

Litter Strategy for North Devon

Our Vision and Aims

We want North Devon to be a great place to live, with clean water and air, and beautiful countryside to enjoy with towns and villages that are prosperous, vibrant, and welcoming.

The environment in which people live has a profound impact on their quality of life. In surveys the public have consistently identified local environmental factors as being one of the most important factors in their wellbeing. When our towns, villages and countryside are blighted by litter, our ability to enjoy our local environment is reduced and so too is our wellbeing.

We need to reduce the amount of litter that ends up in our rivers and seas: Plastic-Free North Devon are leading the way in addressing the issue of plastic litter around our coastline and in our hedgerows, but it is important that we all play our part in stopping people dropping litter in the first place.

One of the Council's corporate priorities is to protect and enhance the environment of the area. Earlier this year we adopted an Environmental Policy and this Litter Strategy forms part of an overall environmental strategy underpinned by that policy that seeks to deliver that corporate priority:

“Protect, conserve and enhance our District's high quality natural environment and diversity whilst improving our parks and open spaces, public rights of way, and green corridors”

“Support the community in the reduction of waste and adherence to the principles of the waste hierarchy”

Our strategy makes direct reference to the Government Litter Strategy for England, published in 2017 [HM Government Litter Strategy for England April 2017](#) (publishing.service.gov.uk) The Government have also published a 25-Year Environment Plan where their stated intention is:

“...to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than we found it.” Our nation's future prosperity will greatly depend on how well we manage our environment.

Our strategy has also been influenced by and supports guidance issued by WRAP “Binrastructure – The right bin in the right place”. We intend to apply best practice in education, enforcement, and infrastructure to deliver a substantial reduction in litter and littering behaviour. Good infrastructure and clear expectations, supported by proportionate enforcement, helps reinforce social pressure to do the right thing. Our strategy therefore addresses cleaning as well as focusing on influencing behaviour.

Dealing with litter places a significant burden on the District Council, with an annual cost to the local tax-payer which would be better spent improving other local services. Living in a littered environment makes people feel less safe in their communities, and less likely to venture out which in turn affects mental and physical health. It is in all our interests to

tackle this problem, to make littering socially unacceptable, to make it easy for people to do the right thing, and remove any possible excuse for anti-social behaviour.

An environment that looks cared for encourages a sense of civic pride and also encourages local investment.

The strategy aims to:

- **change the behaviour** of people who feel it is acceptable to drop litter by sending clear messages
- **make it easy to dispose of litter**, provide the appropriate facilities in the right places, and collect litter in a timely fashion
- **improve enforcement** by exercising council powers to deal with anyone who drops litter

Changing Behaviour

We want to create a culture where it is totally unacceptable to drop litter. This means generating strong and lasting social pressure against littering, making it socially unacceptable to drop litter.

This requires education: from national or District-wide campaigns to constant reminders through messages and logos in all kinds of places. The messages may vary, aimed at raising public awareness or targeted at specific groups of people: children, young adults, drivers, consumers of food etc.

Objective 1

To have in place effective procedures to ensure that litter problems do not build up create a culture where it is totally unacceptable to drop or leave litter lying in the environment (ref Litter and the Law: Appendix A).

We will:

- Allocate areas to zones for monitoring and management
- Provide an easy system for the public to report instances of littering
- Initiate targeted awareness campaigns
- include dog-fouling in our definition of litter and promote ways of dealing with it.
Dog waste can be bagged and deposited in dog bins or in litter bins

Objective 2

To establish partnership working with organisations, communities, schools, and businesses, to extend the capacity for action to address the problems of litter.

We will:

- work with partners to run anti-litter campaigns.
 - *As part of the Plastic-Free North Devon Consortium we are already well-placed to engage in creative campaigns.*
- help people to clear up litter in their local areas.
 - *We regularly work with litter-picking volunteers and help with equipment. Initiatives include setting up community litter groups with their own twitter accounts and WhatsApp groups to keep an eye on their local patch.*

- make sure that we support schools and other organisations in teaching about litter.
 - *Many schools already take part in beach cleans and children are certainly well informed about plastic pollution.*
- encourage businesses to work with others to deal with local litter problems
 - *It is in the interests of businesses in a tourism area to keep places free of litter; this applies especially with takeaway outlets. We will consider what powers we have to ensure that businesses take more responsibility for resulting litter and will campaign for greater powers if needed.*

Objective 3

To build a knowledge base that informs and directs practice, drives all activity, and maximises our effectiveness.

