



CIGARETTE-RELATED LITTER

YEAR THREE REPORT
AUGUST 2025



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INTRODUCTION



This report details the third year of an intensive behaviour change programme, led by Keep Britain Tidy, to tackle cigarette butt litter. It demonstrates how the nation's leading anti-litter charity has managed to reduce the country's most littered item by 17%.

Why does cigarette litter matter?

Cigarette butts may appear small and inconsequential, but they are in fact the most littered item in the country, and wreak havoc on the environment. Contrary to common misconceptions, these butts never biodegrade - instead, they slowly break apart into microplastics and seep toxins into the soil and water, damaging whole ecosystems. They are also particularly difficult to pick up, generating additional costs for those responsible for removing them, including local authorities and businesses.

Furthermore, litter attracts litter, and discarded cigarette butts make a place look run-down and uncared-for. But this impact reaches further still, undermining local pride, lessening societal engagement, and reducing economic investment.¹ It is for this reason that this programme of work was undertaken, tackling the issue of cigarette litter in order to protect our environment.

What is Keep Britain Tidy?

Keep Britain Tidy is the country's leading anti-litter and waste charity and has been prompting effective behaviour change since its inception 70 years ago. Government leans on us as experts in the field of litter and waste: we run the National Litter Survey, inform and influence litter and waste policy, carry out research projects for government including revising secondary legislation, and run an All-Party Parliamentary Group.

¹ Keep Britain Tidy, *A Rubbish Reality: Our Litter Problem and Why it Matters*, January 2025

INTRODUCTION

In addition, we mobilise change on the ground by supporting over 560,000 volunteers and managing a large network of public and private land managers, sharing best practice and providing training, toolkits and campaigns to improve environmental management. Our significant network of local authorities gives us the opportunity to run interventions where they are needed most, working hand-in-hand with councils.

What we have achieved

Since 2022, we have been working to change cigarette littering behaviour across the four nations of the United Kingdom. A grant, provided by CleanStreets Community Interest Company, has enabled us to undertake an intensive programme of work aimed at tackling cigarette-related litter. The programme comprises three main areas:

1. An award-winning national behaviour campaign, based on state-of-the-art behavioural research.

2. Practical interventions that help smokers in the moment to dispose of their butts correctly. These include putting the most effective bins into littering hotspots, creating 'smoking zones', and giving smokers Butt Boxes - portable ashtrays so that they never have a reason to litter again.

3. Surveying, using behavioural observations, as well as on-the-ground litter surveys, to provide tangible evidence of the efficacy and impact of the programme of work.

This combination of targeted behaviour change messaging and practical interventions is working. Since the launch of the programme in 2022, we have now **successfully reduced cigarette litter by 17% across the country.**

The following report is a detailed overview of how this reduction has been achieved, and the contributing activities from the third year of this national behaviour change campaign to tackle the country's most prolific item of litter.



Summary of Year Three

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

National media campaign

We ran our national behaviour change campaign across all four nations of the United Kingdom, with an integrated channel mix. 'Duck' has now been seen by 51.86 million people in the UK, which is 97.1% of the population (all adults) and 99.5% of our target audience.

Major events

We ran interventions at six festivals across the UK. The interventions achieved a 20% average reduction in observed littering, and a 699% increase observed portable ashtray use.

Partners

On conclusion of Year Three, the interventions programme has collaborated with more than 180 partners, 45 of whom are local authorities and Business Improvement Districts. This includes partners such as Keep Wales Tidy, and Scotland's Towns Partnership, who have helped pushed the programme across the nations.



Drains

We piloted a new intervention to stop littering down drains, achieving a significant 57% average reduction. To help raise awareness of the issue, we ran a high-profile PR campaign fronted by Johnny Vegas. The campaign received national media coverage, including a 20-minute BBC Breakfast exclusive.

Butt Boxes

We launched a new personal disposal device across the UK, distributing 70,000 with follow-up research demonstrating a 92% continued use rate.

Litter survey

We re-ran our national cigarette litter survey to provide a comparative result against our 2022 baseline, demonstrating the on-the-ground impact of the first two years of this behaviour change work. The results evidence a significant 17% reduction in cigarette litter across the country since 2022.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- 1 Major nationwide anti-littering campaign that serves as the creative platform for future messages - **complete**
- 2 Additional to retained existing partners, new nationwide, regional and local strategic and delivery partnerships across the commercial and public sectors embedded - **complete**
- 3 Presence of the advertising campaign across all four nations - **complete**
- 4 Campaign dedicated to targeted littering behaviour in drains and from vehicles - **complete**
- 5 Pilot launch of portable ashtray communications, establishing a new normal among UK smokers - **complete**
- 6 Survey into smokers' claimed behaviour, attitudinal shift, and educational shift. Target 3% positive shift by end of year. Target 30% advertising recall by end of each campaign - **complete**
- 7 20% reduction in observed littering behaviour in commercial interventions - **complete**
- 8 20% reduction in cigarette litter by 2025 from the baseline survey - **complete**
- 9 A comprehensive funder report, summarising progress, outcomes, income and expenditure - **complete**
- 10 Proposal for the consideration of continued work streams to ensure sustained cultural and behavioural shift resulting in litter reduction - **complete**



TIMINGS

	2024									2025		
	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March
National campaign												
Butt Box distribution												
Major events programme												
Cigarette litter survey												

Year Three full report

NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

Overview

In 2024, the third year of the cigarette-related litter programme, we continued our mission to tackle the most littered item in the UK, cigarette butts. We did this by encouraging everyday smokers (male and female 35+ C2DE)*, UK-wide, to dispose of their cigarette butts responsibly, rather than litter them. There were three behaviours to address:

- **General Awareness:** Highlighting that cigarette butts are rubbish to be binned.
- **Butt Box awareness:** Offering a solution for when bins aren't available.
- **Drains awareness:** challenging the belief that drains are an acceptable alternative to a bin.

