



Scottish Litter Survey

Tracking public perceptions and attitudes
towards litter and littering behaviour

November 2024

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Foreword

When it comes to litter, we have known for a long time that Scotland has a problem, and our fourth annual Scottish Litter Survey shows that people across the country share that view.

Around nine in ten people in Scotland view litter as a problem across the country, with seven in ten people believing it is a problem in their local area. The trends we have identified over the last four years have continued, highlighting that people view litter as a problem more in our least affluent communities and in urban areas.

Single-use vapes continue to be the fastest growing litter item, with the most common types of litter including food containers, wrappers, and packaging, followed by plastic drink bottles.

This year significant concerns have also been raised about roadside litter, with more than 90% stating it creates a negative impression of our country, and more than half reporting that they think there is more on our roadsides than a year ago.

The challenge we all face is that there is a danger of these statistics becoming background noise, that the more we say Scotland has a litter problem, the more people stop listening and that we erode the belief that there is a way out.

However, we must use these statistics to drive and support positive action – and not let them obscure the ambition we have for Scotland to be litter free and have a circular economy.

We need to focus on the clear demand that people in Scotland have to see more action to address litter and acknowledge the positive momentum being generated through the National Litter and Flytipping Strategy and the Marine Litter Strategy, alongside forthcoming regulatory and policy changes, if we want to inspire positive change.

Very few people can say they don't want a litter-free Scotland. The challenge for us all – individuals, families, neighbourhoods, schools, businesses, public bodies, government – is whether we are prepared to do the hard work required and, where appropriate, ensure that there is sustainable investment to help tackle this problem.

Barry Fisher, Chief Executive, Keep Scotland Beautiful



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



Headlines



1

Over the past four years, **an overwhelming majority of people in Scotland – around nine in ten – have consistently viewed litter as a problem across the country, with 43% believing** that litter in general has become more common in their local areas over the past year.

2

77% of those in Scotland's least affluent neighbourhoods view litter as a problem locally compared to **68% of those from Scotland's most affluent areas.**

3

There is a contrast between urban and rural areas, with **73% of people in urban areas considering litter to be a problem in their area, compared to 64% in rural areas.**

4

About four in five (**82%**) **people in Scotland agree that they want to see more efforts to prevent litter in their area**, and a similar figure (81%) express a desire for increased action to clean up litter locally.

5

71% of people in Scotland **encounter litter from food containers, wrappers, and packaging** often.

Key stats



87%

of people agree that litter is a problem across Scotland.



71%

of people believe that litter is a problem locally.



43%

believe litter in general has become more common in their local areas over the past year.



73%

of people in urban areas consider litter to be a problem in their area, compared to 64% in rural areas.



77%

of people agree that litter is a problem in their area in less affluent areas compared to 68% in the most affluent areas.



82%

of people state they want to see more efforts to prevent litter and 81% agree they want to see increased action to clean up litter in their communities.



55%

of those surveyed report that sightings of single-use vapes have become common in the past twelve months.



88%

of those surveyed agree roadside litter is a problem in Scotland.



71%

of people still occasionally, somewhat often or very often see plastic carrier bags as litter in their local area.



46%

of people reported that they have made changes to their shopping habits, saying they always or often avoid buying goods with excessive packaging.



61%

of people say that they always or often make an effort to switch to reusable products from single-use ones.



85%

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

Attitudes to litter

Over the past four years, an overwhelming majority of people in Scotland – around nine in ten – have consistently viewed litter as a problem across the country – indicating that litter is an issue that really matters to people from all backgrounds and ages.

When it comes to their own area, seven in ten believe that litter is a problem locally. This perception has remained consistently high over the four-year period too, with figures of 71% in 2024, 70% in 2023, 67% in 2022 and 70% in 2021.

There is a clear demand for greater action to address litter. More than eight in ten (82%) people in Scotland agree that they want to see more efforts to prevent litter in their area, and 81% 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 to see action taken in their communities to address the issue of litter.

