





NATIONAL SURVEY OF CIGARETTE LITTER

2022 - 2024

January 2025

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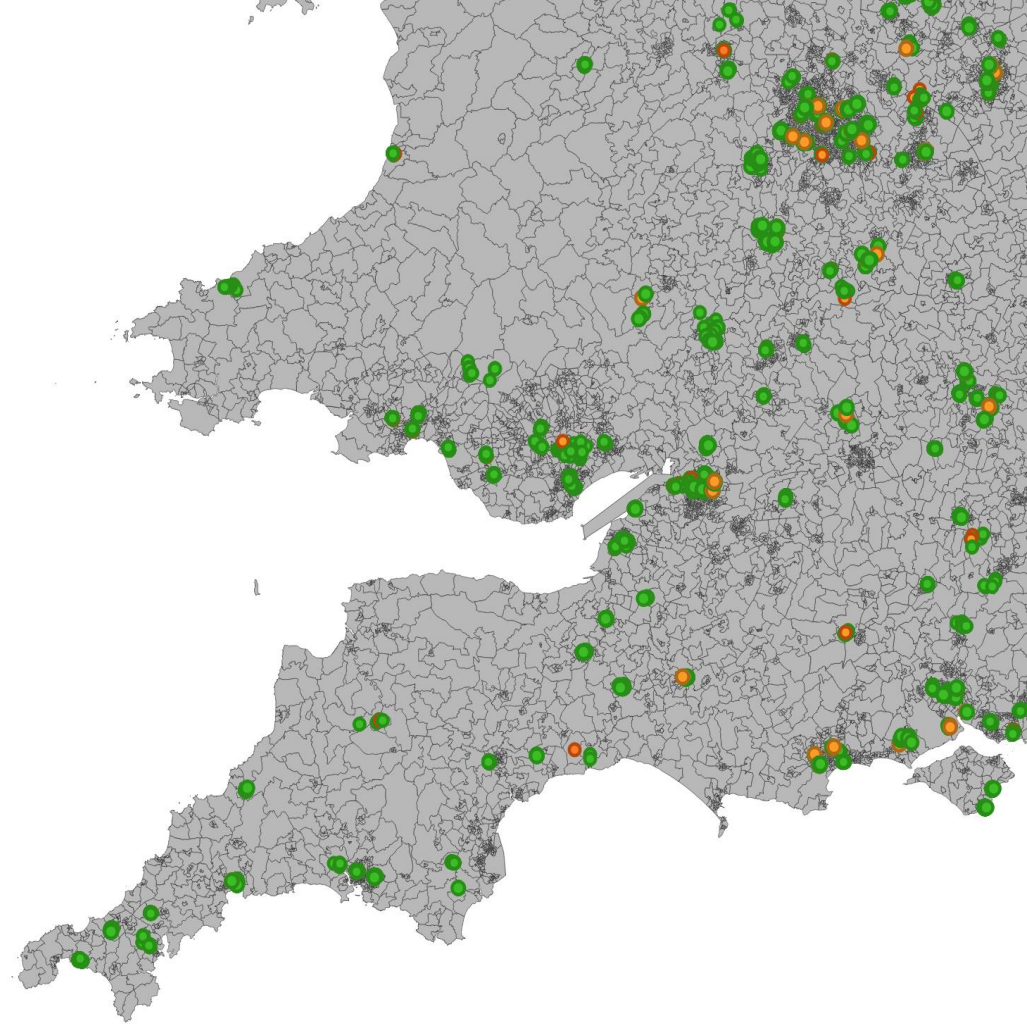
INTRODUCTION

Cigarette butts are the most common littered item in the UK, and one of the most littered items of single-use plastic globally. As leading experts in litter and waste, Keep Britain Tidy has taken on a specific mission to tackle the blight of cigarette litter, which bears a heavy cost on nature, society, the economy, and our public services.

