Valpak & Rubbish Friends

Litter pick 2024



An introduction

Valpak, in collaboration with Rubbish Friends, organised a litter pick in our local area of Stratford-upon-Avon on Friday 27th of September. We embarked on this litter pick from the Stratford Climate Hub and then made our way towards Birmingham Road. There we split into two groups to pick more efficiently, with one group focused on the area around the train station and the other focused on the canal.

The approximate areas that we covered during this litter pick can be seen in the map.





Litter Hotspots

During the litter pick we identified certain hotspots where litter was accumulating, such as in hedges and bushes lining the pavements and along the canal.

Crisp packages, bar wrappers, cans and an unbelievable amount of takeaway packaging were picked, as they get stuck on branches and other vegetation after they are thrown into the street. It was quite challenging to remove the packaging from hedges without hurting ourselves and damaging the plants growing nearby. In some areas we were blocked by obstacles, such as fencing along the road, where we could not get our litter pickers through. Unfortunately, a lot of waste was therefore left behind. We filed a report on the Stratford-upon-Avon District Council app to inform them of this and try to get them to collect it.



We also found a lot of waste accumulating on top of the drains at the sides of roads due to the large amount of rain that had fallen in the past few days. Not only was a lot of the waste sodden, but much of it was also disintegrating and coming apart, consequently polluting the environment with small pieces of waste that are harder to collect and had to be left behind.





We also collected a lot of waste from benches close to the canal and outside hotels, which are areas we should strive to keep free of waste. The first area is close to a water source and as such, litter is bound to end up in the canal and further contaminate local rivers. The latter is a point that is heavily frequented by tourists and visitors in the area. A lot of litter will likely have a negative impact on people's perception of Stratford-upon-Avon and could discourage them from visiting again.

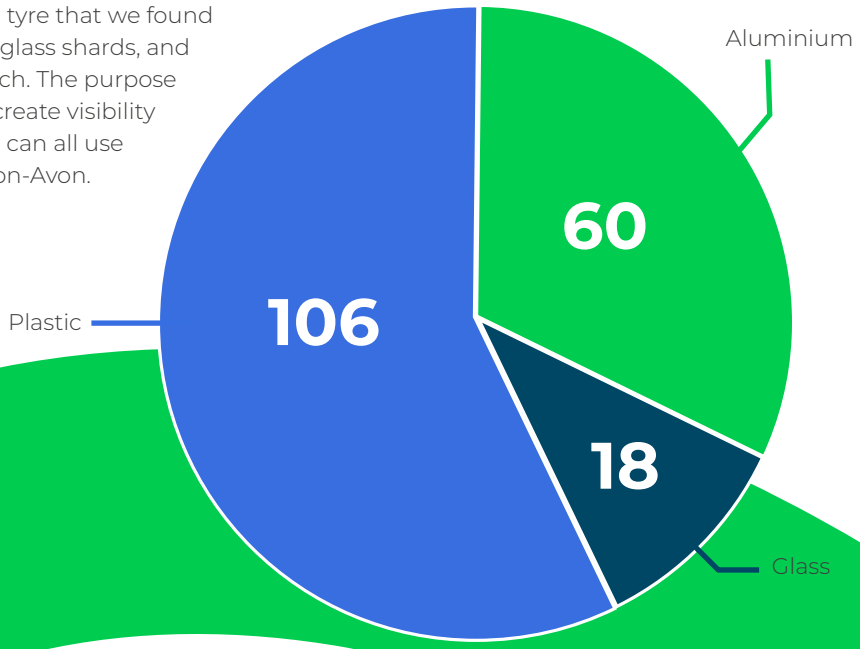
The most shocking litter hotspot we found was outside a fast-food chain's car park and drive-through. This was unexpected, since there was an easily accessible bin for both pedestrians and vehicles close to the shop. Yet, large amounts of waste were found outside of the bin, as well as within the hedges surrounding it.

Waste Breakdown

In total, we collected 4 large bags of general waste and 3 bags of recyclable waste – which contained 106 aluminium cans, 18 glass bottles, and 60 plastic bottles. As waste collected in the streets is usually not recycled, we sorted out the plastic bottles, aluminium cans, and glass bottles to ensure that we were able to recycle these by taking them back to our office and placing them in the appropriate collection bins. Overall, we saved 184 items from going to the landfill!

