

# Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2022/23

KEEP  
NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
BEAUTIFUL



**CLEANER  
NEIGHBOURHOODS**







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# What is the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report?

## The Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report provides a detailed yearly analysis of Northern Ireland's local environmental quality.

The report sets out to give clear, unbiased information about anti-social behaviours, such as littering, dog fouling and graffiti. In total, the report is based on surveying Northern Ireland's cleanliness levels in the following areas:

- **Litter** – anything that is dropped, discarded or thrown down by a member of the public. It includes cigarettes, chocolate wrappers, crisp bags, bottles, cans, PPE and many more things, as well as dog fouling.
- **Detritus** – comprising small, broken down particles of synthetic and natural materials. This includes dust, mud, soil, rotted leaf and vegetable residues, and fragments of twigs, glass, plastic and other finely divided materials.

- **Graffiti** – writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in or visible from a public place. Murals and cultural artworks are not considered graffiti.

- **Flyposting** – the placing of unauthorised advertising or posters in a public place, and includes stickers, bills and large posters.

- **Staining** – all the substances that mark a pavement, and commonly includes chewing gum, oil, drinks stains and heavy discolouration.

All sites, or transects, are assessed to establish the extent to which they are degraded by the presence of each of the pollutants noted above. The transect is then given a pass or fail award and allocated a respective cleanliness score, both of which contribute to creating the overall picture of Northern Ireland's environmental health and performance.



To generate the most accurate and insightful analysis of pollution in Northern Ireland's different landscapes and communities, the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report collects local environmental quality data from a diverse and standardised range of transects that extend to all parts of the country. The full set of land-use types surveyed are:

- Primary Retail
- Secondary Retail
- Rural Area
- Main Road
- High Obstruction Residential
- Low Obstruction Residential
- Recreational
- Industry/Retail Sheds

Finally, as well as providing a summary of the NI Litter Survey, which looks at pollution indicators around the country, the report includes details on enforcement actions taken by councils, including the number of fixed penalties issued for littering and dog fouling, and the associated estimated cleansing spend costs for taxpayers.

## Methodology

The 2022 Northern Ireland litter surveys were carried out between the months of July and September.

The Litter Pollution Index is the percentage of transects that failed to reach an acceptable standard of cleanliness.

The LEAMS approach of measuring litter assigns scores based on an assessment of litter presence, type and source. LEAMS scores record standards of cleanliness (Grades A to D).

This year's report is based on a reduced number of surveys of 397 transects (previous reports were based on c.1,000 transects) also a reduced geographical spread which has raised the statistical confidence limits compared to previous reports. Samples informing this report have only been collected and processed from Antrim and Newtownabbey Council, Belfast City Council, Causeway Coast and Glens Council as well as Mid and East Antrim council.

A sample of this size has a margin of error of +/- 5%.



