

DRAFT PROJECT LITTER STRATEGY

Forward

For Sevenoaks, reducing litter and the impact of litter is one of the largest areas of concern for residents, businesses and visitors living, working and visiting the District. To address this concern, this Litter Strategy is the first element in a review of direct frontline services. This strategy touches on other issues such as fly tipping and household waste collection where they impact on litter.

We're a Seriously Different Council. This means going beyond the traditional remit of a district council by putting the wellbeing of our residents and businesses at the heart of everything we do, while still providing high quality services at a price people can afford.

The Council's work will be built on excellence, innovation and value for money. We know that a great deal of what we already do makes a significant contribution to our residents' quality of life and sense of wellbeing. But we are ambitious for our communities and we want to do more.

The Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are the hallmarks of our District. However, this natural beauty and attractive built environments are sometimes blighted by litter. We are committed to maintaining a clean and tidy District. We continue to be the only council in Kent to collect rubbish and recycling on a weekly basis, sending less than 2% of rubbish to landfill. By employing our own staff we can continue to be responsive to our residents' needs and to seek ways to keep costs within budget.

Dedicated staff and committed volunteers from our communities and partners, including Keep Britain Tidy, support the council in tackling litter and the causes of litter. However, a small but significant culture persists that littering is acceptable and this needs to be challenged if we are to meet our responsibilities.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out our ambition and the steps necessary to achieve it. To help explain the actions we feel we need to take to affect change, this strategy identifies the scale of the problem in the district and the challenges we face in making those changes.

Our Ambition

Put simply, our ambition to make littering unacceptable behaviour and to seek new and innovative ways to reduce littering and to clear it promptly where it turns up.

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The Law on Litter

Litter is controlled under the legislative framework of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which was amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. 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. Fixed Penalty Notice charges are set locally at between £75 and £150. Litter is generally accepted to be anything below the size of a sack of household waste and is mostly understood as items related to smoking, chewing gum or eating and drinking on the move where unwanted items have not been properly disposed of or have been dropped inadvertently.

Section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA 1990) places a legal responsibility (a 'duty') on certain organisations to ensure that land, as far as is practicable, is kept clear of litter. Section 91 of the EPA 1990 goes on to state that a person who is fed up with a long-standing litter problem can use a Litter Abatement Order against those organisations listed under Section 89 (the 'duty bodies') if they are failing in their duty to keep that land clean. There are six 'Duty Bodies' - local authorities, statutory undertakers such as rail and road agencies, Crown Estate, colleges, schools and universities. Privately owned land not open to public access does not qualify for a Litter Abatement Order.

Litter Strategy for England

The Litter Strategy for England 2017 has been designed to apply best practice in education, enforcement and infrastructure to deliver a substantial reduction in litter and littering behaviour, so that in the coming years we see demonstrable improvements against the following;

Street cleaning cost local government £778m in 2015/16.

A significant portion of this will have been avoidable litter clear-up and the money could have been better spent on vital public services.

The National Crime Survey has found that 28-30% of people perceive "litter and rubbish lying around" to be a problem in their area with 81% of people feeling angry and frustrated by the amount of litter lying all over the country.

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The Causes of Litter

The causes of litter are diverse and complex with compounding factors such as a lack of or fragmented data on the impact or importance of each cause and the effectiveness of different approaches to dealing with them. This section of the strategy, therefore, aims to highlight what the council understand to be the key causes of litter. The causes of litter outlined below are not ranked for importance or priority as we do not have evidence on which are the most important. The strategy will also set out to identify gaps in knowledge and which issues the council has the structures, resources and authority to tackle.

Where the council are not in a position to act directly the strategy will outline in what ways it needs to focus on partnership working and community action to secure progress.

Public understanding of the impact of litter: Despite the high profile publicity of the impacts of litter on the environment, particularly around plastics, there is still a large disconnect between individual actions and collective impact. There is also a misunderstanding of how and where to use and dispose of biodegradable packaging.

Litter Strategy for England: litter strategies to raise the profile of litter and to give guidance to those that hope to tackle it.

Lack of influence/control/powers: Whilst there is a perception that the council is responsible for all public land, there are areas where the council has limited or no powers to act to prevent littering or to provide litter services. Examples include:

Roadside litter: The county council have to rely on SWTRA to access trunk roads to clear litter and have limited powers to enforce littering from cars.