Our work is focused on people who smoke regularly who are out and about. They tend to be in the lower three economic groups, male and aged over 35. Since November 2022, we have been running a multifaceted behaviour change campaign with targeted creative. In addition, we have established a set of practical behaviour change interventions with local authorities, businesses and festivals. In summer 2024 we distributed portable ashtrays across the country. This combination of messaging and practical interventions has been developed to ensure that smokers not only do not want to litter, but they also have physical solutions to stop them from doing so.

The following report details the findings of our national cigarette litter survey, developed to track the effectiveness of our programme. We commissioned Litterati, a specialist research agency, to collect the first dataset in the summer of 2022, over three months before any work was put out. The survey was repeated at the same time in 2024. It captures a snapshot of litter on the ground within the constant cycle of it being dropped and cleaned up.

This report focuses on the results of the surveys of England, where the full measure of our campaign and intervention programme has been running consistently since November 2022.



CAMPAIGN AND MEDIA



What a drag... Jason Alexander picks up cigarette butts in his hometown

Every year, over **4.5 trillion** cigarette butts are littered worldwide

Follow Jason @rubbishwalks

Jason is now a lorry driver. He's also a keen environmentalist and, in his spare time, he's a keen collector of cigarette butts. He's also a keen collector of cigarette butts. He's also a keen collector of cigarette butts.

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BOX IT BIN IT

Don't find a bin? Then use a Butt Bin to keep your litter off the ground. Stick out your butt, drop it inside and empty it out when you next pass a bin. The box is reusable, small, pre-set and colored with a duck nose.

Order yours - search for your butt or go to keepitclean.org.uk/buttbin



CIGARETTE BUTTS ARE RUBBISH



If you smoke, bin your butt



RESEARCH AND INTERVENTIONS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since November 2022 Keep Britain Tidy has been running a national behaviour change campaign underpinned by a series of behaviour change interventions aimed at stopping smokers littering their cigarette butts. To measure impact on the ground we ran a national cigarette litter survey in the summer of 2022 and again in the summer of 2024. The results are detailed in this report.

Overall:

CIGARETTE LITTER HAS REDUCED BY 17% ACROSS PRIMARILY PUBLIC LAND

In detail:

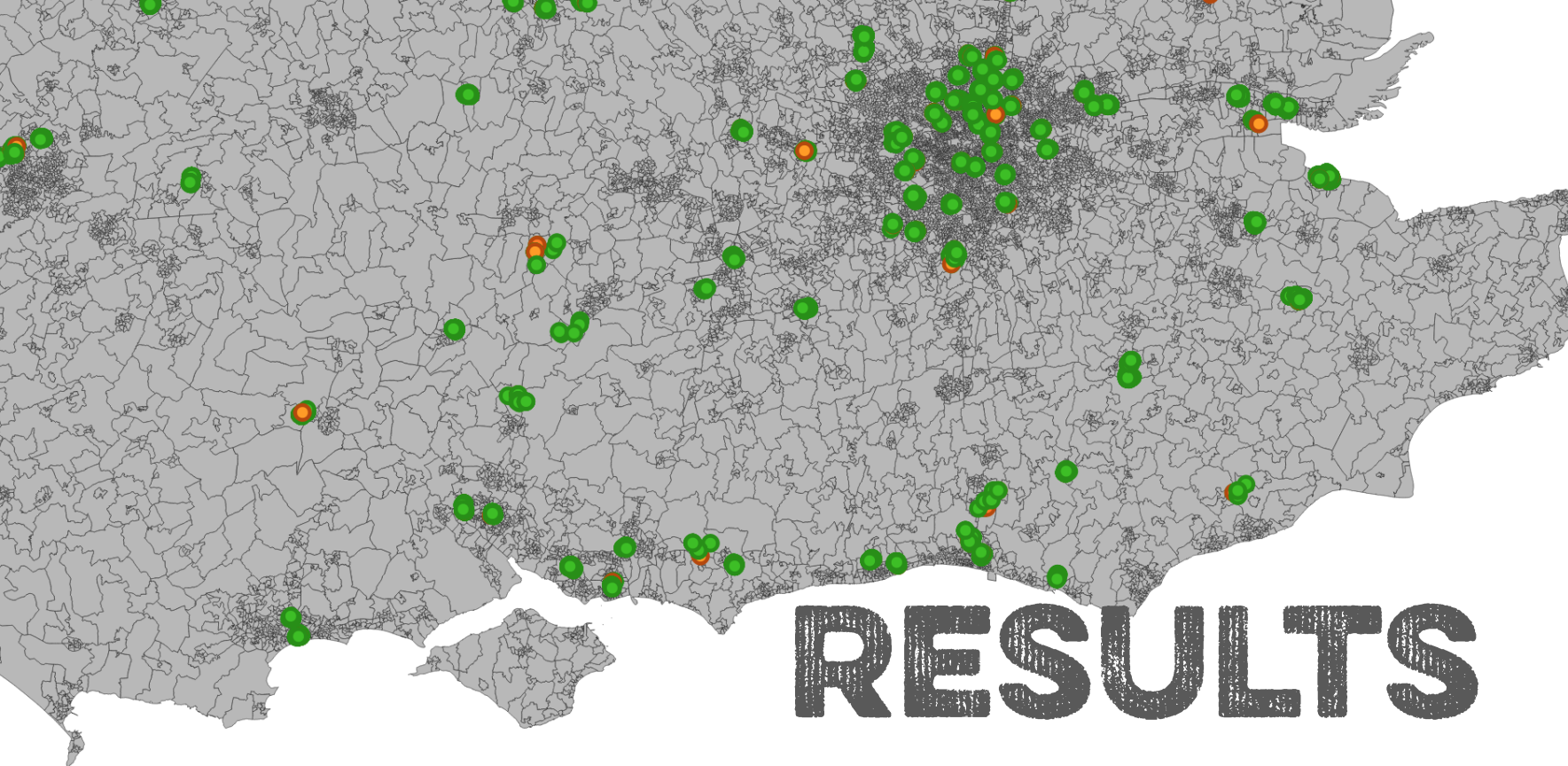
- There has been a fantastic reduction in cigarette butt litter in the areas where most people are, most of the time: around shops, houses and along roads.
- Over the same period, 41% of local authorities told us that budget cuts have negatively impacted their cleansing in the past two years*. The litter reduction in context of these cuts further evidences the efficacy of this campaign.
- The areas that were previously the most littered demonstrate the most significant improvements.
- The campaign has successfully targeted its core audience (smokers, C2DE). The greatest reductions in cigarette litter were achieved in the lower quintiles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and in the areas of the country with some of the highest numbers of smokers.

* Keep Britain Tidy Local Authority Research November 2024

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- Each survey identified a stratified selection of small area units (SAUs) (248 in 2022 and 251 in 2024), designed to provide a nationally and regionally representative sample based on population distribution, deprivation and urban-rural split.
- The researchers, using the Litterati app on their smartphones, collected data at 12-15 spatially balanced locations per SAU.
- Litterati verified and analysed this data, using their bespoke AI platform to calculate a snapshot of the cigarette litter across the nation during the survey period and its relationship with people and places. The measurement used was cigarette butt litter per metre.
- To ensure a robust comparison between the two sets of data, we:
 - Used the latest AI image recognition models and annotation processes to update the 2022 data alongside the 2024 data.
 - Applied a simple weighting method to the 2024 data to bring it in line with the profile of landuse types found in the 2022 sample.