# Summary

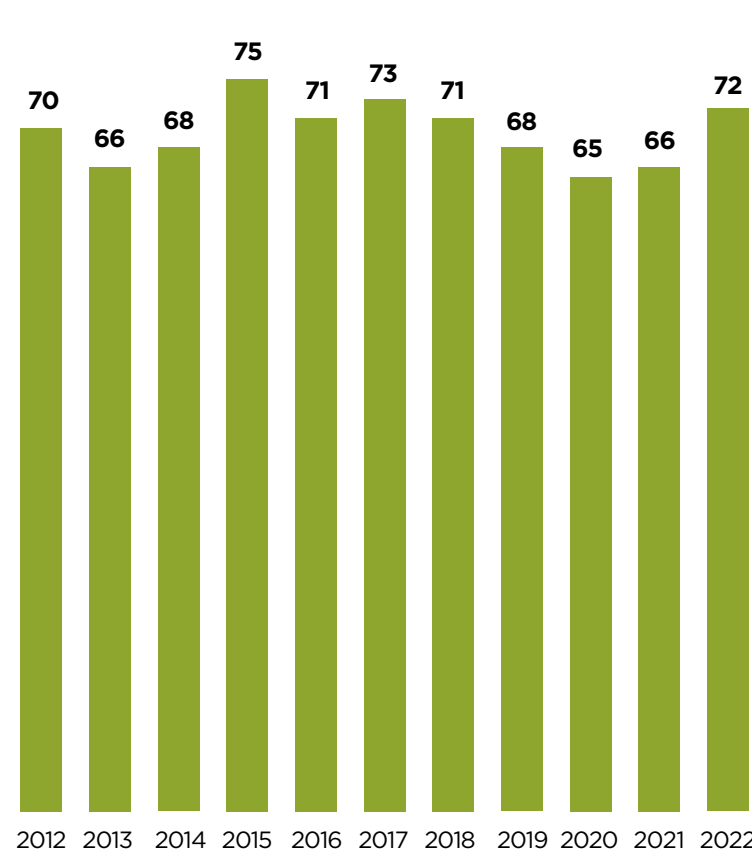
## The Big Picture

### Findings and insights

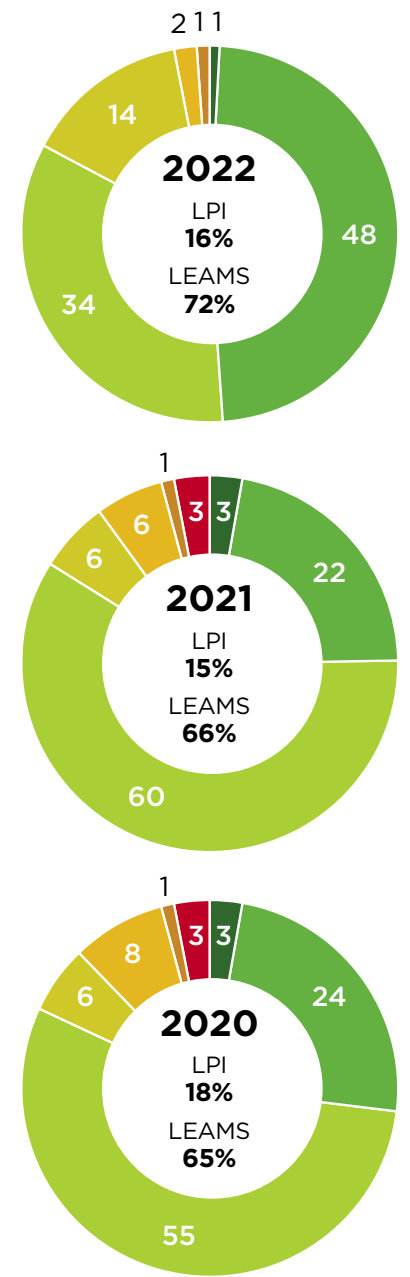
- **16% of transects\*** surveyed in 2022 failed to reach the acceptable standard for cleanliness (Grade A to B). This is a 1% deterioration on the 2021 results.
- **The LEAMS score**, which reflects the average score out of 100 of all transects surveyed, increased to 72 and represents an improvement in cleanliness from the surveyed councils. Similar levels of cleanliness were recorded from surveys pre 2018.
- The percentage of transects with dog fouling continues to decrease from **6% in 2021** to **2% in 2022**.
- However, levels of takeaway packaging across transects skyrocketed, increasing by **117% year on year in 2022**.

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## 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.



