now to improve the quality of our local environments in a decisive, strategic, and collaborative way, we believe that we are facing the increasingly real prospect of a litter emergency. There are several aspects of the current situation which we believe now merit this label to a greater and greater extent:



We have seen a period of **measurable and continuing decline** in local environmental quality, most severely impacting the same deprived communities who are least equipped to address it.



As has been recognised by key stakeholders, there is an **absence of co-ordinated, strategic action** in a situation which sorely requires it, with the National Litter Strategy now six years out of date and proving insufficient in tackling rising litter levels. We acknowledge the positive work done during 2019 and 2020 to review the National Litter Strategy.



There has been a stark **decline in the level of public resources** available for tackling litter, with the average amount spent on street cleaning by Scotland's councils down by 34.6% since 2010-11<sup>32</sup>, making it harder for local authorities to deal with the rising tide of litter. At the same time, the amount of money required to deal with the litter and flytipping on Scotland's streets – previously estimated at £53 million a year<sup>33</sup> – is only likely to increase while the problem is not adequately addressed.



There is **significant public concern** regarding levels of litter in communities across the country. 91% of Scots believe that roadside litter creates a negative impression of Scotland<sup>34</sup>, while recently published data from the 2019 Scottish Household Survey shows that litter/rubbish lying around is now more commonly cited as a neighbourhood problem than at any other point in the past 15 years – and indeed is now one of the two most commonly reported neighbourhood problems, along with animal nuisance<sup>35</sup>.



The rise in litter is being driven in part by **long-term, large-scale social trends** which are difficult to reverse. Levels of consumption of single-use items, for example, have reached staggering heights in recent years, with an estimated 2.5 billion single use coffee cups used in the UK every year including 208 million in Scotland<sup>36</sup>. The impact of this can be seen in continually high prevalence of food and drink packaging on our streets, with this type of litter present on 62% of sites in 2019 (up from 48% in 2014).



There is evidence to suggest that the **COVID-19 pandemic** has further exacerbated some of these trends: driving a rise in the use and disposal of certain types of single use items<sup>37</sup>; increasing the strain placed on many local authorities; causing more people to spend time in and grow concerned about the condition of their community; and leading 30% of people in Scotland to believe that the overall condition of their local neighbourhood has deteriorated over the lockdown period<sup>38</sup>.



“With less traffic there has been less throwing of rubbish out the windows of cars. I have been able to do a litter pick and the roadside is still relatively clean. The verges have been able to grow wild which has increased butterflies wild flowers and bees”

#### Looking at the situation more broadly:



We know that litter and poor environmental quality in our communities are complex challenges that we are collectively failing to meet.



We know that no one organisation is responsible for, or can solve, this complex problem alone.



The current approach is not working overall, or in parts, and requires fundamental change, including with regards to enforcement.



The scope and scale of behaviour change needed cannot be achieved piecemeal - a sustained, properly researched and funded national campaign on the issue is needed but that is not something that is being funded or implemented at present.



We know litter is not a homogenous problem: it affects different communities in different ways. We need a new approach that recognises the reality of this situation and can respond to it.



We also know that local environmental quality is not just about litter and dog fouling: the scale of the problem is such that greater consideration and action is required across all of the indicators of LEQ, including flytipping, weeds, detritus, graffiti and flyposting.



Without action now Scotland faces the prospect of a litter emergency, with levels of litter spiralling out of control, rising damage being done to the condition of (particularly our most vulnerable) communities and wider impacts across a range of important policy areas such as health and wellbeing, education and the economy.



As a result, we believe it is now time this issue was given the attention it deserves as one of our most fundamental and basic environmental challenges: ultimately, if we can't encourage people to look after their local neighbourhood, we are unlikely to achieve the levels of public engagement we will need to tackle the wider environmental challenges of our time associated with climate change and biodiversity loss.



## 8. What needs to change?

We now believe it is necessary for all key stakeholders to recognise we are facing the prospect of a litter emergency if we are to successfully fight back against the historic and current decline in the environmental condition of our neighbourhoods.

Below, we outline several proposals that aim firstly to bring key partners together to recognise the seriousness of the situation we are in and to agree on a collective approach to averting a litter emergency. Secondly, our proposals aim to galvanise community action and maximise the impact of existing anti-litter initiatives – delivering real and significant improvements to local environmental quality in Scotland, and ensuring that our beauty spots and local communities are places we can truly take pride in. Our proposals include:



### 1. Litter Summit

Convene a litter summit in early 2021 to agree a collective approach across sectors to tackling this issue, recognising that we are facing the prospect of a litter emergency if we fail to take sufficient action now.

