



Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2021/22

KEEP
NORTHERN
IRELAND
BEAUTIFUL



**CLEANER
NEIGHBOURHOODS**

Summary

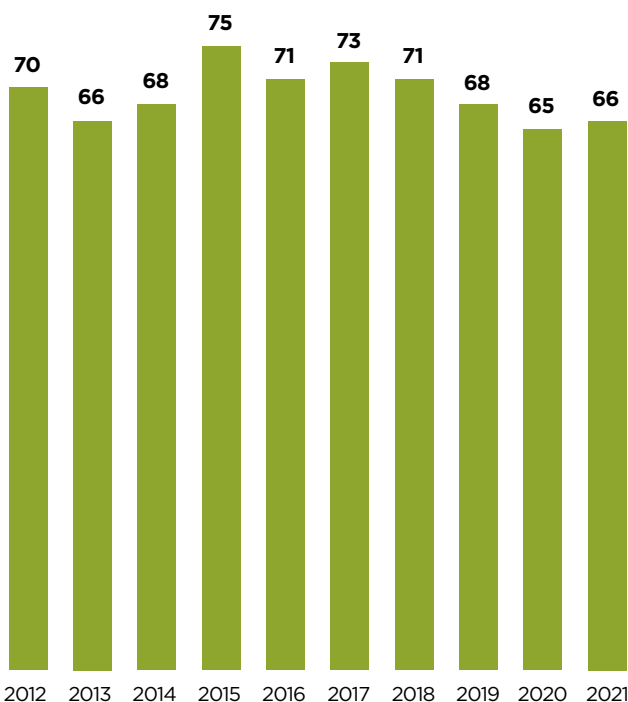
This report details the findings of the 2021 Northern Ireland Litter Survey which was undertaken by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful between July and September 2021.

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful's trained assessors surveyed the local environmental quality of 990 individual transects (streets, roads and recreational spaces) across the 11 council areas. Approximately 49.5km (30.8 miles) were surveyed.

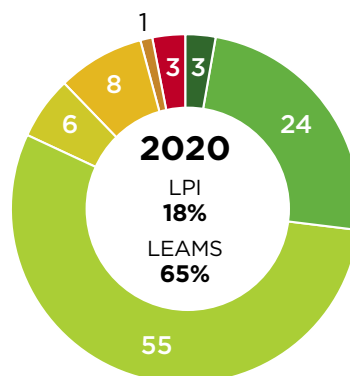
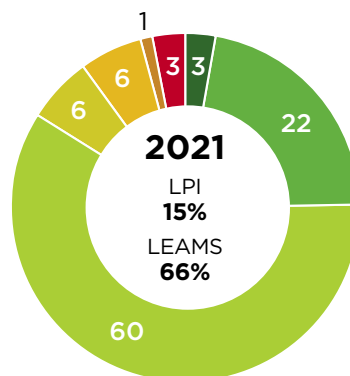
Findings & insights

- **15% of transects** surveyed in 2021 failed to reach the acceptable standard of cleanliness (Grade A to B). This is a 3% improvement on the 2020 results.
- **The LEAMS score**, which reflects the average score out of 100 of all transects surveyed, was a low 66% with only a 1% improvement from 2020. This decline in the levels of cleanliness has been apparent since 2017.
- **Litter and dog fouling** can be considered the primary causes for increased failure rates and declining LEAMS scores. Only 1% of transects fail to meet the acceptable standard of cleanliness due to excessive detritus, staining, flyposting or graffiti.
- **The levels of dog fouling on streets, roads and public spaces** has decreased significantly when compared to the previous findings. The percentage of transects with dog fouling present decreased from 13% (2020) to 6% in 2021. 11% of all recreational areas surveyed had dog fouling present. 7% of all high obstruction housing transects surveyed had at least one dog foul present, less than half of levels recorded in 2020.
- **Rural roads and industrial shed and retail areas**, are disproportionately affected by litter when compared to residential, recreational and primary retail areas. 30% of rural roads and 47% of industrial shed and retail transects surveyed failed to reach

LEAMS



LEAMS is an alternative method of measuring litter and other indicators which is used in both Scotland and Wales. Unlike the pass/ fail 'Performance Indicator' used in Northern Ireland, LEAMS scores are generated by assigning a value to each grade (A=3 B=2 C=1 D=0), and then calculating the average value of all the grades assigned. This average is presented as a percentage of the total available points for the transects surveyed. It differs from the Performance Indicators, in that LEAMS scores take account of how clean or littered a transect is, rather than just whether it is a pass or fail. Scores closer to 100 indicate better performance. It is easier to set a target under the LEAMS system; 66 is the point at which performance is considered acceptable, as it equates with an average grade B.