We will:

- Examine the causes of littering
 - *This will help us deal with littering problems at source*
- ask businesses to think about designing their products and packaging in ways which will reduce litter and will promote locally exemplar businesses.
 - *Packaging should be recyclable by default and state clearly methods of disposal.*
- look for new ways to encourage more recycling and reducing litter.
 - *From large scale media campaigns to the use of small-scale messages and logos in all kinds of places we will communicate visually and verbally.*

Making It Easy to Dispose of Litter

North Devon Council's priorities include improving and promoting our natural environment. Litter and fly-tipping can deter visitors from spending time in an area and businesses may also be put off moving to areas affected by litter.

Objective 4

To establish a system of ongoing audit and review to ensure our provision for litter collection and containment is efficient and effective.

We will:

- have a baseline description of our public place infrastructure, bins, litter, disposal behaviour and public perception
- monitor the placement effectiveness and condition of bins
- refurbish bins in a timely fashion
- review schedules for emptying bins and ensure means of adapting where extra or fewer collections are needed.
 - *The emptying of litter and recycling bins must be sufficiently frequent to ensure that no litter bin or its contents becomes a nuisance or gives reasonable grounds for complaint.*

- create a public realm which looks cared for, with well-maintained street furniture, clear informative anti-litter signage, landscaping features in good condition, and bins where they are needed, properly oriented, clean, and easily accessible to all users.
- make it as easy as possible for people to dispose of their rubbish properly
 - *Around a third of people will be deterred from using a litter bin if it is dirty or damaged. Moreover, if a bin is overfull, people cannot use it, and litter from the bin can start to fall and litter the streets. People may also be tempted to place their litter beside, rather than into, a bin which is full, dirty or damaged.*
 - *The recent pandemic has also made some of the public wary about coming into contact with public litter bins.*
 - *Waste management can have a significant impact on litter and fly-tipping. If waste is left out for collection for long periods of time, especially in plastic sacks rather than bins, it can inadvertently lead to an increase in litter, e.g. sacks may be broken into by animals; people may start to leave their litter amongst the waste awaiting collection; a perception that the street is already affected by litter and waste may lead to an increase in littering behaviour.*

Objective 5

To expand the concept of recycling beyond the domestic collection with greater provision for recycling on the go.

We will:

- Increase receptacles in public spaces
 - *We want to support people being able to recycle more and to encourage people to recycle ‘on the go’. Standard litter bins often do not provide people with the opportunity to separate different types of waste materials for recycling, something which is already done as part of the kerbside recycling service.*
 - *There are many things to take into account when considering the options for a Recycle on the Go (RotG) solution, e.g*
 - *locating units in areas of highest footfall, where most waste is likely to occur - people are often not prepared to walk far to recycle.*
 - *using high-profile areas – locating units near information points or transport facilities (such as railway stations, bus stops and tube stations).*
 - *the types of litter commonly dropped will vary depending on the area involved and so receptacles will be tailored to the needs of the location*
- encourage business support for recycling
 - This could include promotion, or sponsorship of bins.

Objective 6

To build a strong sense of community where people care about the locations they regularly use or visit: engaged citizens who feel empowered to share their ideas and get involved in positive processes to address litter problems.