The campaign delivered impressive reach and recognition, reaching 99.5% of our target audience, with 40% spontaneous recall. In addition, the programme has won two awards, which is recognition of an effective campaign that is having a measurable impact on our environment.



Background and approach

In Year Three of the programme, we continued to build awareness of the campaign platform Duck, which had launched at the end of Year Two and was already showing promising results.

The distinctive creative delivers the clear and simple message: 'Cigarette Butts are Rubbish'. As we continued the roll out of the campaign into Year Three, we optimised and adapted the creative for new media placements, to reach more of our audience. We used national media to keep the campaign visible and the message in the front of smokers' minds, placing advertisements (ads) in prominent spots across the country.

**C2DE refers to the three lower socio-economic groups in the UK*

NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

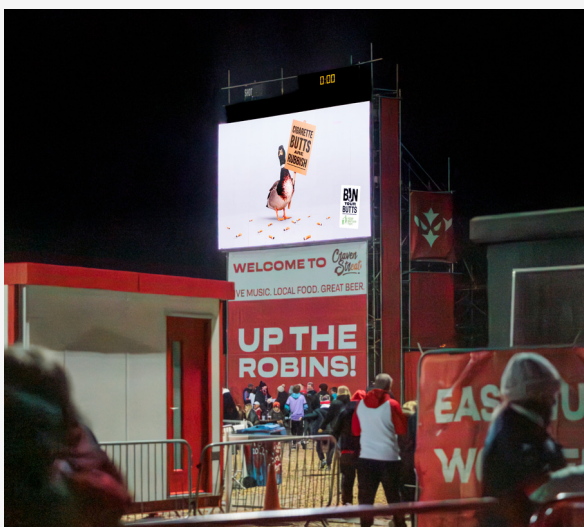
We ran a fully integrated campaign, using a broad mix of channels to both raise awareness, and to prompt behaviour in likely smoking moments. This included:

TV and VOD (Video on Demand) - our video assets maximised our reach across the country, engaging viewers with the full narrative of Duck.

Billboard advertising - this gave us strong visibility and a familiarity with our distinctive creative in environments where people were more likely to notice and remember the message. The activity focused on high-footfall roadside locations that aligned with cigarette litter hotspots identified in the 2022 baseline litter survey, ensuring our message was seen regularly in everyday settings and reinforcing the campaign on the move.

Radio, digital audio, social media and interactive display - research showed that our audience often listened to the radio or played on their phone during smoking moments, e.g. on a break at work. These channels were used to reinforce the key messages in likely littering moments. For our interactive display ads, we built an in-mobile game that asked players to identify 'litter' and 'non-litter' items to reinforce our message.

Outdoor TV - we bought a specific media for mass viewing events, where crowds meet to watch TV together, such as the Euros 2024. This media presented an opportunity for a captive audience to watch our TV commercial during occasions when individuals were more likely to smoke.



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NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

Butt Box awareness

At the onset of the programme, only 2% of UK smokers used a portable ashtray, largely due to two key barriers: the lack of nearby bins and the absence of a suitable container. In response, we launched the Butt Box in 2024, a portable ashtray designed to support responsible cigarette butt disposal when bins aren't available, establishing a new behaviour that was previously non-existent.

We needed to ensure that the Butt Box was closely linked to the General Awareness campaign, because without understanding that cigarette butts are rubbish, there would be no reason to use a portable ashtray. As such, we created a suite of assets utilising the distinctive Duck creative. The retained the playful, humorous tone of the original advert, bringing back the duck and main character in a new, light-hearted stand-off scene to drive attention and engagement.



NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

The media planning focused on channels with longer-form content, such as PR and media partnerships, e.g. The Sun, as well as channels where it was possible to retarget those exposed to the General Awareness messaging, such as VOD and social media.

All media directed smokers to our Shopify page, where they could request up to three Butt Boxes at a time. To better understand which advertising channels were driving requests, we included a mandatory questionnaire: "Where did you hear about the Butt Box?". This simple step gave us clear data on which communications were driving requests, allowing us to identify high-performing channels and optimise our outreach strategy by refining our messaging in real time.

Follow-up emails were sent two to four weeks after delivery, gathering valuable feedback as to whether the Butt Boxes were still being used, helping us understand if they were driving sustained behaviour change.

In addition to online distribution, we used our partnerships to give Butt Boxes directly to smokers in relevant, real-life moments, to shift perception and build everyday usage. This was done through the partnerships with our six major events providers, as well as partnerships with more than 100 sports clubs.

CIGARETTE BUTTS ARE RUBBISH





Butt Box

Free + €3.99 Postage and Packaging

The Butt Box is an easy, responsible way to dispose of your butts and tackle the UK's most littered item: cigarette butts.