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

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

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

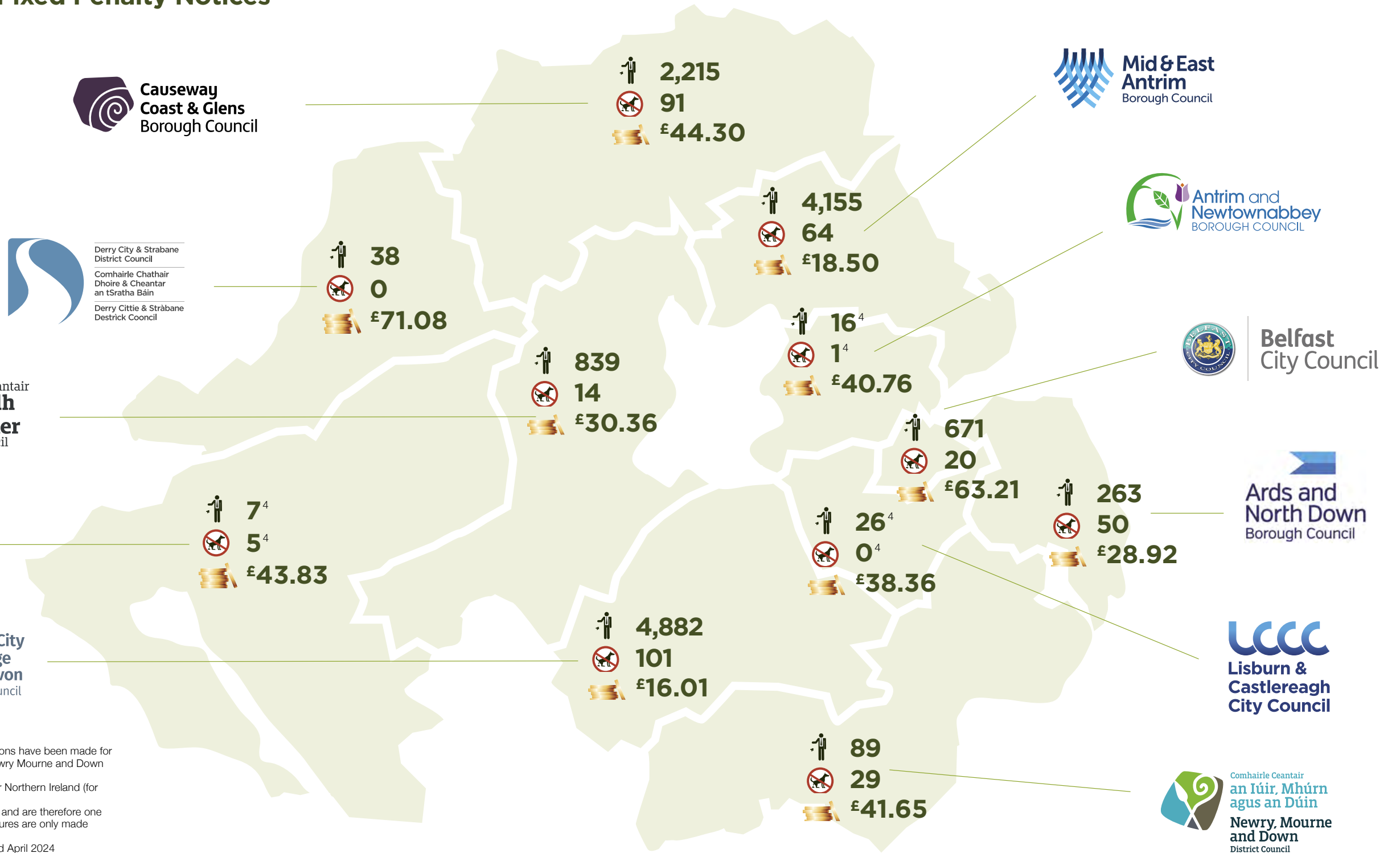




## Total Cleansing Spend and Use of Fixed Penalty Notices

The overall cost of street cleaning in Northern Ireland in 2021/22 was £30,961,701<sup>1</sup>. There are an estimated 1,901,631 people living in 744,754 households in Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>, meaning that each rate payer had an average annual bill of £41.57 for street-cleansing services<sup>3</sup>, irrespective of whether they personally dropped litter or not.

**AVERAGE FOR ALL OF NI:**



**KEY**

- Fixed penalty notices issued – litter
- Fixed penalty notices issued – dog fouling
- Cost per rate payer

1. This is an estimation as cleansing spend projections have been made for Ards and North Down, Derry and Strabane and Newry Mourne and Down based on previous year's data.  
 2. NISRA Population and Household Projections for Northern Ireland (for 2021), 2016-2041 (HHP16\_NI).  
 3. Please note that these figures relate to 2021/22, 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.  
 4. Please note that this data was corrected on 22nd April 2024





# What We're Seeing on the Ground

## Gareth Lamrock is one of Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful's Field Officers, and a trained assessor.

He conducted many of this year's litter surveys. Here, he shares some of his first-hand observations:

"I definitely notice a pattern of more litter on rural roads, and also in high obstruction housing- housing estates. High obstruction housing tends to suffer more than other land uses from graffiti, staining, litter.

Parks in housing estates seem more likely to be vandalised. For the most part it's just graffiti tagging, juvenile stuff. I've been pleasantly surprised at how little sectarian graffiti I've seen.

