



Keep Scotland  
Beautiful

Your charity inspiring action for Scotland's environment

# Scottish Litter Survey

Tracking public perceptions and attitudes  
towards litter and littering behaviour

November 2023



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# Foreword

This is our third annual Scottish Litter Survey. The three years of data confirms consistent public concern with litter levels, and a desire for action to tackle litter and littering behaviour, across Scotland and in local communities.

Corroborating this, our technical data, spanning more than two decades, provides a clear and robust picture of the decline in local environmental quality. The most recent findings are summarised in our '[How clean are our streets?](#)' report.

We declared a litter emergency in 2020. Worryingly, the situation is not improving. Financial challenges at national and local government levels are increasing and have the potential to make this situation worse.

The last year has seen a positive step in the right direction with the publication of Scotland's new National Litter and Flytipping Strategy and we, along with other strategic partners, are well on the way to delivering against the Action Plan for 2023/24.

Our role includes leading on engaging and empowering communities through the creation of an online litter hub and a new community litter education programme. We are also developing and testing innovative interventions to tackle littering behaviours and collecting and analysing litter data to support improvements.

However, the reality is that the data contained in this report demonstrates that more still needs to be done, and urgently – particularly in our least affluent communities.

As part of a coordinated approach to tackle all litter, we need to address the issues that matter to communities across Scotland as outlined in this report, we must continue to influence policy to ensure that we support people to reduce their consumption, drive action on the ground, and tackle the climate, litter and nature emergencies.

We want to see a litter free Scotland and we are committed to working collaboratively to get there.

**Barry Fisher, Chief Executive, Keep Scotland Beautiful**

The Scottish Litter Survey was produced in association with The Diffley Partnership and part of their Understanding Scotland Series.





# Headlines

1

Over the past three years, a large majority of people in Scotland – around **9 in 10** – have consistently viewed litter as a problem across Scotland, with **7 in 10** people believing that litter is a problem locally.

2

There is clear demand from people for more action to address litter. Approximately **85% of people agree they want to see more efforts to prevent litter** in their area.

3

In 2023 those living in less affluent areas are significantly more likely to view litter as a problem locally. **83% of those in Scotland's least affluent neighbourhoods view litter as a problem locally compared to 56% of those from Scotland's most affluent areas.**

4

**39% of people believe that litter in general has become more common** in their local area in the past 12 months with the most common items encountered being **food containers, wrappers and packaging (69%)** followed by **plastic drink bottles (66%)**.

5

**Single-use vapes are the fastest growing litter item** with half of people reporting that sightings of these have become more common in the past 12 months.

6

**For the third consecutive year, the impact of litter on animals and the environment was deemed the most concerning.** This was followed by how people from outside the area would perceive the neighbourhood, with this concern most pronounced among people living in less affluent areas.



# Key stats



**90%**

of people agree that litter is a problem across Scotland, the highest figure in three years.



**70%**

of people believe that litter is a problem locally.



**83%**

of people agree that litter is a problem in less affluent areas compared to 56% in the most affluent areas.



**72%**

of people in urban areas consider litter to be a problem compared to 62% in rural areas.



**73%**

of people in Scotland frequently come across litter.



**69%**

of people report seeing food containers, wrappers and packaging often.



**66%**

of people report seeing plastic drink bottles regularly.



**65%**

of people report seeing littered drink cans regularly.



**44%**

of people reported seeing single-use vapes as litter often – the fastest growing observation of all types of litter.



**88%**

of people want to see an education and awareness campaign.



**85%**

of people agree that they want to see more efforts to prevent litter in their area.



**86%**

would like to see increased funding for community action on prevention and clean up.

# Attitudes to litter

In the past three years, a large majority of people in Scotland – around nine in ten - have consistently viewed litter as a problem across the country. This sentiment has remained high, with figures of 87% in 2022 and 88% in 2021, indicating that people continue to see litter as an on going issue - see Figure 1. The 2023 figure of 90% is the highest on record so far.