Compact enough to fit in your pocket or bag, this personal ashtray with a lid helps you keep your cigarette butts off the ground when you're out and about and can't find a bin.

Keep Britain Tidy is giving away Butt Boxes as part of a research trial to help reduce cigarette litter across the country.

To order one you just need to cover postage and packaging.

[Add to cart](#)

[Order Now](#)

[Share](#)

[View full details](#)

How to use your Butt Box



Step 1.
Stub out your cigarette in the stub hole.



Step 2.
Drop the butt into the main compartment and close tightly.



Step 3.
Once full (5-7 butts), open from the bottom, tap to empty the butts into a general waste bin.



Step 4.
Reuse again and again.

NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

Drains awareness

The General Awareness campaign educates our audience that cigarette butts are litter and shouldn't be dropped, however due to a misconception that putting a cigarette butt down the drain is in fact a responsible disposal method, there was a risk that our main campaign message may increase littering down drains. To bust this myth, we launched a focused PR campaign to shift attitudes and change the narrative.

Research revealed that littering into drains was a behaviour especially common outside pubs and hospitality venues, so we brought the issue to life by rebranding a London pub, The White Swan, as The Poisoned Swan, highlighting the environmental harm of cigarette litter in a setting that felt familiar, relevant and visible to our audience. Inside and out, the pub featured creative prompts including signage, beer mats and drain stencils, making the message unmissable.



The White Swan Pub Landlord Kevin Duncanson and Keep Britain Tidy CEO, Allison Ogden-Newton

NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

To help this PR idea gain traction, we approached Johnny Vegas, a former smoker who once received a fine for littering a cigarette down a drain, having believed this was responsible behaviour. Disgruntled at being 'incorrectly fined', Vegas launched into a public debate with Doncaster Council, which educated Johnny around his incorrect assumption.

The authenticity of the story, in addition to Vegas's fame and reach, helped us gain significant traction. We secured 13 pieces of broadcast coverage (BBC Breakfast, BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC London News TV, BBC Radio Manchester), as well as 34 pieces of online and print coverage (BBC Online, Daily Express, Daily Mirror, London Post, Wales Online, Yorkshire Post).



NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

Timings

General Awareness relaunched on 3 June with several bursts of activity between spring and autumn 2024. October and January saw activity paused, giving space to smoking cessation moments as a priority.

The Butt Box awareness campaign launched on 24 June 2024, giving time for General Awareness to be established, and was live across several channels until the end of September 2024.

Drains PR went live on November 4th, to help spread activity and key messages throughout the year.



Outputs

- A national advertising campaign delivered across all four nations, through a strategic multichannel approach.
- National PR coverage, including a prominent 20-minute exclusive on BBC Breakfast, during which time more than 2,0000 Butt Boxes were requested from Keep Britain Tidy.
- A national print partnership with News UK, delivering 20 placements.
- A partnership with the UK's leading construction radio channel Fix Radio reaching tradespeople, who are more likely to smoke.
- A quarterly performance tracker evidencing continued positive shifts in claimed behaviour and attitudes among smokers, reinforcing the campaign's effectiveness.
- A successful strategy for the launch of the Butt Box - with continual optimisation of media, based off reactive data.
- New creative assets to support our additional messaging, Box Your Butt, providing a solution for smokers when there is no bin nearby.

NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

Results

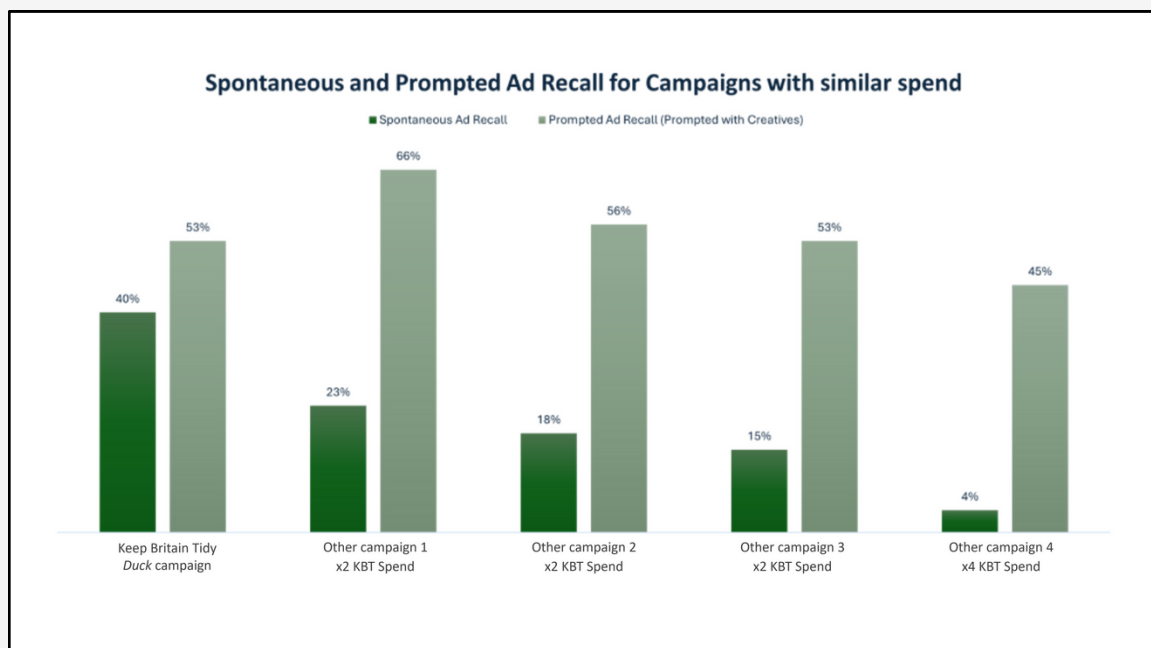
Since 2022, we've used insights from behavioural research to design a strong creative strategy and explore new ways to reduce cigarette littering among smokers. There are several ways we can measure the positive impact of this approach.

