

**27 February 2024**

**Litter Volunteering – Progress Update**

**Ward(s): All**

**Portfolios: Street Pride  
Wellbeing Leisure and Public Spaces  
Resilient Communities**

**1. Aim**

1.1. The volunteer litter programme supports and enables local people to help keep the streets and open spaces across Walsall free from litter and local businesses to keep the street outside of their business clean, through this work the programme aims to:

- build community and enhance wellbeing,
- develop civic pride, and
- improve the environment.

**2. Recommendations**

2.1. Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the progress to date and provide feedback on the future focus of the litter volunteering support programme, confirming that this is still an area of priority for Walsall Council and to support the ongoing work being carried out by the council, local businesses, and the valuable work carried out by individual volunteers throughout Walsall.

**3. Report detail – know**

***Introduction***

3.1. From July 2018 to June 2019, street cleansing collected 2,147 tonnes of waste through a combination of litter picking, fly-tipping removal and street bin waste collection. Keeping Walsall clean and litter free costs taxpayers approximately £1.5 million per year. In July 2019, two volunteer coordinators were recruited, and Walsall Community Litter Watch (WCLW) was created in August 2019 by the coordinators to help support the council in addressing the litter problem within the borough.

***Progress during 2023***

3.2. There were some significant staff changes at the start of 2023 which impacted upon the WCLW programme. The project was and is managed within the healthy spaces team and required other staff members within the team to

support the project, providing administration support and deliveries of equipment and social media updates.

- 3.3. A new reporting portal was introduced which required officers to provide a lot of support to volunteers, and work with the portal developers to make some improvements. A new litter coordinator was recruited in April 2023, and the service has continued to flourish as details in the information to follow.

***Environmental impact***

- 3.4. WCLW directly contributes to a cleaner and healthier environment. Removing litter from public spaces helps prevent pollution, protects wildlife, and supports maintaining the overall ecological balance.
- 3.5. Table 1 below provides detailed litter data including the social return on investment. This level of support provides a big saving to the council and has been substantial over the last two years.

Table 1 - Litter collection

<b>2022</b>	Social Return on Investment	£64,664
	Bags collected	14,632
	Volunteer hours	7,130
<b>2023</b>	Social Return on Investment	£66,113
	Bags collected	11,551
	Volunteer hours	6,288

- 3.6. The data does show a reduction in bags collected and volunteer hours. this has been a trend in recent years and could be down to several factors, such as volunteers having other priorities such as caring responsibilities (for adults or children), returning to employment, no longer being capable (a significant number of volunteers have been lost since COVID), etc.

***Community wellbeing***

- 3.7. Participating with WCLW fosters a sense of community pride and ownership. A clean and well-maintained Walsall contributes to the well-being of residents, creating a more pleasant and attractive community. Officers have continued to support Walsall Wombles, which is the overarching group supporting all the Walsall community litter groups. The priority in 2024 is to support the group to become more independent, which will include electing a new chair, treasurer and secretary. Arrangements have been made to visit Birmingham Green Spaces Forum, which has a similar overarching role supporting its members.

***Educational opportunities***

- 3.8. WCLW delivers educational opportunities to raise awareness about the impact of littering in Walsall and on the environment. Coordinators have been engaging with community, schools, and local organisations to promote responsible waste disposal.

3.9. The team has worked closely with Walsall College, achieving the following engagement:

- Four class-based sessions with Level 3 and Level 2 students (including an introduction into the impact of litter, barriers and benefits of litter picking, health and safety).
- One litter picking session (with four more to follow).
- Approximately 70 students involved.
- Abu Bakr Boys' School – two sessions, informing how litter picking sessions are valuable activities that contribute to keeping the surroundings clean and raising awareness about the importance of proper waste disposal.

#### ***ACT (A Cleaner Tomorrow) initiative***

3.10. The ACT initiative is a school-based programme that has been developed to educate young people in how to take care of our environment for future generations. It teaches pupils what litter is, what happens to it in the environment, how to recycle and gives them an opportunity to teach others.

3.11. Each lesson has national curriculum or 'development matters' links. Taking part in ACT also support schools interested in becoming an eco-school, as it provides a base for the litter topic. Even if the school is not working on the litter topic, eco-school assessors like to see litter free school sites.

3.12. The project also supports Ofsted inspections, as assessors also comment on the amount of litter on the site as it is considered as a sign of pupils' respect for their learning environment. A school's approach to litter can contribute towards its inspection ratings in personal development, behaviours, and welfare.