CIGARETTE BUTT LITTER ENGLAND 2022 - 2024

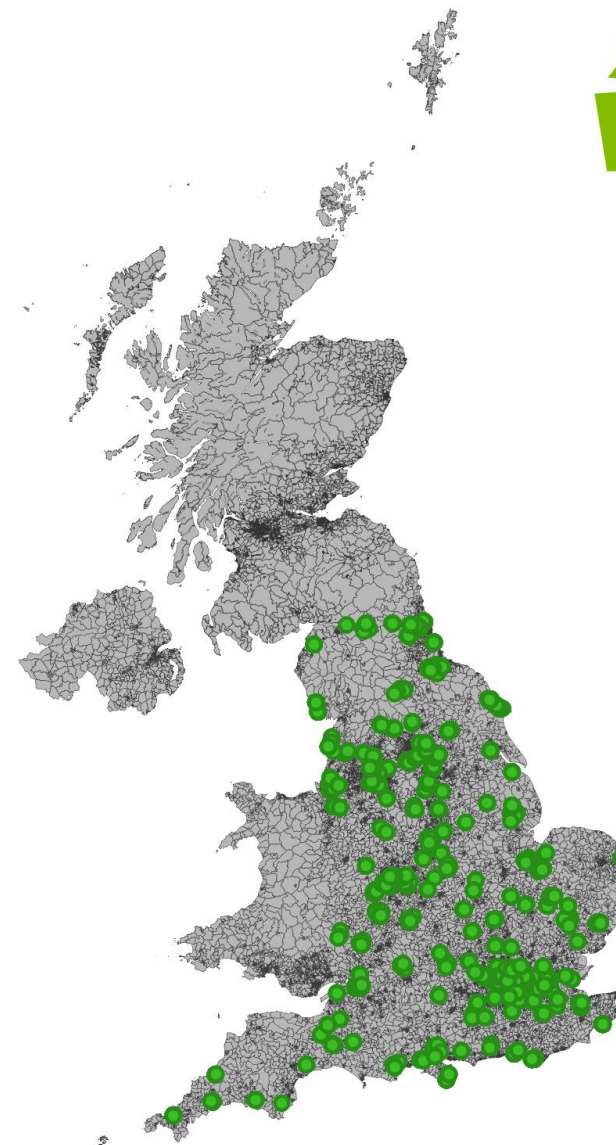


PRIMARILY PUBLIC LAND

2022: 0.103 items per metre.

2024: 0.086 items per metre.