When it comes to their own area, seven in ten people believe that litter is a problem locally. This perception has remained consistently high over the three-year period, with figures of 70% in 2023, 67% in 2022 and 70% in 2021. The belief that litter is a problem in the local area varies among different groups, and this pattern has been consistent over the three years.



## Attitudes towards litter - Figure 1

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

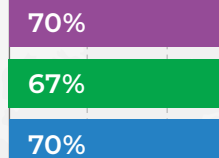
% agreeing with each statement

2023 2022 2021

Litter is a problem across Scotland



Litter is a problem in my area



I would like to see more action being taken to prevent littering in my area



I would like to see more action being taken to clean up litter in my area



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%



# Attitudes to litter

In 2023, those living in less affluent areas are significantly more likely to view litter as a problem locally, with 83% in the least affluent neighbourhoods (SIMD1) and 80% in SIMD2 expressing this concern, compared to 56% in the most affluent areas (SIMD5) – see Figure 2.

There are also noticeable differences between urban and rural areas, with 72% of people in urban areas considering litter to be a problem in their area, compared to rural areas (62%).

When looking at different Scottish Parliamentary regions, there are significant variations. For example, 85% of people in the Glasgow region believe litter is a problem in their local area, whereas 59% in the North East share this view. However, it's important to note that even in regions with lower figures, approximately six in ten people still perceive litter as a local issue.

Younger people (73% of those aged 16-34) are also more likely than older people (65% of those aged 65+) to report litter as a problem in their local area, which may be linked to greater litter issues in urban areas.