We also collected 9 vapes during this litter pick and took these back to the office to be recycled in our designated vape recycling bin. Additionally, 1 phone charger was collected and placed in the WEEE recycling bin at Valpak.

During our pick, we used the Stratford-upon-Avon District Council app to report any waste that we could not take with us so they can collect and dispose of it. For instance, we flagged a bicycle tyre that we found close to the train station, a wheel alloy, broken glass shards, and trash behind a big fence that we could not reach. The purpose of the app is to alert the local authorities, and create visibility of waste in the local area, and is something we can all use when we visit and travel through Stratford-upon-Avon.



Street Bin Waste

The movement of the UK Waste Regulations from Shared Producer Responsibility to Extended Producer Responsibility has seen Street Bin or "Commonly Littered" packaging be separated out for reporting.

Besides Drinks Containers, Street Bin packaging made up the vast majority of what we were able to pick. Within the category of Street Bin packaging most of the waste we found can be categorised as takeaway packaging, these being more prevalent than any other bagged and sealed goods. Some examples of takeaway packaging are listed below:

- Coffee and drinks cups
- Burger boxes
- Food bags
- Clamshell containers
- Sauce pots
- Cup lids

The area we targeted was in very close proximity to a popular fast-food chain, and packaging from this chain is what made up the largest chunk of the takeaway packaging collected. We observed that the litter was particularly prevalent in zones around the establishment where cars were able to park, suggesting that the issue lies in the consumer activity of those using the drive through, with full orders in some instances being left on the side of the road once eaten.

Moreover, the littering of takeaway packaging was not limited to the nearer parking spots but was widespread across all areas we picked, with the furthest found 0.8miles away from the source. Rubbish Friends have also reported this same packaging being present in picks in Bishopton, which is 1.7miles away. This distance again suggests distribution of the litter by car.

With one takeaway chain having such a monopoly on the litter seen in the area, and such a widespread effect, it shows that these businesses are key areas to target when it comes to prevention. Creating partnerships could prove very symbiotic; in reducing the amount of litter arising caused by them, whilst at the same time helping them reach CSR goals and providing positive publicity.

The EPR compliance fees associated with reported Street Bin packaging could be used to fund a campaign targeting drive-through consumer behaviour. By doing this, the EPR compliance fees could be beneficial in aiding the prevention of widespread litter from fast food chains.



Areas for future research

Going forward, we will look to compare the results of our litter pick with future picks in the area, to be carried out by Rubbish Friends, and other volunteer groups. This will aid with assessing what are the most littered packaging items in Stratford-upon-Avon, alongside identifying major litter hotspots (e.g., benches) and noting how far takeaway packaging waste is travelling from their starting point. From this, new litter reduction initiatives or plans could be drawn up by the Rubbish Friends charity and proposed to their local council.

Next Steps

One of the most significant factors contributing to littering is the absence of conveniently located and properly maintained public bins. However, as explained in an article by The Alliance, various personal, social, and cultural influences also play a role in how individuals manage their waste, making targeted approaches crucial for shifting behaviour. Thus, to inspire change to current littering habits, consideration of where to focus the roll out of litter reduction campaigns will be vital. A review by Zero Waste Scotland highlighted that fostering a sense of personal responsibility, strengthening community connections, and raising awareness of the environmental impact of littering are the key personal factors in addressing the issue.

Examples of campaigns that would raise awareness include delivery of educative talks in schools about the impact of littering, with the aim to encourage younger audiences to be more considerate to their environment. Another strategy could involve the production of educative signs that will inform local citizens about the fauna and flora inhabiting their surroundings and the harmful impact littering can have on it. These could then be established in the previously mentioned litter hotspots or areas of high footfall, such as along the canal and at the fast-food chain's drive through. This strategy would aim to deter those from littering there by encouraging a sense of personal responsibility.

