Valpak
a Reconomy Group company

# Valpak & Wildlife Trust

## Litter pick 2022

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

THE HOUSE PROJECT Coventry

# Introduction



**In August 2022, Valpak carried out a litter pick in partnership with the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Sherbourne Valley Project, and with the help of young care leavers from the House Project Coventry.**

Led by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, the Sherbourne Valley project is working towards restoring and revitalising the blue and green spaces around the river Sherbourne. The project has been generously supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and it's thanks to National Lottery players that the project is able to work with local communities to re-write the future of Coventry's river Sherbourne by establishing an urban living landscape in which people, nature and culture can thrive. The Sherbourne Valley project is a shining example of what it looks like to have more space for nature with more people on nature's side[1].

The purpose of the litter pick was to not only collect litter, but also to recycle everything that can be, and to collect data on what was picked up, so Valpak could then create a future forecasting scenario using upcoming policy and societal changes.

Valpak have used their expertise in packaging, waste, policy, and sustainability to bring a deeper level of understanding to the analysis of collected litter.

**Packaging** acccounted for **67% of litter**

## Results

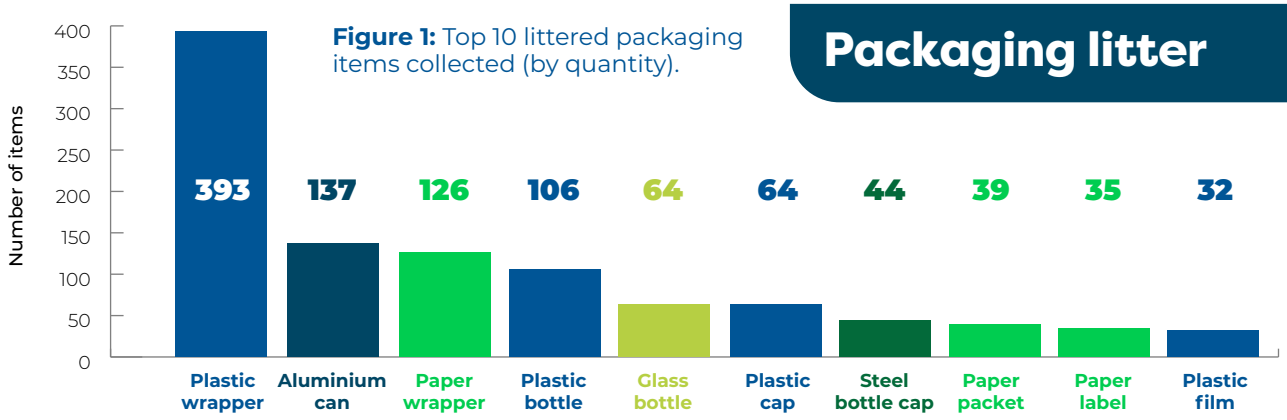
The data below shows the composition of the litter collected on two mornings of picking.

Packaging tends to make up a large proportion of litter. Of the items picked up, 67% of them were packaging (1,237 pieces of litter), while 33% were not (617 pieces of litter), with a total of 1,854 pieces of litter.

Of the packaging litter collected, 42% of the pieces were widely recyclable according to OPRL (On-Pack Recycling Label[2]), and the recycling requirements of the Valpak office. Some of the recyclable items were taken to a local recycling centre, and some were taken to the Valpak office to be collected for recycling.