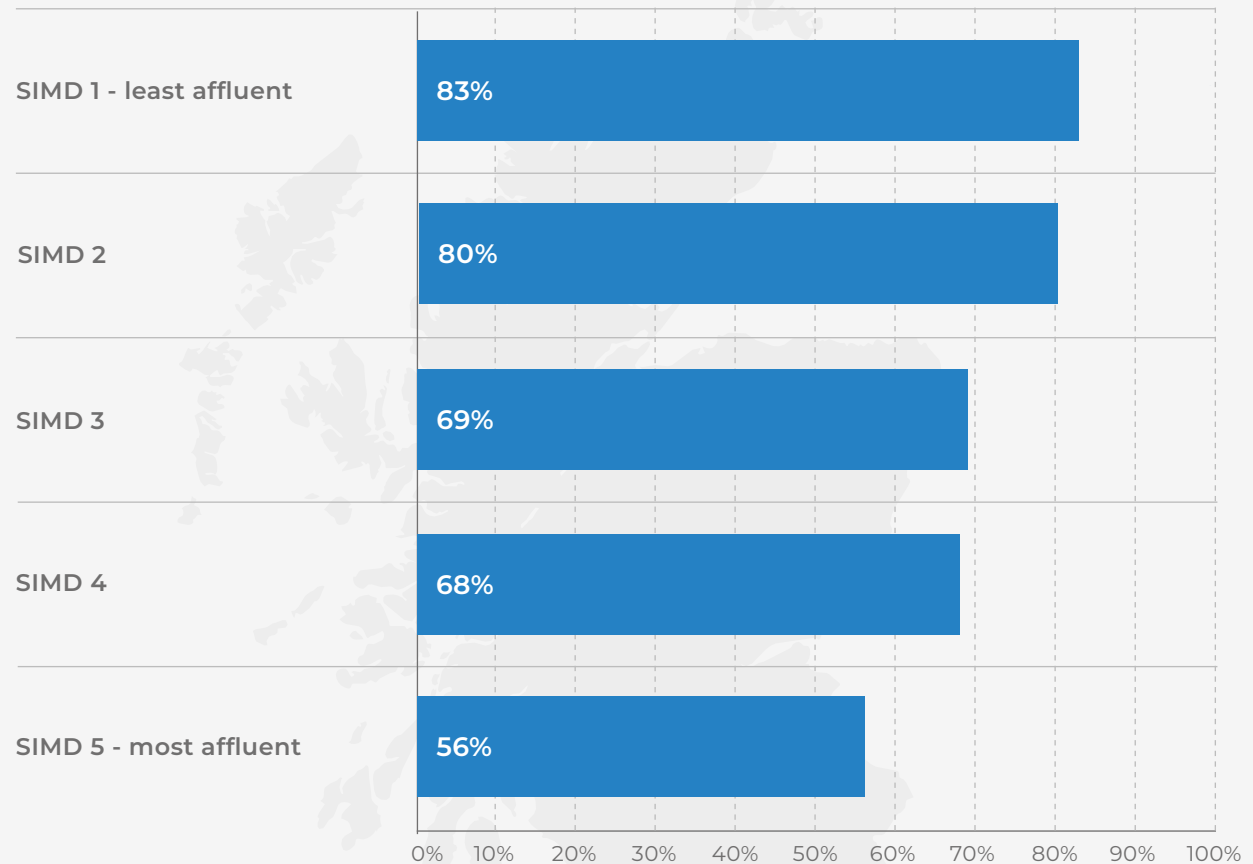


## Perception of litter as a problem in the local area, by SIMD - Figure 2

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

% agreeing litter is a problem in their local area

Agree



# What are the most common types of litter?

In general, 73% of people in Scotland frequently come across litter either very or somewhat often. The most common types of litter that people encounter are food containers, wrappers and packaging (69%). This is the third consecutive year where litter related to food and drink packaging has been the most common type of litter reported - see Figure 3.