-17%

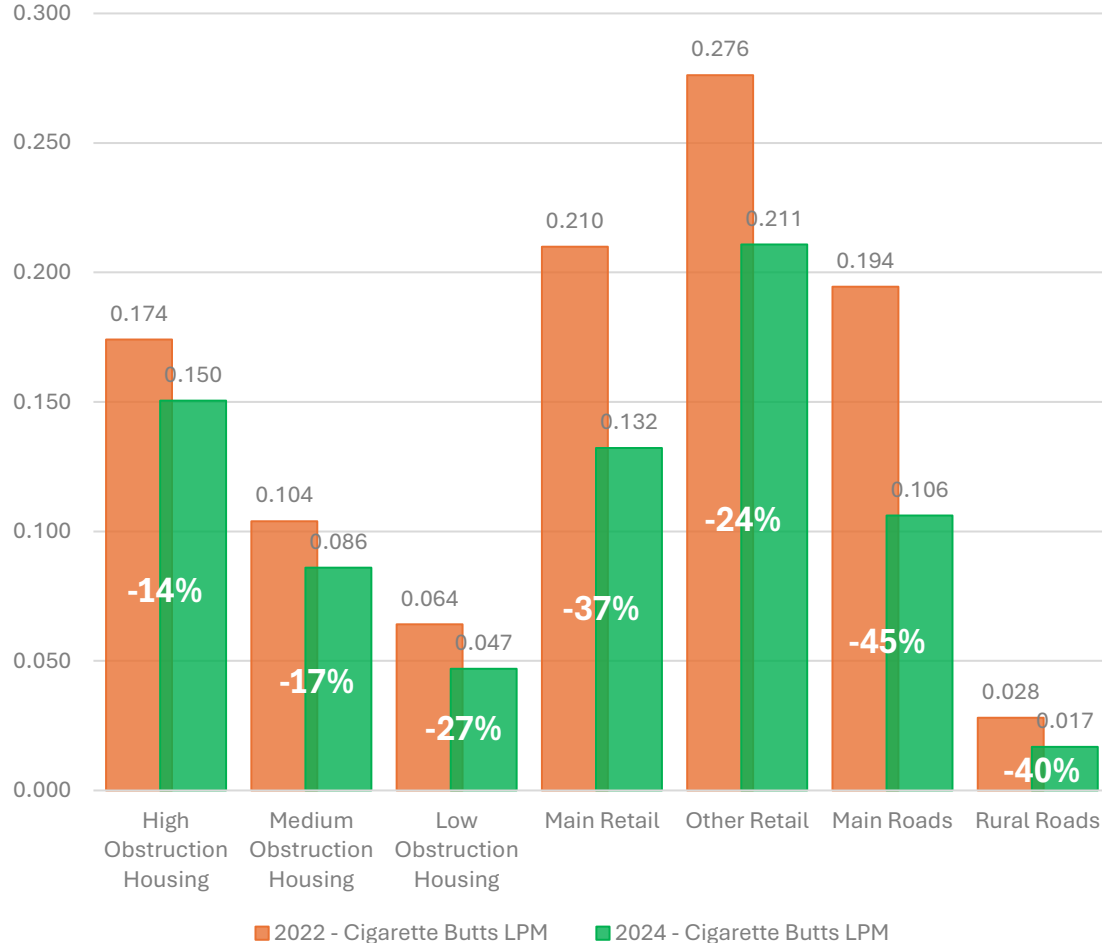


Between 2022 and 2024, cigarette butt litter reduced by **17%** across all primarily public land in England.

CIGARETTE BUTT LITTER ON PRIMARILY PUBLIC LAND



Cigarette Butt Litter per Metre by Land Use



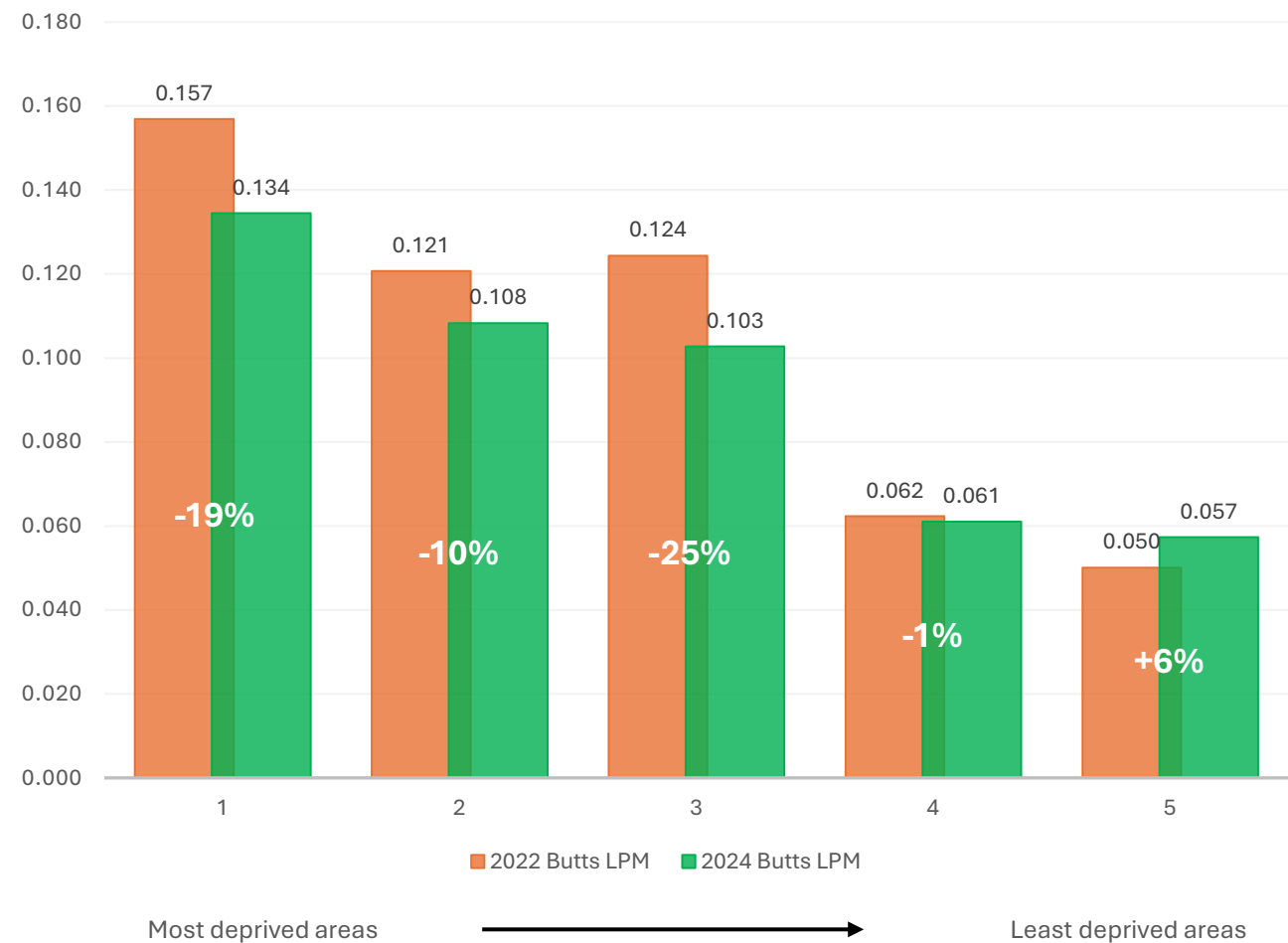
- There has been a fantastic reduction in cigarette butt litter in the places where most people are, most of the time.
- Cigarette butt litter on the ground has decreased most along our roads (-45% along main roads and -40% along rural roads*), and a 37% reduction in our town centres.
- We also see a strong 24% reduction in cigarette butts on the ground in local shopping areas, which had the highest levels of cigarette litter in 2022.
- All housing areas also experienced a reduction in this litter type, with the greatest reduction in detached housing (27%).