In my experience, rural roads are among the worst areas affected. It's crazy what you find – we found Burger King packaging in a road out by Sion Mills, and the nearest Burger King is 45 miles away! And I'm not talking one box, I'm talking several. The likelihood is that it was all thrown out of a car.

Main roads can also pose a problem- it's not always safe to send a litter picking team out if it's a main road, so litter can start to accumulate.

Cigarette litter is the most common type of litter I find. I don't think I've ever done a transect without at least one cigarette butt! Vapes, disposable vapes, they are also becoming much more prominent. They are of particular concern – not only are they plastic, but there's a battery in them too. You can find them everywhere. They come in a metallic foil packaging, so you'll find those as well.

Energy drink packaging is another form of litter you frequently find. Stickers, too – that is something I hate to see. There are stickers everywhere!

I'm pleasantly surprised by how little dog poo I've found, you do find it, but not that often.

I've found a few nitrous oxide cannisters, and a plastic toy gun- but never anything really bonkers!"

### Gareth Lamrock

FIELD OFFICER,  
KEEP NORTHERN IRELAND BEAUTIFUL

"Cigarette litter is the most common type of litter I find. I don't think I've ever done a transect without at least one cigarette butt!"







# Litter Louts in 2022

## The usual suspects became more entrenched and progress was lost elsewhere.

Cigarette litter and confectionary litter were more widespread than in our previous report, while there was a big step backwards on takeaway packaging.

### Cigarette Litter

As with our previous report, the miscellaneous aspects of cigarettes – butts, cardboard packaging, plastic film – emerged as the most frequently encountered form of litter across transects last year. Worryingly, this grew from 65% coverage in 2021 to 78% in 2022, representing a 20% increase. It is also worth interpreting this finding within the context of a bigger uptake of e-cigarettes (vapes) in Northern Ireland. Although this may bring improved health outcomes for smokers, this has not resulted in a reciprocating decline in cigarette litter across our environment and the chemical pollution that this causes. In fact, we anticipate a growing litter problem with these products, which will create plastic-pollution problems of their own.

### Dog Fouling

It is encouraging to see more linear progress on dog fouling, falling to 2% of transects and building on the positive decrease to 6% that we observed in 2021. However, nothing spoils our environment more than dog litter, which poses the threat of toxocariasis. We hope to see more Councils legislate for the recently introduced £200 maximum fixed penalty notice for dog fouling and back this up with proportionate enforcement action that can drive this visceral form of litter even closer to total elimination.

### Confectionary Litter

Confectionery litter shot up to 60% presence across transects last year, up from the 47% that we recorded in 2021. It is interesting to note that, despite the increasing availability of soft-plastic recycling facilities at supermarkets nationwide for items like chocolate and sweets packaging, we have yet to witness a corresponding dip in the pervasiveness of confectionery litter across the country. Lack of convenience, awareness or incentivisation may explain why this service has yet to yield meaningful returns for reduced confectionery litter.

### Takeaway Litter

The most shocking individual finding last year was that takeaway packaging more than doubled to 26% from 12% in 2021, undoing the drop that we signalled in our previous report. Most problematically, there is a considerable portion of takeaway packaging that is made from non-recyclable polystyrene, and this material has a propensity to fragment and find its way on to our beaches and into our waterways. More behaviour-change campaigns are required to tackle this litter problem and to encourage businesses to transition to more sustainable packaging options.

### Drinks-related Litter

Drinks-related litter was the second most frequently recorded item across transects, rising from 47% in 2021 to 66% in 2022. Encompassing everything from cans, bottles, paper cups, lids and packaging labels, drinks litter is a perennial litter problem that will continue to remain a challenge going into the future. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful is hopeful that the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility legislation will make a significant difference in eradicating this issue.



78%



60%



26%



66%



2%



# Recommendations for Individuals, Government and Businesses

## 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. The joint DRS for Northern Ireland, Wales and England is due to launch in 2025.

### 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. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful would like to see the scope of the scheme widened, to ensure that duty bodies (e.g. Translink) also benefit fairly from the shared approach to waste management. At present, duty bodies pass on these costs to customers.

### 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. Get the ball rolling [here](#).





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



### Dr Stephen McGirr

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