Given that a proposed Scottish Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) has been delayed until 2025 at the earliest, it is also important to note that 66% say they see plastic drinks bottles regularly, 62% say that they encounter littered drinks cans often and 32% report seeing glass bottles on a regular basis.

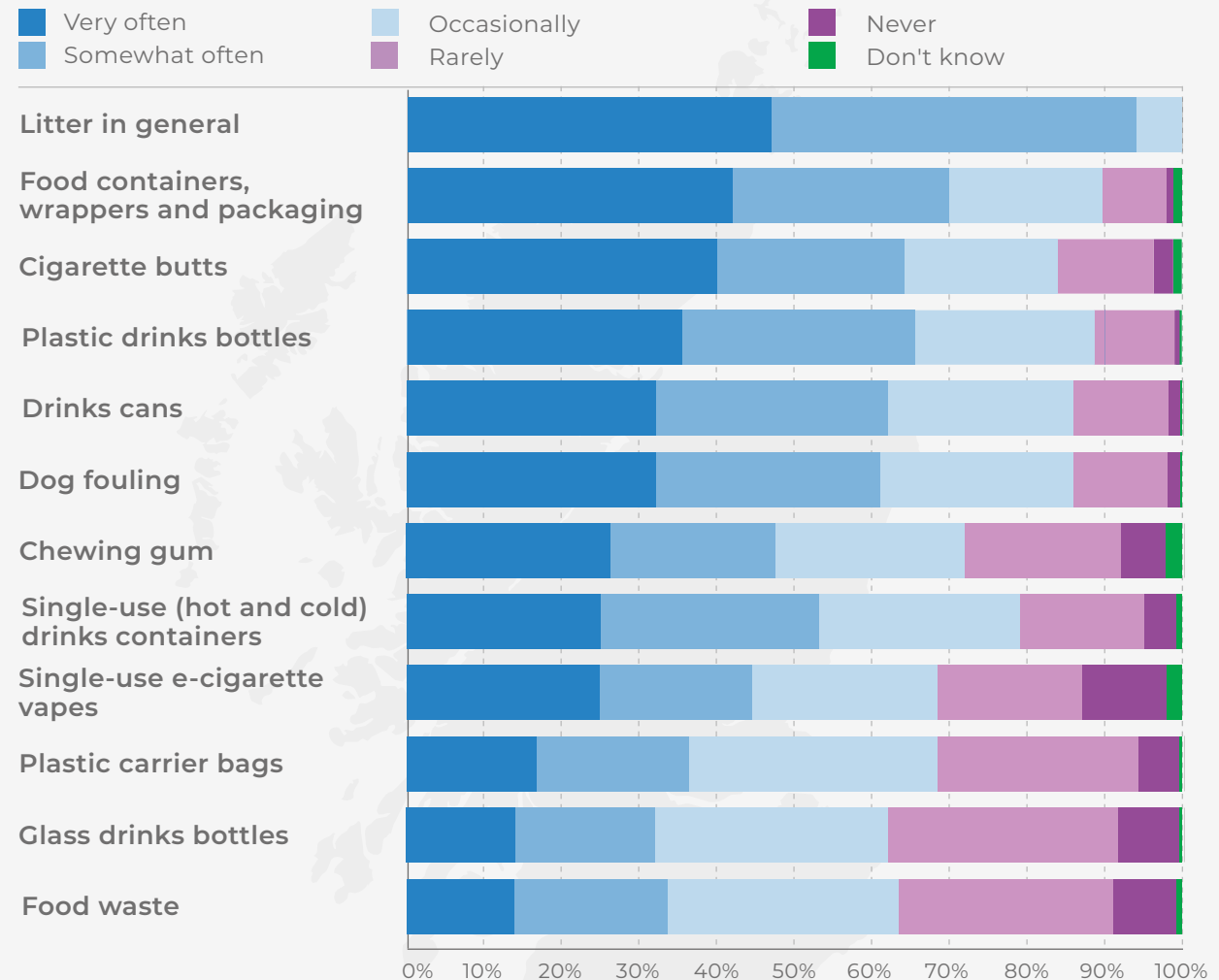
In addition to this, majority of people (53%) frequently spot single-use (hot and cold) beverage containers (e.g. cups).