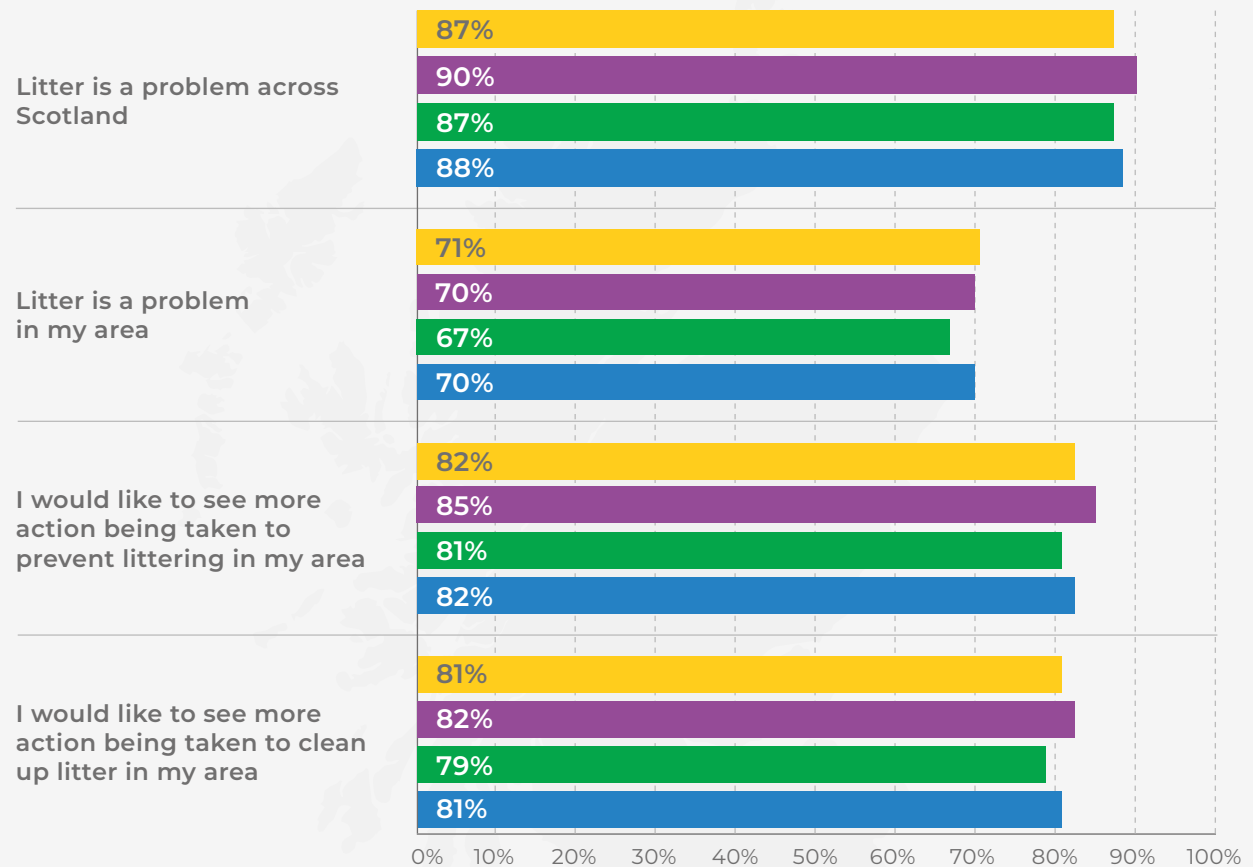


Attitudes towards litter - Figure 1

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

% agreeing with each statement

2024 2023 2022 2021



Attitudes to litter

The belief that litter is a problem in the local area varies between different groups.

For instance, those living in less affluent areas are significantly more likely to view litter as a problem locally than those in more affluent areas.

Although the figures **converge more in 2024**, the pattern remains clear. In 2023, 83% of those in SIMD 1 agreed litter is an issue in their local area, compared to 56% in SIMD 5. In 2024, 77% of those in SIMD 1 report litter being an issue, compared to 68% in SIMD 5.

