

A Litter Strategy for Monmouthshire



monmouthshire
sir fynwy

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Foreword

For Monmouthshire, reducing litter and the impact of litter is one of the largest areas of concern for residents in relation to Local Environment Quality (LEQ)¹. To address this concern, this Litter Strategy is the first element in a review of LEQ services. This strategy touches on other issues such as fly tipping and household waste collection where they impact on LEQ. These and other LEQ issues will be addressed more fully as the county council reviews its approach to managing LEQ.

Monmouthshire is a beautiful county and a gateway to a beautiful country. For many visitors, our county is their first impression of Wales, both as a place to visit and to pass through to other destinations. For our residents, it is the setting for vibrant communities and thriving local economies. However, whilst our county ranks highly in Wales for its cleanliness, the county's natural beauty and attractive built environments are sometimes blighted by litter. Furthermore, as a coastal county with rivers that lead directly to the Severn Estuary and out to the sea, we have a global responsibility to act locally to reduce litter in the environment as much as possible.

Dedicated and committed volunteers from our communities and partners, including Keep Wales Tidy, support the county 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 county and the challenges we face in making those changes

Ambition

Our Ambition is simple: To make littering unacceptable behaviour and to seek new and innovative ways to reduce littering and to clear it promptly where it turns up.

The background context

Litter and the law

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.

Causes of Litter

The causes of litter are diverse and complex with compounding factors such as a lack of a National Litter Strategy and national media campaigns on the issue, 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 county 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 county council has the structures, resources and authority to tackle. Where the county 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.

Lack of an All Wales Litter Strategy: England and Scotland have produced whole country litter strategies to raise the profile of litter and to give guidance to those that hope to tackle it. The Welsh Government has yet to produce a countrywide strategy that would set the tone and direction for action that would help tackle the challenges we face. A national strategy would also support a better understanding of the hierarchy of issues and enable a countrywide media strategy to target behavioural change to reduce littering behaviours.

Lack of influence/control/powers: Whilst there is a perception that the county 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 county 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 led littering to become an acceptable behaviour. Examples include:

- The increasing disconnect with the natural environment caused in part by alternative pastimes based around technology
- Changes in the way we consume food and drink and move to eating (and drinking) on the go
- 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 not possible 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: Monmouthshire is a destination county 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 Wales Tidy identifies smoking related litter as the most common type of litter found on the streets of Wales.

“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 and coast 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.”

Keep Wales Tidy provides useful data on this issue along with strategies for tackling it

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 considerable numbers 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 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 county 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 county. 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 welsh 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 bins and refuse lorries, households not equipped to store multiple bins for waste segregation, confusion over collection days.

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.

Scotland released a national strategy for litter in 2014 followed by a Litter Strategy for England, published in May 2017. Both documents include a combination of education, enforcement and improved infrastructure. Currently, there is no national litter strategy for Wales. A national strategy has the benefit of providing a framework within which local activity can fit. In March 2017 Keep Wales Tidy published a new report "Tackling Litter on our Roads". The conclusion to the report outlines a series of recommended actions:

- Tackling behaviour
- Increase cleansing without increasing the cost and burden on local authorities
- Deal with some types of litter at source (especially plastic bottles and fast food packaging)

Scale of the problem in Monmouthshire

Monmouthshire is a county 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 to the region. 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 Monmouthshire and roadside litter along these high speed routes is a particular problem for the appearance of the county as well as incurring a cost involved to clear it. It has been estimated that the cost of cleaning the county's main 'A' roads is £150,000 per annum alone.

Monmouthshire's litter is easily transported by wind or water to other places where it can do unseen damage such as in rivers and seas. There is a great deal of international concern about the sheer volume of plastic litter that is now entering our 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.

Monmouthshire's 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 2016-17 Monmouthshire County Council received 332 complaints about litter and 569 reports of fly tipping via the My Council Services portal. During 2017 the council undertook an extensive open consultation asking nearly 1500 local people of all ages what they liked and what could be improved about living in Monmouthshire. 3% (42) of responses mentioned litter as having a negative impact on their impression of the County. Some of the solutions proposed by local people include education, increasing the number of litter bins, better enforcement and more volunteering.