## Types of litter reported regularly - Figure 3

How frequently, if at all, do you see the following types of litter in your local area?

% agreeing with each statement



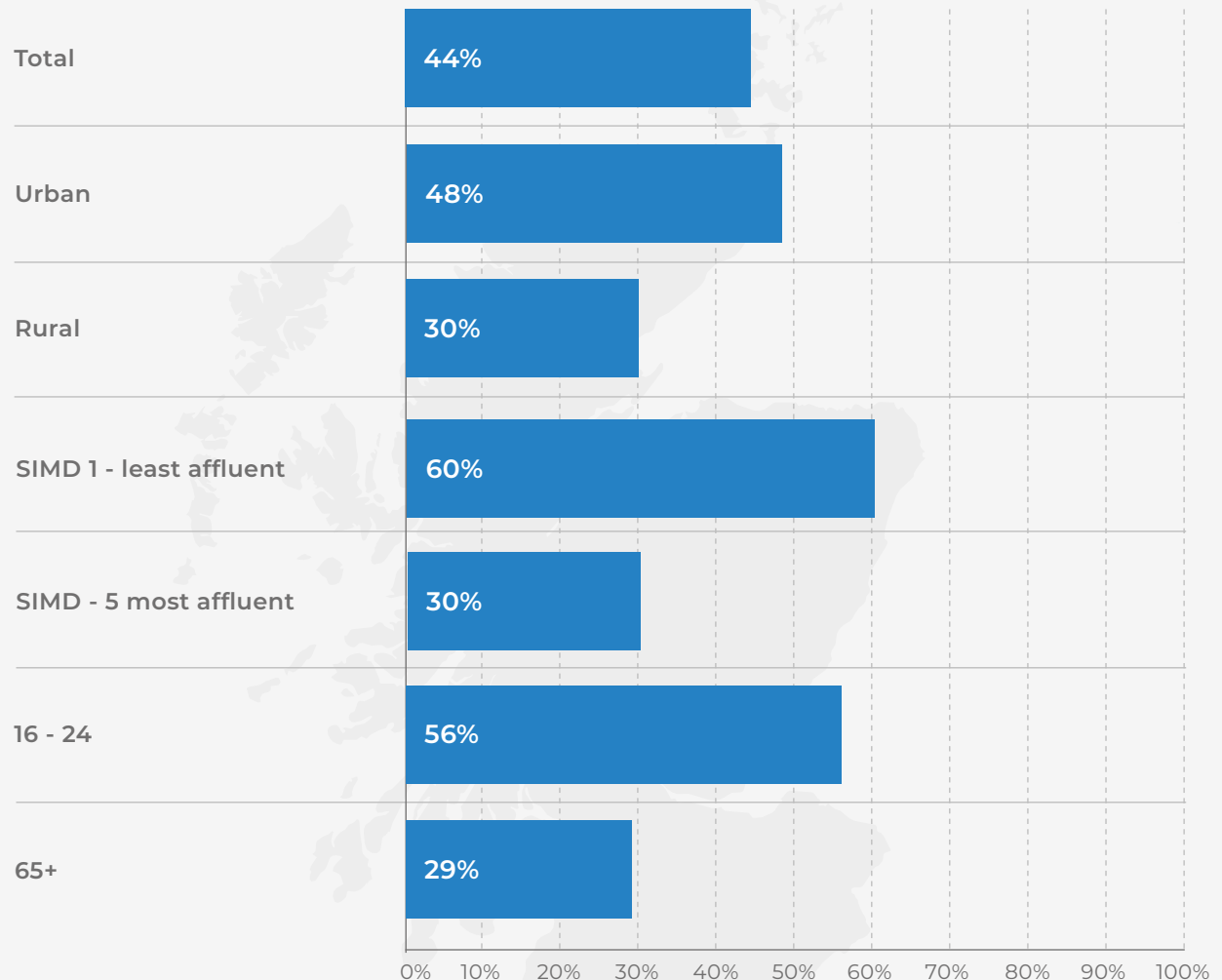


## Reported single-use vape sightings, by selected measures - Figure 4

How frequently, if at all, do you see the following types of litter in your local area?

% reporting seeing single-use vapes in their local area often

Agree



# What are the most common types of litter?

In the 2023 Litter Survey, questions were asked for the first time about single-use e-cigarettes and vapes, with 44% of people reporting that they often see this type of litter. This occurrence is more prevalent in urban areas, in less affluent neighbourhoods and among younger people – see Figure 4.



# Changes in the levels of litter

About two-fifths of people (39%) believe that litter in general has become more common in their local areas over the past year - see Figure 5. This perception is more pronounced in the least affluent neighbourhoods, with 43% in SIMD1 and 42% in SIMD2, compared to 33% in the most affluent areas (SIMD5).

When thinking about items that relate to food and drink consumed on-the-go, we see a significant proportion of people report that food containers, wrapping and packaging (35%), plastic drinks bottles (31%), single-use (hot and cold) drink containers (29%), drinks cans (27%), and glass drinks bottles (17%) have become more common.