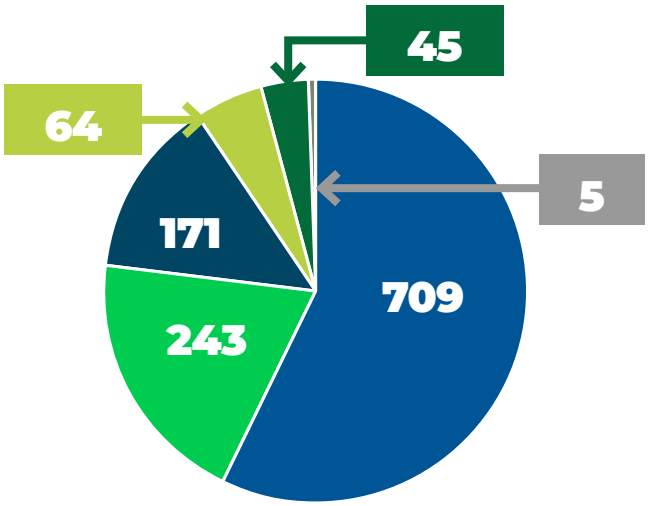
## Packaging litter

**Figure 1:** Top 10 littered packaging items collected (by quantity).




## Material split

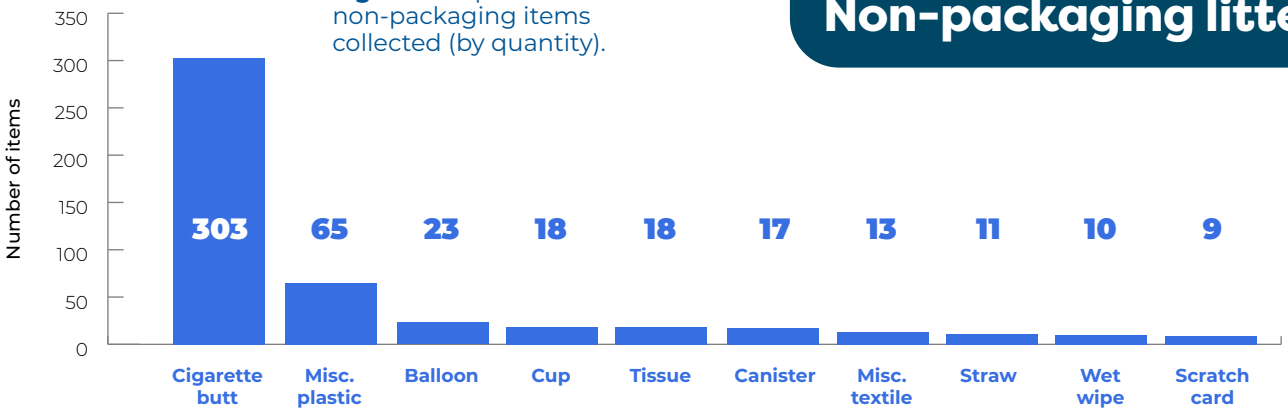
**Figure 2:** Packaging material split, with quantities.




Of the packaging litter collected, 57% of the total pieces were plastic, and 32% of the total pieces were plastic wrappers.

## Non-packaging litter

**Figure 3:** Top 10 littered non-packaging items collected (by quantity).




We can see that cigarette butts are far and away the most commonly littered non packaging item, with 303 collected.

Most non-packaging items are non-recyclable; however, some materials can be recycled (such as electronics and paper cups) and some (such as clothing and shoes) are developing viable recycling options.

# Chasing issues

## Waste is an issue of increasing attention from the public, media, and the government.

With the growing scrutiny of the environmental impact of litter, particularly plastics - combined with the impact of high levels of consumption - more and more legislation and initiatives are being put in place to increase recycling rates, drive down consumption of packaging, and lower the instances of littering.

Below are a few examples of upcoming legislative, industrial, or societal changes that are likely to impact on the type and amount of litter dropped.

## Bottles and cans

A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) is a system in which a deposit is paid when an item (such as a drink in a plastic bottle or a can) is purchased and returned to the consumer when the container is returned to a recycling point.

In 2018, the UK government committed to introduce a DRS for drinks containers, however this has been delayed, with an expected start date in 2024 for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and is expected in 2023 in Scotland. A feasibility study for a digital DRS (a DRS scheme facilitated through digital technology such as QR codes and apps) is currently ongoing in Wales.

It is claimed that a DRS, through attaching value for the consumer to beverage containers, reduces littering. Various studies of areas before and after implementation of a DRS have found container litter reduction of up to 84%, and general litter reduction of up to 47%[3].

## Extended Producer Responsibility

Upcoming Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is expected to implement modulated fees (i.e., fees paid by producers of packaging, that vary depending on the type of packaging, typically highest for those with the most environmental impact) that will encourage recyclability of packaging, as packaging that is more recyclable will have a lower fee. EPR is expected to incentivise companies putting packaging onto the market to reduce the amount of packaging they create and increase the amount of refill options and recyclable alternatives they use[4].

## Films

Flexible plastic films are an example of a packaging type that is commonly littered for which efforts are being made to increase recyclability – a large part of which is providing adequate infrastructure for both collection and the recycling itself. Currently, these are collected at some supermarkets, with moves made to expand this to kerbside. A scheme called FlexCollect is trialling household collection of flexible plastic packaging with up to nine councils and will run for three years from May 2022, to provide evidence for national kerbside collections of plastic film[5].