The rings above show the percentage of transects surveyed that were allocated each of the seven grades available (see key).

Litter Pollution Index (LPI) denotes the percentage of transits that failed to meet acceptable standards.

Totals may not equal 100 due to the rounding up or down of figures to make whole numbers.

KEY

Grade A (pass)

Completely free of indicator (litter, detritus, graffiti etc.)

Grade B+ (pass)

Predominantly free of indicator apart from some small items

Grade B (pass)

Many small indicator items or one larger item

Grade B- (fail)

A few larger indicator items

Grade C (fail)

Many larger indicator items

Grade C- (fail)

Accumulations of larger indicator items

Grade D (fail)

Transect is heavily affected by indicator, both widespread and accumulated

the acceptable standard of cleanliness for litter. This compares with just 4% of primary retail transects which failed to meet the acceptable standard.

■ **Only 2% of Low Obstruction Residential** (where more than 50% of cars can pull off the road into driveways or similar) transects failed to meet the accepted standards of cleanliness in 2021. High Obstruction Residential (where more cars park on street) transects had a 19% failure rate. It is clear that obstructions to mechanical sweepers, caused by parked vehicles, have a significant impact of the ability of cleansing regimes to tackle litter and detritus in these areas.

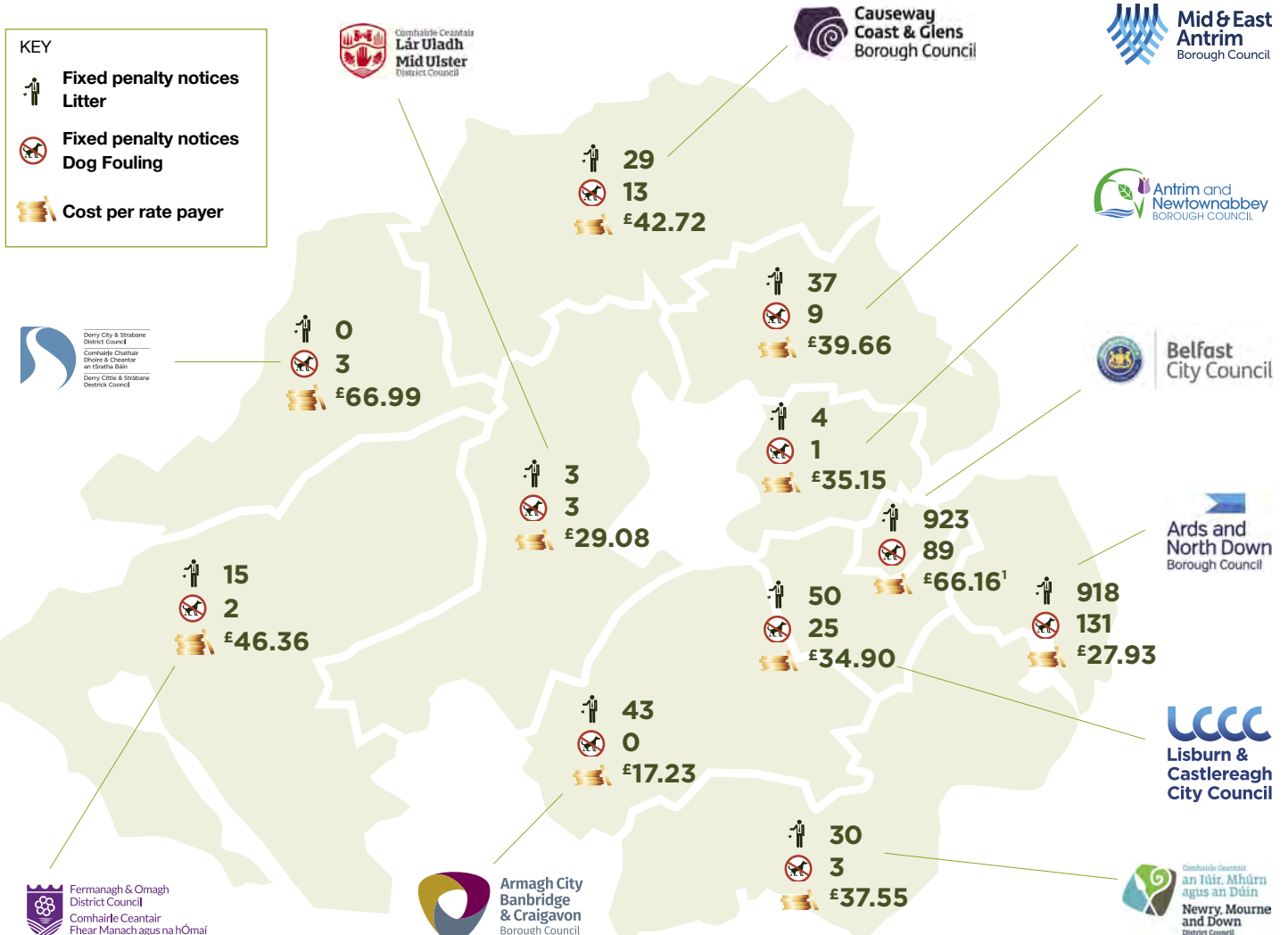
■ **During the survey 8% of transects** were reported to have PPE (gloves and masks) present. Outside of the survey parameters more PPE equipment was observed by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful assessors. It is important that the public recognises that using Personal Protective Equipment comes with responsibility. This includes not just using it properly but also disposing of it in a way that doesn't harm the environment and other members of the public. Once finished with PPE, it needs to be put in the appropriate bin.