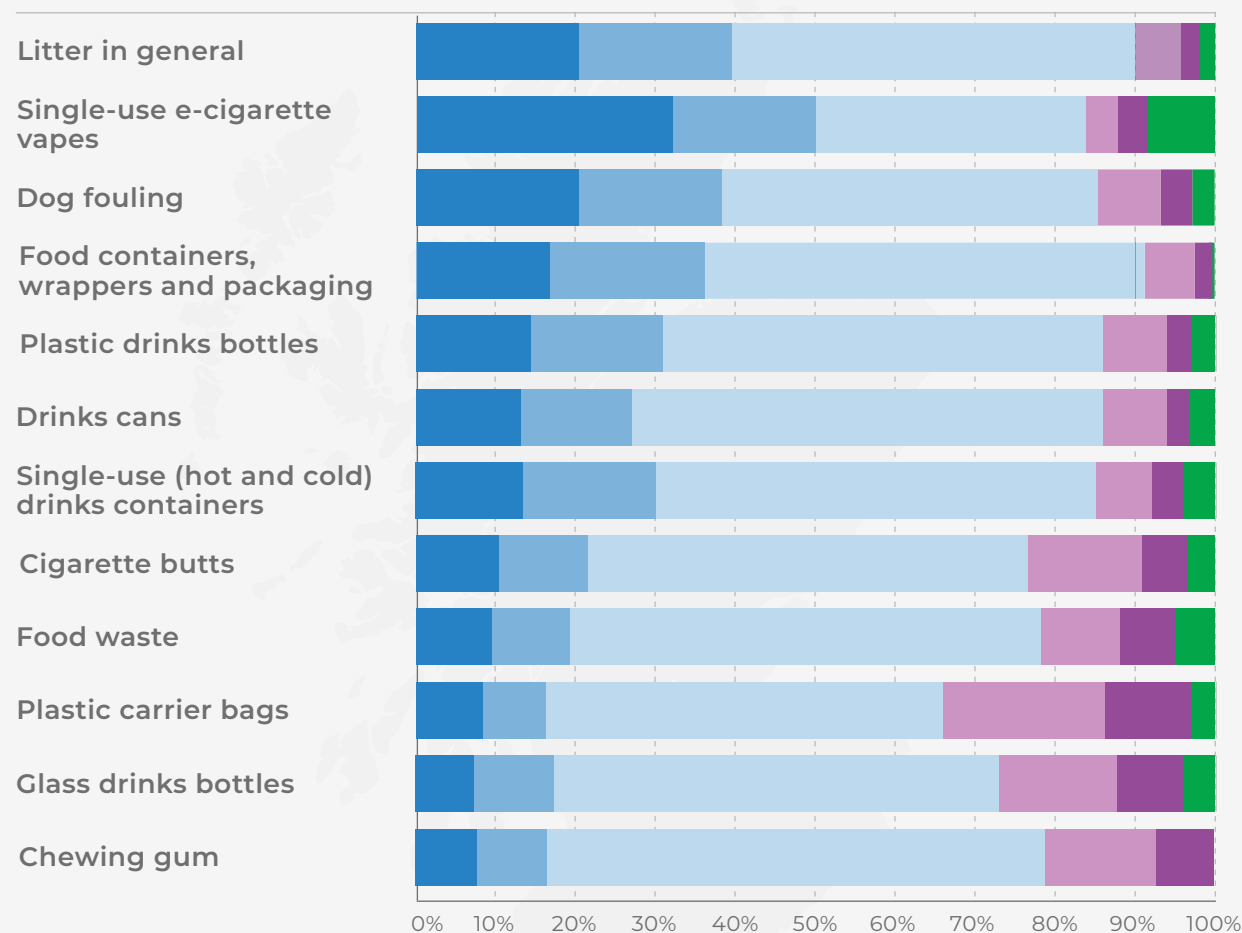
Single-use e-cigarettes and vapes are observed to be increasing at a faster rate than any other type of litter. Half (50%) of people report that they have noticed an increase in this type of litter. People in urban areas (54%) are more likely to report its increasing prevalence compared to those in rural areas (35%). Similarly, younger people (64% of those aged 16-24) and those in the least affluent neighbourhoods (61% in SIMD1) are more inclined to report that single-use vapes have become more common in the past 12 months.

## Changes in levels of littering - Figure 5

And thinking about the same types of litter, do you think they have become more or less common in your local area over the past 12 months?

### Proportions of respondents reporting seeing more and less of certain types of litter

■ Much more common    ■ About the same    ■ Much less common  
 ■ Somewhat more common    ■ Somewhat less common    ■ Don't know





# Impacts of litter

For the third consecutive year, the impacts of litter on animals and the environment are deemed the most concerning – see Figure 6. This concern is relatively consistent across groups, but is slightly lower among those aged 65+.

How people from outside the area might perceive their neighbourhood is seen to be the next most concerning impact of litter on people in the continuation of a trend from 2021 through to 2023. This concern is most pronounced among people living in less affluent neighbourhoods.

