

Tackling litter and flytipping in recreational spaces

A practical guide to changing behaviour



Understanding the problem

From disposable barbecues left on beaches to bin bags abandoned in woodland car parks, littering and flytipping is, unfortunately, rife in our recreational spaces. Litter and flytipping in our parks, beaches and other recreational spaces isn't just an eyesore, it can be potentially dangerous for young children, pets, wildlife and in fact anyone who uses these spaces.

But while littering and flytipping can occur at the same location, the motivations behind these antisocial behaviours can be quite different.

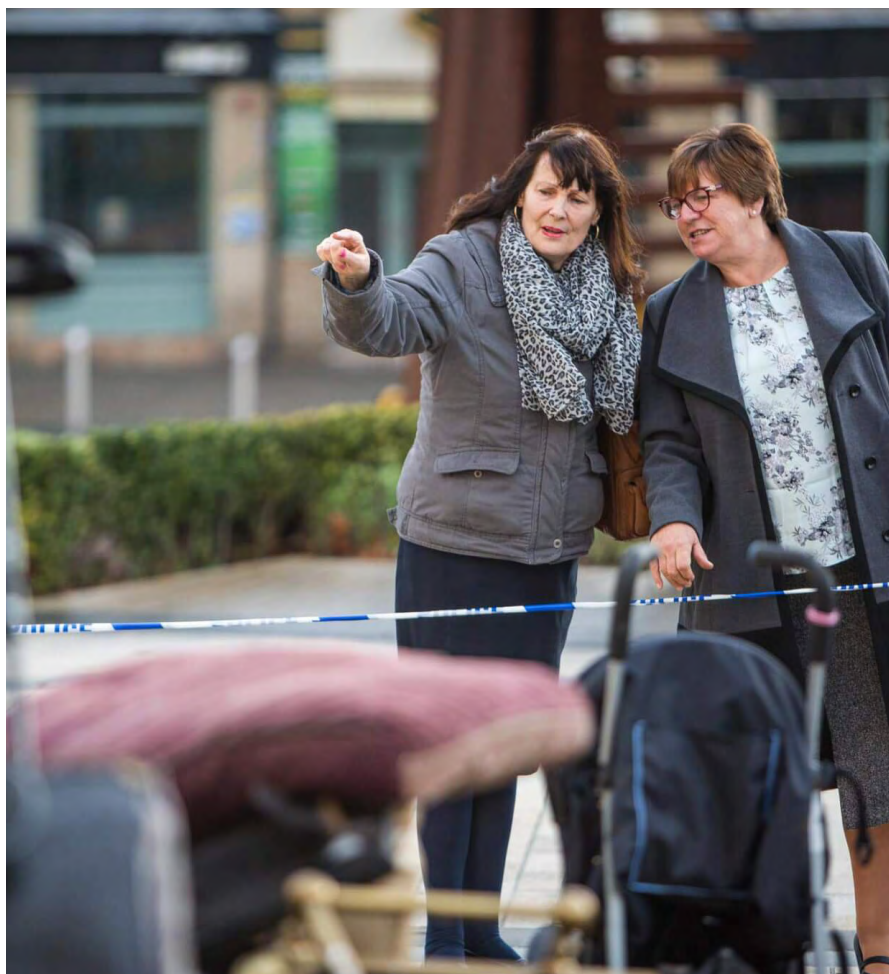
This guide looks at what you should consider when tackling each one. It covers ways to make immediate improvements, as well as long-term tactics to stop the problems re-occurring.

However, prevention begins with understanding. So in both cases, we need to start by looking at data.



Monitor and report (and ask others to do the same)

Knowing the scale of each problem and recognising patterns in behaviour are invaluable when designing interventions.



Flytipping is notoriously difficult to deal with, largely because offences often aren't witnessed, and obtaining evidence of where the waste has come from can be challenging. Help the cause by reporting every instance of flytipping on your land using the centralised [FlyMapper app](#) (if you're a registered user), via the [Dumb Dumpers website](#), or by contacting your local authority.

Planning an intervention in a recreational space? Undertake a survey before you start, and repeat it once your activity is complete. Then report your results so others can see what worked.