*This survey did not include motorways or trunk roads, or any other roads within the strategic road network for reasons of safety and accessibility

CIGARETTE BUTT LITTER AND DEPRIVATION



Cigarette Butt Litter per Metre by Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintiles

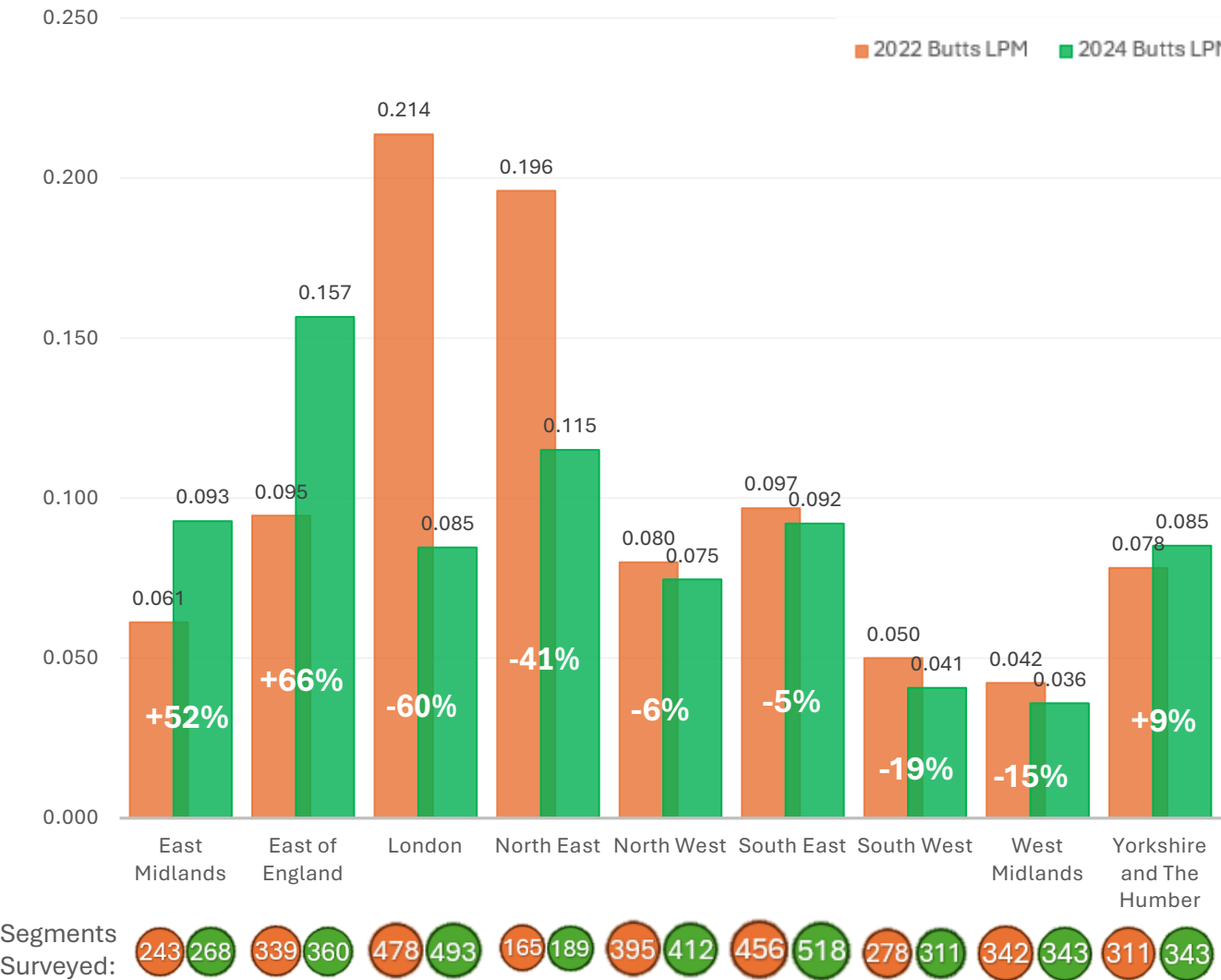


- The largest reductions in cigarette butt litter are seen in the most deprived areas of the country, reflecting the targeting of our behaviour change campaign.
- The greatest decreases (-25%) were recorded in areas with medium levels of deprivation (IMD quintile 3 areas), followed by the most deprived areas (-19%).
- Although in both 2022 and 2024, cigarette butt litter per metre was highest in the most deprived areas (IMD quintile 1 areas) and lowest in the least deprived areas (IMD quintile 5 areas), this litter type has reduced in the four most deprived areas in 2024.
- There has been a small increase in cigarette butt litter in the least deprived areas (IMD quintile 5) between 2022 and 2024, of 6%.