The impact on local residents' health and wellbeing is the next most pronounced concern among people followed by a perceived increase in anti-social behaviour caused by litter. The level of concern relating to potential increases in anti-social behaviour is higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

Overall, impacts on local businesses were deemed less concerning, as were the effects of litter and littering on house prices.

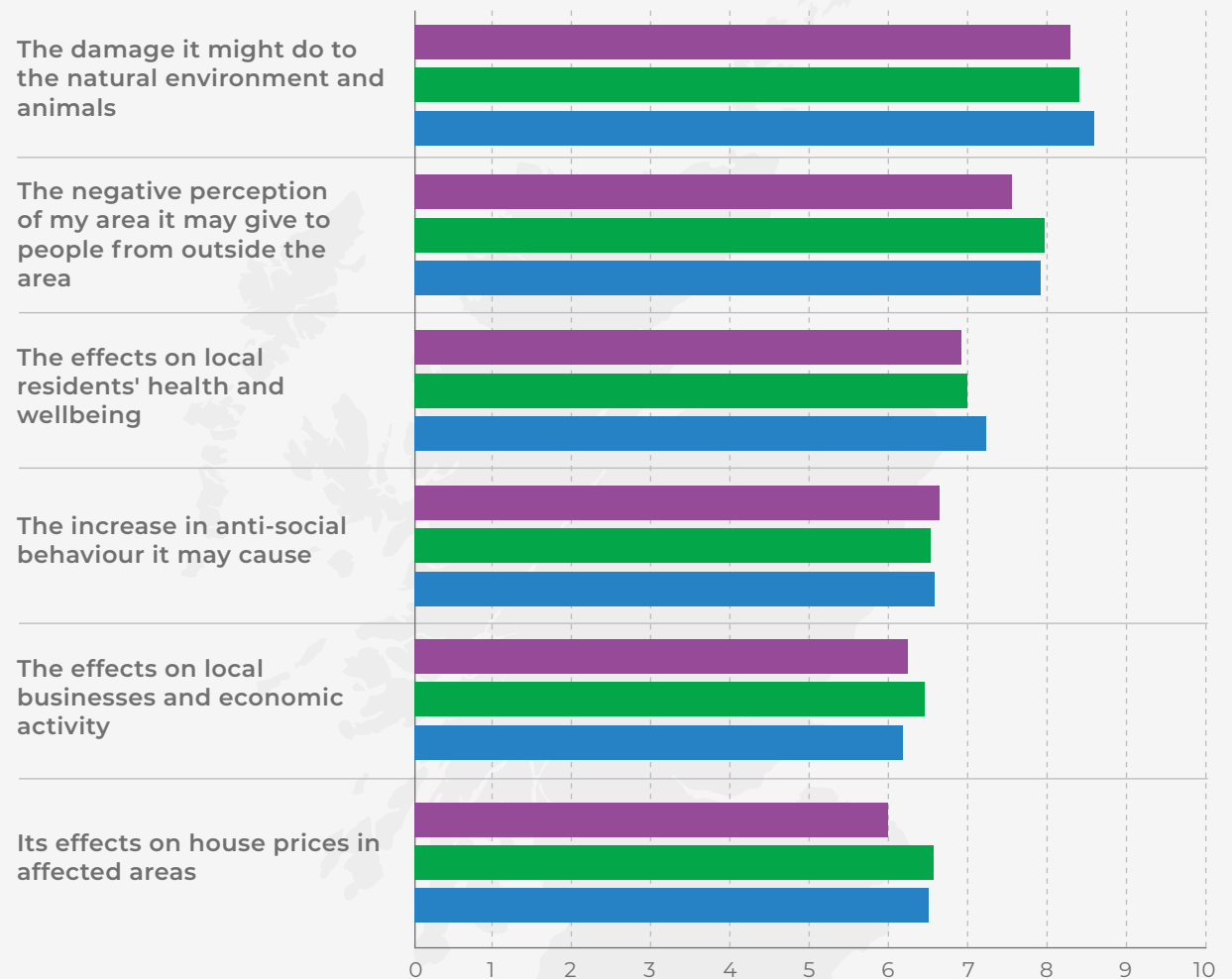


## Impacts of litter - Figure 6

On a scale of 0-10, how concerned are you by the following possible impacts of littering?