Cleansing spend and the use of fixed penalty notices

The total spend on street cleaning across all of Northern Ireland in 2019/20 was £31,390,472.¹ With an estimated population of 1,896,270 people in 740,528 households in Northern Ireland,² this means that on average every rate payer was charged £42.39 for cleaning the streets,³ even if they are not personally a litterer.

1. This is an estimation as Belfast City Council does not have a traditional cleansing spend and spread their costs out across the department so a projection has been made from previous year's data.
2. NISRA Population and Household Projections for Northern Ireland (for 2020), 2016-2041 (HHP16_NI).
3. Please note that these figures relate to 2019/20, and are therefore one year behind the figures in the rest of this report. Figures are only made available in autumn of the following year.

AVERAGE FOR ALL OF NI:



Key focus on drinks related litter

Drinks related litter is one of the more commonly observed types of litter in Northern Ireland, with items being recorded in half of all surveyed transects.

From 2009 – 2019 the production of plastic packaging has continued to grow, with 15.4 million tonnes of plastic packaging waste material being produced in 2019.⁴ A large amount of this packaging is drinks related. During the 2021 Cleaner Neighbourhoods Survey, 554 transects (50%) were recorded as having some form of drinking litter present, ranging from plastic bottles and metal cans to caps/lids and straws. Of the 554 transects 143 of these failed to meet an acceptable standard for litter (grade of B- or less) and normally had multiple items of drinks related litter.