There are limited powers in planning to ensure that new developments include conditions around litter control.

The council do not have powers to retrospectively place litter management requirements on premises that add to littering issues as part of cultural changes in behaviours e.g. service stations now provide food on the go.

Cultural attitudes: Our experience suggests that a number of cultural changes have lead littering to become an acceptable behaviour. Examples include:

- The increasing disconnect with the natural environment caused in part by alternative pastimes based around technology
- Not having the right appropriate street litter bins in the right place
- Changes in the way we consume food and drink and move to eating (and drinking) on the go

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- Increased night-time economy and its impact on less responsible behaviour in urban centres
- Increased car ownership and improvements in car design separates travellers from the experience of the environment around them
- Expectations of responsibility for litter clearance
- Lack of awareness of wider costs of litter

Culture of instant gratification, a compounding factor of eating on the go, the desire to live in the moment means not wanting to hold on to litter until a bin can be found and a reduced sense of responsibility beyond the self.

Eating on the go: With a move to eating on the go, there is an increase in disposable packaging. Today, food and drink are consumed in spatially different ways to the past. Under these conditions, it is vital to be able to predict the locations for bins to meet the needs of those consumers eating on the go. In addition, eating on the go packaging often has high volume packaging (plastic bottles and food trays) meaning bins fill more quickly.

Eating/drinking on the go has also become commonplace whilst driving leading to roadside litter where litter bins would not be an appropriate solution.

Tourism and Leisure: The district is a destination for certain types of tourists largely to enjoy outdoor recreation and historic attractions. Whilst this brings many benefits, tourists do not always have access to facilities for disposing of litter in the same way as residents, e.g. not so easy to take litter home. Tourism also supports demand for eating on the go.

Smoking: Keep Britain Tidy identifies smoking related litter as the most common type of litter found on the streets of England.

Although cigarette ends are small, by law they still count as litter. Their small size makes them difficult and costly to clean, and also means they are easily transported to our waterways by wind and water. Not only do they contain toxins which pollute our waters, but they can be mistaken by wildlife for food, which can be deadly. Cigarette filters are not biodegradable. They're actually made of plastic, so they stay in the environment for a long time.

Dog ownership: Dogs play an immensely important role in our societies, from highly trained working dogs on farms, support dogs for the disabled, rescue dogs for emergency services and educational dogs for children with behavioural needs, through to companion animals for people of all ages. Dogs promote health and well-being, encourage regular exercise and help break down social barriers. However, dog fouling can cause serious health problems and is the cause of complaints about street cleanliness.

Dog ownership is on the rise and, whilst the failure to clear up dog fouling is increasingly socially unacceptable, there remains a small minority of dog owners

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that either fail to clear up after their pets, or clear up but fail to bin it. Failure to clear up properly after dog fouling causes specific additional concerns around health of people, livestock and wildlife. The problems are exacerbated by lack of clarity as to when, where and how to dispose of dog waste correctly.

Drugs paraphernalia: A relatively small issue in terms of volume of litter but significant in potential impact on human health, both for the public at large and for staff dealing with the issue. Drug paraphernalia is a difficult problem to tackle at a departmental or even council level and requires partnership working and lobbying.

Packaging: Changes in shopping behaviour from high street to online, increasing use of marketing on packaging, use of packaging to increase shelf life of products all contribute to an increase in the volume of packaging and a change in the materials used in packaging. Inevitably, an increase in packaging has led to an increase in waste, whether intentionally or otherwise, some of which ends up as litter.

Long distance transport: There is a lack of rest facilities for long distance lorry drivers leading to littering of major laybys in the district. Challenges exist for such locations as bins in these locations attract fly tipping, misuse and abuse.

Schools: walking routes to high schools attract litter as many children eat on the go both to and from school. It only takes a small minority to drop litter on a daily basis on the same routes for litter to become a problem in these areas. The cohort effect makes challenging behaviours an ongoing requirement in an already highly pressured educational curriculum.

Commercial and household waste collection: Pressure from government recycling targets put pressure on waste collection services. Whilst waste segregated at source is widely seen as improving the quality of recylates, the logistics of this approach can lead to the creation of litter. Example problems include historic urban areas lacking in space for rubbish collection and refuse lorries, households not equipped to store multiple sacks for waste segregation, confusion over collection days.