The latest survey by Keep Wales Tidy¹ of Monmouthshire's streets shows that the cleanliness of Monmouthshire's streets has fallen over the last 12 months (2018). The most common type of litter found was smoking litter (found on 85.4% of streets surveyed), confectionery (found on 62.5% of streets) and drinks litter (16.7% of streets). Litter from pedestrian sources was most prevalent. 95.8% of streets were awarded a Grade B or higher for cleanliness a decrease on previous years, falling to its lowest level since 2010-11.

Whilst the figures show that street cleanliness is generally high, there are still problem areas and issues that need to be tackled. With the current and ongoing constraints on resourcing there is a need to work more efficiently, particularly if we are to curb the recent fall in performance and to deal with changes in culture that are leading to new litter related challenges.

Spending on litter collection in Monmouthshire

Considerable financial and man power resources are dedicated to collecting litter in the streets, emptying litter bins and litter picking along country lanes.

It is difficult to quantify the actual cost of litter collection as it is spread across a wide range of departments within Monmouthshire.

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 County Council staff, the council engages with the prison service and probation service to support litter picking across the county. Furthermore, more than 160 dedicated volunteers regularly litter pick in the areas where they live, some of whom will also separate materials into recyclables and waste. Volunteers in rural areas carry out cleansing where it is difficult for the county 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 county council provide volunteers with equipment and collect bagged litter from these activities. Keep Wales Tidy also supports volunteers Local Litter Champions who regularly patrol a route and report the amount of litter collected.

Litter prevention

Monmouthshire County Council Waste & Street Services officers and Keep Wales Tidy undertake litter education and prevention work. Most of this takes place within primary and secondary schools or at the County Council's One Planet Education Centre at Llanfoist. Currently very limited work is undertaken with the general public on raising awareness about litter. There is little work done in Monmouthshire that tackles the root sources of packaging although some volunteer groups have been working to persuade fast food outlets to switch to more environmentally friendly forms of packaging and there is a growing *Plastic Free* movement in Monmouthshire's towns

Where do we want to be

Consultation with staff and councillors, community groups and individuals, Keep Wales tidy and other Stakeholders has made it clear that we want a cleaner county. Our ambition is simple: To make littering unacceptable behaviour and to seek new and innovative ways to reduce littering and to clear it promptly where it turns up. To achieve this ambition, we have reviewed our approach to dealing with litter and set out an action plan to help us achieve this.

Our approach

Monmouthshire County Council has adopted a positive collaborative approach to tackling litter in the county. In response to views from our stakeholders, the county council has identified five thematic areas of work to tackle the many and diverse causes of litter that build on current practice and on which an action plan (set out in the appendix) has been developed. The five thematic areas of work are:

- Education
- Enforcement
- Infrastructure
- Service design
- Partnership working

The action plan will be underpinned by the best available data. Where gaps in the data exist or where data is scarce we will work with our partners to collect and analyse data to underpin our approach.

The action plan is set in the context of two key challenges:

Financial:

The County Council has experienced the longest period of financial constraints in its history and resources to tackle litter are severely limited. Cleansing services are provided across a range of departments and therefore difficult to quantify the full costs to the Council.

There is a dedicated provision for cleansing in the form of Environmental Protection Act EPA Teams within Waste and Street Services. The EPA budget has been maintained over the last 5 years but budget cuts in other areas like refuse collection and grounds maintenance directly impact on the ability to provide this service. Resources often competing against often higher priority areas like refuse collection and safety cuts.

Fragmentation of assets and services:

Land and infrastructure assets are and continue to be fragmented creating barriers to strategic planning for litter, examples include land transfers to housing associations, management of land assets split across departments, arterial roads in control of SWTRA. Furthermore, the County Council is in the process of creating a new arms-length delivery body for leisure and countryside that will augment fragmentation of services.

Action Plan Overview

Thematic area of work	Education	Enforcement	Infrastructure	Service Design	Partnership Working
Causes of litter					
Public understanding of the impact of litter	x				x
Lack of a national strategy for litter					x
Changes in culture	x	x	x		x
Eating on the go	x	x	x	x	
Tourism and leisure			x	x	x
Smoking related litter	x		x		
The impact of dog ownership	x	x	x		x
Packaging					x
Long distance transport			x	x	x
Schools	x		x		
Waste collection services			x	x	

The County Council is facing further cuts in funding including in the area of Local Environmental Quality. The next section of the Strategy provides and aspirational Strategic Action Plan that sets out to tackle the challenges highlighted above. However, given the pressure on resources, many of the actions are dependent on securing external funding including those where internal resources have been nominally identified.

Strategic Action Plan