Reach

The campaign drove strong visibility and long-term impact among our target audience. Duck has now been seen by 51.86 million people in the UK, which is 97.1% of the population (all adults) and 99.5% of our target audience.

Memorability

Unprompted and prompted recall figures have reached their highest point yet at 40% and 56% respectively, demonstrating the long-term memorability of the Duck campaign. When our unprompted/spontaneous recall figure is compared with other brands with twice, or even four times the spend of our campaign, it shows how effective and memorable the Duck creative is. Given our campaign has now been seen by 99.5% of our target audience, this would suggest more than half of smokers in the UK would remember our advertising.



NATIONAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGN

Behaviour change

At the onset of this programme, claimed cigarette littering behaviour sat at 35%. Upon conclusion of Year Three, claimed behaviour is now 22%, evidencing that claimed littering behaviour has seen a 37% reduction.

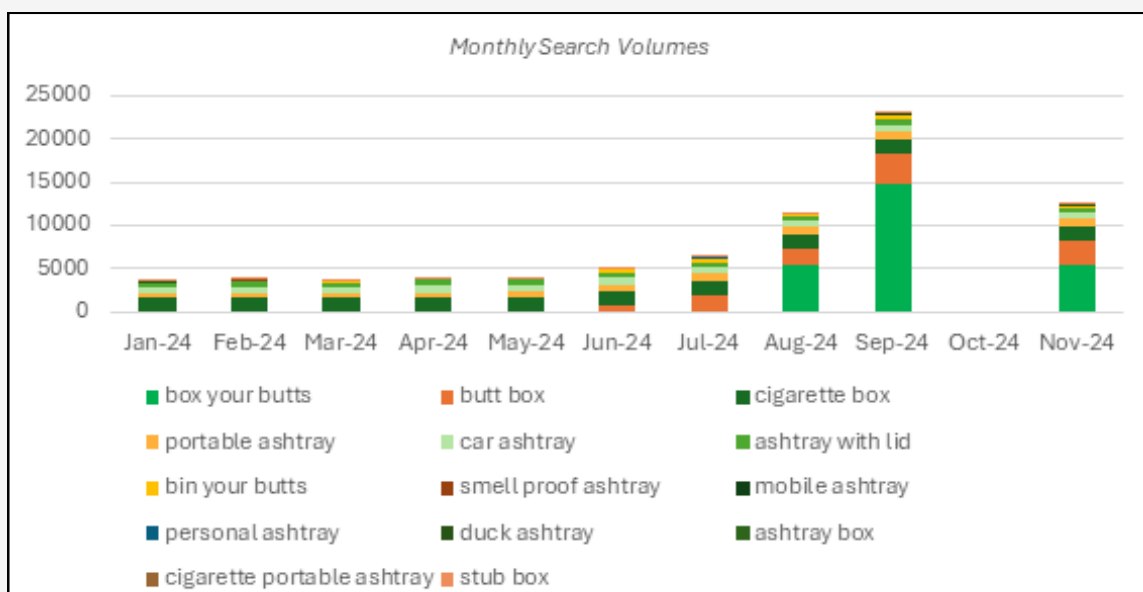
In addition, our research suggests that 80% of those who recalled the campaign took some form of action, 60% made a behaviour change, and a third of smokers who saw the ads have made a conscious effort to dispose of their cigarette butts correctly.

Drains

Post-campaign research showed a significant drop in smokers agreeing that it is acceptable to dispose of cigarette butts down drains (from 32% to 20%). Litter monitoring also confirmed a 57% drop in cigarette butts found in drains.

Butt Box

The campaign didn't just raise awareness for the Butt Box, it also established a new paradigm of responsible cigarette litter disposal. Keyword search volumes for portable ashtrays rose sharply between January and November 2024, with a clear spike following the launch of the Box Your Butts campaign in late June.



INTERVENTIONS

BUTT BOXES

Overview

As the national behaviour change campaign began to embed the message that Cigarette Butts are Rubbish across the country, it was important to address one of the key barriers that smokers still face - lack of a suitable container for their butts in the absence of a bin.

Cigarette butts are unlike other forms of litter - they can catch fire, and they smell. This means that they cannot be held on to or put in a pocket until a suitable bin is found. As with the mass adoption of 'dog poo bags' among dog owners in the UK, Keep Britain Tidy was keen to establish a similar pre-preparedness in smokers to ensure they carry a suitable container with them for responsible disposal in the absence of a bin.