Collaboration with others – including your local authority if you are a public or private landowner – could prove fruitful. Recruit the local community to be your eyes and ears. Ask individuals to report any instances of litter or flytipping they see while enjoying local recreational spaces. Encourage schools and community groups to join citizen science schemes.

Not only does monitoring litter and flytipping at this grass-roots level give us more data, it also engages everyone who gets involved – from school groups to individuals. Win-win.

Tackling litter in recreational spaces

There's no single reason for littering. Some people are too lazy to walk to the bin. Others drop rubbish out of bravado. A few misguided individuals convince themselves it's a good way to keep cleaning teams in a job.



Who litters?

Littering tends to be a spontaneous act, so it's often context, rather than character, that determines whether people drop their waste. Tackling it comes down to a versatile approach that takes this context into account.

Start in the community

Want to turn a negative into a big positive? Encourage the community to get involved in reclaiming recreational spaces.

People rarely stop to consider that a litter-strewn site can become a space that enriches society. But involving locals in monitoring, cleaning up and maintaining litter hotspots is one of the best ways to tackle the problem in the long-term.

Newly cleared spaces and a sense of ownership inspire community pride. Extend this even further by introducing clear goals for the future, such as working towards a Green Flag Award.

IN FOCUS

Lambeth Parks



**YOUNG
LAMBETH
COOP**

YOUNG LAMBETH COOPERATIVE
LAMBETH COUNCIL'S PARTNERSHIP
WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE COMMUNITY
TO COMMISSION SERVICES IN A NEW WAY

Lambeth Council needed to make difficult budgeting decisions. They were reluctant to sacrifice the quality of the region's recreational spaces, but allocating sufficient funds here would mean creating cuts elsewhere. Instead, they came up with an innovative solution: a parks cooperative. This arrangement handed over the management and maintenance of council-run green spaces to members of the local community.

Results

The chair of the Friends of Parks group reported that residents' motivation to contribute to the parks' upkeep had sky-rocketed, as they can now take ownership of, and credit for, positive change.

IN FOCUS

Marine litter education



Research conducted by Plymouth University in 2013 highlighted the important role children can play in finding solutions to reduce marine litter. The study looked at the impact which education can have on raising awareness, changing attitudes and promoting activities to reduce waste, particularly plastic.

Results

The results pointed to greater knowledge of the possible sources of the rubbish, and the potential time it takes litter to degrade. The children also reported that since taking part in the educational activities, they had been more active in encouraging their family and friends to think about litter-reducing behaviours¹.

Upgrade your infrastructure

Littering is usually a split-second, in-the-moment decision. Which means everything you can do to make acting responsibly the easier option instantly reduces the chances of rubbish ending up on the ground.

Getting the right bins in the most effective locations is part of that. But it's not the only thing you need to consider.

How easy are the bins to see from a distance? Are they accessible to everyone? How often will they need to be emptied? These issues are all part and parcel of planning an effective 'binrastructure' in a recreational space.

Once you've settled on a plan, carefully monitor the effect on litter levels. Do you need to increase waste and recycle-on-the-go facilities in litter hotspots? Could you reposition bins that are being underused? Over time you'll reach the optimum solution.

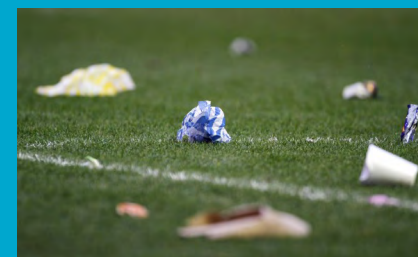
IN FOCUS

Dundee City Council Sports Litter Project



Officials in Dundee were fed up with the amount of drinks bottles and sports-related debris left on, and around, sports pitches in three of the city's parks. Something needed to be done.

Crucially, rather than pointing the finger at local sports teams, they got them involved. Having input at this early stage made players more open to adopting new behaviours later on. Youth team coaches proved to be excellent advocates for the project throughout.



With the teams' help, the council developed three key tactics:

- ❶ Teams who played on the pitches regularly were asked sign a voluntary agreement saying they would help keep the parks clean.
- ❷ Extra recycling stations were added near the sports pitches, making it easier for players and spectators to dispose of their rubbish responsibly.
- ❸ 'Have pride in your pitch' posters were put up around all three sites to remind people of their duty to clean up after themselves.