Weighted averages of perceived impacts out of 10

2023 2022 2021



# Tackling litter

For the third consecutive year, there is majority support for all proposed measures to tackle litter, demonstrating a consistent demand from the Scottish public. The most popular measure remains improving waste disposal facilities with 97% supporting this measure.

There remains an evident preference for preventative approaches, with around nine in ten (88%) supporting educational and behavioural campaigns and increased funding for community action on prevention and clean-up (86%).

Though a similar proportion (85%) also support strengthening fines and penalties, support for strengthening fines and penalties is lower among those aged 16-24 (66%) when compared to other age groups. There is also higher support for strengthening fines and penalties in rural areas (89%), compared to urban areas (83%).

Regarding actions to address litter, there is a clear demand from people for more action.

**85%** of people agree that they want to see more efforts to prevent litter in their area.

**82%** of people express a desire for increased action to clean up litter locally.

These figures have also remained high over the three years of the survey, indicating a clear and consistent desire from people to see action taken in their communities to address the issue of litter.





# Looking forward

Throughout 2023 we have worked collaboratively with partners, funders, supporters, local communities, volunteers and a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that challenges we face in terms of the litter emergency are taken seriously and to inspire practical action on the ground.

Our commitment to supporting the delivery of the National Litter and Flytipping Strategy and Action Plan, published in the summer of 2023, is woven through our data collection and analysis, our campaigns, our training and our policy work.

We are dedicated to raising awareness, working collaboratively across sectors to develop and deliver innovative interventions, positive community-led action, and encourage the sharing of good practice and learning from across Scotland.

Over the next 12 months we will use our influence to ensure forthcoming policy has a positive impact and help us and others in their efforts to tackle the litter emergency. We have called for a bold Circular Economy Bill with a comprehensive Route Map that delivers action across all sectors in the transition to a circular economy. Additionally, we are determined to see reform of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations with implementation powers devolved to Scotland that could provide additional funds for litter prevention, infrastructure and waste management – putting prevention at the heart of any plan for a litter free nation.

These measures must be implemented urgently without further delay.

Tackling the litter emergency is complicated. It is challenging. It is expensive.

The reality we all have to confront is that we've all contributed to creating the litter emergency, through our misinformed and unsustainable consumption over many years. Those who litter are our family, friends and neighbours, but the good news is we can all do more to tackle this problem. The first step is for us all to refuse to accept that litter is part of the reality of life in Scotland today, and then to commit to act individually, or with others, and help make a difference. We know that there is more that industry and retailers can do, and we will continue to encourage and challenge them to change. And yes, government nationally and locally can do more to put in place policies and support positive behaviour changes.

We didn't get here overnight, and the road back will take sustained action by us all over a number of years.

However, little by little we are moving forward, and our mission to inspire changes in behaviour to tackle litter and waste and to improve the quality of our lives, our wellbeing and the places we all care for is underway. From councils to community groups, from businesses to schools - engage, innovate and collaborate with us and help us keep Scotland beautiful by:

- Registering a litter pick as part of Spring Clean 2024.
- Carrying out a litter survey to help us collate real information on the issue where you live.
- Sharing our messages and tips to help everyone become litterate.



## How clean are our streets?

For over 20 years, Keep Scotland Beautiful has coordinated a national programme of local environmental quality surveys across Scotland. The data that is gathered provides a national picture of local environmental quality, and regional data, to support local authorities to deliver services as efficiently as possible, a challenge of growing importance in the current climate of budget reductions.

You can view this report on our website:

[Read report](#)



We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is your charity for Scotland's environment. We work with you to help combat climate change, tackle litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places.



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