We will:

- work with organisations to make sure they have the right facilities to get rid of litter.
 - *Businesses have a key role to play in helping to tackle the problem and we want to work with them to do so. We would encourage businesses to recognise the benefits to their own business, and to the economic health of the area, of helping to ensure that the streets remain clean and attractive to customers, and the potential negative impact on their business of litter outside their premises.*
 - *Studies have found that about half of smokers would not walk more than 10 paces to use a bin, but also that many smokers did not notice bins that had been placed in convenient locations for their use*
- work with communities to decide where bins should be placed, what types to use and how many are needed.
 - *Research into littering behaviours has consistently found that many litterers - around one in four people, including a particularly large segment of young adults and one in six chewing-gum litterers - blame their behaviour on a (perceived or real) lack of bins. Observational research has also confirmed that littering rates increase the further people are from a bin.*
 - *We will consider all relevant guidance when taking decisions on the type and position of litter bins*
 - *Bin technology now makes it possible to install bins that sense when they are full or nearly full. Trials conducted by North Devon Council and other evidence of their use indicates that they can lead to a 50% reduction in collections, and sometimes more, because the sensor removes the need to check on a bin to see whether it needs emptying. It is important to balance the number and types of bin provided with the costs of maintenance. Different styles of bin may be more appropriate to target the different types and quantities of litter that occur in different locations.*
 - *We will identify different types of bins to use with a view to influencing behaviour. Trials of a special bin for cigarette butts on the Council's own premises, which embraces "nudge" techniques, have shown a reduction in that type of littering.*
 - *Consultation with dog owners should identify the location for dog waste bins that may be required in addition to litter bins.*
- support and encourage people sharing their experience of what works to reduce littering
 - *We understand that community priorities and expectations vary, and that different communities face different challenges in developing their own solutions to local litter problems. A range of different tools and approaches will be needed in order to tap into their enthusiasm and energy, and help willing volunteers access opportunities to get involved.*

Improving Enforcement

Littering, and associated environmental offences like dog fouling, blight our communities and impose avoidable costs on the public purse, drawing money away from priorities such as social care and education. Education and awareness measures will help to embed a

culture which views littering as an undesirable act which creates an avoidable problem. However, in order to change behaviour effectively we also need to back up this social message with appropriate and proportionate enforcement.

Objective 7

To actively pursue opportunities to increase the enforcement capability and the related deterrent effect.

We will:

- take enforcement action (issue of a fine or prosecution) when we have evidence against the offender to a criminal standard of proof (“beyond reasonable doubt”).
- issue fixed penalties for small-scale fly-tipping offences
 - *There may be a fine line between littering and small-scale fly-tipping, although fly-tipping is often associated with a desire to avoid the legitimate costs of waste-disposal . The deposit of a single black plastic sack of rubbish should usually be considered a fly-tipping offence, rather than littering.*
 - *A fixed penalty notice will not be an appropriate sanction for operators in the waste management industry, repeat offenders or those responsible for large-scale fly-tipping or the fly-tipping of hazardous waste. We will continue to use existing prosecution powers, which may lead to unlimited fines or imprisonment.*
- promote transparency and accurate reporting of enforcement action against littering, so that offenders know they will be punished if they are caught.
 - *Research has found that “people who have seen or heard about fixed penalty notices being issued via local media are significantly more likely to think they are effective” and that “attitudes to enforcement are greatly shaped by the degree to which an individual sees them as a threat – and many do not think it is likely they will be fined for environmental offences”*
 - *public awareness of responsible enforcement activity and the seriousness with which these offences are viewed may also help to reinforce the social norm against littering and other environmental ‘incivilities’.*
- acknowledge people who are doing the right thing
- continue working with stakeholders to tackle fly-tipping and litter hotspots

Objective 8

To promote and affirm the achievements of enforcement officers and increase their profile, visibility and presence, alongside the accountability of perpetrators.

We will:

- communicate with the public the enforcement actions that will be taken.
- create roles that can be undertaken by community organisations, e.g. National Trust rangers.

Focus on what works

We spend thousands of pounds per year on tackling litter, and we need to choose the most cost-effective combination of approaches to tackle the particular litter problems facing our communities. That means that we need to make continuous improvements in our understanding of ‘what works’. We need to try out and evaluate new ways of doing things,

and we also need to test and refine existing approaches. Even where we do know for sure that certain approaches do work in a particular context, we still need to consider whether they are cost-effective or practical for widespread or long-term implementation.