INTERVENTIONS

BUTT BOXES

Approach

After two years of campaigning to embed the message Cigarette Butts are Rubbish into the public consciousness, our research highlighted that the primary barriers to correct disposal reported by smokers had shifted.

While 'not enough bins' had always been heavily cited, 'not having an appropriate container' was a new response that had grown to one of the primary barriers to correct disposal reported by smokers at the beginning of Year Three.

At the onset of the programme in 2022, research suggested that only 2% of smokers were using a portable ashtray however, this recent shift in self-reported barriers showed that our smoking audience were beginning to take personal responsibility for their rubbish. In response, we launched the Butt Box - a pocket sized, smell-proof, fire resistant portable ashtray, designed to hold 7 to 10 cigarette butts.

Our research showed that a major reason for low usage of portable ashtrays across the UK - is that so many of them were not fit for purpose: they leaked, were too heavy, had a short life span, or were aesthetically off-putting for smokers. Testing showed that the Butt Box overcame all of these barriers.

As an environmental charity, it was important that the Butt Box, unlike so many other portable ashtrays, did not contribute to single-use plastic waste. It is robustly reusable and made from recycled materials that are also recyclable at the end of its life. Partnering with the manufacturer Take Tray, Keep Britain Tidy branded it the Butt Box.

This branding was backed by our research, which suggested that connotations associated with words like 'ash' and 'ashtray' can stir feelings of disgust in smokers, while using the word 'box', reinforces its compact nature and its ability to seal the contents neatly and securely.

INTERVENTIONS

BUTT BOXES

The Butt Box is:

Handy

Lies comfortably in the hand, ideal size for pocket.

Sustainable

Durable, made from recycled material and can itself be recycled.

Odour-proof

No unpleasant odours come out.

Leak-proof

Safety lock prevents unintentional opening.

Optimum volume

Not too small, but not too big for daily use.



INTERVENTIONS

BUTT BOXES

Our distribution approach aimed to make portable ashtrays available at multiple touchpoints, ensuring smokers could easily access and integrate it into their existing habits. We positioned the Butt Box as the go-to option for smokers in moments where proper disposal was needed.

This included:

- An online distribution platform
- A Butt Box awareness campaign (detailed in pages 13-14)
- A PR campaign (detailed in pages 15-16)
- Activations at 6 major festivals and events
- Partnerships with more than 100 sports clubs
- Distribution in select pubs

At each distribution point, we gathered research data to ensure we could follow up to see whether the Butt Boxes had managed to achieve sustained behaviour change and continued use.

Timings

The Butt Box launched on 21 June 2024 and was promoted through several bursts of activity up until the end of the year. Activity was paused in October to prioritise Stoptober messaging.

Outputs

- Creation of an online distribution platform.
- Distribution at six major festivals and events across the UK.
- Partnerships with 100 sports clubs to widen reach.
- A Butt Box awareness media campaign, across all four nations.
- Continual optimisation of media, through use of agile performance learnings.

INTERVENTIONS

BUTT BOXES

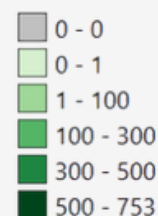
Results

The 2024 Butt Box programme was a huge success: we distributed 70,000 units across all four nations within the UK, from cities to remote rural locations. Thirty-three percent of smokers now say they have ordered a portable ashtray, 15% specifically requested a Butt Box from Keep Britain Tidy, and a further 10% had searched for one online.

Online distribution volumes were highest in areas with greater deprivation, showing that the campaign connected with a broad cross-section of smokers and confirming the strength of our targeting strategy.

Follow-up surveys conducted two to four weeks after distribution showed that 92% of users were likely or very likely to continue using their Butt Box. Behaviour change models emphasise that the first month of a new behaviour are critical for sustained habit formation, indicating that the Butt Box is driving meaningful, habit-forming behaviour change.

While it is not possible to extrapolate how many cigarettes these 70,000 Butt Boxes will have prevented from being littered, the scale of distribution combined with strong user retention suggests a substantial contribution to reducing cigarette-related litter nationwide.



INTERVENTIONS

FESTIVALS

Overview

Following successful interventions with strong results in Years One and Two, we decided to evaluate the impact of our full range of interventions rolled out at scale during Year Three, at major events and festivals.

The interventions served two purposes: they enabled us to have significant impact on smokers' littering behaviour by running interventions during occasions with increased smoking and littering rates, and increased our reach with a large captive audience.

We partnered with six major festivals and events across the country, improving binrastructure, educating with targeted messaging, and distributing Butt Boxes.



INTERVENTIONS

FESTIVALS

Approach

Festivals tend to have high concentrations of smokers and face significant environmental challenges, specifically annual pressure from the media for the quantities of waste that they generate. As a result, many have developed 'leave no trace' policies. Cigarette butts are one of their top three littered items, yet they are commonly omitted from these policies. Adding to the challenge, festivals are frequently held on grass, making cigarette removal by clean-up crews and litter pickers even more difficult, creating tension with land managers.

This laid the way for a clear pitch from Keep Britain Tidy, and we found partners eager to get on board.