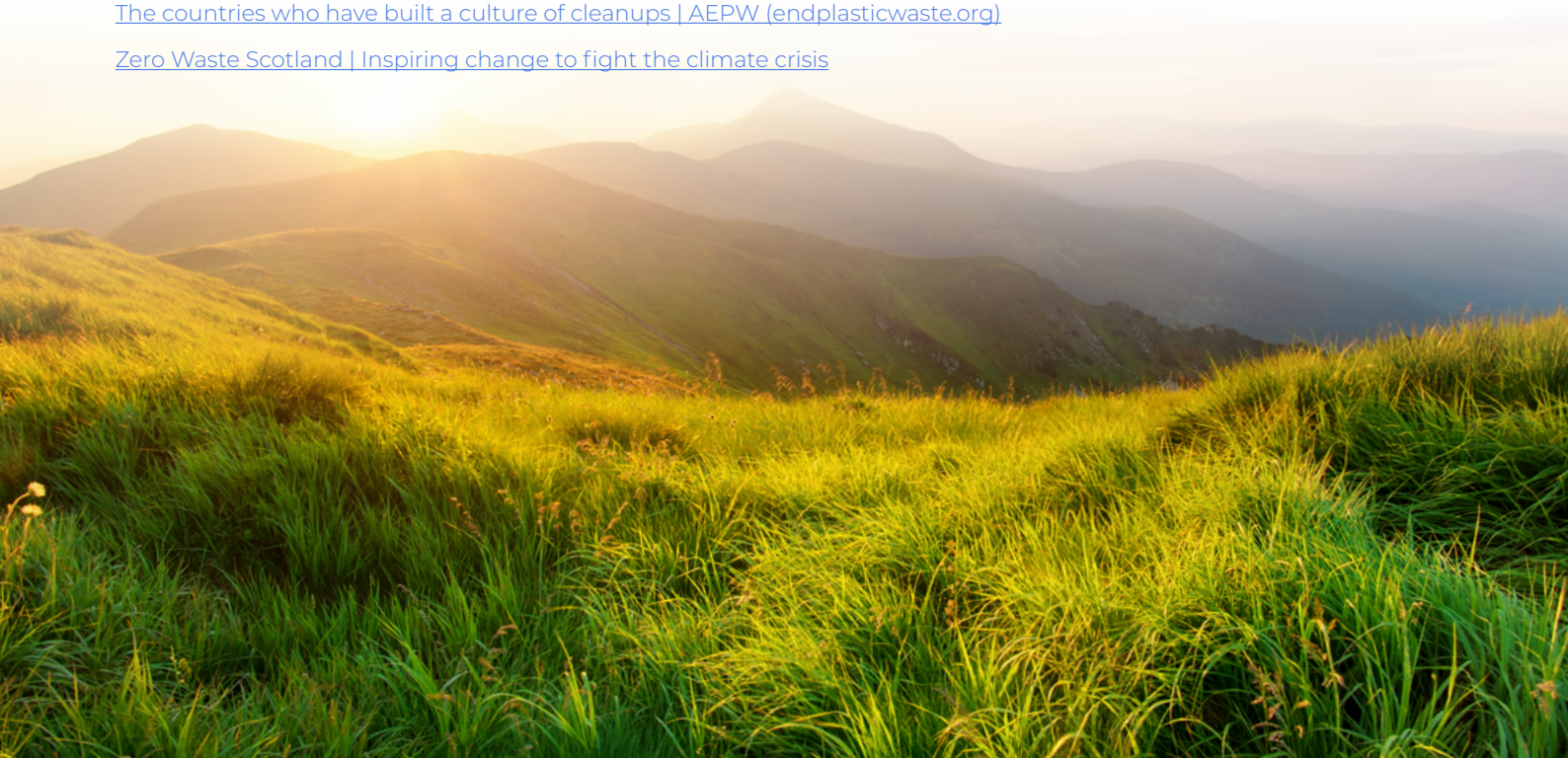
Conclusion

We hope that the findings in this report will serve as hard evidence for Rubbish Friends to present to the council and push for litter prevention initiatives to be implemented on a local level.

Sources:

The countries who have built a culture of cleanups | AEPW (endplasticwaste.org)

Zero Waste Scotland | Inspiring change to fight the climate crisis



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