REGIONAL CHANGES IN CIGARETTE BUTT LITTER



Regional Cigarette Butt Litter Per Metre

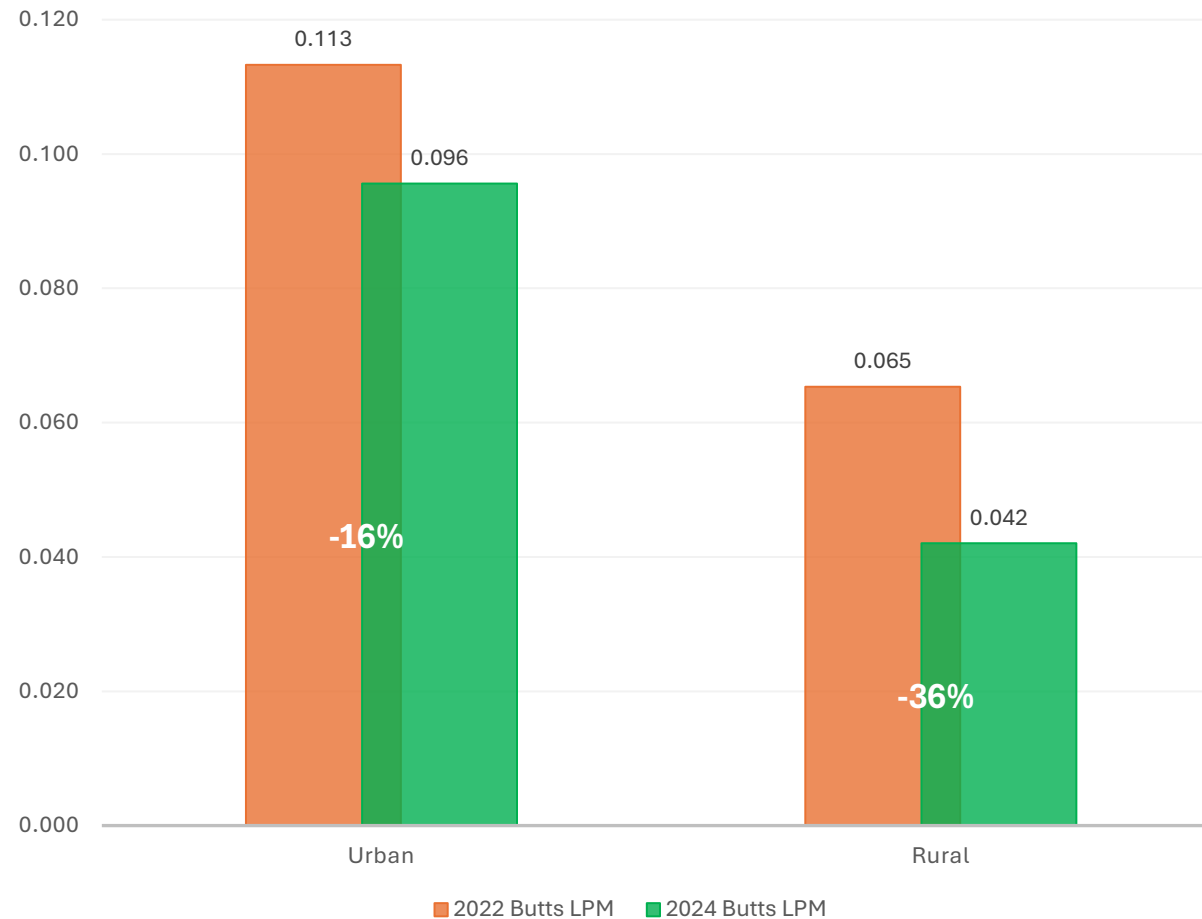


- Some of the areas of the country with the largest numbers of smokers have seen the largest decreases in cigarette litter per metre: London and the North-East.
- Most regions demonstrated a reduction in cigarette butt litter between 2022 and 2024. The largest decreases occurred in London and the North-East. In 2022, cigarette butt litter per metre was highest in London and the North-East.
- Cigarette butt litter per metre increased in the East of England, East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber during this period.

CIGARETTE BUTT LITTER IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS



Cigarette Butt Litter Per Metre in Urban/Rural Land



- Cigarette butt litter reduced in both rural and urban areas between 2022 and 2024.
- Rural areas saw the most substantial reduction (-36%).
- Cigarette butts on the ground in urban areas still reduced by a notable 16%; very close to the national average reduction of 17%.
- As in 2022, overall, urban areas had more cigarette litter on the ground than rural areas in 2024.

CONCLUSION



- **Cigarette litter is prevalent and pernicious** – in Keep Britain Tidy's litter survey*, 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, two years into our work programme specifically tackling the littering of cigarette butts, we are seeing a significant reduction in butts on the ground.
- **Our campaign is working** – our behaviour change communications have been focused on people who smoke when 'out and about', in the lower economic groups. Our audience tend 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 last two years.
- **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 councils 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 years**.
- **Partners are a vital part of the solution** – our partners, from across the public, private and voluntary sectors, 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.
- **The right place at the right time** – 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.

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

** Keep Britain Tidy Local Authority Research November 2024

WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US?



For more information on this survey or partnering with Keep Britain Tidy to reduce cigarette litter, please get in touch:

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