## Textiles

EPR for waste textiles is currently under consideration by the UK government, due to the environmental impact of textile overproduction and subsequent waste.

Textile EPR has been successful in France since 2007, was implemented in Sweden at the beginning of 2022, and is about to be implemented in the Netherlands at the start of 2023. This legislation requires companies to support the end-of-life management of their textile products, with the goal of increasing recycling and reducing the amount of textile waste going to landfill (or being littered).

## Caps

Plastic caps on bottles are typically only recyclable when they are attached to the bottle, as because of the size they are often lost through the trommel in a recycling centre; a piece of machinery designed to filter out non-recyclable material.

Container design is changing to help capture this material in the recycling stream by introducing tethered caps, which remain attached to the bottle after it is opened.

## Paper-based cups

The National Cup Recycling Scheme was set up by Valpak in partnership with a number of major coffee cup retailers to increase cup recycling rates by providing specialty recycling containers in stores and arranging collection and recycling. As the scheme expands, and cup recycling containers become more widespread and communicated, cup litter may decrease. England is proposing all coffee shops offer mandatory take back of single use paper-based cups in 2024.



## Single-use plastic

In the EU, single-use plastic plates, cutlery, straws, balloon sticks, and cotton buds were banned in 2021. Although there is no longer required to comply with EU Directives, there is increasing pressure for the UK government to commit to phasing out some single-use plastic items[6].

In November 2021 Defra published a call for evidence on commonly littered and problematic plastic items[7], including wet wipes and tobacco filters. Many wet wipes are single-use plastic items and can cause problems for sewers and the environment, and cigarette filters are one of the most commonly littered items and cause damage to the environment.

In the EU, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) must be considered when implementing the single-use plastics directive, taking steps to eliminate waste from smoking products, particularly cigarette butts[8].

## Behaviour change

When it comes to litter, implemented policy and industry action must take place in conjunction with action on citizen behaviour change, to change attitudes towards packaging and waste, and encourage correct disposal.

Campaigns from organisations such as Keep Britain Tidy and Zero Waste Scotland help to reduce litter through communication of the impacts. An example is Hubbub's 2018 eight-month 'Drive Down Litter' campaign to tackle litter around service stations (through behaviour change and awareness raising, including provision of roadside bins for cars, and return and reward schemes) reduced litter on adjacent slip-roads by 60%[9]. Another example is the Love Essex campaign to reduce littering, which reduced litter by 41%[10].

Behaviour change campaigns normally include posters, social media, leaflets, and radio, among other avenues.

# Potential impact

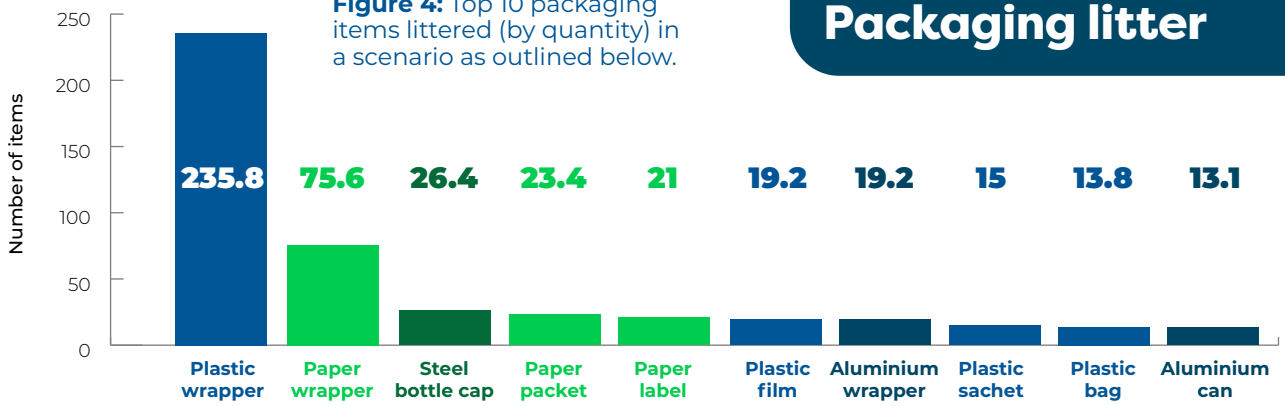
Based on the above examples, a scenario has been developed to show what the litter composition of the future could be.