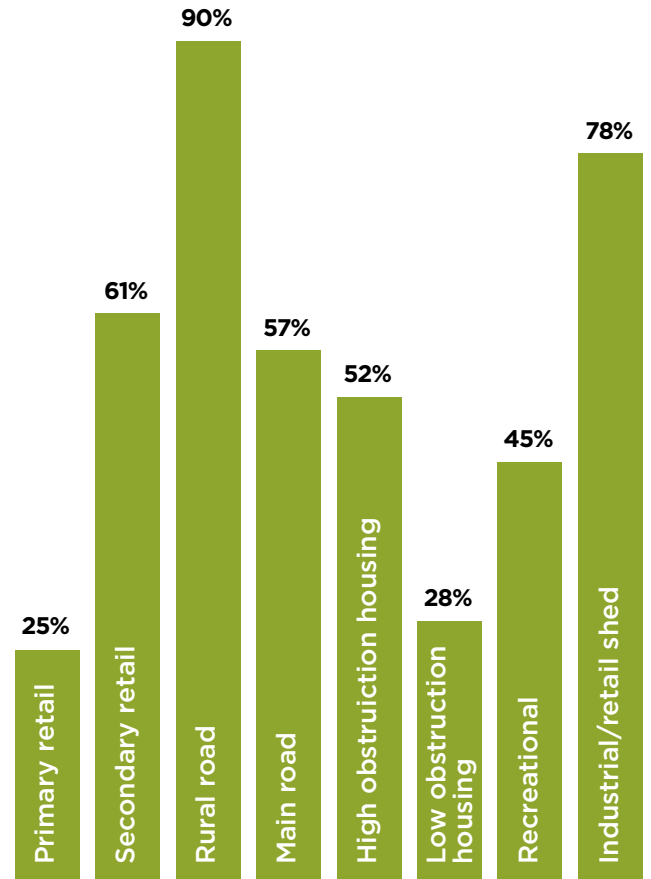
From the results of the 2021 surveys presented in the graph, we can see that the majority of drinks litter is recorded at a distance from the point at which it was purchased. 90% of rural roads and 57% of main roads surveyed had drinks related litter present on them. There appears to be a car-based takeaway food culture in Northern Ireland, with a certain percentage of drivers who still think it is acceptable to throw their takeaway packaging out of the car window. We see less drinks related litter in main retail and low obstruction residential zones. This is due to councils investing more effort and resources within these areas, with mechanical sweepers used to help tackle the problem.

When we look at the origin of litter analysed in the 2019 Litter Composition report, seven of the ‘top ten’ brands represented were all related to drinks, with the remainder coming from confectionary or cigarettes. We urgently need manufacturing businesses to recognise the problem and to take responsibility for the amount of packaging they produce. Businesses need to invest in preventative initiatives and the public must think more carefully about how they dispose of their waste.

4. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Packaging_waste_statistics

The presence of drinks related litter per land-use type

Percentage of transects with drinks related litter present, for each of the land-use types assessed during the survey.



Bins

Are bins really as useful as we believe? The presence of more bins doesn't always result in less litter, but may still may be a step in the right direction.

People often claim that a lack of available bins explains why they might drop litter; asserting that if there were more bins they would litter less. Our research reveals a more complex picture...

During the 2021 surveys, general waste bins were present on 248 (23%) of all the transects surveyed. Of these transects only 26 failed to meet an acceptable standard for litter and these were mostly recreational and secondary retail. In transects without a bin present 125 failed to meet an acceptable standard for litter. There were only 11 transects recorded with specific dog fouling bins present and only 1 of these transects failed due to 2 or more fouls being present.

A more extensive look at the effect bins have on litter was undertaken within the 2019 litter composition analysis completed by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. The results showed that overall, for every 3 items littered, only 1 item was being binned. When one disregards those transects without bins and focuses on those that do have bins, three items were binned for every two that were dropped. From these results we could assume that having a bin present does in fact help reduce litter, but there is more we must do to increase the positive impact of bins.

We know that the public use waste bins when they are available. However, an increase in bin usage is needed. This could be a good chance for the introduction of nudge signage, which uses simple psychological techniques to encourage people towards a desired behaviour. Examples might include making the bins more colourful and obvious to see, placing them in a more obvious area, using arrows and messages of encouragement to direct people to the bin or making people aware of fines for littering. There are also different types of bins - ballot bins used to encourage smokers not to litter and plastic bottle bins being trialled by Translink.

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful can offer bespoke surveys for councils to help identify areas that may benefit from nudge usage and assess the effectiveness of different nudge techniques to determine the most affective for those areas.

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful offers posters as well as offering support and advice on their optimum use.⁵

5. <https://www.keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org/cgi-bin/resources?instanceID=1>



Above: Single Use Plastic bin being trialled by Translink.