Our research also revealed a key behavioural insight: smokers in crowds at festivals are reluctant to leave their friends to find a bin, leading to very high littering rates for cigarette butts, with 5.5 million cigarette butts estimated to have been dropped at the UK's top 30 festivals alone during the summer of 2024. This made our Butt Box the perfect solution.

To target this issue, we worked with six major festivals across the UK. We ran a media campaign using our iconic duck on bins, digital screens, posters, Butt Boxes, and social media. Furthermore, dedicated smoking bins were strategically placed in high-traffic areas. All sites were monitored both before and after the intervention to understand its impact on observed littering behaviour and portable ashtray use. We also interviewed smokers to gather valuable qualitative insights into their behaviours and perceptions.



INTERVENTIONS

FESTIVALS

Timings

- Pride Cymru: June 2024
- British Summer Time festival: June – July 2024
- The Clipper Race Homecoming: July 2024
- Kendal Calling: July 2024
- Boomtown: August 2024
- Green Man: August 2024

Outputs

- Six major festival partners secured, across the UK.
- Development of bespoke creative toolkits for festivals and events.
- Tailored intervention packages for different event types, sizes, locations and partners.
- Utilisation of data and insights to improve Butt Box distribution and bin usage based on performance learnings.
- Specific PR event focused on reducing cigarette litter at festivals.
- Research report for each festival, averaging a 20% reduction in cigarette litter.



INTERVENTIONS

FESTIVALS

Results

The Year Three festival strand of activity was highly ambitious, as it combined all areas of the programme's activity for the first time. The interventions were a huge success, and led to an average 20% reduction in the observed rate of cigarette littering across three festivals in England and Scotland, where baseline data was available for comparison.

The intervention's effectiveness varied, people littering when alone demonstrated a more significant change, with a 29% reduction in littering during the intervention, compared to 13% in groups of two or three. This echoes the behavioural insights we have gained from our campaign: people are more concerned with social perception when alone, and seek to actively avoid being seen as litterers.



However, when part of a group an individual's behaviour is more heavily influenced by the group's prevailing norms and actions, which has the potential to dilute the personal desire to avoid littering.

Demographic factors also influenced the intervention's impact. Littering by women decreased by 21%, compared to 17% by men. Age also played a role, with older age groups (45-54 years) exhibiting a 27% reduction in littering, compared to a 24% reduction in those aged 25-44.

Portable ashtray use observed an average 699% increased use at the festivals. The Butt Boxes were well received by smokers, who reported they were convenient and easy to use. After three weeks, 84% of those who received a Butt Box at a festival or major event said they would be very likely to keep using it from now on.

Finally, smokers' satisfaction with the availability of bins improved following the interventions. At baseline, 55% of smokers reported that they had somewhere to bin their butts at the festival, compared to 81% at the endline. These results are compelling evidence that combined interventions can be effective in mitigating cigarette litter at large-scale events, where they are needed most.

INTERVENTIONS

DRAINS

Overview

Cigarette butts are frequently dropped into drain gullies by smokers who wrongly assume that drains are part of the waste system. Our research showed that almost half (47%) of smokers believed that cigarettes littered into drains don't go anywhere else.² As a result, cigarette butts account for 57% of all littered items found in drains.³

Approach

This pilot intervention set out to disrupt that behaviour, testing whether clear visual messaging and better disposal options could change these habits in the real world. Alongside reviewing our behavioural insights, we also had to work closely with local authorities to understand the practicalities around any intervention, including durability, trip hazards, adaptations for varying drain cover types etc.

The campaign was trialled across two phases and six local authority areas, with intensive monitoring at three sites. The intervention combined drain stencils and eye-level posters designed to disrupt behaviour at the point of disposal. This was combined with strategically placed Bucket Bins designed to provide an easy-to-use, visible and immediately accessible alternative to littering into the drains.



² Keep Britain Tidy (2023) Smokers' research

³ Keep Britain Tidy (2023) Drains Research

INTERVENTIONS

DRAINS

Timings

- Phase One: Aug-Sept 2024
- Phase Two: Nov-Dec 2024
- Final reporting: April 2025

Outputs

- Six local authority partners secured to run the pilot intervention.
- Creation of tailored creative, drawing on behavioural insight to reduce littering around drains.
- Partnership with Anglia Ruskin University for research and analysis of cigarette litter in drains.
- Piloting of materials at a variety of different types of sites to assess impact, including night-time economy and construction sites.
- Bespoke research insights gathered, based on both behavioural observations and in-drain monitoring.



INTERVENTIONS

DRAINS

Results

This pilot project showed that with the right combination of cues and convenience, even deeply embedded behaviours like drain disposal can shift. Across all monitored sites, the amount of cigarette litter found in drains fell by an average of 57% post-intervention. Where used, Bucket Bins accounted for 39% of all cigarette disposals post-intervention.