There are also noticeable differences between urban and rural areas, with 73% of people in urban areas considering litter to be a problem in their area in 2024, compared to 64% of those in rural areas.

Young people in Scotland (77% of those aged 16-34) are also more likely than those older (66% of those aged 65+) to report litter as a problem in their local area, which may be linked to greater volumes of litter in urban areas where the population is generally younger.



What are the most common types of litter?

Most people in Scotland - three quarters (76%) - report that they see litter in general in their local area either very or somewhat often. The real concern is that only **5% say they see litter rarely or never.**

People across Scotland report seeing a range of litter in their local area.

This is the fourth consecutive year where litter related to food and drink packaging has been the most common type of litter reported. Litter related to food and drink packaging remains common, with food containers, wrappers and packaging, plastic drinks bottles, drinks cans, and single-use (hot and cold) drinks containers all seen often in their local area by over half of those surveyed.



The eight types of litter seen by half or more of people surveyed:



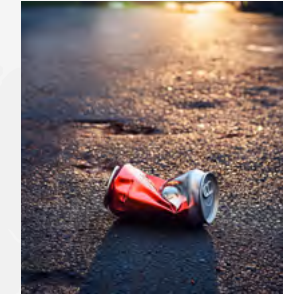
71%
Food containers,
wrappers, and
packaging



66%
Plastic drinks
bottles



65%
Cigarette butts



63%
Drinks cans



62%
Dog fouling



61%
Single-use
e-cigarettes/
vapes



56%
Single-use (hot
and cold) drinks
containers



54%
Chewing gum

Single-use vapes spotlight

Single-use vapes are the fastest growing litter item.



55%

of those surveyed report that sightings of these have become common in the past twelve months.

57%

of people in urban areas are more likely to report increasing prevalence compared to 43% of those in rural areas.

Both of these figures are greater than they were in 2023.

A forthcoming ban on single-use vapes, as called for by us and our partners, could significantly reverse this trend.

Roadside litter spotlight

Roadside litter is dangerous and expensive to clean up.



88%

of those surveyed agree roadside litter is a problem in Scotland.

91%

agree roadside litter creates a negative impression of Scotland.

Only one in ten (11%) agree that enough action is being taken to reduce the amount of roadside litter in Scotland.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill has powers to strengthen enforcement to address roadside litter. We look forward to the forthcoming introduction of a civil penalty charge for road users that litter from vehicles. This is something that we called for back in 2017 as part of our roadside litter campaign and we secured support for this change from more than half of local councils.

Changes in the levels of litter

Over two-fifths of people in Scotland (43%) believe that litter in general has become more common in their local area over the past year.

When thinking about items that relate to **food and drink consumed on the go**, a sizeable proportion of people in Scotland report that food containers, wrapping and packaging (35%), plastic drinks bottles (32%), single-use (hot and cold) drink containers (32%), drinks cans (29%), and glass drinks bottles (19%) have become more common.

Many of these litter items could be reduced with the introduction of an all-inclusive UK wide Deposit Return Scheme (currently scheduled for 2026) and Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging regulations which we believe should include ground and binned litter.