3.13. Three ACT session have been delivered as part of the healthy spaces team's Holiday and Food (HAF) school holiday delivery. Further sessions have been delivered at the following schools:

- Four at St Joseph's Primary
- Two at Blakenall Junior School
- One at County Bridge Primary School
- One Brownies session
- Two at All Saints International Academy School
- Four at Brownhills West Primary School

#### ***Preservation of heritage sites***

3.14. Heritage litter picks are particularly important for helping to preserve historical and cultural landmarks. Keeping these sites clean helps maintain their integrity and is crucial for preserving their value and beauty, ensuring they can be

enjoyed by current and future generations. Four heritage picks have taken place over the last 12 months at the following sites:

- Bloxwich Park Memorial Clock
- Arboretum Visitors Centre
- Barr Beacon War Memorial
- Moorcroft Environmental Centre

### ***Promotion of civic pride***

- 3.15. WCLW clean-ups engender a sense of civic pride and responsibility. It instils the idea that everyone has a role to play in maintaining the cleanliness of public spaces, creating a stronger and more connected community in Walsall.
- 3.16. Litter stations have been developed across the borough. A litter picking station is a base that loans out litter picking kit for free. The equipment stored at these locations includes litter pickers, hi-visibility vests and waste bags. Libraries involved in the pilot include Brownhills, Aldridge, Bloxwich, Streetly, Willenhall and Darlaston, as well as the Stan Ball Centre and Reedswood Sons of Rest.
- 3.17. WCLW volunteers were part of the inaugural Walsall Council Volunteer Recognition Awards – Pride in our Patch, which recognised the contribution volunteers make to our parks and greenspaces. It is vital that their work is recognised, acknowledged, and celebrated.

### ***Key points:***

- Litter picking equipment is provided as a short-term loan, to be returned straight after the litter pick. Anyone wishing to borrow the equipment for longer is encouraged by library staff to sign up as a litter picking volunteer. Library staff support them to fill in the registration form online if needed.
- Bags and stickers are distributed to existing volunteers when requested.
- Library staff advise the customers about how to report the bags for collection and provide support around accessing the reporting portal.

### ***Positive social impact***

- 3.18. With support from council officers, SpaceHive funding was awarded to Walsall Wombles to help the project to continue conducting community litter picks across Walsall. The grant helped WCLW to provide equipment, litter picking community events and funded school visits. Additionally, training sessions were provided to volunteers including 'sharps' (needle) collection, first aid, and #LitterHero Ambassador (Keep Britain Tidy) programme.
- 3.19. There are more than 1,000 volunteers registered with the scheme, approximately 450+ of whom actively volunteer. In 2023, WCLW recruited 116

new volunteers to support the project, many of whom were social litter pickers meaning they only attended a single one-off event, e.g. a corporate or community litter pick.

- 3.20. Walsall drafted a litter charter which businesses were encouraged to sign up to. Through signing up, businesses agreed to a variety of potential actions which could be as simple as putting up posters in windows to discourage customers from littering, storing waste correctly and keeping their premises and surrounding area clean. The programme was launched in 2022 and 75 businesses expressed an interest. A new push on promotion of the charter will take place in 2024.
- 3.21. Working in partnership with others is critical to the success of WCLW. Numerous partner organisations have become community ambassadors of the programme. In 2023, officers have worked closely with several 'Friends of groups, Walsall College, Sainsbury's, TK Maxx, A.F. Blakemore & Sons Ltd, Wiggle Ltd, Barhale Ltd, Poundland, Mossley Big Local, Darlaston All Active, whg - Neighbourhood Services Team and Asda Darlaston.
- 3.22. Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) is a leading independent environmental charity that works to inspire, educate, and enable everyone in this country to value the environment on their doorstep. Working relationships have been developed with KBT and Walsall regularly has representation at its annual conference and takes part in the Great British Spring Clean. Walsall has also taken advantage of support offered by KBT relating to graffiti removal, dealing with smoking litter and chewing gum reduction.

### ***Future proposals***

- 3.23. The WCLW Action Plan 2024 is provided at **Appendix A** of this report. Key work includes:
  - Working with Street Scene Operations to identify and target hotspots.
  - Relaunch the litter charter with local businesses.
  - Developing partnerships, which will include Housing Associations, Walsall Football Club and the Canal and River Trust.
  - Roll out of the newly developed secondary school programme.

### ***Conclusion***

- 3.24. Walsall Community Litter Watch involves educating future generations, and supporting individuals, communities, and businesses to help keep Walsall streets and open spaces clean and free from litter. The volunteering aspect reduces the pressure on council budgets, enabling these limited resources to be used elsewhere.
- 3.25. For the volunteers, the act of volunteering is good for their mental wellbeing, through the achievement of cleaning an area, the feeling of giving back to their

local community and for some, meeting new people with likeminded values. Additionally, it is also excellent for physical health, with many miles being walked.

- 3.26. There are numerous ways in which the public of Walsall support the council, but the act becoming a litter volunteer is one of the most valued by the services and communities it supports.

#### **4. Financial information**

- 4.1. Litter volunteer and business support work is delivered within existing resources, or through the sourcing of external funding.

#### **5. Reducing inequalities**

- 5.1. Any member of the community who can assist as a litter volunteer will be supported to do so. Equipment and training are provided, as is any required ongoing support.

#### **6. Decide**

- 6.1. The committee is asked to note the current focus of the Walsall Community Litter Watch programme identified in the 2024 action plan.

#### **7. Respond**

- 7.1. Any recommendations made by the committee will be considered and added into the work plan if it is achievable within the existing resources.

#### **8. Review**

- 8.1. The future litter volunteering work plan will be monitored by the healthy spaces team managers and updates will be provided to the Street Pride, and Wellbeing Leisure and Public Spaces Portfolio Holders.

#### **9. Background papers**

- 9.1. None

### **Appendices**

#### **Appendix A – WCLW Action Plan 2024**

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