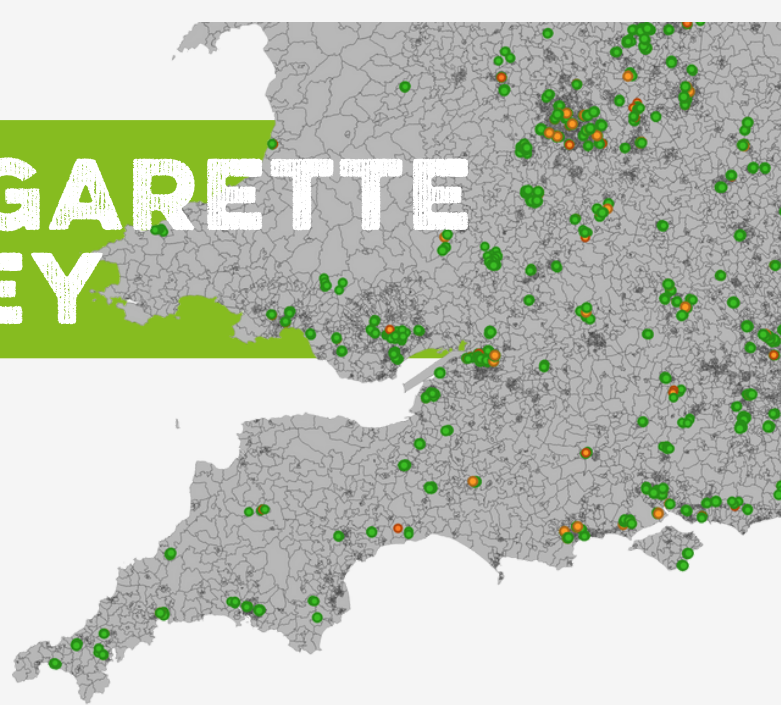
Feedback from our local authority partners highlighted strong support for the intervention's messaging and delivery. Partners expressed enthusiasm for wider rollout and emphasised the value of working in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy.

"WE WOULD RECOMMEND THIS INTERVENTION TO ANY OTHER COUNCIL. IT'S A NO BRAINER! IT'S FUN, IT'S EDUCATIONAL AND IT CLEANS THE STREETS!"

"IT'S ALWAYS A PLEASURE WORKING WITH KEEP BRITAIN TIDY. THIS PARTNERSHIP ADDS WEIGHT TO OUR WORK AND SHOWS THAT WE'RE NOT JUST TACKLING AN ISSUE BUT REALLY UNDERSTANDING ITS CAUSES."

"THIS BEING A KEEP BRITAIN TIDY INTERVENTION ADDS LEGITIMACY TO THE PROJECTS AND WHAT WE'RE DOING. IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO APPROACH A PROBLEM FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES AND WITH A WIDE RANGE OF INTERVENTIONS. RESULTS COMING FROM THIS PARTNERSHIP HAVE MORE VALIDITY THAN SOMETHING WE COULD HAVE COME UP WITH ON OUR OWN."

NATIONAL CIGARETTE LITTER SURVEY



Overview

Since the onset of the cigarette-related litter programme in 2022, our national campaign and interventions have set out to change smokers' littering behaviour and reduce cigarette butts on the ground.

Our National Cigarette Litter Survey is designed to capture a nationally representative snapshot of the scale and pattern of cigarette litter on the ground through real-world data.

Method

The baseline National Cigarette Litter Survey was conducted across the UK in the summer of 2022 and repeated in the summer of 2024. Each wave covered over 500 areas nationwide, with 12-15 survey sites per area.

Timings

- Summer 2022 - baseline survey
- Summer 2024 - follow-up survey
- January 2025 - results published

Results

Between 2022 and 2024, **cigarette butt litter on public land fell by 17%.**

While over the same period, smoking rates have also fallen by 6.25% overall,⁴ 41% of local authorities state that budget cuts have negatively impacted their cleansing in the past two years.⁵ This means that fewer cigarette butts may be being littered, but fewer are also being picked up.

To have achieved a 17% reduction in this context is a huge achievement and provides strong evidence that the national behaviour change campaign is working. This is reinforced by the fact that the greatest reduction aligns with our campaign audience: C2DE adults, who are 'out and about'.

To find out more information on our National Cigarette Litter Survey, please see the full report published on our website.

⁴Adult Smoking Rates in the UK: Office for National Statistics

⁵ Keep Britain Tidy Local Authority Research November 2024

Year Three conclusion

CONCLUSION



On conclusion of Year Three of the Cigarette-Related Litter programme, Keep Britain Tidy is greatly encouraged by the promising results evidenced in this report - most notably, that cigarette litter has reduced by 17% across the country since 2022.

Cigarette litter is prevalent and pernicious, but change is feasible - in Keep Britain Tidy's litter survey⁶, cigarette litter remains the most prevalent litter type in our nation. It is also pernicious, leaching harmful chemicals into our soils and waterways, and taking up to 14 years to break apart into microplastics. However, after the third year of funding, this programme is able to evidence a significant shift in behaviours and, most importantly, a significant reduction in cigarette butts on the ground.

Our national behaviour change campaign is working - our behaviour change communications have been focused on people who smoke when 'out and about' - in the lower economic groups. Our smoker audience tends to work in manual jobs and to live in the more deprived areas of the country. Our survey shows that all of these areas had the greatest reduction in cigarette litter over the past two years.