Left: ballot bin used to encourage smokers not to litter.

Below: examples of 'nudge' posters designed by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, and available on our website (see link opposite).



Litter – what is the current picture?

Year on year the Cleaner Neighbourhood Surveys continue but the situation regarding litter doesn't seem to be getting any better. It is important to look at the big picture but it's also vital to take a close-up look at the individual elements of the litter that is so evident in our environment.

TRANSECTS WHERE LITTER IS PRESENT (%)

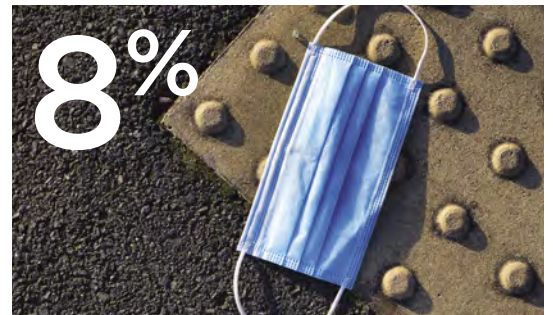
Dog fouling

The most emotive form of litter; dog fouling was present on 6% of transects either as a foul, smeared or in a bag. Although this is a positive improvement on the previous year, it is still a huge issue. It is not only deeply unpleasant, but dog fouling can also be dangerous, potentially causing toxocariasis or blindness.



PPE Equipment:

Due to COVID-19 the world had to make big changes and adapt to help reduce the spread of the virus. One mitigation was the use of personal protective equipment, including gloves, masks and visors. In Northern Ireland, from 6th March 2020 to 28th January 2022, a total of 758,055,575 core PPE items were distributed to health and social care services.⁶ This includes aprons, face masks, visors, gloves and gowns which must be disposed of after use for reasons of clinical safety as well as to prevent them ending up as litter in our environment. 8% of transects surveyed contained at least one item of PPE.



Cigarette Litter:

The most abundant type of litter recorded on litter surveys is cigarette related, in particular cigarette butts. In 2021 65% of all transects surveyed had some form of cigarette litter present. This is an unsightly form of litter that often grows exponentially. As more cigarette butts are discarded, it appears to 'signal' to smokers that this is acceptable. Cigarette butts are difficult for litter pickers to collect, and they are made from cellulose acetate, a type of plastic that takes at least 13 years to break down.⁷ Moreover, they release dangerous chemicals, such as arsenic and lead, into the environment.



Confectionary litter:

Confectionary litter was present within 47% of all surveyed transects. This is a form of litter that is often thrown away carelessly by the public or in some cases, young children. 79% of all play parks surveyed had confectionary litter present. Children are receptive to education about litter and its impact on our environment, and it is important that they receive information and support in developing positive attitudes and behaviours. Schools and parents have a role to play in educating children about the correct methods for disposing of litter.



Takeaway litter:

Takeaway litter was recorded on 12% of transects surveyed, a decrease of 5% from 2020. There is a strong takeaway culture in Northern Ireland. In many cases the resulting litter is thrown out of car windows to lie on rural roads for a long time. Beaches, parks and other amenity areas receive large volumes of this kind of litter. There are solutions to this problem but they require a joined-up and committed approach from government, businesses and individuals.



6. HSC Business Services Organisation (2022) PaLS PPE Statistics (COVID-19). <https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3190.htm> . Accessed 18th February 2022

7. Joly, & Coulis. (2018). Comparison of cellulose vs. plastic cigarette filter decomposition under distinct disposal environments. *Waste Management*, 72, 349-353.

Recommendations for policy makers, individuals and government

Individuals

1. Be active in tackling pollution

- Use less plastic and more reusable containers (bottles, cups, food containers)
- Choose products with less packaging or more recyclable packaging
- Challenge yourself to make a change in your purchasing habits.

2. Get involved with the local community

- Get involved with Live Here Love Here
- Adopt A Spot in your area and receive equipment and support.
- Write to your MLAs and local councillors and demand change.