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Where are we now

In the UK the cost of dealing with litter is around £850 million a year and whilst the types of litter have changed, the level of litter has not fallen for over 12 years. Fast food litter has increased over the last decade as people have taken up the habit of eating and drinking on the go. Litter can last a very long time in the environment, with some materials such as crisp packets, cans and glass bottles remaining intact for decades, and plastic bottles having a life of hundreds of years.

The Litter Strategy for England May 2017, includes a requirement for a combination of education, enforcement and improved infrastructure.

Scale of the Problem in Sevenoaks

Sevenoaks is a district with high quality landscapes, historic towns and villages and many protected environments that are highly valued by local communities. These beautiful towns and rural landscapes also contribute to the local economy by attracting tourists and businesses to the district. Litter has a negative impact on the built and natural environment and, ultimately, has a negative impact on the economy, wellbeing and safety of humans and wildlife.

Several trunk roads pass through Sevenoaks and roadside litter along these high speed routes is a particular problem for the appearance of the district as well as incurring a cost involved to clear it.

Litter is easily transported by wind or water to other places where it can do unseen damage such as in rivers. There is a great deal of international concern about the sheer volume of plastic litter that is now entering our rivers and oceans and the difficulty in removing it. In addition to the obvious dangers to marine life, it is a hazard to the food chain, and assists potentially invasive species to travel around the globe, destroying habitats, threatening species and harming human health.

Sevenoaks litter problem is a very visible manifestation of some people's lack of awareness and care for the local environment yet for others, it remains one of the issues that they care very much about. In 2019-2020 the council received a significant number of complaints about litter and fly tipping.

Solutions often put forward by local residents and businesses include education, increasing the number of litter bins, better enforcement and more volunteering.

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Spending on litter collection in Sevenoaks

Considerable financial and staffing resources are dedicated to collecting litter in the streets, emptying litter bins and litter picking in urban centres and along country lanes. It is difficult to quantify the actual cost of litter collection as it is combined with a wide range of direct services within Sevenoaks.

The clearance of litter is an avoidable cost but to reduce this requires significant culture change alongside well designed and planned infrastructure and services to meet current and future needs. Changing culture is challenging and requires ongoing investment in education, engagement and, occasionally, enforcement. Given that much of our infrastructure is old and designed and planned for a different time, updating this to meet current and predicted need in the current economic environment will be a challenge and new and innovative ways to deal with this will be necessary.

In addition to council staff, the council engages with the prison service and probation service to support litter picking across the district, as part of community service. Furthermore, a large number of volunteer groups and individual volunteers regularly litter pick in the areas where they live, some of whom will also separate materials into recyclables and waste. Volunteers, parish and town councils in rural areas carry out cleansing where it is difficult for the council to do so due to a lack of resources and volunteers are often able to undertake additional regular deep cleans of their local area. The council provide volunteers with equipment and collect bagged litter from these activities.

Our Approach

Sevenoaks District Council has adopted positive collaborative approach to tackling litter in the district. In response to views from our stakeholders and partners, the council has identified five thematic areas of work to tackle the many and diverse causes of litter that build on current best practice.

The five thematic areas of work are:

1. Education & Prevention
2. Enforcement
3. Infrastructure
4. Service design
5. Partnership and stakeholder working

Education

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We will proactively work with education and environmental partners to ensure we clearly communicate, promote and ultimately educate the public on making the dropping of litter behaviourally unacceptable, while improving resources to collect street litter effectively.

Enforcement

We will use enforcement in a proportionate way and when it is needed, ensuring action is necessary and justified. Enforcement, if used in the right way can assist effective behavioural change and in turn reduce litter.

Infrastructure & Service design

A Street litter and dog bin review has been completed, mapping out the location, type and collection schedules of all of the street litter and dog bins across the district.

It is clear from the review that we have adequate street litter bin infrastructure, however, what is clear from the review is that the infrastructure is old, un-inspiring, of to a low capacity for the litter needs and many are in the wrong locations.

Partnership & stakeholder working

Working with our partners, particularly the Parish Council's, local community groups and our suppliers the pilot will look to introduce targeted collections, driven by technology and to offer recycling options at key locations.