Interventions based on the theory that people behave better when they think they are being watched have been successful in encouraging socially desirable behaviours in other contexts, such as encouraging people to pay into an honesty box and preventing bicycle theft. Keep Britain Tidy combined this insight with their own research which showed that dog-fouling offences tended to take place at night-time or in areas that are not overlooked, such as alleyways. Incidents also tend to increase in the winter under the cover of darkness. They designed posters with glow-in-the-dark images of eyes combined with different messages encouraging people to clean up after their dog, or report fouling to the council. The posters were tested in dog-fouling 'hotspots' in 120 target sites and dog-fouling incidents were monitored in the surrounding areas. All versions of the posters were found to be effective and delivered an average reduction of 46% in fouling.

Nudge-type interventions are often small changes that are relatively cheap to implement, compared to traditional behaviour-change tools like large-scale campaigns or enforcement. For example, there is no difference in cost between using positive social norm messages (e.g. "be part of a clean community") rather than negative instructions (e.g. "don't drop litter"), yet nudge theory suggests that positive messages should be more effective.

We will be imaginative in our approach and will be confident about trying different ideas, learning from others as we develop our action plans: see Appendix B for the strategy in tabular form.

Appendix A

Litter and the Law

Litter is controlled under the legislative framework of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which was amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

A Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse, most recently updated by Defra in 2019, "seeks to encourage duty bodies to maintain their land within acceptable cleanliness standards". Duty bodies are: principal litter authorities; appropriate Crown authorities; designated statutory undertakers; governing bodies of educational institutions; local authorities in respect of any relevant highway for which they are responsible; Secretary of State in respect of motorways and certain other highways.

It is an offence to drop or leave litter and not pick it up. It applies to all land that is open to the air, including land covered with water and privately owned land. A person found guilty of dropping litter can be fined up to £2500 in a magistrate's court. Most offences can be dealt with through serving a Fixed Penalty Notice on the perpetrator by an authorised body such as a local authority or police force.

Litter is most commonly understood to be materials, often associated with smoking, chewing gum, or eating and drinking on the move, that are improperly discarded whether deliberately or inadvertently by members of the public, or that are spilt during business operations as well as waste management operations.

Note: Whilst dog-fouling is a separate offence from littering, it is included in this litter strategy because it can be deposited in standard litter bins as well as specific dog bins.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834331/pb11577b-cop-litter1.pdf

Appendix B

Strategy at a glance

AIM	To change the behaviour of people who feel it is acceptable to drop litter by sending clear messages	To make it easy to dispose of litter, provide the appropriate facilities in the right places, and collect litter in a timely fashion	To improve enforcement by exercising council powers to deal with anyone who drops litter
<i>Objective</i>	<i>To create a culture where it is totally unacceptable to drop or leave litter lying in the environment</i>	<i>To establish a system of ongoing audit and review to ensure our provision for litter collection and containment is efficient and effective</i>	<i>To actively pursue opportunities to increase the enforcement capability and the related deterrent effect</i>
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted awareness campaigns • Educational programmes • Community engagement and litter picking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bin placement monitoring • Bin refurbishment • Location appraisal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted action – Hotspots • Targeted action – Offending groups • Extended delegations
<i>Objective</i>	<i>To establish partnership working with organisations, communities, schools, and businesses, to extend the capacity for action to address the problems of litter.</i>	<i>We want to expand the concept of recycling beyond the domestic collection with greater provision for ‘recycling on the go’</i>	<i>To promote and affirm the achievements of ‘enforcement officers’ and increase their profile, visibility and presence, alongside the accountability of perpetrators.</i>

Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced networks • Extended partnerships • Business connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transferable principles explained • Increased receptacles in public space • Related business support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR for enforcement action • Role for community activists
Objective	<i>To build a knowledge base that informs and directs practice, drives all activity, and maximises our effectiveness</i>	<i>To build a strong sense of community where people care about the locations they regularly use or visit: engaged citizens who feel empowered to share their ideas and get involved in positive processes to address litter problems.</i>	
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining causes of litter • Improved mapping • Enhanced reporting/recording • What works elsewhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business and communities involved in designing activities • Adopt a space 	

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