Government

1. Litter legislation

We need a litter strategy. A joined-up approach is essential to tackle the causes of litter in Northern Ireland. This would need to include education, enforcement and public engagement. Litter legislation is directly linked to the Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility, as well as the Plastics Directive (part of the NI Protocol). It is extremely encouraging to see that a Litter Strategy has been referenced within the draft Northern Ireland Environmental Strategy.

2. Courts must produce coherent guidelines for the treatment of those who litter.

Fair and reasonable penalties must be applied consistently to avoid discrepancies across the various courts dealing with these cases. Fines issued by a court should never end up being less than the cost of paying a fixed penalty. Councils' costs must also form part of the payment due, for those found guilty of littering.

3. Joined up approach for councils on litter enforcement.

We propose policy across all councils to ensure that best practice on enforcement of litter and dog fouling is followed. Enforcement practices need to be fair, clear and consistent across Northern Ireland. We advocate a single NI-wide level for fixed penalty notices.

4. Deposit Return Scheme

Deposit return schemes (DRS) would see consumers paying an up-front deposit for certain items such as drinks. The return of the empty packaging after use would allow the deposit to be redeemed. This practice would help incentivise correct disposal of packaging, as it would now have a monetary value. DRS would also greatly reduce the number of plastic items reaching our seas. It would therefore help Northern Ireland play its part in tackling marine plastic pollution and would support the good work being

done to achieve Good Environmental Status for Descriptor 10 in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. DRS policy proposals are being developed for Northern Ireland alongside England and Wales, following public consultations in 2019 and 2021.

5. Extended Producer Responsibility

EPR for packaging across the UK was widely consulted on in 2019 and 2021. Costs to councils for packaging in street bins will be met by producers of packaging from 2024. In addition, producers will contribute to the costs of litter prevention such as campaigns. EPR will also increase recyclability of packaging through fees that producers will have to pay.

6. The EU Plastics Directive.

This legislation is being implemented (in part) in Northern Ireland as part of the NI Protocol. England, Scotland and Wales (as well as the Republic of Ireland) have already introduced regulations to ban certain items. Northern Ireland is still to consult on this issue. We ask for a rapid conclusion to the consultation and the implementation of bans. Furthermore, for items out of the scope of the bans, we urge government to build on the highly successful carrier bag levy by broadening the legislation to include a 'call-up' list of single use plastic containing items (including cigarette butts, single use plastic lined paper cups and a wide array of packaging) that can be levied in Northern Ireland. This will help generate funds to further support delivery of the litter strategy and will help producers consider ways to decrease the amount and types of packaging they place on the market. Where other legislation comes into effect, such as DRS and/or EPR, items can then cease to be levied.

7. Prioritise spending on prevention in order to reduce spend on clean-up.

Behaviour change through education needs to be a higher priority if we are to seriously tackle the issues of dog fouling and litter. Increasing spending on clean-up will not change behaviour. There is an opportunity for funding to be reallocated to projects and campaigns that work towards changing the behaviour of individuals as well as corporations. The Live Here Love Here Campaign is a well-established, collaborative, litter prevention platform. Through education and empowerment, it builds a sense of civic pride in our local communities. Individual actions and small scale campaigns can only, at best, achieve incremental improvements and the global crises, including marine plastic pollution, now requires transformational change. Additional litter prevention-focused investment in Eco-Schools is needed to maximise the awareness of young people and to help drive messaging into individual households.

Businesses

- Sadly, investment in litter prevention from this sector has dwindled in recent years. Successful businesses will be looking

at making changes even before legislation (Extended Producer Responsibility/Deposit Return Schemes) come into force. They should be supported and encouraged to do so.

- Legislation to reduce the use of Single Use Plastics is on the horizon, which will improve the situation regarding takeaway containers. Education and support for small businesses in particular needs to be increased.

- Proposed solutions should have industry input.
- We would encourage businesses to engage with the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful 'Tackling Plastics' team to receive a free toolkit and would also encourage them to sign the Plastic Promise as a starting point on their journey towards sustainability and circularity.⁸

8. <https://www.keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org/cgi-bin/generic?instanceID=60>



Belfast City Centre

To discuss how we can work together to tackle littering please contact:

enquiries@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org

T 028 9073 6920

www.keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org



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