⁶ Keep Britain Tidy, *A Rubbish Reality: Our Litter Problem and Why it Matters*, January 2025

CONCLUSION

- **Prevention is better than clean up** - stopping smokers littering in the first place is the best way to keep our streets clear of litter - and it is much more cost effective than cleaning up what has already been dropped. Despite the great efforts of local authorities and volunteers cleaning up their communities, we are working in an era of reduced resources - 41% of local authorities state that budget cuts have negatively impacted their cleansing in the past two years⁷. The promising results from our interventions evidence that significant impact can be made even through simple interventions, which are far less resource intensive than clean up.
- **Partners are a vital part of the solution** - our partners, from across the public, private and voluntary sectors, from all four nations, are a key part of the approach. Working with partners enables us to tackle problem areas during known smoking occasions, amplifying the campaign and providing practical solutions. This report gives us valuable insight into persistent problem areas, and the types of partners that will be valuable in addressing them.
- **An integrated approach is needed** - consistent messaging, combined with physical solutions, at just the right point of cigarette butt disposal, are vital to enable people to change their behaviour. The results of this survey show that when properly implemented, integrated behaviour change campaigns can have significant impact.



⁷ Keep Britain Tidy Local Authority Research November 2024

Year Four key developments

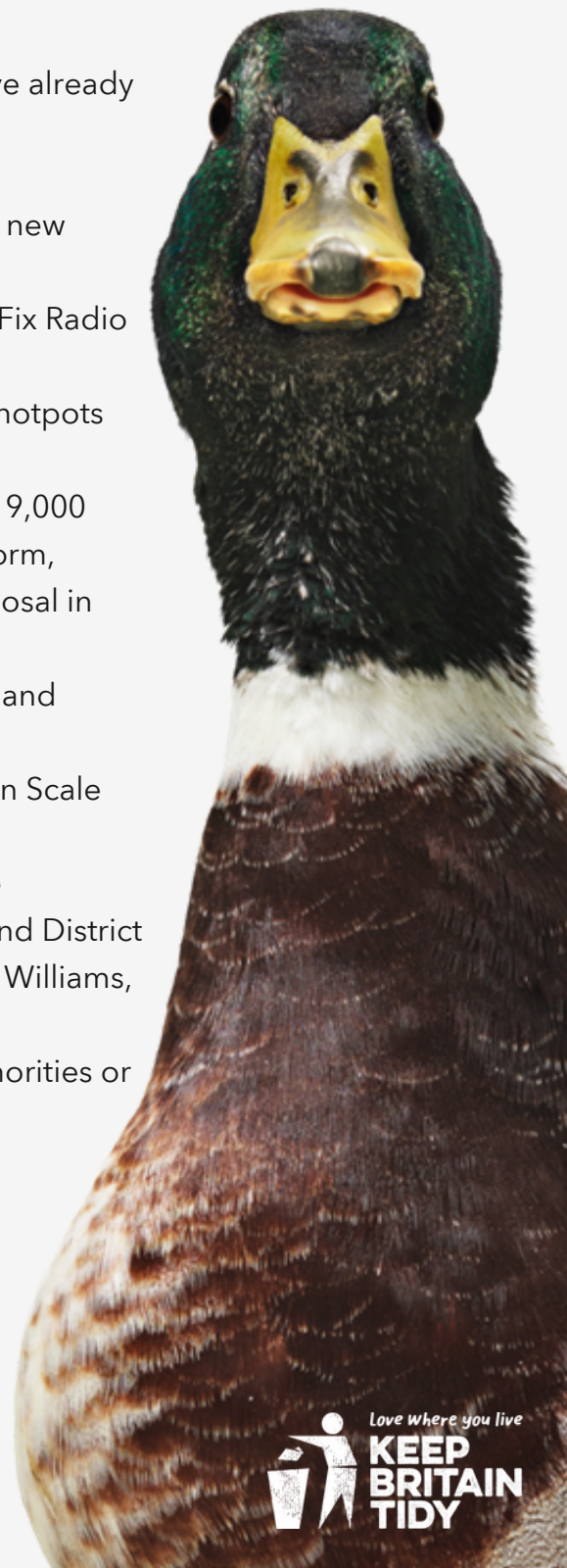
YEAR FOUR

The Cigarette-Related Litter programme was successfully awarded a fourth year of funding, which commenced in April 2025. Year Four is currently underway and continuing to build on the success of the 17% reduction in cigarette butts on the ground, evolving and scaling the work to date.

Activity began in June 2025 and the following deliverables have already been achieved:

- National behaviour change advertising campaign live, with new optimised assets.
- Media partnerships secured with News UK, TalkSport, and Fix Radio to extend reach through trusted voices.
- New data-driven media plan, upweighted against littering hotspots from the national cigarette litter survey.
- In the first month of this year's Butt Box programme, nearly 9,000 Butt Boxes were requested via the online distribution platform, demonstrating our success in normalising responsible disposal in absence of a bin.
- Five major events and festivals secured, with toolkits ready and being deployed to delivery partners across the nations.
- Successful confirmation and enactment of three major Town Scale Partnerships with three new local authorities.
- Regional and national PR coverage of Spalding Town Scale Partnership, celebrating the collaboration with South Holland District Council and working with local celebrity darts player, Scott Williams, to maximise campaign impact.
- Partner count now stands at 285, of whom 68 are local authorities or Business Improvement Districts.

The Year Four KPIs are currently all on track to be achieved by the end of the current grant funding year, on conclusion of which a full report will be published. In the interim, all results suggest that the programme is continuing to have an impact on cigarette litter reduction and, most importantly, protecting our environment.



Keep Britain Tidy, the nation's leading anti-litter charity.
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