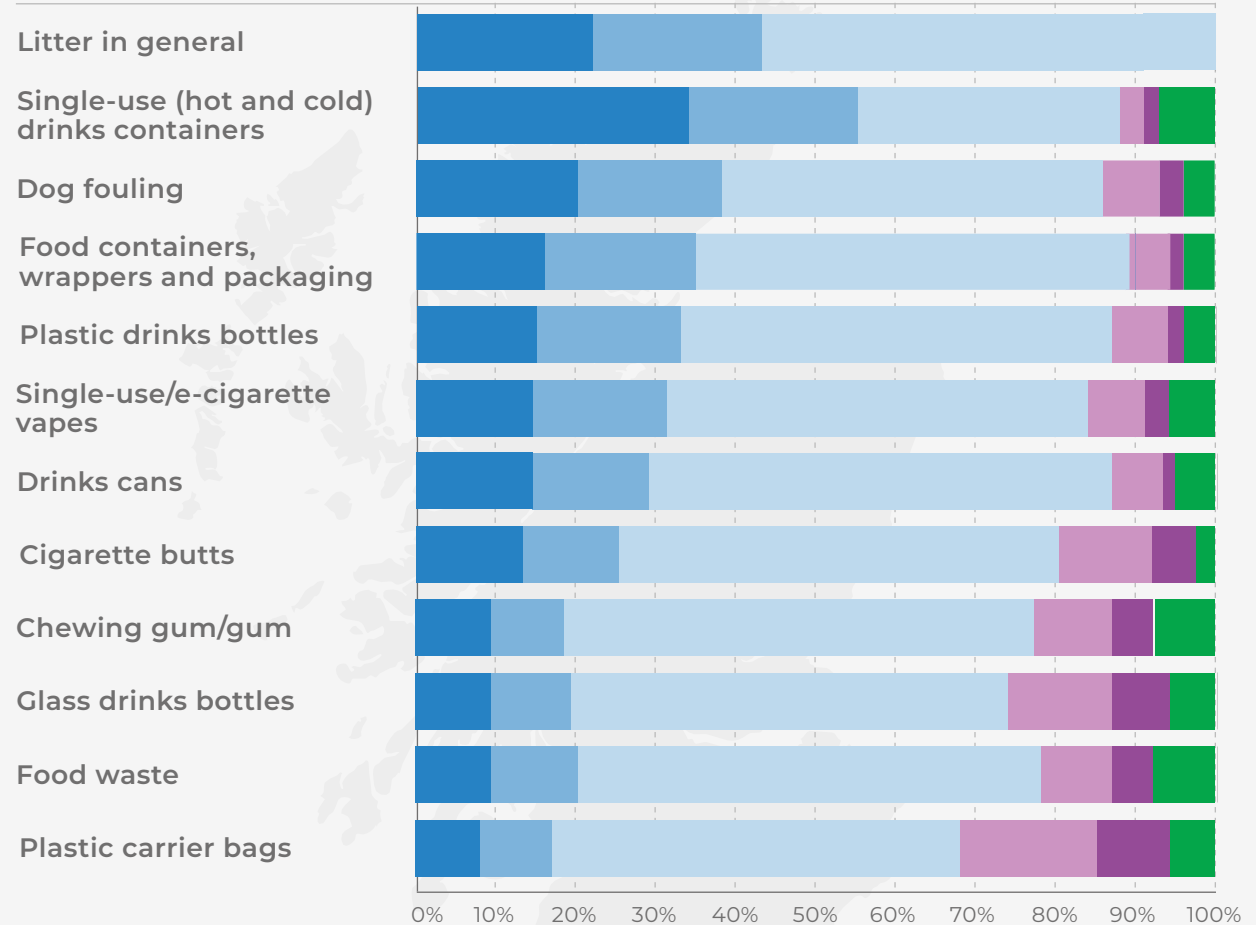
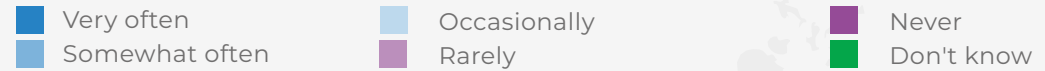
Seventy-one per cent of people still occasionally, somewhat often or very often see plastic carrier bags as litter in their local area. Additionally, this polling highlights that half (51%) report seeing plastic carrier bags as much as 12 months ago with a further 17% reporting that this type of litter has become more common.

However, there are a number of litter items which people perceive to be increasing – including dog fouling, cigarette butts and chewing gum – which are not covered by these proposed systems.

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



Impacts of litter

For the fourth consecutive year, the impacts of litter on animals and the environment are deemed the most concerning. This concern is relatively consistent across groups but is slightly lower among those aged 55-64 and 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 Scotland in the continuation of a trend from 2021 through to 2024. This concern is most pronounced amongst people in higher age bands (45-54, 55-64, 65+).