Results

Sports-related litter was cut by 20% in targeted parks while the project was running.



Collaborate with local businesses

Sadly, recreational spaces and food-litter often go hand in hand. If the problem persists once you've got your infrastructure sorted, getting local businesses on board can be a good way to help your cause. Ask nearby takeaways and convenience stores to review their packaging, provide bins on their premises and remind customers to dispose of their rubbish responsibly.



Make your communications contextual

Generic communications are all-too-easy to ignore. Give your campaign a better chance of success by tailoring your approach:

- Running a campaign near school grounds? Adopt language that resonates with a younger audience and roll out messaging across channels these individuals gravitate towards – like social media and smartphone apps.
- Trying to motivate community groups to get more involved? Build a campaign around issues specific to your local area.



Context Specific Litter Interventions: Overview of Materials

ARTWORK

The ZWS Litter Prevention Communications Toolkit

You'll find lots of free-to-use, context-specific materials in our litter prevention communications toolkit.

Tackling flytipping in recreational spaces

The main motivation for flytippers is usually cost-saving – dumping is seen as an ‘easy’ way to dodge disposal fees. Convenience also has a part to play – they’d rather risk a fine than have to find their way to the local recycling centre.



However, when it comes to creating more detailed profiles of flytippers, we run into problems. As with litter, flytipping is heavily influenced by context. How familiar is the culprit with the local area? What disposal options are nearby? What are the chances of getting caught? Knowing this, we can design effective ways to stop the tippers in their tracks.

Make the rules crystal clear

Research shows that the public’s perception of flytipping is sketchy at best. Lots of people see ditching waste next to a public communal bin as a perfectly acceptable thing to do – after all, won’t cleaning teams take it away with the rest of the rubbish? They’d likely be shocked to hear they were guilty of flytipping.

Make sure people in your area know exactly what’s legal – and what’s not. Our flytipping prevention communications toolkit includes a step-by-step guide to creating an educational brochure that’s perfect for door drops in your local area.



For those who already know their actions are unlawful, education is unlikely to be enough. Use the toolkit to up your signage efforts and let the dumpers know that, if caught, they’ll face a fine and possible prosecution. You’ll find messages for all kinds of context-specific situations to kick-start their consciences – or at least trigger an apprehension of getting caught.

ARTWORK

The ZWS Flytipping Prevention Communications Toolkit

You’ll find lots of free-to-use, context-specific materials in our flytipping prevention communications toolkit.



Publicise fines

Fines are only an effective deterrent if they're seen as a real risk, not an empty threat. Take to social media and use local press to let people know each time penalties are issued. The more often people hear about effective enforcement, the higher they'll rate their chances of getting caught.

Take material measures

Flytippers target sites that are easy to access and where there's a low risk of getting caught – this is why more remote scenic areas can be the worst affected. Where possible, tighten up security to dissuade even the most determined dumpers.

You can find out more about securing your site by reading our [Top Tips for Preventing Flytipping](#)

Repurpose the space

Flytipping is at most risk of taking hold when people don't value a local space enough to nip an emerging problem in the bud. Introducing a new purpose for an area can be the answer.

When a neighbourhood starts to see a space as a valuable part of community life, their tolerance of flytipping tends to drop dramatically.

IN FOCUS

Greenferry Trust, South Queensferry



The problem

Woodland in Port Edgar had become a flytipping hotspot. Despite weekly litter picks, the area had been an eyesore for years.

What they did

Used a £10,000 grant from Zero Waste Scotland to clear the site and turn it into a mountain biking track.

The Trust is making other improvements too. A skills loop was recently added, and they're working on plans to install dual-purpose paths that encourage more walkers and cyclists to enjoy the area.

Reflections

The land always had the potential to be valuable community space. But it took the introduction of a clear purpose for the site to turn it from glorified dumping ground to much-loved local area.

Conclusions

Whether you're addressing litter, flytipping or both, a context-specific approach is key. For the best chances of success, focus on the specific problems you're targeting and enlist community support in tackling them.