Figures 4 and 5 show what the collected litter could look like in a future scenario where:

- Flexible plastic films become widely recyclable.
- Cups are frequently recycled at coffee shops, and plastic cups are banned altogether.
- DRS causes an 84% reduction in littering of plastic bottles and aluminium cans.
- Wet wipes and cigarette filters are reduced under a type of single-use plastics initiative.
- Caps on bottles are attached, and captured by the DRS.
- Plastic cutlery is banned.
- Textiles become recyclable, and production is reduced.
- ***AND* action on behaviour change and communication facilitates the above.**

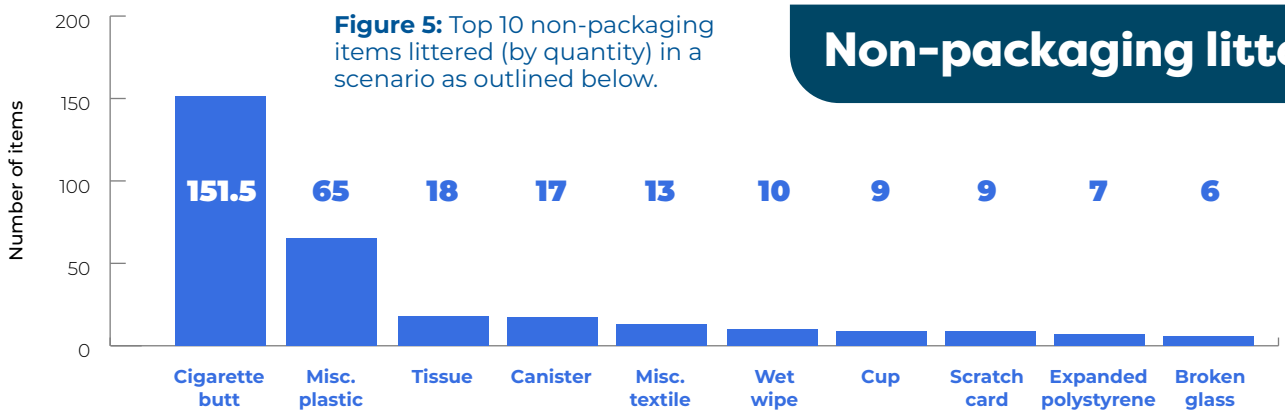
## Packaging litter

**Figure 4:** Top 10 packaging items littered (by quantity) in a scenario as outlined below.




## Non-packaging litter

**Figure 5:** Top 10 non-packaging items littered (by quantity) in a scenario as outlined below.




For litter categories where recycling options and recycling rates increase, we have assumed a 50% reduction in littering, based on background research on potential impact of littering campaigns where disposal options were increased. Impacts of mechanisms like DRS (based on research showing a potential 84% decrease in litter) are overlaid onto this.

**This would amount to a total of 555 pieces of packaging, and 409 pieces of non-packaging litter (totalling 964 pieces) – a 52% reduction! While the assumptions on reductions are indicative, this shows just how much impact changes to policy and to behaviour can have.**

Furthermore, in the real packaging litter data, 42% of the pieces were considered widely recyclable, while if plastic films / wraps / wrappers became recyclable, 91% of the pieces collected would be widely recyclable.

# Footnotes

1 Volunteers (including the many litter picking groups across Coventry) are integral to the success of the project, if you or your business would like to get involved, please see further details at www.sherbournevalley.co.uk

2 https://oprl.org.uk/

3 https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DRS-Factsheet-Litter-long-29Jan2021.pdf

4 https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/extended-producer-responsibility-epr

5 https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/councils-flexible-plastic-collections/

6 https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/plastic-free-july-breaking-up-with-plastic-across-the-uk/

7 https://consult.defra.gov.uk/environmental-quality/call-for-evidence-on-commonly-littered-and-problem/supporting_documents/Call%20for%20evidence%20document.pdf

8 https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/30-05-2022-eu-ban-on-microplastics-stubs-out-cigarette-butt-pollution

9 https://www.hubbub.org.uk/drive-down-litter

10 https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/litter-flytipping/behaviour-change-communications

# For more information please contact us.

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