The litter summit should bring together key stakeholders in the third sector, the public sector, industry and in local and national government for an open and honest discussion around the challenges we face in reversing the decline in local environmental quality; and should then turn to the crucial question of how we can best work together to improve the condition of our communities and avert a litter emergency.



### 2. Clear Strategy

Deliver a clear strategy by the end of 2021 at the latest that provides direction across all sectors and drives community-based action on protecting and enhancing places, encouraging behaviour change to tackle litter, dog fouling and the other indicators of local environmental quality.

This should build on the shared ownership and collaborative approach developed through the review of the National Litter Strategy and recognise that the challenges we face are not the responsibility of any one organisation but can only be effectively addressed via a collaborative approach that harnesses the strengths and capacity of all sectors.



### 3. National Campaign

Launch a sustained, Scotland-wide campaign with consistent messaging to make littering and damaging the condition of our communities socially unacceptable, and encourage people to take pride in the quality of Scotland's local environments.

We are also keen to see the existing Scotland is Stunning campaign sustained as part of the fightback against litter, and would emphasise that national campaigns such as this are more likely to succeed in embedding behaviour change if they are consistent and rolled out over a generation. Once embedded and easily recognisable, this message could be adapted so as to best suit the evolving circumstances regarding lockdown restrictions, and in order to best meet the needs of stakeholders at the local level. More broadly, meanwhile, we are eager to continue partnering with Zero Waste Scotland and Scottish Government to ensure that our respective messages align and are complementary in their reach and impact.



### 4. Community focused litter-ate educational programme

Develop and implement a community focused litter-ate educational programme that raises awareness of the challenges we face, builds capability and capacity on a range of issues including behaviour change and localised campaigning, facilitates data gathering through citizen science and helps drive local action across the country.

This would build on the success of work we have undertaken in terms of the anchor group model, climate ready classrooms and carbon literacy training – and could be delivered face to face and online.



### 5. Gather and monitor data

Continue to gather and monitor data through the continued use of LEAMS/LMS as a base measurement, to ensure that local authorities and other key stakeholders have the evidence and expertise necessary to facilitate effective and well-targeted action on local environmental quality.



### 6. Commission review of failing enforcement model

Commission a review of the existing, failing enforcement model (from top to bottom, including local capacity to enforce, current legal status and priorities/challenges) to assess the most effective and efficient approach to enforcement, considering whether a move to a restorative approach is appropriate and looking at what has worked successfully in other areas of policy. We know, for example, that the increase in the level of fine for dog fouling has only been followed by an increase in non-payment rates; making it crucial that we consider whether restorative, community payback approaches to dealing with these offences may have greater success in bringing about adherence to the law in this area.



### 7. Establish an innovation fund

Establish a behaviour change innovation fund enabling the development and testing of new infrastructure and solutions to address Scotland's litter crisis at the community level, targeted on supporting councils, community groups and other local stakeholders to identify, develop and implement innovative proposals for changing behaviour with the possibility of scaling up if successful. Potential focuses of such a fund may include changes to infrastructure and specific problems and issues such as on the go food packaging; potential sources of funding, meanwhile, include assistance from corporate players and proceeds from DRS unclaimed deposits or EPR behaviour change funds.



To prevent the looming litter emergency and reverse the decline in environmental quality across Scotland's communities, we will continue our efforts to tackle the issues and over the next three years we will:

- 1** Engage with stakeholders and communities across Scotland to understand their views and the solutions they want to see.
- 2** Speak to communities across Scotland to hear what they have to say about what more we can do to tackle these problems.
- 3** Armed with this information and with views from across the country, put in place a range of advice and support delivered online and directly, which can be tailored to local circumstances.
- 4** Through Clean Up Scotland, implement a focused, three-year action plan to reverse the decline; in partnership with people, communities and organisations across Scotland.
- 5** Provide leadership and build from the local level up on what works, building on the enthusiasm, passion, and commitment of countless people in communities up and down the country: raising awareness, gathering evidence and driving action locally across Scotland.
- 6** Widen our support and resources for community hubs and anchor groups across Scotland to tackle litter in their communities.
- 7** Undertake further research and analysis, in particular through citizen science and our audit data.
- 8** Widen participation in Its Your Neighbourhood, helping create 20-minute neighbourhoods in every part of the country.

We need you to join us in our renewed effort to better protect and look after the places and spaces that are so important to us all – for our environment, our wildlife, our health and our wellbeing. If we cannot respect and look after the places that we love and live in, we have no hope of solving the climate and nature crises. Tackling the first can help the latter.

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

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We support the ambitions of the United Nations 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.



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