The impact on local residents' health and wellbeing is the next biggest concern followed by a perceived increase in anti-social behaviour caused by litter. The level of concern relating to both of these impacts is higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

Overall, impacts on local businesses were deemed less concerning, as were litter's effects on house prices.



"Wild life being hurt, young children falling on broken glass or picking up dirty litter, cigarettes or vapes"

"Lowers the tone of the area which effects people's self esteem and sometimes mental health"

Tackling litter

For the fourth consecutive year, there is majority support for all proposed measures to tackle litter, demonstrating a consistent demand from the Scottish public for measures to be taken to improve the situation in relation to litter across Scotland.

The most popular measure remains improving waste disposal facilities with 91% supporting this.

There remains an evident preference for preventative approaches, with more than eight in ten (85%) supporting educational and behavioural campaigns and 81% supporting increased funding for community action on prevention and clean-up. A similar proportion (86%) also support strengthening fines and penalties.

Around seven in ten (67%) express support for introducing litter wardens and/or increasing police presence.



Looking forward

This is our fourth annual Scottish Litter Survey, it is disappointing and incredibly frustrating to have to report that 9 in 10 people across Scotland view litter as problem nationally, with seven in ten viewing it as a problem in their own area, 43% believe that it has become more common in their local area in the last year.

There are very few issues that would generate this level of concern year on year without a public outcry or demands for action.

We don't believe that this is the Scotland we want now or for future generations. We hear that people in Scotland are not happy with the level of litter in their communities, yet we are all in danger of choosing to accept litter as the backdrop to our lives.

Our unsustainable consumption of 'throw-away' items is one of the primary drivers of the global climate and nature crises and the litter emergency we declared in Scotland in 2022.

There is no point pretending there is a quick fix to this issue, if there was we would already have implemented it, unfortunately changing our consumption behaviours and habits is complicated, expensive and challenging.

The reality is that only decisive action from all sectors over a number of years will help to tackle the challenges associated with litter and reduce this level of concern.

But, the good news is that we already have many of the tools we need to make a difference.

Strong partnerships have been developed nationally and locally, and positive action is underway. Since our last report we've significantly moved forward actions outlined in Scotland's National Litter and Flytipping Strategy, including:

- the creation of an online Community Litter Hub;
- a litter intervention to tackle on-the-go food and drink packaging;
- piloting community litter workshops; and
- collecting and analysing data to support improvements.

The Strategy is, as we hoped, becoming a framework for Scotland to begin its journey to become a litter free nation.

Additionally, key policies which will help address the litter crisis should come into play over the next few years.

- The fastest growing litter type – single-use vapes – should decrease once the forthcoming ban on sales comes into place in 2025.
- Measures in the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act could help address single-use cups and make it easier to tackle roadside litter.
- A Deposit Return System will lead to more drinks containers being captured for recycling.

Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (pEPR) regulations could include ground and binned litter – which our data shows the need for - and could provide additional funds for litter prevention, infrastructure and waste management.

Looking forward we need to strengthen commitment and collaboration at a regional and local level, build on the commitment of the 45,000 people who participated in litter picks during Spring Clean 2024, work more closely with local government to ensure existing campaigns, materials and resources are known about and used, and empower businesses to play their part in creating a litter free Scotland.

We're stubborn and will not lose sight of our original ambition, nor will we stop striving for greater collaboration, commitment, finance and action.



How clean are our streets?

We've coordinated a national programme of local environmental quality surveys across Scotland for more than two decades. The data gathered provides a national picture and highlights regional trends which support local authorities to deliver services as efficiently as possible at such a challenging financial time. This year the data collected from more than 12,000 sites is presented in an interactive dashboard, allowing you to navigate the data yourself at both a national and local level.

[Explore the data](#)

It's simple – to Keep Scotland Beautiful – we must stay optimistic, and we all need to take action.



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, reduce litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places. We aim to inspire changes in behaviour to improve our environment, the quality of people's lives, their wellbeing and the places that they care for.



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